

## November 17, 2009 - Spain–UNICEF Award for the Don Bosco Center in Goma-Ngangi



**(ANS – Madrid)** – The Spanish Committee of UNICEF has granted the Don Bosco Center in Goma-Ngangi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, the International Award “Children First.” The recognition, presented on November 13 at Caixaforum in Madrid, rewards the work on behalf of children and needy youngsters in the region of northern Kivu.

In the middle of wars, violence, and poverty, the Don Bosco Center welcomed, educated, cared for, and supported over 26,000 children. Directed by Fr. Mario Perez, the center has 20 teachers, 100 assistants, 5 Salesians, and 8 volunteers who take care of 500 children for whom they provide accommodation, plus 3,000 more whom they teach and feed daily.

The director of the Center has acknowledged the award and thanked the Committee “for having thought about the forgotten children in this part of Africa.” According to Fr. Perez, “It is one way of making the cry of so many young people who are suffering heard and of changing the cry of suffering into a shout of hope and life.”

The Ngangi Don Bosco Center was founded in 1988 to provide sporting and extracurricular activities for the youngsters in the district. But with poverty making school unavailable to 80% of the children, it was necessary to change its aims. Hence the Center became a school. Shortly afterwards intertribal hostilities and the war in Rwanda broke out, and the school was adapted and became a reception and refugee center for many youngsters.

The International UNICEF Award is in “recognition of the many people engaged in helping children and working for the future of humanity,” Fr. Perez says. The award will also be an encouragement to renew their enthusiasm “to continue to fight so that it may be possible to see the human rights of all the children recognized and respected,” he added.

Each year the Spanish Committee of UNICEF recognizes the social and humanitarian work of some of the organizations and institutions which collaborate in a significant way to the defense of children’s rights by giving awards at national and international level.