



AFRICA/CONGO - "I am impressed by the spirit of solidarity on behalf of everyone", says the Nuncio of Brazzaville

Brazzaville (Agenzia Fides) - "The tragedy that has befallen these people is really great. Entire families have lost their homes and their various members " says to Fides His Exc. Mgr. Jan Romeo Pawlowski, Apostolic Nuncio in Brazzaville, devastated since March 4 due to a series of explosions of an ammunition storage in the barracks of Mpila (see Fides 05/03/2012)

"Yesterday I went to two reception centers set up at two churches. Today we continue the visits", said Mgr. Pawlowski. According to official sources, the homeless are at least 3,000.

"Among the displaced there are also refugees from the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo who have long sought refuge in Brazzaville. Now for the second time they have again lost everything" said the Nuncio.

"I must say we admire the commitment of the population and the local Church that provide what little they have to give the homeless a bit of food, water and a bed. It is important for these people to feel accepted. All are mobilized within the limits of their ability to meet the immediate needs of these people: the government and the Bishops, Caritas and foreign embassies have launched an appeal to solidarity".

In this regard, Mgr. Pawlowski recalls that "in this terrible event a positive coincidence has emerged. Two months ago, when the presidential elections were held in the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, the embassies in Brazzaville, at least those in the Western countries, were prepared to accept a possible influx of refugees in the case some accident had occurred in Kinshasa (separated from Brazzaville by the Congo River). For this reason, some embassies possessed stockpiles of food, tents and mattresses that have now made available to those affected by this tragedy".

The area directly hit by the explosion is not yet accessible. The army has in fact declared a curfew in the area for the risk of unexploded ordnance. Some experts from outside are expected to arrive to help in the demining operations.

"We are trying to slowly return to normality, even if we are faced with the problem of the wounded, while operations continue to find missing persons among the despair of relatives and friends. Seeing the damage to buildings in the districts surrounding the forbidden zone, we can imagine the devastation there is in that area, the closest to the epicenter of the explosion. Here the parish of St. Louis des Francais is completely destroyed. Unfortunately we have had confirmation that a group of faithful did not follow the invitation of the pastor to leave the building. It is feared that these people have remained under the rubble", said the Nuncio.

The death toll is still provisional. "There are those who claim about 500 deaths, those who say that there about 1000 victims, some say that many have been buried. In these circumstances it is difficult to make assessments. In these days it is very hot, and epidemics are now feared" says Mgr. Pawlowski.

"The world must not forget the tragedy of Brazzaville" concludes the Nuncio. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 06/03/2012)