

Comboni Missionaries
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Zaire: The Other War

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Comboni Press/Rome/12/30/96. The situation in Eastern Zaire is worsening. On Christmas day, Isiro was completely looted by fleeing Zaire troops. The two Comboni Mission houses were despoiled of everything and the provincial house of the Comboni Sisters was burned down. Twenty seven missionary personnel, including the Comboni Missionaries, Comboni Sisters, Dominican Sisters and some Zairean novices, escaped and fled to the forest. As evacuation remains the only option, news has reached Rome that on December 30, an aircraft was expected at Isiro to move the missionaries to Kinshasa. The question remained how the evacuees would reach the airport, however.

The mission in Mungbere has nothing left to give as each group of fleeing soldiers has been looting or demanding everything in sight. However, the hospital has been left untouched. The mission of Niania, on the Isiro-Kisangani road, has been destroyed, but the Kabila rebels have taken over and the situation has improved. Kisangani is under curfew, and there is the threat that the Zaire army regulars will follow the usual pattern of looting and burning before leaving the city. Also, the missions at Neisu and Viadana, manned by the Consolata Missionaries, have been looted.

At Rungu, the mission has not been touched by marauders and the Comboni Missionaries remain at home. The COE volunteers (Centro Orientamento Educazione, NGO of Milan) have taken shelter. Banyamulenge rebels reached Watsa on December 30 and also destroyed the mission of NIA-NIA.

Comboni missionaries in Dungu and Duru, which were already looted, plan to take refuge in Sudan with those at Nzara, while the Comboni Missionaries of Ango-Dakwa are moving towards the Central African Republic. So far, the missionaries are safe, just leaner, and are ready to resume work as soon as the conditions allow them to return.

Mobutu has returned to Kinshasa. As his motorcade made its way through the city streets, people were screaming. Thief, thief! Mobutu has totally alienated the population even in the capital and there is growing support for Kabila. The Voice of America speaks often of Zaire and the rumor in the streets is that the USA is behind Kabila in an effort to get rid of an uncomfortable former ally.