

November 1, 2007

Dear Friend,

Every morning now when I awake and look out my bedroom window, I see Mt. Elgon looming majestically sixty miles to the north. It is one of the highest mountains in Africa and rests on the border between Kenya and Uganda. The elders say that they used to see snow on the top in the morning on their way to school, but with global warming, I have never seen snow.

I glance at the mountain because I wonder how the people living on the mountainsides are faring. The biggest conflict in Kenya is on the eastern slopes of the mountains. Two clans of the Saboot tribe, who are related to the Masai tribe, but live as agriculturalists on the fertile, well-watered slopes of the mountain, are clashing over land. In the last year over 200 people have been killed and 60,000 have become displaced. The land lies fallow. The people, afraid to go to their fields because some people have been killed while cultivating, did not plant in April as usual. Schools and health clinics are closed. Travel is difficult. The Kenyan Government – as too many governments opt to do – has attempted a military solution bringing large numbers of police and army to suppress the conflict rather than solve it.

What is the African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI) doing about this conflict?

In Mt. Elgon, AGLI has begun the process of training 20 Healing Companions through the Healing and Rebuilding Our Community (HROC) program. AGLI has finished the first basic workshops to select the 20 candidates and has brought Florence Ntakarutimana from Burundi and Chrysostome Nshimiyimana from Rwanda, both experience HROC facilitators, to conduct these workshops. The workshops are being held at the Friends Peace Center in Lubao, which was recently built by AGLI workcampers, because the situation was too tense on Mt. Elgon for the participants from the opposing sides to feel comfortable interacting there.

I talked to Florence and Chrysostome after the second workshop. They told me that the workshops were very similar to those held in Rwanda and Burundi; when the participants arrived, the two sides did not sit together, did not make eye contact or greet each other. However, by the end of the third day the HROC magic had worked just as it does in Rwanda and Burundi. The two sides had become friendly and were now determined to work together to heal the wounds and resolve the conflict without more bloodshed.

In January 2008, Adrien Niyongabo from Burundi and Solange Maniraguha from Rwanda, two of the best HROC lead trainers, will come to Lubao to conduct the first two-week Healing Companion training for the 20 newly-selected trainees. Once trained, the new trainees will take this information back to the mountainside to conduct further trainings.

Kenya has more than 130,000 Quakers, the greatest number of Quakers in the world. Recently, my wife, Gladys Kamonya, and I decided to move to Kenya. We build a house in Lumakanda, a small town of 500 people in an administrative district of Western Kenya and moved there in March of this year. Gladys's grandmother joined the Friends in the 1920s when Quakers were discriminated against and had to live separately from other members of the society. Recently,

Gladys showed me where her grandmother came face-to-face with a lion on her way to Sunday meeting! My father-in-law, David Okwemba, was inducted in the British army during World War II, but refused to carry a gun. He was put in prison for two weeks until a British officer decided to hire him to be his cook – an occupation he continued the rest of this working life.

Our move to Kenya has worked well for me and for AGLI. With the advances of technology, I am able to use cell phones and the Internet in ways that would have been nearly impossible or cost prohibitive 9 years ago when AGLI was founded. I continue to be on monthly AGLI Working Group conference calls and I now plan to come to the US 2-3 times per year, just as I had once visited Africa.

The move has been greatly advantageous for the AGLI work. Our programs have grown considerably in the past two years and it is no longer feasible for me to visit them all just once or twice per year. AGLI is also attempting to intercede in conflicts before they become “hot” and violence escalates. This will necessitate a rapid response when an incipient conflict is identified. I want to be close by in order to assist in monitoring the situation and organizing the response. Some examples of “hot” conflicts are listed on the attached page.

With the completion of the AGLI-supported Friends Peace Center in Lubao, AGLI will be in an excellent position to enhance the peacemaking work of Friends in Kenya. When AGLI started AVP in Kenya in 2003, Friends in Kenya – unlike those in Rwanda and Burundi – were lukewarm towards peace work. Since that time, AVP has caught the imagination of Friends in Kenya and the demand exceeds our ability to meet it. My presence will increase the possibilities for additional trainings and my AGLI’s office will be in the Friends Peace Center when the administrative block is finished.

You recently received the latest AGLI Report, *“Now I Am Human: Testimonies from the Healing Companions Program in Rwanda and Burundi,”* which indicates the profound effect the program is having on the participants and in the communities in Rwanda and Burundi. Your support has been vital for AGLI’s programs to thrive and grow. I respectfully request that you continue that support. We will then have the means to continue with the program on Mt. Elgon as well as the attached list of AGLI’s newest endeavors.

Thank you for journeying down this road with me.

Peace,

David Zarembka, Coordinator

AGLI's Newest Endeavor

AGLI's newest endeavor is to intercede in incipient conflicts and put out fires before they become "hot" in order to keep them from escalating. We have begun this new endeavor with the following projects:

- At the beginning of 2007, the Tanzanian Government expelled 60,000 Rwandan and Burundian refugees from the Karagwe District, an area west of Lake Victoria in Tanzania. The Rwandan Government placed some of these refugees in resettlement camps where they were to build new, self-sustaining communities. Originally, the Rwandan Tutsis refugees were placed in separate camps from the Hutus in Tanzania. However, upon return to Rwanda, these two groups were mixed together with much suspicion and distrust among them. From May to July 2007, AGLI did a pilot intervention in one resettlement camp with six AVP workshops. The results were so successful that AGLI is currently expanding the program into six more of the resettlement camps.
- Rwanda government officials in Kidaho, northwestern Rwanda, have asked AGLI to work with 30 families in the region which are in severe conflict -- sadly, for reasons currently unknown, four families have killed members of their own family. AGLI will sponsor three AVP workshops for sixty members of these families.
- In northwest Kenya, warriors from the pastoral Turkana and Pokot tribes have raided each other's cattle for generations. Now, unfortunately, the warriors are using semi-automatic weapons instead of spears, leading to much death, the fleeing of the inhabitants, and destruction of the community. AGLI has secured access to these two groups and has planned a 7-workshop AVP program for the groups. Regrettably, just as AGLI was to begin the program renewed fighting has broken out and the program has been postponed, illustrating one of the difficulties of doing this type of intervention. I will be visiting the region in early November 2007 to make new arrangements so that AGLI can begin the program in January 2008.
- In Gisenyi, Rwanda and Goma/Sake, Congo, AGLI is currently training 20 Healing Companions together from both countries in order to foster positive relationships between the two countries which have seen two wars and continued conflict.

While it is too early to assess the success of these projects, they have the potential to bring non-violent, non-military solutions to potentially violent conflicts. Thank you for your interest and support.