

Archbishop pleads for help for Congolese

The Congolese people face desperate and dangerous living conditions in a country beset by war, disease and extreme poverty, said Archbishop Francois Maroy Rusengo of Bukavu, Congo.

In a series of visits to Baltimore, Washington and Virginia, Archbishop Maroy focused on health issues and stressed that peace is the country's most important need.

Archbishop Maroy spoke in late September before Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien as well as officials from The Johns Hopkins University, Catholic Charities in Baltimore and other charities.

The World Health Organization says 21 percent of Congolese children under age 5 are acutely malnourished, and 44 percent are chronically malnourished.

Archbishop Maroy acknowledged Americans have trouble understanding the levels of poverty in Congo and invited people to visit and see.

"The American people and the Congolese people are all created in the image of God, and we all have the right to live in peace and happiness," he said during a meeting at St. Mary Church in Alexandria, Va.

Archbishop Maroy's visit was organized by Great Lakes Restoration and Jatukik Providence Foundation, two groups dedicated to improving the lives of the Congolese people.

"He brings a current Congolese perspective and the moral voice of one who has lived through and personally experienced the violence and destruction visited on the area in recent years," Great Lakes said in a statement.

Matthias Cinyabuguma, founder and president of Great Lakes, noted HIV and AIDS are rampant, and his group said rape remains a weapon of war.

Mr. Cinyabuguma pointed to needs for investment in health, education and infrastructure to improve living conditions.

Jatukik, Great Lakes and a few other nonprofit organizations discussed ways to help, including a marketing plan to make the complex problems of Congo easier for the U.S. public to understand.

Catholic News Service contributed to this story.