

Bruno: When Nakahe returned, he saw his friend. He was so happy.

Meghan: (laughing) He looks really happy.

Bruno: He went to see what Maria was cooking. She was cooking beans. He kicked over the beans and stormed out of the house.

Meghan: Oh, that's not very nice...

Bruno: Yeah, mean.

Meghan: This is Ineza Kabera Bruno reading me a portion of his favourite book. Bruno is a student at a peace library MCC supports in Rwanda.

Meghan: Why is this your favourite book?

Bruno: I like this book because it is so beautiful, it is so wonderful and it's so funny.

Meghan: Does it make you laugh?

Bruno: Yes.

Today on the show, we're taking you to the Gicumbi Children's peace library in Rwanda.

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I'm Meghan Mast and you're listening to "Relief, development and podcast," a production of Mennonite Central Committee.

(MUSIC FADES UP AND THEN DOWN)

Meghan: The genocide against Tutsi people of Rwanda in 1994 turned neighbors against neighbors and friends against friends. These divisions were first sown by Belgian colonialism, which divided Rwandan ethnic groups and assigned power to the Tutsi elite.

A Quaker pastor, David Bucura, lived through the genocide and recalls the chaotic time.

David: I saw it. I saw it myself. How innocent people were killed, yeah, how innocent women children were killed without knowing why? We lost many people, friends, friends, relatives, people, key people, and where we I saw people killing each other, and where I saw people killing each other. I did not think Rwanda would be again a country from what I saw myself, because the killings were everywhere.

Meghan: In the years following, local and international organizations started peacebuilding initiatives. They hoped to repair the rift between ethnic groups that decades of colonial rule had deepened.

Many of these programs were focused on reaching Rwandan adults. But some people, including David, one of the founders of the peace libraries in Rwanda, felt like it was important to also

teach the next generation. He worked with MCC's partner Transformational Leadership Centre (TLC) to open the first children's peace library in 2005.

David: If we do peace building with children, we have a dealer of peace in the future. It's why, in 2009 we started the children peace libraries, where we have with the word peace and leading because we said we is good, the children may grow with the culture of peace and the culture of reading. And we found also ignorance contributed a lot during genocide against Tutsi. And is why we said, when the children grow with the culture of reading, the culture of peace, we will have a durable peace in the future. And we say, never again, genocide. And through the children's peace libraries, we do trainings, especially with the children. And we work with the schools and the schools send children, and we train them also in peer mediation. And the children become peer mediators amongst themselves, and we tell them how to solve problems and even to help other children who have conflict when they go to school, where they come to school, sometimes they have conflicts on the way going, and those peer mediators, they help.

Meghan: Children learn peacebuilding skills at the libraries and they learn to read both in English and Kinyarwanda.

I visited the Gicumbi peace library last year. The shelves are stocked with colorful Bible stories, crossword anthologies and books on the environment. Stories from African authors shares shelf space with titles like Clifford the Big Red Dog.

Children from a local elementary school visit the library with their teacher. They learn conflict resolution skills and participate in peace debates.

While I was there, I had the chance to watch a peer mediation role play with the students. Children are given a scenario where there is an argument between two students. Another student acts as a mediator trying to resolve the conflict.

Meghan: Can you explain what they're going to do?

David: Well, you see we do peer mediation with the children. And now the children want to act what they do. It's only showing you how the peer mediation workshops go with the kids, where you will see the mediators, and see the people in conflicts, and they try to solve the problem, and you try to mediate. There are two people in conflict. Okay, come.

(Kids come in arguing in Kinyarwanda)

David: They are saying we are peer Mediators.

Student mediators: We are peer mediators. My name is Hakizimana Iraboneye Sonia. My name is Ineza Kabera Bruno. We are here to help you. What problems do you have?

Student: Iravuze, he steal my bag

Meghan: He stole your bag?

Student (translated by David): Pen. I buy my pen this morning. Iravuze, he stole my pen. And they're saying it's his pen but it's mine. That is the problem you have now, it's why we're fighting.

Student mediators (translated by David): Now, please come and you go in a safe place. Go in safe place where we try to help you.

David: Now you can sit.

Student mediators: I think now we are going to make rules.

Meghan: As part of their training, the mediator lays out some parameters for how they can resolve the conflict in a good way. Rules like: don't interrupt and tell the truth. He reassures the students that the conversation they're having is confidential.

Student: I am going to start. My father gave me a pen. Iravuze says the Father gave the pen. And how do you say that? Because the pen is for Iravuze from his father.

Student: I bought the pen this morning from my money.

Student mediator: Iravuze says he did a mistake. He was thinking it is his pen, but is not his pen and he's asking forgiveness. What do you say about it?

Meghan: Can you explain what they're doing?

David: Yeah, that now he got his pen, and now they're impressing each other in love and forgiveness.

Meghan: They're giving each other a hug.

David: Yeah, they're giving each other a hug.

Meghan: The hope with these scenarios is that children can practice mediation techniques and learn how to navigate conflict as it arises in their own life. With their peers, their family and also in the community. Some of the students go on to form peace clubs in their schools. David believes this work is crucial and says international NGOs too often forget to incorporate peacebuilding in their work.

David: What I want to mention, is that most NGOs, they do support development work. They do forget peace. And I think development if there's no peace, there's no development. There's a connection. Is why peace must go for development, development, peace, yeah, and I think it's good to think also how they can support peace, especially this time where we see everywhere there's no peace. Yeah, there's no peace. I think they must think how to support peace. And another thing, as a Quaker I think when I see how much money goes to to military, yeah, all over

world, I wonder this, if we should have this money, maybe for peace building, maybe people will be peace builders.

Meghan: He believes that change is possible and says he's already seen healing happen. He says, in order to move forward, people needed to drop the labels.

David: Yeah, After genocide, we are lucky, because we have good leaders, political leaders, as I said, No more Hutus, no more Tutsis, no more. We are all Rwandan. This is why this time we do not like to mention Hutu Tutsi and we are proud to be Rwandan. Yeah, not to see you are Hutu or Tutsi, yeah, we are Rwandan. It's why we see him as a development team. This is forgiveness, is reconciliation. If unity is going on, we want to be seen as one person here in wonder, we are one, and we are wondering, because that was called your system, the dividers. And now we do not want to be divided. Again is where we say, if we are not divided, is where we reach, where we say, never again genocide. That is our goal. Never again genocide.

Meghan: And so that seems like a really important part of building peace too, is to stop the division. And to recognize that everyone is Rwandan.

David: Yeah, even if you, as I said, you have children peace libraries. You see when you saw even the children who cannot distinguish you say he's why we do not want to say, when they work together, they come to celebrate together as they are in schools together, they will grow with the culture of peace. They are not know those division because they are working. They are starting. They are starting working together as Rwandan children. For them, is why we have hope with these children. Yeah, sometimes we say as adults, we are destroyed by those backgrounds, historical, colonial, but our children are not divided. I work together, reading together, I acting together, and they are growing with the culture of peace. And is why we have hope from our children.

....And now I do think that, from what I see, how the country is developing, how the unity and the harmony among the people today, it was unbelievable to be able to see someone lost and forgiving, someone who killed the parents, the children's relatives, but forgiveness is seen here. Because I see everyone wants to contribute to our nations—from the leaders to the communities. And now is why we see Rwanda now is developing.

Meghan: He's seen someone forgive the person who killed their parents or their other relatives. Miracles, really. And this work is deeply important to David. He understands the stakes.

David: Genocide is why we are involved in peace building and reconciliation and the unity among people. It's why we are teaching children.

When I see conflict, when I see wars, when I see where people are fighting, even me, you know, near here in Congo, closer to us, there's heavy fighting. And when I see what's happening in Gaza, and it's sad. When I see what you had here in Rwanda genocide against Tutsis, I say, we need to put our effort, our energy, on peacebuilding and to do something or this world.

Meghan: That was David Bucura, a Quaker pastor and one of the founders of peace libraries in Rwanda.

MCC's partner Transformational Leadership Centre (TLC) opened the first peace library for children in 2005. Today the organization runs six peace libraries across Rwanda.

This episode of Relief, Development and Podcast was produced on Treaty 1 territory, the original land of the Anishinaabeg, Cree and Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. This episode was hosted and produced by me, Meghan Mast. The head producer is Leslie Bector. And this is my last episode because I'm leaving MCC to move onto a new job. I've really enjoyed making this podcast over the years, and I'm so grateful to you for listening. But I'm leaving you in good hands! Next month, Ken Ogasawara will be guest hosting and bringing you a story about a new meat canner. And Christy will be back after that.

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A lot is happening in the world right now. This is a difficult time for many. May you experience God's provision and protection as we work together to share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ. Thank you for listening.

(MUSIC FADES UP AND THEN DOWN)

SHOW NOTES:

Read more about peace libraries in Rwanda [here](#).