

Exchanges with partners: Nyabushongo School Institute

1. Introduction

As part of the preparations for the Healing of Memories workshop scheduled from 15 to 25 July 2022 in Cotonou, Benin, a series of questions was given to future participants in order to gather more information from several target groups in their respective communities. In addition to the discussions between members of the Martin Luther King Group, in April 2022, conversations took place at the Nyabushongo Institute, a secondary school operating in the commune of Karisimbi, city of Goma, province of North Kivu in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

2. Activity carried out

In one of the classrooms of the Nyabushongo Institute, three members of the Martin Luther King Group, including one woman, gathered 74 students, including 56 boys and 18 girls, from two senior classes in the nutrition section. After giving a brief presentation of the Martin Luther King Group, with particular emphasis on its vision, mission and objectives, we thanked the school authorities for offering us this opportunity, as well as the students, who were our interlocutors. We had received answers from the students in the form of questions, some of which were backed up by real-life experiences.

With regard to the traumatic events which they had suffered, the pupils told us that they had been traumatised from a very young age up to the day of the conversation because, according to them, they had been born during the war and had grown up in the same situation up to that day. Among the major traumatic events, they cited

- Successive and deadly wars;
- Volcanic eruptions;
- Kidnappings (abductions);
- Rapes;
- The corona virus pandemic with its consequences;
- Generalized insecurity;
- Arbitrary arrests
- Suicides;
- Assassinations;
- Murders....

Comment: Among these traumatic events, we have focused on rape as a collective wound.

Widespread rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo:

- In Katanga province

Prisoners have been reportedly raped. A group of 15 prisoners, considered dangerous and held separately from the others, overpowered their sole guard and stormed the prison. They incited the other inmates to violence, set fire to several buildings and quickly took over the prison, causing the staff to flee.

Of the 56 women and girls in the prison, 37 women and one teenage girl reported being sexually assaulted or raped. There were also credible reports of the rape of six men and boys.

- In North Kivu province

In North Kivu, nearly 200 women were raped during a rebel offensive between 30 July and 3 August 2010 in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

On 30 July, FDLR men and Mai Mai fighters controlled the village of Luvungi in North Kivu province. A total of 179 cases of sexual violence have been reported and since then this part of the DRC has been torn apart by national and foreign armed groups.

Comment:

For more than two decades, rape has become a weapon of war in the DRC. Faced with this tragedy, some people talk about revenge. Still others think of forgiveness and reconciliation. It should be noted that in some cases, some of the people we spoke to told us that they had been victims. For them, these traumatic events left wounds, some of which are still 'bleeding' in their own words. In passing, they alluded to disappointments in love and failure at school, which do not fail to leave wounds in the minds of young girls and boys.

When asked what political and social attitudes can cause wounds, the students listed a number of them, among which we can mention

- The irresponsibility of some politicians;
- The irresponsibility of some parents;
- The climate of mistrust between the governors and the governed;
- The lack of work among young people;
- Senile delinquency;
- Juvenile delinquency;

Faced with this picture, which seems to be bleak for young students, we asked the question about the 'areas of silence'. In answer to this question, they mentioned in particular

- Impunity
- Corruption
- Bad governance
- No respect for human dignity,
- Human rights violations (murders, assassinations, rapes, etc.)

We also asked: What can be done to get out of the current situation?

The following answers were given to us:

- Increased safety for citizens and their property;
- A greater sense of responsibility at all levels;
- Fighting injustice and punishing the guilty;
- Healing wounds and preventing further wounds;
- Establishing effective leadership;
- Setting up mentoring centres for young people, especially through employment;
- Respecting human dignity;
- Establishing good governance;
- Ensuring that the State has control of the entire national territory;
- Combating the national and foreign armed groups that are causing so much grieving among the population...

Another question was the dreams we have. Among the many answers, the following caught our attention:

- To take power by force and drive out those who make the people suffer (coup d'état) ;
- To neutralise national and foreign armed groups;
- To create jobs.

3. Lessons learned

- Girls were more vocal than boys, except when talking about rape;
- Young people were worried about their future;
- Some of the questions were difficult for some people, reminding them of sad events;
- Teachers were less vocal when it came to violence against women and girls.

4. Difficulties encountered

- Poor lighting in the room;
- Some pupils did not say anything, even when we tried to encourage them.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Generally speaking, the activity went well, to the satisfaction of the students and their teachers. Given the interest that some young people found during the conversation, about ten wanted to become members of the Martin Luther King Group. At the end of this activity, the participants made the following recommendations :

- The Martin Luther King Group should reach out to several schools in the city of Goma and the province of North Kivu, because many young people are wounded inside as a result of the traumatic events they have experienced since birth,
- Detraumatization activities should be organized as soon as possible, and in a specific way in favour of young people;
- Given that these activities are of capital importance for the country and its population, support would be a relief.

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