



SYNOD PUTS HOPE IN AFRICAN YOUTH

Prelates Decry Forced Child Soldiers, Prostitutes

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 14, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The main treasure of Africa is its young people, but they need protection from those who would force them into lives as child soldiers or prostitutes, the bishops of that continent are affirming.

Archbishop John Baptist Odama of Gulu, Uganda, is one of the prelates who made this appeal Tuesday morning at the 13th General Congregation of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.

The prelate spoke from personal experience of the "great violence done to children" in his archdiocese.

According to an English summary of his intervention, released by the Vatican, he stated that this violence has been perpetrated by rebel soldiers of the "Lord's Resistance Army, who the past several years have terrorized the people and particularly targeted children."

These forces, the archbishop reported, "have taken young boys and girls to force them to become child soldiers, damaging their minds and spirits in terrible ways."

He added that the soldiers have "abducted young girls as sex slaves, ruining their hopes and futures."

Archbishop Odama acknowledged that these violent acts take place in many other parts of Africa as well, affirming that this includes the "violence of hunger, lack of educational opportunities, shortage of adequate health care, and unfit living conditions in urban slums and refugee camps."

He appealed to the Synod to "speak out against the political, economic and social situations that do such violence to our children."

Shocking rates

The prelate continued: "But let me add yet another way in which violence is done to children, and this is the shocking rates of abortion that take away the lives of innocents even before birth.

"A culture of abortion, a dynamic of lack of respect for the unborn, a promotion of 'rights' that even allows for this denial of the right to life, is but another sign of violence against life."

As an answer to these problems, the archbishop called on the Church in Africa to take a strong stance on respect for life.

This value, he said, "is both strong counter-witness to violence and vigorous endorsement of the conditions necessary for life."

As well, Archbishop Odama affirmed that the Church should be "known as strong defenders of the rights of women," in their "God-given dignity" to counteract those who "speak of the rights of women in ways that would violate the rights of others -- especially the rights of unborn children."

Bishop Ernesto Maguengue of Pemba, Mozambique, another of the 27 prelates who gave interventions in this session, also spoke in favor of protecting the young.

He stated: "The main riches of the continent is represented by its population, and especially the youth, adolescents and children. Africa is a continent with the youngest population in the world.

"African youth is an inestimable treasure that cannot be forgotten or lie unused, if one wishes to guarantee a future of lasting development, reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa."

Encouragement

The prelate lamented the fact that many young people fall into "violence, prostitution, drug trafficking and use, organized crime, political, ethnic and tribal strife, as well as into religious fundamentalism and satanic sects among others."

He appealed to the Synod to give a "strong message of trust and encouragement" to young people.

Bishop Maguengue called on the Church and government to stimulate and tap into the "vast potential which African youth represents."

The bishop underlined the need for "education and integral formation of youth that takes into consideration the context and their culture so as to make them able to be true servants of reconciliation, justice and peace."

He also called for attention to pastoral care for youth, "due to the fact that the majority of children and adolescents grew up in difficult environments characterized by destroyed families, hostilities, wars, violence and abuses of fundamental rights which have left deep wounds in the souls."

Piarist Father Mamby Dominique Basse, Vice-provincial in Senegal of the Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools, expressed the hope that consecrated persons can help care for youth.

He noted the environment in Africa "is often difficult, and that nurtures in the young internal tensions that translate externally into behaviors that are completely contrary to the spirit of peace and reconciliation."

"Violence is also close to the young," the priest said, "because it is present in the continuous devastations of the conflict which destroys family life."

Partnership

He added that "education for peace and reconciliation is an urgent necessity, everywhere where the consecrated work with youth."

The priest proposed creating "services of listening where the consecrated, trained in the techniques of active listening, are available to welcome the young who feel the need to confide."

He also noted that religious congregations could help "create structures whose objective is the smooth insertion into professional life for the young, as well as their access to work and to a decent income."

The bishop of Miarinarivo, Madagascar, also promoted the Church's involvement with African youth.

Bishop Jean Claude Randrianarisoa expressed gratitude toward Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI for "their

solicitude in favor of youth."

In the World Youth Days, he said, these young people become "considerable witnesses of reconciliation that overcomes the boundaries of continents, race and cultures."

"This experience as universal Church stimulates the fervor of our young people to continue this, despite the various socio-political tensions in our country," the prelate added.

He observed: "We see that our young people could become one of the best agents of reconciliation, if they are trained and helped by their pastors and their elders by a witness of authentic Christian life to study their faith through a catechesis based on the Word of God; to live their faith through prayer and the celebration of the sacraments especially the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation."

The bishop expressed hope in the youth as the future of Africa, affirming that "they are very quick to find themselves together, to share their deep aspirations amongst themselves, to pray together, to study their faith to find and bear witness in turn to their human and evangelical values."

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