

## Please Forgive Us- An emotional apology by women from Pokot Community in Baringo County- Kenya

“I want God to be a witness of what we shall say today. The Creators of Peace Circles training that we went through is now bearing fruits. Today, I stand here as a Pokot woman and speak on behalf of the Pokot women. We are very sorry for all the pain that our sons have caused to your people - please forgive us. We are sorry for all the deaths caused by our sons - sons that gave birth to - please forgive us. We are sorry for all the people who have



been displaced by violence caused by our people - please forgive us. You are widows because of us. Your children are not going to school because of us. You are living in the forest because of us. You are dying of hunger because we took all that you had - please forgive us. We are also tired of violence and killings. We want peace and we are working hard to bring peace. Please forgive us. I realise that we have different ethnic communities, but all of us fall under one community called “the women community”. If we as women hold hands together, we will make a difference in this county.”

These words above are just some of those given by Mary Kuket, a woman from Pokot community. She spoke on behalf of women from her region to women from the Ilchamus, Tugen and Endorois communities who have suffered a lot due to the actions of some people from the Pokot Community. The reconciliation meeting, is a result of Creators of Peace Circles which took place in Marigat town, Baringo County on the 27 May, 2015, witnessed by 75 people.



As Mary, with 25 other Pokot women standing with her, gave the apology and asked for forgiveness, there was a deep silence in the room. Many women from the Pokot, Ilchamus, Endorois and Tugens communities couldn't hold back their tears. You could tell the apology was coming from the heart. You could also tell that it was breaking the chains of hatred and bitterness in the hearts of many women in the room. The number of times Mary, said “we are sorry” and “please forgive us” on behalf of her community, was uncountable.

What made the apology even more moving is the fact that there was no justification at all from the Pokots over why things were the way they were. It was pure acceptance of their role in the pain of the others. They did not even go as far as to say that they also have lost their sons in the violence. Actually, the women from the

Illchamus, Endorois and Tugen communities later acknowledged the fact that the Pokot women have also suffered because they too have lost their children as a result of the violence.



After the apology, Illchamus, Endorois and Tugen women from different areas walked to the podium and poured their hearts out. When some of them started talking, those of us in the mediation team held our breath praying that things wouldn't spiral in the wrong direction and cause harm instead of healing. We thank God that every woman who spoke on a personal note or on behalf of others, embraced and accepted the apology and agreed to forgive.

'Thank you so much for asking for forgiveness. We have suffered a lot. We say 'it is enough'! (referring to violence and killings). Mothers giving birth in the forest and their babies being eaten by snakes because they have been displaced - it is

enough. The number of orphans - it is enough. The number of widows because of the killings - it is enough. We want peace. We accept the apology and we forgive you.' said one lady.

'I never thought that anything like this could ever happen. I never thought that anybody from Pokot could apologise and take responsibility for all that has happened. But today it has happened. We don't know where all this started (atrocities) and we don't even know where it shall end. But we accept the apology. If Creators of Peace is the channel through which Baringo County shall be peaceful - may it be so.' Was a comment by one of the women.

'I have suffered so much because of the Pokots. I was once a teacher. Unfortunately my house, all my official documents and the school where I was teaching were burnt down. I am now living in poverty because I can't get a job since I don't have any documents to show that I am trained. But it is well. I personally accept the apology and I choose to forgive.' shared another broken woman.





‘Yes, we have really suffered because of the Pokots. We now don’t even have hospitals and our families are dying because of you (referring to Pokots). You probably have no idea how much we have suffered. But you have asked for



forgiveness. According to our culture, if someone asks for forgiveness, you can’t refuse to accept it. We forgive you. We are ready to join you, the women of Pokot to reach out to people in every corner of Baringo County and tell them we want peace,’ shared another woman.

‘As we speak, there are rumours that some Pokot young men are in the forest planning an attack. We want to ask you the women of Pokot, please do whatever you can so that these young men can go back home before they cause violence. We want peace. Let’s all put the birth belts on and work for peace,’ was another comment. (According to their culture the birth belts are worn by

women after giving birth. When a woman puts it on and talks to her children, they should listen otherwise they can be cursed).



After all the acceptances for the apology and forgiveness was done, the women came together in song and dance embracing one another. The celebration was followed by the making of a commitment, a pledge of peace. Then a candle ceremony was performed where women lit each others candles as a sign of being ambassadors of peace wherever they are. Finally, the women, while holding the burning candles, sang the Kenyan national anthem, a very beautiful prayer by itself, as a commitment to God that they shall remain creators of peace in their homes and community.

All those present made a commitment to doing everything they can to bring peace. Great appreciation was expressed for Creators of Peace Circles which is the genesis of the reconciliation meeting. In their acceptance and forgiveness speeches, they also asked for support to reach more women in Baringo County so as to create a mass of women who are committed to the process. As Creators of Peace (CoP) and Initiatives of Change Kenya, we also felt that this is a cause worth supporting. There is a huge need to reach out to more Pokot women so that they can join hands and talk to their sons whom they admit are the perpetrators of violence. There is also a need to reach out to women from other parts of Baringo County for healing as well as increase the number of women who can help strengthen the campaign for peace in the county.



'I am happy that I witnessed the reconciliation that has taken place between these communities which has been in conflict for a long time. What has happened be shared on all

here today is wonderful and should platforms - Facebook, WhatsApp and any other media. Women, if empowered, are powerful tools for change. You should be supported by the government to do even more. I shall pass the message of what happened today to my local leader. When these women come to bring the message of peace to my ward, we shall offer security,' commented Mr. Musa Maita, a Ward Administrator from Tangulbei area.



the CoP team has agreed to make Baringo the County a priority to run more Peace Circles to create a groundswell as well as take the apology and forgiveness message to more people by helping the Pokot, the Tugen the Endorois and Ilchamus women reach out to women in different areas in in the Baringo county with a message of peace and reconciliation.

This apology was made after a journey that started in August 2014 when the CoP team took the CoP training to women in Kabarnet, Marigat, Sandai and later in January 2015 went in to East Pokot, Tangulbei and Nginyang. In total, 81 women took part in the Peace Circles in Baringo County. Before the start of Peace Circles in Pokot, there was a meeting with leaders from the area.

We are grateful for the courageous step by these grassroots women. Some people might say "these are just local women who don't make any major decisions in their communities and therefore their apology and forgiveness is insignificant." We want to emphasize that this small step, if fully supported and can make a mark in the history of Baringo County and that of Kenya. With proper support, we can help create a movement of grassroots women who in turn can make decisions that will be listened to by the entire community. If well

supported, we can help turn the leadership and decision making to a bottom up approach. However, we would like to highlight the fact that, yes, these women may not be in boardrooms discussing the politics and possible strategies for dealing with the security challenges in Baringo County, but they interact with the young men that cause all the insecurity, violence and atrocities in that County. They have the power to influence positive change in the young men.





With financial support, we can empower and support more women in the Baringo County and make peace a reality. On behalf of the Creators of Peace Circles team in Kenya, I wish to kindly request IofC-



International, Creators of Peace International, IofC Bodies across the world, community/peace funding organisations and individual well-wishers, to consider supporting the project.

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