

**DOCUMENT PREPARED BY THE GENERAL EXECUTIVE OF
THE MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA
CONCERNING
FATHER GUY THEUNIS**

Many people have contacted us in order to obtain information on the events surrounding the arrest of our confrere Guy Theunis. The aim of this document is to answer those requests, concentrating on the person and activities of our confrere.

Guy THEUNIS was arrested on the 6th September 2005 in the departure hall of Kigali Airport (Rwanda) as he was preparing to leave Rwanda for Belgium.

1. Apostolate of Father Guy Theunis in Rwanda:

Guy Theunis, Belgian citizen, was born at Schaerbeek (Brussels) on the 1st July 1945. He was ordained a priest on the 21st June 1969 in the Society of Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers).

He arrived for the first time in Rwanda on the 15th September 1970. After learning Kinyarwanda, and after several years of parish work and teaching, he was appointed head of social communications media in Kigali, a post he held from 1989 till 1994.

During this time he participated in the foundation and running of several press publications and associations for Human Rights.

- Editorial Secretary of the review *Dialogue* from 1989 till 1992
- Executive Secretary of *Reba Videwo* from 1989 till 1994
- Founder and contributor to *Revue de Presse Rwandaise Dialogue* since 1992
- Treasurer of the Rwanda Association of Journalists from 1991 till 1993
- Founder and Head of the publications *l'Association Rwandaise pour la Défense des Droits de la Personne et des Libertés Publiques* (ADL) (Rwandan Association for the Protection of individual and political freedom) from 1991 till 1994
- Founder member and contributor of *Pax Christi Rwanda* and of *Duharanire Amahoro* (ecumenical organisation for Peace)
- Rwanda Correspondent *Reporters Sans Frontières* (Reporters Without Borders) (Paris)
- Rwanda Correspondent *l'Actualité Religieuse dans le Monde* (Religious news in the world) (Paris)

He left Rwanda on the last plane evacuating Belgian nationals on the 15th April 1994.

From Belgium, he continued to participate in the review *Dialogue* and was Delegate-Administrator of Radio Amahoro (Radio for Peace) from July 1994 until June 1996. He gave evidence as a witness before the Belgian Senate and the French National Assembly.

After a period of personal renewal, he was appointed to South Africa. There he worked at Lumko Centre (centre for training of pastoral workers) from September 1998 until May 2003. As a member of the staff of Lumko, he travelled in several African countries for workshops. He is the co-author of *Acting against Poverty*, an economic justice workbook on HIV/Aids, democracy and Peace for parish groups. He contributed as well to various other publications.

Since September 2003 he is based in Rome where he is in charge of ongoing formation for confreres of the Society. He regularly visits African countries giving workshops on conflict resolution and leading spiritual renewal programs.

2. The facts of his arrest:

Guy Theunis, as head of ongoing formation, had just led sessions on non-violence for our members working in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He was due to return to Brussels via Kinshasa. In view of the cancellation of Kalemie-Lubumbashi-Kinshasa flights for technical reasons, he decided to travel to Kigali. At the border, he obtained a visa without difficulty. But 24 hours later, on the 6th September 2005, while he was already in the departure hall of Kanombe International Airport (Kigali), he was arrested by the Rwandan State Security and detained at the Police Brigade of Remera. He remained there for two nights before being transferred to the Main Prison in Kigali.

On Sunday 11th September he appeared before the *gacaca* (popular tribunal) of the Ubumwe Cell, Rugenge Sector, District of Nyarugenge in Kigali. In view of the seriousness of the charges laid against Guy Theunis, putting him into Category 1 of genocide planners, the judge of the *gacaca* requested the transfer of the trial to the Criminal Court of Kigali.

3. The charges against Fr. Guy Theunis:

According to Emmanuel Rukangira, National Procurator, in an interview given to MISNA on 14th September 2005, Guy Theunis is accused of inciting people to commit genocide. The other accusation is revisionism and denial of the genocide. The first accusation refers to the period 1990 to 1994 while the second accusation refers to the period after the genocide.

These accusations seem to be based on

- Guy Theunis' participation in the review *Dialogue* in which he is accused of having reprinted articles from the extremist review *Kangura*,
- Faxes sent in April 1994 of which he was a co-signatory and through which he is accused to have propagated false information on what was happening in Rwanda

4. The position of the Missionaries of Africa:

Father Gérard Chabanon, Superior General of the Missionaries of Africa, issued, on September 8th 2005, a communiqué expressing his incomprehension at the arrest of Guy Theunis¹.

4.1. As the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs pointed out, there has never been, to the knowledge of the authorities, a prosecution file on Father Guy Theunis. Not being accused of any misdemeanour, Guy was previously able to freely move around in Rwanda. In this way, from the 5th to the 26th September 2004, he led a workshop in Kigufi. He had entered Rwanda having obtained an entry visa and left again undisturbed. This time again he had obtained an entry visa at the border.

4.2. The Review *Dialogue*, in which he participated for many years, was a review of information and reflection dealing with economic, social, cultural political religious and other issues with a bearing on Rwanda. The review delivered facts and pointers, helping readers to understand and analyse the data. The review did not support any ideology. It sought to promote a policy of hope, believing in a better future from a Christian perspective (Cfr. N° 121 March 1987, pages 21-30: « *Une philosophie pour Dialogue* ») (A philosophy for *Dialogue*). The aim of the review is to promote a true debate on the problems of the country with a maximum of objectivity and independence (N°154 de May 1992, page 1).

The review *Dialogue* was not the business of one individual. Every article passed through an executive committee of the editorial Association that decided if it were publishable.

For the 19 years of his participation in the review *Dialogue*, Father Guy Theunis, convinced of the necessity of the freedom of the press, wrote mainly reviews of books and articles. He wrote some articles and editorials, but without ever inciting violence or hatred. Quotations from extremist articles were only published for a critical examination and to bring them to the attention of the foreign press. Thanks to these texts translated from Kinyarwanda, the foreign press could therefore follow the development of the political situation in the country. In a special issue, published in 1991, devoted to the new Rwandan press, the editorial office of *Dialogue* regretted "clearly racist or regionalist slanted articles, often of an insidious nature" of Kangura. "They risk making the atmosphere in the country oppressive." (n°147 July-August 1991, page 79). The review also categorically rejected the famous "Ten commandments of the Bahutu" (n° 170, September-October 1993, page 120).

We note also that in March 1994, he was moderator of a seminar-debate organised in Kigali by the Belgian Embassy on the theme of "Objectivity and honesty in political information."

Robert Ménard, Secretary General of *Reporters sans Frontières* said of Guy, "We have known him for years. He is the opposite of someone who would incite hatred. He is someone who has always stood for ideas of tolerance and respect for others. He has spent his life precisely to combat ethnic hatred and all these accusations have nothing to do with him." (Statement on RFI 12th September 2005).

4.3. Human Rights: Throughout this time, Human Rights and non-violent communication became major missionary orientations for Guy Theunis. Far from keeping quiet before the genocide, Father Guy Theunis, cofounder of *l'Association Rwandaise pour la Défense des Droits de la Personne et des Libertés Publiques* (ADL), was the editor responsible for two reports on human rights in Rwanda. These two reports of 358 pages were important in bringing to the attention of the international community the abuses committed in Rwanda between September 1991 and October 1993, as much by the government leaders as by the Rwandan Patriotic Front. Its very wide distribution made possible the international enquiry that revealed to the world what was happening in Rwanda before 1994.

During the gacaca hearing, Alison Des Forgesⁱⁱ testified that Guy Theunis worked with her in unearthing human rights abuses in Rwanda before the genocide.

In the review *Dialogue* Guy Theunis signed some articles that underlined his concern for democracy. Consequently the editorials of n°147 (July-August 1991) and n°148 (September-October 1991) respectively bear on 'L'eau de la démocratie' (The Water of Democracy) and 'Multipartisme et Dialogue' (Multiparty policy and Dialogue). He also took part in numerous activities in favour of peace and respect for human rights initiated by OXFAM.

After his return to Belgium, he actively helped in setting up and running Radio Amahoro. Programmes broadcast on Africa n° 1 and Voice of Peace called for peace and reconciliation after the genocide. In front of the Belgian Senate and the French National Parliament, he did not hesitate to testify and to speak out about the genocide.

Mr Eric Watteau, member of Pax Christi Wallonie-Bruxelles, in an open letter sent to Belgian politicians, gave this testimony, "On the occasion of a group reflection on active non-violence, I noted the thoughts expressed by Guy Theunis such as the importance of lobbying to push towards dialogue or further, that hate newspapers should be suppressed."

4.4. The 8 faxes sent in April 1994 were firstly written to calm the fears of the families of confreres who were worried, with no knowledge of what was then taking place in Rwanda. They were then sent to several other persons and organisations concerned. They recounted massacres, pillaging and even spoke of a 'bloodbath'. They also spoke of refugees, notably Tutsi wounded and killed. Here are some extracts of these faxes which clearly show that Father Vleugels, Provincial Superior in Rwanda at that time and, Guy Theunis did all they could in a chaotic and dangerous situation to let the world know of the horrible massacres and genocide that took place in Rwanda. "In Kigali itself, at the Remera Christus Centre, many people have been killed." (The names of the persons follow.) "We also deplore other barbaric acts; soldiers entered the church of St Charles Lwanga at Nyamirambo, forced the people outside then opened fire, killing the people inside the church as well as outside. At the Masaka Health Centre (Kigali Archdiocese), other soldiers entered and shot wounded Tutsi to death in their beds."

Conclusion

Knowing Guy personally and his life long commitment for the freedom of the press and for justice in the spirit of the Gospel, we find the accusations brought against him completely incomprehensible. We are distressed by the seriousness of the accusations against him when all the evidence we have points towards someone who spoke out and denounced the widespread human rights abuses which led to the genocide. Those who worked with him during those tragic years in Rwanda are also of the same opinion.

The Missionaries of Africa request from all those who have known and appreciated Guy and from those who believe in justice to support our call for his immediate and unconditional release. We are also concerned about his health. We thank all those who have already shown him and us their support.

Rome, September 15th, 2005

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ⁱ Communiqué of the Missionaries of Africa on the arrest of father Guy Theunis :

"It is with much surprise and sadness that we learned of the arrest of our brother, Fr Guy Theunis last Tuesday night at Kigali airport. The accusation of the Rwandan prosecutor, Emmanuel Rukangira, associating Fr Theunis, even if indirectly through the periodical Dialogue to the terrible genocide of 1994, appears to us to be totally unfounded.

"Father Theunis was the director of this periodical in Rwanda from 1989 to 1992 and in Belgium from 1994 to 1995. Written in French, this periodical describes itself as one 'of information and reflection on all social, economic, cultural, religious and other problems concerning Rwanda. While not being an official Church publication, Dialogue examines the issues from a Christian perspective'. When Fr Theunis was at its head, an editorial team made up of about 12 people that met every month to discuss articles prepared this publication. The

director was never alone in deciding whether or not to publish a text. It is therefore unthinkable that 'articles of extremist publications' could have been published by Dialogue. Perhaps it could have happened that references to these publications have been made to convey awareness about the dangers of such opinions, or to criticise them in such a way that there could not be any doubt as to the nature of the text published.

"Human rights and non-violent communication have become, throughout the years, the main missionary orientations of Fr Theunis. These same commitments are those of our Missionary Society. As we cannot understand the reasons for these accusations echoed by the media - BBC, CNN, AFP, - we hope that our brother will be promptly freed. Meanwhile, we wish to express our deepest solidarity, our communion of thought and the support of our prayers for Fr Theunis in such difficult times.

"We also thank the Belgian Government, the media, Vatican Radio and all Fr Theunis' numerous friends who have shown their support for him."

Father Gérard Chabanon, Superior General of the Missionaries of Africa

ⁱⁱ Alison Des Forges is the senior advisor to the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch. She has forty years working experience in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. She has served as expert witness in genocide proceedings at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, U.S. Federal Court and in Belgian and Swiss courts.