



## **AFRICA/CONGO DR - "To help child soldiers we need to build schools"**

Kinshasa (Agenzia Fides) - "We found that children who voluntarily enter into armed groups are those who do not go to school. This is why it is important that in North Kivu there are always more schools and educated youth. In class, students learn to live together peacefully: we train them so that tomorrow they are the builders of peace in Congo," said Esperance Nsengimana, a teacher of general education in secondary schools in Kanyangohe in Mweso, built by the JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service) in 2012.

Just yesterday, as every February 12th, we celebrated the Day of the Red Hands, dedicated to the plight of child soldiers in conflict countries. On this occasion the Jesuit Service for Refugees Africa Great Lakes wanted to emphasize the importance of education and access to school as a privileged instrument to prevent the entry of minors among the rebels.

According to the experience of JRS staff in North Kivu, where today there are more than 900 000 displaced due to constant insecurity, going to school helps keep alive the hope for the future of children and young people.

Education is also essential because the adults of tomorrow will not take up arms and to form future leaders dedicated to peace and development of the Country. But the difficult economic conditions of different families prevents them from sending their children to school. That is why, when the JRS builds a school in a village, the headmaster of the institute commits himself to receiving a free number of displaced students. In the area of Mweso, in 2012, JRS built four schools.

The continuing violence perpetrated by rebel groups still represent a major obstacle to the access to education by children. Following the actions of the rebels of the Movement of March 23 (M23), which on November 20 had seized the provincial capital, Goma, at least 240,000 children lost several weeks of lessons. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 13/02/2013)