

Muhanji speaks about Kenyan peace as part of International Week



John Muhanji speaks to a group of Quakers at the United Society of Friends Women International and Quaker Men International 42nd Triennial Sessions in July, 2007.

By Liz Farquhar
STAFF WRITER

John Muhanji's Bryan Jr. auditorium presentation on March 24 started off slow - a technician performed a sound check before a small crowd. But soon Muhanji lit up the room with a strong discussion, accompanied by a slide presentation, explaining his creation of a peace-and-conflict curriculum for Kenyan high schools.

At one point he flipped to a slide showing an older Kenyan couple whose home had been soaked by a night's heavy rains. They both had their hands extended, cupped in gratitude toward the camera - but this gesture would only become clear as Muhanji told the story.

"Something just told me to stop (at their home)," said Muhanji. "And the tears just started running down my face. I wondered 'how am I spreading peace when these people are living like this?'"

His undertaking to promote peace education is a response to riots that killed 300 people after the 2008 Kenyan elections, where various tribes lashed out against a decision in favor of Mwai Kibaki.

The next slide then showed that same shanty, this time with a clean metal roof and a row of students standing in the foreground. The student team had finished their roof.

"This man can go to sleep knowing that the next day will come," Muhanji said as he evoked the clearest emotional response of the evening from his viewers.

A proposed curriculum in Kenyan high schools could create an abundance of positive student action and hopefully prevent another political riot in 2012.

"We (would be) teaching them principles of integrity, how to be good statesmen so that when they are the leaders they can actually make a difference in the African continent," said Muhanji.

The program headed by Muhanji and Friends United Meeting also seeks to bolster his country's reputation as a strong African nation. Muhanji held up neighboring Somalia

as a counter-example, pointing out that they lack a functioning central government. His patriotic intention was also clear in his rhetoric.

Traditionally, Kenya is politically stable. It is a popular tourist spot for Westerners, according to the BBC. However, this reputation was tarnished during 2008 riots, enacted mostly by high-school-aged young men, according to Muhanji.

Thus students are the target of his conflict resolution agenda. They will have the potential to bring from the proposed program their new knowledge, experience and integrity to the universities and beyond, into society.

Here's how the program will actually operate in Kenya's 200 Quaker high schools: A class taught once a week to Quaker students would employ a transposed American curriculum, with the participants organizing service projects communities throughout Kenya.

Muhanji and his Quaker team are still researching curriculum and compiling human resources.

Variables include choosing the kinds of materials suitable for different grades as well as the actual programs most effective. According to Vernie Davis, head of Guilford's peace and conflict studies department and an aid to Muhanji, these resources are readily available. He mentioned, for example, that Ohio high schools have a strong conflict resolution curriculum - a potential model for Muhanji's program.

In terms of human resources, Muhanji will organize an internship program aimed at the Guilford community where students and non-students alike would teach in Kenya's Quaker high schools. The program will allow students to choose between three- to nine-month teaching experiences.

His program will affect over 200 Quaker high schools and approximately 140,000 students. Muhanji suggested the impact of the proposed program by noting that there are only approximately 800,000 young people in Kenya.

Guilford Alumnus David Hewson

will be visiting artist Mon.,
March 30- Wed., April 1.

EVENTS

TUESDAY, MARCH 31

11a.m -12:30 p.m. Art Gallery
Hewson will present Bruce Parry's
Amazon Journey, (Episode 2)

5-7 p.m. Art Gallery
Reception to meet the artist. Hewson
will make brief remarks about his
experiences living in Peru

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

3-3:30 p.m. Art Gallery
Gold-leafing demonstration.

3:30-4:30 p.m.
Screening of Heaven Earth/Cielo Tierra

