

AJANews 64 - Kenya special - February 2008

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WHY A KENYA SPECIAL?

30 December 2007: *The election has just ended in Kenya and Mwai Kibaki sworn in for his second term as the President of Kenya. Although the President said now is the time for healing and reconciliation, there is tension all over the country. Raila Odinga claims he has been rigged out of State House. This has made his followers bitter with the whole process, causing chaos in major towns.*

31 December 2007: *New developments are positive. The government is meeting the opposition on the way forward. I think people have realised that going to the streets won't solve the situation. One voice coming out all over the country is Kenya does not belong to politicians, Kenya is for all citizens, Kenya is our home. We need our safe Kenya, which we have developed for the last 44 years.*

Two email messages from a Kenyan regent at AJAN House, in Kangemi, just outside Nairobi. Eric Simiyu's predictions in the early days of unrest oscillated between trepidation and hope, accurately mirroring the fast-moving events that shook his country following the suspect counting. Post-election frustration has been combined with past grievances and tribal antagonisms and whipped up into acts of extreme brutality and destructiveness. These in turn swiftly provoke vengeance. A quarter-million people are internally displaced, more than 850 killed, and property and livelihoods destroyed. However, as Simiyu writes, the vast majority of Kenyans are resolutely against violence, even if their voice is deafened by the screaming headlines of vicious division.

Waiting and praying for a positive outcome to talks between the two main parties mediated by Kofi Annan, AJAN House has prepared a special issue of *AJANews*, for you to picture how Jesuit communities and works in Kenya have been affected, how everyone is struggling to carry on and to reach out to those affected by the unthinking violence. As befits AJAN's mission, we highlight the impact on people living with HIV and AIDS and those who care for and serve them.

A MONTH OF VIOLENCE

In a letter issued on 2 January, the Kenya Episcopal Conference urged all Kenyans to *refrain from the senseless killing of our brothers and sisters. We have lived together for all these years as brothers and sisters. There is no reason for us to be used to raise our hand against our neighbour because he or she belongs to a different ethnic group or political affiliation. Life is Sacred! We all belong to one family of God.*

The Church in Kenya has not been left unscathed by the violence, including the Jesuits. Kenyan Jesuits suffer personal grief as their families are affected. We remember especially Julius Mulsuna from Kakamega, 34, married with three children, the brother of our novice Josephat Pallister Mukaka. On 15 January Mulsuna was kidnapped in Mombassa and, three days later, his tortured and mutilated body found in a parking lot.

Fr Michael Kamau, a 41-year-old priest known to many Kenyan Jesuits, was

butchered on 26 January when he was stopped at an illegal roadblock. Even though he was wearing a cassock and pleaded for his life, the armed youth stoned him and set him ablaze, showing no mercy.

A caregiver of Lea Toto, the community-based service for HIV-positive orphans of Nyumbani, was murdered in Kibera, Africa's largest slum and home to one million people on the edge of Nairobi. Other caregivers and community health workers had their properties destroyed and looted.

On 27 January, a Jesuit candidate was returning from west of Nairobi in a matatu (mini-van). Stopped at a roadblock, he was dragged out of the vehicle, beaten, his head slashed with a broken bottle. The driver shouted, *He is not a [the wrong tribe], look at his I.D.!* The attacker checked the I.D. and said *Sorry*. The candidate sports a 20-stitch scar on the crown of his head.

Institutions like those of the Society of Jesus are under threat, as starkly revealed by mob violence outside the very gates of Hekima School of Theology in the early afternoon of 23 January. *It's one thing to talk about violence and quite another to face its crude and poisonous reality when it suddenly erupts at your door*, said Paulin Manwelo SJ, director of the Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations (HIPSIR). A mob of youth, forced by Police to evacuate the scene of an Opposition 'prayer gathering' for victims of the recent violence, started to burn vehicles in the compound of the Jamuhuri telephone exchange, across the street from Hekima, and to attack the building itself. *This happened right here, at the front door of Hekima College; just after the usual Wednesday mass and lunch for staff and students*, continued Paulin. After an hour or so, the police intervened to disperse the youth. Stunned, appalled and puzzled, the entire Hekima College Community could not understand the degree of violence. Suddenly the Hekima alarm system went off. Some youth tried to enter the compound; fortunately they didn't manage.

WE NEED EACH OTHER

Eric Simiyu Wanyonyi SJ, a Kenyan Jesuit doing reGENCY at AJAN House

Yes, it is true the Kenyan community is faced with a wave of horrifying events of killing, raping, and destruction of property and infrastructure. Young people, especially men, are possessed and overwhelmed by the terrifying spirit of *No Raila no peace*. Myself, I am left wondering what the phrase *No Raila no peace* means! Taken together it amounts to nothing less than political madness.

The political divide separates the rich and the poor, the politicians and the electorates. The poor are the ones who carry the burden of the political violence. Whereas the rich have protected themselves from the stalemate, the poor in slums have resorted to killing one another, destroying their own property in the name of *we want our democratic rights*. While a section of the electorate battles with riot police on the streets, the protagonist and political hardliners are in the safe city of Nairobi, confronting each other through press conferences. This is ridiculous!

The media is reporting only the burning houses, riot police in full gear, people dead. They are not reporting how local Kenyans are responding to the situation. Not all are affected by the political division and anger. All kinds of leaders are reaching out to one another to resolve the conflict. Some brave elected members of the 10th parliament have gone back to their constituencies to urge their supporters to stop violence and to respect other ethnic communities.

I'm personally happy with the way most Kenyans have acted in different ways to stop the politically-triggered chaos. They are really supporting one another. People

are ready to house those who are displaced, and businesses are providing food and finance to help affected people.

I believe this is an opportunity for Kenyans to realize that we need each other as we seek peace that includes social justice, socio-economic equity, political maturity and religious freedom. Moreover, listen attentively and remain sensitive to words that are not spoken, attitudes not overtly expressed, behaviours that may not be what they seem. As we pray for peace and justice, we are invited by Jesus Christ to embrace one another with words and deeds of love and humility, and not of vengeance.

YOU ARE STILL MY BROTHER

Marcel Uwineza SJ, regent from Rwanda at AJAN House

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. The staff of AJAN House heard the challenging exhortation from the Gospel of Matthew 5 during a Mass for justice and peace in Kenya held on 11 January. The celebration was followed by another for the entire Jesuit community of Kangemi on 15 January. Presided over by Paterne Mombé SJ from the Loyola Hope Centre, Togo, both were special moments in the life of AJAN.

On 11 January, the Jesuits, candidates and staff at AJAN House gathered for the Eucharist. Staff members shared how the post-election violence had touched them: some of their relatives have lost property. One prayed that he would once again see a peaceful Kenya where all tribes live together, as he had always known it, and that his children and grandchildren will be born and grow up in a peaceful country. The first reading promised a happier future: *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; on the inhabitants of a country in shadow as dark as death, light has blazed forth* (Isaiah 9).

Mombé testified how happy he was to hear one of the staff saying to another: *Adika! Even if we are different and come from a different tribe, you are still my brother.* Before the elections, the staff lunch at AJAN House had been the scene of the liveliest political debates, with votes more or less evenly divided amongst government, opposition and abstainers; perhaps *lively* approached *hurtful* at times. Mombé encouraged everyone to see themselves as Kenyans first, before turning to their multiple lenses of identity. *As we seek political peace and justice,* he continued, *Christian principles of love, compassion, and forgiveness are to guide us.*

Mombé added a story with a moral. *A bird laid its eggs in a certain place and flew off. Now in that place were already some eggs left by a bird of a different species. The eggs hatched and the chicks grew up together, learning how to fly despite their differences.*

The second celebration on 15 January gathered six priests, three regents, three novices on experiment and two candidates from the three Jesuit houses in Kangemi. One described meeting someone involved in the recent looting and killings. When the Jesuit asked him why, the man replied that, having witnessed others doing it, he was coerced to join in. A novice shared how this crisis has plunged his family back into memories of 1991 when they had to vacate their home under threats from neighbours. And a father confessed that preaching *Love your enemies* is normally difficult enough, but when people really think, speak and behave as such?

These moments of sharing and prayer, each followed by a meal, brought a sense of unity to the AJAN staff and Kangemi Jesuit community. All felt that peace and justice are cornerstones for a reconciled people.

SAYING NO TO VIOLENCE

Kangemi, an ethnically-mixed neighbourhood of about 100,000 on the northeast outskirts of Nairobi, is home to a Jesuit community in three houses: Hakimani, St Joseph the Worker, and AJAN.

Kangemi remains relatively peaceful, mirroring the calm and restraint with which most Kenyans have greeted the disturbing upheaval. It is surprising that, as Kenya continues to plunge into chaos, we are safer here than in other slums. Residents have said NO to violence and looting.

But the threat of unrest is in the air. *I still feel safe walking to and from the parish dispensary, says Winston Mina SJ, a Filipino doctor and novice with the Missouri Province, on experiment at AJAN House and working at the dispensary of St Joseph the Worker. However, unlike recent weeks when I felt that we were almost insulated from all this mayhem, I am now more aware that danger lurks around the corner.*

Staff of both the parish and some of its projects have received credible threats; one staffer and her husband were beaten and are hospitalized; and rumours of indiscriminate or targeted violence criss-cross Kangemi. The laboratory technician at the clinic heard that a gang was coming to expel him and his fellow lodgers (of a certain tribe) from their apartment in Kangemi, and to burn it. An elderly patient of the clinic, member of the tribe reportedly planning the expulsion, confirmed that he had indeed been approached by younger members who wanted to do just that. However, they were dissuaded. Another risk is posed by displaced people moving into the area, bringing with them the possibility that they'd be hunted here too.

The AJAN House community, in Simiyu's words, has been *sharing bread with those who have none, and mobile-phone-cards (there was a sudden 'scarcity') with those who wanted to contact their relatives who are trapped in troubled places.* And when it was too dangerous to go home, staff overnighted at AJAN House.

Winston adds: *I'm grateful that I am here, right now. I think my presence somehow is giving hope to the staff and even to people on the street. Mainly by listening, and by sharing a smile at every appropriate moment, I think that I am actually living out a life of a Jesuit, hopefully bringing Jesus by whose name the Society is designated, to those who desperately need His presence at this time.*

CARRYING ON

Jesuits in Kenya are pressing ahead with their mission amid the alarming unrest. In communion with the whole Church, they are taking up the appeal of the Bishops on 2 January: *We especially urge our priests and religious in our parishes and religious communities to facilitate as much as possible justice, peace and solidarity with those suffering at this moment.*

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is reaching out to those sheltering in police stations in Nairobi and to people displaced in Kitale in the west of the country. The decision to work in Kitale follows assessment visits by the JRS Kenya director, Anne Wangari, to the dioceses of Eldoret and Kitale, where the internally-displaced number some 90,000. *In partnership with the Jesuit Hakimani Institute, we plan to work in Kitale diocese, and collaborate with agencies there, including Trocaire and the Red Cross, said Joe Hampson SJ, JRS Eastern Africa director.* Aid will focus on emergency relief, with tents, sanitation, food supplements for children and HIV-patients, peace-building initiatives and counselling, as well as one-off support of fertilisers and seeds for people to start again. JRS staffer Anne Peeters: *We want to*

pay special attention to vulnerable people and therefore we will be giving food supplements to children and HIV-patients. We estimate that a total of 500 children and HIV-patients will be receiving food supplements, which is where AJAN is supporting and ready to do more.

All this in an atmosphere where going on as usual is a daily struggle. Fr Joe said: *The JRS staff tries to come to work when transport is available, but the normal pattern of life has been badly affected in Nairobi, as in many parts of the country, and this is likely to continue for some time.*

Hardest hit are aid projects serving people in certain slum areas, where the violence erupted fiercely. Jesuit and other initiatives have suffered setbacks as insecurity and destruction deal heavy blows to their employees and beneficiaries. Sr Mary Owens IBVM, who runs Nyumbani, said: *We are assessing the needs of our staff so that we can assist them. Getting to work can be very challenging and risky, to go into the communities to visit families. Our staff have shown remarkable courage and dedication.*

People living with HIV and AIDS are at extra risk because displacement and disruption have prevented many from accessing anti-retroviral treatment (ARV) and food supplies. In recent weeks, healthcare givers have struggled to ensure people continued receiving ARV drugs. However, it has been very difficult to travel, especially in slum areas, to deliver medications or treat the sick, so for a while, the only ones who got drugs were those who could call for them at the centres themselves. The failure to take ARVs regularly seriously jeopardises the success of treatment. Sr Mary said: *We are very relieved that almost all our children on ARVs have managed to get their drugs either through our centres or through other health centres if they are stranded up-country.*

Although Nyumbani's Lea Toto programme was minimally functioning in the first week of January, it is now almost fully operational, except in Kibera. As a stronghold of the opposition, Kibera was an area of great destruction. *Sadly, Kibera is still a no-go zone; however, our security people have been able to guard the premises successfully,* continued Sr Mary. Like many other NGOs and the local health authorities, Nyumbani set up a mobile clinic in the Jamhuri Showground in Nairobi, where people displaced from Kibera have found refuge.

An added worry is that many projects have no news of their beneficiaries. Sr Mary said they had managed to contact 1,894 out of 2,502 Lea Toto children. Terry Charlton SJ, who co-founded St Aloysius Gonzaga secondary school for AIDS-affected teenagers in Kibera, said about 60% of students were going to school. *The rest of our students and graduates are upcountry and have not been able to return because of the insecurity. Unfortunately, we have no way to contact them. We have not heard of any of our students or their families being harmed by the violence. We hope all will be able to return very soon.*

Fortunately, Kianda, the area of Kibera where the temporary St Aloysius is located, was largely spared any destruction. *On a couple of occasions, a group came to the buildings, interested in burning; but the people living nearby pleaded that this is our school and serves our children and so it was spared.* After a week's delay like most establishments in Kenya, St Aloysius began its new academic year on 14 January. Fr Terry said: *In the opening Eucharist, I tried to emphasize how the future of the country can only happen if all the citizens think of themselves as Kenyans and work together, and each of us must do all we can to overcome tribal prejudice in the way we think, in what we say and in the ways we act.*

The Jesuit Hakimani Centre, which fosters economic justice, good governance and

peace-building, is working overtime to promote dialogue and reconciliation, to bring about an immediate end to the violence. Hakimani held two public fora at Hekima College in collaboration with HIPSIR. On 25 January, *Post-Election Crisis: Mapping the Early Warning Systems* looked at indicators that can point to the way out of the crisis. And on 1 February, *The Way for Kenya out of the Post-Election Crisis*, criticising the failure of leadership and collapse of institutions, considered forms of transitional justice, dialogue, and other healing mechanisms Kenyans should urgently make use of.

In keeping with the Kenyan Bishops' letter, Hakimani calls to end the violence immediately, to provide material and spiritual aid for victims, to support mediation between the major parties, and to work towards a long-term solution by encouraging reconciliation and national unity and promoting transparency in the electoral process.

But I say to you, Jesus taught with authority, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5).

If you wish to support the AJAN effort and response in Kenya, please send a brief message to aids@jesuits.ca for how to best make a donation. Thank you!

AJANews is published by the African Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN) in English, French and Portuguese and is available free of charge. To subscribe, or to change your e-mail address, please click on *Update Profile/Email Address* below or write to ajanews@jesuitaids.net.

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