

## TRAUMA HEALING IN BURUNDI

By David Zarembka

In July I was supposed to open the Listening Room at Cagura Church (pronounced "Cha-gu-ra"), but was unable to go upcountry due to the fighting. I arrived this time on Tuesday, September 17, and on Wednesday, David Niyonzima, Coordinator for the Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services (THARS), asked me to go upcountry to cut the ribbon to open the Listening Room. I took public transportation from Bujumbura to Gitega (on the Kwa Imani--"For God"--mini-bus owned and operated by the Burundi Yearly Meeting Development Office to support their work) for less than \$2. Levy of Mi-PAREC drove the next morning to the Burasira Catholic Church where the four THARS Team members were having another workshop with the 22 Trauma Healers they had trained. Their work was impressive. During the first day they asked everyone to relate how the trainings had affected them and I heard these stories from Felicity, a member of the Team.

Sebastian lives in an IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camp which means he is a Tutsi. One night a woman in the camp was distraught and banging her head on the wall. Sebastian and two others were called to pray over her. This they did to no effect until they got tired. Then Sebastian remembered the skills he had been taught and he said to the woman, "I see that you are hurting. I am here to listen to you." He had to repeat this a second time and the woman calmed down and said, "Do you really want to listen to me?" When Sebastian replied in the affirmative, she said, "Come back tomorrow morning and I will talk with you." This he did and found that the woman was in great conflict with her daughter so he had also to talk with the daughter. (Note that trauma work and mediation work are not as distinct as our analytical methods might assume that they are.) The head of the IDP camp was so impressed by Sebastian's work that he offered him a room at the administrative center to meet with people--ie. his own listening room.

Zipporah is David Niyonzima's older sister (2 years). She said that as children they were very close to each other. She was a very shy woman. David said that when her husband died and left her with seven children she wanted to commit suicide. When she started the trainings, she never said anything. But recently she spoke up at a meeting David was at--to his astonishment. She spoke up a number of times at training I attended and Felicity commented on how much she had shed her shyness. Zipporah had commented that the training had changed her as she no longer said things like "You are stupid--you will never amount to anything" to her children.

Both Carolyn and Felicity told me that they were moved by the testimonials of the 22 trainees. This is what let us to plan for a second group to train. Only one of the trainees knew halting English (and no Swahili) and only 4 or 5 others were willing to speak Swahili with me. Some would know no language but Kirundi. Some had never visited Bujumbura until the training that was held there! That we could do this work with those who are clearly leaders in their churches and communities, but who have had such limited exposure to the wider world is a statement of "finding that of God in everyone."

Charles wrote me the following concerning the fighting in July and August in Burundi:

## Kibimba Trainees Whose Possessions Were Stolen.

1. Pastor Audace Ntahombereye: Pastor at Kabuguzo Monthly Meeting. He fled in July for 3 weeks, back home, he fled again in August for another three weeks. Almost everything in his house--clothes, food, domestic animals--was taken. Last year, his house has been burnt and rebuilt.
2. Nikobamye Emmanuel: Kibimba Hospital staff, member of the Gitongo Monthly Meeting and elder of that meeting. He spent three weeks outside his home. Back home for 4 days, he fled again for 3 weeks in August. Doors of his house were destroyed and almost everything stolen. The whole month of August he was not paid because he could not go to work.
3. Sindimwo Celestin: Religious teacher at Buhangura Monthly Meeting. He spent 2 weeks outside his home. Back home for 2 weeks but fled again in August for 3 weeks. Doors of his house destroyed, everything was stolen except some clothes that he fled with.
4. Moises Banderembako: Religious teacher at Nyarurambi Monthly Meeting. He has been fleeing since the beginning of July, sometimes at the communal office, and most of the time on hills or in the forest. Everything from his house has been stolen except some clothes he and his family fled with.

These four had asked THARS for some assistance. Felicity in particular was very concerned, but there were no funds in the budget (this is the money from the US Embassy grant) to pay for this kind of thing. Normally their neighbors would have helped them out, but of course their neighbors were in the same predicament. It was determined that an appropriate amount would be \$25 each--enough for them to buy some pots, mattress, blankets, etc. to get them started again. I proposed that I would collect this \$100 from the folks from overseas who were attending the Consultation. This I did with a \$10 maximum gift from each individual.

So on Friday we all went to the opening of the Listening Room at Cagura Church. This was perhaps 3 or 4 kilometers in from the Gitega-Ngozi road in an area with a lot of destruction due to the fighting (Mutaho town which had a large square and houses along the road is totally destroyed). What a celebration!!! I estimated that there were 1500 people present (half were children) while the pastor estimated 2500. Burundi drummers, the church choir, government officials including a representative from the local military camp, most of the trainees, pastors, guests, teachers, the Team, many from the church (the second largest Quaker church in Burundi with over 700 members). A loud speaker system hooked up to a car battery. The representative from the Governors' office and I cut the ribbon to a very nice listening room attached to the church. Two to three hundred people were fed after the opening. The listening room will be staffed by the trainees from Mutaho Quarterly Meeting (and the General Secretary of Mutaho Quarter asked that about six or seven more listening rooms be opened in churches in his quarter). People can come for counseling on Wednesday and Friday without appointments and other days with appointments.