

**A Letter from David:**

## **Responding to the Violence in Kenya – Jan 2008**



I am not sure how much you have heard about the violence that followed the presidential election on December 27, 2007. How at least 400 have been killed and thousands of others got displaced in mostly the Rift Valley areas that included Nakuru, Eldoret and Kisumu. Even though the situation seems to be being brought under control, thousands of people are very very traumatized and many, including church leaders have a feeling of shame for what Kenyans did to each other.

I was invited by the Agape Fellowship Center in Nairobi to train people who can help. I traveled on Wednesday, 9 Jan. On Thursday I spoke to over 60 pastors, clergy people, counselors, representing 20 denominations. I spoke on the trauma healing issues and trained them to do a quick therapeutic intervention in time of crisis. I spoke from my experience in Burundi and shared with them the techniques of defusing and debriefing which were very helpful to them according to their comments. Two of the participants were professional counselors with private practices. During the group discussion when we applied the teaching to ourselves, I realized most of my audience were traumatized because each of them shared their fears, nightmares and many other emotions as they experienced or witnessed violence in some suburbs of Nairobi.

We even prayed for the talks which were going on in the state house as we did in Burundi when we prayed for the cease-fire to be agreed upon by the Burundi politicians. You might have heard that so many diplomats and formal African presidents such as those of Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania are now visiting the Kenyan politicians so that they may help in mediation. Koffi Annan was expected to come and kick start a formal dialogue after President Kuffuor of Ghana failed to bring together President Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga of the opposition party ODM (Orange Democratic Movement) to an agreement on Thursday.

It was a little bit hard to condense the teaching of a week or three days to only one day but, thank God, it was possible and the participants were all happy and very much appreciated what they learned. They will be helping

the 700-1000 people who usually come to the center from the slums of Kibera and Mathare to get the flours, rice, greens, oil and other things to help them in their displaced persons camps. The participants will use the technique I shared with them to help stop an eventual vicious cycle of revenge that usually comes because of the unhealed trauma or the lack of a therapeutic intervention during a violent situation when blood has been shed.

On Friday I was taken to Nakuru, 150 Km from Nairobi where I met with 80 people representing 10 denominations. I had a brief awareness-raising session with 8 bishops who have churches in the affected areas to sensitize them about the importance of responding to the trauma issues of the population in order to avert more violence and other disorders among the community. They appreciated the teaching but, of course, the time was so short and since some of them had been exposed to counseling teachings what I shared was added material to what they are doing for their people.

Before returning to Nairobi on Friday evening I was able to visit the Nakuru Showground where an estimated 10,000 of mostly Kikuyu displaced people are being helped by the Red Cross. Vehicles were still bringing more survivors of the violence. My host, Bishop Kabachia who is coordinating the church leaders' initiative to help the victims, told me that some of the killed people were shot by poisoned arrows and others were burned. He said that some houses were still burned in remote areas where the military has not yet arrived. You might have heard of the 34 people among whom 24 were children who were burned in the Assemblies of God church where they had sought refuge.

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Thank you for your care and love,



David Niyonzima