

The Bottom Line

An investment in Scouting is an Investment in the Future

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Scouting and Peace



"We were too late last time"



When local tensions diminished, Gilbert who seems too modest to ever be photographed, managed to bring 24 young Scouts to the Africa Regional Jamboree in Kenya. For most of the distance, they hitch-hiked. Their mixture of identity papers amazed many officials who could not believe such a group would be travelling together

*STOP PRESS:

In January the eruption of this volcano destroyed much of Goma, including the Scout Centre which was so important to the Scouts' work with refugees and street children. More information about this will be published as soon as possible

Gilbert is a very modest person, unassuming even, as he tells the story of when over one million Rwandan refugees streamed into Goma in 1996. His team of just 15 volunteers in the regional Rover crew grew to almost 1,300 active volunteers within weeks. They buried bodies, distributed food and clothing and formed the backbone of the relief efforts managed by many international NGOs in the camps. Without the Scouts, these NGOs would have found it much more difficult to operate, and surely many more lives would have been lost. But when this was all over, he didn't sit still, he wondered what could be done to prevent any future re-occurrence.

The place allocated to the refugee camps Goma is an unforgiving place, on the slopes of an almost dormant volcano*. But in 1996 it was refuge – from the genocide and terror of Rwanda and Burundi, a refuge from the long, arduous, barefoot walk from home villages which had been ethnically cleansed, and harassment by bands of soldiers and officials. Within days, it turned to a death-trap, with insufficient water, food, shelter and simply not enough space.

Hundreds, if not thousands of foreign aid workers also flooded into Goma scrambling in vain to distribute assistance, and to make sense of this place. Many of these aid workers themselves fell ill, victims to the unwelcoming environment. Many just couldn't cope with the stress.

Gilbert, team leader in the provincial Goma Scout Rover crew, assembled 15

of his best people. Armed with loudhailers borrowed from IOM (International Organisation for Migration) they criss-crossed the mountain slopes which had become a sprawling city and invited all Scouts to come together. 1,300 Scouts and former Scouts joined the call, and within days they had buried 26,000 bodies: victims of the long walk, starvation, and cholera. This unexpected team of local aid workers soon became the backbone of the relief operations managed by UNHCR, CARE International, and many other organisations.

And their work was paralleled by other Scouts throughout the region affected by this horrible tragedy.

There were also Scouts, to their shame, among the perpetrators of the violence and the ethnic cleansing. When neighbour turned against neighbour, Scouts too joined the call to hate. Gilbert and his colleagues in the Scout associations of the region, seeing the result in Goma and elsewhere, vowed that they would do their best to prevent it from happening again.

Secret Camps For Peace

But what to do? This region had been an ethnic tinder box, with flames of hatred fanned by fanatics, profiteers and mindless criminals. How could any organisation cross the lines and make a difference?

In response, Scouts from the region's associations secretly camped together,

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“We were too late last time”



Hutu and Tutsi, Rwandan, Burundian, Congolese. Leaders were trained as peace educators in non violent conflict resolution, peace education and communications. And above all, young people from this troubled region had the chance to do something for themselves, coming together in two work camps to build homes for those who lost theirs in the conflict. In building these homes, they began to build a future.

The World Scout Foundation helps the growth and development of Scouting worldwide by providing the financial support for the World Organization of the Scout Movement.

Some priorities include: Improving child health. Helping marginalized youth. Actively protecting nature and the environment. Assisting in the development of Scouting in newly emerging countries. Helping Scouts address community needs in developing and industrialized countries.

When once again war flared and the “Mai Mai” (jungle gangs that press kids into the conflict) came to a village to encourage boys and young men to join up, one lad came to his Scout leader to say goodbye, he was off to fight in the war. His Scout leader, recently trained in one of Gilbert’s courses, talked carefully, and the boy changed his mind, staying behind while his friends left. Three months later, he thanked his Scout leader, as all his friends had since died.

One life saved, an example of many more untold stories.

And for the future

With their own resources, and with a limited support from the WOSM Regional Office and a Belgian NGO Broederlojk Delen, and a grant from the Queen Silvia Fund (one of the special funds of the World Scout Foundation) Gilbert and his team have kept the programme alive since its inception in 1996. So far 48,638 Scouts and 1,194 leaders have been touched by the programme

Gilbert and his colleagues have seen Scouting make the difference. They have seen Scouts do amazing things – in the height of the crisis local Scouts shone among all the thousands of aid workers. In the shadow of the crisis, Scouts formed bridges and helped to rebuild their communities.

Gilbert’s team is committed to continue, so their plans are not modest. He intends to help Scouts make the difference to more individuals, and to the wider community with an ambitious programmes of 2002 and 2003:

- More trainer training, ensuring more adults (aiming at 2,500 key leaders) are trained as “multipliers” of non violent conflict resolution techniques;
- An ambitious dissemination campaign producing printed manuals, t-shirts, badges and educational games;
- Challenging cross community and cross border workshops dealing with living in peace, tolerance and interdependence;
- Linking these programmes with other essential issues facing Scouts within the region, such as their programme on AIDS prevention.
- But most important, Gilbert and his team want this programme to be taken broader – throughout the Africa region and beyond. “The time for peace education is not when the butchering starts,” sighs Gilbert, “we ignored the warning signs last time and left it too late, next time we will be prepared ... we hope everyone else will learn from our experience.”

The personnel needed for this programme are in place as volunteers in the different Scout Associations involved. A detailed programme document has been elaborated. Some funding is available. More is needed. US\$50,000 for two years is not much, given what they have achieved to date!

Help Gilbert spread his experience wider!

World Scout Foundation

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