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AFRICA/CONGO DR - Francophonie Summit begins: the crisis in Kivu and in Mali and the relations between France and Africa at the centre of the work

Kinshasa (Agenzia Fides) - Last night the fourteenth summit of the Francophonie summit began in Kinshasa, the first in Central Africa and, in particular, in the Great Lakes of Africa. For months, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo prepared itself with great intensity to an event which sees the participation of about twenty Heads of State and government.
The city was thoroughly cleaned at the expense of small tradesmen who were forced to leave their homes where they carried out their activities.
Among the issues at heart are: the crisis in the north of Mali; the possible membership of Gabon in the Commonwealth and above all the latest developments of the crisis in North Kivu, in eastern Congo, where since the end of April 260,000 newly displaced people have fled their villages to save themselves from the violence of the new rebel group M23, as well as by other armed militias raging across the territory (FDLR, Mai mai, Nyatura, APCLS, just to name a few). To these, we have to add another 60 thousand people who have crossed the border with Uganda and Rwanda. In North Kivu, today, the number of displaced persons amounts to about 700 000 out of a total of two million throughout the Congolese territory.
The spotlight of the summit are particularly focused on the participation of French President François Hollande, who yesterday, in Dakar, inaugurated his first official visit to Africa, which is of great importance, especially because it follows the much-disputed speech held in the Senegalese capital by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007. A speech which was widely criticized because, in essence, it accused Africa and the Africans of being linked to the past and not being able to project into the future. For this reason, Hollande's speech will be followed with particular care.
Hollande's arrival in Kinshasa, however, was preceded by a dispute with the Congolese government that did not well digest some of his sentences concerning the lack of human rights, democracy and recognition of the opposition in the country that was once called Zaire. The French President’s following appeal to non-infringement of Congolese borders from foreign nations, with an implicit reference to the nearby Rwanda of Kagame, however, was highly appreciated by Kinshasa and nipped tones of the controversy in the bud.
(D.G./L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 13/10/2012)

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