

*Greetings YMCA family and friends*

*The Africa Alliance of YMCAs has done extensive work on gender awareness and mainstreaming over the last five years. This culminated in the adoption of a gender policy at the Alliance level and some YMCAs in Africa have already adopted the policy at country level. In principle, all YMCAs are cognisant of the policy and the need for the dimension of gender justice and equity to be mainstreamed in YMCA programmes.*

*There is a statutory provision in the policies of the Alliance and national movements for women to at least have representation at all levels of decision making. At the recent Global Operating Plan (GOP) meetings in Togo and Ghana, it was apparent that in reality we are still far from our aspirations and targets – women's representation was negligible.*

*The YMCA is perceived as a male organisation and it is imperative that we change this image. I must hasten to say that I am not talking about tokenism. In our African countries, there are many active and powerful women who are making fundamental impact and change in their communities. It is our duty to find ways to attract these women of dedication and high calibre skills. It requires effort but the return on such investment is guaranteed.*

*Beyond representation, gender is mainly about power relations. We believe that the African Renaissance will not happen while women continue to be marginalised or exploited. It is crucial for us to build a new society on justice and equitable distribution of roles and power. The youth have a unique opportunity to do things differently from their parents' generations.*

*Africa Alliance will continue to be the guardian of our shared values of justice and fairness and this includes the implementation of our own resolution on gender mainstreaming and justice.*

*We march towards the full participation of women in our movements and our countries... Siyahamba!*

*Carlos Sanvee  
General Secretary, Africa Alliance of YMCAs*

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## **TRIBUTE TO THE SELFLESS WORK OF PETER KAMEI OF YMCA LIBERIA**

**Lyn Gray, Liberia YMCA**

At the end of 2008, Africa lost one of its longest serving National General Secretaries, as Peter Z. N. Kamei of Liberia stepped into retirement. His 21-year service carried the Liberia YMCA through two civil wars. Despite some serious setbacks when facilities were attacked and staff scattered, the Liberia YMCA was an important ally during the war, providing food, shelter, education, health services, counselling, vocational training, and HIV/AIDS education to hundreds of thousands.

Peter was visiting the YMCA of Greater Indianapolis, USA in 2003 when a rebel faction reached Monrovia and indiscriminately fired rockets across the city to force out President Taylor. Not heeding his American colleagues' warnings to stay, Peter travelled to Sierra Leone and boarded a chartered plane carrying relief items back to Liberia. He pulled together the staff who had been hiding around the city, and they began the



process of re-opening the YMCA, dealing first with the damage, looting, and the corpse they found in the office. With fast response from donors, the YMCA became, over the next few years, one of the best recognised local NGOs for its work with a war-weary population.

During the 2003-2005 transitional government, peace was far from guaranteed. Former fighters at all levels still identified themselves by factions, and a perceived wrong to a fellow faction member required retaliation. The worst manifestation of this arose at the end of October 2004. The origin was a property dispute involving the head of a rebel faction who called on some of his fighters to attack the other man. Many who still felt animosity toward that faction tended to identify it by its main tribe, which is mostly Muslim. This led to attacks on mosques, which in turn predictably led to attacks on churches. It didn't matter that the other man in the dispute was also Muslim; such is the idiocy that comes from mistrust and poor communication.

The so-called "religious riots" held up thousands commuting home the first evening. Street fighting continued for several days, each incident prompting another, despite a curfew and heavy deployment of peacekeepers. Lives were lost, and many were injured.

On the fourth night, Peter was awakened by his children knocking on his door. "Are you hearing the noise?" they asked. "People are trying to burn Alis' home." Their neighbor Ali was a leader among his people, so many families had flocked to his house for safety. Peter could hear the crowd yelling, and from their flashlights and torches he could see they were throwing rocks. "You have to go," his children were saying.

"I recognized my limitations and decided I had better stay where I was," Peter explained. "There was a shooting in our neighborhood that morning; a youth walking to church was shot for carrying a Bible. That was certainly the reason for tonight's attack, and I knew it was very dangerous to go out."

Within fifteen minutes the children were back in his room. "You have to go," they said again. He also knew he had to go – that he couldn't lie in bed and let his neighbours burn a house full of innocent people. Yet he was still afraid, so he took a minute to pray. "There is a Being that is higher than me," he says, "so I decided to take a stand."

Peter was a respected member of the community, so as he walked toward the crowd, many recognised him. "Some started thanking me for coming," he said. "My simple presence seemed to have pulled them to the side they knew was right, as though they had been paralysed until I came. This gave me strength."

But the situation was still dangerous; there may have been a hundred people, and many continued to throw rocks. Going into the centre of the mob, waving his arms to get their attention, Peter shouted, "Stop! You all, stop!" Some answered by telling him about the young man who was killed that morning. "I know about that," Peter answered, "but we can't deal with it this way. Who's the leader here?" Some began to put down their stones, but others were still intent on hurting the people in the house.

Peter moved out of the crowd and toward Ali's house, placing himself directly between the group and the house, and turned to face the crowd. Then he called for the leader to join him. Fortunately, the young man who had led them to this point agreed and walked over and stood beside Peter. Then Peter talked to them,



**MADAGASCAR GOP: Analyses and perspectives**  
**Lantonirina Rakotomalala, National General Secretary, Madagascar YMCA**

The recent partners' meeting for an institutional diagnosis of Madagascar YMCA was a space of sharing for the movement, international partners and to fellow African movements.

Held at the new YMCA Youth Centre in Ankazomanga, Antananarivo, held in December, it was an extremely participative process, despite some difficulties due to language barriers (Malagasy, French and English). Attending the meeting was the board of officers, two representatives of every local branch, Kjetil Ostnor from Y Global of Norway, Harriet Knox from Y Care International (UK), Eric Kinuthia and Annie Nqwira, the NGSS of Kenya and Zambia YMCAs respectively, and Carlos Sanvee, the General Secretary of the Africa Alliance of YMCAs.

Analysis was focused on the three pillars of the Global Operating Plan (GOP), ie mission clarity, institutional viability and social relevance. What emerged was a clear sense of the strength of the movement, especially on the clarity of the vision and mission at national level. Positive impact of activities and projects were seen as palpable in the communities in which we work, and indisputable social relevance was evident. However, the activities of YMCA are still very fragmented and lack coordination, so it is now necessary to concentrate more on the young people to constitute them as a niche market. Much effort needs to be spent on institutional viability, and to this end the board of officers, as well as the commissions set up at the meeting, committed themselves to work on institutional priorities until the next meeting, that should be held in June 2009.

Actually, the institutional diagnosis highlighted divergent ideas, such as the use of the certificates of operations. Will the local movements use the national certificate or their own (which have been registered locally)? The commission will conduct a feasibility study and verify juridical aspects, while considering practical aspects. Some articles of the constitution may need to be reviewed. A membership recruitment policy and leadership training are also planned.



Governance tools are also essential for Madagascar YMCA to ensure the viability of the movement. The National General Secretary and the technical staff team are working very closely with the commissions to develop manuals of procedures of the operations and finances, and the standards required for every local movement member before the planned June meeting. At the same time, activity manuals will be developed for local member use to assist them to focus more on youth interests.

Finally, the improvement of the communication policy and tools is vital to ensure dissemination of information and keep everyone updated on plans and achievements.

This first partners' meeting evoked deep reflection on the very nature of the YMCA movement and its practices. All participants have been shaken but it reinforced our feelings of adherence to the YMCA. We all affirmed to do more to empower the young people for the African Renaissance so that we may all be

### **YMCA YOUTH AT 9th AACC GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**Mutale Chanda, Vice National Youth Chairperson, Zambia YMCA**

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) held its 9th General Assembly from 7-12 December 2008, in Maputo, Mozambique, under the theme 'Africa Step Forth in Faith'.

Organised by the AACC, Mozambique Council of Churches, Norwegian Church Aid and other partners, the event drew over 200 youth from across Africa to join the 1 200 plus delegates who converged to review achievements and challenges, and to charter the way forward for the Church in Africa.

The Africa Alliance of YMCAs was represented by a delegation of 6 young people and 1 resource person, who was also a facilitator in the Youth Workshop. The national movements represented were The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, South Africa and Zambia.

Of the nine themes at the Assembly, the notable ones were:

- The Youth Responding to the Challenges for the Renewal of Africa
- Women as Tools of Reconciliation and Peace
- Moral Regeneration
- Human Rights
- From Political to Economic Independence

After five days of discussion, debate and much reflection, the young people who were representing the church and the partners of the AACC resolved that we were going to take up the space created for us and prove that we deserve to be recognised as capable and responsible citizens and leaders of today, and not tomorrow. As a step towards this, focal persons were appointed to represent the four regions as well as co-ordinate youth activities in the AACC. A database was also created so as to enhance effective communication.

Evidently, we the young people in Africa are ready to take up our space and apply ourselves. We need to change our attitudes, seek to be informed, *and* skilled... in other words, empowered. Let us believe in ourselves. Allow me to borrow from the US president and say YES WE CAN! Yes, indeed we can.

### **TESTIMONY OF ABLAM APETI, A TOGO YMCA BENEFICIARY**

**By Lambert Daisher, Togo YMCA Project Manager.**

My father has 19 children, and when we grew up he was not able to meet our needs. So I quit school and opted for vocational training. I am now a tapestry-worker. I am 36-years old have two children, aged 10 and 8 and also take care of one of my nieces, who began secondary school last year.

During my tapestry training I had to walk about 10 km to and from the workshop every day. I had to pay for the apprenticeship fees on my own. At the end of the training in 1990 I was 18 years old, and I loitered around for a while with nothing to do, as I had no means to set up my own workshop. Then I heard about a YMCA sponsored project called the OJBC (Opération Jeunesse Batissons la Cité), which involved the youth cleaning up the city. I offered my services and was consequently recruited by the YMCA.

At the end of a day's work we would be paid part of our wages while the rest would be retained as a saving. The idea was to pool savings to benefit group members more meaningfully. Then came the 9-month strike starting November 1992 where opposition political parties were fed up with the dictatorship of the late President Eyadema (who ruled from 1967 – 2005) and were trying to force him into resignation through civic action. Some of our group members left the country and never came back. Despite this, we had training from the YMCA in management and income generation, but times were tough and eventually the group disbanded in 1994.

I was left alone. I decided to take the risk, and with the savings from the OJBC project, I started a small project making bags and clothing items, while the YMCA assisted me to market my products. The YMCA



also constructed a stall for me at their premises. I began to earn a stable income and was able to rent a house and feed my family, having married in 1996.

I don't know what I would be today had it not been for the OJBC project. Perhaps I would have ended up a delinquent, as this is the road some of my friends have taken. Some of them left home for the streets, and I see others living in a shanty area not far from the YMCA headquarters where they use drugs and commit acts of theft at night.

With the management and marketing training that I received from the YMCA, I am able to run my business well. I have purchased a piece of land on which I have started to put up a workshop. I have also trained four young people, and if I manage to expand my market for my products, I can create more employment opportunities for more youth.

I would like to establish new markets abroad and also increase productivity. I am ready to train any other young persons that the YMCA will entrust to me. My particular interest is to train beneficiaries from the Togo YMCA 'Justice and Rehabilitation for Young Offenders' programme to be tapestry-workers, should financial opportunities make this possible.

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### **ALL I WANTED – FLAMES OF HATRED FROM ZIMBABWE TO SOUTH AFRICA**

**Tafadzwa Ndiyamba, volunteer Media Co-ordinator, South Africa YMCA**

All I wanted was a better life for my wife and child. My home country, Zimbabwe, was on fire, burning with flames of hunger, desperation, poverty, shortages of survival basics, and the non-existence of human rights. After having been detained several times by the regime for doing my journalism job and having witnessed fellow journalists being tortured like terrorists, I considered myself lucky not to have been tortured to death. I realised that to see my newborn child grow up, I had to move.

It all started with a call ordering me to report to the police station. There I was interrogated, harassed and threatened in a fashion that I had only seen on television films. It was my first time in the hands of the Central Intelligence Officers. They demanded to know who I was working for: America or Britain? They wanted my confession on how much I had received for selling footage of the much-dreaded Border Gezis (notorious youth militia) and swore that I would talk eventually because there is only one reward for sellouts: death. I could only imagine what they would do to make me confess to a crime that I did not commit.

I had a million questions...How fast were they going to kill me? Were they going to remove my eyes first, then chop off my toes one by one until I died? Would they allow my father to see my corpse? What would my wife tell my child as she grows up fatherless? One question haunted me: why in heaven's name did I become a journalist?



Flickr upload by Sokwanele, Zimbabwe – 11 Nov 2005, showing front cover of the week's print edition of *The Zimbabwean*

I was not allowed to leave town without big brother's authorisation as I had seemingly become an enemy of the state. Every time I was summoned to the police station I sent a text message to a friend just in case it was my last trip there. Frankly, I just did not know when they would decide to pull the plug on my life. I have never been so terrified in my life. I will not tell of my wife's experience because I would not do justice to it. I thought she was going to leave me. Every day we thanked God I was alive. Of course I knew that when death comes, you cannot run, but there are experts in Zimbabwe who specialise in bringing death to your doorstep and, for me, it was a matter of time.

So with great sadness, in 2006, I left the country I loved, my family, friends and everything that I had worked for in my four years as a journalist. Most importantly, I had to leave my wife and my 5 week-old daughter.

When I got to South Africa, reality dawned on me – I was no longer the person I spent my school and college years trying to become. I was no longer that television producer or cameraman. I was desperate. I had to send money and groceries to my wife and child. So there I was, a rookie

waiter, doing tables from 8am to 10pm, earning as little as R50 a day. Each night I was so tired and drained that I walked home barefoot, and as it was the rainy season, the heavenly waters would give me a lovely shower on my long walk home.

Being a waiter was one of the lowest moments of my life, where I stared ugly racism in the face. Yes, it taught me to be humble, as fate had brought me down to earth and taught me to accept my situation and make the best of it. I had a little one who depended on me for survival, no matter the circumstances or my misfortunes. But being black and non-Zulu speaking (local vernacular) worked against me as a typical conversation with black customers went along these lines: "*Umntu omnyama ongakwzi ukukhuluma isiZulu?*" "*Hayibo.*" "*Ngeke, ngikhulume isingisi nomuntu omnyama. Ngitholele umuntu okhuluma isiZulu.*" ("You are black and you can't speak isiZulu?" "No." "I do not speak English to a black person. Get me someone who can speak Zulu.")

This was always a blow because I generally wouldn't get much of a gratuity. What was shattering was that they would communicate with the white manager in perfect English. Some black customers were so kind and understanding, and I greatly appreciated that. Then there were the white customers who insisted on being served in Afrikaans. Strange, though, that all menus were only in English!

Management did not make life easy. Blacks were always given unfavourable tables to serve, and they would swear at us in front of everyone, complaining that we were useless and asking if we had even seen

an entrance into a school. Customer complaints fuelled this behavior and many times customers just complained to get a free meal voucher for another lovely family outing that would be sheer hell for waiters like me, prepared to smile through it all for a lousy gratuity.

What had become of the television producer? But I decided to bury my pride for the sake of my beautiful child. I soldiered on with my worn pair of shoes and old pair of jeans, which I covered with a long, ill-fitting apron.

I was happy to swap the apron for a radio job at a Christian radio station, and by then my wife and child had joined me. We stayed in a flat in town, and the rental swallowed almost all our monthly earnings. I didn't want to stay in high-density areas where neighbours would question why we couldn't communicate in the local language. I considered my family safe in an expensive flat which left us with little to spend on food and virtually nothing for luxuries.

At my new work place, despite my four years' journalism experience, I was hired as an intern with an allowance less than my earnings as a waiter. But I accepted this as I wanted to get back into my career and was prepared to earn less rather than serve selfish and rude people in a restaurant.

I thought working with Christians at a Christian radio station would be heaven on earth, as I wouldn't face rejection like at the restaurant. I was wrong. In the newsroom they spoke the local language and acted as if I wasn't there, sometimes in meetings that were supposed to affect me.

True colours did not take time to come out. During the May 2009 xenophobic attacks, I was shattered when my workmates told me that foreigners should leave the country as they were stealing their jobs, perpetuating crime and prostitution and selling drugs. They claimed that more than 80% of the jail population was foreigners, which I knew was untrue. They argued that foreigners were benefiting from the RDP (the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme) and getting houses at the expense of locals. I realised my nightmare was not over. The rejection continues. These "beautiful and civilised people" were drowning in their own hate, and no day went by without them expressing their displeasure with foreigners. I could not believe they had no empathy for my fellow countrymen and women who were set alight alive. If my Christian workmates supported the flames of hate, how safe was I? How long before I was also found guilty of being a foreigner who stole a South African's job, and was then sentenced to the flames of hate.

Commentary at the time explained causes of xenophobia as due to poverty, poor service delivery, lack of jobs and crime. My experience informs me that it is an attitude towards foreigners. But the questions are: after burning the foreigners, who is next, and did anything improve after chasing away the foreigners?

When the ink on the Zimbabwe power-sharing agreement had not even dried, the South African Government was



Refugees mostly from Zimbabwe and Mozambique in city hall in Gauteng, South Africa, during June 2008 xenophobic attacks.  
© Tebogo Letsie/IRIN

sending asylum seekers back to Zimbabwe. The latest breakdown in talks gives us little hope for genuine governance in my country. What are Zimbabweans going back to, considering that some had their homes burnt with everything they owned? Some lost their loved ones who were breadwinners, so how will they survive? They cannot look for jobs because most industries are closed and in Zimbabwe there are no social grants.

We talk of an African Renaissance but are some of us so full of anger and hate for each other that this hate is consuming us? Interestingly, it is the youth who take this hatred and make it theirs, and it is also the youth and innocent children who tend to suffer the most. In recent Poverty Hearings in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, it was noted that poverty has shifted from old people to the youth. We need to answer this to map a way forward.

Counselling has not been made widely available to Zimbabweans, both for their ordeals in our home country or for the xenophobic attacks in South Africa. Is it fair and just to expect people to go back to live in a place where we faced the worst rejection by our neighbours, a place where we watched our fathers and mothers set alight until they died slowly in the flames with people cheering... a place where we lost everything, including your dignity?

So where do I go? I want to work hard, socialise freely and raise my family in a good environment that tolerates others, no matter their colour, belief or nationality. All I want is for my daughter to grow up with dignity and hold her head high.

Thank you for the words of encouragement regarding the Siyahamba initiative. We invite you to send us your comments on our newsletter initiative and on the content. We encourage YMCA family and friends to send us ideas for content, opinion pieces and articles. Please send to Gil Harper, the newsletter editor: [gilh@africaymca.org](mailto:gilh@africaymca.org)  
Christian Kamara is the NGS newsletter contact person and is assisting in compilation and monitoring of news and copy. He can be contacted at: [sierraleone@africaymca.org](mailto:sierraleone@africaymca.org)