

World Christian Literature Outreach

Going where missionaries cannot go and staying when missionaries cannot stay.

Web Site: <http://www.wclo.net>

Ministry of the Livonia Church of Christ



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THE CONFLICT CONTINUES!

The government is proclaiming that the conflict is ended and peace is now in place. The following article focuses on an area about 80 miles north of Kisumu and lets you see that is not the case.—Russ

Kenya, March 13, 2008. The military sealed off a region of western Kenya where land disputes have flared into violence, and witnesses said helicopter gunships were strafing the area Thursday to try to drive gunmen from forests and caves.

"Always in this country, people are fighting over land," said Lucy Okello, head nurse at Kitale District Hospital, where four girls were being treated for severe burns after their village was attacked, allegedly by the Sabaot Land Defense Force, a militia fighting for the redistribution of land.

The oldest girl, 15-year-old Joanne Temuko, wailed and held her head in her hands as nurses applied balm to her scorched back.

Thirteen other civilians were hacked, shot or burned to death in the attack last week. There was no claim of responsibility. A militia member said at the time that his group was simply trying to "correct historical injustices."

The military operation at Mount Elgon comes despite a power-sharing agreement designed to end a wave of violence that erupted after a disputed election last December. The violence awakened decades-old tensions over land and inequality.

Police manning checkpoints Thursday along dusty roads lined with banana trees and onion farms leading to Mount Elgon ordered journalists and aid workers to turn back.



There was no word on casualties in the military operation, which began Monday around Mount Elgon, an extinct volcano near the border with Uganda, where spectacular caves, waterfalls and hot springs draw hikers and other adventure tourists.

"This is a serious government operation," said an officer at a checkpoint in the last village before the foothills of Mount Elgon, about 300 miles northwest of Nairobi. "You only go through if you have a uniform."

In Nairobi, government spokesman Alfred Mutua said journalists were being kept out of the area for their own safety.

Gunmen "have been killing people indiscriminately. We don't want them to start killing journalists and for (journalists) to be caught in the line of fire. So it is basically keeping away journalists for their own security," he said.

The Dec. 27 vote tapped into a well of resentment that resurfaces regularly at election time in Kenya, but this year's bloodshed has been the most brutal and sustained by far.

The election, which international and local observers say was rigged, unleashed weeks of bloodshed that has killed more than 1,000 people and exposed simmering

resentments over land and President Mwai Kibaki's Kikuyu ethnic group, long dominant in politics and the economy.

Mutua said the aim of the military operation at Mount Elgon was to flush out and arrest suspects in killings and other crimes. He said some suspects had tried to flee across the border into Uganda.

Several villagers outside the area sealed off by the military said they have seen helicopter gunships firing for several days now, most recently before dawn Thursday.

"I was seeing fire," said Jeff Ngeti, 18. "Men were running."

Jacqueline Kamello, 27, who was working on an onion farm, said there were at least three helicopters flying in the area Thursday morning.

"I am happy about this military operation," she said. "These land militias have been bothering us, carting away our animals, attacking our neighbors."

Current president Kibaki and his rival, Raila Odinga, have now agreed to share power. Late Thursday, Kibaki named a six-member panel to investigate the election. Such a probe had been agreed to under the same deal that led to the power-sharing accord.

Despite the political accords, western Kenya has not seen an end to violence, much of it unleashed by land disputes.

The Sabaot Land Defense Force, members of the Sabaot ethnic group, are unhappy with recent attempts to settle land grievances and have turned on groups they believe were unfairly ceded land.

The violence has been worsened by guns smuggled into Kenya through its porous borders. The Sabaot militiamen and other raiders increasingly have been spotted with assault rifles.

Okello, the head nurse at Kitale District Hospital, said more patients are coming in with gunshot wounds, as well as injuries from weapons such as bows and arrows.

"We started receiving so many more people this year, with these wounds," she said. "I have cried for these victims so much, I can cry no more."

(By ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY, Associated Press Writer)

\$1,800 sent in food relief to date!

To date we have received and sent about \$1,800 to Kenya for the relief effort in and around Kisumu. The aid organizations working there estimate that there have been 350,000 people displaced as a result of the conflict. George Obonyo and our brothers and sisters



Displaced Family

there in Kenya are purchasing and distributing food and other necessary items to those in need. We realize that we can't help everyone, but we are doing what we can. Food relief is not the thrust of our work, but God has presented us with an opportunity to touch the hearts of many people and teach them because of this conflict.

We want to thank each of you who have helped us send help to those who are hurting and have nowhere else to turn.

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