

War is a *Disease*

Nations at peace are healthy nations; they become diseased when they are at war. Burundi, a nation in central Africa, is really diseased; it has suffered from too many wars. Burundi is the home from which my family escaped in the midst of war. There are two major ethnicities, the Hutu and the Tutsi. It seems as if, for centuries, these ethnicities have been in conflict. These conflicts have caused millions of deaths and made the country so poor that too many Burundians suffer from famine and lack of education. What makes the situation worse is a leadership that only looks after itself. The leaders are self-centered and corrupt. So Burundi is a sick nation, one that needs to be healed. For this to happen, the nation needs to try strategies that could cure the disease of war: it needs nurturing, communicating, and empowering. That way we could get peace.

I believe that peace has to start first with the family. Family members need to nurture each other and settle any quarrels nonviolently, as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King have taught us. Much of this nurturing can be fostered by the churches and schools, but the main responsibility has to be the parents'. Proper nurturing involves not just feeding and protecting, but also, according to Dictionary.com, supporting and encouraging. Within each family, there needs to be true communication. Family members should not be afraid to speak frankly to each other and they should respect each other's opinions and feelings. They need to trust each other. Finally, there needs to be empowerment. Children should be given more responsibilities as they get more mature. The adults should be modeling this in their own relationships.

Similarly, within the local community, relationships should be nurtured. As in families, members of the community should respect others' opinions, protect each other, help each other and behave ethically. People in the community should feel able to express their honest feelings and opinions. Communities should feel empowered to make good decisions about their lives as long as the larger communities to which they belong are not harmed.

Finally, there is the larger community in Burundi, that made up of the Hutu and Tutsi. This larger community should adopt the same principles as the family and the local community. In their leadership of the nation, there should be unity within the Hutu ethnicity and within the Tutsi community; when leaders of the two ethnicities come together, they should see themselves as part of a single family. Just as parents should serve as good models for their children, so leaders should be good models for their ethnic groups. Thus, the leaders would not be corrupt nor self-centered.

If Burundians can learn to use these strategies, Burundi could be freed of this horrible disease of war. With a sustainable peace, Burundi could be a model for other countries in Africa, and perhaps Africa, instead of being crippled by war, corruption and disease, could be a model for the world. The strategies I have described are already well-known; *they just need to be tried.*