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Welcome to the seventh edition of *Letter from Africa*, the official quarterly newsletter of African Prisons Project.

African Prisons Project is a growing charity founded to improve the welfare, health and education of detainees in Africa. For more info, see page 8.

This edition is packed with the latest information from APP. In addition to the usual news stories and photos, we have a detailed report of the trustees' visit to Uganda earlier this autumn. Diana Opio outlines the busy schedule of visits and interviews conducted on the visit. Finally, a feature written by volunteer Daneal Bassiouni who conducted a drama workshop with condemned prisoners at Luzira. Full details about APP are, as ever, listed on the back page. Read on for more news and don't forget to keep checking www.africanprisons.org for updates.

– Adam Smith, editor



3.10.09: APP's first African Nations Cup five-a-side football tournament, held at Camberley Arena, Surrey. More on pg 3.

African Prisons Project celebrates a positive year

African Prisons Project held its annual general meeting for 2008–2009 on 10 December. The event marked an opportunity to review the charity's activities in the past year, receive the formal accounts, and to hear of APP's ambitious plans for 2010.

The AGM heard from Director General Alexander McLean that "the past year has seen APP expand its operations both in the UK and Uganda". McLean added: "We have successfully completed construction on the healthcare centre at Gulu Prison,

which was planned as a Level II centre but may now actually be a Level III, meaning that it will get more funding from the Ugandan government. We have also seen success with a number of other projects from dietary supplements for HIV/AIDS patients in prison to installing more educational materials into our growing prison libraries."

Trustee Adam Smith said: "It has been a valuable year of progress at APP. In the UK we've recruited around 40 more volunteers and have (cont'd)..."

established a number of committees based on our areas of work. We have also held successful fundraising events from music nights to football tournaments, plus many other successes.”

Toby Brown expressed thanks on behalf of the charity’s members. “I’d like to express our continued gratitude and admiration for the tireless work of Alexander McLean and the staff in Uganda, and the unwavering commitment of the trustees and volunteers in the UK,” he said. “With the support of the charity’s donors, these tremendous efforts mean APP is making a humbling difference to the lives of those incarcerated in such terrible conditions.”

In the coming year, APP will undertake a number of exciting projects, including the installation of a university library and the ongoing legal support to the lawyers working on the death row appeal cases. The support of APP’s donors will continue to be paramount in making a difference to inmates’ lives.



Adam accepts the award on Alexander’s behalf

APP director wins major national volunteer award

Alexander McLean, APP’s founder and director, was recently awarded the Legend award at the national vinspired awards, which recognise the contribution of volunteers across the UK to the third sector.

“I’m delighted to have won this award,” said Alexander. “The vinspired awards are a wonderful and heart-warming way to recognise the good work that young volunteers do. I’m honoured to be awarded alongside the other winners.”

The glamorous ceremony was held on 26 November 2009 in the O2 arena in London. APP volunteer Adam Smith collected the award on behalf of Alexander, who was running operations in Uganda. “The ceremony was fantastic,” said Adam. “Hopefully Alexander’s award will generate some national media coverage for APP – there was certainly plenty of photographers taking my picture as I accepted the award from rap sensation Tinchy Stryder!”

Female inmates welcome literacy programme

APP has commenced a functional adult literacy programme at the Victoria Women's Prison at the Luzira prison complex that houses over 600 inmates.

The women were excited with the programme, which features a book club and storytelling initiative that will keep them occupied and improve their reading and writing skills. A similar adult literacy programme has been conducted for the past eight months among the 900 male inmates at Kampala Remand Prison, where APP built a modern library that is fully stocked with over 4,000 books, computers and other information materials. It is open from Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4pm when inmates are locked in their cells until the next day. Daily attendance at the library is 80 to 90 people, including prison staff. The comprehensive programme at Remand entails storytelling and creative writing, a book club, basic computer training, translating English books to various African languages and a drawing and painting club.

"Though there are future plans of building a library in the women's prison, I thought that having this programme in the meantime would help a lot as the prisoners wait for the library," said Glorias Asimwe, APP's prison libraries officer. "It will be conducted every Wednesday and Friday 2pm to 4pm. The project will run at Remand library Tuesday and Thursday. I'm working on having another programme started in the Upper Maximum Security Prison where the university programme is underway."

African Nations Cup 2009



APP's African Nations Cup 2009 raised hundreds of pounds and was attended by footballers of all ages and skills – not to mention their eager supporters. APP volunteers organised the whole day's activities which included the tournament and also a bazaar, some drums and a talk by a trustee. Thanks to Paul McFarlane for organising and Mayuko Ono for taking the photos.



A visit to Uganda

by Diana Opio, chair of the board of trustees

Objectives of visit

- To become familiar with the work APP is doing in Uganda;
- Review progress of the projects;
- Meet the APP staff and gain understanding of their roles;
- Look at ways of improving organisational communication;
- Review the structure of APP Uganda;
- Explore some networking opportunities.

Trustees' diary

Friday, 18 September

Lyn McLean and Diana Opio arrived in Uganda and stayed at the APP house in Luzira. On arrival they were introduced to members of staff.

Saturday, 19 September

Visited Upper Prison with APP director Alexander McLean and Beatrice Ocam, one of the prison nursing officers, who is a friend to APP. Trustees visited the sickbay and clinic, which had been refurbished by APP in 2004, and the library, which had been moved to a smaller venue since it

opened. At the condemned section of the prison the two trustees met inmates and also visited and the condemned prison library, which now has one computer.

Sunday, 20 September

Trustees attended the Anglican church service held in the condemned section of Upper Prison. After the service they went to welcome Zur Kredo, a retired Israeli prison official, who was visiting APP for a week. Attended the funeral gathering held at the APP house for a condemned prisoner who had died in Mulago hospital.

Monday, 21 September

Trustees arranged interviews with the APP staff, starting with assistant directors Renzo van Diepen and Marcel van Gils. Attended APP management meeting in the afternoon.

Tuesday, 22 September

Travelled to Gulu. Toured Gulu women's prison, which was badly in need of repair. We then inspected the new health centre built by APP and funded by ICAP. The building structure was complete

although still being plastered and still to have windows, doors and other fixtures finished. Some key people were present for the inspection including an engineer from the Uganda Prison Service (UPS), regional prison officer, a key district health official, the officer-in-charge of the men's and the women's prison and the contractor, among others. After hosting the officials to lunch at St Monica's Convent, we then toured Gulu men's prison. This was a new structure with a sickbay and clinic, but the building was very overcrowded, although only opened six months previously.

Wednesday 23 September

Returned to Kampala by bus. In the afternoon Diana Opio and Alexander McLean visited the Luzira compound to meet with Evelyn Akello (UPS senior hospital administrator) and Beatrice Ocom, who it was agreed would be the APP focal person in Luzira concerning health matters and she would have Evelyn's support. Also discussed:

- Training of wardens in basic nursing skills, so that when prisoners are taken to Mulago Hospital, they can help keep them comfortable (this would address the problem of prisoners dying from lack of care);
- Infrastructure development – as undertaken in Gulu;
- Nutritional support for children and people on anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs);
- HIV treatment initiatives (addressing a lack of ARVs);
- Support for the more elderly inmates;
- Long term curriculum development for prison staff; and
- Capacity building support – to attend conferences, training etc.

Lyn McLean and Zur Kredo visited the condemned section of the prison, taking art equipment so that prisoners could participate in an art competition. Pictures and poems were being collected for an art

exhibition to be held in Yorkshire in May 2010.

Thursday, 24 September

Interviews held with APP staff members Olive Ajambo, Brian Wamala and Kerry Ann Akers. The management team meeting was continued in the evening, where members discussed the restructuring of APP Uganda.

Friday, 25 September

Lyn and Diana interviewed APP engineer Gordon Binomugisha and APP librarian Glorias Asimwe. Then went with Glorias to visit the remand prison to see the health unit and library, which was opened in September 2008. Both were in very good condition and well used. The library also offered literacy classes, storytelling and art sessions.

Having interviewed the APP staff, and carefully considered the ethos and future direction of APP, the trustees set in place a new organisational structure.

Saturday, 26 September

Trustees had some free time in the day. Then had supper together with Mary Kaddu, the retired deputy commissioner of prisons, and Beatrice Ocom. Future collaborations were discussed.

Sunday, 27 September

Attended the church service with the condemned prisoners. Many of the prisoners expressed a variety of requests, ranging from making phone calls, supplying provisions, selling their handicrafts, publishing their creative work and getting pen pals with whom they could correspond. Visited Mulago Hospital in the evening to visit the hospitalized prisoners: it was obvious that prisons in Mulago received virtually no care except from that given by APP and its group of committed volunteers.



Acting up in condemned

by Daneal Bassiouni

I recently had the privilege of carrying out a drama workshop in the condemned wing of Luzira Upper Prison, Kampala. The workshop aimed to assess the feasibility of conducting a long-term drama project at the prison. At the end of the workshop I felt both encouraged and excited about the possibility of future projects. Despite the workshop lasting only three hours, the experience left a lasting impact on me in ways that were unexpected.

As soon as I entered the condemned wing it was clear that I was in a very different situation from a British prison. While I was prepared for a number of the differences I faced, such as extreme overcrowding and malnutrition, many of the differences were both surprising and refreshing. I was perhaps most shocked by the welcome and hospitality the inmates showed me, which contrasted hugely with my experiences in prisons in the UK. It has not been the norm in my experience of UK prisons that inmates carry your bag for you, liaise with the guards about the possibility of using different spaces for the workshop, and offer you cups of tea. Throughout the

workshop I found that the inmates seemed to lack the distrust and suspicion of visitors that is so common within prisons in Britain.

The differences between the behaviour of inmates in Luzira and those in UK prisons extend beyond different cultural attitudes. As the morning went on it became increasingly clear that the wardens in Luzira adopted a radically different approach to the responsibility they gave to inmates. The way British prisons distribute responsibility and authority has the lone virtue of being simple: prison wardens have it; inmates lack it. Hence my surprise when the wing warden, faced with the nuisance of a *mzungu* (European) wishing to conduct a drama workshop, passed me on to the director of studies of the wing (an inmate), who the guard told me would be the person to organize the workshop. The director (as he was respectfully referred to by his fellow inmates) then began to discuss with me the difficulties of carrying out drama programmes in prisons, such as a lack of literacy, rehearsal space, and time when all

those interested could be together. As the director explained this, I had to remind myself that he was an inmate in the prison. The British penal system could do worse than look to the Ugandan approach towards prisoners in this respect. Granting certain inmates who have exhibited good qualities a position of authority reduces what is an inevitable gulf between warders and inmates, limiting the hostility of inmates towards warders. Allowing inmates to retain and work towards positions of responsibility also plays a vital role in helping inmates to retain structures that are central to the fabric of the outside world, making issues of rehabilitation less problematic.

While the inmates at Luzira may have been more open and welcoming to me than expected, they expressed a number of concerns about the workshop. They had found western classics such as *Waiting for Godot* difficult to understand. Many inmates who were interested in taking part in drama were unable to read or speak English fluently. I reassured the inmates that the morning's workshop would not involve scripts, but would give them a chance to create drama about issues that were relevant to them, and the problems they faced. My role would not be to direct them but rather to facilitate them. When greeted with a group of enthusiastic yet cautious inmates, 'facilitation' certainly involves at least some level of trickery: the prospect of merely creating drama from your imagination is to many, understandably, an intimidating task. The structure of the workshop was designed to distract participants from this end goal and build to it, gradually moving from simple exercises, such as learning each others' names, to creating frozen images, to full dramas based around a theme. The dramas developed each had a clear moral message such as 'go to school', 'go to church' and 'respect your family'. When questioned as to the reason for this one of

the inmates replied, "Because there are so many people in here who have made these mistakes, and now they are here."

Daneal Bassiouni has worked in a number of young offenders' institutions as an assistant facilitator for the National Youth Theatre, running drama workshops and recruiting students for its courses for those with experience of the criminal justice system. He has worked with a range of groups outside of institutions, including primary school children, children with special needs, and young people in underprivileged areas. He has been involved with Little Big Africa, a water and sanitation charity based in Mbale, Uganda. He aims to set up a permanent drama project for APP next year, after having carried out an assessment workshop in September 2009.

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Thanks for reading...!

We hope you enjoyed the newsletter. Why not forward it onto friends and family who might be interested in finding out more? And please get in touch if you have any suggestions.

Email the editor, Adam Smith, at: adamsmith@africanprisons.org

You can read the latest APP news on our website:

www.africanprisons.org

And check out Alexander's blog at:

www.scottmelhuish.com/africanprisonsblog



And remember we still need your donations. Please give what you can so we can continue to help improve the lives of prisoners in Africa.

African Prisons Project (APP) is a young charity founded to improve the welfare, health and education of detainees in Africa. We aim to restore the dignity of prisoners by providing humane conditions and improving welfare, access to medical facilities and the opportunity to learn. Our principal projects are the creation or refurbishment of prison clinics and libraries.

Africa is a continent in transition, and its problems are magnified within the detention system. The plight of detainees is rarely noticed; therefore they receive little help from charitable organisations. Yet they include the most downtrodden and vulnerable - babies imprisoned with their mothers, the mentally ill, children and the illiterate.

In general, the conditions in African prisons are painfully poor. Many are severely overcrowded, lack sanitation and are unable to provide adequate nutrition. Access to books and education is limited or non-existent. Medical facilities are wholly inadequate. Few countries have universal access to legal representation, whilst many retain the death penalty and corporal punishment. Prison sentences can be significantly longer than in developed countries and it is not unusual to spend long periods in prison without trial.

Since its foundation, APP has been run by young volunteers - students and young professionals who want to make a difference. Increasingly we are supported by our advisors and partners. We provide school leavers and those from disadvantaged backgrounds with the opportunity to gain experience and skills by assisting a project in Africa. Our volunteers then act as ambassadors when they return home.

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