THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Congolese church of Christ / 8th Community of the Pentecostal Churches of Central Africa (8th CEPAC) – Swedish Mission Council

THEME: CONFLICT, WARS and the CHURCH:
The case of the Democratic Republic of Congo

1. Introduction

We will be speaking about conflicts, wars and the Church in the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo. We will present:

- some of the causes of conflict and war in the region of the great lakes
- some of the main participants in conflict and war,
- some of the consequences of conflict and wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- How the Church has also been affected by conflicts and war,
- What experience can we take from the Church in the DRC to avoid or transform conflict and wars in other countries?

2. Context

The conflict experienced in the Democratic Republic of Congo does not resemble the traditional definition of war. According to the theoretical definition, there is conflict when a person, or group of people, for reasons that are justifiable for them, refuse to accept the natural difference that exists between what they are, and what they have, what they want and what they can do.

The refusal of this difference has always been, in different parts of the world, the origin of conflicts that have later worsened. Nevertheless, the DRC, in spite of its 425 linguistic variations, has never known a war as big, complex and deadly as the one that has been continuing since 1996.

The wars we will be speaking about in this paper are plural due to the fact that the DRC has experienced the repetition of some wars.

Regarding the Congolese Church of Christ, it is an association of local Churches grouped in a community which has a civilian quality and having full rights to undertake activities inscribed in their objectives and conforming to their mission.

3. Some causes of conflicts and wars in the region of the great lakes.

Vinoth Ramachandra in the paper at the world consultation of the Micah Network (RESEAU MICHEE) at Chang Mai, Thailand (Sept. 2006) said:
“There are many causes of conflict, and two wars are never identical. Certain countries have successfully lived in peace for centuries in spite of religious and ethnic differences; others have been incapable of developing into pluralist democracies. It is very rare for ethnic, cultural or religious differences themselves to lead to war. It is when these same differences are perceived to be at the heart of a larger matrix of social, political or economic discrimination that cultural and religious traditions provide the ideological resources for militant conflict”.

There have been many reasons used to justify war in the region of the great lakes for many decades. Among others, you could cite:

- Territory (problems of space)
- Identity (ethnicity)
  - Morphological identity
  - Linguistic identity (native and non-native languages)
  - Ethnic identity with origins in waves of migration
- Poverty
- Access to power
- Questions of security in the region of the great lakes
- The interests of other countries (the desire of wealth)

4. Some of the political causes of conflict and war in the Democratic Republic of Congo:

In order to understand the actual and remote causes of conflict that have plunged the DRC – a country at the heart of the great lakes – into mourning, we can first of all state that since the being granted independence on 30th June 1960, the Prime Minister Patrice Emery Lumumba in his role of head of the government, officially declared in his inaugural speech that “from now on, all the natural resources that the Congo is overflowing with must primarily benefit the Congolese people in order to raise their living conditions and rapidly develop the new state”. Dissatisfied with this programme, all of the major powers, with Belgium and the USA leading the way - continuing to believe and hope that the Congo would remain the place of “free resources” and at the despicable cost of strategic raw materials - did everything in their power to prevent the realisation of Lumumba’s plan and decimate the DRC.

Effectively, just 11 days after the declaration of independence of Congo, these major powers created and supported the secessionist struggle (of Katanga on the 11th July 1960 and South Kasai on the 8th August 1960) in order to also deprive Lumumba’s government of the proceeds of mineral resources (copper, cobalt, diamonds etc..) from the two provinces. Under instruction from the imperialist
west, the Prime Minister Lumumba was illegally overthrown on the 5th September 1960, arrested, savagely tortured, and finally shamefully assassinated on the 17th January 1961 at Elisabethville (Katanga) by the Belgian police and the American CIA. As if this wasn’t enough, the body of Lumumba was then cut into pieces and dissolved in sulphuric acid in a bath tub and poured into the drains. The new Republic lapsed into political chaos and indescribable economics! On the 14th January 1963, assisted by the ‘blue caps’ of the United Nations in Congo (L’ONUC); the government of Prime Minister Cyrille Adoula (Trade Unionist) succeeded in ending the independence movement of Katanga. The insurrection of South Kasai had already been stopped by the National Congolese Army¹. This situation would have unwelcome repercussions for the political, economic and social stability for this large country at the heart of Africa.

Following this, the dictatorial regime of Marshal Mobutu Sese Seko would replace the indescribable chaos in which the country had been plunged by the events of the sixties with 32 years of oppression and (his government) single-handedly took part in corruption, nepotism and ‘influence peddling’ before being overthrown by the war of independence of the AFDL, lead by a man loyal to Lumumba, Laurent Désiré Kabila.

5. Participants in the conflicts and war in the DRC:

Collette Braeckman² reveals that the war in 1996, posited as an uprising of the Tutsis from South Kivu, (the ‘Banyamulenge’ people, victims of ethnic cleansing) was nothing more than a military operation long organised by powers assisted by opponents of Mobutu.

Replaced by the rebellion of the Congolese Democratic Union (RCD - Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie), this African World War - placing many African states in opposition on Congolese soil - eased the invasion of Ugandan/Rwandan/Burundi backed troops; however the confrontations in Kisangani between the Rwandan and Ugandan army in 2000 will clearly show the Congolese people to be victims of an unjust war fuelled by the vast Congolese riches sought after at great cost by multinational companies.

The paradox exists between the vast and highly prized Congolese resources and the flagrant misery of the majority of the population that have been impoverished for decades. This makes it easy for various groups and foreign militia associated with rebel local chiefs (FDLR, RASTA, INTERAHAMWE, LRA) still operating illegal arms trading within the borders with total impunity close to

¹ J.Kyalangilwa, Europe in the Congo conference (conférence Europe sur le Congo), 2007
² Colette Braeckman, l’enjeu congolais, fayard, 1999, P.25
ethnic groups (as in the case of the Ituri between Hema and Lendu); to perpetuate the climate of insecurity, to the benefit of those who exploit – through blood-money – the diversified and sought after mines hidden in the earth for resources such as coltan (columbite-tantalite\(^3\)), gold, diamonds, uranium, cobalt, copper, methane gas, oil…

The causes of war and conflict are manifold; as are the participants that could be:

- Political Leaders
The armed groups of which the ‘Interhamwe’ and ‘Ex-Faz’ are two - came from Rwanda supplied with arms after the genocide in their own country; spread terror amongst the Congolese population; pillage; rape innocent women and kill night and day on Congolese soil after having been welcomed as refugees after pressure from the international community.
- governments
- multinational companies
- the international community and
- Rulers or ethnic chieftains (militias)

6. Some of the consequences of war and conflict in the DRC

The consequences of these unjust conflicts and wars on the population and their surroundings are incalculable today. Since the start of the wars in the DRC, over 4000,000 people are estimated to have been killed.
In the 2006 paper on the globalisation of conflict, Vinoth Ramachandra is quoted as saying:
“The conflict in the DCR has caused, according to estimations, almost four million deaths, that being 7% of the population, the vast majority by malnutrition and sickness.”
As well as that, we must add the massive violations of human rights, abductions, rape and violence against women irrespective of their age, sexual slavery, sodomy, the phenomenon of child soldiers, or children born through rape, the proliferation and increase in sexually transmitted diseases as well as HIV and AIDS, children thrown out onto the streets (these children not being educated), the destruction of socio-sanitary infrastructure, and communication (making the Congo the first country affected by the Antonov Air disaster), destruction of the education infrastructure etc…

We report that likewise, the country was, at a given moment divided and occupied by different warring factions.
One section was occupied by -the government,
Another by -the DCR / Goma

\(^3\) a metallic ore used to produce the elements niobium and tantalum (my addition)
7. Have the conflicts and wars affected the Church in the DCR

The persistence in the state of danger following unjust conflicts and wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo has not spared the church. Among other wrongdoings we quote as a case in point:

- The poverty of members that have found a new method of survival through the proliferation of sects;
- The divisions maintained through conflict between ethnic groups, fed by power hungry politicians with hidden agendas;
- The opposition between believers belonging to various faiths;
- The internal displacement of people fleeing danger and leaving village churches empty;
- The lack of proper means allowing members of the church to maintain all of their needs;
- The trauma that members of the church experience – even its leaders;
- Deportation and assassination of certain serving members of the church for having denounced human rights violations by the rebels.

8. The place and role of the church during the conflicts and wars in the DRC

Before the wars

The church was still suffering together with the population and stood alongside them in demanding their rights in spite of the difficult political situation. We remind ourselves, however, that between 1985 and 1990, with the support of the church and the ‘civil society’ came the appearance of several opposition political parties recognised as radical, such as the DCF5, UDP56, UFERI7… Before Marshal Mobutu, his regime and his supporters were painfully surprised by the results of the February/March polls, at the end of which (after having officially received nearly 6000 memos in which the Zairian people said loud and clear “No to the dictatorial regime, Mobutu, and the MPR8!”), Mobutu declared on the 24th April 1990 from the high tribune that “with deep emotion and a tear in his eye” he was taking leave of the party, and proclaimed a tri-partite government.

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4 intermediary institutions such as NGOs (my addition)
5 Convention des Fédéralistes pour la Démocratie Chrétienne (Federalist Christian Democracy)
6 Union Pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (Union for Democracy and Social Progress)
7 L’Union des FédéraListes et Républicains Indépendants (Independent Union of Federalists and Republicans)
8 Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution (Popular Movement of the Revolution)
Soon after, the Congolese people were brought together at the National Conference for Sovereignty (CNS – 7th August 1991 – 6th December 1992) Presided over by the Church (firstly Pasteur Kalonji, followed by the archbishop of Kisangani, Laurent Monsegwo Pasinya) – the Church exerted great pressure on the then Prime Minister at the time of the closure of the CNS; a Christian March took place on the 16th February 1992 calling for it to be reopened and many Christians and their leaders were killed by Mobutu’s troops. Unfortunately the results of this forum never satisfied the Congolese people because Mobutu, in spite of the consensual agreements with the people, refused to apply the decisions taken in the CNS and its’ decision making organisation the HSR-PT (High Council of the Republic-Parliament of Transition).

Transition Period

The long, interminable transition period that had lasted since 1992, after having had wars and rebellions from all sides during its course would once again receive the contribution of the church in the political negotiations. From these negotiations, apart from figures in the transitional government (christened the “1 plus 4⁹”), members of the church would be charged with setting up key organisations after having accepted the mission to organise elections. The following organisations are lead by people from the Church – the transitional parliament, the independent electoral commission, (CEI), and the truth and reconciliation commission.

Electoral and post-electoral period.

The involvement of the church in raising awareness of the elections through campaigns of civic education and citizenship has been a remarkable success, even if the people elected don’t seem to hold the same expectations as the populations that have elected them. Today, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has chosen its leaders through free, democratic and transparent elections.

Creation and effective participation in the activities of the GLEF/ FECCLAHA.¹⁰

The environment that allows the leaders of the church to involve themselves in research and the construction of peace is not an insignificant element in defending those without a voice.

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⁹ A model that consisted of one President and 4 Vice Presidents.
¹⁰ Great Lakes Ecumenical Fellowship / Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa
It is towards this goal that the Church of Christ of the Congo/South Kivu has taken the initiative to develop the disarmament and repatriation project for armed groups operating in the East of the DRC.

Also, (the church are involved in) other humanitarian and emergency projects in aid of the stricken population. We list for example, looking after female victims of sexual violence in hospitals managed by the Church. The CEPAC PANZI Hospital at Bakavu is a further example of the church’s actions.

We have also denounced human rights violations through church organisations, structures and services such as ‘Inheritors of Justice’, the Justice and Peace Commission, and the ‘Jeremy group’... examples of the church’s work in changing the country.

Furthermore, the church organises regular prayers, anti war demonstrations, television and radio programmes campaigning for peace, reconciliation...

9. What experience can we take from the church and the DRC in avoiding or transforming conflict and war in other countries?

Although the context is different, the church must:

- Pursue its prophetic mission in denouncing evil and calling the people and leading them with respect to their commitments subscribed to in the constitution.
- Remain defenders, opposing all oppressive measures imposed on God’s people.
- Assist in the democratic process through its education of Christian and citizenship values based on respect for others.
- Oppose all attempts to return people to a state of oppression
- Encourage and participate in reconciliation initiatives of social groups otherwise engaged in never-ending fighting through forgiveness and love of thy neighbour.
- Along with the support of charities and the ‘civil society’ (NGOs), make it easier for demobilised people to be reintegrated at the heart of society.
- Encourage dialogue between warring factions
- (Try to ensure) that ‘civil society’ organisations that work for long-lasting developments and the promotion of human rights are financed in order to continue to pursue their interventions which are beneficial to the population.
- To involve the major players in the search for peace.

Conclusion

We express our solidarity with all victims of armed conflict and those against whom atrocities have been committed;
To the survivors of all violence, victims of sexual abuse in particular;

We express our solidarity with all people who for political reasons have been uprooted; Romans 12:15 11“Weep with them that weep”

We condemn war, human rights violations and we continue to engage in advocating an environment which benefits their life. Matthew 5:9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of god”.

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For the Congolese church of Christ / 8th Community of the Pentecostal Churches of Central Africa (8th CEPAC) – Swedish Mission Council.

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11 King James I version of the bible