

## AFJN Members Reflect on Hope for Africa's Children

By Phil Reed

Close to two hundred people gathered at Notre Dame University on October 3-4, 2006 for the AFJN annual conference. Many first time participants mingled with the long standing members to reflect on the theme, "Africa's Children: Peril and Promise," to discuss, to pray and to commit to action. The President of Notre Dame University, Rev. John Jenkins, took time out from his busy schedule to personally welcome those who had come from many parts of the United States and to invite them to take advantage of the splendid facilities offered by the university.

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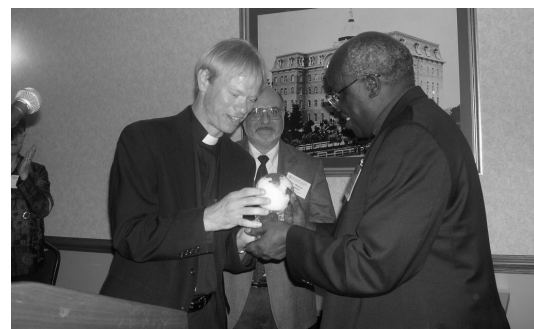
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The first keynote panel featured Archbishop John Baptist Odama of Gulu, Uganda, Sister Connie Gemme, MSOLA, Vicki Simon, Maryknoll Mission Associate and Rev. Donald Dunson. The panelists, coming from their areas of experience and expertise, informed and challenged the audience by speaking to the trafficking of women and children, the life of street boys in Nairobi and the political and social situation in the north of Uganda.

After a stimulating open discussion with the panelists, the participants were treated to a wine and cheese reception with entertainment by children of Rwandese immigrants. The 30 children performed traditional Rwandese dances taught to them by adults in an effort to help them retain their African culture while living in the upper Midwest of the United States. Many participants gladly accepted the invitation to join with them in the dance.

The celebration continued around a meal of West African specialties during which AFJN presented its 2006 Faith and Justice Award to Archbishop John Baptist Odama for his enduring dedication to the people of northern Uganda and his prophetic witness of peace and reconciliation.



Archbishop John Baptist Odama accepts the Faith and Justice award from AFJN President Fr. Bob Dowd at the 2006 Annual Meeting.

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## Hope Springs... Eternal!

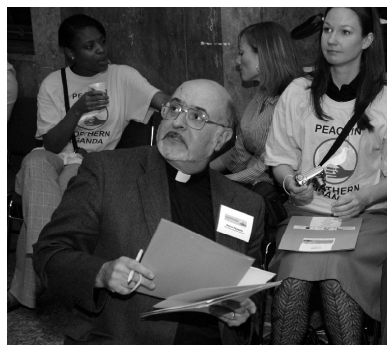
By Rocco Puopolo

Hope springs...eternal. We often hear this line, and if you are like me, it comes to mean different things in different times. Experience shapes us. Faith gives perspective to that experience. And Hope is continually stirred.

The reality of the incarnation is very important to us. During this Advent season we are preparing for the celebration of that Incarnation once again. The Incarnation stands as a premier expression of Hope! God has not given up on us. God's Spirit and Word have taken flesh in Jesus, and now in us as the Body of Christ.

I just began my work at AFJN as director and have witnessed Hope springing up. Hope sprang anew at our Annual meeting in Notre Dame. We all met a great person of hope, Archbishop John Baptist Odama, a pastor tried and true to Gospel Witness. We met AFJN members whose stories show how simple presence, love and service become hope to their people. We met many young people there at Notre Dame thirsting to make a difference in Africa.

Back in Washington, AFJN was part of the symposium and lobby day on Northern Uganda. Organizers expected around 400 students from around the country to take part.



Fr. Puopolo at work during the recent Northern Uganda Lobby Day.

Seven hundred came and registered that first day. It was well beyond our expectations. Among them was a young man, Nathan, from Loyola University, Chicago, who commented to me in a later email, "We are very active and very interested in growing, not for the sake of growth, but only insofar as growth will help us accomplish our mission and bring more people into the movement for justice."

Hope springs... eternal. Two hundred other young activists joined AFJN for the Gulu-Walk on October 21<sup>st</sup> in DC. Meanwhile here at Trinity University, where our offices are, two students asked our help in organizing a day on Darfur for Trinity faculty and students. They planned and projected for 40 participants. On the day of their event, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 80 came.

Hope springs ... eternal. Recently I had a phone conversation with one who gives me hope. Fr. Ted Hayden, SMA, one of the founders of AFJN, is just back from Liberia for a few months. He returned to Liberia two years ago to give a hand to Bishop Dalieh of Cape Palmas and his beloved Liberian people. Ted came home to join his community for their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations this month. He, and many like him, are hope.... So, as you read these lines, give a minute of thought to who you and I are. We are Hope, springing eternally from the font of grace that is in God, and incarnated in the Body of Christ...Missioned. Sent.

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Participants were treated to workshops on October 4, enabling them to deepen the discussion in relation to the previous day's topics. Dr. Gerry Powers of the Kroc Institute challenged all to go the next step with intelligent advocacy in order to effectively transform American policy into something conducive to finding solutions to the perils with which Africa's children are faced. The Notre Dame Folk Choir and the Notre Dame chapter of AFJN led a moving prayer service that ended the morning and sent off the participants with a joyful South African song in their hearts.

The annual business meeting of the members of AFJN followed in the afternoon with the financial report, an update on office activities and a discussion of resolutions, defining stances that the members wished to take. The members were encouraged to take the resolutions back home as

tools for further advocacy on Sudan, Congo, northern Uganda, human trafficking and HIV/AIDS. The resolution on HIV/AIDS was a response to the call of last year's keynote speaker, Bishop Kevin Dowling, of South Africa, to encourage the Church to accept the use of condoms to prevent HIV infection.

All of the resolutions, photos of the annual conference may be found on the AFJN website, [www.afjn.org](http://www.afjn.org).

**Save the Date:** Next year's conference, to follow up from this year's, will also focus on children and will take place from March 9-12 in conjunction with the Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, DC. The theme will be **"...and How are the Children."**

## Decentralization in Focus as Historic DRC Elections Conclude

By Desiree Fair

The buzz surrounding the presidential runoff elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is growing. Leading up to elections in August, news sources around the world increasingly reported on events in the DRC. When violent clashes erupted in Kinshasa after the results of the first round of elections were announced, a flurry of reports circulated through media outlets. After the violence subsided, international media focused almost exclusively on the impending runoff election. Every move that candidates Joseph Kabila and Jean-Pierre Bemba made was published on the BBC, AllAfrica, the UN Mission to the Congo (MONUC) website, and other UN news sources. After years of enduring "the war the world forgot," the DRC was finally receiving media attention. Not all news, however, is good news.

International attention focused on the second round of elections completely eclipsed the provincial elections that took place simultaneously, despite the enormous amount of power and influence that provincial governors will hold under the new Constitution. First, provincial governors will each appoint two representatives to the Congolese high chamber of Parliament. Second, provincial governments will receive 40% of the state's revenue in order to better meet the needs of their constituents and battle state corruption. These significant changes to the government structure were the result of encouragement by the international community's to decentralize Congolese political leadership after decades of state-concentrated power.

Two of the fundamental goals of provincial decentralization are to foster political accountability and effectively deliver services to the Congolese people. Nowhere in the forty years following independence do the Congolese have an example of a political leader who was accountable to the people. Mobutu's government was untouchable; while his people were enduring the pangs of hunger, he accumulated a personal fortune of over \$4 billion US. His wealth came from exploiting natural resources and by collecting foreign aid from the West that poured into government coffers during the Cold War. Both sources of income should have been used to improve the quality of life for the Congolese people, providing essential services like health care, educa-

tion, roads, infrastructure, and electricity. The Congolese know political leaders who are corrupt and unaccountable. In their lifetime, most Congolese have yet to see a new school built by the government. Provincial decentralization represents an amazing opportunity to change this tide and create new precedent.

International attention, however, has yet to reflect this opportunity. The global community focuses almost exclusively on top-down approaches to post-conflict development and reconstruction in the DRC, such as security and presidential leadership. Top-down strategies are extremely important elements of reconstruction, but alone, they cannot fix such deep-rooted historical problems. Both top-down and bottom-up strategies will be crucial to post-conflict sustainable development of the DRC. To facilitate these processes, increased focus on bottom-up strategies will be necessary from both foreign governments and international media sources. Kabila and Bemba will remain significant actors, but much of the work needs to take place at the provincial and grassroots level.

Ultimately, it is the 56 million Congolese people who will transform the Democratic Republic of Congo. Provincial decentralization gives them the power to hold their leaders accountable, a radical change in the political landscape of the Congo. The Congolese are demanding service delivery - schools, health clinics, and infrastructure—from new political leadership. Investing in human capacity building will be the main responsibility of provincial governments. AJFN and other Africa advocates should join the Congolese in holding provincial leaders accountable in their new responsibilities by demanding increased attention to Congolese provincial governments from our press and our governments.

### Legislative Watch

**The Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act (S.2125)**, after passing the Senate in July, was introduced to the House and is now awaiting a final vote. If the Bill does not get passed before January, it will die and have to be reintroduced. Urgent pressure is needed on leaders in the House of Representatives to ensure the bill is passed.

**Call your Representative and urge him/her to call for an immediate vote on Senator Obama's Congo Bill before it is too late!**

## Momentum for Peace in Uganda Builds with AFJN Lobby Day

By Michael Poffenberger

There have been several significant developments, both domestically and internationally, related to northern Uganda in the past few months. As peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continue to take place in Juba, Southern Sudan, partners and constituents of AFJN have successfully generated significant momentum in their advocacy for a peaceful resolution to the 20 year conflict. In response to intense international lobbying and organized public demonstration, the Juba talks are beginning to gain support internationally.



AFJN convened the Northern Uganda Lobby Day, which brought over 700 activists to Washington. **Left:** Congressman Chris Smith addresses the press conference. **Right:** Participants before lobbying.



education and leadership programs and gaining media and political attention across the globe.

In response to the momentum generated by the Lobby Day and continued pressure from AFJN in Washington, DC, the State Department released a statement at the beginning of November in which it welcomed the developments coming out of the Juba peace talks and urged adherence to the recently-signed Cessation of Hostilities agreement “as a step toward a peaceful solution to the long-standing conflict in northern Uganda and the region.” It also pledged that the U.S. would provide nearly \$90 million this year in assistance to address the humanitarian crisis, peace initiatives, rehabilitation and development needs in northern Uganda.

While these developments are encouraging, they still fall short of a statement of direct support for the talks, and the State Department

On October 9-10 in Washington, DC, AFJN hosted over 700 activists from 40 states gathered to take part in the Northern Uganda Lobby Day and Symposium. On the first day, participants heard from experts about the causes, history, humanitarian costs, and future of the conflict in northern Uganda. The keynote panel featured remarks by Grace Akallo, a former child soldier abducted by the LRA, Betty Bigombe, chief peace negotiator between the Government of Uganda and the LRA, Chief Rwot David Onen Acana II, Paramount Chief of the Acholi, Dr. Joyce Neu, who mediated bilateral talks between Uganda and Sudan, and Eunice Reddick, the Office Director of East African Affairs for the U.S. State Department. The first day also featured a series of panels on topics related to issues of peace and justice in the region. Participants then used this information to lobby Congressional Staffers about the need for U.S. support for the Juba Peace Process and humanitarian assistance.

Following the Lobby Day, on October 21st AFJN members joined more than 30,000 people in 82 cities in 15 different countries walked as “reasons for hope in northern Uganda” as part of GuluWalk Day 2006. The event was a great success, raising over \$500,000 for children’s health,

has yet to pledge funds to the Juba Peace Initiative—the UN fund established to facilitate the peace process. In order to continue to put pressure on Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, AFJN staff worked with Senator Russ Feingold to draft a letter, cosigned by 21 other Senators, requesting that the U.S. provide funding for the talks and take public action to hold accountable parties to the negotiations. Now is the time for the U.S. government to take decisive action for an end to the twenty year nightmare in northern Uganda.

International advocacy also helped the United Nations Security Council pass a statement this month in which it welcomes the ongoing peace talks and urges action by all parties to bring this conflict to an end. This action, supported by the United States, will be important as serious obstacles to the successful conclusion of the talks remain.

The humanitarian situation in northern Uganda remains tenuous, as two million displaced people await a definitive outcome of the negotiations. Mortality rates due to conditions in the camps remain high, and services in the camps poor. For the first time in a decade, however, residents of displacement camps have been allowed access to ex-

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## Faith Leaders Call for Investment in International Affairs Budget

On November 15, 2006 leaders from diverse American faith-based organizations including Richard Stearns, President of World Vision, Ken Hackett, President of Catholic Relief Services, David Beckmann, President of Bread for the World, and Fr. Rocco Puopolo of Africa Faith and Justice Network joined to urge President George W. Bush and Congressional leaders to make greater investments in the United States International Affairs Budget. In an open letter to policymakers, the faith leaders delivered a strong, unified message in support of U.S. global development and diplomacy efforts.

For a little more than one percent of the total U.S. Federal Budget, the U.S. International Affairs Budget funds vital programs that ensure our national security, build economic prosperity and strengthen our humanitarian values. America's international programs ensure the well-being of millions of children and families by supporting global health initiatives, alleviating poverty around the world, improving basic education, strengthening democratic institutions

and fostering cultural understanding.

Earlier this year, President Bush requested \$35.1 billion for the U.S. International Affairs Budget, including funding for education, refugees, the State Department, as well as to fight HIV/AIDS and malaria. However, more than \$2 billion requested for these programs, which includes funding critical to fighting global poverty, is currently in jeopardy.

Recognizing the U.S. International Affairs Budget as "a statement of America's values," the faith leaders asked the President and Congress to overcome partisan differences and work together during the remaining weeks of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress in order to ensure adequate funding for America's invaluable development and diplomatic programs in 2007. Additionally, the leaders urge the President to continue his commitment to foreign assistance and U.S. global engagement as the Administration begins preparing the FY 2008 U.S. Federal Budget.

### Announcements

**Poems, prayers and short stories of faith are welcome!** In an effort to share and deepen the Faith that is key to AFJN, we invite members and others who read our newsletter to submit any poems, prayers or short stories from your experience which can be shared either in this newsletter or in a special new section of our web site coming soon. The short stories are to be 500 words in length. We are inviting writings that witness the Faith, speak of Faith, stir the Faith, all related to our experience with and commitment to Africa. Please send these works of faith to: Fr. Rocco Puopolo, s.x. AFJN 125 Michigan Ave NE, Washington, D.C. 20017 or [director@afjn.org](mailto:director@afjn.org).

**AFJN thanks its interns for their dedication and hard work.** The AFJN staff would like to thank Desiree Fair, Aimee Oberndorfer, and Jesse Eaves for their ongoing efforts as interns in the AFJN office! The work of Desiree and Aimee was critical in ensuring the success of the Northern Uganda Lobby Day and Symposium, and Jesse has joined our office to undertake important work on HIV/AIDS education.

**AFJN mourns the loss of Carole Collins.** On Saturday, September 23, 2006, Carole Collins quietly died at home with her family in Long Beach, California. Carole worked on the staff of AFJN from 2001-2002 as a policy analyst but was a kindred spirit for many years before and since her direct involvement on staff. We mourn her passing and the void it leaves in our lives, in the lives of her husband and young son and in the Africa advocacy community. We celebrate her very productive and accomplished life as writer, analyst, administrator and friend.

**Hats off to the Society of African Missions!** AFJN joins the many friends of the Society of African Missions (SMA) as they celebrate 150 years as a missionary community. There will be a celebration in New Jersey on the first weekend of December. AFJN will be there! The SMA community played a key role in the founding of the Africa Faith and Justice Network. Fr. Ted Hayden picked up the challenge that came out of the 1983 Mission Congress and a feasibility study that concluded that there was a need for an advocacy network such as AFJN. The SMAs, along with the Missionaries of Africa, the Spiritans, and, very soon after, Maryknoll, joined forces to create AFJN. Ted was the first executive director of AFJN and continues to follow our growth and impact. To Ted and the whole SMA community, we offer our sincere congratulations at this time in your history as a mission community and our deepest thanks for your invaluable support.

## 'Together, Life is Possible'

By Rocco Puopolo

"Together, life is possible" This was a frequent saying that Sr. Leonella Sgorbati, a Consolata Missionary Sister, often said in passing. She was murdered on the streets of Mogadishu mid-September together with her Somali bodyguard, Mahamud Mohammed Osman. Presiding at her funeral, Bishop Georgio Bertin, Bishop of Djibouti, a personal friend of hers, commented, "they lived together, worked together, died together: A European and an African, a white and a (nearly) black, a Christian and a Muslim, a woman and a man".

Sister Leonella served for over 25 years in East Africa. Four years ago, after a community leadership role in Kenya, she went to Mogadishu to set up a nursing school at SOS Hospital in the Somali capital. It is the only hospital with a functioning maternity ward and gynecological care facility in Somalia.

Sister Leonella was well aware of the dangers and cost of her service. She often commented that there was a bullet with her name on it. For someone unknown to many in Europe and the USA, her death touched a cord. The timing of her death, so soon after the Pope's unfortunate choice of words regarding the Islamic tradition during a conference in Germany, provoked commentary from many circles. Bloggers spoke of her sacrifice, witness to religious life and service. America Magazine called her a Martyr of Charity. Pope Benedict, offering words of support to the Consolata Sisters and those who came to his audience in Rome, stated: "These words bring to mind the witness of so many Christians who, with

humility and in silence, giving their lives in the service of others for the cause of Jesus Christ, work concretely as servants of love and therefore as artisans of peace."

We join AFJN members who worked with Sr. Leonella in East Africa in mourning her death and celebrating her gifts. AFJN organized a Eucharistic celebration in Our Lady of Africa Chapel at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington on the day of her funeral in Nairobi.



Sister Leonella with one of her nursing students.  
*Photo courtesy of Helmut Atkins of SOS Villages.*

During the week of November 6<sup>th</sup> AFJN received word of the deaths of other religious personnel in Africa. Father Pascal Koné Naougnon was murdered in Ivory Coast during an attempted robbery in his parish. Fr. Pascal, born in Ivory Coast, but trained for missionary priesthood in Peru, returned to serve in his home country. In Mozambique, Brazilian Father Waldyr dos Santos, SJ, and Idalina Neto Gomes, a lay volunteer of the Portuguese organization Laymen for Development, died at the

hand of bandits. Portuguese Father Mario de Almeida, and Mozambican Brother José Araujo de Andrade, were wounded in the attack.

"We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Th 1:3)

AFJN continues to pray for and support our many sisters and brothers who serve in Africa.

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panded farming areas to grow their own food, and displaced people have experienced greater freedom of movement.

The sustainability and permanence of these positive changes in the humanitarian situation depend on developments in the negotiations. While most experts remain hopeful that the talks will bear fruit and result in a lasting peace, potential spoilers still exist. Indictments from the International Criminal Court for rebel leaders are unlikely to be revoked. Rebel and government negotiators disagree

on fundamental issues revolving around how to address the roots of the conflict. The government of Sudan, long a supporter of the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), may act to disrupt the talks (and indeed may be responsible for a recent spate of attacks on civilians in southern Sudan that were an attempt to undermine negotiations).

As this window of opportunity for peace remains open, we hope and pray together for the people of northern Uganda, and will continue acting as the voice of those most suffering the consequences of this twenty year nightmare.

# AFJN Happenings in Brief...

### Sign-on Letters:

- Faith leaders letter to President Bush urging international funding for development and diplomacy
- Letter to House leadership regarding DR Congo bill

### AFJN Events:

- October 3-4: Annual Meeting, at University of Notre Dame, with theme "Africa's Children: Peril and Promise"
- October 9-10: Northern Uganda Lobby Day and Symposium in Washington, DC; "Peace Within Reach"
- October 21: GuluWalk for children in northern Uganda
- September 21: Memorial Mass for Sr. Leonella Sgarbati, killed in Somalia
- September 25: Open House for Trinity Students
- November 1: Trinity University and AFJN co-sponsored "My Name Is... Darfur"

### Advocacy Meetings:

- With missions from key European donor countries and civil society representatives from northern Uganda
- With Congressional staff for pressure on State Dept. regarding peace process in Uganda

### Rallies/Demonstrations

- GuluWalk for the children of northern Uganda

### Congressional and State Department Briefings:

- House Subcommittee on Africa: The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Programming Aid in Africa

### Media Appearances

- Washington Post, NPR Morning Edition and Diane Rehm Show, Christianity Today, Catholic News Service, Philadelphia Catholic Standard, The Hill Newspaper, Voice of America news and radio, Uganda's Daily Monitor and New Vision, SudanTribune, AllAfrica, Reuters Alertnet, and ReliefWeb on Northern Uganda Lobby Day
- Op/Ed in Philadelphia Inquirer on lobby day and peace talks in northern Uganda
- BBC World News Service and Voice of America interviews during GuluWalk

### Working Group Meetings:

- DR Congo Coalition
- Southern Africa Customs Union trade working group
- Northern Uganda working group
- Catholic Task Force on Africa
- Ecumenical Advocacy Days leadership
- Peacebuilding in Liberia at US Institute of Peace

**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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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Contributing Member \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ Organizational member \$1,000 \_\_\_\_\_

Return to AFJN, 3035 Fourth St., NE, Washington, DC 20017  
 Ph. (202) 884-9780 Fax: 202-884-9774 email: afjn@afjn.org  
<http://www.afjn.org>

*Advocacy for justice and peace in Africa doesn't just happen. AFJN needs your help and participation! Thank you for your financial support.*

**Save the Date!**

*AFJN 2007 Annual Meeting:*

*“...and How are the Children?”*

*March 9-12*

*Washington, DC*

In conjunction with the annual **Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace With Justice**, AFJN will follow up on its 2006 conference held at the University of Notre Dame with an opportunity for AFJN members to add to their knowledge of issues that affect children across the continent, and then to lobby their elected representatives.

The Ecumenical Advocacy Days event is a joint initiative of numerous faith-based organizations. AFJN members will both participate in the Africa Track of the Ecumenical Advocacy Days and enjoy separate sessions exclusively organized for AFJN.

*The Staff of the Africa Faith and Justice Network wishes you a very happy and holy Christmas and New Year!*