

*"Turn your vision earthward...
'Tis we must lend a hand."*

EARTHWARD

Edition 2, Spring 2006



Quarterly Newsletter Publishing

Upon publishing our second edition of the newsletter, we would like to welcome two new volunteers to the EARTHWARD ranks: A new Webmaster and Newsletter Editor. It is hoped, with the addition of these two volunteers, that the newsletter will become a quarterly event that allows our supporters to keep up to date and involved with EARTHWARD projects. We hope you will enjoy it. You can view or download our newsletters at <http://earthward.org/nldl.shtml>, in various formats. If you would like to receive our newsletter by email, please subscribe by sending an email to NLsub@earthward.org. Please indicate what format (MS-Word, Adobe Acrobat or HTML) you would like to receive.

Technical Difficulties and Website Upgrades

EARTHWARD had technical difficulties the first 18 days of the year. During this time, the website and email were off-line. Unfortunately we were unable to receive email. If you tried to contact EARTHWARD at this time, please resend your correspondence. Our apologies for any inconvenience. The problems have been corrected and thanks to our new Webmaster there are upgrades in progress. An "In the News" page (<http://earthward.org/news.shtml>), which will keep you up to date on world events related to religious violence, is our newest feature. Please visit our homepage: <http://www.earthward.org>

Newsletter Spotlight

Most Urgent

The Okello family continues to struggle to survive after losing Mrs. Okello on June 2nd. Preview of the plan to move the family and return them to self sufficiency. Donations desperately needed.

Books2Kashmir

Help needed to establish a children's library in the Kashmir region.

Religious Violence in Nigeria

An article describing circumstances surrounding the continued religious violence in Nigeria. Contributed by Leo Igwe of the Nigerian Humanist Movement.

URGENT Help a Family who has Fled the Lord's Resistance Army



The Okello Children: Celine (15), Alicia (11), Amy (7), Edmond (13) and Mick (4)

The Okello family is continuing to struggle to meet just their basic needs.

Mr. Okello writes:

Since we had no clean drinking water, we have had to be boiling any water we want to use for drinking or cooking, some how this is helping though it is not very safe. We hope that some help by way of food-stuff and cooking fat will reach us faster because we are completely out of all food material and safe water.

Sadly EARTHWARD has received word that typhoid and amoebic dysentery claimed Mrs. Okello's life June 2. These diseases run rampant in the slum where the family now lives. Mr. Okello and the children are also at risk as long as they stay there. The family now also faces the formidable task of paying for the final arrangements that come to about US\$500. Any donations are urgently needed to help the family cover the additional costs related to the passing of Mrs. Okello along with moving the family out of harms way. To read more about the recent events please visit <http://earthward.org/tragedy.shtml>. To donate, please visit: <http://earthward.org/phase3.shtml>

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Okello Family Cont.

As the Okello family struggles to survive, EARTHWARD would like to focus on moving the family to a safe and stable region. Providing them with means to become self-sufficient is the ultimate goal. Mr. Okello has worked with computers before and we would like to assist him in starting a computer consulting business.

Currently, there are several ongoing efforts to bring computers and internet to the general population in Central Africa. With this expanding access to technology there is a great need for education and technical support in the region. Mr. Okello could fill a niche here by providing computer and internet related services.

Some examples of services he might provide:

- 1) Setup software (for email, internet, etc.) on customers computers.
- 2) Teach customers how to use this software.
- 3) Provide internet access service for a fee.

Starting this kind of service requires a fairly secure environment, electricity and telephone and/or broadband service. To these ends, a tribe leader has kindly donated two acres to the Okello family in a neighboring region.

Initial estimates came in at US \$7,000US for the move, construction of the house, and supplying business necessities. Construction has been broken down into two stages; the second stage to be funded by the family once their finances improve. Stage one would be funded by EARTHWARD, which would get the family moved, the essentials built (kitchen, bathroom, multipurpose room) and computer supplies. The estimated cost of Stage one is US \$4,300. EARTHWARD is working in conjunction with our affiliates in the region to bring down this cost through purchasing goods in more stable (less expensive) areas and finding goods that can be donated. Even with this kind of aid, there will be a substantial monetary need.



Left to Right: Deo Uhasso with the Uganda Humanist Association, Elizabeth Okello, and Peter Okello

To date, EARTHWARD has supplied US \$1340 in aid. A history of aid distributions can be found at <http://earthward.org/phase2.shtml>. Unfortunately, we have no funds currently available for further aid to the Okellos. Mr. Okello has often expressed great appreciation for the help we've been able to provide his family, through our donors' generosity. We recognize, though, that it has often fallen short of their basic needs. The family will shortly be out of clean drinking water and food. Whether or not this family will have enough to eat next month, depends on the generosity and compassion of people like you. Your donations will help EARTHWARD to reach the ultimate goal of returning the Okello family to full self-sufficiency. In the meantime, the Okellos will have priority for any donations you make to our Africa Fund. If donations exceed the amount needed by this family, second priority will be for other families and individuals, in Africa, facing similar circumstances.

To donate, please visit: <http://earthward.org/phase3.shtml>

For updates and more information please visit: <http://www.earthward.org/refugee.shtml>

Books2Kashmir

EARTHWARD has been contacted by an organization, VANSTHAL, working in the Kashmir region to establish a children's library. Mr. Rajiv Tewari of VANSTHAL is working with two local graduates in the Poonch district of Kashmir. In his words, they are working to "expose these kids to the latest things in world to wean them from militancy." He also comments that "[t]he kids know alphabets, rules of grammar etc. However they don't know what is happening in the civilized world." Mr. Rajiv Tewari requested donations of children's books and magazines (ages 5 - 15). If you have any books or magazines that your children have outgrown, we encourage you to donate them to this very worthy cause.

Please send them directly to:

MISS NIMMI DEVI, SPO,
WARD NO 4, NAI BASTI,
NEAR CITY PARK, POONCH,
JAMMU AND KASHMIR, INDIA

For more details please visit: <http://earthward.org/b2k.shtml>

Religious Violence in Nigeria

Contributed by Leo Igwe of the Nigerian Humanist Movement

Religion has been a major factor in most conflicts in Nigeria. In most cases, religion has either aided abetted, helped sustain or been used as a pretext for violence and bloodshed. Nigeria has three main religions-Islam, Christianity and Traditional Religion. Even though Nigeria has a constitution that seeks to separate religion and state, adherents of the dominant faiths are pitched in a battle for influence and domination of the polity.

In January, the cartoons of Prophet Mohammad published in European newspapers set off violent protests in Asia and the Middle East. And in Nigeria, tension started simmering particularly in the Muslim majority states in the North. Many people expected protests and riots by Nigerian Muslims in solidarity with their colleagues in the Arab-Islamic world. Most often Islamic extremists in Nigeria vent their anger and frustration by attacking and killing non Muslims in their midst.

In Kano, an Islamic stronghold, the anti-cartoon demonstrations took place without major incidents. According to newspaper reports, members of the Kano State House of Assembly rose from an emergency session and adopted a resolution condemning the publication of the cartoons. Afterwards, the lawmakers came to the front of their building shouting 'Allahu Akbar' and set ablaze the Danish and Norwegian flags in 'symbolic demonstration of the anger of the Kano people.' Dozens of Muslims joined the lawmakers in chanting 'Allah will punish the man who insulted the Prophet' during the burning exercise.

But in Bornu, Bauchi, Niger and Yobe, the anti-cartoon anger boiled over causing death, anarchy and destruction. In Bornu, no fewer than 58 persons were killed, and 30 churches and several shops belonging to Christians were burnt by Muslim extremists in the state capital, Aiduguri. Most of the dead were Christians. Among them were a Reverend Father and his assistant. They were burnt to death in their residence. Thousand of non Muslims fled the cities and took refuge at the military barracks.

In Bauchi, Niger and Yobe states at least 20 people were reportedly killed and 7 churches burnt by Muslim fanatics. The arrival of the bodies of southern Christians killed during the riots in Aiduguri sparked reprisal attacks and bloodshed of Muslims in the southern town of Onitsha. Christian mobs and gangs rampaged through the city with machetes and shotguns killing any Muslim that came their way. At least two mosques were razed down and 78 people were massacred including several school children that were allegedly killed by a Muslim soldier protesting the death of his kinsmen.

Like in most cases of religious violence in Nigeria, it's difficult to know the exact number of casualties. The government and police officials played down on the number of casualties to forestall further outbreak of violence. But the fact remains that more people have died in Nigeria due to the cartoon riots than in other parts of the world put together!

Since Independence in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed several instances of religious violence and bloodletting. In the 80s, the Maitasine riots swept through major cities in Northern Nigeria causing so many deaths and destruction. In 1991, many Christians were massacred by Muslim fanatics protesting the visit to Kano of a German Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke. Most of the victims were beheaded or butchered like cows or thrown into Wells where they drowned or suffocated to death.

In 2000, thousands of Nigerians lost their lives during riots over the proposed implementation of Sharia law in Northern Nigeria. Many of those who died during the Sharia riots in 2000 were Christians from the South. And the arrival of their bodies sparked reprisal attack and killing of Muslims in Southern Nigerian cities- Aba, Owerri, Umuahia etc. Since 2000, Nigeria has witnessed several religious conflicts in Kaduna, Kano, Plateau and Osun States. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation inherited a jihadist Islam that is an Islam that is promoted and propagated by violence. Whenever Muslims in Nigeria feel provoked or whenever they feel that their faith is under threat, they declare Jihad, that is they resort to violence-killing, maiming and destruction of lives and property of non Muslims, some times of Muslims themselves. In fact the blood of non Muslims has watered the tree of Islam in Northern Nigeria. It is conservatively estimated that at least 20 thousand Nigerians have lost their lives to religious conflicts and sectarian violence since 1960.

Fraud Warning

Two and a half years ago, EARTHWARD was contacted by an individual claiming his name was Stanley Mbogori, and that he was an officer of the South African Atheist Society, which turned out to be non-existent. At the time he provided suspicious information, and requests for funding of various projects in his region. One of our affiliates introduced us to a Johannesburg resident, who along with a policeman friend went to the address given to us by Stanley, it was found to be the apartment of a woman who did not know Stanley nor the organization he claimed to represent. It has come to our attention that this person has recently made similar contacts with other Atheist / Humanist organizations. We urge you NOT to provide any funds to this individual, and in general, to exercise extreme caution in providing funds or personal information to any individual that elicits it through email.

Pass It Along

Please do not hesitate to share this newsletter with anyone you feel might be interested. We welcome any help to increase our circulation. In particular, please pass the newsletter, or our website URL, to anyone you feel may be willing and able to donate any amount to the Okello Family Project. Their need is extreme, and any help at all will be greatly appreciated.

Motto

We, at EARTHWARD, could not be more pleased with our motto. It is an excerpt from a poem written in 1890 by Samuel P. Putnam, Secretary of the Secular Union of New York, at that time. That it coincidentally contains the name of our organization is only a small part of its appeal. This phrase in particular, and the poem in general, perfectly describe the motives that drive us to do what we do.

Turn your vision earthward --
'Tis we must lend a hand.

To view the complete poem please visit <http://www.earthward.org/motto.shtml>

EARTHWARD is Seeking Volunteers, Donations, and Affiliates

EARTHWARD is seeking volunteers to fill many roles within the organization. Among a wide variety of roles, we are especially seeking a Treasurer, web developers, writers and fundraisers. Any eligible volunteer willing to read the email list, keep in regular contact with the Board, and contribute an occasional idea is also welcome. Part of an organization? Become an affiliate! Please go to our Get Involved page to find out the many ways you can help:

<http://www.earthward.org/getinvolved.shtml>