

Rival groups lay down differences to celebrate International Day of Peace in Kenya

PeaceNet facilitated a number of activities in various parts of Kenya to mark the International Day of Peace observed on September 21, 2008. Events of the post 2007 election violence marked the theme of this year's peace celebrations in most parts of the country, where members of diverse ethnic communities which fought came together to celebrate peace and reconciliation that has since been achieved in the communities.

A Peace Caravan commissioned 15 days earlier (Sept 6, 2008), returned to Nairobi on Sept 21, 2008, after traversing several communities to Northern Kenya, promoting peace and harmony among the warring communities living in the area.

The Caravan specifically targeted mainly the youth, using innovative peace messages weaved into various theatrical, artistic and popular games activities, performed during stop-over sessions from one location to another.

Other than peace messages, entrepreneurial ventures and democratic processes were also discussed to encourage the youth to actively participate in income generating activities and leadership. Aboard the caravan were 42 youth, representing the Kenyan ethnic diversity.

In the Central Rift Valley region, celebrations to mark the day were held in Kipkelion town, where hundreds of people from diverse ethnic communities, drawn from at least three neighbouring districts (Kipkelion, Molo, Koibatek and Kericho districts), women and youth groups, school children, CSOs and Faith Based Organizations in the area converged to celebrate together.

The event was graced by the Rift Valley Provincial Commissioner, Noor Hasan Noor and attended by District Commissioners from Kipelion, Molo, and Koibatek districts. Local leaders including area Member of Parliament and civic leaders were also in attendance.

During the event, various groups presented plays, songs, poems and prayers, all condemning violence and affirming the need for peace-building, reconciliation and harmony among communities living in the area.

In the North Rift Valley region, a peace meeting was held in Kapsabet town, where community members, together with local leaders, civil society groups in peace-building, youth and women groups and elders met at Kapsabet town garden grounds to celebrate the day.

Theatre groups performed drama activities capturing the events of the post 2007 election violence, to demonstrate the need for peace and reconciliation in the area. In South Rift Valley region, PeaceNet regional leaders together with Faith Based Organizations visited some 61 households who had been displaced from Narok during the post 2007 election violence and have since secured a two acre piece of land in Maimahiu area, using the 10,000 shillings given by the government as a re-start up assistance to IDPs in Kenya.

The group went to assess their welfare and security situations with a view to informing necessary interventions. They also donated some food and other necessities to the group as well as discussed on the need to embrace peace and reconciliation.

In Nairobi, at least three peace-building activities were carried out to mark the IDP. As a build-up to the IDP, two activities targeting secondary school students were undertaken on September 18th and 19th, 2008, where students were engaged in a discussion forum on the importance of peace and harmony in the society.

On Sunday, a peace meeting and prayers were held at District Officer's (D.O's) grounds in Kibera, where PeaceNet Kenya, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Jamii Bora Trust were among Organizations represented. The event graced by a representative of Nairobi Provincial Commissioner (P.C) was attended by other local Provincial Administration officials, including Nairobi West District Commissioner and a number of District Officers. Several churches also dedicated Sunday sermons to pray for peace and harmony.

In the North Eastern region, a public forum on peace was held at Garissa Primary School, where Garissa District Commissioner, Peacenet regional Trustee, and the District Peace Committee chairman addressed the forum. Religious leaders also conducted peace prayers.

Later during the day, PeaceNet regional committee undertook visits to children homes hosting orphans of the resource based conflicts in Garissa, Ijara, Wajir and Mandera districts. The committee took with them Ramadhan gifts to the orphans in AlNajah, Al Sunnah and AlFurqan orphanage in Garissa, Mandera, Ijara and Wajir districts to mark the auspicious day.

In Nyanza region, a peace meeting was held in Nyalenda, Kisumu, where community members, the post election Internally Displaced Persons, and CSO groups in the area shared their experiences and testimonies of the post election violence.

In Coast Province, celebrations were held in at Hola stadium in Tana River district, where 22 guns and 100 rounds of ammunition surrendered by the members of the community were handed over to government agents, led by the Coast Provincial Commissioner, Ernest Mwinyi, who was the chief guest. Also, three AK 47 assault rifles and 541 rounds of ammunition recovered from suspected thugs were handed over.

During the celebrations, members of the Wardei, Orma and Pokomo communities, who are in constant conflict with each other, mainly over natural resources (Land, water and pasture) converged in a peaceful atmosphere, to share experiences of the conflict and discuss ways of mending their differences to ensure peaceful coexistence prevails.

Elders and youth representatives from each of the communities were given an opportunity to share their views concerning peace in the area. Also in attendance were local leaders, including the area Member of Parliament Dr Nuhu Nasir among others.