



AFRICA/SIERRA LEONE - It is important to bring war criminals to justice, but we also need to improve the population's economic and social advancement

Freetown (Agenzia Fides) - Fr. Gerardo Caglioni, a Xaverian missionary with a long experience in Sierra Leone, sent his contribution to Fides Agency on the situation in Sierra Leone in the light of former Liberian President, Charles Taylor's sentence for crimes committed by Sierra Leone's rebels with his help and endorsement in neighboring African country (see Fides 30/05/2012). "With Charles Taylor's sentence, justice has been done, but only in part. Sierra Leone, which a few years ago was hit by civil war, now can certainly breathe a sigh of relief. It is certainly true that other subjects - individuals or communities - will also have to receive an exemplary sanction, but something substantial will also be returned to the victims of many atrocities. For nearly eleven years, the Country was ransacked and upset by diabolic garrisons that plagued it with all kinds of violence and abuse. Much of the population were displaced in lands which were not theirs, buildings and community activities were destroyed or damaged. Sierra Leone is also very rich: lots of raw materials, precious minerals that are mined only in a few other nations (rutile, bauxite, iron, gold, diamonds), of precious wood, and probably also of abundant oil. Also water, for the production of electricity, would be generally abundant in different parts of the Country. So, why does this population continue to be among the poorest in the world? An appropriate response must be found and a positive solution offered to so many people. The international community did great things to stop the war and give back to the country more humane conditions, after the terrible "civil war" that invested it. International aid also patched up a good part of the socio-economic development. After the war, education received a great impetus (probably more in quantity than in quality) and the buildings destroyed were largely rebuilt and often multiplied. New means of communication were opened and promising economic initiatives were undertaken. To the best of my knowledge, the present Government of Sierra Leone has been very dynamic in many policy areas and economic development. It is important to bring war criminals to justice, But the economic, social, educational and political improvement of the entire population also needs to be pursued. In fact, with the long civil war, Sierra Leone suffered unspeakable wrongs. Now it certainly needs to receive more adequate justice. In this post-war reconstruction, the Church has certainly played an important role for Sierra Leone. Even today, 11 years after the end of the conflict, it should be an amalgam of different ethnic realities and the ferment for the Country's growth in justice and peace. Unfortunately this role has not always played to the full. I said that during the civil war - and the period immediately after the end of the war - the Catholic dioceses contributed to the rebirth as protagonists, being a driving force in all activities of pacification and physical and moral reconstruction. Perhaps this today is no longer the case and other factors have intervened in the national balance and forces are redistributed in different forms. The Catholic Church, composed of missionaries in the years before the war, is now fully African and perhaps seeks new visibility in the national arena. Perhaps certain local emphases prevent it today to play a role as a true leader. What I hope is that the Church, expert in humanity, as Paul VI had said at the United Nations, continues with the Gospel to be leaven in the mass and to give new vitality to a country that strongly calls for rebirth to new life after the painful and tragic experience of the long civil war." (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 02/06/2012)