

Dictated: Goma, Zaire, Africa -- September 7 (Wednesday, 11:45 PM)

First Day with the Refugees

Greetings, dear friends, from Goma, where there are over one million Hutu, Rwandan refugees...the very people who slaughtered 500,000 Tutsi fellow countrymen. Our team of 16 arrived late Tuesday afternoon after being delayed one day in Kinshasa, the capitol city of Zaire, which is on the western side of the country. Goma is on the eastern side bordering Rwanda. This delay, however, was ordained by God as we (Team 4) overlapped the departure of Team 3 and were able to have a day of orientation with them before replacing them. They answered many of our questions and helped prepare us for the work we were about to begin today, Wednesday, September 7.

A team of four doctors, seven nurses and paramedics, an interpreter, a CBN film team of three, and I make up the team of 16. Dr. Leon Greene of Seattle is the Medical Coordinator. We asked Dr. Doug McDonald of Seattle to lead a team today working in a makeshift tent hospital at one of the refugee camps with over 200,000 people. Since we have divided our team into three, we put a second team to work with Doug because of the massive amount of work. There is also a team of three, led by Dr. Christopher Carlson of Minneapolis, working in the government-run Goma Hospital.

Even though the day's activities were planned well and the day was extremely successful, things were quite hectic from time to time. We had to deal with such things as running short of medicines, not having proper equipment, vehicles not arriving on time, and a huge downpour late in the afternoon. We also had to struggle with the incredible emotional impact of seeing hundreds of children and adults with tremendous physical...as well as spiritual needs. (Did I say hundreds? I should have said thousands.)

The Operation Blessing (CBN) man in Goma is Andre Valentine. Andre has been a tremendous help to the team logistically, and we certainly could not have even begun to get involved with the needs so quickly without his previous preparation. We have also been able to build on the work of previous teams, especially Teams 2 and 3, and on Operation Blessing's specific ministries that they have started. This is namely the field hospital/clinic, which consists of one major tent which will hold about ten stretchers and two smaller tents for interviewing patients for diagnosis. Two local school classrooms are used to keep patients for a longer period of time.

I spent the better part of the day getting the teams situated and then running all over the city with Andre trying to find the equipment, obtaining a tent, blanket and plastic coverings, and begging for food, etc. In the midst of the rain Andre and I (believe it or not) were able to put up a large Dutch military tent which will hold 20 to 30 more patients on stretchers. This was quite an undertaking, as neither Andre nor I knew how to fit all of the braces together, as they were so complicated. But we simply committed it to God and asked for His wisdom. So with the help of about 1000 refugees (really only about 30) we were able to get the tent up in about an hour and a half. I got soaked and filthy but ended up rejoicing with the Rwandans. (Of course, I would have to get a smashed thumb out of the deal.)

Late this afternoon we delivered three very sickly abandoned orphans to an orphanage, and a very sick lady to the French Military Hospital. They said they would treat her as we were not able to handle some major surgery she needed. Our nurses took care of several babies today at the hospital. Since they did not have bottles to feed the babies with, they took rubber gloves, filled them with milk, and stuck holes in the fingers so the baby could suck. Tomorrow we will be looking for bottles, but believe it or not, even with an estimated 80,000 refugees including 10,000 to 20,000 little babies, it seems no relief agency has brought bottles for feeding them. I thought for sure we would have evangelistic literature such as gospel booklets and tracts, and

especially New Testaments in French; but none of this is available either. Yet the Christian refugees, several of whom are working with Operation Blessing, are begging us to get these because there is such a hunger for the Word of God!

I was able to phone Margaret today on a cell phone owned by Operation Blessing. I asked her to get in touch with the main office in Virginia Beach with the whole list of items for Team 5 to bring or to send with the people who join our team later this week.

Children. We certainly praise the Lord that the situation in Goma is not nearly as bad as it was three weeks ago. For example, the daily death rate is down from 2000 to around 200-300. There seems to be a fairly successful effort in getting food to those who really need it, as well as in putting a stop to the cholera epidemic and much of the dysentery. The huge problem lies in the massive number of unaccompanied children (they do not call them orphans). There is an estimate of as high as 200,000 orphans not only in the Goma area but also in other places such as Tanzania, etc. However, in the Goma area, there may be as few as 20,000, but some are estimating as high as 80,000.

Can you imagine what it was like my first day here? I took a team of three (one doctor, two nurses) to assist in an orphanage with 2500 children (possibly 750 under the age of three). Imagine walking into a room with plastic on the floor filled with 25 little children between 10 and 18 months, all naked, sitting or standing or walking around crying -- crying not so much with fear or hunger or pain, but with what seems like a "wail of hopelessness." I cried as I tried to hold and comfort as many as possible, pleading with God to show mercy to these little ones.

As I discussed this situation with other Christians and relief workers today, it again became apparent that there is a need for large Christian orphanages, camps and homes to each to handle 500 to 1000 children. In the Goma area alone, there could be at least 20 well-run homes, each with a minimum of 500. Would it be too much to ask 20 evangelical missions, with their vast experience, to take in at least 500 Rwandan orphans here in Goma?

There is so much land available. It would be so easy to develop well run, Godly, loving and Christ-honoring orphanages to care for these children. This is the only way to handle such a mass of needy ones. Many of these children will die for lack of loving care. They will especially lack the opportunity to hear and understand the glorious gospel of our Lord if we as evangelicals do not do something!

It is 12:45 AM and I really must close. I should have written this out instead of trying to dictate it, as I had to stop several times. As you can well imagine, it has been a very emotional day. However, I was greatly encouraged from the Word of God tonight as I shared with the team from Hebrews 12:1-3, especially the emphasis on "*fixing our eyes on Jesus*" and not on ourselves, or on the problems, or the difficulties, or the pain, the agony, death and destruction, or even our own emotions and lack of control of them, but simply "*fixing our eyes on Jesus.*" I was also blessed by the end of verse 3, that we should "*not grow weary and lose heart.*" All of this comes about as we fix our eyes on our Lord and "*consider Him.*"