

FROM BISHOP PETER, BISHOP LIBBY AND BISHOP KEITH

18th April 2018

Dear Friends,

We are writing to inform you of the current turmoil in Aru and Boga, the Diocese of Chester link dioceses in northeast DR Congo. There has been some coverage of this crisis on national news which you may have seen. We have received requests for support from our link dioceses in this time of need.

These dioceses are approximately coterminous with the district of Ituri, an area that saw some of the bloodiest fighting in the Congolese War from 1999-2003. Much of that fighting was between two tribal groups with a long history of conflict, the Hema and Lendu.

Starting last December, and coming to a head in February, there has been a resurgence of hostilities after more than a decade of peace. Although the old tribal antagonism has played a part, church and community leaders do not really understand who is stirring up the situation; it is not like it was before. Clergy report churches and houses being torched, women raped and many killed. The centre of these atrocities is Djugu, 70 kilometres from Bunia, the provincial capital, where +Keith, Archdeacon Ian and a team from the diocese were visiting last July.

Unsurprisingly, many are fleeing the fighting. Earlier this month it was reported that there were more than 100,000 displaced people, including 42,000 refugees in neighbouring Uganda. Bisoke Balikenga, Provincial Youth Leader, tells of 25,000 displaced families in Bunia. The number of displaced and refugees in DRC as a whole equals those of Syria.

The local Church is doing a magnificent job. They are putting people up in their homes and opening up their schools to shelter the displaced. Their whole ethos is summed up by their vision 'Ensemble nous pouvons' (Together we can). However, emergency aid is essential: the Anglican Alliance, whose mandate is to bring together development, relief and advocacy work across the Communion, is aiming to raise \$100,000 across ten DRC dioceses, starting with Aru and Boga.

When asked about the greatest need in the current unrest, the bishops' unanimous answer is **prayer**. Therefore, we urge all churches in Chester Diocese to remember the situation in Ituri before the Lord, in both public and private intercessions. They also ask for **advocacy**: the Archbishop of Canterbury mentioned the DRC conflict in the House of Lords. One of our local MPs, David Rutley, has been in touch with the Department of International Development and received an encouraging reply that the British Government are monitoring the situation very closely and are planning a visit later this year.

Finally, those displaced by the conflict require emergency aid in the form of clothes, food, healthcare and trauma healing. To this end, we are asking parishes, schools and individuals across the Diocese to consider ways in which we across Chester Diocese can support our brothers and sisters in the Dioceses of Aru and Boga. As the Apostle Paul wrote: *At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need* (2 Corinthians 8:14).

We are asking if you would make a donation, however large or small. Donations should be made direct to the Congo Church Association, using one of the following methods;

- By **online payment**, details can be found at www.congochurchassn.org.uk You can Gift Aid your donation, by using this payment method or by downloading a form from the same website.
- By **cheque**, payable to 'Congo Church Association', Please write on the reverse of the cheque the reference **DioChester** and address it to; The Hon. Treasurer, Paul Dickens, Hockliffe Grange, Hockliffe, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 9NL.
- By **direct payment**, payable to 'Congo Church Association' CAF Bank Ltd Account No. 00016616 Sort code 40-52-40

When making a donation please quote the reference **DioChester**.

We thought it would be appropriate to ask everyone to **pray and give**, especially during the time of Thy Kingdom Come, and respond to this appeal by the Day of Pentecost, Sunday 20th May, if you are able to give financially.

Information, updates and details about the Dioceses of Aru and Boga are on the Diocesan Website.

Please pray, and thank you for your response.

With love in Christ,

+Peter, +Libby and +Keith



Photo taken by Philip Alston
of children attending
Sunday School in Bunia