



One Page (monthly bulletin of the Carmelite NGO)

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KINSHASA: The United Nations mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) urged the government to exhume more than 400 bodies buried last month in a mass grave, the head of the organization's human rights office said. Local authorities in the Capital Kinshasa have said they buried 421 corpses overnight on March 19 in the rural commune of Maluku. The government says the bodies are unclaimed fetuses, stillborn babies and homeless people from the city morgue. However, rights groups suspect that some might be people killed in anti-government protests in January of an earlier crackdown on criminals in Kinshasa.

"We recommend doing the exhumation but it is up to the authorities to take all measures to reassure the population and to combat rumors," Jos Maria Aranaz, director of the UN's Congo-based Human Rights Office (UNJHRO), said at a news conference.

Justice Minister Alexis Thambwe said last week that the government was prepared to exhume the bodies if asked by UN officials or the US-based campaign group Human Rights Watch. However, Thambwe said on April 13 that the decision would be left to the prosecutor leading an investigation into the burials, explaining that the government wanted to show it could conduct a transparent investigation on its own.

Congolese authorities say the mass burial of unclaimed bodies is a common practice used to clear space at the overcrowded central morgue in Kinshasa. Aranaz said that the UN mission was providing logistical support to the Congolese investigation in addition to carrying out its own. He said that his office had asked the government for all pertinent documents, including the morgue registry and death certificates, but was still awaiting a response.

Reported by REUTERS, April 16, 2015

The Discovery of A Mass Grave in Kinshasa: Deep Need of International Inquiry Commission

The government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) officially recognized the existence of a mass grave containing around 241 decomposing bodies in a rural municipality of Kinshasa. However, it says the bodies buried in the mass grave in Maluku are those of stillborn babies, indigent or unidentified persons. Moreover, "seeing the bodies I do not think either babies or miscarriages" alleged one resident.

The reaction of the association Voice of the Voiceless was quick. It rejected the explanations given by the Congolese government. Furthermore, the common grave of Maluku continues to make the headlines. 421 people were buried collectively March 19, 100 km far from the capital city.

Questioned by the protection of human rights organizations in recent weeks, the authorities announced that a judicial inquiry was ongoing. A first report was filed with the prosecutor and the site was secure.

The authorities say they have nothing to hide, but questions remain. The common grave of Maluku will be exhumed? Such desire was expressed recently days either by the Congolese civil society either by the international community. For the latter, make autopsies would close the debate on the origin of the death of these 421 people. Congolese forensic science has in any case the capacity to conduct exhumations after a series of training provided by France and Germany. But on the side of the authorities, the decision has not been taken yet. It is the Attorney General of the DRC to do so. However, according to one of the magistrates in charge of the investigations, the exhumation will be decided only if it is deemed “interesting” or “necessary” for the purposes of the investigation. Meanwhile, calls have multiplied to ask families who are always in search of the remains of their loved ones killed or disappeared in recent months to testify as part of the investigation. An appeal was also launched to NGOs that are in contact with some of died men’s families. For a week, the authorities want to investigate repeated “seamlessly.” But a number of questions remain: the detailed list of people buried in that grave and date of death. The government, according to some media, ensures that the other three mass graves have been created over the past year in another cemetery of the town; to Mikonga (suburb of Kinshasa) on site, two gravediggers interviewed by RFI belie; no trace of a mass grave in this cemetery closed, they say, since April 2014.

According to some media write, “it’s a pile of sand surrounded by tall grass. To find it, we must do more that 100 km by road and follow a small track. This is where, behind a cemetery, we spotted a large freshly turned dirt patch. No cross, and no headstone. A mass grave that could have passed unnoticed, but there not been so many inhabitants of testimony for the report. “Besides, in the area, many people say they have seen around 4:00am, trucks covered with plastic sheeting. People who have started to unload told them that it was dead and asked those passing by to move away because of the strong smell of decaying bodies.”

A woman who just returned from the fields next tells what she saw: “It was 4:00am and there were many corpses in plastic bags. We buried them here, we dumped them all in the same pit.” “Another woman with a plate of yams and vegetables on her head says: “I have not seen the body, but when they arrived they told us that they are rotting corpses state and that should not be made to approach the unhealthy smell.”

“Why bury to the night between 2:00am and 4:00am?” Still the common question of many Congolese and foreigners.

The Congolese authorities must now decide whether or not they will exhume the body to shed light on this strange mass grave.

Reported by Chelo Dhebbi, O.Carm., Ph.D. Fr. Chelo is a full professor at the Catholic University of Congo and Secretary General for Finance and Project Management at the Catholic University of Congo.

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