

Winter heating, Congo, Gospel News, March 2008

We are continuing to distribute Winter heating support to brothers and sisters in need of it throughout Eastern Europe. We have many subsistence farmer brothers and sisters who store their Summer harvest of potatoes and root crops and eat them over the Winter. Spring is the time when they are sometimes quite desperate, as they've not been able to harvest anything yet as the snow is only just clearing, and so they're living on the remains of last Summer's harvest. We drove many km. recently visiting as many as we could. With the collapse of the USSR, some of the huge collective farms broke up, and the workers were given plots of land to farm. This was very inefficient, as countries like Latvia cannot now feed themselves, and the plots of land are farmed inefficiently just to provide food for those living on them.

Photo: Ruined collective farm in Eastern Latvia, photographed this weekend



Many of the plots of land are just sections of the once huge fields; there are no made roads leading to them, and shops and services are far away. The elderly and sick are in a very desperate position in these areas. So we loaded up with sacks of clothing, firewood and medical supplies and distributed aid to the ones we could get to:



Here's brother Vladimir receiving his sack of clothing, and taking it to his falling down home. The cracks between the logs which comprise the walls are significant, with only wallpaper on the inside... it's absolutely awful in deep Winter. We also gave firewood, which you can see our brother eagerly feeding into the burner. Note his bed on the right, with a chair next to it, with his Bible open upon it with a large print Bible Companion on it.



You may recall the story of sister Nina , whose accomodation was rebuilt by us 18 months ago- see <http://www.carelinks.net/care/nin0106.htm> and <http://www.carelinks.net/care/nin1008.htm> She has aged considerably this Winter. She's not well enough to walk the 5 miles or so to the nearest shop. The 'short cut' she takes across the fields [which reduces it by a mile or so] is terribly muddy- here's a picture of it just after the snow melt. She has very bad legs, heart problems etc., so she is pretty well stranded. You can see below her kitchen- notice the firewood on the stove, she is drying it out. One of the problems with wood burning is that the wood has to be dry for it to burn and give heat. It's a real headache for her to have enough dry firewood. We gave her fresh supplies.



She had no idea we were coming; we found her delighted to see us, wearing the very clothes we'd given her previously, but in great pain because of a toothache. She had even tried to pull out the tooth with her hands- she only has 3 teeth left. We gave her some pain killers, and the sequence of photos below is like a commercial for Nurofen... and characteristically, she burst into open prayer before us once the pain killers kicked in. We got her supplies and gave her funds to pay a 'neighbour' across the fields to buy her more as well as groceries.



We also gave her food, as her potato stock isn't that great- in gratitude she insisted on cooking us some of her potatoes [see picture]



Our final visit was to sister Sevtlana. Her father died of cancer with pathetically little medical attention. The mud was so thick we couldn't get the last few km and so she came to meet us on foot, with her dog which she has for protection. The Police never get to those areas and they are quite lawless. We gave her all remaining clothes and firewood.



Appreciation for this help is deeply felt, and we believe the whole project is really well pleasing to our Heavenly Father. Thank you so much for enabling it!

CONGO

We're increasingly struck with how the press doesn't headline major crises which aren't of great interest to the Anglo Saxon world. According to a recent report at <http://www.theirc.org/special-report/congo-forgotten-crisis.html>,

"Conflict and humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo have taken the lives of an estimated 5.4 million people since 1998 and continue to leave as many as 45,000 dead every month, according to a major mortality survey released today by the International Rescue Committee".

Eastern Congo has been referred to as "the most miserable place on earth." And we have a number of brothers and sisters there, about 40 in 2 ecclesias! So many have been killed in the

tribal warfare that the fighters have become brutalized, resulting in terrible rape of thousands of women- especially in the very areas where we have 2 ecclesias. Near the Bukavu ecclesia, a recent report states *"that up to 15,000 people are living in a camp ... Four hundred thousand people have fled their villages in recent months and more civilians are now fleeing... UN forces, Congolese officials and humanitarian organisations are now drafting evacuation scenarios for civilians caught in the war zone, the French news agency AFP reports"*. <http://bbs.keyhole.com/ubb/showflat.php/Cat/0/Number/953320/an/0/page/0>

"Bukavu ... the inhabitants of the region have seen unimaginable hardship in the form of starvation, mass murder and rape. In 2004, 16,000 women were raped over a single weekend when an Army General told his troops, "The city is yours for three days."

<http://bbs.keyhole.com/ubb/showflat.php/Cat/0/Number/953320/an/0/page/0>

"Bukavu is another story. The city has mushroomed from 300,000 people 6-8 years ago, to approximately a million now. The city is bursting with displaced persons, mainly from villages who come for security. There is not enough housing and services for them, and many are homeless. There is a widening gap between the rich and poor. If you have a good education, you have the possibility of working maybe with an NGO, or business, but this is still a slim possibility. Those who are lucky to find such a job will be like a millionaire compared to the peasants". <http://www.nabuur.com/modules/villages/mystory.php?villageid=235>

"More than a half a million people have been displaced in the past 12 months in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)... Escalating clashes between Congolese armed forces (FARDC) and dissident groups and militias, as well as widespread human rights violations committed by all groups throughout 2007 especially since last August, are responsible for the massive increase in internal displacement within North and South Kivu provinces". <http://allafrica.com/stories/200801160968.html>

Whilst unpleasant reading, consider the following from a New York Times article recently: "Every day, 10 new women and girls who have been raped show up at his hospital... According to the **United Nations**, 27,000 sexual assaults were reported in 2006 in South Kivu Province alone, and that may be just a fraction of the total number across the country. "The sexual violence in Congo is the worst in the world," said John Holmes,..in one town, Shabunda, 70 percent of the women reported being sexually brutalized...Few seem to be spared. Dr. Mukwege said his oldest patient was 75, his youngest 3..."Some of these girls whose insides have been destroyed are so young that they don't understand what happened to them," Dr. Mukwege said. "They ask me if they will ever be able to have children, and it's hard to look into their eyes." "That is the question," said Andre Bourque, a Canadian consultant who works with aid groups in eastern Congo. "Sexual violence in Congo reaches a level never reached anywhere else. It is even worse than in Rwanda during the genocide." Panzi Hospital has 350 beds, and though a new ward is being built specifically for rape victims, the hospital sends women back to their villages before they have fully recovered because it needs space for the never-ending stream of new arrivals. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/07/world/africa/07congo.html?_r=2&pagewanted=1&oref=sl ogin

The point of sharing this with you is this: God willing, this week, an attempt is going to be made by Carelinks workers to get to meet the brothers and sisters and contacts in this part of Congo.

Please pray for the success and safe keeping of this trip. We hope to report more next week, God willing.

Finally, we'd like to remind readers of the existence of Gospel News magazine, whose aim is to publish the news and views of our brothers and sisters in the mission field. You can view it online at <http://www.carelinks.net/pastissues.htm>

With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelink