



*Solidarity with  
our sisters in*  
**Africa**

NEWSLETTER Edition 13

Autumn 2023

***"These countries and this continent deserve to be respected and listened to, they deserve space and attention, take your hands out of these countries."***

*Pope Francis, visiting DR Congo, January 2023*

Over the past twelve months, Rwanda and DR Congo have featured more times on UK national news than in twelve plus years of writing this newsletter. At the start of this year, DR Congo was the first stop on the Pope's tour of the African continent. In other news, there has been much debate about Rwanda as destination for asylum seekers from Great Britain – part of the "stop-the-boats" campaign. We have also seen reports about both DRC and Rwanda and devastation suffered in the wake of natural disasters – effect of climate change – and our sisters have sent their own local reports and pictures, some too harrowing to put in this correspondence.

We pray in support our sisters, their work and situation in the climatic and economic global sphere.

### **MIRHI BUKAVU**

We receive short reports throughout the year from the sisters, usually by Whatsapp. The photos show how busy the Community are, in the normal way, with all their work.



The following is an account of some of the bigger challenges they have faced this year, compiled from those reports and from what has been 'in the news'.

## **Goma: Dealing with Volcanic Eruptions and War**

You will recall that Goma suffered volcanic eruptions in 2022. The aftermath has been devastating, particularly with the backdrop of conflict in the surrounding area.

Goma, a city that has endured the trauma of volcanic eruptions and the scars of war, faces yet another challenge. The recent volcanic activity has caused substantial human suffering and material damage. Earth tremors have further damaged homes and infrastructure, leaving the city in a state of continued crisis. Many people have been made homeless and have lost their property due to their houses being destroyed or looted.

Those displaced – after the eruption or because of the conflict situation - have sought refuge in camps, while others remain isolated within their communities. Poverty levels have increased. The area around Goma is extremely unstable.

A message from S. Thérèse in February described a state of emergency in the city – shops, schools, offices closed – there was no traffic, no movement – and the sound of gunshots all around.

To describe the current situation to us, Thérèse sent us a local news report – of the refugee camp in Bulengo, which during the course of this year has been receiving thousands more people. Bulengo is about 15km from the city of Goma. It is a camp for displaced populations fleeing the clashes between the M23 rebels and the army. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) the camp is facing a major humanitarian crisis, with limited access to basic services, hygiene, and health care. The increase in population of the camp is putting untold pressure on the already scarce resources and facilities and there have been serious incidents of violence against women and children.

Our sisters, continue to do what they can to help the local people and other refugees. They are afraid but don't want to leave the local population without any help.



Above is an illustration of the help the sisters have been able to provide for malnourished children, with money sent from the UK.

At the end of February, 27 orphaned children were brought to the sisters from Masisi, a highly insecure area of Goma. They were children who had been picked up, on the road – with no destination - parents killed or lost when they fled the conflict. The children arrived with the sisters, exhausted, some ill with malaria, hungry, with very sad faces. Several didn't even know their own names.

They are now healthy again, thanks to funds arriving from the UK and Belgium, which provided food and medicines. Therese, on behalf of all the sisters, sends her huge gratitude to all those who send money to assist and for your prayer.



### **Kalehe: A Village Lost in the Floods**

In May, there was heavy rainfall and devastating floods in DR Congo and Rwanda. In Kalehe, a village between Goma and Bukavu, the entire village disappeared beneath the waters due to severe flooding. The incident occurred on market day, making it challenging to count the dead and missing. The marketplace and its visitors were swept away in the deluge.

The families of some of our sisters were affected. We extend our support and condolences to those sisters. The pain and grief are immeasurable. The incident was so devastating that a National Day of Mourning was declared; many died and in such challenging circumstances, that victims had to be buried in a communal grave. Our thoughts and prayer are with the affected families.

In these trying times, we continue to pray for strength and resilience. All of this with the backdrop of a 'forgotten' war, which rarely makes the news in the rest of the world. In North and South Kivu, the ongoing war has made the population in the whole region more vulnerable as people can no longer recover lost property; many are displaced; cannot work or grow food – obviously a huge issue and the sisters say, taking all this into consideration, the levels of poverty now are unprecedented.

### **The Pope's visit and some Community Celebrations**

A high point in a difficult year, was Pope Francis' visit at the end of January. DR Congo was the first stop on his African tour. The Pope welcomed and listened to the victims of violence and was visibly moved by their stories, says S. Véronique.

The Pope pleaded for the cause of African countries, in powerful words: *"these countries and this continent deserve to be respected and listened to, they deserve space and attention, take your hands out of these countries."*

The event of the Pope's arrival gave joy to all Congolese, our sisters report. His presence gave encouragement to them as defender of the poor and defender of Africa. They also noted specifically that after the visit, they experienced a short period of relative calm.



Mirhi also had the great joy this year of celebrating 4 golden jubilees, 6 silver jubilees and in July 8 young sisters took their final vows.

Several sisters from the Priory in Mirhi are in mission abroad - they report to be well settled, caring for migrants, the elderly, nursing the sick and giving pastoral care.

The Community have many sisters who are sick. We pray for their recovery and in particular for S. Georgette who died recently. S. Georgette was, we are told, "very kind, generous and devoted to all, especially to her sisters in the Community, to the poorest and the disabled".

## **RWANDA**

In the UK, there has been a lot of debate about a controversial government plan to deport asylum seekers (arriving in the UK) to Rwanda, where they would be held in detention centres to claim asylum there instead. The plan, part of the 'Stop the Boats' campaign, is aimed at deterring the increasing number of migrants from risking their lives crossing the English Channel in small boats and to stop people smugglers from exploiting them.

Last year, the first flight was cancelled shortly before it was due to take off after a last-minute intervention by the European Court of Human Rights, who found the policy to be unlawful. The UK's Supreme Court – the UK's highest court – will consider whether the 'Rwanda policy' is lawful, with a judgement expected later this year. This decision could reshape how asylum seekers are treated globally. The case hinges on whether deporting individuals to Rwanda would breach human rights standards, particularly Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Here is the report from our Rwandan Community about what has been happening there.

### **Floods in Rwanda**

As in DR Congo, floods and droughts have increased over recent years in Rwanda and have killed hundreds of people and destroyed homes. Heavy rains are common between March and May, but Rwanda's weather authority attributes the unusual rainfall patterns to climate change. You can read more on the internet by searching '2023 African Great Lakes Floods'.

### **Muhanga**

A few days before the floods in DR Congo in May, there were news reports in UK media from Rwanda that several people died and many homes swept away in flooding after extreme weather conditions. S. Marie Rose told us that the building in Muhanga which houses the disabled children was affected by the flooding and suffered structural damage.

After hearing about the floods, we were pleased to receive these photographs of the sisters with children and young adults in Muhanga in June. A testimony of their resilience.





One of the photos came with the caption: 'Disability is not inability'. The sisters are encouraging the children and young adults to be involved in everyday activities, including housework, sewing and other crafts. It is wonderful to witness the positivity in Muhanga.



## **Masaka**

The school in Masaka continues to develop. The sisters now provide 'porridge' mid-morning for the younger children. All the children eat at their desks as there isn't a refectory in the school.



We are also pleased to hear that the children have regular 'playing-out time'!



### **Community news**

Many people will be sad to hear of the death of S. Thérèse Ntaawigenera. Thérèse took special care of our volunteers who taught English to the Community in Rwanda, between 2015 and 2018. May she Rest in Peace.

### **KINDU**

In Kindu, S. Jacqueline reports, the sisters continue our work to help the poor in an ever more insecure environment. They try to do this, she says by having "a heart that listens" to those who come to them and by creating an "atmosphere of joy to help them forget the stress in which they are immersed".



Since establishing the first mission house in Kindu in 2013 and their involvement with healthcare in the locality, the sisters have become aware of the incidence of deaths due to the fact that the hospitals in the area are not properly equipped for paraclinical examinations: lack of ultrasounds, CT Scans, X-Rays etc. In order to get this type of medical examination, people have to be referred to clinics in other regions or in other countries, which means this treatment is inaccessible for the poor, so they have to live with - and die from - potentially treatable conditions. The sisters themselves also have the dilemma of the cost and accessibility of treatment, when members of the Community have health issues.

In an attempt to improve this situation, the Kindu sisters have recommissioned a building in Kindu, which was used for the postulants and have turned it into a hospital in the city. They have received help from a Congolese lady doctor in Belgium and now provide beds for adults and children. With money from donors, including fundraising and donors in the UK, they have bought an ultrasound – which they are using for maternity scans. They hope that they will be able to buy more devices and medicines with help from donors.



The sisters continue their dispensary and maternity clinic, which serves the rural area outside Kindu. Money is scarce as the sisters run this operation on their own. They do not have any other funding and patients have difficulty paying.

### **Community life**

We were delighted to hear that S. Anne Marie has made good progress after being unwell for a long time with a serious health condition and we send her good wishes.



S. Anne Marie, from the establishment of the first house in Kindu until very recently, was the sister who sent us regular reports and wonderful pictures of Kindu.

The sisters in Kindu report that they continue to have several enquiries to join the Community. They are grappling with the issue of needing to continue the building to house the novitiate and the lack of funds to do so.

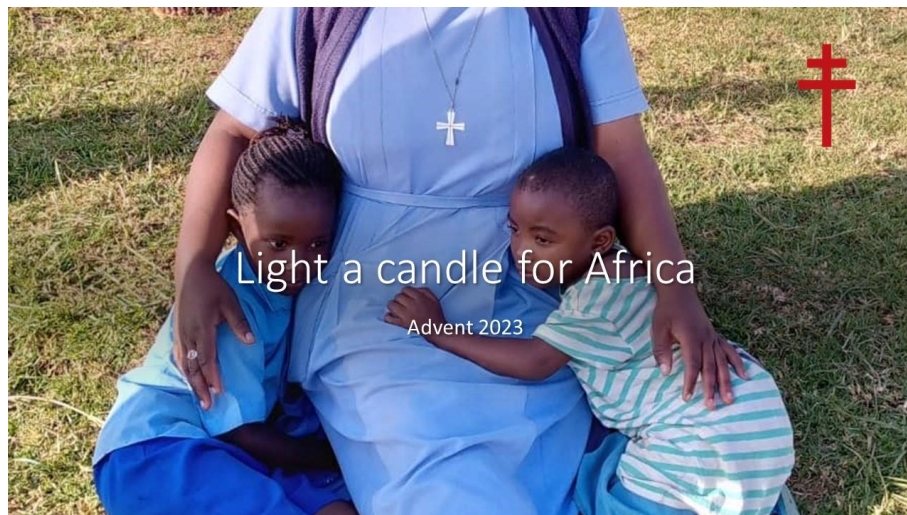
Kindu also report the sad news of the first death in the Kindu Priory, Sister Anastasie (sub-prioress), she died after a diabetes attack.

## FUNDRAISING

On behalf of our sisters in Rwanda and D R Congo, we thank everyone of you who have given donations for Africa over this past twelve months – either by regular or one-off donations and by holding or supporting a fundraising event. The sisters are also grateful for your prayer.

### Advent Action to help Africa

Last year we raised £4,380 from our Light a Candle for Africa appeal and we send our great thanks to you all. We are running the fundraiser again for Advent and we hope you will be able to support it.



This is how it works:

- You donate whatever you are able by clicking on the [DONATE](#) button (or see under CONTACT page on our website) Please put in the description 'LIGHT A CANDLE FOR AFRICA'.

- Or send a cheque payable to Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre to the Community at 74, Howe Close, Colchester CO4 3XD - put 'LIGHT A CANDLE FOR AFRICA' on the envelope.
- Send your message to the Community, via email Pauline McAloone at [projects@canonesses.co.uk](mailto:projects@canonesses.co.uk) or addressed to Pauline at above address.
- Your message will be added to our prayer tree (see picture below). The Community will light a candle every week of Advent and will pray for your intentions and for the sisters in Africa.



On behalf of all our sisters,



**THANK YOU ALL**

