

# Quakers and War

December 30, 2008

Recently the Friends Journal--I'm sorry I can't find the actual quote--had a comment that the Quaker Peace Testimony was ineffectual since in 350+ years, Quakers had never stopped a war. But we have!

In 1800 Richard Gush was a young man on his way from England to South Africa. He picked up some pamphlets on Quakerism at London Yearly Meeting and decided he was a Quaker and a pacifist. Then in 1826 the local Xhosa warriors were going to attack the British settlers in the town of Salem in South Africa. As a known pacifist he walked out between the town and the assembled warriors and convinced the Xhosa not to attack the town. OK, this was only a battle stopped by one Quaker.

But the US history books are devoid of descriptions of Quaker battles, massacres, and war with the Native Americans because these didn't happen.

Then, the British Quakers were instrumental in stopping the longest war in history (400+ years)--the continual wars in Africa to supply the transatlantic slave trade. Read Adam Hochschild's Bury the Chains (<http://www.motherjones.com/news/qa/2005/01/hochschild.html>) to see how a few non-voting, discriminated against Quakers launched the movement to abolish the slave trade, using the Yearly Meeting structure to promote the first human rights movement in history.

Here we are in Kenya where a potential civil war broke out a year ago today, December 30, 2007, when post-election violence erupted after the disputed election results were announced. There are more Quakers in Kenya than anywhere else in the world and some of the conflict was right in the heart of the area where the Quakers are most numerous--my hometown of Lumakanda included. Quakers, like everyone else here, were stunned by the violence; totally unprepared to respond. Yet within a week the Friends Church of Kenya issued a very strong anti-violence epistle. By the end of January, while the conflict was still at its height, the Quaker organizations -- Friends Church in Kenya, Friends World Committee for Consultation-Africa Section, Friends United Meeting-Africa, and the AGLI sponsored Alternatives to Violence program (AVP) -- held a conference in Kakamega to determine what would be the Quaker response to the conflict.

The Friends Church Peace Team (FCPT) was created. Initially FCPT gave relief supplies to those internally displaced people (IDP) who had been missed by the Red Cross and the Kenyan Government. It then moved on to do reconciliation and peacemaking work, focusing on an area near where Gladys and I live. FCPT visited the local internally displaced people's camp at Turbo, and then held listening sessions in nine local communities that had displaced the people. When the Kenyan Government closed the IDP camps they accompanied the IDPs back to these communities. Since then FCPT has visited the villages to see how the reintegration is progressing. On January 13 to 15, 2009 FCPT will hold another peace conference with two

representatives from each of the 16 yearly meetings in Kenya and others who have played a part in the reconciliation work. The purpose is to review what we have done in the last year and discern where we should put our efforts in the future.

AGLI itself, when the violence broke out, gave relief to the IDPs at Lumakanda Primary School (who were later moved to the Turbo IDP camp). We held one-day listening sessions in various places, including 42 sessions with the Center for Disease Control in Kisumu. We supported peace-keeping meetings on the border between the Kisii and Kipsigis where a large number of people were killed, hundreds of homes burned down, and shops, businesses, and schools were destroyed.

The major activity from March through November was to conduct 190 three-day AVP workshops, mostly for youth involved on one side or the other in the post-election violence. After a delay in January, due to the violence, AGLI conducted HROC (Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities) training at the Friends Peace Centre in Lubao for 16 Kenyan facilitators. HROC lead facilitators from Rwanda, Burundi, and North Kivu were instrumental in both this training and seven follow-up apprentice workshops with the new Kenyan facilitators. These newly trained facilitators then conducted six workshops on their own. The locus of most of these workshops was high up on Mt Elgon (on the border between Kenya and Uganda and visible from our house in Lumakanda). Here two clans of the Sabaot have been involved in a land dispute that had turned very violent – perhaps up to 600 people have been killed. As usual with HROC workshops, participants intentionally came from all sides of the issue. The work is fraught with potential violence. One man who participated in a HROC workshop was later slashed on the leg with a machete by someone from his own group for being in the workshop with people from the enemy side – he has recovered.

AGLI plans to continue its work as resources allow. If you would like to donate to Kenya peacemaking write a check made out to "Friends Peace Teams/AGLI", with "Kenya Peacemaking" on the memo line, and mail it to 1001 Park Avenue, St Louis, MO 63104 or donate through our webpage, [www.aglionline.org](http://www.aglionline.org).

The situation in Kenya remains tense. While the political issues have been solved for the moment, the underlying issues are still festering. Renewed violence is possible and, if it occurs, it will be much worse than last time. If we Quakers (along with many, many others) succeed in our peacemaking work, you will hear nothing – except perhaps from one of my reports. If we all fail, then you will see it on TV and read about it in your newspapers.

Please keep the situation in Kenya in your thoughts and prayers. We will need them.

Peace,  
Dave

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