

# **Making Peace in Kibimba**

## **Healing and Peacemaking in Burundi**

By **Aloyse Ningabira**, Vice-Chairman, Kibimba Peace Committee  
and **Rosalie Dance**, Member of the Working Group, African Great Lakes Initiative  
with narrative assistance from

Anne-Marie Hakizimana, Josephine Nyambikiye, Matthias Ndimurwanko, and Melance Ntahompagaze  
and technical assistance from Joyce Abarbanel, Emmanuel Nibaruta, and Janne Niyongere.

### **The Community of Kibimba: Geography and History**

Burundi's villages are distinguished by their location on hills, each village its own hill, or *colline* in French. Kibimba is a colline in the province of Gitega in Burundi. Because of its central location and the quite developed community infrastructure of Kibimba, the colline became a meeting place for villagers in surrounding communities. A hospital managed by the Friends Church of Burundi, a primary and secondary school, and a church constituted the social and religious institutions that established Kibimba as a significant place of ethnically mixed community interaction until the crisis of 1993.

Kibimba was recognized as a cultural centre for both arts and education. Many well known Burundian artists studied in Kibimba in addition to a significant number of the country's political and religious leaders which earned Kibimba's schools a national reputation.

In 1993, Kibimba suffered a tragic event that brought its name international recognition. The assassination of Burundi's president, elected only a few months earlier, was followed by genocidal massacres throughout most of Burundi, and Kibimba was not spared. At Kibimba, seventy secondary school students were taken to a gas station and burned alive. The retaliation and hostilities that ensued brought regular life at Kibimba to a halt. The lives of the general population were jeopardized as Kibimba became a battleground between the army and rebel groups. The schools and the hospital closed as people could no longer safely access them and the secondary school became the centre for a displaced camp regrouping people from Kibimba and the bordering communes. With the creation of a displaced persons camp, the colline of Kibimba became divided into two separate areas: the displaced camp on one side and the hospital and church on the other. Kibimba thus became characterized by a spirit of hatred and vengeance and was known for its volatile nature. The events at Kibimba, however, mirrored the larger politics of Burundi during this period.

### **Formation of Kibimba Peace Committee**

In early 1994, the Kibimba hospital resumed its work with the support of a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer. It offered services to persons of all ethnic groups. However, there was so much suspicion and fear among the people that the reopening of the hospital actually served to increase tensions between the displaced camp and the hospital. The displaced people (mostly Tutsi) were afraid to return to their home villages, and Hutus refused to frequent Kibimba even to go to the hospital. To address these tensions, representatives of the hospital including Susan Seitz (MCC volunteer nurse), with the Chief of the displaced camp, Matthias Ndimurwanko, took the initiative to organize a committee whose aim would be to address the situation of conflict at Kibimba and explore how to rebuild trust and peaceful cohabitation in the area. An organizing committee was hence formed consisting of 10 Burundians made up of equal numbers of both ethnic groups. Matthias, who played a key role in the establishment of this committee, was the former director of the primary school and had narrowly escaped death in the Kibimba gas station tragedy, yet remained a strong advocate for peace and cohabitation. As Chief of the displaced camp, Matthias continued to earn the reputation of community leader.

The organizing committee invited local administrators, chiefs of surrounding collines and sous-collines, leaders of the displaced camp, the hospital, and the primary school to meetings where they posed the basic question: How can we live together again in this community of Kibimba? Ideas were generated and meetings became more frequent and more consistent leading to the creation of a Peace Committee comprised of 70 members most of whom played leadership roles in their communities. The original committee of organizers was altered to include women. By then it included people from the collines within a 12 km radius around Kibimba.

The Kibimba Peace Committee was officially formed the 6th of December 1994. Matthias Ndimurwanko was elected its president, a position he still holds today (2003).

### **Kibimba Peace Committee's Vision**

The Peace Committee was to promote peaceful cohabitation and to restore community life. Its vision has gradually enlarged to include not only a perspective of reconciliation and the rebuilding of relationships but to address broader security issues and social and development projects aimed at improving the economic well being of the community.

Objectives. The central objectives that guide the work of the Kibimba Peace Committee are:

1. To increase the security of community members.
2. To foster a spirit of trust and cooperation between people of different ethnic groups.
3. To rebuild the infrastructure of the colline (religious, social, economic, and political).
4. To improve the economic well-being of the community.
5. To become proactive at the community level in addressing issues related to group violence and other criminal activities.
6. To improve communication between civilians, the military and local administrators in Kibimba and the surrounding areas.
7. To create spaces for exchange.
8. To reframe the community in a positive way, especially with women's projects and youth sports activities.

### **Re-opening Kibimba's Schools**

The first concrete project of the Kibimba Peace Committee that brought people together consisted in reopening the primary school December 6th of 1994. Matthias reassumed his position as director and hired teachers of varying ethnic origin, encouraging them to continue working together despite outside pressure. In order to get students to attend the newly opened school, peace committee members personally visited homes and encouraged parents to send their children to school. The reopening of the school was a significant step forward in the promotion of peace and reconciliation in that it united children and teachers of all ethnic groups and brought together parents around a common cause at various school meetings. Peace education is taught in the primary school.

On July 31 and August 6, 2003, Rosalie Dance interviewed Matthias Ndimurwanko at Kibimba at a workcamp to rebuild houses destroyed in the crisis for people who had been displaced from their homes for many years. One of the five houses rebuilt by the workcamp was his. What follows is excerpted from the interview:

*The Kibimba Peace Committee began 6 December 1994, in the crisis. I was among the people who met the problem in 1993. Many people were together; many died. I was with them, but God saved me. Later, in 1994, I was with a certain mzungu named Susan. We made the Peace Committee together. Susan came to the camp where I was to tell me what she wanted to try to do and to discuss it with me. We planned together.*

*The object was to bring people together to dialogue. The Committee had Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. Before the Peace Committee began, there were no meetings in churches or elsewhere, the market was closed, and so were the schools.*

*I said that the first thing we should do was to open the primary school, and that is what we did. All children, Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa came to the primary school when we opened it, although at first they were few because the people did not trust each other. At first, the children who came feared each other. They fought, and they threw stones at each other. But I was able (as headmaster of the school) to talk to them and to help them learn to treat each other well and be friends. Before long, the number of children in the school doubled.*

*A second thing that I organized was to bring people who lived in their homes to visit people living in the Displaced Persons camp. This helped us to build friendship and trust. We began to organize seminars concerning peace. We were together in the seminars with all of the people and with soldiers from both sides. People came to the Kibimba Peace Committee meetings from Giheta Commune in Gitega Province, from Bugendana Commune in Gitega Province, from Rutegama Commune in Muramvya Province, and from Ndava Commune in Mwaro Province. Others came from the Internal Displaced Persons camp. There were men, women and youth. We organized a department for sports and a department for women; then the women organized the Mat Project. These activities helped us to make peace.*

*When trouble came again, the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa fled together to Kibimba,*

*After that, we began to think about how to re-open Kibimba Secondary School. We organized meetings and wrote letters to the Ministry of Education. We opened the school in 1999. One reason this was so important was that without a secondary school in Kibimba, students who graduated from Kibimba primary school were required to attend schools in areas not considered safe. Permission was granted and Kibimba Secondary School reopened. Today it has 200 students.*

*Before the secondary school opened, while I was organizing a project to build two classrooms at the Primary School, they were looking for me to kill me. I knew this, but I was not deterred. One day while our people were bringing bricks from Tagama for the classroom buildings, they were stopped on the road by bandits who searched the car they were traveling in, but I was not in the car. The people traveling in the car were told that it was I they were looking for. The reason that I was a target is that I was chief of the IDP camp and I was organizing the Peace Committee and bringing people together. I still have a letter they sent to me informing me that they intended to kill me.*

*There was a second case. At the end of each month, a car would come to the camp to take me to Gitega to the bank to do the camp's banking. But on one occasion, I stayed at the camp; others went to do the banking. The car was stopped. The people fled from the car, and people with guns chased them. They caught the Headmaster from another primary school who had been in the car, thinking he was Matthias. They said to him, "But aren't you Matthias?" and demanded to see his identity card, but they found that he was not the man they were looking for. They let him go, but they told him that if he had been me, they would have killed him.*

*From these two events, I can say that God loves me so much.*

*These are my wishes for the future:*

- *To expand the Peace Committee's work to include other communes so that the whole region has peace.*

- *To multiply our peace meetings.*
- *To dialogue with people who have fled the country and with those who are returning.*
- *To organize projects so that people will work together.*
- *For the Women's project to be able to meet with other women in other countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.*

*The Kibimba Peace Committee has never met with people in other countries. People from Rwanda came here, but we never went there. No one from the Peace Committee has gone out of the country to seek knowledge; we need to do so. Yes, Aloys has gone to Kenya, but it is for the church. We want someone to go from the Committee. In the Peace Committee, we are all the religions, Catholics, Protestants, Friends, "pagan". Our object is to bring people together in peace, all people. We do not want to bring people from just one church.*

*I was formerly a Catholic, but now I am a Quaker. Just yesterday, I was invited by the Catholic church in Gitega to discuss peace matters. We want to take our testimony for peace to others.*

Note: Following this interview, Matthias and Josephine Nyambikiye were invited to go to Rwanda for an African Friends Consultation on Peacemaking, but they were unable to go because they were unable to get travel documents in time. They may be able to attend a similar consultation next April in Kaimosi, Kenya.

### **Kibimba Hospital and the Amohoro Restaurant**

In 1995, the Peace Committee raised the issue that suspicion and fear created a situation that resulted in the hospital serving one part of the population only. A suggestion was put forth that the hospital open a restaurant under the direction of a foreigner. The Peace Committee asked for an MCC volunteer to manage the restaurant. Once MCC agreed, the Peace Committee opened the Amohoro (Peace) Restaurant at the hospital and then encouraged all local people to frequent it. During this period, buying food anywhere was a problem because people feared being poisoned. The presence of an expatriate at the restaurant contributed to the fostering of trust, a trust which was eventually transferred to the hospital itself. The restaurant became a focal point where community members met, lingered, and eventually spoke to one another.

### **Sports and Reconciliation**

The Peace Committee then initiated the creation of a sports club of about 60 youth from the area. The objective of a sports club was twofold. First, it addressed the increasing social problems involving youth. Young adults with time on their hands and little to do could easily be recruited by groups ready to exploit them. Daily sports practices organized the youth around activity that they truly enjoyed. The competitive games became a forum for peace and reconciliation messages and avenues for players as well as spectators to meet and dialogue.

The sports club meets three times a week for practices. Competitions are organized between strategically chosen teams. The sports club soccer teams are made up of both Hutu and Tutsi players and they play against teams from other regions, as well as local military teams or other local administration. Besides being fun for the youth and bringing players together who had before lived in fear of one another, a diverse group of spectators gathers to cheer integrated teams rather than ethnic identified groups. Following these soccer matches, peace committee members serve refreshments and give a 'teach piece' on conflict resolution to all present.

Melance Ntahompagaze is Sports Organizer as well as Secretary of the Peace Committee. Rosalie interviewed Melance on July 30 and August 4, 2003, at the workcamp in Kibimba. Melance was a member of the Workcamp. Excerpts from the interview follow:

*This story takes place over 10 years of my life. I was there, at the beginning of the crisis. At first, it was mainly Tutsi people who died. I am Tutsi, and I was one of those chosen to die. In the second stage of the crisis, it was Hutu people who died. This was revenge. Because of that, I had to do something.*

*In the first part of the crisis, Hutu people hid me. It would have been difficult to save my life if those from the other side had not given me help. Thus, in the revenge, the second stage of the crisis, I had to do something because I must have something in my heart.*

*My first act was this. I work in the hospital. There was also a Hutu man working there who had participated in the killing. This Hutu man knew that he would be named to be killed. When he was named, I knew about it and warned him and helped him to escape. Many were astonished by this act. They asked how I could find the love to protect a man who had killed many people in my family?*

*Where I was born, Ndava commune, Hutu and Tutsi have kept their neighborly relationship and their friendships. Tutsis, my people, began to say that all Hutus are criminals. But I spoke out, I told all the people where I live that Hutu from our home place have never killed anyone. Many people have come since then to thank me because no Hutu was killed there during the crisis.*

*On December 6, 1994, when we began the Peace Committee, it was difficult. People hated and feared one another. There were few of us at first who would attend the Peace Committee meetings where we talked about how we could do something, how we could organize meetings, how we could help neighbors to have good relationships. Some came to the meetings, but at first there was no understanding between people. We tried very hard to explain that it is bad to give bad words to others (speak ill of others). Now there is understanding between the people, and we work together to rebuild our Hutu and Tutsi community and to include the Twa.*

*I will tell you what is happening now because now there are good relations between the people. People organize meetings together and work together. I am secretary of the Kibimba Peace Committee. If someone wants to ask about the meetings, I go to tell them what we do and why. People tell me what they need, and I relate this to the Peace Committee. People are thankful for what the Peace Committee does.*

- *People get counseling by coming to our committee.*
- *We help to re-construct the houses; we did 6 before you came for the workcamp (3 for families from the Internal Displaced Persons camp and 3 from here).*
- *We help people who are coming back from other countries where they fled from the crisis. We will continue to build houses for people in the camp and for families who return from other countries. We cannot build in the rainy season, though; the rains begin in September.*
- *We have 7 cows that we share. Many people lost all their cows and goats in the crisis. We have 7 that live at different people's houses. They give milk and fertilizer for the family who cares for them. When a cow has a calf, we give it to another member.*
- *We have 21 goats. We give one goat to one family. If there is a new goat born to a goat in a Hutu family, they give it to a Tutsi family. If there is a new goat born to a goat in a Tutsi family, they give it to a Hutu family.*

*We wish we could get help to have more goats and cows. We want to sell goats to get money for things like paper and pens. Something else we need very much is books for teaching people about peace. People who come to the Peace Committee house need to be able to read about making peace. They can be in French or Kirundi. It is important.*

### **Mats for Peace and Prosperity**

In 1998, women were finally given a more prominent place in Kibimba Peace Committee. Until then the committee's focus had been ethnic conflict with little attention paid to balanced gender representation. In 1998 women were included in the overall structure of the Peace Committee (three of the ten person organizing committee were replaced by women, and 2 women from every colline attended the 75 person peace committee). Placing women in leadership roles led to the promotion of projects specifically targeted for women. In 1998 a straw mat project was initiated to gather women of diverse backgrounds and provide an opportunity for them to dialogue informally. Once a week women from the area met to make mats and slowly they began to develop friendships. The women's Mat Project evolved into an income generating activity with a peace building component. The mats were sold to Christian Aid for distribution in displaced camps, hospitals, and to people whose homes had been pillaged. Women involved in the Peace Committee began to support other women from the villages organizing visits, bringing them food, and accompanying them on their journeys into villages. These acts of 'encouragement' served to build relationships between women. Later, strengthened in their sensitivity and commitment to one another, women of the Peace Committee deemed it important to begin a literacy and peace education club for women.

Josephine Nyambikiye and Anne-Marie Hakizimana are members of the Peace Committee. Rosalie spent many hours talking with Josephine and Anne-Marie between July 28 and August 8 at the Kibimba work camp. Some of what they told her follows:

*In 1993, Anne-Marie Hakizimana, a Tutsi woman, sought refuge in Kibimba Friends Church from the fighting. Josephine Nyambikiye, a Hutu woman who was later to become Anne-Marie's dear friend, later had to flee to the mountains. In the church, people were being protected by the Tutsi army; Josephine would not have been safe there. These two women who later became close friends but did not yet know each other then, were from ethnic groups at war with each other.*

*Anne-Marie stayed for 3 years in the church in Kibimba and then 8 years in the Internal Displaced Persons camp. One day she went to a house where people spoke of wanting to change their thinking. In this meeting, it was decided that the mothers would be together, Tutsi and Hutu, to speak of how to work together to build their community and to build Burundi.*

*Susan Seitz, MCC volunteer and the head nurse at Kibimba Hospital who had helped Matthias plan the origins of Peace Committee, was the person who went to each group, the Hutu mothers and the Tutsi mothers, to suggest that they should come together. But once they were together, they realized that they were alike, that they had nothing to fear from each other, and they began to plan how they could help each other to rebuild their country.*

*Josephine, now Anne-Marie's very close friend, ran to the mountain in the crisis, although she did not feel safe there either and there was not enough food for all the people who fled there. She lived in the mountains for three years. But after Hutu women from Kibimba had lived two years in the mountain, then came the time that Susan went to the Tutsi people and helped them to seriously seek ways to make peace. Information about the people who wanted to make peace was passed by the churches. In this way, the information reached Josephine. She decided to come back to Kibimba to work with these people.*

*When Josephine arrived, she found that Kibimba Hospital was caring for the people, and she knew some of the workers there. She went to converse with them, and because of this she was not fearful about returning. But she did not stay in Kibimba; they had not built enough trust for that. The Hutu women came for the meetings, but returned to the mountains when the meetings were*

over. In the mountains, they did not have food, but they felt safer there, even though they had to go to their fields at night to take food.

At first, only a few women, possibly 100, came down from the mountain for the meetings with Tutsi women about peace, but after each meeting, the women who came told others; then more and more came, and then more.

At first, it was very difficult for Josephine to feel trust in the Tutsi women. All the Tutsi women sat on one side of the meeting, together; the Hutu women sat on the other side, and Susan stood between them, trying to explain the importance of peace in terms of availability of food. Tutsis in town needed certain foods from the mountain but could not safely go. Hutus in the mountains needed food from the fields but had to look for it after dark when often it was gone. If they could build peace and trust each other, Susan pointed out, it would be better for both. The women knew that the Hutu and Tutsi men had already begun to trust each other in the Kibimba Peace Committee. This knowledge helped them gain the courage to trust each other. In time, the groups moved closer together, closer, closer, and then truly came to sit together in the meetings.

Susan proposed two actions to the women. She proposed that they should choose representatives in the mountain and in town. There were 6 collines. For each colline two representatives were chosen, one Hutu and one Tutsi. Josephine was chosen as the Hutu representative from Kaguhu; she was also chosen to be the chief Hutu mother responsible for all the collines. Anne-Marie was chosen as the chief Tutsi mother, responsible for all the collines. These two women became leaders of the movement for making peace. Second, Susan proposed the mat making project. The object of the Mat Project was to have people working together. Because they would sell the mats, they were also able to get credit so that they could buy what they needed; when the mats were sold there would be money to repay. However, the real object of the Mat Project was not the money, although it was important, but to have Tutsi women and Hutu women working together. Although the project does not go on as before because of the funding for materials and lack of a good place to work, the women continue to make mats now, together, in their houses.

The Mat Project had importance beyond the needs of the women who made them. There were few mats left for use on people's floors to sleep on or for other uses because everything had been destroyed in the crisis. Mats are important in Burundi village homes. They are used for sleeping, for sitting, for preparing food (a place to put rice or beans while removing the stones), to care for an ill person, and, very importantly, to wrap a body after death. Together, Tutsi mothers and Hutu mothers made the mats to supply this need of all the people. Susan bought the mats (through Christian Aid) from the women and gave them to whoever needed them, no matter whether they were Hutu or Tutsi or Twa, but especially to the people living in the Displaced Persons Camps. Income from the mats allowed the women to buy clothing, school fees for the children, and medicines.

There are 229 mothers now, half Hutu, half Tutsi. By January 1999, the original material for the mats was used up and they have never since had money to buy enough to continue the mat project in the way it was intended, with all of the women working together. More critical, after Kibimba Friends Church was restored for use as a church, there was no longer a place where all the women could come together for their three important activities: mat making, embroidery, and leadership training. Note: Following these interviews, the headmaster of Kibimba Secondary School agreed to permit the women to use a classroom at the school for their projects and to use the school hall for their meetings, causing much joy among the women.

Now the women would like to move toward keeping cows and goats to help each other. Already they have 24 goats. 4 goats are kept by one "mother" on each of six collines; the group of 4 goats

*is moved from house to house to take care of them. While they are with a mother, they can supply milk and fertilizer in exchange for their care.*

*Josephine and Anne-Marie say the Women's Association of the Peace Committee would like to*

- continue to make mats; these are very important for families*
- have a machine with which to grind maize and cassava, which they could then sell*
- have sewing machines so they could stitch clothing*
- hold seminars for women where they could learn about others' ideas.*

*Anne-Marie says that after the crisis and before they began the mat-making activity, she viewed Hutu women as the enemy, but when they began to work together, she saw them instead as friends. It is especially pleasing to her to be able to visit her friend Josephine in her home and to talk with her about the work of the "mothers."*

*Anne-Marie still lives in the Displaced Persons Camp. She has 7 children, all with her now, all daughters. Their ages range from 28-year-old twins down to an 18-year-old. One of the twins will complete the last year of secondary school this year and expects then to become a primary school teacher. The other twin has four more years of secondary school. The next daughter is in school learning to sew, two others are in primary school, and the youngest, Jacqueline has three more years of secondary school.*

*Anne-Marie and her youngest daughter, Jacqueline, were both members of the Kibimba Peace Committee's workcamp in July/August 2003 building 5 houses for families from the Displaced Persons camps whose houses were destroyed in the crisis. Anne-Marie astonished people by carrying large quantities of bricks and dongo, singing while she worked, joyful at seeing the walls rise.*

*In 1996, Josephine came back to live at Kaguhu, her former home, three years after the crisis and one year after the start of the meetings of Hutu and Tutsi women together. But then in late 1996 and 1997, robbers came; and then soldiers with guns looking for the robbers. This time, they ran to Kibimba. They had learned how to be together, Tutsi, Hutu and Twa; they had learned how to love one another. If they flee, they flee together. They were able to do this because of the safety of the friendship between the Tutsi women and the Hutu women.*

*The Tutsi soldiers protected only the Tutsis from the robbers. They would kill Hutu people because, they said, "These robbers are your sons." Now the soldiers have changed, and they treat others with civility. Now they do not kill peasants. However, Josephine does not feel confident that this will remain so; she fears that if the army, which is perhaps 96% Tutsi, begins to suffer casualties, that is, if Tutsi men are killed, they may once again begin to slaughter Hutu people.*

*Like Anne-Marie, Josephine has 7 children. She has 5 girls and 2 boys. The eldest is 24 and now a married woman. The second is a handicapped girl of 22 who had given up her studies but now is trying again. The third girl is a student at university. Her 18 year old son and 16 year old daughter both have problems with their eyes that make studying difficult, but after resting from schooling, both hope to be able to continue. The 14 year old girl has not attended school because of her experiences in the war. The youngest is a boy of 12 who has just finished primary school. Both Josephine and her 16 year-old daughter Esperance are members of the house-building work camp.*

*The friendship that these two women have developed is known to all in the community. Everyone says that wherever one is, you will find the other. In this way, they are an example of how we can*

overcome our distrust of people from another group and even work together to give leadership to causes that are important to all of us.

### **Esperance and Jacqueline**

Esperance is the daughter of Josephine, and Jacqueline is the daughter of Anne-Marie. Both of these young women participated in the workcamp with their mothers, helping to build the five houses. Rosalie spoke with them to try to understand what the experience of the crisis and its aftermath has been like for children. Esperance was 6 years old in 1993 (now 16); Jacqueline was 8 (now 18).

*R: Esperance, how did you feel when you had to run to the mountains?*

*E: I felt very bad. I had great fear that we would be killed by Tutsi. We ran far from our homes. We came back during the nights to get food from the fields because during the day we thought we would be killed. But sometimes when we came at night we would find nothing because it had all been taken.*

*R: Jacqueline, how did you feel when you had to run to the church for refuge?*

*J: I felt very bad. If I saw someone Hutu, I thought they would want to kill all Tutsis. We stayed at the refugee camp and we could not return to our homes for food. We were very hungry.*

*R: Esperance, when your mother began to attend the peace meetings with the Tutsi women, how did you feel, what did you think?*

*E: I was very interested! When my mother went back to meet with other women, it made me hope that one day we would get peace.*

*R: Jacqueline, when your mother began to attend the peace meetings with the Hutu women, how did you feel, what did you think?*

*J: When I was at home and my mother went to the peace meetings and I heard that Hutus were together with Tutsis in the meetings, then I could hope for peace one day.*

*R: When your mothers were elected to be the chief representatives of the women from your people, how did you feel?*

*E: I received that news very well because I believed that my mother could help make peace.*

*J: In my head, Hutu and Tutsi could not be together after the crisis. But when I saw my mother and the others together, it gave me much hope.*

*R: Where do you live now?*

*J: We live now in the Displaced Persons camp. Our former home is now forest. (It was completely destroyed.)*

*E: My family lives in the home where we lived before the crisis. One small part of the house was damaged, but it is mostly good. When we moved back to our home, I was very happy. When we were in the mountain, we were hungry and sad. I was so happy to come back.*

*J: I want the projects for peace to continue. I want to help people to be together. With peace, we can continue our studies and do all the activities of life.*

*E: Things like this workcamp are very important. I want to learn more and I want to study and make a difference.*

*R: What do you want to do in time, eventually?*

*E. I want to live an example of peace, and I want to teach peace to others in the region.*

*J: Yes, that is what we want to do; I, like Esperance.*

### **Continuing to Work for Peace**

The Peace Committee from its inception to present has devised and implemented strategies aimed at guaranteeing the security of the population in the Kibimba region. The Peace Committee succeeded in discouraging the population from supporting rebel activities and were successful in their efforts to promote community collaboration in other concerns over security issues. When communities heard rumors of rebel passages they would warn others in the surrounding area, or together the population would pack up and leave their villages finding safety in neighboring communes. In this way the population was able to avoid the cross fire between military and rebel groups. This 'passive resistance' signaled to rebel groups their lack of support. Once the population stopped accommodating rebel passage way through the area, they became targets for angry reprisals and even torture. However, they have been able to maintain their peace by mutual support.

Another activity of the Peace Committee that greatly influenced the realm of security was that peace committee members became advocates for individuals unjustly imprisoned. The testimonies of people from another ethnic group had a significant impact during one's trial. Several individuals were liberated from prison due to the support of peace committee members.

As confidence in the Peace Committee grew, villagers asked the peace committee members to take care of their animals. Often during rebel infiltrations, livestock were stolen or killed. The Peace Committee became responsible for guarding the safety of the livestock of all their members and members of the population. This led ultimately to the Peace Committee's livestock project which helps to finance their activities and provides a means of supporting its poorer members. They now own a few cows, a bull, and a small herd of goats. The objective was to distribute at least one female goat to peace committee members which they could breed. Each member signed an agreement to pass on the first and third kid to a family from the other ethnic group in their respective communities. Unfortunately, many of the newborn kids do not survive due to illness and malnutrition, slowing down this dimension of economic development.

Theatre has been an effective means of sharing peace messages in Burundi. In 1995, the Kibimba Peace Committee asked Mennonite Central Committee for formal training in peace education. Inspired by these workshops, the Peace Committee began a theatre group. They wrote, directed, and performed plays on forgiveness and reconciliation in Bujumbura, Nyabihanga, Musama, and surrounding communes. Each performance was followed by a three day workshop and dialogue process involving groups of mixed ethnicity. The plays and the workshops were well received. The theatre group eventually ceased its work because of having no means of transportation.

A significant contribution from Mennonite Central Committee is training for teachers of Kibimba's schools in conflict resolution skills and working to develop with them a curriculum adapted for Burundi.

Today Kibimba Peace Committee has 250 members from 8 collines. Each colline is represented on its Organizing Committee by 6 persons (2 Hutu men, 1 Hutu woman, 2 Tutsi men and 1 Tutsi woman) as well as commanders and sub-commanders of the military, church leaders, and administrative authorities. It has representatives from all social levels and political organizations,

and all racial and gender groups.

Organizers walk to the surrounding communities two Saturdays per month in order to gather news and distribute the meeting summaries. In addition to the regular monthly meetings, the organizing committee can also convene emergency meetings depending on the security situation. In both regular and emergency meetings, members analyze security issues and work out plans for preventative action. In these meetings participants develop peace building initiatives, explore and plan development and income-generating projects. Kibimba Peace Committee has become a forum for sharing ideas and reflecting on the future of their communities. A report of each meeting is produced and made available to the general public in the participating collines.

### **Overview of the Peace Committee's Impact**

Security. The Peace Committee made marked improvement in the security of the region. In the past, rebel passage caused havoc as the military shot indiscriminately and vengefully, not able to distinguish the 'enemy' from the population. The population and the military were thus divided and confrontations that ensued were destructive. Now because the military are included in the peace committee, in the football matches and in other activities, they have come to know and recognize community members. Soldiers who once shot young men on suspicion of criminal activity can now distinguish strangers from community members. Most notable is the decrease in support of rebels. Through communal meetings to share information, evacuating communities when there is a rebel passage and protecting livestock in a central enclosed area, rebel activities have virtually ceased within the area the Peace Committee serves. Similarly, recruitment of young boys to fight has been avoided. The youth sports program has brought in many young people and channeled their energies more constructively. This has led to a decrease in theft and other criminal activities.

Conflict resolution workshops and projects aimed at bringing community members together to dialogue have not only been successful in re-framing the community by organizing its members around a common interest, but have contributed to the transformation of perceptions of the different ethnic groups. For example, young Hutu men once thought by non-Hutu to all be rebels are otherwise perceived. Perceptions of the military have also changed. As a result of involving the military in meetings addressing security concerns and including them in the alternative dispute resolution training sessions, the Kibimba area is experiencing less military violence against the population. A recent development has been that the military have approached the Peace Committee asking for assistance in facilitating discussions between themselves, administration, and rebel groups. The Peace Committee's projects designed to bring the population together have been successful; they have diminished mutual suspicion replacing it with trust and a desire to collaborate. Relationship building enterprises and reinvesting in equal education have contributed much to the peace and security of the area surrounding Kibimba.

Community. There has been notable improvement in inter-ethnic relationships within the community that is evident from the level of participation in community projects. The hospital is a trusted institution which continues to offer services without ethnic discrimination. The ongoing collaboration between teachers, parents, administrators, and students in the primary school and secondary school is another testimony of the willingness for peaceful cohabitation and community development. The peace football tournaments, the women's mat making project, and the organizing of community actions in response to rebel passages, have all contributed to fostering a renewed trust and willingness to work together in the rebuilding of the community. This collaboration grows out of the ethnically mixed composition of the peace committee. Integration can also be seen in community celebrations and mixed marriages. The Peace Committee has been able to bring the community together around shared interests of security, community development and economic development.

The Kibimba Peace Committee has also been instrumental in facilitating the return of the inhabitants of the displaced camp to their native villages. Many of the individuals and families still living in the displaced camp at Kibimba remain there for lack of resources to rebuild their homes. Many of the persons remaining in the displaced camp are widowed women and their children.

Economic recovery. The impact indicators for economic development are probably the least clear, partly due to the limited financial resources that the committee has for economic development projects and also because most of its development projects are in their infancy. The women's mat making project generated some additional income for the community, and the Peace Committee is able to bring in some revenue by renting out their bull. These profits serve barely to support their own functioning. Indirectly, all of the Peace Committee's projects have an economic impact on the community in the sense that rebuilding and strengthening social and political institutions is basic to the economic well being of a community. For example, increased security in the Kibimba region has meant that people can cultivate their fields without fear and could open small boutiques.

The courage and resourcefulness of the Kibimba Peace Committee to initiate and persist with peace and reconciliation work, at times in extremely dangerous and challenging circumstances, provides living example of much that we try to live by.

They have spoken truth to power.

They have sought that of God in others and reached out to them as brothers and sisters.

They have lived peace.

*The African Great Lakes Initiative, a Friends Peace Teams project, partially funded the rebuilding of 5 houses for people from the Internal Displaced Persons Camp by Kibimba Peace Committee and AGLI workcampers. But most of Kibimba Peace Committee initiatives and projects have been realized with no outside funding. The committee has a firmly established and respected community structure with a vision for the future. In order to increase the scope and impact of its activities, the peace committee is in need of additional funding.*

To contribute to the work of the African Great Lakes Initiative's work in Burundi, please make checks payable to *Friends Peace Teams* and send the check to

David Zarembka  
African Great Lakes Initiative  
3031 Laclede Station Road  
St. Louis, MO 63143 USA