

*****MEDIA RELEASE*****

Caritas Australia aid worker meets with Holy Father in Democratic Republic of Congo

2 February 2023

Lulu Mitshabu, Caritas Australia's Program Coordinator for Democratic Republic of Congo, had the honour of meeting with His Holy Father Pope Francis on 31 January.

Ms Mitshabu was one of only 40 aid workers in the country included in the diplomatic core to meet Pope Francis to discuss the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is facing the most complex and long-standing humanitarian crisis in Africa, and the fourth largest internal displacement crisis in the world.

The near-constant fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo has forced over 500,000 people from their homes since March 2022.

Communities across North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri provinces are facing repeated attacks on civilians, as well as looting and burning of shelters and homes to the ground.

The combination of conflict, COVID-19 and climate change has pushed over 26 million people into acute food insecurity – around 15 million of these are children.

“The number of internally displaced people has gone through the roof. People have been displaced a number of times, and they've lost everything. The level of poverty is unbelievable,” said Lulu Mitshabu, Caritas Australia's Program Coordinator for Democratic Republic of Congo.

“Over 60 per cent of the population is under the age of 24. These kids have been displaced, they have no access to education, water or shelter, and they're facing relentless violence. While nobody is talking, the Democratic Republic of Congo is facing the worst crisis in the world.”

Catholics make up about half of the country's population, yet are key players in health and education, as well as in democracy- and peace-building efforts.

The last papal visit to a central African country was 37 years ago, when the country was still called Zaire, and Pope John Paul II met with former President Mobutu Sese Seko.

“With the Holy Father visiting the Democratic Republic of Congo, I hope that the world will stop and see what is happening here,” said Ms Mitshabu.

“It is a forgotten crisis. We pray that people will try to respond and help with this conflict that has been going on for over three decades. Please, let’s work together and help the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo.”

In the middle of this volatility, aid organisations, including Caritas Australia’s partner CAFOD, are responding with emergency support, including food, water and shelter.

Your generous support can help provide emergency relief to help families recover and rebuild from disaster. Visit caritas.org.au/donate/emergency-appeals/democratic-republic-of-congo/ or call 1800 024 413 toll free to provide much needed support to the Democratic Republic of Congo by donating to our Africa appeal.

CONTACT: Jessica Stone 0490 684 867 / Jessica.stone@caritas.org.au

NOTE: Lulu Mitshabu is available for interview from Kinshasa.