Columns
Ministry



Sr. Juliette N'guémta Nakoye Mannta, second from the lower right, is pictured with some of her students at the Amadou Hampaté Bâ library in the parish of St. Josephine Bakhita in Atrone, in N'Djamena, Chad. She believes educating youth helps counter negative national trends. (Courtesy of Juliette N'guémta Nakoye Mannta)



by Juliette N'guémta Nakoye Mannta

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May 4, 2022

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During the Advent and Christmas season, I asked myself: where is hope being reborn in Chad? It is so vulnerable in so many ways! Like everyone else in the world, we are talking about the value of vaccination against COVID-19, but our uniqueness lies in that we are also talking about the value of inclusive dialogue for our country. With all the talk, I still wonder about hope. But — although it is difficult to know at times — there are some signs.

My first doubts about signs of hope come when I look at the political situation of our country. The Transitional Military Council led by President Mahamat Idriss Déby and the Chadian people all aspire to an inclusive dialogue for a lasting peace, but what will bring about the sort of perpetual peace that the philosopher Immanuel Kant would hope for?

Perhaps one sign of hope appeared on Dec. 5, 2021. When hearing about this aspiration for peace from the government, four Chadian opponents and activists: Makaila Nguebla, Abel Maïna, Habib Ben and Hisseine Dagga Tahirou — then living in exile in France — decided to return to Chad with the hope of promised collaboration. They sincerely wanted to be part of the effort to have inclusive dialogue in the country.

But what did they find? I am not sure how to describe this so-called "inclusive" dialogue. To me it seems that — in national government power relationships — violence has not yet said its last word. Chadians are not experiencing the conditions necessary for a credible and sincere dialogue. We are still living under a strict police state, and the actions of the transitional charter of the military council of transition are unilateral and not transparent. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are being violated, with arbitrary arrests and fines.

Corruption reigns, and authorities ignore the voices of opposition political leaders and civil society like Wakit Tama, and Succès Masra. They promised to use consensus to designate members of the Organizing Committee for the Inclusive National Dialogue, or CODNI, and that has not happened. Even the meetings held in preparation for the dialogue are held under confusing conditions. In short, neither

the form nor the content of this so-called national dialogue for peace is apparent to all Chadians.

The economic and social affairs of the country are also in chaos. International and national companies are plundering and mismanaging national raw materials, in cooperation with members of our ruling class who are using power to decide life-and-death rights over other Chadians. They have fostered inter-community conflicts between farmers and herders, whose despair has led to alcoholism, theft, kidnappings for ransom, drugs, prostitution and rape. Some supporters of government policies are rewarded by jobs in the civil service, without having to show competence or experience.

Socially and culturally, our country has witnessed the entire collapse of our education system along with a generalized decline in Chadian community values. According to the World Bank's Human Capital Index 2020, a child born in Chad can only expect to reach 30% of his or her productive potential during his or her lifetime due to inadequate education and health problems. As I reflect on the situation of Chad, I agree with Chinua Achebe — Nigerian novelist, poet and critic, in his book, *Things Fall Apart* — that our world is collapsing.

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One ray of hope for some of us is that the Catholic Church of Chad is working counter to the current government trends. This family of God is in communion with Rome and working towards the synod of 2023. It is working for the restoration of Chad's social fabric, trying to build a society of love in the vision of Pope Francis' *Fratelli Tutti*, and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development under the direction of Cardinal Peter Turkson. Archbishop Goetbé Edmond Djitangar of N'Djamena, president of the Episcopal Conference of Chad, or CET, is also working in this direction, in communion with his CET bishops.

The theme of the symposium is "Watchers over the city," taken from messages of the bishops of Chad to the church and the nation from 1965-2020. This is summarized in a book *Light In Our Night*, (which can be found at the Jesuit theologate in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), France or Chad) by Sr. Noélie Djimadoumbaye, who is getting her doctorate at the Center Sèvres in Paris.

As a Religious of the Sacred Heart, I think our mission also counters the negative national trends, by witnessing to Christ in faith, charity and hope through educating youth in the fundamental values of social life. Although COVID-19 aggravated and escalated our national social injustices and lack of concern for the high costs of life and death, we sisters — though lacking in financial means — have been able to remain present at the side of our suffering people.



Sister Juliette's students from last year who graduated (Courtesy of Juliette N'guémta Nakoye Mannta)

Some of us teach philosophy and religion in our Sacred Heart high school in N'Djamena, others minister in parishes or parish libraries, parish councils, or serve in vocation ministry, in the catechetical office, and in the RESRAT (which translates to "Priestly and Religious Meeting of Africans in Chad") to assist in the inculturation of the Gospel in Chad.

We accompany the Christian Life Community, including youth and other people in need, particularly women and minors in Klessoum prison (N'Djamena) or the sick in their homes. We also lead conferences at a cultural center, and present social justice programs on diocesan radio and television. All this requires that we be bold and creative in developing Christian leadership at all levels of political, economic and sociocultural life in our country.

From November through December 2021, we participated via Zoom in the Special General Chapter of Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with the slogan: "Behold, I am making all things new." Being together gave us more impetus to live our charism, "to discover and manifest the love of the heart of Jesus by glorifying Him through the service of education." We live this out in openness of heart and mind, and with an attitude of listening to the heart, of discernment and above all, of universal love.

The invitation of Pope Francis to live synodality and the forthcoming celebration of the centenary of our church are also important glimmers of hope. These events are an opportunity to walk together to give thanks to the Lord for all his blessings, and to witness our commitment to build a just and fraternal society (See the December 2021 Christmas message of the bishops of Chad).