

Halleluiah They're Free at Last!!

News from Hands Across Nations in Lira, Uganda

February 29, 2016



This week contained a night we will never forget unless our minds stop working. For over a year our team has been working in the Lira Main Prison, training teachers, and supporting the teachers and learners as they move on the fast track of "Learning to Read to Read the Bible". There were 5 male inmates who were part of our core teachers, 3 we knew exceptionally well because they were the coordinators of the last two groups of learner classes. They were Okaka, Alphonse, and Vincent. More recently, they have been part of a team who are writing an adult mathematics book to be used throughout the Lango Sub-Region, for all the Hands Across Nations (HAN) reading classes in the future. They are the innovators and the prison literacy classes are the testing ground. These 5 men and 6 others had been incarcerated almost 4 years waiting for their case to go through the process of prosecution, defense and judgment on an accusation of having been the ones who attacked and injured a man and his wife. All of those 5 had alibis to prove they were nowhere in the area. Most of them had been respected teachers in secondary school prior to their incarceration, and while in prison, had wholeheartedly given themselves to the work of teaching illiterate inmates who could not read and write. In recent weeks, it was clear that Alphonse was losing his mental grip on reality.

These 5 men have become dear to us as we have seen and experienced their heart for God and their fellow inmates. On Tuesday Feb 23rd, they went to court early in the morning for their judgment. All day, they sat waiting to be called forward to hear the verdict. Just a few weeks earlier our exceptional women's literacy coordinator, Florence and her son, Caesar, were convicted of hiring someone to shoot her brother in law and his mistress. There was no solid evidence against her, or Caesar, a nephew and 3 others convicted with them who were complete strangers to them. She was sentenced to an astounding 50 years of incarceration, Caesar to 10 years and the rest to 45 years. Florence has been moved to the Luzira prison in Kampala to serve her sentence, far away from all her loved ones. We continue to pray for her and the others, for God's intervention and mercy on them. This was surely running through our teachers' minds, as case after case was judged and the people sentenced or set free. At 8pm they were the only prisoners left in the courtroom, with their relatives and friends, including our lead teacher-trainer Peter (in the yellow reflecting jacket on the left in the photo above) and the Officer in Charge OC of the prison. She is a humble and caring person and felt as we did that these men were innocent.

Then.....about 9 pm, the verdict was pronounced.....innocent - all were acquitted! The place erupted in celebration, even the OC danced and cheered for them. We were there in minutes, celebrating with them and their very honorable attorney, Etum Levi. He humbly gave the credit to God. Hugging and cheering and crying, everyone was so exultant at their sudden independence. They walked out of the courtroom as free men. Okaka and Vincent's first statements to us were that the 5 teachers of the literacy program were definitely going to set up a school for their "women and old men" at home so they could learn how to read and write. Vincent said they are so thankful to God for the skills they now have, because of what they learned through the Hands Across Nations literacy training, which will help their whole community to come out of illiteracy and poverty. After the jubilation died down and the photos were taken, the men and family members squeezed and piled into the two vehicles available. Our Toyota rolled out with 11 onto the streets of Lira, windows down, everyone singing praises to the Lord over and over through the town to where they would sleep for the night. When we arrived, the first thing was a heartfelt prayer to God, thanking Him for His goodness and for the justice that they received that night.

As Keith and I dropped into bed, we expressed the deep emotions of thankfulness for being a part of something so extraordinary. There are some tough days when we feel like packing up and running back to our "America the Beautiful", because of the evil, poverty, and pain we see and deal with every day here in Uganda. And then.....there are these moments, when no mountain climb, or glistening powder day at the ski hill could hold a candle to the inexpressible gratefulness we experience at being chosen to touch the ones Jesus sees and cares for; those who are invisible to most of the world. There's nothing that compares to it, and we desire to stay, in the pursuit of "Sharing the Love of Christ in Practical Ways".

Keith and Carolyn Jones can be reached at: [keith.jones@handsacrossnations.com](mailto:keith.jones@handsacrossnations.com) or [carolyn.jones@handsacrossnations.com](mailto:carolyn.jones@handsacrossnations.com). If you should feel led to assist in funding their work in Uganda, donations can be sent to: Hands Across Nations, PO box 9048, Spokane, WA 99209