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Organo di informazione delle Pontificie Opere Missionarie
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AFRICA/CONGO DR - A ransom for the three priests kidnapped has arrived; Bishops condemn the crime

Kinshasa (Agenzia Fides) - "We received a phone call from a person claiming to belonging to the group that kidnapped the three religious, with a ransom note" says to Fides Agency His Exc. Mgr. Melchisedec Sikuli Paluku, Bishop of Butembo -Beni (eastern Democratic Republic of Congo), in whose diocese three Assumptionist fathers (Augustinians of the Assumption) of Congolese nationality were kidnapped (see Fides 10/22/2012). The Bishop is cautious about the reliability of the request: "We are still waiting to find a reliable channel for dialogue with the kidnappers."
The Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) issued a statement condemning the kidnapping. "I hope that the kidnappers are aware of the size of their act and take this into account," said Mgr. Sikuli Paluku. The message, signed by His Exc. Mgr. Nicolas Djomo, Bishop of Tsumbe and President of CENCO, in addition to strongly condemning the kidnapping of the three religious priests (who had been recently appointed to the parish of Mbau), "appeals to the kidnappers who committed this unacceptable act to safeguard the physical and moral integrity of the three priests and free them without conditions to enable them to continue their pastoral service and assistance to the people of Mbau."
Regarding the news according to which the three religious were kidnapped by some guerrillas of Ugandan origin operating in the area, Mgr. Sikuli Paluku replied: "In the region there are some groups that were born in Uganda but have been in Congo for years, and have become Congolese also because their members have married Congolese women. These groups live out of banditry or put themselves at the service of others. I do not think, however, that it is them. There are indeed other indigenous groups and I believe we need to look in that direction," concludes the Bishop. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 23/10/2012)

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