



## **AFRICA/CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC-The Diocese of Bangassou welcomes the victims of the "tyrant of child soldiers"**

Bangassou (Agenzia Fides) - For about 5 years, the Bishop of Bangassou, His Exc. Mgr. Juan José Aguirre, welcomes boys and girls who succeed in escaping from the criminal Joseph Kony, "the tyrant of child soldiers", in his diocese. (see Fides 10/03/2012), who has kidnapped 300 young children so far in the Central African forest and together with his guerillas kills, assaults, rapes and tortures people. Kony's guerillas kidnap children to use them as carriers in the forest, where they remain prisoners for at least 5 years. Young girls are brutalized and raped for years by groups of 30 or 40 soldiers, when they manage to escape and reach the mission they are "completely blocked, terrified, with no self-esteem," said the Bishop, many are also pregnant.

Mgr. Aguirre points out that everyone expects Kony to be arrested along with his soldiers. The Bishop, together with priests and religious women who work in the diocese, continue to risk their lives without any form of protection, even after reporting to have witnessed scenes of violence perpetrated by these criminals against innocent children and girls, and then kidnap them. Bangassou is a sub-prefecture of the Prefecture of Mbomou, in the Central African Republic. To go from the capital to the diocese it takes 18 hours by car.

Besides, just to cross the diocese from west to east and to reach all the missions, three days are required by car to travel on badly damaged roads. In support of this diocese the Fundación Bangassou was established in Cordoba (Spain), thanks to which Msgr. Aguirre, along with his missionaries and local cooperators, brings forward 25 major projects, including the distribution of milk powder intended for children who cannot be breastfed by their mothers because they have died or have AIDS.

Among other health care projects there is that of the "Good Samaritan", a home for the terminally ill with AIDS, a leper colony, a children's ward and a center for malnourished children. With regard to schooling, the Foundation has provided a school run by the pupils' parents for each mission. There are already about 8 thousand children who are attending school in the diocese. As far as welfare is concerned, thanks to the "Orphans" project, 1,100 children are followed, who have remained in this condition mainly due to AIDS. There are 80 cooperatives for grandmothers who welcome the orphans into their homes. Another significant center is the so-called "House of Hope" where there are adults with dementia who are in jail on charges of witchcraft. They are assisted by a religious woman that offers them a daily meal and a bed to sleep. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 05/06/2012)