

A Letter from David:

Earthquake in Democratic Republic of the Congo – Feb 2008



Greetings. I thought you might be interested in the trip I made in Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo, at the invitation of the Christian Aid - Burundi . They wanted a psychotherapist to do healing sessions for their staff and their families who are now suffering of the affects of the earthquake.

I went on 28 Feb 2008 and returned on 2 March. I have been writing a comprehensive report along with moving from our former office, this last week, to a much smaller one. We are focusing on establishing ourselves at our new Gitega site, where we have already set some of our office stuff. Also, my sister Rebeka (57) died last Saturday and I have been with her family upcountry.

I found that people were still very much traumatized by the earthquake that shook the town of Bukavu in Congo and that of Cyangugu in Rwanda on February 3 at 9:35. The epicenter was very near Bukavu and its magnitude was 6.1. In Bukavu about 35-45 died and hundreds wounded some of whom are still in the hospitals. I worked with women, men and children separately, a total of 50 persons. Of course all sessions were group therapy.

The earthquake was more devastating to the psychological aspect of the people than one could imagine. It surfaced the unhealed traumas of the population. It seemed as if people have been living in a denial of the psychosocial affects of the different wars they have endured in their town in particular and in the region in general. A lot of people confessed that the earthquake was more terrifying than war. According to most people interviewed, one can try to locate how far or how near the battle is and move or relax accordingly. They also argued that with war one can try to hide but with earthquake there is no hiding place.

I proposed a training that could take into consideration of the cultural/traditional understanding of the earthquakes, so that the local population will not think that the earthquake *Muririma* needs a sacrifice in order to be calm and stop destroying homes, as I heard from one of the

women when she narrated about how her grandmother explained as she saw her family members panicking.

There are unhealed traumas that need to be addressed. I interviewed people on the streets and in the market and found this to be true. While our objectives were to intervene for the victims of trauma that was caused by the earthquake, people are still suffering the effects of political wars and interethnic/intertribal bloody conflicts. It was so evident that should we had had enough time, individual therapy was going to be carried out with enough clients around.

Friends who want to lend support to our work here can make checks payable to:

“Sherwood Friends Community Church”, indicating THARS on the memo line. Sent check to 2706 Eton Road, Charlottesville, VA 22903, Attn: THARS or contact Jim Mustin at mustin3000@yahoo.com or 434-906-4239 about how you can volunteer.

Thank you for your care and love,



David Niyonzima