

# NEWSLETTER

## West Africans Join 2007 QPN

Kibuye, Rwanda, the site of the 2007 QPN World Consultation



West Africa was blessed to be represented at the QPN Africa gathering at Kibuye in Rwanda. Abdul Kamara of Sierra Leone who lives in London defied all odds in getting a visa and flight to join Kumah Drah of Hill House Meeting in Accra, Ghana

at the Bethany Retreat Center in Kibuye.

The West African delegation found the gathering was quite useful. It was full of sharing experiences.

*(continued next page)*

### Editor's Note

It is with great pleasure that I introduce the second issue of our newsletter, designed to highlight the activities of Friends in West Africa. While we may all be aware of the conflict in the West Africa region, I believe there is a general lack of awareness of the role Friends are playing in addressing those conflicts. The purpose of this newsletter is to act as a forum for sharing experiences, discovering new developments, and exploring effective techniques for peacebuilding. If you have received this newsletter for the first time and would want you or your meeting to be added to our mailing our mailing list please let us know by sending us an email or simply fill the enclosed newsletter request form and return it to the address at the back of the newsletter.

-Abdul Kumara

## A Bird's Eye View of QPN 2007

For more info on the 2007 gathering, read how the Epistle Committee captured the main events at Kibuye, Rwanda.

*During the week of March 28th to April 3rd, fifty peacemakers from Central, South, East and West Africa as well as representatives from Europe, North America and Australia came to worship together and exchange their experiences of peace work. The varied expressions of peacemaking included National Peace Centers and Peace Churches, Advocacy, Trauma Healing/*



*AVP, Community Peace Building and Reconciliation, and International Collaboration.*

*The group benefited from an extensive discussion with Stephen Collett, who presented an historical perspective of Quaker Peacebuilding. This presentation provided an important foundation for the week's conversations and helped to understand past Quaker movements up to present-day activities.*

*(continued page 3)*

... 2007 QPN Gathering, continued

From deliberations we learnt a lot from many initiatives Quakers and others working for peace are taking in other parts of Africa. Throughout the continent problems ranging from poverty to conflicts were mentioned. But the consultation rekindled among the participants the need to continue to work for peace.

Kumah provided an analysis of the West African region with some specific references to Ghana, his home country, which he said is often seen as an island of peace in the region. In Ghana there are still problems of ethnicity and distribution of national and regional resources. In different parts the sub region problems of xenophobia where even those who migrated generations ago are still not accepted still exist. Also social problems are not being addressed by current efforts towards good governance, liberalization and privatization, education is still beyond the reach of many, and crime is increasing with the proliferation of small arms.

Abdul spoke about his work in West Africa and the UK. He gave a report on QPN West Africa, explaining that they had not met because of a lack of funding, although the organizing was done. He then went on to explain the process of registration that he was able to complete to register QPN West Africa (QPNWA) as an NGO in the UK. Since completing this process he has been fundraising

and from various yearly meetings in the UK has been able to collect £4700. The QPNWA newsletter was also distributed for participants to look at.

Abdul reported on funds that had been donated by AFSC a few years ago for a communication project that has been running in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Computers were bought but the internet no longer functions as it was too expensive to continue but people continue to use them.

Abdul was nominated as QPN Africa representative for West Africa. For the Communications Committee Kumah was nominated to join Martin Struthmann and Aaron Froehlich.



## QPNWA BUILDS PEACE WITH COMMUNICATION PROJECT IN SIERRA LEONE



Communication in Sierra Leone is not the best. The conflict in 1991, worsened the situation as the country's scanty facilities including the communication structures (telephone, postal, print media, etc) were destroyed. Before the outbreak

the 11-year conflict, the cost of communication in Sierra Leone was so high that most people could not easily afford.

Mobile phones became available only in the late 1990s and Internet came later in the early 2000. The cost of communication and the fact that it is limited and often unreliable had particularly affected University students and limit their capacity to carry out meaningful research.

I was wondering how Sierra Leone could be part of the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century without modern communication facilities.

During my field research trip to Sierra Leone, I noticed the situation as a serious challenge. I therefore decided to work out a communication project in the Brookfield community, west of Freetown.

In April 2005, I brought together Quaker Friends in Freetown and other stakeholders in the community to launch a communication project which aimed at preventing conflicts. The project enables individuals to learn about how conflicts are being solved in other part of the world. *(continued next page)*

QPN EPISTLE . . .

*Another lay presentation was made by Peter Woodrow who spoke on the research findings of the CDA on mapping the causes and identifying intervention strategies in conflict situations. A third significant discussion was facilitated by Jessica Huber and Aletia Dundas from QUNO on the UN Peacebuilding Commission, which will create a link between immediate post conflict needs and long term recovery and development. The Peacebuilding Commission will focus on Sierra Leone and Burundi in 2007. The two QUNOs will undertake a mapping project on Quaker Peacebuilding activities to feed into this body and connect Quaker grassroots peace building to international policy level.*

*Each morning we had a devotion that was led by a participant to center ourselves in worship for the upcoming day. Equally, we ended the day with group worship- sharing. The days were shaped by panel discussions which included extensive question and answer sessions. We also broke into interest groups which generated ideas for moving forward. The outstanding beauty of the natural setting of the Centre Spirituel Bethanie, the wide open Lake Kivu with lush green islands framed by layer upon layer of distant mountains in the Congo , the shapely shrubs and exotic birds, all added to the setting. The attendees really did enjoy seeing the active volcano located at a distance in the Congo emit what looked like pink fluff each night. The juxtaposition of this remarkable setting with the terrible events of recent history gave powerful stimuli for reflecting on peace issues.*

COMMUNICATIONS . . .

The result of this was the Quaker Prevention Network Communication Centre, opened on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2005. The Office is situated at 16 Bailey, Brookfield, Freetown.

The Centre has become an important meeting place for research and strategic planning for Quaker Friends in Freetown. It enables Friends as well as community people to communicate effectively. University students also have the opportunity to carry out research at a minimum cost. The Centre also organizes and funds outreach activities such as workshops, training and conflict prevention consultative conferences.

Insufficient funds and time have however constrained us from hosting our website

which will have a database and information on all our activities. Our aim is to have the Centre equipped with state of the art technology that will make it possible for grass root organizations in the south to discuss issues with their counterparts and agencies in the in the North. The site which we still hope to host in due course will have English, French and Arabic versions. It shall have a page dedicated to research into conflict issues, current affairs and news about consultation and conferences, help and advice on issues such as jobs, HIV/AIDS, and on religious and issues of a social nature. This bold and ambitious plan will require finance to start and to sustain it. For that reason there will be a link for donation.



**CONSULTATION 2007, CAPE COAST, GHANA**

The consultation of the network did not take place as planned last year because of insufficient funds. It was planned to take place in Cape Coast, Ghana from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2007. The purpose of the consultation was to create awareness, get relevant feedback and respond to it appropriately. While the Consultation is still restricted both in scope and coverage area, we strongly believe we can do more to expand it if the required wherewithal is mobilized.

## Avoid Violence on Mt. Elgon—Peacemakers Plead

In a bid to avert violence before, during and after elections in Kenya, it was suggested at the Kibuye gathering that a message is sent to the President Kibaki. Below is the full text of the message, which was signed by most delegates.

*15 April 2007*

*Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Kenya and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Kenya,  
Dear Sir,*

*The Quaker Peace Network - Africa Region, meeting at Kibuye Rwanda 28 March - 2 April 2007, stands together with its Kenyan members in expressing grave concern over the emerging conflict in Mt Elgon District, Kenya. Network members from 14 countries unite in making this public statement to the Government of Kenya.*

*The Quaker Peace Network is a global network of Quaker (also called Friends) Churches and Organizations working at all levels of society to promote peace, non-violence, prevention of violent conflict, and post-conflict healing. Friends have witnessed to the transforming power of Jesus Christ, who takes away all occasion for war and violence, since their founding over 350 years ago. Today we stand together with the World Council of Churches in their Decade to Overcome Violence, remembering the words of Jesus "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (John 14:2).*

*The violence now unfolding on Mt Elgon has already caused enormous suffering. According to the Kenya Red Cross Society, more than 140 people have died, with a similar number having suffered injuries. Over 61,000 people are displaced from their homes, and are living without adequate food, sanitation, safe water and shelter. These numbers are increasing daily. Fifteen schools have closed, and over 10,000 children were unable to attend school during the first term of the year. There are reports of atrocities committed by the security forces, and of sexual violence against women and children being used as a weapon in the conflict. Economic activity has almost entirely ceased in the area, leaving huge numbers of people vulnerable to further disease and hunger. The environment on the slopes of Mt Elgon, a vital watershed for all of western Kenya, is suffering damage. The voter registration process has been disrupted, threatening the democratic rights of the area residents. Small arms are proliferating in the area, further fueling a nation-wide surge in gun-related crime over the last six months. The situation is an emerging conflict with the alarming potential for harm to all Kenyans.*

*The current cycle of violence on Mt Elgon is the most recent manifestation of a recurring problem, dating back to the item of independence, regarding government land allocation policies. This is not primarily an ethnic conflict, and attempts to cast it in ethnic terms can only further destabilize the situation. The large-scale presence of government security forces in the area has itself become a provocation to further violence in the community. The attempts to manipulate the situation for political gain in this election year further destabilizes the area and undermines efforts for peace.*

*We call upon the Government to:*

- resolve the conflict through non-violent community reconciliation and consensus-based land policies, rather than through attempts to suppress conflict through forceful and threatening means;*
- assume an evenhanded stance as mediator, rather than to take sides, as is now perceived to be the case;*
- reconsider the current land allocation exercise;*
- train security forces to resolve conflict through non-violent means and to know their human rights obligations as state actors;*
- develop a disarmament and amnesty programme for non-state actors in the area;*
- cooperate with the Ugandan government to stop the cross-border flow of small arms;*
- address immediate humanitarian needs;*
- work with civil society partners for long-term intervention strategies toward a sustainable peace; and*
- immediately open the Mt. Elgon region to humanitarian agencies, human rights observers and civil society peace workers.*

*As Quaker peacemakers across Africa, we stand ready to cooperate with government and civil society, to offer our experience in non-violent conflict resolution and peace-building.*

*Signed on behalf of the Quaker Peace Network,*

*Colin Glen, Coordinator (South Africa)  
Hezron Masitsa, Assistant Coordinator (Kenya)*

# Sierra Leone



In exploring the present political and security situation in Sierra Leone, it is worth noting the situation where it was. During which unspeakable atrocities were committed against Sierra Leonean that saw thousands of Sierra Leonean killed and mutilated while more so were forced to flee to neighbouring countries as refugees. Worse, it was during these periods the country begins to linger at the bottom of per capita GNP list and has, even with the end of the conflict, still not recovered as the recent report place it at the bottom of the human poverty index.

The cause for such atrocities has its root in the 1960-68 period during which Siaka Stevens, the president of Sierra Leone after the 1968 election, brought Sierra Leone under the one party political rule of the All Peoples Congress (APC). And it is during this period most commentators have been attributing the conflict to, a period of bad governance characterized by political and social exclusion, centralization of public administration, lack of democratic principles and high level of corruption by the ruling elites. The result of which was noted to have develop a deep-seated grievance among the civil populace, which eventually help, with the support of external influence from it neighbours, blow the conflict beyond proportion.

Even though deep-seated grievance has been ever present, open or violent conflict first came into public view in March 23 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded Sierra Leone south-eastern border with Liberia, in the village of Bomaru. Their invasion was swift in the face of the ill equipped soldiers of the Republic of Sierra Leone armed forces. In just a year of invasion they were able to capture a lot of towns and also made a name with the mayhem that accompanies their conquest. And it was in the face of these atrocities that the conflict started attracting a lot of attention and condemnation from many which include the international community for the brutality the RUF authored against the people of Sierra Leone.

Efforts to pacify the country and restructure its shattered economy have not however been easy. It has taken several peace accords, the overthrow of the

APC Government by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) and the overthrow of Valentine Esegro Melvin Strasser, Chairman of the NPRC, in a palace coup. Sierra Leone is being transformed into a democratic state with the election that brought Alhaji Ahmed Tejan Kabbah to power and finally with the effort of donor and international non-governmental and governmental organizations.

At present the country is enjoying peace, which was made possible by the Lome peace treaty which was described as fragile. A view that has been supported in the DFID/CRP Final operation plan technical proposal( p Viii) which noted "the fragile peace accord continue to be threatened by pockets of discontented ex-combatants (XCs) who are unable to generate a satisfactory livelihood or to reintegrate back into society" . Addressing those threats has been paramount to them and to all concerned.

At present all efforts are on the way to address those issues underlying the conflict, beginning from governance reforms through the DFID and partner organizations and also especially

the diamond trade which should have made the country one of the most richest in the region but rather used to power the spiral of violence in which a hand full of RUF rebels have grown in power via the diamond trade. These have been restructured and hopefully will yield dividends bringing needed foreign exchange to government coffers.

As true forgiveness could not come without recognition by the part of the perpetrators, and the willingness of the victim to forgive. The International community has dispatched an additional five man team to join the five already there to help the government to maintain and improve its commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court have been set up to try and convict perpetrators of atrocities and also give victims of the conflict the opportunity to face people that have committed atrocities against them. At present the country is far from what it used to be when it was refer to as one of the most peaceful but with time and commitment by those involved, positive peace will surely be established again.



# Football in the Sierra Leone Conflict

Being an insider and an athlete myself, I will want to give an insider's view about the astonishing front role Sport, especially football, played in the Sierra Leone conflict. The effect of which has been two fold. When energy is applied positively it creates positive impact and when applied wrongly it creates negative effects. In addressing the negative side of it, it is worth to note that the coup of May 25 1997, which for the first time invited the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) to enter Freetown, was caused by footballers belonging to the army team. They used to go for training in the midst of continuous hardship and after one training decided to overthrow the first post conflict government.

In toppling the government they appointed Abu Zagallo Sankoh, a former division one player of the Sierra Fisheries Football Club and now coach of the army football team, as its Principal Liaison Officer 1, a position that was equivalent to first vice president while the other parliamentary positions were distributed among the team captain, his team and few other

imported to bring prestige into the mutineers rank. As wrong as they were to over-

throw a constitutionally elected government, this bunch of rag tags as they were later referred to by the Sierra Leone Peoples Government (SLPP) were able to show character which saw them ruling at the annoyance of the international community for one year, and later when they were dislodged from the seat of power manage to rebound again on the 5-6 January to overrun the peace keepers again.

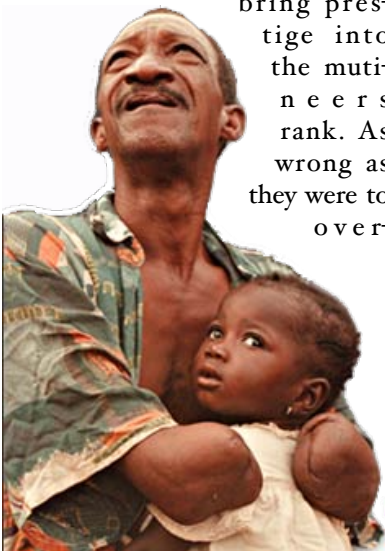
During the one year rule of this sportsmen, who later call themselves Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), a period which will for sure go down as one of the darkest period in our country's history, they were successful in their attempt in using youth and football to attract a lot of following. Even though they were broke they managed to raise some money to send the Leone Stars, the national team, to the Zone II tournament but were beaten to it by the Kabbah government in exile in Guinea who also realizing the technique the juntas were using managed to send another team before the junta were able to do.

Having been beaten in the International arena, the Junta reverted to organizing and helping others to organize series of junior leagues around Freetown. In just six month of their rule those leagues had improved and were, everywhere they were conducted, attracting a lot of spectators from different viewpoint. These gatherings, I suppose many will agree helped, without exaggerating its significance in reducing the deep-seated grievance that was present

among the civilian populace as a result of the sub-culture that was created between supporters of the Junta who were tagged as junta collaborators, sympathizers or juntas - a crime that was punishable by lynching.

During the war period, the only attraction that was able to bring people together was football. It is worth noting that it continued astonishingly in-between battles and bombshell in Freetown by the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), these according to my personal conviction help in to a large extent in preventing Sierra Leone from experiencing Genocide as was experience by other countries.

Football is played at every level within Sierra Leone society and has a well-organized structure, although it lacks resources. Footballs are very expensive to buy and teams lack kit. But with such a history about the role that football has played in uniting people for good and for evil - as the AFRC proved - retaking and using it for good in reintegrating the country will, as history have proved, have a significant effect that will be felt far beyond the football pitch into the minds and heart of every Sierra Leonean.



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