

Friday June 29th

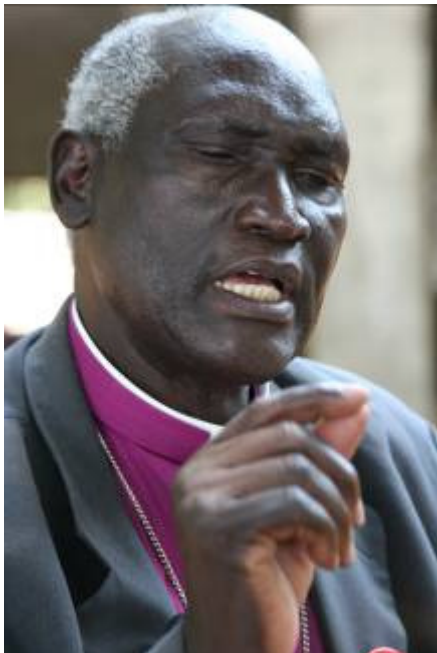
After breakfast of bread and coffee with the Brothers, the four of us drove to the camp where Bishop Ochola was staying. We then drove with the Bishop to the Hotel Juba, the temporary home of the delegations representing the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army. What surprised me most was the lack of a military presence. When we arrived, we simply walked through the hotel and into a tranquil rear courtyard overlooking the Nile River.



Thanks to the extensive contacts and immense credibility of both the Bishop and Father Carlos, we had easy access to members from both delegations. As we sat on plastic lawn furniture, we chatted with several people who came by to greet us or pay their respects to the clergymen.

Eventually, Godfrey Ayoo (Eye-YO) showed up. He's the designated spokesman for the L.R.A. An expatriot, now living in Germany, he has become the human face of the rebels who, for the longest time, had no official voice and spoke only with their guns. Until recently, he operated a radio station from Germany that beamed L.R.A. propaganda into northern Uganda. Here, he projects an image of intelligence and sophistication, complete with dapper suit, white shoes and cigarettes, which stands in complete contrast to the common conception of the rebels.

Over the years, Ayoo and Father Carlos had talked many times and exchanged hundreds of emails, which got us off to a good start. Carlos and I tried to convey a common message: both of us needed access to the top L.R.A. commanders — Joseph Kony himself or Vincent Otii — to lay the foundation for understanding, with our respective audiences. The spokesman said he thought Otii would be "open" to meeting with us, but much would depend on the availability of transportation. Our only option would be a U.N. helicopter ride to the L.R.A. lair in Congo. He told us he'd see what he could do.



As we waited to see what might happen, we interviewed Bishop Ochola about why he thinks traditional Acholi justice is a better way to achieve true reconciliation, as opposed to conventional western justice, such as the arrest warrants issued for Joseph Kony and his three top aides by the International Criminal Court. Essentially, he said that western justice emphasizes punishment but leaves both victim and perpetrator in their bitterness, whereas Acholi justice addresses the need for accepting responsibility, asking forgiveness and making reparations, all of which lead to a healing of the heart and genuine reconciliation.

Both the government and the L.R.A. want at least some form of traditional justice, but there's still no final agreement on what that might look like. Late last night, the two delegations went late into the

morning, discussing provisions related to accountability and reconciliation. This morning, the two sides were reviewing those provisions and formulating their responses. Many of the deliberations take place in the courtyard under what they call “The Acholi Tree.” After leaving to let the delegates to get down to work, we drove to the Hotel Raha, site of the peace talks themselves.

Again, I was astonished at how light the security was. We walked right into the area where both sides congregated when the talks were in recess. There were groups of people talking at plastic tables in various parts of the hotel’s backyard. In the centre area was a thatched bar with a TV. We arrived just in time to hear about a bomb scare in London. Evidently, police found a car containing 200 litres of explosives in the theatre district.

Since negotiations had not yet resumed, we interviewed Capt. Barigye Ba-Hoku (Bar--EE-gee Bah-HO-ku), the official spokesman for the Government of Uganda. He was a slight but no-nonsense military man who also spoke Spanish. After Father Carlos warmed him up with a conversation in their common language, I asked what it would take to get and keep a peace agreement.

Not surprisingly, everything was the fault of the L.R.A.; there was already a system in place to deal with any atrocities committed by government troops and, indeed, about 20 have been punished, even executed in some cases; and peace will only be possible if the rebels will take responsibility, tell the truth, and submit to some sort of “hybrid” justice that takes elements from both the traditional and conventional systems. Mostly, we got government spin.

Since there was a lot of hurry-up-and-wait going on at the talks, we went back to the Carboni Mission for lunch with Carlos’ friend, Joseph, who runs a church-affiliated radio station. We dined on fish, posho (a white, starchy corn dish) and green vegetables that tasted like strongly-flavoured spinach. Joseph told us taking pictures in Juba is dicey, even when you get permission because the police often seize your equipment and you have to negotiate its release.

In the end, we decided to try for video at the site of the peace talks where a camp commander had told me earlier he wanted to eat his lunch in peace and we would talk later about the possibility of photography within the compound. En route to the complex, Andrew spotted some boys playing with toy guns made out of grass. They were near the radio station and Carlos and Joseph had already started taking pictures when we arrived.

The “guns”, though simple, looked hauntingly suggestive of the real thing and the children were striking poses of power and authority as they



brandished their makeshift weapons for the cameras. The moral dilemma for us was that the kids clearly thought we were impressed with their posturing and, since they spoke only a local dialect, we had no way to communicate what we were really thinking. This scenario was especially frustrating for Dave who hit upon the idea of having them trade their toy guns for one of our soccer balls. Then we remembered we had taken the balls out of the vehicle, to make more room.

To help us find our way around the sprawling city of 700,000 people, we took with us two local young men, Emmanuel — who wants to be a journalist — and his friend, Marcos, who listened to Radio Canada as a student in Khartoum and was strangely well informed about life at home. As we drove, they told me they were far from optimistic about prospects for peace, not just because the L.R.A. couldn't be trusted, but also because of tribal warfare that darkens the horizon.

According to Emmanuel, the Dinka tribe wants absolute power. Their motto, he said, is "Born To Rule" and they're only waiting for the L.R.A. situation to resolve itself before they seize control. So, whether an agreement with the rebels comes or not, there will be more violence in a land that has known nothing but conflict for more than 40 years.

We saw first hand conflict was played out bell tower at St. Catholic Church, an 86 steps via seven bolted to the walls of camera and had to be without releasing my the climb was worth it. giant metal bells just heads, Juba lay spread



where some of that when we climbed the Theresa Roman ascent that took us up aluminium ladders the tower. I had the careful to hold on grip on the gear. But As we stood with the barely overtop our out below us.

From such a height, the city looked infinitely more clean and colourful, and the Nile provided a beautiful backdrop for the urban arc that followed the shores of the fabled river. Marcos and Emmanuel pointed out



specific areas where fighting had taken place over the years. On the far side of the river, there was next to no development, in contrast to the crowded displacement camps that choked the near side of the Nile.

Our guides explained that nobody had built on the one side of the river because it was too vulnerable to the rebels, whereas the water provided a natural, protective barrier separating the L.R.A. from the city,

When we climbed down, we were met by a group of young boys who said the one English phrase we've heard everywhere in Juba, regardless of the time of day: "Good Morning!" They wanted bottled water, which they'd spotted in our vehicle. One boy about nine said, "I want to go to Canada with you."

As we made our way back to the site of the peace talks, we saw a man wearing a soccer sweater with the sponsor of the team clearly labelled: Halton Regional Pest Control. I also noticed there are goats everywhere in Juba, of all sizes and colours. We even passed a goat market where the offerings were tied to stakes in the ground. It was right across from the cattle corral where most of the animals had long, thick horns unlike anything we have at home. When we stopped for gas, the attendant was going to make the trucker ahead of us let us go first, because we were white, but we put a stop to that.

Back at the Hotel Raha, we arrived just as the two delegations were beginning a break. We used the time to interview the L.R.A. spokesman, Godfrey Ayoo. In a long, wide-ranging exchange, he refused to say whether the rebels had committed atrocities or not. He said such atrocities had happened but that responsibility could not be assigned until a complete investigation had taken place. He implied that accounts from victims in the north about mutilation and murder were biased and unreliable, and that the government had committed war crimes, both recently and in 1983 when the current president, Yoweri Museveni was a rebel working to overthrow the regime of that time. He even went so far as to say that the L.R.A. only took up arms as a means of "self-defence" against a depraved government bent on destroying the people of the north.



Godfrey Ayoo with LRA delegation sitting behind him.

When we broached the subject of forgiveness and the prospects for reconciliation, Ayoo said it would all depend on the victims. If, hypothetically, rebels must one day admit responsibility for crimes and ask forgiveness, only to find that victims won't give such forgiveness, the rebels would be absolved of any further guilt, in his view. He said peace will only come if the Acholi want it. The spin was just as evident in this interview as it had been in the one with the government rep this morning.

Since it was clear the delegations were in for another late night, we left and went to the same restaurant we were at last night. The four of us cooled down with Bell beer or Stoney soda and ordered fish or fried chicken. About 10 o'clock tonight, we had a tropical rain storm. There was no thunder or high wind, just a slow, wet patter that gradually progressed into a torrent that drummed a Sudanese rain dance on our roof for about 15 minutes. Drawn to it, I went outside and stood in the rain, letting it wash away the fatigue and frustration of the day. It's all part of the adventure.

...the Bending Spears Team, Rick and Dave (Andrew, Tim)