

Our Most Recent Newsletter

Summer 2012

Girls' Education: A Casualty of Escalating Border Violence

Sudan has declared a state of emergency along its border with South Sudan. The volatility has taken a toll on our girls' school in Akon. After much deliberation, the staff and board of My Sister's Keeper have made the difficult decision to suspend operations of our educational projects. We will continue, however, our critical peacebuilding and advocacy work.

Akon is located in Warrap State, which is on the border with Sudan. With Khartoum's sinister Antonov bombers circling overhead, border residents are anxiously preparing to defend their communities from potential attack. Young men have joined the army in record numbers. Fearful parents, mindful that the Sudanese government has previously bombed school buildings in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains in Southern Kordofan State, are no longer sending their children to school. We are especially worried that we have not been able to make contact with our staff since mid-April.

These developments are particularly disappointing, given the success of our March training for 26 teachers from 7 area schools and 75 students in the concurrent reading enrichment camp. Each teaching cluster left excitedly with a work plan detailing their plans to implement their newly learned strategies to improve early grade reading skills. But two days after the new school year began on April 2, a state of emergency was declared and school was abruptly suspended.

We will reevaluate our overall strategy by April 2013 when the new school year usually begins. Please pray for our entire Akon family and all people of Sudan and South Sudan.

What's in A Name?

"What's your name?" I asked the 11 y.o. 3rd grader while visiting in December 2005. She lowered her eyes and whispered, "Elizabeth." "She's shy," her teacher explained. I hugged

Elizabeth and asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

"A doctor," my timid friend mumbled.

"Great!" I responded. "One day we'll work together! My patients call me Dr. Gloria. Let's call you Dr. Elizabeth! What's your name, again?" I quizzed. Her eyes still downcast, she whispered, "Dr. Elizabeth."

I turned to her classmates. "What's her name, girls?"

"Dr. Elizabeth!" they shouted for their bashful, but now beaming friend.

Elizabeth's teachers say that was a transformative moment for their quiet student. She and her classmates began to see her through new lenses. "Dr. Elizabeth" is now known as a leader in her school, and is one of only 11 of her 90 original classmates to complete 8th grade. We unleashed the "girl effect"!

The Girl Effect, n.

The unique potential of 600 million adolescent girls to end poverty for themselves and the world.

www.girleffect.org

Congratulations! You've Unleashed the "Girl Effect"!

Since 2003 when the Kurnyuk School for Girls was founded, you've been unleashing the "girl effect" not only for "Dr. Elizabeth", but also for the 600 girls who enroll annually. That's powerful in a country where a 15 y.o. girl is more likely to die in pregnancy than to complete 8th grade. In 2009, you built their permanent campus and you continue to donate uniforms, books and other supplies.

When we launched our Women's Peace School literacy project in 2007, you began empowering as many as 200 adult learners (including Elizabeth's mother!) to reduce the 92% rate of illiteracy among women countrywide. While 63% of South Sudan's primary teachers are untrained, you've equipped 26 teachers from 7 schools that have a combined enrollment of 4200 students, with new teaching skills and strategies. You've laid an important foundation in the world's newest nation!

Most importantly, you've shown Sudanese women and girls that although 8000 miles separate us, our sisterhood unites us. You have been your sister's keeper! You've reassured them, "You may be down, but you're not out!" That's why we still need your ongoing support of Sisterhood for Peace. For your generous partnership and God's amazing grace, we are extremely grateful.

Sudanese Women Establish Sisterhood Fund to Aid Refugees

In February 2012, MSKeeper convened 20 courageous women to strategize how to address the current crises in the border states. They developed a comprehensive policy statement which they presented at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in February and among US policy experts.

The sisters also launched a "Sisterhood for Peace" fund to provide desperately needed sanitary supplies for women and girls now in refugee camps who must now use leaves during menstrual cycles. Will you become a partner? They raised the first \$2000 themselves. Your generous donation of \$100 can supply up to 80 women.

As the death toll rises dramatically and war drums beat more ominously, we urgently need your advocacy. Please call 1-800-GENOCIDE or go to actforsudan.org, endgenocide.org, or enoughproject.org to take action NOW.

Lucy Shama: "Quiet Empowerment";

This profile in courage was written by our Marketing Intern, Sarah Danielson (Northeastern University, 2012), for International Women's Day, March 8, 2012.

Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile State are the latest victims of Khartoum's ruthless ethnic cleansing campaigns. According to the United Nations, more than 200,000 victims have sought refuge in neighboring South Sudan and Ethiopia; hundreds of thousands more remain under siege, desperately eating leaves and insects to stave off death by starvation.

Lucy Shama is familiar with this tragedy. Born in Blue Nile State, she was 5 y.o. when her family fled to Ethiopia to escape the violence of the North/South Civil War. In 2005, after 18 years in Ethiopia, she immigrated to the United States as a conflict refugee. She is now the leader of the Blue Nile women's group.

Lucy attended our February 2012 Sisterhood for Peace conference. Meeting so many diverse Sudanese women was a first for Lucy. Though quite shy, she found her own quiet way to represent the women of Blue Nile. She asked our Program Director, Sarah Rial, to read a statement to the participants on her behalf. By the time Sarah finished, our participants were in tears, but an empowered Lucy had begun to find her voice:

“Blue Nile State has struggled for many years for freedom and peace in Sudan. But women of Blue Nile State have suffered most during the civil wars and the current wars where many women are now marooned in refugee camps in Ethiopia and South Sudan. Blue Nile State women are not yet educated to represent their community and beyond... But I am here to make sure that Blue Nile State women for the first time are represented [at] this conference and will be represented in future conferences.”

It is women such as Lucy who compel My Sister's Keeper to work so tirelessly for the empowerment of grassroots women in both Sudan and South Sudan. So this Women's Day, let us honor the women who have endured long suffering, and celebrate those whose empowerment, even if quiet, can change the world.

Aung San Suu Kyi Inspires Sudanese Women to Persevere!

There is no better example of a “quiet” empowered woman than 1991 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi. Though barred from public speech for decades, the “sound” of Suu Kyi's silent perseverance reverberated worldwide. In April, the iconic leader of Myanmar's pro-democracy movement was elected a parliamentarian. In June, she finally accepted her Peace Prize, 21 years late.

The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all..

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

1991 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

As in Myanmar, the road to sustainable peace in Sudan and South Sudan is wearying. However, like Suu Kyi, Sudanese women and My Sister's Keeper are determined to go the distance. Yes, regretfully we must suspend our educational projects. But our cause is just, our voices strong, and no, we absolutely will not suspend our resolve to pursue a “more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.” Won't you stand up and speak out with us? Please give generously today!

Gloria White-Hammond, Executive Director

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