



Brussels, 18 January 2018

To the whole Province

Subject: On the peaceful march requested by the CLC on Sunday 21 January in DR Congo.

Dear companions,

Peace of Christ!

1. May the Spirit of God light his fire of wisdom, courage and love in our darkness. At this tragic moment in our history when dehumanizing misery has taken up residence in our homes, communities, towns and cities, the Society of Jesus walks in the Church and intensely communicates with the appeals of our Fathers, Bishops of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO).
2. As you certainly know, the Lay Coordinating Committee (CLC) is organizing for the second time a "peaceful march of Christians." According to the organizers of this protest march, the objective is to implement the December 31st Agreement. The main points of the claims are as follows: "... 1. A public declaration by the President of the Republic that he will not be a candidate for his own succession in accordance with the Constitution. 2. The effective, full and bona fide implementation of the New Year's Agreement, including the following measures: a. The release of all political prisoners; b. The end of the exile of opponents threatened with arrest on their return to the country; c. The end of the duplication of political parties; d. The liberalization of media spaces and especially of the RTNC; e. The reopening of unjustly closed media; f. Restructuring of the INEC in order to rebuild confidence between the electorate and the institution organising the elections; g. The use of the timetable recently proposed by the INEC as a working tool for the elaboration of a consensual timetable; h. The free exercise of political activities by all." (CLC, Kinshasa, 31 December 2017).
3. The President of CENCO, in his last letter to the bishops, asks everyone to discern how to support this action of the laity who, according to the social doctrine of the Church, do not need to ask for permission from the Church's hierarchy in order to commit themselves.
4. "To CENCO's positions, some oppose the principle of secularism of the Congolese State; others advocate the notion of the Church's neutrality. It should be remembered that the secular character of the Congolese State cannot prevent the Catholic Church from fulfilling its mission, that of announcing the Good News of Salvation, from being at the service of the Congolese population, with a view to respecting the human rights and human dignity essential to its well-being and integral development". (Kinshasa, 11 January 2018).

5. Therefore, to you, Companions of Jesus, I say this: those whose conscience invites them to go for the march will first have to talk with their local superior to discern with him the behaviour to adopt. All will observe caution and avoid all forms of ostentation. Scholastics will indicate in writing that they do so freely, knowing the possible consequences.
6. I ask those who want to march to avoid any isolated involvement and join the parish communities that will be involved.
7. Some say they are embarrassed that the Society of Jesus has not made any strong public statements. Let them know they have nothing to be ashamed of. Indeed, the Society of Jesus (our Province) has always endorsed the declarations of the bishops; it has even played a decisive role in the organization of the dialogue that produced the New Year's Agreements for which blood is flowing today. Our companions, Fathers Minani, Bueya and Moka were certainly not applauded by the crowd, but history will say one day, after the passion, how beneficial their participation in the dialogue has been for this country. I am an informed witness. This is our way of doing it: giving the best of ourselves where we hope to bear fruit, fruit that endures.
8. Following Ignatius' advice, I ask that we avoid embarking on major discussions that divide the community. The situation in our country is very complex; it takes a lot of patience and detachment to interpret the puppet game from all sides that unfolds tragically before our eyes. Beware of manipulation, no matter where it comes from. The Lord Jesus did not make partisan politics: "My kingdom is not of this world." (Jn 18:36) However, his unambiguous choice of Yahweh's "anawim" party, the poor of Yahweh, had certain political implications and revolutionized the present world... He is our Model.
9. May your lamp, Lord, illuminate our footsteps and may your ears be attentive to the cries of our misery.

Fraternally in the Lord,
Fr José Minaku, SJ
Provincial