

Burundi Update for the Romsey Deanery Overseas Committee

Burundi continues to be in turmoil; the president has been sworn in for a third term but it hasn't been recognised by any of the major western powers, or even by the African Union. Many people have been shot dead, including the ex-Army chief and the Vice President and 100 people have been killed, murdered either by the Army or Government forces.

However, the human crisis is more desperate - there are now over 160,000 people who have fled the country, many of whom are from the churches and who we know. They have gone to Rwanda and Tanzania and now are in refugee camps where cholera and malaria is rife. Within the country, the economy had come to a standstill and many small businesses are simply folding. Many of the banks have closed and there is a great tension and concern across the whole country. The Anglican Church is maintaining a stance of peace and reconciliation and is not entering into the debate on the overt criticism of the Government. Many church leaders who have stayed have done so to seek to maintain a sense of peace.

This is no longer a tribal issue between Tutsis and Hutus but has gone down the political divide of pro- and anti-Government. Effectively a country which was growing into democracy has slid back into a dictatorship. Recently I met with one of the Anglican clergy from Bujumbura who is over in this country and seeking to do a Masters in Uganda. He is fiercely critical of the Government and is at a loss as to why western powers are not intervening - I have subsequently written to the Archbishop of Burundi and will take this up with Caroline Nokes, our local MP. There's no point in sending money at present to projects since we have no idea what is happening with the banking system. What our brothers and sisters need to know is that we are praying for them, that we are on their side and that there is a sense of "Do not be afraid, God is with us and will see us through this desperate, difficult time".

On a more positive note, Steve Muneza, the Archbishop's son who did a placement with us, is now in Durham. He has been given a House for Duty post and is hoping to begin PhD studies and his wife Christine who is also part of the parish here has a scholarship to do an education degree. Bishop Paul Butler has been wonderful in finding them help and support.

If you want to follow more about the situation in Burundi then if you simply type Burundi in the search engine of the BBC website then you get the best up-to-date news.

Tim Sledge, September 2015

