

*“You must not mistreat or oppress foreigners in any way.
Remember, you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.”*

Exodus 22:21

Visitors are Blessings

Huriya is a student at Ainsworth Primary School in Nairobi, Kenya’s volatile Eastleigh neighborhood. She and her family fled Somalia when extremists gained power and began forcing them to follow their radical sect of Islam. Huriya and 90% of the girls at Ainsworth wear school uniforms accessorized with flowing white Muslim headscarves.

The vast majority of Kenyans are Christian and many now associate Muslim Somalis with the recent wave of terror attacks. After explosions killed 6 people in Nairobi last year, police have been reportedly terrorizing the Somali population. Eastleigh residents accuse police of banging on doors late at night asking for the occupants’ national identification cards only issued to Kenyan citizens. When the refugees explain they do not have one, the police ask for bribes. If a sufficient bribe cannot be produced, they are arrested or worse. Within months, Ainsworth went from 1500 to 1000 students.

The situation is very hard on teachers, as well. Classes are taught in Swahili and English. Senior teacher Mary’s refugee students rarely speak either when they begin school. “We have agreed to struggle with these kids,” Mary pledged. “I always say when I get annoyed with kids, I always tell my God, ‘Let it be for a minute, and the next minute I should be happy with these kids.’ This kid left home to come to another mother — and sometimes I tell them that I am their grandmother — so why should I get annoyed?”

With the devotion of Ainsworth’s teachers, some students are graduating and going to high school, college, or technical school. Emotionally traumatized children have been aided by educators and counselors. “We try to tell the teachers to understand them and advise them that this place is safe, not like Somalia,” Head teacher Abdi noted. “They have changed: not one or two — many of them.”

“Refugees want peace, and they came for peace,” Abdi shared. “They can’t go back to their country because it is insecure. The extremists are still there. The refugees say we are all human beings. Everyone can live together with their own faiths.”

As I spoke with Abdi, he and his colleagues brought me tea and cookies. He welcomed me with genuine sincerity, looked into my eyes, smiled, and declared: “A visitor is a blessing.”

Joel Cooper serves as a Global Mission Intern with the Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (FDCD) in Lebanon. He previously served with Church World Service East Africa in Nairobi, Kenya. His appointment is supported by Week of Compassion, Our Churches Wider Mission, Disciples Mission Fund and your special gifts.



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The prayers and help you provide through your local congregations make possible the work and witness of GLOBAL MINISTRIES, which is supported by Disciples Mission Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) of the United Church of Christ.

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