

Press release - September 18, 2016

On a pilgrimage to Rome from Cameroon as a sign of mercy and gratitude

Nine Fon from Cameroon, together with their retinues, participate in the Pope's General audience on Wednesday, September 21. A press conference is to be held at 12.30 at the J.H. Newman Hall, Urban University.

A delegation of 40 people arrives in Rome from Cameroon. Among them, there are 9 **Fons**, the native **Kings of the Bangwa people of Lebialem, South-West Cameroon** (Fon-Fontem, Fon-Nwametaw, Fon-Nwangong, Fon-Esoh Attah, Fon-Akum, Fon-Lewoh, Fon-Nkar, Fon-Bamenda and Fon-Douala), who are accompanied by **Mafuas (Queens), two Mayors and other distinguished persons.**

They travel to Italy to **celebrate the Jubilee of Mercy with Pope Francis and to thank God for the 50 years** that has passed since **the Bangwa people and the Focolare Movement** met for the first time in Fontem.

Their "pilgrimage" starts at the Vatican. They look forward to meet Pope Francis during the General Audience on Wednesday, September 21, when the Fon-Kings will greet the Pope on behalf of the delegation and their peoples, offer gifts typical of their culture and thank him for all that the Church has done for them.

During their stay in Italy, they will be guests of the Focolare Movement and they will visit places where Chiara Lubich was born, lived and is buried: Trent, Loppiano (Florence) and Rocca di Papa (Rome). In fact, it was Chiara and the Focolare Movement, who answered the plea of Bangwa people, that came through Msgr Peters, bishop of Buea in the early 60's, when the endemic sleeping sickness and other tropical diseases provoked a 90% rate of infantile mortality, threatening the extinction of the whole population.

Today, these diseases have almost disappeared and the hospital, with its outpatient clinics, laboratory, operating theatre, male and female internal medicine department, surgery, maternity and pediatrics departments and the new department for infectious diseases, excels in the healthcare for the whole region. In the early 70's, a power plant, a carpentry shop, a nursery school and college were also built. The college, which takes more than 500 students, is one of the most popular pre-university institutions in Cameroon.

These 50 years of *evangelization*, built on facts and involving the whole region of Lebialem, led tens of thousands of people to accept the Christian message, in their personal life and in the life of society. They were supported by the work of the Mill Hill missionaries, the White Fathers and religious men and women of other congregations, who contributed towards the setting up of parishes, of the recent diocese of Manfi, of other schools and of public and administrative State structures.

The baggage of the delegation led by the nine Fons contains this story of their people, a story which makes them feel the need to thank God and "Mafua Ndem Chiara Lubich" (*queen sent by God*), as the Bangwa people call her.

**Press Conference with the Bangwa Delegation
on Wednesday, September 21 at 12.30 (after the audience with Pope Francis)
at J.H. Newman Hall, Urban University.**

(entrance: n.16 Urbano VIII Road; entrance door 20 metres to the left)

Further information: <http://focolare-fontem.org/> - <http://focolare-fontem.org/news/video-of-mary-health-of-africa>

Victoria Gómez (+39) 335 7003675 – Benjamim Ferreira (+39) 348 4754063