

THE PRIESTS OF THE DEANERY OF MUTARA PROTEST

CASE NO. ICIR-98-41-T ABOUT THE DISTRESS OF VICTIMS OF THE WAR.

EXHIBIT NO. DNP 115B

DATE ADMITTED 19-10-2005

TENDERED BY DEFENCE

NAME OF WITNESS LE 1

The ^{crj} ~~crj~~ of the abandoned

These pages want to be a ^{crj} ~~crj~~ of distress, an appeal for help, perhaps the ultimate SOS of populations entrusted to our pastoral charge. The Church sent us, we priests, in the parishes of Rukomo, Nyarurema, Rushaki, Nyagahanga which constitute the deanery of Mutara. We are then inside the zone of war. We would like to deliver our reflections about our parishioners' life. In fact, the compassion they give to us impose to us the duty of speaking in their favour. We implore all those who accept to hear us and have some power of decision: "Stop this war... Do something... Do it quickly!"

A. Current situation

Nobody can see the end of this war. Day by day, in the prefecture of Ruhengeri and of Byumba, the situation is getting worse. In some areas, it has become dramatic.

A long time ago, in Kiyombe commune, the sectors of Gatsilima, Nkana, Kiyombe, Kizinga and Kaniga which are adjacent to the ugandan border, have been deserted by their population. Every night, the sectors of Muyumbu, Cyondo and Kabare, a bit far from the border, are deserted by their residents, because many weeks ago, with the help of the darkness, repetitive attacks have caused tens of civil victims.

In Muvumba commune, the sectors of Kazaza, Bweya, Tabagwe, Shonga, Karama and Gatunda, close neighbours of Uganda, have also been deserted a long time ago. The sectors of Rukomo and Mukama, located more inside the country, are deserted during the night, since the last attack on Rukomo in the night of 1 to 2 February. Thousands of persons, when the night comes, leave their homes and properties and go to seek refuge inside the country, either at the home of relatives, in the bush, in the wood or in the banana plantations. Many camps for displaced persons are deserted, from the sunset to the sunrise, by terrorized and shocked refugees. Some courageous who dare staying at home are suspected of being accomplices of the assailants.

The last attack on Rukomo has been extremely violent. The health center, as well as the SOPEM, a private secondary school, have got very tremendous damage, just like the communal cultural center which sheltered displaced persons. Just in front of that center, a dozen of tents have been destroyed by shootings of rockets and grenades which killed six persons and wounded a great number of others. The camp of displaced persons of Rwebare, under the protection of the army, has been targeted by a second attack where three persons have been killed. As for the attackers, they left a dozen of dead bodies on the spot, in ugandan army uniform. During two hours and a half, they were only explosions of bombs, rockets, grenades and whizz of bullets.

Without any doubt, most of you follow up with anxiety the incidents of those attacks. But we fear that many, inside and outside Rwanda, ignore the extent of our misfortune and the true nature of this war. They are not fightings between two armies anymore, but a terrorism against innocent populations. The rwandan army is well present in the entire region. But, when the night comes, the assailants infiltrate themselves through the military defense system, to go and conduct guerilla attacks against a population which has no security anymore. How many persons entrusted to our charge of shepherds, have been killed and are regularly victims of terrorists ?

B. Consequences of this situation

Those continuous harassments to sow death have disastrous implications.

a. Increasing insecurity

We have just said it, many thousands of persons have deserted the approaches of the ugandan border to be sheltered in camps or at the homes of good-hearted compatriots in the region of Rukomo and Mukama: in Muvumba commune, about ten thousands of persons are sheltered in camps, another ten or so at the home of residents. Some tried to come back at their homes to glean some food, but many of them have been killed by the terrorists or by land mines.

At the beginning of November 1991, the camp of Rwebare has been attacked and partly burnt down: 19 persons lost their life. In the sectors of Rukomo, Mukama, displaced persons have been feeling that they had a relative security, until the attack in the night of 1 to 2 February which destroyed all the confidence.

Fear then took hold of minds and the feeling of insecurity is so great that, when the night comes, the population flee the camps and their approaches.

Some civilians have been just armed. History teaches us that elsewhere in such conflicts, creating a self defense has rarely been the good solution.

What for an immediate future ? Soon, the rain season will start, until where people must be displaced to find camps which are out of reach of the terrorists and build there new shelters ?

b. Food situation

In some regions of Mutara, the lack of food, consequence of not enough harvesting caused by the drought, is the way things are. At the same time, displaced persons, whose number always increases don't dare going in their fields anymore. So, where will they find to eat ?

c. Health situation

The hospital of Nyagatare doesn't work anymore. The one of Ngarama is overcrowded. The health center of Nyarurema having been attacked three times, has been damaged. In the one of Rukomo which went through the hard time of war, sick persons refuse to spend the night there. Imagine the situation of mothers

come to deliver ! The medical personnel is insufficient and the medicines (especially patent medicines) very rare: the pharmacies do not exist anymore. Diseases like malaria, eyes diseases or skin diseases spread like epidemics especially in camps with high concentration of persons.

We appreciate the courage and the expertise of many agents of the Red Cross who have a lot of devotion.

d. Discouragement

Far from their homes, people without any activity sink into the apathy. After months of waiting which have no result, the situation seems to them as without any way. It is then not enough to feed them, it is also important, in case of disease, to treat them. Their shelter, even though temporary, should be improved. To get out of their prostration, could not they receive some occupations ? when there are some available lands near the camps, could not they cultivate ?

e. Education

From the beginning of the war, the secondary schools of Rushaki and Nyagatare are closed; the one of Rukomo has just been closed. Students living in the zone of war, but who frequent educational establishment located far from their homes, have not received the promised assistance. Many primary schools have closed. Some of them still work more or less, but the heart is not in it. Displaced parents have no money to pay the education of their children.

f. Business

Traders have no stock anymore, for fear of being robbed. Yet, they also desert their shops when the night comes, to seek refuge in a secured area, where they can sleep. When there is harvesting, it has to be immediately liquidated, because there is no guarantee making reserves. As about the owners of smaller livestock, they do not get buyers: who has money or the will and possibility of breeding ?

All that we have just said, always puts this insistent interrogation: "What do we do and what can we do for those victims of the destabilisation at our borders ?".

C. Our proposals

1. Necessity of information

Not to deliver information in Rwanda and abroad about what happens to our country is to serve the interests of our attackers, them who, shamelessly, manipulate the desinformation.

The french journal on Radio Rwanda about the attacks against the camp of Rwebare announced that the attackers had been chased out, leaving on the spot twelve dead bodies, wearing uniforms of ugandan army ... and nothing else ...

And we who were waiting for a decalration about barbarity against Rwandans !

Why so few details ?

Indifference ? Certainly not, the medias do not ignore their mission: to inform Rwandans about the injustices that their country is suffering and denounce them over the world. The will of making less alarming ? the relation of the supported horror will always be short of the reality and all the citizens of this country have the right to know the truth.

An accurate and exact report of the misfortune borne in the prefectures of Ruhengeri and Byumba interests tge whole country, because it is Rwanda as a whole, which is concerned by wht happens at the northern border.

It is not useful to hide one's head into the sand ...

Without any doubt, farmers are proud to get informed of the visit of high ranking officials in their rice fields where they discuss about new projects calculated in millions of dollars. But terrified and without knowing their future, what kind of interest can they find in that information ?

It is vital for many to be informed of the project of distribution of parcels in Mutara. But who will dare to be a candidate owner, when the region is deserted because of insecurity ?

Let us then talk about vital issues ...

During the period of disaster and mourning, to keep silent is not a good therapy. The only ones who would enjoy that situation is the very ones who are the instigators of that unfortune. We do agree about the duty of solidarity which commands to share with those who suffer a great deal. But how to share, if the most elementary information doesn't circulate ?

You easily imagine the resentment and the anger of the victims of the cowardly agressions when the latter are not even mentioned in the "news in brief"... Informing the whole rwanda about the unfortune of Rwandans is the most elementary respect for the listeners. To be delighted in ordinary news, or those concerning foreign countries is not mature. It is not flawning on Rwandans in recognizing their sense of dignity and their contempt of triviality. Then let us respect our people.

2. Appeal to the responsables and to any good wiiling person

Unfortunately, the October 1990 victory and ythe successes of the last days have not put an end to the agression. The authorities know well that this is the problem to be solved before all others, because without peace, nothing valid will be accomplished.

Our region is daily plunged in insecurity, with the war as a backdrop. Shall we be obliged to abandon these parishes, giving then the advantage to the agressors, whose ambition is to occupy the empty space ?

We must absolutely ensure the security for persons sheltered in the camps or in the homes of neighbours.

In addition to assure them provisions, it is important to improve medical care and to make efforts to suppress the idleness.

We, priests, we think we must talk because the population is desorientated and traumatized. We would like that our voice be heard beyond our borders by governments and people abroad, that the international instances and all good willing persons be sensitive about it.

Our burning wish is to see the negotiations succeed between the Patriotic Front and the Rwandan Government. That approach must be supported and encouraged. Is it utopian to hope that the powers that support or shelter the aggressors against Rwanda would stop supporting them without delay ? We invite you to pray for and with those among whom we live and suffer: the soldiers so often in danger, the terrorised civilians, the displaced persons, the refugees repatriated from Tanzania, the sick, the stricken population, the orphans, the handicapped and the casualties. We don't forget persons with great generosity of spirit who work on relieving so much misery.
Let us pray for peace.

Done at Rukomo, 10 February 1992.

Nyagahanga: P. Jean Marie LUCCA
P. Michel BROISELLE
P. Stefaan MINAERT
P. Alphonse CALOZET

Nyarurema: A. Giancarlos BUCCHIANERI
A. Silvio RIGHI
A. Giorgio SIMONETTI

Rukomo: P. Karel WINTERS
P. Brnard PAGANELLI
P. Joseph MATTEDI
P. Michel Hans HURTER

Rushaki: P. Walter GHERRI
P. Jean DESCHILDRE
P. Robert DEFALQUE
P. Robert GUILLAUME
P. Joachim VALLMAJO

In the name of my colleagues
and in agreement with them

P. Karel WINTERS.