

A R O U N D Africa

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Dear Members and Friends of AFJN,

In this issue of Around Africa, we are happy to announce that AFJN has named Fr. William Dyer, M.Afr. as Executive Director and Mr. Michael Poffenberger as Associate Director. Fr. Dyer is a person who knows Africa well due to the many years he has served in East, Central and West Africa. Michael Poffenberger is a person of knowledge and great passion. Fr. Dyer is intimately connected to people on the ground in Africa, particularly people who are associated with the religious communities that have traditionally formed the support base of AFJN, and, among other things, Michael Poffenberger brings connectedness to our growing constituency base on college and university campuses.

Fr. Bill Dyer, M.Afr. comes to AFJN with a wealth of experience on the ground in Africa dating back to 1971, when he went to work in a parish in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo. Fr. Dyer has worked in Cote d'Ivoire [1980-1986], Kenya [1989-1992] and Tanzania [1992-1993; 1997-2005]. Most recently, he has been serving as Assistant Provincial of the Missionaries of Africa who are at work in Tanzania, Kenya, and Sudan, and Interim Coordinator of Justice and Peace for the Religious Superiors Association of Tanzania. Besides experience on the ground in Africa, Fr Dyer has been active in advocacy when in the United States between assignments in Africa. In addition to serving as a Board member of AFJN [1993-1996], he has been an active member of the Washington Office on Africa, Advocacy Network for Africa, and the Catholic Task Force on Africa.



**AFJN Executive Director
Fr. William Dyer**

Originally from Seattle, Washington, Michael Poffenberger comes to AFJN from the University of Notre Dame, where he earned a B.A. in Anthropology and Peace Studies. Michael lived and worked in Uganda between January and May 2004. Michael has served as President of the AFJN-Notre Dame [2004-2005]

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The Advent of Uganda Conflict Action Network

by Michael Poffenberger
and Peter Quaranto

At the end of 2003, Jan Egeland, the United Nations undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, told the BBC: "I cannot find any other part of the world that is having an emergency on the scale of Uganda that is getting so little international attention." Egeland's words could not have been more true or their ramifications more horrifying. While the 19-year-old war in northern Uganda to which Egeland referred has devastated the region, the most disturbing element of this mass violence has been the silence of the Ugandan government, U.S. government, and international community. It is clear to almost all observers that a serious commitment to peace from any of these bodies can catalyze an immediate end to the war. Yet, silence abounds.

On the ground in northern Uganda, the scene is shocking. Tens of thousands of civilians have been maimed or killed by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Ninety percent of the region's population of almost two million people has been relocated into internally displaced people's camps that lack food and security. People in the camps are enduring disease, malnutrition, and nighttime attacks from the LRA. An

old man living in one such camp told us, "Since 1985, we have just had restless nights...In some ways, we are already dead. We yearn for peace, but we have no hope anymore."

The bulk of the soldiers fighting for the LRA are children aged seven to seventeen who have been abducted from towns and camps. Escapees recount stories of being abducted, brutalized, brainwashed, and forced to kill viciously. One account from a nine-year-old boy highlights this hell:

"There is nothing I liked there. They collect all the children together and make you beat someone to death. Once

there were about seven who tried to escape, including two girls. The commander decided not to kill the girls. He picked one boy to be killed. He told one of the girls to come and chop this boy into small pieces. The other boys were told to help. Then they were told to play with the dead person's head. After that, they commanded the girls to smear blood of the dead boy on their chest. Finally, they informed us that anyone who tries to escape will have the same thing."

Ugandans deserve better. For years, the U.S. government and entire international community have looked the other way, not providing the necessary relief assistance nor using

their diplomatic power to push the Ugandan government to commit to ending the war. This inaction has facilitated the maintenance of the status quo and has served to perpetuate the violence. It is time to speak up for the most vulnerable in our world, and to demand that the equal value of all human life be recognized, be it American or Ugandan, poor or rich, black, white or brown.

Movements have recently arisen to call for

attention to other crises in the Great Lakes Region, such as the genocide in Darfur and conflict transformation in southern Sudan. At present, utilizing these movements provides great potential for effective international action and pressure to impact the emergency in northern Uganda. Responsible foreign policy toward the region will take into consideration the linkages between the various crises. We must use our power as people and citizens to turn attention and resources to this disaster and the region as a whole. We must act now to see that our own government seizes this opportunity to contribute to a long-awaited peace in northern Uganda, the Great Lakes Region of Africa and beyond.



Silent suffering.



One man told us, "Since 1985, we have just had restless nights. In some ways we are already dead..."

To this end, AFJN is launching the Uganda Conflict Action Network (Uganda-CAN), and we invite you to join. Together, we will raise awareness about this hidden war, expose the silent complicity of the global community and demand action for a peaceful resolution. Betty Bigombe, the chief negotiator for peace in Uganda, told us, "If your campaign is successful, it would be a huge contribution for peace in our country." With your funding and support, united in solidarity with the hopes and visions of millions of Ugandans, we will build a campaign of ordinary, outraged citizens to combat this unnecessary human suffering and help bring healing and renewal to the region. Together, we will learn the true meaning of civic duty in a global world.

There are several ways that you can contribute to Uganda-CAN to help bring peace to Uganda. The most important contribution you can make to the effort is your **TIME**. Visit our website at www.ugandacan.org to learn more about the situation in Uganda and about our mission. Spread the word of our efforts and help raise awareness by sharing our website and mission with your family, friends and coworkers. Sign up for our email listserv to receive action alerts and occasional updates.

Second, this campaign needs your **ACTION**. Visit our website for information on how to express your concern about this situation to your elected representatives as well as information about our "Virtual March" on Washington

this fall. By demanding action from our government, we hope to bring about legislation that will end the conflict and bring peace to this troubled area.

Finally, this campaign needs your **MONEY**. Funds are needed to publish and distribute information about the crisis and to effectively communicate the gravity of the situation and our demands for action to representatives in Washington. Funds are also desperately needed to provide direct aid to the people of Uganda who are most affected by this crisis; a significant portion of all donations will be redirected to humanitarian relief efforts in the area. Any contribution that you are able to make will be greatly appreciated. Checks can be made out to Africa Faith and Justice Network, and sent to the address above, or donations can be made through our secure website, www.ugandacan.org. Africa Faith and Justice Network is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and all donations are tax-deductible. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Thank you for your willingness to face the reality of horrors in northern Uganda. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you. We firmly believe that this world can be a better place, and together we can make a difference.

Peter J. Quaranto (pquaranto@ugandacan.org)
Michael Poffenberger (mpoffenberger@ugandacan.org)

Northern Uganda: Crying for Attention

by Peter Quaranto

I returned to southern Uganda from the north on Wednesday and have been meaning to write since then. This trip was an intense one, leaving me really tired and overwhelmed by the suffering that continues horrifically as I write. There is a gloom that hangs over northern Uganda, tarnishing what should be a land of beauty and production.

Perhaps the most intense experience of this trip was visiting Noah's Ark, a center for children who "commute" to the town at night from the rural villages and IDP camps to get security from LRA attacks. We traveled by bike across town in the dark to see this center, which is really a series of tents surrounded by barbed-wire fence, not unlike what I imagine concentration camps looked like on the outside during the Holocaust.

As we walked towards the gates, the kids came into focus. And the numbers were enormous. There were over 2000 kids in ripped, dirty clothes ranging in age from a few months old to seventeen. They all sat huddled together wearing stares of fear. We visited the tents where these children sleep - they sleep on the dirt floor with blankets, gridlocked together like Africans on a slave ship across the Middle Passage.

Can you imagine? These children as young as one-year-old have to walk miles in the late afternoon into town where they sleep inside barbed wired fences, overcrowded into tents. At the break of dawn, they march back to their villages. And they do this every day. Every single day. Can you imagine living such a life dictated by fear and poverty? Can you imagine living such a life as a three-year old? It is abomina-



I could not forget those children...or the cries of the people for peace.

ble. And the numbers in these "night commuter" centers are increasing due to more attacks from the LRA and greater insecurity.

After we visited the tents, we started to walk back to the entrance. As we moved up the hill, the children rushed past us to secure their spots for sleep. It was an emotional moment - seemingly endless waves of little malnourished, fear-ridden, cute children walking past us. And then the kids choir in the camp, which had been practicing in the distance, started singing a song. We could only make out one word: peace.

My trips to the north have been overwhelming, and the last one perhaps the most. Yet it is often even more overwhelming to leave the north, because we then face the daunting task of trying to connect worlds that seem so distant, so disconnected. Returning to the busy, bustling streets of Kampala, I could not forget those children who walked past us to sleep in barbed-wired camps, the victims of the LRA without lips, eyes or ears, the escaped little children abducted into the LRA forced to kill and rape, or the cries of a people for peace.

We should not forget. I should not forget. And even

more, we must act because this situation is so violent inhumane and brutal, destroying lives every single day. It is destroying a whole culture, a society. It really is a subtle form of genocide. Every day that we settle for simple awareness more people die. The horrors demand action.

So that is what we are trying to do with our Uganda Conflict Action Network - push for awareness that is transformed into serious action to help the people who are on the brink of annihilation. Starting this summer, we will be launching a campaign to raise awareness about the war, and then to mobilize people to pressure Washington to act seriously for a peaceful resolution to end the war in northern Uganda.

Everyone I have talked to here says that if Washington decided it wanted the conflict to end at breakfast, it would be over by dinner. The U.S. has a huge influence over the Museveni regime, and if the U.S., using its clout (military and economic aid) demands that he take peace talks seriously, he will. The U.S. needs to send a senior diplomat to Kampala soon to send this message to Museveni; then, the U.S., along with European countries, needs to send peace envoys to secure the safe zones of ceasefire, monitor the

peace talks and help rebuild trust.

I had the honor while in the north of interviewing Betty Bigombe, the chief peace negotiator for the conflict. She is a passionate, determined woman whose efforts are frustrated by the military endeavors and lack of international support. I told her about our campaign. She told me, "Your campaign will be a major contribution to peace for our people here."

As I wrote before, the task of this campaign is daunting and difficult. Yet, the stakes could not be higher or the cause more worthy.

Peace from Uganda to all of you across the seas.

Peter Quaranto is a senior at the University of Notre Dame and writes this article from Uganda, where he has been living and studying since January 2005. Peter is working on an AFJN-sponsored initiative called Uganda Conflict Action Network (UCAN), intended to promote peace in northern Uganda. For more information on UCAN and to find out how you can help, please contact Peter at quaranto.1@nd.edu or AFJN at afjn@afjn.org.



Noah's Ark

NOT ENOUGH PEACE - Revisiting Liberia

by Fr. Michael Moran, SMA



Still, there is only enough peace to allow the UN to move around the country and make promises of repairing the roads, power plants and water facilities.

It's been awhile since I visited Liberia. I had been there in 2003 and then returned last March. In a very real sense not much has changed in two years.

In 1990 the capital city of Monrovia lost its electricity and water because of the destructions that follows in the wake of war. "Freedom Fighters" were just outside the city in May of that year and waiting to liberate the city from an oppressive regime. That was their line but the real liberation was to liberate people from their acquired property. At the barrel of rifle, a 10 year old commanded the actions of adult men and women. They acquired wealth in an instant and relinquished it just as quickly.

In 1997 elections were held to help Liberia move towards peace. Hailed by the international community and endorsed similarly it was hoped that the war had come to an end and peace in the region would be secured. Instead, five years of repression followed with fighting occurring in one part of the country supported by another country. Corruption ran amuck and life was difficult for the general population. Rights of the individual were constantly disregarded so that the few would benefit. Property was taken from citizens, others killed or disappeared because of what they said or did. The rule of law was "he who has the gun rules".

Now there are UN peacekeepers in the country. They have made it possible to travel the county, although ambushes of vehicles do occur, occasionally. Fighting still breaks out occasionally, as promises are not fulfilled, occasionally. Schools are open, except when the money to pay the teachers is not there, occasionally. Hospitals are open, when the medicine is not diverted to personal clinics, occasionally.

Yes it looks like peace, occasionally. Enough peace to allow over 50 presidential candidates for the upcoming elections in October. Enough peace to allow the UN to move around the country and make promises of repairing the roads, power plants and water facilities. Enough peace to have people begin to invest in Liberia again - invest in the lumber, iron ore and other natural resources.

But there's not enough peace to bring those who committed war crimes (recruiting child soldiers, killing large groups of civilians) to justice. There's not enough peace to hold the leaders of the present government account-

able for the over 300 million dollars that has been entrusted to them. There's not enough peace to have the schools open on a regular schedule and provide a good education. Perhaps it is better to say there is the absence of war but no peace yet.

We should encourage President Bush to continue on his course to call former president Charles Taylor to be responsible for his actions. We need to encourage funding into the country for the repair of electrical power and water supplies. We need to open the schools for all, not just for those who took up guns (the Unites States offers aid to rebuild schools if half of the student body are former fighters). We need to repair the roads, and restore communications. We need to see that Liberia is not just a country but part of a region. We need to secure peace in Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and Guinea. We need to discourage leaders of other countries from offering armed groups protection and freedom of movement in their areas of control.



We have to remember that peace is not only about the absence of fighting but the presence of true justice...justice for all.

If we fail, fighting will break out again. The hundreds of Liberian mercenaries, who have fled to neighboring countries, will see to this. The rejected politicians who do not get their power through the ballot box will see to this. The greedy international opportunists will see to this. We have to remember that peace is not only about the absence of fighting but the presence of true justice...justice for all.



We need to open the schools for all, not just for those who took up guns. The Unites States offers aid to rebuild schools only if half of the student body are former fighters.

Fr. Michael Moran worked in Liberia from 1978 through 2002. Now, among many other responsibilities, he serves as the Vice Provincial and Peace and Justice Director for the SMA.

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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Associate Director: Mike Poffenberger

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and has been an active member of the Sudan Working Group at Notre Dame. While at Notre Dame, Michael also served as Justice and Peace Coordinator with the Center for Social Concerns and served on the Advisory Board of the Joan B. Kroc Center for International Peace Studies. He has also been a Research Fellow at the Center for Concern in Washington, DC [2004]. At Notre Dame, Michael was famous for his bi-weekly column that appeared in *The Observer*, Notre Dame's daily newspaper, in which he regularly attempted to raise awareness of how U.S. policies affect the world's poor.



Michael Poffenberger (left)
AFJN, Associate Director

We are blessed to have two highly competent and committed individuals to lead AFJN. I have absolutely no doubt that Fr. Bill and Michael will do a great job and make AFJN increasingly effective in its mission of transforming United States mentality and policy on Africa. They will help us all to apply Catholic Social Teaching and to do all that we can to promote policies that put people first in Africa!

Robert A. Dowd, C.S.C., Chair, AFJN



The AFJN Board and Staff invite you to the 2005 Annual Conference. Please refer to the enclosed brochure for details and use the reservation form today to take advantage of the special rate.

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