

PEOPLE THE WORLD FORGETS

A STORY FROM NORTHERN UGANDA

AS TOLD BY DAVID LUWUM



TRANSCRIBED BY NOEL HARROWER

SOUTH WEST REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FRIENDS
OF NORTHERN UGANDA

6, Lyndhurst Rd. Exmouth, Devon, EX8 3DT Tel 01395 271731

1. The Luwum Family

David's great grandfather was made one of the chiefs of the Acholi people after he had killed some wild animals that were terrifying the villages around Kitgum in the northern area of Uganda. His grandfather inherited the title of Chief, and was converted to Christianity by an English missionary visiting northern Uganda. He helped the missionaries to build their churches and thousands were converted.

There were five sons. The eldest, Janani, became an ardent Christian. He took holy orders in the Anglican Communion, and was later appointed as Principal of Bulawasi Theological College. In 1966, he became Provincial Secretary of the Churches of Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi and three years later he was ordained as Bishop of Northern Uganda. The third son, Emilio, went into the Diplomatic Service, serving the first President of the new state of Uganda, Milton Obote. Promotion for him was rapid and he was appointed as the Ugandan Ambassador first in Rome, later in Moscow and finally the United States of America.

David, Emilio's son, was born in Rome, and later attended the English school in Moscow, and a school in Washington, U.S.A. It was during this time that there was a coup in Uganda. The government of Milton Obote was overthrown and the military leader, Idi Amin, seized power. As Ambassador to the United States, Emilio was in a key position and faced a great dilemma. For a while, he avoided comment, but as news of outrages in Uganda began to circulate, and he was questioned about this, Emilio felt it necessary to speak his mind.

What would Idi Amin do about this? Emilio held his breath. To his amazement, when the response came from the government, it was in a most unexpected way. He was recalled to Kampala to take up the post of Minister of the Interior, a key position, equivalent to Home Secretary. This created a great conflict in his mind. What was his Christian and his family duty? At that time, his elder brother, Janani, had been promoted again in the Church and was now the first African Anglican Archbishop of Uganda, and he, too, was very critical of Idi Amin's policies. Was he really to be appointed as Minister of the Interior, or was this simply a ruse so that he could be arrested and possibly killed? If he refused, he would only have one course open to him, to seek political asylum in the U.S.A. If he did this, would his brother, the Archbishop, be in peril? On the other hand, if he accepted and was actually appointed he would have a top post in the government and might be able to effect real changes, mitigating some of the worst abuses. He prayed about it, and discussed it with the family.

David was concerned because he noticed that when his father tried to explain the position to him, he was not looking him straight in the eye, as he usually did. David asked him why this was, and Emilio then looked right at him and simply said, "Let us enjoy the time we have together."

Emilio felt he was guided to return to Uganda, accept the post and use it to change the mind of the President. He and his family flew back to Kampala, where he was received

well and given quarters in the President's own compound. Emilio set about his new duties, and David was sent to a boarding school. The new Minister of the Interior prayed with his brother about the dangerous situation in which they were both placed, and felt they were being guided. The Archbishop had powerful friends through the worldwide communion of churches, and he had the courage to make overtures not only to the Roman Catholics, but also to the Muslim leaders in Uganda, and spoke out on their behalf also. For a short while, things began to improve.

At first, the President seemed to listen, and Emilio found that in his new post he could help ameliorate some of the nation's problems. He tried to restore justice through the courts. But inevitably, the day came when he had to challenge the President directly, and this was taken with ill grace. Soon after, Emilio was abruptly warned by a Chief Officer in the military that he had only two hours to leave the country. An order had been issued for his immediate arrest. Emilio escaped with his wife and younger children. There was no time to collect David from his boarding school.

To David's utter surprise, the Archbishop turned up at the school and collected him, taking him to his own home. He told the eight-year-old boy what had happened and reassured him that he would now be living as one of his own children. For three years, David stayed in the Archbishop's Palace in Kampala, going to a day school, attending Sunday services, and quietly observing everything that was going on in the tense capital city. Then, once more came the need to defend the innocent.

On the 12th of February, 1976, Archbishop Janani Luwum delivered a protest to President Amin against all acts of violence that were allegedly the work of the security services. It was signed by an impressive array of Church leaders. Those who put their names to the protest were summoned to a meeting in Kampala, convened by the Security Forces. When Janani returned home that night, he told his family that he might be arrested at any time. Later that night, officers came to collect him, and he said goodbye to a family who did not expect to see him again. An official statement was issued next day saying that he had been accidentally killed in a car crash.

The incidents which followed were well described by Bishop Festo Kivengere in his book, "Revolutionary Love."

"It became clear to us, through the Scriptures, that our resistance was to be that of overcoming evil with good. This included refusing to cooperate with anything that dehumanises people, but we reaffirmed that we could never be involved in using force or weapons. Therefore, we knew of course, that the accusation against our beloved brother, Archbishop Janani Luwum, that he was hiding weapons for an armed rebellion, was untrue – a frame-up to justify his murder."

"The news of his arrest and death on February 16th, 1977 sent us reeling. The truth is that it boomeranged on Idi Amin himself. He lost respect across the world and it was the beginning of the end for him. More than four thousand people walked un intimidated past

Idi Amin's guards to pack St. Paul's Cathedral in Kampala on February 20th. They repeatedly sang 'The Martyr's Song' - 'Oh that I have wings such as angels have that I would fly away and be with the Lord' and the singing of those thousands at the Memorial Service had wings too."

"After the service the crowds gathered in the cemetery, where the grave had been dug for Janani, beside that of Bishop Hannington, the first bishop for central Africa, sent out from England to the young church in Uganda. (He was martyred in 1885 by King Mwanga.) Our Archbishop's grave was empty, because the soldiers had taken it to his own village in Kitgum for burial, in order to avoid embarrassment for Idi Amin. At the open grave, former Archbishop Erica Sabiti, quoted the angels at the empty tomb of Jesus. 'He is not here. He is risen!' Instantly a song of Zion burst out with such power that 'Glory, Glory, Hallelujah' was heard from that hilltop far into the city."

There was an international outcry, but the major powers did not take action. The Tanzanian President, Julius Nyerere sent an invading force into Uganda, toppled Amin, and restored Milton Obote to government. At this stage, Emilio found he could come back to the country, and David was reunited with his parents.

Some time later, David's father took him to see the family's homeland in the north of Uganda, the area of the Acholi people where David's grandfather and great-grandfather had been Chiefs. David loved to explore the rural area and was taught some of the skills of subsistence farming. He found peace there again, and loved to climb the mango trees from which he could see for miles across the plains. There was a tradition that children should pluck the first fruits and present them to their parents. David decided that the first ripe mango he saw would be given to his father.

2. Perilous Times

The peace did not last long. Milton Obote lost control, and for a brief time an Acholi leader was appointed as President. This caused resentment amongst the tribes in the south and in 1986, another army commander seized power, the self appointed President Museveni. Fighting continued against him in the northern districts of Kitgum, Gulu, Lira and Pader, where the Acholi tribe traditionally resided.

Museveni managed to establish a strong government in the south of the country, and stability was again established there, but the pockets of resistance in the north were a continuing irritant. The President blamed all the Acholi people and sent strong forces to defeat them. A wild religious maniac called Alice Lakwena and her cousin, Joseph Kony, set up what they called "The Lord's Resistance Army", a group of rebels, supposed to be inspired by "The 10 Commandments." Alice thought that she was possessed by the Holy Spirit and they were all powerful. She told her child soldiers that stones they threw would transform into grenades and oils smeared on their bodies would cause bullets to bounce off their chests. Hundreds of gullible young men were led to their deaths. Joseph Kony,

who succeeded her as leader, was also totally ruthless, kidnapping children and drilling them as fighters. Soon a civil war was raging and many innocent people were dying at the hands of either the rebels or the government troops. Emilio Luwum tried to mediate on behalf of local people, and soon the army was out to get him. He had to hide in the forest, and David, now 17, used to visit him secretly, taking food to his jungle hideout. He used to climb the mango trees to watch the movements of the soldiers, and then advise his father which way to go.

One day, some villagers warned David that he was being watched. If he continued to do this, both he and his father would be caught by the soldiers. The help of missionaries was sought, and with their aid, and that of some friendly police officers, Emilio was smuggled out of the country to Sudan, and David was hidden in a vegetable lorry bound for Kampala. After an exhausting and frightening journey, David was eventually released under cover of darkness, provided with an airline ticket, and driven to Entebbe Airport. David's instructions were to get off the plane at the first stop and seek political asylum, whichever country he was in. He fell asleep on the plane, through sheer exhaustion. Someone shook him to say. "We've landed."

"Where are we?" he asked. "Gatwick," he was told.

The British Immigration Control Officer was not convinced by David's story and nearly put him on the next plane back to Uganda, but David had the wit to challenge him. "If you think I am not telling the truth, telephone the Uganda Office of the Interior," he said in desperation. They did just that, and were told "Yes, we want him." Clearly, the officer thought that Emilio Luwum had arrived in the U.K. David was given permission to stay, whilst his case was looked into.

He spent his first night in England, in a Hostel for the Homeless. It was a noisy Saturday night and he was exhausted.

David did not know anyone he could contact and was very confused. He lay on his bed and prayed. When he opened his eyes and looked out at the dark London skyline, he saw an illuminated cross on a church spire somewhere across the busy street outside, "It's Sunday tomorrow. In the morning, I'll go there," he told himself.

The next day, he tried to do that. The traffic on the busy main road was incessant. He did not know how to get across. He tried to dodge the traffic, and cars honked at him. A lady walking on the pavement called out, "Are you trying to kill yourself?" Dodging back, he explained. "No, I'm just trying to cross the road."

"I think you'd better use the pedestrian crossing. Come with me," the lady said. She led him there and pressed the button. After a moment, the traffic stopped miraculously, and they walked over a zebra crossing. "Have you only just arrived in London?" she asked.

"Yes, I came last night. I did not know about these crossing places."

“What part of Africa are you from?”

“Uganda.”

“You’re an Acholi, aren’t you. You come from the northern area. Not so much traffic there, eh?. But plenty of other problems though, I think.”

“Yes, that’s why I’m here.”

“I used to work in Uganda, and I know about the troubles in the north. What’s your name?”

“David Luwum.”

“Luwum,” she stopped in her tracks. “Are you the son of the late Archbishop?”

“No. He was my uncle.”

“Your uncle, who is your father then?”

“Emilio.”

“I knew them both, when I was a missionary in Uganda. Where are you going?”

“I’m trying to get to that church over there.”

“Have you any special reason for choosing that church?”

“No, I just saw it out of my window last night.”

“Well, I don’t know anyone who goes there, but if you’d like to come to my church, I’ll introduce you to some friends of mine.”

In this way, David was introduced to friends - one of them was the man who had been the last English Archbishop in Uganda. He had been proud to be able to hand over to the first African Archbishop, Janani Lawum.

3. Imperial College, Nottingham and UNA

David obtained permission to stay in the U.K. and was granted refugee status. He was asked, if he wished to continue with his education? What University would you like to go to? David had no idea how to answer the question. His schooling had been broken, he had never been trained for work.

He had lived in the bush and done a little hunting and subsistence farming and his knowledge of the English education system was limited to hearing about Oxford and Cambridge. He had been watching television that evening though and heard a discussion about the Engineering Courses at Imperial College. They sounded good, so he said “I’d like to go to Imperial College to study Engineering.” Incredibly, that is what he did. He was encouraged to apply, was interviewed and told what A Levels he would need. He went to a London College of Further Education and resumed his studies. Three years later, he graduated in Mechanical Engineering.

What was he going to do now? He had been living in London, had joined a church, and done some voluntary work as a youth organizer. Now he felt it was time to see more of England. He applied for another course in Management at Nottingham Trent University. During a period of work experience, he was seconded to a Nottingham engineering firm.

Whilst there, David did a time and motion study exercise, and was asked to give a presentation to the Company Director. The company was suffering from the textile industry recession, and David pointed out how he felt that the skills of the workforce could be used in other types of work. The Director was so impressed that he offered David a job, which involved him specializing in this aspect. In time, it even gave him the chance to travel abroad on behalf of the company, seeking possibilities overseas.

The fact that his father had been an Ambassador helped David. He contacted the Foreign Office and explained about the company’s work to the Labour attached, who put him in touch with countries overseas where there the expertise would be valued. This was followed through and David arranged contracts in Latin America, Rome and China.

David worshipped at Mapperley Parish Church in Nottingham and one evening went there to attend a prayer meeting. By mistake, (or perhaps he was guided) he went into the wrong room and found himself in a meeting of the Nottingham Branch of the United Nations Association. He had never heard of local UNA groups, but he was interested.

Later, he joined the Branch and found new friends. Now that he was settled in the U.K. and was acquiring British Citizenship, David had a deep desire to help the people of Northern Uganda. His mother was in a displaced person’s camp near Kitgum. He had regular telephone talks with her and knew how desperate the situation had become through the continuing fighting. Could UNA help in some way?

David was invited to attend the Annual Conference of the United Nations Association. He spoke on a resolution he had helped to frame about Northern Uganda. There was a keynote speech given by Bill Rammell, a Minister in the Foreign Office. David spoke, challenging him to try to see that problems of Northern Uganda were aired in the UN Security Council. Later, he and Malcolm Harper, the Director of UNA(UK) had a meeting with another Minister there to talk things through in more detail. Malcolm Harper spoke to Kofi Annan’s Adviser on African Affairs. There was a glimmer of a breakthrough, but things were very slow moving.

Malcolm Harper had worked previously as the East Africa Officer for Oxfam. He knew Uganda and now that he was approaching retirement, he decided that he would like to visit the area again, with David, who had just obtained British citizenship and felt that it might be safe for him to return. Malcolm made contact with the UNA of Uganda, and they agreed to help with a programme of assistance for the people in the northern territories. In January 2004, David flew back to his homeland on a ten day visit with Malcolm. They were met in Kampala by several members of U.N.A. (Uganda) and also by a representative of the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs .

4. Return to Kitgum

Kampala is a thriving capital city. Uganda is often praised in the West for its forward-looking policies, especially with regard to its established programmes of tackling the enormous problems created by AIDS. The well known western agencies such as Christian Aid and Oxfam have offices in Kampala. People in the central part of Uganda have no ideas of the terrible conditions in the north of the country, and the Western agencies are steered away from that area. They are told by the Ugandan government and others: “It would not be safe for your people because of rebel activity. But we are dealing with the problem.” The truth is that after eighteen years of conflict, the government are not dealing appropriately with the situation, and do not wish the world to know about their failures.

It was decided that a delegation of five people would fly to Kitgum and also visit Gulu. They would not tell the Ugandan government and embassy that they were going as they knew they would be advised very strongly not to do so.

On the night they arrived in Kitgum, Malcolm and David of the United Nations Association of the United Kingdom (UNA-UK), George and Richard of the United Nations Association of Uganda (UNA-U) and UN staff members from the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) found a big delegation of local Councillors and Leaders waiting to talk to them at their hotel. They pleaded for UN intervention to stop the harassment of the people by both LRA rebels and Government soldiers. They explained that many of the LRA rebel soldiers are their own children who have been kidnapped against their will, and turned into rebel front line soldiers and are forced to fight for their lives against well armed government troops.





Thousands of people have been turned out of their farms by the government and herded into Displaced Persons Camps (DPCs) being told it is for their protection from the rebels, but there is no work there or education for the children.

They depend on the UN World Food Programme for sustenance, whilst their farm lands run to waste. The DPCs are not even safe. There are nightly raids on the camps by rebel forces, who take boys to train as soldiers and young girls to act as sex slaves for their officers. The children are so fearful that they walk into the town centres every night for protection.



Later that night, they were horrified to see thousands of people, mainly mothers and children, parade into the town from the so called protected D.P.C.s to sleep in the open streets rather than face the risk of being kidnapped or raped in their own beds. These grotesque nightly processions have been going on for years. The army has camps in the region and constantly attacks the rebels but

the innocent people are often caught in the crossfire and sometimes the behaviour of the government troops is little better than that of the rebels.

During the next few days David and Malcolm had many meetings – with Kitgum Town Council, religious leaders and various local organizations.

1. The counsellors were anxious to have shelters to protect the night commuters, who were very vulnerable, particularly during the rainy season, when many of the children caught pneumonia and infectious diseases, including HIV AIDS. The Council owned an open piece of land which was a suitable site. It lay between the school and the hospital and could be used by them if the war ended, but shelters for thousands would be very costly and they had no money. The local people would gladly build them, if the materials were supplied and a professional surveyor could supervise construction.
- 2.

The church leaders and the Muslims explained the Religious Leaders' Peace Plan. They had managed to arrange a meeting with some of the rebel leaders who were tired of the fighting and wanted a settlement. The Government told their army commanders to go to these meetings and try to reach an accommodation, but just when peace began to seem possible, the army moved in and tried to arrest the rebel leaders. Fighting broke out and the opportunity, which had been so delicately nurtured, was thrown away. They questioned whether the Government really wanted a settlement. Were they content to let the war continue thinking "It's only Acholi people killing each other after all. What does it really matter?" Part of this thinking goes back to the earlier civil wars. Old scores are still being settled.

3. There are many enterprising groups of local people doing wonderful work. They met “The Concerned Parents Association” which helps link children, who have escaped from the rebels, with their own relatives, who are often dispersed to camps many miles away. Orphans are sometimes helped by their members, but there were far more needy children than adults with the energy to take on additional foster children, so many families consist of young sisters, or occasionally brothers, carrying for little ones.

“The Kitgum Women Bee-Keepers Association” train women to support themselves.

“The Child Refuge Centre” is an embryonic organisation aiming to train others in such skills as tailoring, building and vehicle maintenance. They met representatives from forty women’s village organizations who had gathered to discuss their problems. They visited Displaced Person’s Camps, Kitgum Comprehensive College, Kitgum Hospital, a representative from the World Food Organisation, and talked to the child night commuters themselves. What struck them most was the lack of international Aid Organisations in the region. The Government says it is coping and does not want them in this area.

From Kitgum, the team flew on to the neighbouring province of Gulu. They found that the problems here were similar, but relief efforts from the outside world were more apparent. Action Aid had set up a camp for escaped children, and was providing some schooling and health care. They were starting the long slow process of trying to rehabilitate children who had seen and often been forced to participate in unspeakable brutality, sometimes against their own friends and even families. There was a long road to travel, but tentative steps were being made towards healing in Gulu.

On their return to Kampala, the team had meetings with the UN Agency representatives and made representations on behalf of the people. They spoke to M.P.s from the north and Government and Army leaders, who argued that although things were bad, it was all the fault of the rebels, and they were getting things under control. The team had seen no evidence to suggest that this was true. They came away deeply saddened and determined to try to wake the conscience of the world.

THE FRIENDS OF NORTHERN UGANDA

On their return to the U.K, David and Malcolm took stock of the situation. The task was so enormous. Where could they start? David was working flat out in a very demanding job as an Engineering Development Manager. Malcolm was just about to retire as Director of the United Nations Association (UK) and there was a huge winding up job he had to do. Time was limited, but they both felt an enormous pressure to help in both a macro and an individual way. They sought meetings with UK Government Ministers, development agencies and church leaders. Malcolm was able to raise the issues with Officers at the UN in New York, and eventually the Friends of Northern Uganda were born.

The objectives are fourfold.

1. To work for peace in Northern Uganda through political pressure.
2. To raise awareness in the world through publicity and media contacts.
3. To raise support so that project workers can go to the area, to work alongside the local grassroots organizations, helping the peacemaking and healing processes.
4. To fundraise for night shelters in Kitgum and assistance with education and vocational training in this area initially and later wherever needed in the region.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

At the macro level, the process is all too slow, but awareness has been raised with politicians in Britain and in the U.N. Meetings have been held with journalists and the problems have been featured on TV, Radio and in certain areas of the press. The task is to keep this question alive, and work for an achievable solution. Major charities remain shy of the Kitgum area. The Ugandan Government would not welcome them there, and the situation remains dangerous for personnel, in an area where there is no real infrastructure to support them. The UN has offered to send Peace Mediators, but the Ugandan Government has rejected this offer. Fundraising has been started for a night shelter in Kitgum.



Michael and Geoffrey

At the individual level, fundraising and publicity has now enabled four young people Who escaped from the rebels to resume their education, Michael Ojak and Geoffrey Ryeko at Kitgum Comprehensive College, are being assisted by the Concerned Parents Association and other pupils are being assisted financially by Burford High School in Oxfordshire. A young girl, Jacqueline Aryemo.and her child are now being assisted, as she is being trained as a tailoress . It is hoped that many more will be helped as funds grow. More schools and churches might well adopt children who have been identified.

LINKS BEING ESTABLISHED BY OTHERS

Burford High School organized an exchange visit with Bishop Dunstan Nsubuga Memorial Secondary School in Kalangala, Uganda. Some students from Kitgum and Gulu were brought south to join them, near the banks of Lake Victoria.

Ugandan and U.K. students debated the values of peace talks rather than fighting, enjoyed camping together, participating in sports activities and sharing art lessons. A broadcast was made about the exchange on Radio Uganda and links between the schools are continuing, with donations of clothing and equipped being offered.

In Devon, the “Food for Thought” Programme organized by the Global Centre in Exeter has enabled local primary schools to be linked with schools in Mubende, Gulu, Amoru

and a special school in Kampala. Lessons are based on school farming, with pupils also exchanging information about market gardening and cooking.

Teacher exchanges are being arranged which are invaluable for broadening understanding. Some Devon teachers have helped to build a vocational training block. This is being attached to a Gulu Primary School who primarily consists of children living in displaced persons camps. Many of them have escaped from rebel hands. Organised games are one of the most healing activities for these traumatized children.

In Nottingham, St. Jude's Parish Church in Mapperley have donated substantial funds to help kick-start a shelter building programme in Kitgum, and St. Andrews-with-Castlegate United Reformed Church have helped to provide money for children's education. Other churches are becoming involved in the area, with help from the Nottingham Branch of the United Nations Association.

In York, an independent initiative has been taken by St. Michael-le-Belfry Church, who have sent four of their parishioners to a five-day conference in Kitgum being organized by SOMA (The Sharing of Ministries Abroad). This follows an initiative from the Bishop of Kitgum, and will give an opportunity for the lay workers to work alongside people living in the D.P.Cs and worshipping in churches there. Again the focus is on community peace building.

Three of these developments stem directly from the visits paid by David and Malcolm in January 2004. The Devon and York projects are quite independent, but close links are now established between the organisers.

WHERE CAN WE GO FROM HERE?

This is a big question. The aim of ending the fighting and establishing decent standards of living for the people of northern Uganda is paramount. Ultimately this is a political matter, but things are quietly stirring. Some cease-fires have been organized for limited periods. Several rebel leaders have indicated that they are sick of the fighting and would like to reach a settlement. The UN has offered assistance, but at present is stalled by the Ugandan Government. Religious leaders are active in northern Uganda and have devised an outline Peace Plan. There is a big prayer campaign at work.

Meanwhile, we must ask the questions. What can I do personally? What can my church, school or organization do? You can become a friend of Northern Uganda. For a simple subscription you will receive our occasional newsletter and be kept informed. If you want to help directly you can contribute to the Education Fund.

FRIENDS OF NORTHERN UGANDA

EDUCATION FUND

HOW CAN A CHURCH, SCHOOL OR OTHER ORGANISATION OR INDIVIDUAL HELP?

Boarding school fees and a living allowance for an escaped young person
Cost around £375 per year.

This might be raised through an activity or event.

Alternatively, 15 people donating £25 will meet the cost.

Regular annual donations can support a young person through a full six year course of secondary education.

Cheques can be made payable to "The Exeter Branch of the United Nations Association," and covered by a note saying this is for their Uganda Fund.

These can be posted to Noel Harrower, 6, Lyndhurst Rd. Exmouth, EX8 3DT