



# MIAMSI NEWSLETTER N°5

International Movement of Apostolate in the Independent Social Milieus

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## Editorial

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### Good politics serves peace

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Dear friends,

When sending his disciples on a mission, Jesus said to them, "In every house you enter, say first: " Peace to this house." If a friend of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; otherwise it will come back to you "(Lk 10: 5-6).

Offering peace is at the heart of the mission of Christ's disciples. And this offer is made to all those who, men and women, yearn for peace in the midst of the dramas and violence of human history. The "house" of which Jesus speaks is every family, community, country, each continent, in its specifics and history; it is above all each person, without distinction or discrimination. It is also our "common house": the planet where God has put us to live and which we are called on to take care of with solicitude.

That is therefore a call to all today and especially to us members of an international movement. Let's live and commit to "Peace on this house!"

*Maryse Robert*  
*MIAMSI president*

## AFRICAN BOARD :

### Last elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a lesson to be learned: the need to keep the peace

(A comment from Prosper HONAGBODE, MIAMSI's VP for Africa)



After several postponements since 2016, the provincial, legislative and presidential elections were held on December 30, 2018. All attention was focused only on the presidential election.

#### Official results announced by the bodies in charge of the elections

The results were published in a tense climate. The Internet was cut off on December 31 and it was impossible for the Congolese to follow the international media. For the first time in its history, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) experienced a political handover through the ballot box. Guns fell silent and the opposition candidate Felix Tshisekedi was proclaimed winner of the 30 December 2018 presidential election, according to the results announced by the election bodies. He won with 38.57% of the vote, ahead of rival opposition candidate, Martin Fayulu, the runner-up with 34.8%, who is disputing these results and has called for a recount (because he was in fact the real winner) and a third candidate targeted by European Union (EU) sanctions for putting down demonstrations, Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, the heir apparent of the outgoing president Joseph Kabila, who had to make do with 23.8%..

#### The local church published the findings from its observations in its watchdog role

The Congolese Catholic Church had the largest network of electoral observers in the country, with 40,000 observers deployed throughout the country, and published 12,300 reports on the voting process in 56.52% of the country's polling stations. According to these reports, voting was riddled with multiple irregularities. As a result, 846 voting centres were set up in inappropriate places such as police stations, bars and political party headquarters. In addition, 1,543 reports reported incidents during voting: voting machines malfunctioning, observers banned from access to polling stations, corruption, vandalism, voting interrupted. For the church and for many analysts on the continent and abroad, the results announced did not comply with the truth from the ballot box, even if the person declared the winner by the election management bodies (after several backroom deals) comes from the ranks of the opposition to the defunct regime, which suggests that the outgoing President chose his successor. The ballot was neither transparent nor sincere, but above all it was the fear of having the outgoing President's heir apparent imposed on them that was uppermost in most people's minds.

#### Reception of the results: eyes turned towards the future

After disputes related to the insincerity of the results of the general elections, especially those of the presidential election, the positions of civil society in general, foreign powers including France, procrastination at the African Union, today everyone seems to be resigned and getting used to the de facto situation that has hitherto turned out to be less catastrophic than was once feared.

The Catholic Church is still the religion that brings together the highest number of believers in the DRC (nearly 41% of the population). Its sociological base, spread over 1,479 parishes and 47 dioceses, makes it the most important church organization in human terms in the DRC. It therefore presides over the spiritual destiny of a large section of the Congolese population, with the responsibility it also has to promote social welfare. Apart from the government authorities, it is the only institution established all over the Republic. The Catholic Church has set up structures for supervising the population. We can mention the efforts of the Episcopal Justice and Peace Commission (CEJP) which, through its basic structures i.e. the Diocesan Justice and Peace Commissions (CDJP), has multiplied civic and electoral organizations.

The results of this framework for citizen participation were noted in mobilizing the population during the last elections. This announcement of tailor-made results rightly raises the major issue of peaceful power transfers in Africa. Indeed, as noted by an independent source we can say, after several years of tormented political life that had many innocent victims in the country, the transfer of power between **Joseph Kabila** and Felix Tchisekedi is a symbol of peace and a sign of hope in the sub-region of Central Africa which is still in the hands of authoritarian regimes with prisons teeming with political prisoners. Regimes that show no will towards modernizing and real democratization of electoral systems in order to perpetuate their ambitions to stay in power by all sorts of obscure devices. "If you can't get what you deserve, you make do with what you've got." In the Congo, after the euphoria of the national conference, we have returned to the devastating polls, carriers of conflicts that divide the nation, weaken it and remove any prospect of change. Here and there, rumours rustle about the outgoing authorities getting back into business in future presidential elections, so we take the same ones and start again. This is likely to spread like wildfire on a continent where bad examples gain a following.

**And what about development?**

Why today, after several years of independence, do the Congolese people still not fully enjoy their resources? The answer to that question is the resource curse. The current world order is marked by the interplay of interests among great powers who, wanting to preserve their interests at all costs, foster worsening poverty for the Congolese.



The Congolese are victims of their mineral wealth. In fact, the DRC is a country endowed with huge natural resources: over 80 million hectares of arable land with only 10% developed, major mineral resources (diamonds, coltan, tungsten, tin, etc.), the 2nd green lung on the planet after the Amazon, the 2nd global fresh water reserve. On top of that, the country has large hydroelectric potential (53% of African potential and 13.5% globally).

Unfortunately the people of the DRC do not benefit from all this wealth. Its economy is crippled by nonstop armed conflict and one of the highest levels of corruption on the planet, according to Transparency International. In this context, success in business depends on close relations between business and power: favoritism in handing out legal authorizations, government subsidies, tax breaks, etc. It is real "crony capitalism" for those close to power, outside the rule of law. This system has prevented many from entering the formal sector: a large part of the labour force has been forced to move into the informal sector. The ILO estimates that over 72 per cent of the Congolese workforce is in the informal sector, so that it has become the dominant sector for job creation in the country. But in the informal sector, economic "development" is very highly constrained.

The Secular Coordinating Committee (CLC), the Congolese Catholic lay association that initiated the anti-Kabila marches in early 2018, denounced this attempt by Congolese leaders to cut the country off from the rest of the world by cutting off the internet. Their slogan "Congolese, let us be vigilant so as not to be robbed of our victory", has had no effect. It will now be up to them and all men of goodwill to focus on the issues of peace and development by supporting the poor of Yahweh who are the widows, orphans and immigrants, and this country has enormous numbers of them. This is the approach for the new actions of the ACI, the Congolese MIAMSI, which after having little success in defending human rights, is directing itself resolutely towards supporting the victims of wars, raped women, street children and other marginalized social groups. May the Holy Spirit support their efforts.

*Prosper HONAGBODE*

**Morocco: Father Nourissat in his new role.**

From Casablanca to Rabat ...  
 "Everywhere there are people to learn to love, and the parishioners of Rabat have welcomed me gently, little by little contacts are formed, I'm beginning to support a MIAMSI Life & Faith team, which gives me a practical reconnection with the ministry that led me to Morocco on Father Antoine Riobé's initiative."



## LATIN AMERICA SECRETARIAT:

### Situation in Brazil:

The economic, social and political state of Brazil has been declining since 2014. Complete disorder, the country split down the middle, hatred and violence until the president was forced to resign in 2016. Laws, government decrees with the country's land sold to foreigners, a total mess.

A discharged serviceman announced his candidacy for the presidency. He is a right-wing politician who defends the military dictatorship, extols the torture of that time, attacks social activists and the press, defends gun ownership and does not recognize minority rights (natives, blacks, homosexuals). A misogynist too. His radicalized speech pleased many people who shared his ideas.

Today there is disunity everywhere even between members of the same family.

We discussed all these topics in the teams: Overcoming violence, social inequality (like wealth - Brazil is almost a champion of inequality). Some people assume their true personalities, but many people in the movement itself do not show them. It's not about the poor. There are many highly educated people who have joined. It's a social class movement. Sunday was a dark day for those of us who follow Jesus.

The other candidate is an honourable man : he did not represent our hope, but we believed that he would not have had such evil attitudes towards the poor, marginalized and so on.

Now this fact means we have to take up the fight again and combat discrimination and fascism.

ESSAL has been in solidarity with us all the time and we are sure we can count on our companions and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Thank you.

*Anna Nigro (Sao Paulo)*

## EUROPEAN BOARD:



The MIAMSI European Movements met in Florence on 16 - 18 November 2018 on the topic "With Our Differences Facing Common Challenges for Evangelization Today" and identified a number of challenges directly related to the current period of opportunity for proclaiming the Gospel.

Indeed, it is a favourable moment, "a sign of the times" that the European elections are giving us to show some common positions. Our identity as lay faithful of Christ is played out not only at the local level but also in a global dimension that no one can escape. For this we need to go back to the original European project based on Christian personalism; a project born after two world wars, animated by a desire for lasting peace. It also seems essential to remember the steps taken to build a Europe that is more inclusive and attentive to peoples' rights.

From the actions of European Bishops, especially COMECE - and HE Angelo Card Bagnasco, President of the CCEE, we wish to focus on the need to:

- Put the person at the centre of European politics in his/her relations with others and at the heart of creation, without being subject to economic and financial logics.
- Build a Europe that does not remain frozen by fear and various crises but is able, according to its tradition, to be united, supportive, welcoming, inclusive in respect of cultural, historical and religious differences. Because for us, welcoming the stranger is a sign of building "God's kingdom."
- Give more weight to education in European values, pay attention to the hierarchy of rights, uphold social rights such as the right to health, family, housing, work, ...

Furthermore, we are convinced that the current migration challenge will remain a major concern for the coming years, not only for Europe but the whole world. This challenge can be seen as symptomatic of a deep crisis. It crosses our countries and upsets our conception of democracy, of living together, including in our churches. It generates fears that we have to fight.

To be faithful to our commitments as citizens and Christians, we will actively participate in the next elections for the European Parliament; we will have to choose candidates according to the European projects that they propose and not according to a narrow, instrumentalized vision from domestic parties. A symbolic action common to all countries will be proposed to the members of our movements a few months before the elections.

Many repercussions following this meeting. To follow them please go to the MIAMSI website. (Various meetings in France - Chartres, Thionville, Belgium, Italy etc)

## INDIAN OCEAN ISLANDS

### SECRETARIAT:

#### Madagascar :

#### Madeleine Ramaholimihaso, the new Grand Chancellor

Madeleine Ramaholimihaso succeeds Etienne Ralitera. This well-known civil society figure was appointed Grand Chancellor of the Malagasy National Order during a government cabinet meeting.

Madeleine Ramaholimihaso, the first woman in this position, is the first appointment that marks the beginning of Andry Rajoelina's five-year term. The position has been vacant since the death of Etienne Ralitera in 2017.



For those who do not know Madeleine:

**A fervent Catholic, from 1965 to 2007, President of the Malagasy Catholic Action for Independent Milieus, Coordinator of the Episcopal Commission for**

**the Apostolate of the Laity, MIAMSI delegate for Africa.** President of the Caritas Madagascar Development Commission, Secretary General of the Episcopal Commission for Social and Charitable Pastoral Care. **From 1977 to 2008, a member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity (appointed in 1977 by Pope Paul VI, then renewed by Pope John Paul II in 1978), a member of the Mixed Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Council of Churches, in 1999, she served three terms as a Member of the International Auditors Council at the Holy See (she was the only woman among the five members of this council). She founded KMF-CNOE (National Election Observation Committee) and was the Secretary General from 1989 to 2002. A member of SEFAFI, on the micro-finance side, and President of the Association for the Promotion of Enterprise in Madagascar (EMPA)), founded in 1987 by GEM members.**

## OTHER COUNTRIES:

### India :

#### Action for the Future

Action in recent months for understanding the Vision. Mission and core values of MIAMSI/AIM. This was undertaken to help members to renew and understand the basic tenets of the movement.

what are the factors that promote Evangelization of the Self, Family and community in Indian context to ultimately be closer to God.

The following key points emerged from the discussion and reflection of the members at the monthly meetings.

**Self:** **1.** Christ is at the centre of our peach, action and precepts. We need to live a exemplary life as witness to Jesus. The word of God as in the bible shall be our guiding light. **2.** We should have courage to own up our mistakes and take responsibility for our action. **3.** We should watch our emotional outbursts, behaviour, when dealing with a community /social problem. Seek god's intervention when we face challenges in personal life.

**Family:** **1.** Christ is the centre of family Life. **2.** The family that prays together, stays together. **3.** Children are very good at imitating parents and we are their role models in their young life, they should see in us that we don't have double standards in our day to day life. **4.** Educate children from early age the value of honesty in daily situations to understand what is right and wrong and so we set an example.. **5.** Social media

has great influence on young children; educate the children on the good and bad of social media.

**Community :** **1.** We need to have greater awareness of the politico-social-economic contexts under which individuals live in the society. **2.** Let us not be carried away by different value systems that we around us or discouraged by the duplicity in the way people live. **3.** Let us not be judgmental or discriminate people in the name of caste, creed, socio-economic condition. **4.** Let us not hesitate to join hands with others to promote justice in the community. **5.** Counsel youngsters when they make mistakes and guide them to take the right path. **6.** We shall lead a life of righteousness which others can recognize that we are Christians. **7.** Both Individually and as a family, we can set an example to the neighbours. **8.** Treat our neighbours as we want them to treat us. **9.** God loves us unconditionally and in the same way we need to do the same without any expectation, reservation. Let us commit to follow this message.

**Suggested Action Plan for 2018-2019:**

1. Hold regular monthly meetings as they are essential to the strengthening of Units.
2. Promoting Eye donation as our social action
3. Actively spread awareness among the parishioners on the 'Vision Ambassador' movement.
4. Spread awareness among young children through organizing awareness programs.
5. Join hands with other social organizations in promoting eye donation.
6. Create awareness among church leaders on the need for accessibility in the churches for people with disabilities.
7. Adopt and reflect on the monthly meeting readings and reflections given to units by the National Chaplain.

*Members of GEM.*

## **NEWS FROM THE OTHER INTERNATIONAL SPECIALIZED CATHOLIC ACTION MOVEMENTS (MIACS) :**

**Choose a common challenge..**

The objective of the 01/12 meeting (MIAMSI, MMTTC, Miic Pax Romana) was to prepare the Miacs annual meeting. In a time of great change, a turning point in history, what is the most essential thing to work on ?

**The situation**

The meeting was held in Paris in the midst of the "yellow vests" conflict, angry people who are expressing general discontent, do not believe in dialogue, or political institutions or trade unions, or traditional media. A strong challenge to democracy in a context of fear for the future in Western countries.

This is the Facebook style : no mediation, instant reflection without consistency, irresponsibility due to the pseudo, and consanguinity between those who think the same thing. It is the rejection of otherness understood as a threat to an individual freedom that can't bear being contradicted, but is often demanding of others.

But this freedom leads to enslavement in relation to better organized powers, isolation, the difficulty of thinking and making proposals due to lack of debate, and paralysis for lack of organizing ability. It allows non-institutionalized shows of solidarity by "being against" without being able to formulate a project. However, there are also citizen behaviours, beautiful initiatives to serve the humane. We do not talk about them very much, yet they involve a lot of people and play an essential role in the life of society.

What about in other countries ? The debate should help us formulate a more universal statement.

Similar phenomena exist in the US with Trump against the establishment, the migrants, the media ... Brexit, the 5 stars anti-system movement in Italy, the league against migrants, Poles pray against their enemies: Germans, migrants, and the 'European Union. Elections foster the return of authoritarian regimes, which promise protection against real or imagined enemies. International institutions are abandoned, like Unesco by the USA, or become the scene of conflicts between states. Such developments also show themselves within our movements: difficulties in dialogue, and autocratic tendencies.

All of this results in an inability to truly communicate, and take a reasonable decision about what our future will be, which is essential in the current time of change.

**The core of our reflection: dialogue**

These elements strike at our deep convictions. To us, dialogue between brothers is an essential element for building both people and society. But in a context of overvalued competition, the other, whether an individual, group, nation etc ... has become a potential threat.

We believe it is necessary to recreate the conditions for dialogue : to listen to and recognize others, different in their truth, to accept our differences, our divisions can become a path to conversion.

Dialogue enables a person to change, be creative, the person develops more easily when he/she feels free. Their freedom combines with that of others to bring about shared development.

But this profound encounter implies recognizing the transcendent dimension of every human being. Addressing the spiritual dimension of the relationship is difficult in our materialistic societies. How can it be done ?

**Our action: to search together.**

Hannah Arendt used to say that in a time when all references collapse, you cannot find your way alone. We must search together, sharing our experiences in the following areas:

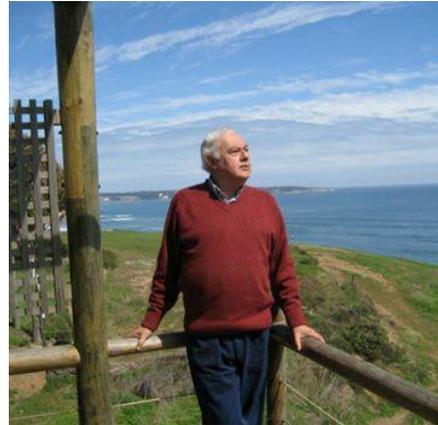
- Internal dialogue between the movements of different countries, managing tensions.
- Mediation and assistance :
- in national movements when they themselves are divided by the policies of their country
- in the international institutions we are part of.

The hypothesis proposed is that the essential thing is not to bring in new ideas, because a new idea without dialogue is a potential source of conflict. The main new idea is the practice of dialogue. It requires learning and real conversion work. It is our way of being witnesses to the Gospel.

In practical terms, we must first formulate the common challenge that we want to tackle starting from the situation we see in different countries.

## TESTIMONIAL

**Patricio Gomez Bahamonde, RC Chile national leader.**



A great man is gone, leaving us the beautiful memory of a full life. Full of love and dedication, commitment to the cause of the poorest and most marginalized people. A life, too, of physical suffering that he endured with remarkable strength of mind. Though a leukemia patient for almost a decade, he continued to coordinate Christian Renewal in Chile, MIAMSI, as well as moderating the website "Caminando Juntos" (Marching Together) a weekly blog where lay movements or sympathizers took turns to write the reflection on a gospel of the week. His health gradually deteriorated until he learned at the end of January that his end was close. He sent a written message to all his friends and colleagues to say goodbye, telling them that he wanted to spend his fifteen days in prayer, surrounded by his family.

*María Marta Raggio*