

Mar 2005

## PERSISTENCE AND PATIENCE

### **Our Gratitude and Best Wishes**

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Like those of you who have lived and worked in Africa, I have learned a great deal from my African friends [I also feel that I have much more to learn!] Among other things, I have learned about the value of two qualities that I have found in abundance in Africa: PERSISTENCE and PATIENCE. I all too often find myself impatient, frustrated and ready to give up too quickly if things are not going as I would like. Perhaps nowhere in the world are more people more patient and more persistent, unwilling to give up, than in Africa.

### **A Call to Action: Make Visible Uganda's Invisible War**

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We, the members of AFJN, are called to put into practice the lessons we have learned from our African brothers and sisters, particularly the lessons of persistence and patience. As people devoted to raising awareness of Africa and working to transform U.S. mentality and policy on Africa, we may be tempted to give in to frustration. We must resist this temptation! We must remember our African sisters and brothers and allow ourselves to be encouraged by the power of their example.

### **A Commitment to Strengthen the Network in Africa**

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We, the members of AFJN, have important work to do! We form the only national Catholic organization devoted explicitly to education and advocacy on behalf of justice in Africa. We must not tire of amplifying the voices of our African sisters and brothers in our communities, in our parishes and schools, and in the halls of Congress.

We must not tire of raising awareness of the devastating consequences of HIV/AIDS, the violence against the young, the poor and defenseless that can and should be prevented, and the evil that would deprive the poorest Africans of their basic human rights. While we believe that the call to work for justice in Africa is a call from God, we also believe that even those who are primarily focused on national interest and global security, will see, with our help, that Africa must not continue to be neglected.

Because our work is so important, we will soon make intensive efforts to expand our membership and I will be requesting that our institutional and organizational members increase their membership contributions to AFJN. I am extremely grateful for the generosity extended that has enabled AFJN to do what it has done to this point. However, I am convinced that , together, we can and must do better!

Let us continue to help each other to become increasingly persistent and patient in working for justice and peace in Africa. The work is too important! We must not lose heart!

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Fr. Robert Dowd, C.S.C.  
Chair, Africa Faith and Justice Network

**Africa Faith and Justice Network** is a Catholic network of individual and group members focused on Africa and the experience of its people. AFJN is committed in faith to collaborate in the task of transforming United States mentality and policy on Africa. It seeks to be an instrument of education and advocacy on behalf of justice for Africa.

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**OUR GRATITUDE AND BEST WISHES**

By Robert A. Dowd, C.S.C.  
Chair, Africa Faith and Justice Network

**MANY THANKS TO MARCEL AND LARRY!!**

As many of you may know, both Marcel Kitissou and Larry Goodwin have departed AFJN in order to assume responsibilities elsewhere. We at AFJN are very grateful for the commitment and dedication to justice in and for Africa that both Marcel and Larry have demonstrated as representatives of AFJN.

After three and a half years of dedicated service as our Executive Director, Marcel Kitissou has left that position to assume the position of Faculty Director of the Global Humanitarian Action Program at George Mason University. Marcel has been tireless in his work for justice for Africa and has represented AFJN well on Capitol Hill and elsewhere. As we thank him, we wish him well and are certain that he will do great work on behalf of the world's poor and most vulnerable at George Mason University.

After seven years with AFJN, Larry Goodwin has assumed a senior position in Bread for the World. After working in Uganda [1971-1986] and Zimbabwe [1987-1988], Larry became Executive Director of AFJN in 1998. After serving three years in that position, Larry served as Associate Director until this past February. Larry's knowledge of and love for Africa, combined with tremendous advocacy skills, made Larry extremely effective in his work at AFJN. We are grateful to Larry and we wish him the very best as he continues to be a voice for the voiceless with Bread for the World.

Thanks to Marcel and Larry, we in AFJN have a strong foundation upon which to build.  
We are extremely grateful to them both!

**MANY THANKS TO PHIL REED, M.AFR.!**

The Africa Faith and Justice Network owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Fr. Phil Reed, M.Afr., who just finished a term as Chair of the AFJN Board of Directors. Phil recently returned to Africa, and has begun work in Burkina Faso. Phil is an extraordinarily gifted person, filled with passion for the work of peace and justice in and for Africa. He brought his many gifts to the AFJN Board and generously shared them with us.

It is our hope to keep in touch with Phil and that, from time to time, he will update us on his work and the situation on the ground in Burkina Faso and other parts of West Africa.



## A Call to Action: Make Visible Uganda's "Invisible" War

By Michael Poffenberger

The cries of victimized children in Northern Uganda remain strong. The cycle of violence in the region's eighteen-year conflict continues, characterized by the abduction of tens of thousands of children into the ranks of the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) as soldiers or sex slaves, dozens of camps for the internally displaced, and the terrorization of the civilian population through killings, torture and maiming.

Most fault Uganda's historical North/South divide for the perpetuation of the conflict. The nepotism and region-favoring of Uganda's post-independence history, as well as colonial policies of ethnic division and marked differences in language and culture, has led to significant regional divergence and inequities in access to power. The fruits of current President Yoweri Museveni's tenure, which include success in combating the AIDS crisis, universal primary education, and strong economic development, have yet to reach the North.

Instead, 80% of Northerners—approximately 1.6 million people, mostly of the Acholi Tribe—now live in camps, supposedly protected by the Ugandan military. But the ineptitude of government soldiers, who are often accused of drunkenness and hostility toward locals, has allowed LRA soldiers relatively easy entrance into the camps for access to food and abductees. One recent LRA massacre inside a camp in Lira District killed over 200 civilians.

The lack of security in the region has also led thousands of children to seek shelter in the protection of towns or camps at night, rising every morning to walk up to ten kilometers to school during the day. These so-called "night commuters" have only recently captured the attention of the international press, and are yet another sign of the immense suffering of the people of Northern Uganda.

The Government of Uganda has taken a joint military and political approach to seeking an end to the conflict. Recent ceasefires and negotiations however have yielded little progress. Neither the rebels nor the Government have demonstrated good faith in the possibility for non-violent resolution.

Prospects for peace in Uganda have increased of late with the hopeful conclusion of Sudan's North/South war. Khartoum's support for the LRA, which was provided in response to Museveni's previous channeling of aid and arms to the Southern Sudanese rebels, has now ended. Furthermore, recent victories by Uganda's military and an

increase in the stream of LRA soldiers opting to take advantage of the offer of amnesty are reason for hope.

Further possibilities for achieving peace must include more aggressive and obvious actions by President Museveni to combat the skepticism of Northerners and to demonstrate his commitment to seeing the war's end. Military campaigns, though touted by the Government of Uganda, have been weak. The power of Uganda's military was demonstrated in the DRC and in skirmishes elsewhere in the country; it is questionable as to why it is able to accomplish so little in the North. The full resources of the government and military must be turned toward the war.

Museveni could also demonstrate his commitment by showing greater faith in the process of negotiations. His actions have thus far led to a deterioration of trust between the two parties and greater despair among Northerners.

Finally, the historical divide between Northern and Southern Uganda must be bridged. Most Northerners—arguably with justification—feel ignored and alienated by power structures in Kampala. The Acholi people are often even demonized and blamed for the war by Southerners. As a result, the relationship between government officials and the general population of the North is tense. Museveni's attempt to change Uganda's constitution to allow himself to be a lifelong president is another obstacle to the development of genuinely democratic institutions, and if successful it will likely prolong the war.

As conscientious Catholics and people of good will, the importance of bringing greater international attention to this crisis and generating significant political resolve to ending it must be recognized. Museveni's status as a "star child" in the eyes of Western donors has allowed him to keep the war in the North out of the global limelight, but it also makes him vulnerable to threats of aid reductions if he does not end the war. In solidarity with the suffering people of Northern Uganda, let us call for action and transformation.

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\*Michael Poffenberger is a senior at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, and President of the Africa Faith and Justice Network at Notre Dame [AFJN-ND]. For more info on the activities of AFJN-ND, please contact Michael at [mpoffenb@nd.edu](mailto:mpoffenb@nd.edu).



**A COMMITMENT TO STRENGTHEN THE NETWORK IN AFRICA:  
COLLECTING REAL WORLD GRASSROOTS EXPERIENCES**

It is important for those of us in AFJN to grow in awareness of how our network extends into Africa. It is our intention to strengthen our connectedness to people on the ground in Africa so that our efforts might be increasingly informed by real world grassroots experiences.

AFJN is a network like few others, due to the individual and organizational members present “where the action is” so to speak. Therefore, we ask you to keep in touch with members of your communities, family members and friends who are presently living in and/or at work in Africa and to put them in touch with the AFJN office.

**Currently, we are especially interested in receiving reflections on current conditions from those who are living and working in or just returned from:**

- \* northern Uganda
- \* Sudan [especially, but not exclusively, Darfur]
- \* eastern Democratic Republic of Congo
- \* Togo
- \* Zimbabwe
- \* Liberia

Accounts of real world grassroots experiences in Africa are important for enhancing the effectiveness of our educational and advocacy efforts. They can make all the difference in the world when trying to get the attention of policymakers.

Therefore, please encourage members of your communities, family members and friends in Africa, particularly those in the regions and countries mentioned above, to send accounts of their experiences to [afjn@afjn.org](mailto:afjn@afjn.org). If that is not possible, we ask that you write to them, ask them to relate their experiences to you, and forward their accounts to us at [afjn@afjn.org](mailto:afjn@afjn.org). Please type GRASSROOTS EXP in the subject line to avoid being blocked and/or deleted as SPAM.

**SAVE THE DATES! 16-17 October 2005  
FOR THIS YEAR’S AFJN ANNUAL MEETING**

AFJN members will hold their annual meeting in Tucson, AZ, following the Mission Congress organized by the U.S. Catholic Mission Association. We will send you important information about both events in the weeks ahead.

Meanwhile, please mark our Annual Meeting dates on your calendar and plan to join us for an exciting, timely and enjoyable program of speakers, workshops and interaction with other AFJN members. Meet our board members and help AFJN chart an effective advocacy course over the years ahead.

*“We received a wealth of information about Africa. The business meeting was the best I’ve experienced in any organization, and the vitality was obvious in the smooth functioning of the conference”*  
— Participant at AFJN’s 2004 Annual Meeting in Louisville, KY

Around Africa is published eight times a year by the Africa Faith and Justice Network.

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