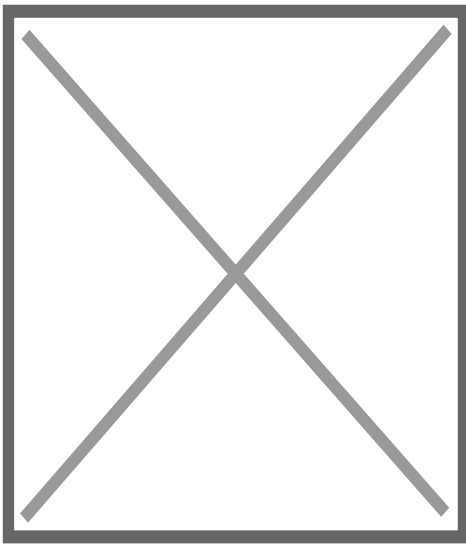


Kenya in turmoil

The Salvation Army provides safety and shelter during political upheaval.

by Karen Gleason –



A man carries a propane canister past a rioting mob.



Kenya—long considered the most stable democracy in Africa—exploded into civil unrest and tribal warfare on Dec. 27, 2007, sparked by irregularities in the national presidential election that left incumbent President Mwai Kibaki the victor over opposition leader Raila Odinga, who appeared to have won. Western officers Lt. Colonels Kenneth and Jolene Hodder, stationed in Nairobi, serve in the Kenya Territory as chief secretary and territorial leader of women’s ministries, respectively. While the government declared a media blackout, the Hodders sent news of the tragic situation and of The Salvation Army’s efforts to keep people safe.

With normal operations at THQ suspended, Hodder explained: “Salvation Army officers living in the slum areas of Nairobi are being housed at a safe Salvation Army compound in the city and security at all Army facilities has been increased. We are in close contact with our divisional offices in Eldoret, Kisumu, and Kakamega, where hundreds of refugees are being sheltered and fed. Unfortunately, it is not physically possible at this point to reach those locations.”

Hope amidst fear and chaos

In Eldoret, where a Lutheran church was set afire and many died while seeking refuge, The Salvation Army's Eldoret corps officer sheltered over 300 people in his small building—just down the road from the burned church.

As The Salvation Army continues to provide sanctuary and food for those in danger, the post-election riots and violence have left over 500 people dead and another 250,000 displaced, with no immediate solution in sight as government and opposition remain divided on how to conduct negotiations.

In a recent newsletter, Lt. Colonel Jolene Hodder relates stories from officers in the field. One involves workers at the construction site of the new territorial headquarters and staff quarters in Kakamega; some of them live onsite. When the divisional commander, Major Shavanga, realized that they were in danger because of their tribal affiliation, he brought them into his home. Within an hour, a mob had shown up at the site looking for the men. Shavanga was no doubt instrumental in saving their lives, at no small danger to himself and his family.

Another officer, on furlough when the riots broke out, was determined to return to his people. Hodder writes: "The police had blocked most of the roads, and those roads not monitored by the police were taken over by armed gangs, which would only allow members of their own tribe to pass unharmed. The officer is from another tribe, but he put on his Army uniform and, for several hundred miles, he prayed himself through roadblock after roadblock. He arrived safely home to serve his people."

Thousands displaced

While accurate figures are unavailable due to ongoing violence, the Kenyan Red Cross announced that up to half a million people could need vital humanitarian assistance. A Salvation Army international emergency services assessment team has traveled to neighboring Uganda, where many Kenyans are seeking safety. So far thousands have fled their homes.

Major Mike Caffull, international emergency services field operations officer, noted that The Salvation Army has a strong presence in the impacted areas and stands ready to assist those in need.

Major Eluid Nabiswa, in charge of the Army's Eastern Division in Uganda including the Kenyan border, stated: "There are large numbers of people at...all towns along the border. At the moment the shops still have goods for purchase but the prices are already going up. There is little gasoline, which will soon have an impact on deliveries. The main needs are food, shelter and soap. Medication and clothing are also needed for some people."

In Nairobi, in the midst of the turmoil, Lt. Colonel Jolene Hodder expressed that the Army has "few resources in Kenya to meet what we would call back home 'emergency services'. We lack money, food and supplies."

Donations to the Africa Disaster Fund may be made online at www.salvationarmy.org or by sending them—clearly marked for this fund—to The Salvation Army, Officer Services 12th Floor, 180 E. Ocean Blvd., 90802.

Sources include a Salvation Army emergency news report and issue #86 of the Hodders' African Adventure newsletter.