

LATEST NEWS # 497, April 2, 2008

The following news concerns Kenya.

Registered users of the UBS Intranet can find more news about Bible Societies' work under *Latest News* in the Communications section

Kenya refugees 'scrambling' for Bibles

A team from the Bible Society of Kenya recently visited two camps sheltering thousands of people who lost their homes, loved ones and livelihoods in the post-election violence that erupted in January. General Secretary Elizabeth Muriuki reflects on the visit and explains why the Society is determined to provide the refugees with Bibles.



"It was both a joy and a challenge to see the hunger for God's Word among the many internally displaced people we met in two camps in Limuru, about 30 miles west of Nairobi. We undertook the trip mainly to gather information about the scale of Scripture needs in the camps, but we were also able to take 86 Bibles with us in English, Kiswahili and Gikuyu. It soon became apparent how desperate the refugees are for Scriptures – people were literally scrambling to get hold of the few copies we had.

The first place we visited was Kirathimo camp, which means 'blessing'. It is a Kenya Red Cross facility and is sheltering about 2,000 men, women and children who fled their homes in Burnt Forest, Molo, Kuresoi, Kericho, Narok, Kisumu and other parts of western Kenya.

The Red Cross and other humanitarian organisations, such as the United Nations Population Fund, are providing them with food, clothing and medicine. An informal school has been set up, staffed by volunteers who teach classes from kindergarten to school leaver level. There are also lessons for adults.

These kinds of things are helping people in the camps hold onto some semblance of normal life, but family life is very difficult, particularly as women and children have to sleep in one place, and men in another. Many of them are deeply traumatised about the things they experienced during the violence, particularly those who lost family members. Although there are counsellors working in the camp, many of them are very young and inexperienced.

One of the refugees we met was a doctor who had owned and run his own clinic and pharmacy in Eldoret. Both businesses were completely destroyed in the unrest. He has to start over again, relying only on his medical knowledge and qualifications. He has now found employment with the



Kenyatta National Hospital. There are many others like him in the camp – people who lost everything they had worked for many years to build up.

We came across one group of men who openly told us that no matter how long it took them, they would take their revenge for the violence and loss they suffered. There is clearly a serious need to share the Bible's message of hope, forgiveness and peace in these camps.

To help ease the pressure on the facilities at Kirathimo, overflow camps have been set up, some based at local churches. We visited Word of Faith Church, which is housing more than 725 people in tents in the church compound. Another 42 families are staying in rented accommodation paid for with funds raised by a special church committee.

Pastor Mungai is the camp chaplain and has set up a daily program of prayer, worship and discipleship classes for the refugees. He says that many people have become committed Christians during their time in the camp. Although some New Testaments have been provided by the Gideons, Mr Mungai emphasised the urgent need for full Bibles, particularly in the widely spoken languages of Kiswahili and Gikuyu.

We ended our visit to the two camps more firmly resolved than ever to provide Bibles and other Scriptures for the many refugees who are struggling to come to terms with the trauma that they have experienced.”

Editor's note: The Bible Society has since made definite plans to distribute 60,000 Bibles, 100,000 *Peace Selections* and 300,000 Portions entitled *The path to healing Kenya* in partnership with Churches who are working with the refugees. The distribution will take place at camps near Limuru, Nakuru and Eldoret.

(This story relates to projects 79953, 79954 and 79955.)

Photograph:

KEN08DJ-2: Elizabeth Muriuki (far right), General Secretary of the Bible Society of Kenya, distributes Bibles to refugees at Kirathimo camp near Limuru. The visit, which took place in early March 2008, was to assess the Scripture needs in the camps in order to plan for a large scale distribution project. Kenya.

For further information please contact comms@ubs-wsc.org