

# **MENNONITE CHURCHES IN DR CONGO**

## **Background**

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a country located in Central Africa, inhabited by nearly 80 million people, belonging to 500 tribes and living on a surface of 2 345 410 square kilometers. The country experienced two waves of evangelism. The first evangelism occurred during the 15th century through the first European explorers. This evangelism did not produce appreciable results. The missionaries' collaboration with the colonizers for slavery, the lack of the Gospel in local languages, the fighting between tribes, and the traditional religions were some of the main cause of its failure. As for the second evangelism, it refers to the era of missionary organizations. The American Baptist Mission (ABMFS) was the first organization to launch its ministry in 1878 in the Congo Central, in the west of the country.

Among the missionary societies that followed, one can quote the Congo Inland Mission (CIM), a mission society founded by American Mennonites. The work that CIM started in the Congo in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has resulted in about 250 000 congolese Mennonites belonging to three different denominations: the Communauté des Eglises des Frères Mennonites au Congo (CEFMC), the Communauté Evangélique Mennonite (CEM) and the Communauté Mennonite au Congo (CMCo).

## **Congolese Mennonites initiatives**

Anabaptist-Mennonite churches in DR Congo preach a holistic Gospel. This is why, everywhere they are established, they build chapels, but also schools, clinics or hospitals, colleges or universities. They are also involved in peace building and reconciliation initiatives with the support provided by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite Brethren Missions. Moreover, Congolese Mennonites are presently active in cross-cultural evangelism. Their testimony goes beyond boundaries especially to Angola, Congo Brazzaville and South Africa. And in DRC, Mennonites continue planting churches in other provinces and are reaching even hidden or resistant people such as Batwa Pygmies in the Equatorial Forest. Four Batwa pygmies have been already trained at a Bible Institute and three of them are ordained pastors. Thirty-two local churches are established with them and led by themselves. In fact, mission departments are in charge of this important ministry in the Mennonite conferences. Besides, a program to reach especially Chinese citizens and/or foreign businessmen is already moving through prayers, distribution of Christian literature and other contacts.

## **Major challenges**

In spite of the dynamism of the Congolese local Mennonite churches and the various natural resources in the country, the populations are confronted with poverty and the majority of them, even Mennonites, live in rural areas, below the poverty line. Political instability, wars, corruption, and the activism of the non-Christian religions are the major challenges that Christian ministries and churches are facing in the DRC.

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