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REPORT ON THE CHRISTMAS 2016 CELEBRATION FOR SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEE WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN KOBOKO – UGANDA

Summary

The women who are mainly the victims of any conflicts understand better how wars and war related atrocities impact on people - loss of lives, properties, communities, sense of belonging and hopeless in a place which is not home. With this driving force and motivation, they brought together women and children from the host communities, churches, refugees, vulnerable people and the YWCD0 staff on the 27th December 2016 in the Peace Hall to celebrate Christmas amidst their pains and suffering, so as to encourage one another with words of wisdom and raise HOPE for these women and children in 2017.

Introduction

The **CHRISTMAS 2016 CELEBRATION** which was an initiative of Nyarilo Progressive Women Club (NPWC) of the Youth and Women Committee Development Organization (YWCD0) took place on the 27 December. The main aim of the celebration was to bring together South Sudanese refugee women and children, local community and church leaders, politicians, YWCD0 staff etc. in Koboko District. The conflict has displaced thousands of women and children who are currently resettled in Rhino Camp, Yumbe and Koboko District refugee settlements. But a great number of them settled in the urban centres of the district due to precarious and shortage of facilities including jobs and other income generating possibilities at the camps.

Initially about 200 people: 50 women, 100 children in including nationals, 25 religious, community and government leaders & 25 YWCD0 staff were invited. But over 350 people mainly children turned up.



Children sat on mats and papyrus mats as chairs were not enough and thus reserved for the adults.

The zeal to offer South Sudanese refugees in urban areas of Koboko District, Christmas 2016 celebration propelled the organizing members to embark on fundraising locally and internationally. Locally, a sum of 500,000 Ushs (five hundred thousand Ugandan shillings) equiv. to €131 was raised. While a sum of €500 equiv. to 1,722,312 (one million, seven hundred twenty two thousand, three hundred twelve Ushs) was received from the Netherlands. In total 2.222,312 Ushs (two million, two hundred twenty two thousand, three hundred twelve shillings) was raised for the event.

Though Gratitude and appreciation goes to initiators and YWCD0 for organizing such event in Koboko District paving way for a bigger one in December 2017, but **Credit and a Big Appreciation** goes to our sisters and brothers in the Netherlands. Through our partner organization, Support Trust for Africa Development (STAD) financially supported to call. Thank you all for putting smiles and laughter into these people's faces and for making this event possible. You showed indeed that Christmas is all about sharing and HOPE.

Program for 2016 X-mas Celebration

The organizing committee welcomed all invited guests into the Payote before the program started. This was intended to promote and create space for harmony for interaction, sharing information etc. among themselves. The Guests were later welcomed to the Peace Hall for the actual program of day.



The invited guests were directed to the Peace Hall by Mr. Khemis Ben Manoah (in blue shirt)

The program was officially opened with prayers at 1:00 pm. Followed by key note speeches ([see summary below](#)) by South Sudanese student intern at YWCD0, the women representative, religious representative, South Sudan women refugee representative, YWCVD0 and Guest of Honor.



Mats were spread on the floor for children to sit on. Mothers & some youth sat on plastic chairs in the Payote. Below are photos showing the delivery of speeches on the program



Intern student Khemis Ben Manoah



women representative Rose Leya



South Sudan refugee representative



YWCD0 coordinator, Mr. Ronald Baiga



Religious representative



Guest of Honor Prof. Stella Night

Entertainment

The entertainment program included the choir from Canaan protestant church who presented live gospel music. Two pieces of educative dramas on war and peace in Kakwa Language.



Canaan presenting a song

Young Doreen reciting a poem

Canaan performing a drama

Presentation of gifts

Gifts were presented to all women who attended the function. Each was given a half bar of soap and a packet of salt. Group beneficiaries were mothers, invited women, choir from Canaan protestant church and cooks. Gifts were presented by the acting program officer, the women representative, the Program Coordinator and the Guest of Honor. Children were given sweets and biscuits at the end of the function.



Photos showing the presentation of gifts to women and some youth from Canaan protestant church



Meals and refreshments

All guests and the children were served breakfast upon arrival to sustain them throughout the intended program as food was the last item on the program. The cooks prepared meat, chicken, fish, vegetables, rice and cassava flour (ugali) thick porridge. The committee was afraid that food would not be enough due to high turn up. But as God fed 5,000 people with 5 loafs of bread and 2 fish, YWCD0 was able to feed these people and had left over for them to take home. What a blessed event!



Serving food and sodas to some of the quests



The organizing committee tasked some women from the community to help in preparing food for the invited guests and well wishers. Their contribution was magnificent in the sense that they showed cooperation and cooked as expected. They prepared enough food and no one missed on that day. The women representative extended her appreciation by awarding each with a half bar of soap and a packet of salt, soda, food and other balance of items left.



Pictures of cooks receiving gifts from the women representative, Rose Leya



Games

The children were interested in watching films. But due to big number of the children, it became difficult to organize some specific activities for them. Thus most of them were running around playing netball and rubber ball in the compound. They had all the energy especially in the evening after eating. They all enjoyed the day and were so grateful to the organizers. A jubilant day to remember Christmas 2016 at YWCD0.



Young girls pose for a group photo prior playing netball on an open court.

Summary of the speeches

Speeches were delivered by the Master of Ceremony, the acting Program Officer, the women representative, Program Coordinator, a representative from the South Sudanese refugees and the Guest of Honor. The Local Council (LC) 1 chairperson was the only person who did not deliver a speech because of late arrival. She was not given any opportunity so that next time, guests/ speakers will come on time.

The South Sudanese Intern student and master of ceremony welcomed the guests and all the children. He gave an elaborate overview of the Christmas celebration, YWCD0 background, project activities, achievements and challenges encountered in 2016.

The second speaker was the women representative who introduced five respected women from the audience. She extended invitation to Canaan youth who presented the Christmas songs and performed drama and the young girl who recited the peace poet. She said, Christmas is about family, love, sharing and HOPE. She talked about sufferings, destructions and social fabric, communities, families' etc destructions and being torn apart due to wars and poverty. She continued to say that in all these, there is resilience and HOPE. She called upon all people from all back grounds to stop the circle of violence, forgive each and start reconciliation for healing to take place so that people can try to live together as before.

The South Sudanese female representative was grateful to the organizers of the event for bringing people together. She praised Mama Rose Leya, the women representative, YWCD0 for initiating the idea and playing a crucial role in uniting them and the capacity building of especially the women in many areas. She was particularly happy with the Adult Literacy program that shaped their knowledge and understanding of issues.

She is hopeful that when peace returns to South Sudan, they will use the knowledge and skills acquired to rebuild their lives and nation.

She also emphasized that rebuilding their shattered lives and broken lives can only happen if people are willing to learn to forgive, respect and love diversity as God's created children. There is nothing wrong by having so many different tribes and cultures in a Country. We need to educate the children and especially the girl child who can foster rapid development in all spheres. She concluded by thanking God and advocated for yet another bigger event in December 2017.

The YWCD0 coordinator welcomed the people to celebrate Christmas at YWCD0 which is the voice of the voiceless people in the community regardless of their backgrounds- religious and political affiliations, social status etc. He urged women, children, nationals and refugees to live together in love by sharing one another's burdens. He said that the hall they are sitting in is called **PEACE HALL**. It is meant to be a place where or a hall within the organization where people of all walks of life can come together to share experiences, learn, conduct various activities including peace building, comfort each in times of loss, joy etc. He concluded by wishing the audience to feel at home & a happy Christmas 2016 celebration.

The religious representative was happy for the 2016 Christmas celebration organized by the women of YWCD0. He was working in Morobo, South Sudan diocese as a planning and development Officer before the conflict. He also worked with Winrock organization implementing a project called "Room to Learn South Sudan." Campaigning for education for all. He advised women to take Adult Literacy Education serious to improve their socio-economic status, reduce dependency syndrome, fight for their rights, and be self-reliant and involved in peace building as well as agents of Peace and reconciliation in a torn country like South Sudan.

He challenged all the men to support, respect and involve women in all leadership roles in all levels in the community and national activities. He said women are resilient and as first teachers or closest to children, they should teach children non-violent approach to resolving problems. Schools should organize debates to teach children to disagree and agree without becoming violent if we want to be able to overcome the atrocities committed to them, relatives and children.

The Guest of Honour is the current Dean of Students at Muni University Arua. As an educationist who is half South Sudanese and Ugandan (mother South Sudanese and father Ugandan), called on YWCD0 and primary schools leaderships to organize education tours for school children to expose them to other cultures to widen their understanding of the world issues surrounding them. Sticking to negative traditions and cultural practices, nepotism, tribalism etc. won't bring peace in a current Global World. Exposures enables people learn to respect differences of opinions, ways of conducting/ doing things the way they do and practices.

She emphasized that, there are many different courses offered at Muni University in Arua including nursing. So there is no need for parents to send their children to study in Kampala (which is very expensive). Education should be a priority for all. She asserted that there are many scholarships for female students but their entry points make it difficult to some girls to reach the set standards. We should strive to develop soft skills in youth to compete in many jobs to avoid being lured into crimes, fighting/join or coerced into the army/ militias as means to earn a living. Parents should play a crucial role in protecting children by knowing who their children play with to avoid wrong peers and be teaching children at home to grow into responsible citizens. In conclusion, she wished everyone a merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year 2017. And said Christmas is a day of happiness, joy and celebration of the birth Jesus, Prince of Peace and HOPE

Challenges encountered

The number of people invited to celebrate Charismas 2016 exceeded anticipated number planned. The majority were children mainly from the neighborhood. Due to big no control and organizing specific activities for them became difficult. Papyrus mats and mats were provided to accommodate them in both the Payote and the Peace Hall. The children were very happy and really enjoyed the day very much and said they are looking forward to 2017 Christmas.

High prices of items

Increased commodities prices in the market as Christmas drew nearer to make double profits. The organizers prepared the budget before prices went up. But the organizers utilized the budget available without any balance left for future use.

Increased workload

The organizing committee could not cope with some of the activities due to high turn up. For example the South Sudanese intern was the master of ceremony, delivered a welcome speech, took photos and also participated in the presentation of gifts to the people. It was hectic and difficult to conduct interviews with South Sudanese refugee women and children. The battery of the digital camera was down when it was needed most.

Though the workload was too much, nevertheless, things went smoothly & was a very successful day.

Recommendations**Bigger Christmas celebration next year 2017**

All the invited guests were happy with the event which brought different cadres of people: women, children, youth, males, religious and community leaders, politicians, nationals and refugees together to celebrate Christmas in a peaceful and joyous manner. Because of the success of the day, they recommend that a similar but bigger celebration be planned for 2017. Women were in high spirits that prompted the respected Guest of Honor to pledge 100,000 Uganda shillings in advance for Christmas 2017. They also want to see that contributions are done in time for the next event in December 2017

Secure more plastic chairs, tables etc. There are currently only 120 plastic chairs in the organization-not enough to accommodate a large audience. Youth and Women Community Development Organization should buy more chairs to accommodate big audiences in the upcoming events.

Conclusion

Christmas is about family, love, sharing, forgiveness and Hope. As the birth of Jesus is to give and show humanity true love and HOPE, NPWC/YWCD0 showed the South Sudanese refugees love and compassion by bringing them together as a big family loved by God. They shared food, drinks and awarded mothers some gifts (a bar of soap and salt) and children biscuits and sweets as a symbol of gifts normally exchanged by families on Christmas day. All children need is love and a space to play especially when are not hungry.

The entire staff and management of Youth and Women Community Development Organization, invited guests and south Sudanese refugees in Koboko extended their sincere gratitude to St. John and St. Philip Church, STAD, individuals donors and well wishers (whom we can't mention by names) in the Netherlands for your unwavering and concerted effort in short request time by funding this Christmas 2016 celebration

We are extremely happy and sincerely extend our appreciations and gratitude to our local donors /contributors for the financial support extended to celebrate X-mass with South Sudanese refugees in Koboko. We look forward are more than willing to cooperate with you next year as we hope to build and transform our community to learn to live in harmony and share one another's burdens. God bless you our partners our partners and supporters in the Netherlands in Uganda. Happy and a Prosperous New Year 2017

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