

CHALLENGES FACING CHURCHES IN KAKUMA REFUGEE

CAMPS - KENYA

PRESENTED

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TO

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I. Introduction

My fellow brothers and sisters I greet you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, good morning! Allow me to begin with my testimony; my names are Rev. Jacob Nhial Guut, a South Sudanese citizen by Nationality; I was born in Jan 1st 1982, in a small village called Adumwuor to Mr and Mrs. John Guut Amool Guut and Mary Bol Alier. I am the 3rd born among my siblings of two sisters namely, Abuk John Guut and Ajah John Guut and one brother called Abel Chol John Guut. Both my parents are peasant farmers. I was ordained as a deacon in 2005 and was given ACK St. Peter Uthiru in Nairobi Kenya (South Sudanese congregation) where I ministered until 2006. Later on I was appointed to serve Zone 1 Parish in Kakuma refugee camps as their priest in 2011, a position I have served to date. I was also made a care taker priest at the ACK St. Andrews Parish Zimmerman in Nairobi Kenya in 2016 (South Sudanese congregation) when the late Ven. Antipas Mayen Biar fell sick and after his death.

As a priest, I have been particularly concerned about peaceful coexistence among our people in the camps and also at home. This has led me to effectively lead our churches in peace outreaches within the refugee camps in Kakuma and development activities. I have since been appointed to serve as a general secretary of Kakuma Peace Institute (KPI) which was established in 2013 by the diocesan Bishop of Aweil, Rt. Rev. Abraham Yel Nhial with some of us as it's members. The objective of the institute is to bring all South Sudanese pastors, church leaders, and community leaders in Kakuma refugee Camp together and to create a forum where peace and development matters affecting South Sudanese refugees in Kakuma could be articulated.

As I mentioned above, I was born in Lualdit -Adumwuor Clan South Sudan where i lived until 1987 before i migrated to Ponyido Ethiopia due to the war broke out in Sudan on 16th May, 1983. In 1987 we walked for fifteen (15) days by foot, with a lot of difficulties i.e. eating leaves of trees and roots, and many of us lost their lives through poisonous leafs and roots, attacks from wild animals, and unquenched thirst. I lived in Ponyido from the year 1987 to 1991 where many people died due to the outbreak of various diseases. In 1991 when the president of Ethiopia was overthrown, I left for Gilo where many of my colleagues lost their lives by drowning in River Gilo as the enemies were chasing us. We later settled in Pochalla in South Sudan where we stayed for half a month without food until the Red Cross and UNHCR came in our support when

they began to give us food and medication. In the same year when the enemies attacked Pochalla we moved to Boma and Magoes where we were shot at night and three people died instantly and later on we settled in Kapoeta in search of security. Kapoeta was later captured by the enemy in 1992 when we had already moved to Narus, passed Nadapal in South Sudan and eventually found our way to Logichoggio - Kenya.

Upon our arrival in Logichoggio at the Kenya - South Sudan border we were received by the UNHCR official on 27th July 1992 in Kakuma Refugee Camp and since then I have lived in Kakuma Refugee Camp to date. I am married and blessed with seven children. Mary Adut Gai Riak (My wife), Joseph Leek Jacob Guut (Son), Priscilla Abuk Jacob Nhial Guut (Daughter) Sarah Yar Jacob Nhial Guut (daughter), the triplets i.e. Zechariah Bior Jacob Nhial Guut (Son), Martha Yar Jacob Nhial Guut (daughter) and Reuben Gai Jacob Nhial Guut (son) and Nyabol Jacob Nhial Guut (daughter).

II. Background Information

Kakuma Refugee Camp is located in Turkana District of the northwestern region of Kenya, 120 kilometers from Lodwar District Headquarters and 95 kilometers from the Lokichoggio Kenya-South Sudan border. Kakuma Refugee Camp hosts refugees who have been forcibly displaced from their home countries due to war or persecution. It was established in 1992 to host Sudanese refugees, and has since expanded to host refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Uganda and Rwanda according to UNHCR Fact sheet, September 2008. The weather in Kakuma Refugee Camp is semi-arid desert, and it is challenging. The area has always been full of problems: dusty windy storms, high temperatures, poisonous spiders, snakes, and scorpions, outbreaks of malaria, cholera, and other diseases.

The average daytime temperature is 40 degrees Celsius, or 104 degrees Fahrenheit. In regards to the local economy, refugees are largely unable to support themselves with own income-generating activities while restrictions on employment deter refugee job-seeking; those who work with NGOs receive a small incentive for their work. Living inside the camp is very hard and challenging, actually it's not different from living in prison and exile. Once admitted,

refugees do not have freedom to move around the country as they are required to obtain Movement Passes from UNHCR and Kenyan Government.

III. Challenges Facing Churches in Kakuma

Regarding church development and growth at Kakuma Refugee Camp, I wish to mention the following challenges that presents serious threats and challenges to the work of God in the Refugee Camps and that calls for our immediate intervention;

- a) First is the problem of Spiritual development as a result of the necessary leadership skills among church leaders who are not trained to handle spiritual matters. There is urgent need therefore to offer training opportunities to these pastors and church leaders so as to enable them to gain skills on both spiritual and church development matters. Many people who have found themselves working in these churches are school dropouts who did not even complete their primary schools while others who have completed their secondary education do not have the necessary skills to handle church matters thus posing a major constraint to the spiritual development of the local congregation in Kakuma Refugee camps. I therefore wish to make an appeal to well-wishers and friends of South Sudanese refugees to come forward to support these pastors and church leaders to take basic courses in church leadership or basic certificates and diplomas in theological training.
- b) Secondly, there is the problem of church space where the congregation can assemble to fellowship. The UN does not provide building materials for churches and thus leaving the responsibility to the local churches which is proving to be a major challenge since the South Sudanese refugees who are settled in these camps do not have any form of income that would give them resources to construct such buildings. Even pastors in these churches do provide voluntary services. It's upon this background that I'm a again appealing to our friends to come forward to support us with church materials, and furniture as we are restricted to cut trees by the host communities.
- c) The next problem is lack of Christian literatures and sound equipment that can help to enhance the growth of local Christians and help the effective growth of the local churches in these camps. These includes; public address system, Holy Bible, Commentaries, Bible dictionaries, common books of prayer and hymn books.

- d) The other challenge is peaceful coexistence among the inter-ethnic communities in the refugee camps as has been attested by the persistent outbreak of ethnic conflicts and disagreements among the refugees in the camps. Most of these conflicts and disagreements arise from the local politics back at home and we feel that there is need to carry out continuous awareness training programmes so as to build the capacity of the refugees on the need of peaceful coexistence, reconciliation, trauma healing, forgiveness, negotiation and mediations. We have experienced cases where some people within the camps have also committed suicide due to disappointments and hardship, while a number have contracted HIV/AIDS virus due to the hardship and isolation. This also calls for our support if we have to tackle these emerging difficulties. Unfortunately the church is not financially sound to continuously carry out such important training activities without the support of friends and organization like yours. We therefore call upon your organization to come forward for our support so as to help the local congregation from further trauma and unnecessary hardship.
- e) The problem of poisonous insects such as spiders, snakes and scorpions are now posing another challenge since the local communities do not have anti poison drugs to counter their effects. We appeal for your support to help us purchase some of these materials that help to reduce the effect of these poisonous insects.
- f) There is also the problem of constant outbreaks of malaria, cholera, and other diseases, shortage of water food shortage, sanitation facilities, education, health facilities, free movements, economic challenges, and unemployment among others.
- g) The other important challenge that we wish to bring to your attention is that of orphans, widows and widowers, elderly men and women, disabled and maimed former soldiers who are currently living with their relatives in the camps. The people need a lot of care and support and with no income it is proving to be major problems as the UN do not provide clothes, shoes, mattress, beds, pumpers for children and other daily human requirement like body lotions among others. We therefore make an appeal to support us to make these items available for our people at Kakuma refugee camps

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to make special appeal to all our friends, well-wishers and NGOs working with the refugees to come forward to network with local churches in refugee camps because the churches offer immediate contacts with the refugee communities and can therefore easily work with them to build their capacity which will go along to support the entire refugee communities. We have the human resources needed but lying in waste that can easily help us to carry out such important life changing programmes in the refugee camps. Our youth and young mothers who have just completed their secondary schools and Universities can be engaged to train their own people on various issues and implement some of the proposed solution in this paper.

Finally, as Paul mentions it in I Corinthians 12:26, I would also like to remind us that we are one body but many parts and if one part should suffer then every part should suffer and should one part be honored every part should rejoice with it. Therefore my fellow brothers and sisters I invite you to please support us to support these wonderful people of God.

Thanks and many blessings through our Lord Jesus