
Deadly attack in DR Congo. Nuncio Balestrero: "I mourn the loss of my friend Attanasio"

"I mourn with deep sadness the loss of my friend Ambassador Luca Attanasio and of Vittorio Iacovacci, the Carabinieri who was escorting him. The ambassador had asked me to accompany him on this mission, but I had to attend a very important meeting of the Bishops' Conference in Kinshasa. Monsignor **Ettore Balestrero**, who served as Apostolic Nuncio to the Democratic Republic of Congo for two years, had the opportunity to become closely acquainted with Ambassador Attanasio. He answered our questions at the end of a "very sad day" to express his deep gratitude to all those who, like Mr Attanasio and Mr Iacovacci, "risk their lives every day." Faced with tragedy, this is a time for prayer. "I offer my heartfelt condolences to the families and parents of both victims, in particular to the ambassador's parents, whom I had met in 2020, this time of the year, when they came to visit their son. We are planning to gather, here in Kinshasa, those who knew and appreciated the Ambassador and the Carabinieri, for a moment of prayer, when possible. The ambassador" the Nuncio said, "earned the people's respect and esteem in this vast country. He promoted the image of Italy along with many solidarity initiatives. Together with Vittorio, he bore witness to the generosity and thoughtfulness of our fellow citizens abroad."



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Is the assault the tip of the iceberg of a situation of instability? The deadly assault was carried out in an extremely dangerous area, marked by the presence of numerous armed groups. Assaults, kidnappings, killings, robberies, and all forms of atrocities have been committed in that and in nearby areas for years. The population is in a state of exasperation, indeed worn out. *Thus, as I mourn my friends, symbolically killed while taking part in a humanitarian mission, I pray to the Lord to receive their sacrifice, that He may help keep the international community's spotlights on this region, where death and grief are tragically the norm.* **Is it already possible to determine political responsibility?** I believe it's still too soon to identify the parties guilty of the attack, but they must certainly be identified and firmly prosecuted. In any case, this tragedy is a plea to avert becoming "accustomed to it" and to

not resign ourselves to suffering and evil, which sadly still prevail in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

It is also an invocation to express our gratitude for the continued humanitarian aid provided by the international community and by various agencies for decades. Above all, this tragedy is a reminder that hundreds of human lives have been sacrificed just as humanitarian relief efforts were underway, vital for the population's survival and for overcoming the deadlock of conflict and hate. **What is the role of the Church in the peace-building efforts?** The Church is the 'Good Samaritan' of these people, running many hospitals, providing education, continuing to instil hope and raising her voice in defence of all inhabitants. A delegation of Congolese bishops went on a pastoral mission to eastern Congo just over a month ago, to pray with the local population, meet with them and learn about their most pressing needs, but also to visit and gain first-hand knowledge of the many cases of extreme vulnerability. Hundreds of priests, nuns and missionaries live in eastern Congo, devoting themselves daily to their mission and risking their lives. Some have been kidnapped and killed.

