

# GHANA MENNONITE CHURCH PEACE KEEPING ORGANISATION

## ANNUAL REPORT 2006

*“God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God” (mat 5: 9)*

*We thank the almighty God for his blessings. He has watched over us and kept us going through thick and thin. To him we give all praise and adoration.*

### **PROJECTS**

This year has been very demanding but we are happy that we have been able to succeed so far and we will continue to do our best in making meaningful, the lives of many hundreds of people.

We really faced difficulties this year with fresh outbreak of violence in neighboring Ivory Coast. We had to withdraw our workers from there because it became increasingly difficult to avoid attacks by rebels even though they knew our work in the country. We therefore had to concentrate on social problems in Ghana but we hope that by next year, given the right logistics and environment we would be able to move back into the Ivory Coast to care for the many thousands who had been left homeless due to the conflict.

We focused mainly on the following issues in the northern part of the country-Ghana.

- **Campaign against ethnocentrism**
- **HIV / AIDS education**
- **Promotion of gender equality**
- **Guinea worm eradication campaign**
- **Malaria free future campaign**

### **CAMPAIGN AGAINST ETHNOCENTRISM**

Ghana is a country of many tribes such as Ewe, Ga, Fante, Asanti, Guan etc. these tribes are found in the southern part of the country and they have learnt to accommodate each other and live in peace. However the northern part with tribes like Tsallah, Atsode, Adele, kokomba, kotokoli and Ntrubo is easily destabilized. Just recently a paramount chief was assassinated by people from other tribe and this really made our work in this traditional area very difficult. We have to send in a lot of volunteers and with the help of government and other sister organizations; we have managed to cool tempers for now.

The main cause of tribal clashes is that people in one particular tribe feel they are unique, stronger and better than people in other tribes. This selfish pride then engineers conflicts. We organized about 20 seminars in about 5 different traditional authority areas preaching brotherliness and peace. The heart breaking thing of all is that, the northern part of the country is the less privileged and undeveloped. There are few infrastructure developments, education is not their primary concern, and they are economically under-developed and socially demoralized. Instead of them working together, they rather engage in meaningless tribal clashes which have fatal results. This is what we were able to make the people see. We had to make them understand that government and other investor's world not to put their resource in insecure and conflict prone areas.

The organization was able to make the people see themselves as elements of tribes but more importantly, citizens of a country which is above all affiliations and that they should work together for there is strength in unity.

The organization was able to make 10 tribes sign a peace agreement which we constantly remind them of to prevent any further violence. Our team of workers is around and we have advised that students should be taught the topics on unity and nationality. The district educational directors of these five traditional areas have accepted to include such topics into the schools curriculum. We hope that by the end of next year, more chiefs will be convinced to join the agreement.

## HIV/AIDS EDUCATION

It is on record that about 200 hundred people are infected with HIV everyday in Ghana. It is also on record that Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest number of HIV/AIDS victims. The organization has offered a lot of assistance to provide some relief to some of the patients in certain towns like Damanko sibi, Jole and Nkwanta in northern Volta of Ghana.

Already many children have been orphaned by this disease. Most of these children result to the streets because society is not able to provide for them. Then there is streetism with its associated problems of drug abuse, prostitution/casual sex, adolescent pregnancy and these creates a cycle of more infected HIV/AIDS people everyday. This year therefore, we divided the HIV/AIDS education into two (2). The first part dealt with infected persons.

We managed to get some of the infected person's retroviral drugs and educated the public against stigmatizing and discriminating the victims. In Ghana, HIV/AIDS patients and their families are ridiculed and some even are disowned and outcasted by their societies because it is a shameful disease. Discrimination is equally dangerous because infected persons live in constant rejection, pain and misery. Those who cannot take the discrimination commit suicide and end their lives. We reached out to the infected families, educating and counseling both them and the patients. We asked them to accept the unfortunately infected ones and care for them.

The second part was educating the entire public to prevent infection. We have seen that if we could reach out to every body the youth especially, educating and helping them to develop healthy lifestyles, many thousands of lives would be saved. Many people now know a lot about this catastrophic disease so we expect them not to engage in casual sex but instead abstain totally until marriage. And of course, even then, they have to protect themselves against possible infection.

## PROMOTION OF GENDER QUALITY

As part of our social responsibilities, we decided to hold talks on this subject because gender inequality is destroying the lives of many people especially young girls in northern Ghana. Girls are not allowed to go to school because the parents feel their daughters do not need education. For this reason, many young girls are married off at tender ages to full grown men. Sometimes when a daughter is just born, a man pays her dowry and when she is about ten (10) years, he takes her away as his wife. This is inhuman in every sense of the word.

We had a lot to do in educating the parents to send their daughters to school. This was really difficult because the locals felt we were trying to change their tradition and so many of the communities were not receptive to us at all. We managed to convince six chiefs and their council of elders who intend helped us spoke with their subjects. Culture is both dynamic and static. Therefore the people had to maintain their good traditions and change those that hampered their development. This was our main goal in terms of promoting gender quality. We also realize that, since only boys were allowed to attend schools, almost always, they made decisions in their homes and subsequently in the community. Women are not allowed to participate in decision making which is very wrong. We therefore got to the hearts of the women and got them involved so as to empower them as much as we can to also take part in making decisions about things that affect both sexes in the communities. In this way mothers got convinced to send their daughters to school and we talk to the fathers to do likewise because it was against the rule of law and humanity.

At the end of it all, we were able to make them realize that it was equally worthwhile investing in every child's education be it a boy or a girl. The areas we visited have an estimated young girls of school going age population around **three thousand (3,000)**. After our persistent talks with the people, **five hundred (500) girls** have been enrolled in public schools this year. This means that if we work harder, we would get more girls enrolled in schools and we are working towards it. We want to be able to empower women

economically so that they can also have “prestige” and be able to make all kinds of decisions in the society.

### **GUINEA WORM ERADICATION**

Guinea worm is another disease which has plagued the people of Northern Ghana until recently when much extensive effort has been made to eradicate it completely by government non-governmental organizations, churches and even individuals. We also have taken it upon ourselves to help in this cause.

Within the last three years, the disease has been prevalent but with our help, the infection rate has significantly reduced from 10% to 6.5%.

We conducted some research and we noticed that most of these people are infected because they do not have access to good drinking water and so are compelled to use guinea worm infested water for their domestic activities. We decided to firstly sensitize the locals about the disease. We visited homes and community centers and talked with as much people as we could. Later on, we provided white scuffs with which they could strain water to remove guinea worm eggs after which the water should be boiled before drinking. We bought and distributed a thousand and five hundred scuffs but this is not enough at all if we are to help eradicate guinea worm or at least reduce the rate of infection to an insignificant percentage.

The best way to eradicate the disease is to provide bore-hole facility for the people in five communities. We pray that God in his own wisdom would touch the heart of donors to help us provide these bore-holes for the people.

### **MALARIA FREE FUTURE CAMPAIGN**

Malaria is a very dangerous disease. HIV/AIDS kills but malaria kills twice as much as in Ghana. This is very alarming. If nothing is done, many thousands of lives would be lost. Already, thousands have died and many more already infected. It is estimated that about eight thousand people are killed by malaria every year. Pregnant women and children suffer most from the disease. Our research also found out that generally unclean environment breeds the mosquitoes which carries the malaria parasite. We sensitized the locals on keeping their environment clean always. We have also been able to distribute about five hundreds treated bed nets to especially pregnant women and mothers, together with other sister organizations and government. We undertook a one day free malaria treatment in a local clinic and over 300 pregnant women and children were treated.

### **CONCLUSION**

It has become increasingly difficult to fund all these projects but we thank everybody who has been with us and helped us in all ways. We are especially grateful to the Government of Ghana, the ministry of health and all non-governmental organizations, working with us especially, Youth Services and Child Care International. God Bless you all.

Our profound gratitude also goes to the Netzwerk Friedenstever for including us in their activities and letting the world know about our work.

We also wish to plead for up to five thousand euros to be granted us to replace our obsolete equipment in our office and partg of this grant would also be pushed into our budget. We appeal to all donor organizations and individuals to meet us half way and help alleviate suffering from among these people.

It is our hope and prayer that this year’s 11<sup>th</sup> International conference on War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns would be very successful as usual.

*To God Be The Glory.*