

SOMA Sudan Youth Conference, Mundri
3rd – 12th December 2004
Supplementary Report by Agnes Badaru & Walter Ocimati

‘It is pleasant and good for brethren to dwell together and more so in unity. Its like precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon mountains of Zion. For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore’ (Psalms 133).

More still, Hebrews 10:25 urges us “not to forsake the assembly of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but to exhort one another; and so much more as we see the day approaching”. This practice, which the early apostles embraced well among several things they did, is hated by the devil. He will always struggle to hinder such gatherings or even prevent individuals from being part of it. Often he tries to raise several barriers like busy work schedules, laziness, illness, accidents etc to wreck such arrangements. However, more important if the Lord Jesus is for us, who can be against us.

It all began when we received an invitation to the SOMA youth conference in Sudan. Doors opened up easily for four out of the five of us who were invited (Agnes, Lillian, Immaculate and Walter) despite the busy academic schedules; but Monica (who had even already processed her travel documents) was unable to come. The team travelled safely from Kampala on 2nd December, and merged with friends who are Sudanese nationals in Arua (who had travelled from Nairobi on the 3rd), before setting off for Mundri on the 4th through the border town of Koboko. The team from Kajo-Keji that was to join us arrived in Koboko at 2.00pm, only to find to their disappointment that the vehicle was too small to accommodate them. So they had to spend the night there.

At 3.30pm, we set off for the Sudan border. Crossing the border didn’t present much of a challenge, except for Lillian who neither had a Uganda passport nor a Sudanese permit! However she was easily able to obtain them from either side of the border. By 5.30 pm we left for Yei. We arrived there at 8.30pm, had supper at a restaurant and spent the night at Yei Diocese guesthouse. It’s a comfortable place except for the lack of water - forcing us to sleep still dusty from the journey, which the ladies were especially unhappy about, as all the way they had expressed their anxiety to shower! By 10.30 we were ready to sleep - but as we dozed off, the silent night was awakened by two gunshots. Being aware of the prevailing insecurity in the country, we weren’t so much scared.

The next morning, the 5th, we set off for Mundri at 10.00am, travelling without any setbacks till 8.00pm, 12km from Mambe Payam junction, when the headlamps of the vehicle abruptly went off. The driver quickly responded by switching off the engine. This was immediately followed by a loud explosion from the battery. The driver lamented later that if he had not been alerted by the headlamps, the blowing of the battery would have resulted in a fatal outbreak of fire. This was the first example of God’s gracious deliverance from the devil’s wicked schemes of destruction. A group of six gentlemen walked to Mambe to find help, while the others remained in the thick dark forest. Afraid, we prayed and sang aloud, and the Lord gave us strength and protected us throughout the whole night.

By 12 noon on the 6th, the vehicle had not been repaired. We almost lost hope of any help, as hungry, tired and thirsty we watched the mechanic work on the vehicle without any success. At 1.00pm we decided that we would walk to Mambe Payam to find food and water. After 7 kms walk, the vehicle arrived to rescue us.

At Mambe, which was 66 miles from Mundri, we had food and water to drink, and rested as we waited for the vehicle to be fully serviced. The struggle here was in getting a new battery, as the person who had lent us one (who was resident in Mambe) had taken it back. The rescue vehicle sent for us from Mundri, a Land Rover, was diverted to search for a battery from Maridi - a town 18 miles from Mambe. The battery was brought at about 10.50pm, and as they serviced the vehicle, some people transferred to travel in the Land Rover. Ten of us together with two conductors boarded and left at 11.00pm.

It was just an hour into the journey, and about 20 miles from Mambe towards Mundri, when we entered the fateful fatal scheme of the devil. The vehicle was on a high speed and suddenly it jackknifed and wobbled on the road. The last thing we noticed was hearing the shout of “Jesus, Jesus save us” and a loud bang. When we came back to consciousness, we were all standing on our necks with some screaming for the Lord’s intervention.

Some confessed later to have prayed their last prayers committing their souls to God. All this was preceded by the struggle to leave the wreckage. Thanks be to God, who enabled one of the front doors to be flung open in the accident, enabling somebody to open the rear door, thus preventing suffocation due to lack of oxygen and the leaking petrol. After the rear door was open we helped each other out of the wreckage. Some were not yet conscious at the time they were evacuated. All recovered well except for Rev. John Lukade who broke a shoulder bone, Immaculate Mugisha who had her eye and ear injured, Victoria who sustained simple fractures in her finger bones, Lillian who had an injury in the back and Agnes who had chest pain. The rest either had minor or no injuries. This was a reflection of God's salvation - given the speed of travel, the time of the accident and its location far from help. Later on we came to know that the driver hit a porcupine that was crossing the road thus destabilising the vehicle.

At such an hour of the night it was hard to find help and so with the pain and coldness we shivered till 4.00am. Then three men on bicycles, brought from five miles away by three of the members who walked to find help, arrived and lit a fire for us. They took three of the critically injured for first aid to a dispensary 6 miles away. We waited until 10.00am when the vehicle that was under repair arrived to find us stranded and picked us up.

We arrived in Mundri exhausted and aching, but relieved to be there. Arua to Mundri should be about 8 hours drive under fairly good road conditions but instead turned to be a three-day journey.

The return journey was equally not easy. We spent two nights on the road and lost our vehicle to a mechanical breakdown half way along the journey, and ended up using a trailer to bring us back to Koboko. More still, we faced difficulty at the Sudan border post despite having our travel documents.

In all we thank God who protected us in all the harsh moments. Our predecessors like Paul, Peter, John and more went through hardships and even to death for the cause of the Gospel. What gain is it if we save our selves from these hardships, and eternally lose our souls in destruction? For Christ urges all to carry their own cross and follow Him. For the cause of His call we are here on earth, and so wherever He will lead we will follow. No soldier pays for the cost of the battle he is assigned to fight, and His grace is there for us all.

May he richly bless you with that sustaining grace.

We also appreciate SOMA's ministry for this tireless endeavour to reach out, and more still for involving us as partners. May God prosper this Ministry to the Glory of His Name. Amen