



## **AFRICA/CONGO DR - The desecration of a church in Beni has not been confirmed. The Bishop: "explosive situation"**

Kinshasa (Agenzia Fides) - The desecration of a Catholic church in Rwahwa (in the territory of Beni, in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo) has not been confirmed, where on 28 June some armed bandits entered the building, removing the Blessed Sacrament.

"I am outside the diocese and I have not received precise information on what happened" says to Fides Agency His Exc. Mgr. Melchisedec Sikuli Paluku, Bishop of Butembo-Beni. "I am trying to get back to Butembo as quickly as possible to follow the situation which seems to be more explosive than before", continues the Bishop. In past days the governor of the province of North Kivu, Julien Paluku, denounced that the city of Beni, the capital of the territory, is threatened by a coalition of Ugandan rebels ADF-Nalu, by a group of indigenous of Mai-Mai and even members of Somali Shabaab.

Mgr. Sikuli Paluku speaks of "a complexity of the presence of various old and new armed groups". The Diocese of Butembo-Beni also lives the drama of the Assumptionist priests who were kidnapped last October and "there has been no news for over 9 months". But there are hundreds of missing persons in the area" denounces Mgr. Sikuli Paluku. "MONUSCO (the UN Mission in the DRC) states that there are 150 missing persons, civil society groups speak instead of 300 people, while the kidnappings and murders continue unabated. Insecurity is especially serious in the north of the territory of my diocese".

With regards to the presence of the Shabaab the Bishop says "what we know is that for years there have been strongholds of Somalia in the area that act in coexistence with local groups".

Sikuli Paluku describes a situation where there seems to be no outside interests that favor the spread of Islamic radicalism.

"Immediately after the kidnapping of the three priests – he says - I was contacted by some people who claimed to detain them (I do not know whether it was true or not) and who claimed to be converts to Islam."

"We also know that there are people in the region, even whole families who have converted to Islam, no one knows how. Of course there are foreign interests behind this phenomenon". "Years ago, some traditional leaders, who had been invited in Gaddafi's Libya, then converted to Islam", the Bishop concluded. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 08/07/2013)