

ONE VOICE

TOGETHER IN PRAYER FOR AN **END TO POVERTY**

OVERCOMING FEAR IN BURUNDI

'Whenever there is an election in Burundi there is a crisis... people have fear whenever they think of elections,' says Reverend Sylvestre Bizimana, the General Secretary at the National Council of Churches in Burundi.

The last time Burundi held a presidential election was in 2015. There were countless protests and tensions were rife across different ethnic communities. At least 70 people died. The country is now in the midst of a new election season; on Monday the polls open to elect a new president.

Violence is rising again. But there is hope that things could play out differently this time.

The powerful message of peace

In February, Tearfund ran a workshop for faith leaders from across Burundi. They were invited to take part in training on how to promote peace before, during and after the elections.

Faith leaders can play a vital role during election times – they are a trusted voice in their communities. Around 90 per cent of people in Burundi are Christians.

Reverend Bizimana took part in the workshop. 'This training was very fruitful and wonderful for me,' he says. 'The Bible says that we are the salt and light of the world... It is very important for us to preach peace, to behave peacefully and transform our members as peace makers.'

The faith leaders who attended this workshop are now sharing what they've learned with their own networks and running events in their communities. The message is spreading. Hope is on the move.

PLEASE PRAY

- Praise God that faith leaders in Burundi have come together to share a message of peace. Pray that this message will reach even the most marginalised in the run up to the election.
- Pray there will be no outbreaks of violence before, during or after the election, that people will be able to vote without fear and the result will be respected.
- Lift up other countries that will be electing new leaders over the next few months. Pray they will be able to hold elections safely and peacefully. And pray that whoever is elected will lead fairly and seek to help the most vulnerable in society.

A NOTE FROM...

'Every time we have elections in Burundi, unfortunately there is violence. We created spaces for church leaders to gather and discuss what could be done. I was amazed to see – for the first time in Burundi – the most influential faith leaders, including Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Muslim, sitting together to engage on what actions could be taken to maintain peace. We thank God that he enabled us to organise this work.' **Desire Majambere, Tearfund Country Director in Burundi**

FILTERING OUT CYCLES OF POVERTY

Azmir* is a community leader in northern Afghanistan. The main water source in this area is a dam. Villagers have no choice but to use this water – to drink, wash and cook with – even though it is causing serious health problems.

'People had a lot of problems with children getting diarrhoeal diseases,' Azmir says. 'We live in a mountainous area and the health clinic is far away. When the condition of the child worsens, parents are forced to go to the doctor, but on the way the child could die of dehydration.'

This is a painful decision for any parent or caregiver to have to make.

Cycles of despair

Diarrhoea is the leading cause of death in children under five. Globally, there are nearly 1.7 billion cases of childhood diarrhoea every year, killing 525,000 children under five. It is both preventable and treatable.

Unclean water traps people in cycles of poverty. It causes sickness and disease which mean people cannot hold down jobs, children miss out on school, and families face soaring healthcare costs to survive.

It's why Tearfund's local partner worked with Azmir's community to come up with a solution.

Change is coming

The roads leading to Azmir's community were then destroyed by disasters, including heavy snowfall, floods and landslides. This made it impossible for our partners to reach them.

But our partner's plans to help the community access clean water weren't abandoned. People weren't forgotten.

As soon as the roads were cleared Tearfund's local partners were able to set up a distribution point to serve eight villages in the community. People came from all over to receive this help – some travelling for as long as six hours on donkeys or horses over rough terrain.

Tearfund's partners gave filters to families so that people could finally have access to safe water. People also received training on how to use the filter and maintain it, to empower people to own this solution.

'We were taught how to prevent the dehydration of babies and children,' says Azmir. 'And we all shared this information with our relatives and neighbours in our village.'

Our partners also led hygiene awareness training, including sharing information on the importance of handwashing.

A fresh start

Something as simple as a water filter has helped communities to protect themselves from disease and preventable deaths caused by unsafe drinking water, but the work is by no means complete.

An estimated 844 million people around the world still do not have access to clean water. We're doing all we can to make sure communities like Azmir's have the best chance of overcoming poverty.

And that starts with clean water.

PLEASE PRAY

- Thank God that Azmir's community can now have access to clean water because of these new filters. Pray that what they've learnt from the hygiene awareness training will be widely shared in the community, to protect them from sickness and disease.
- Lift up communities like Azmir's that are hard to reach because of difficult terrain and extreme weather. Pray that help will be able to reach them.
- Pray for people who still do not have access to clean water or safe sanitation. For protection over their health. And pray that Tearfund and our partners will be able to work with them on solutions to give them access to clean water and to help them overcome poverty.

**Name has been changed to protect identity.*

This article references events that took place before the coronavirus crisis.

A REBOOT FOR OUR WORLD

I want to invite you into a conversation. Jack Wakefield, from Tearfund's Campaigns team, reflects on how we can start rebuilding a fairer society, even in the midst of a lockdown.

In the midst of the current coronavirus crisis, many are beginning to wonder what life might look like afterwards. Might this be a chance to create a new normal? While this is likely to be a drawn-out crisis, we can already start to play a vital role in shaping what happens next.

The story so far

In response to coronavirus, churches around the world have adapted quickly to serve their communities. With online services, food distribution networks, phone banks for the isolated and much more, we have been finding new ways to be a light in the darkness, to love our neighbours and care for the most vulnerable.

Although our church buildings may be closed, the role of the church in wider society has never been more important. We've seen increasing numbers of people engage with church and heard stories of a rise in spiritual hunger.

Coronavirus has held up a mirror to our society, in the UK and globally, and revealed brokenness that was often previously ignored. As many are currently saying: 'We're all in the same storm, but we're not all in the same boat.' Globally, the lockdown has meant cramped living conditions, increasing debt, no access to (even digital) school lessons, and days without food.

But among the disorienting chaos and anxiety of this almost global lockdown, many are rediscovering the centrality of our connection with God, and with those around us. People are reaching out to God and to each other.

We are also glimpsing the benefits of living in harmony with God's creation. People are hearing birdsong louder than before, they're breathing cleaner air and realising just how important getting outdoors can be for our well-being. We are beginning to spot the potential of a better life on the other side of this, and both hope and imagination are beginning to rise.

What happens next

Archbishop Justin Welby highlighted in his Easter sermon: 'After so much suffering, so much heroism from key workers and the NHS, we cannot be content to go back to what was before as if all is normal. There needs to be a resurrection of our common life.'

Together we can choose the part we will play as the church – locally, nationally and internationally. Amidst the grief and uncertainty, this really could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape society.

We now face an opportunity: how can we 'build back better', and what is the church's role?

As the people of God, we can speak prophetically to our society, casting a vision for a way forward. To do this, we must first reflect on what God might want to reveal to us personally through how we are experiencing this crisis, and on where God might be extending an invitation for us to join in with his work.

We want to invite you both into this conversation and into this time of prayer.

Join us as we listen for God's guidance and intercede for an economic recovery that tackles climate change, protects the vulnerable and creates greater global solidarity.

PLEASE PRAY

Loving God, we pray for all those living in poverty around the world, those without access to clean water to wash their hands or a safe place to isolate and call home. In the midst of this pandemic we cry out for you to calm the storm and heal the sick.

We thank you for churches all around the world who are serving their communities. Bless them with protection and give them energy, wisdom and strength.

Redeeming God, as we look to the future and how the world might be, help each of us to play our part in seeing your kingdom come, the poor set free and creation well cared for. Give us each the wisdom to know our part, and the courage to call on our leaders to act.

In Jesus name we pray, amen.

Tearfund has created a discussion guide and a video to help you continue this conversation in your small groups and with your families. You can find them on our website at: www.tearfund.org/about_you/action/the_world_rebooted/

PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

-  A fire broke out in Cox's Bazar refugee camp this week, damaging over 670 makeshift dwellings. The camp is home to more than one million Rohingya refugees. As well as vulnerable people losing their homes and what few possessions they have, this will have triggered traumatic memories for many. Pray God's peace and comfort over them, and ask for his provision.

-  In Malawi, doctors and nurses who are treating coronavirus patients are being stigmatised and some have been evicted from their homes. Pray for an end to this. Give thanks to hospital and care home staff around the world who are working in hugely challenging circumstances. Pray God's protection over them.

-  Today (15 May) is the International Day of Families. Lift up to God people around the world who are separated from their families because of conflict, war and disease. Pray for those who are mourning the loss of loved ones, or who feel alone. And pray for the work Tearfund is doing to promote healthy relationships in families, so that home can be a safe place.