

## Refugees In Malawi December 2009

The savage ethnic conflicts in Congo and surrounding areas has resulted in many millions of refugees flooding neighbouring African countries. They typically fled to neighbouring Tanzania, but the camps there are now limited and Tanzania is hostile to accepting any more. They have therefore fled southwards, many currently in Malawi. They arrive by foot, bicycle, or hitchhiking on trucks- over 1000 miles on tracks and poor roads. The Truth is present in many of the camps and amongst some of the refugees. Some time ago, Brother Marcus sent a box of Bible Basics to a brother who shared them with other truth seekers. For some time now, a group has been developing at the Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi, and Carelinks managed to visit them recently. Their stories are tragic. Most have lost their families, surviving by God's grace alone.

"My family are all now perished, I alone escaped by hiding in the jungle"

"My cousin raped a Hutu woman and in revenge all our family must die, and most of them have"

"My brother was in the rebel military and now all our family are hunted to death"

"My family were tied up and shot but me they raped and let me go"

And so the stories go on. The human carnage is awful. Many survivors are emotionally and physically ill, with little care. One brother wrote out his experiences as follows:



The UNHCR have arranged with the Malawian Government to allow the refugees to settle on land at Dzaleka, a location 20 km. down dirt roads from the nearest tarmac road. Over 10,000 people there. They have built themselves small mud-and-straw brick cabins with thatched roofs strung out on tree branches, with earth floors. No electricity nor sewage. They are given 13 kg. of maize meal per month per person , although they say often they don't receive this. No meat, vegetables or other protein is provided.

Photo: UNHCR maize distribution centre at the camp:



Each home is allowed a small vegetable patch, and fortunately the rains have come and the land yields well. The women and children are constantly working the land to get as much as they can from it.

Photo: Refugee huts in the Dzaleka Refugee Camp:



New arrivals building their home:



Photo: Brother Innocent's daughter tending their plot:



Open sewerage channels run everywhere, with kids playing in them, and with the public latrines overflowing in the rainy season [which is now]:



Not so far from this foul smelling overflowing latrine, a well has been sunk. Water is a major problem- there are only a few wells in the camp, and the women and children spend much of their day walking to and fro to the well, waiting in line for the pump, and then bringing the water back to their huts. In our opinion, unless the water source is separated from the sewage, there can only be outbreaks of cholera and other diseases:



Water borne disease is evident everywhere, as is malaria, for which no Quinine is provided by the camp. Here are a brother's three children- two play in the dirt whilst another sleeps with fever on the ground:



And then there's the old problem of firewood. They have no electricity so they have to scavenge increasingly far and wide, cutting down most trees for many km. around.

Photo: Refugee woman carrying firewood; women do really have it rough here. Barefoot and pregnant, and carrying heavy loads and children:



What we saw is confirmed by other reports, see e.g. <http://afrikoje.weebly.com/refugees.html>

Primitive capitalism is almost a natural process. One might think that 10,000 people with nothing would stay that way. But a very few have money sent to them from relatives abroad, and they spend that money within the camp. And so the rest of the population strives to get a few \$ by offering about everything imaginable for sale. The epitome of poverty perhaps are the men sitting in the dirt all day with a pile of odd shoes, in the hope someone will buy one, or maybe even two. They have them in two piles, left and right. But no pairs. Strangely reminiscent of the

shoe piles of the Auschwitz victims. This kind of petty money grubbing leads to crime, not least prostitution. HIV /AIDS is everywhere; some kind hearts have set up a rape crisis centre, standing rather forlornly with broken windows and now "Closed until further notice":



Life here is desperate and with no hope of anything better- many have been here years. They're not allowed to work in Malawi, they are just supposed to exist, day after day, year after year. On 13 kg. of maize meal / month. And so if you've hit a dead end in this world, if life really isn't life but existence until you die a premature death [we saw nobody over 50 there], you turn to God. And you want to be sure that what you believe about Him, His Son and His Kingdom is right. And so our little group have studied the Bible very carefully and devoured Bible Basics . They meet usually in the open air each Saturday morning. However the heavy rains and a lack of any clean water to perform the baptisms meant that we ferried them to a cheap African lodging about 30 km. away. Here there was a bath tub, and we were able to quietly enjoy serious Bible study and confirm that our friends truly understood the Gospel. It was with pleasure therefore that we baptized brothers PAUL, GERALD, DELYSON, BEBI-SABI, STANLEY, INNOCENT, JIMMY and sisters SALOME and FLORA. They had all washed their clothes and even borrowed nice shirts from neighbours for this great occasion. Truly the Angels also rejoiced.

Photo: With some of the group after baptism:



As the meals were only about \$4 each at the lodging, we treated them to the first decent meal they had had for years. Tired of nsima [the coarse maize meal given out by UNHCR], they were thrilled to have rice. It was also the first time in many years they had had table salt and even ice cold bottled water. Let alone be served by a waiter. It was a meal of grace, one to remember:



Sister Flora, shaking from malaria and wearing a woollen sweater in the African summer at +30 degrees because of the malaria shivers, was just overjoyed to be in Christ:



We naturally tried to do what we could to provide assistance with food, and we will continue. But the task is enormous. But as someone once said, "the need is the call". What's really needed is for someone to go out there for a couple of weeks and work out how we can ensure regular delivery of food to our brothers and sisters; simply sending cash isn't, we believe, the solution. Anyone who hears the call, or thinks they do, is welcome to contact us at [info@carelinks.net](mailto:info@carelinks.net) . Our new brethren are Bible lovers, doctrinally sound; the potential for work

here, be it preaching, Biblical debate, welfare work, medical aid, kind hearted care, easing the awful burden upon women, education.... is just huge. All such welfare work would powerfully back up the message of the Kingdom. Whilst with our new brethern, we recorded an MP3 of our "What is the Gospel?" presentation in Swahili. It may be helpful for others preaching throughout Africa, and all are welcome to download and use it without acknowledgement: <http://www.carelinks.net/audio/mp3/swahili.mp3> .

Finally, an anecdote from Duncan, sent to the Carelinks Committee:

*"After my first day at the camp I realized the need for a meeting place where we could study without the rains stopping us and endless interruptions from others, and also that there was nowhere to do the baptisms- no river, and they seemed scared stiff of getting sick from using any kind of standing water. So many are sick from water borne diseases, they are kinda scared of dirty water. So, that evening I found this cheap hotel where I ferried them all to the next day. I quietly explained to the manager the situation- that I'd like to baptize 9 refugees from the Dzaleka camp [which has a terrible reputation amongst the local Malawians] at his establishment, and would be happy to rent a room with a bathtub for this purpose. I assured him something to the effect: "Don't worry, we're a sober, conservative bunch, we won't be shouting, singing, dancing, playing music, making a commotion and disturbing your other guests, I'd just like to use the bathtub in one of your rooms to immerse these 9 refugees". The manager responded: "So, you're going to baptize NINE people, you're telling me, and you won't be making any noise or fuss about it?". "Yes sir, that's correct, I assure you. You have my word". "Well I tell you this, even if YOU people are not going to be singing and dancing to the Lord over nine baptisms, I will be for sure! I'd also like to give you a discount on the room and any meals as you're a church, as I too am a Christian". No doubt we'd have disagreed about a lot of doctrinal matters, but I went away sobered [even moreso!], rebuked and exhorted".*

**Much love to you all from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks**

*PS: EMAIL CHANGE*

*Brother Duncan Heaster's email has changed to dh [at] heaster.org*

*PPS: Exhortation For Sunday*

*There's an exhortation for this Sunday based on the Genesis 5 & 6 readings about Noah, at <http://www.aletheiacollege.net/audio/noah1.mp3>*