

# ONE VOICE

TOGETHER IN PRAYER FOR AN **END TO POVERTY**

## **EBOLA DEATH TOLL REACHES 1,000 IN THE DRC**

**The death toll from Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has risen to over 1,000, according to its government. Tearfund staff and our network of church partners are there, doing all they can to contain the spread of the disease.**

David McAllister, Country Director for the DRC, says Tearfund has an important position among many humanitarian groups working there: 'Our deep connections with the church have allowed us to uniquely access remote communities and provide immediate assistance.'

Since August 2018 there have been more than 100 deaths a month – an average of four deaths every day. This makes it the second deadliest outbreak of the disease ever.

### **Fighting for truth**

The current outbreak is primarily in the North Kivu and Ituri Provinces, in the east of the country. The 2014-2016 outbreak in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia killed more than 11,000 people. However, the true extent of this outbreak in the DRC is not yet clear, with fears it could spread through major cities or across national borders.

Although the World Health Organisation (WHO) is yet to declare a global health emergency, efforts to bring it under control have been hampered by conflict and mistrust of the communities towards humanitarian and government officials.

Some people are sceptical and can be hostile to those working to stop the spread of the disease. Added to this, a number of armed groups remain active in the area and pose a threat to the population, as well as those working there. Several Ebola treatment centres have come under attack.

### **Creative solutions**

Tearfund and our partner organisations in the DRC are working in challenging circumstances to try and curb the spread of Ebola.

Together with faith leaders, we are sharing information with local communities on how to prevent the disease from spreading. This involves producing Ebola prevention songs in local languages for broadcast on the radio and for use by choirs; talks and announcements in church services; and door-to-door sharing.

Tearfund is also supporting 50 health centres, ensuring they have essential medical supplies and are able to access safe water.

'Despite the current mistrust leading to violence against the humanitarian community, there is still hope as God will not leave his people alone,' said Syvain Kanyamanda, Mayor of Butembo town, where Ebola has hit hard.

PLEASE PRAY

Father God,

We lift up to you the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo: for those who are suffering with Ebola, for those in fear of it and for those working to bring an end to this outbreak. We also ask for peace, for the fighting and hostilities to cease and for this nation to flourish once again.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

### **A NOTE FROM...**

'We are full of compassion for communities affected by Ebola. We would like not to record one more death. A major need is good relationships between humanitarian workers and communities: once confidence is restored, the work will go well and will benefit the health of many. Thank you for your prayers.' **Mwaka Deogratias, DRC team**

## **CREATION AND CATASTROPHE**

**Why the church can't afford to ignore the environmental crisis.**

*By Gideon Heugh*

We should be grieving. We should be weeping and wailing and shouting at the heavens.

*How long, O Lord – how long will you do nothing while mankind lays waste to your creation?*

God's answer, of course, is how long will *you* do nothing?

A UN report on the health of the natural world, released on Monday, has laid bare the terrifying extent to which we're destroying creation. We are currently in the midst of a mass extinction on a scale not seen since the dinosaurs were wiped out.

The headlines from the report make grim reading:

- One million species are at risk of extinction
- Three quarters of all land on Earth has been damaged by human activity
- Up to 400 million tonnes of heavy metals, solvents and toxic sludge are dumped into the waters of the world every year

**But why should we care about nature when there are people suffering?**

Because if we harm nature, we harm ourselves.

One third of all crop production on Earth relies on pollinators such as bees and other insects. Nearly eight hundred million people currently don't have enough food to eat – if insect populations continue to decline, that number will skyrocket.

Furthermore, the report shows that 300 million people are being put at risk of flooding due to the loss of coral reefs and mangrove forests.

The clearing of rainforests releases huge amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, as well as reducing the Earth's ability to absorb them – accelerating climate change. The loss of these habitats often displaced vulnerable indigenous communities.

**This isn't just a 'green' issue, a liberal issue, or a political issue. This is a human issue, and it's one that the church mustn't ignore.**

The Bible tells us that all things are made through Christ (John 1:3) – plants, mammals, fish, rivers, trees, everything. God takes joy in creation (Genesis 1), and charges us with its care (Genesis 2:5).

If we truly love Christ, we need to love his creation. The church must stand against anything that prevents life – all life – from flourishing.

We cannot go on living as if we are separate from the rest of nature. The more we consume and our economies grow, the further this beautiful Christ-woven world is pushed to breaking point.

**So, what do we do now?**

The way forward, towards an economy that cherishes creation, will require changes at every level of society – both collectively and individually.

'We need to change the way we think about what a good life is,' says Prof Sandra Diaz, one of the authors of the UN report. 'We need to change the narrative that puts an emphasis on high consumption and quick disposal.'

'We need to shift to an idea of a fulfilling life that is more aligned with a good relationship with nature, and a good relationship with other people.'

In the Bible, we see God call his people to model a better way of living to the world around them – to let our lights shine before others (Matthew 5:14-16). Looking after creation is a way that we can shine and show love to our neighbours. There are a number of practical steps we can take to do this, which you can find below.

**These issues might seem overwhelming, but there is always hope in Christ – amazing things can happen if we take action together as the church. As always, we can start with prayer. Please join us in saying this prayer for creation:**

PLEASE PRAY

Loving God,

Thank you for this amazing world you have created.  
Thank you for its beauty, and for the abundance of life within it.

We repent for the way we have abused this earth –  
The poisoned rivers, the toxic fumes, the polluted seas,  
The species we have made extinct. Forgive us.

We pray for an end to man-made climate change,  
For the prevention of disastrous temperature rises  
And for nature to be restored.

We pray that governments and corporations  
Will take swift and decisive action –  
That everyone will see your creation as a gift to be cherished,  
Not a resource to be plundered.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.

### **Some ideas for practical action:**

- Call on the government to adopt stronger laws to reverse environmental decline by writing to your MP.\*
- Reduce your food waste at home and eat less meat. If possible, make the switch to organic, seasonal produce.
- Use public transport more, walk or cycle and reduce how often you fly.
- Switch to a 100 per cent renewable electricity provider for your home and church (you can do this at [www.bigcleanswitch.org/tearfund](http://www.bigcleanswitch.org/tearfund)).
- If you have a garden, avoid use chemical weed killers, mow the lawn less and plant pollinator-friendly plants.
- Reduce the amount you buy by following the principles of refuse, repair, reuse and recycle

*\*For more information, and for more steps you can take to help care for God's creation, please visit [www.tearfund.org/action](http://www.tearfund.org/action)*

## **THE LITTLE CHURCH THAT COULD**

**After the Rwandan genocide 25 years ago, Immaculate's church was down to just three worshippers. However, Immaculate couldn't bring herself to close it and move on.**

The church, once a place of joyful exuberance, felt like a hollow shell. It all happened so suddenly.

When the Hutu attackers came after the Tutsi of Bugesera in 1994, many of them fled to churches hoping for sanctuary. Their attackers paid no heed and openly slaughtered thousands of men, women and children inside the churches. Immaculate managed to escape during the slaughter.

When she returned, few people had survived. Immaculate's church – once packed with worshippers – now consisted of herself, her husband and her father-in-law.

### **Running on empty**

'Once when I came to the church, I said: "God, why did I survive?" She remembers. "I have no one to work with, no one to worship with." I felt like there was no point in continuing. The church had been broken. I asked God, "Will I ever again be able to come before you and say thank you?" It was a time full of tears.'

Somehow, though, Immaculate couldn't bring herself to give up and join another church. 'I prayed for God to let me go to other churches, because I wanted people who would be close. But my heart was telling me, "You are a member of this church, and if you go, who will stay here?"'

It was then that Immaculate chose to pray a bold, even shocking prayer: 'I asked that he could bring those people that massacred us to come and worship with us.'

### **Green shoots**

Gradually, remarkably, her prayer began to be answered. Both Hutus and Tutsi were slowly added to the congregation – men and women who had lost their family and friends were worshipping God with others who had been involved in the killings.

'We have had training and workshops about unity and reconciliation. And God has healed our wounded hearts,' says Immaculate. 'My heart was badly wounded, but through the church and partners who teach us to forgive, in my heart, I have forgiven them and I love them.'

The group that worked with her struggling church is the Kigali Diocese of the Anglican Church. They are partnering with Tearfund in the region to help churches like Immaculate's discover more of their true purpose, as a light to their communities.

### **Beacon of hope**

And that's exactly what Immaculate's church has become. Currently they are helping to run a number of self-help groups (SHGs) – small scale community savings groups throughout the village. Thanks to the SHGs the women can now pay school fees for their children, buy health insurance, buy animals, bring electricity to their homes, or buy supplies for their businesses.

Families are climbing out of poverty thanks to all the good things happening in Immaculate's church, which is, in turn, thanks to Tearfund's support. Immaculate's church has become a beacon of hope for the whole village.

It's so much more than Immaculate could have dreamt of when she decided to stay loyal to her three-strong congregation.

'God has transformed us: in our families, in the church. I give thanks to God, for he has healed my wounds. Once again, I can open my mouth and sing. This was the time that I was crying for.'

### **PLEASE PRAY**

Dear Lord God,

We pray for the nation of Rwanda as it remembers the genocide, 25 years on. Thank you for all those who, like Immaculate and her church, have chosen the path of forgiveness reconciliation and renewal. We pray that as they continue to grow and heal as a nation, you will allow more and more people to escape poverty and prosper.

Amen

*\*Name changed to protect identity*

## **PRAYER POINTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD**



It's been more than six months since Indonesia was hit by earthquakes and the devastating tsunami. Pray today for the affected communities to remain strong and hopeful during the long process of rebuilding their homes and livelihoods. Pray for Tearfund's partner organisations, that they will know how best to support those directly affected.



Please continue to pray for the fragile security situation in Afghanistan. On Wednesday at least five people, including three aid workers, were killed in an attack claimed by the Taliban in Kabul. Pray for the peace talks between the Taliban and the US that are underway, and pray for protection over our partners and their work.



Pray for farming communities in Central America, who suffered due to a lack of rain last year. Pray that this year's rains will be enough and will fall when needed in order to produce good harvests. Pray for Tearfund's partners in the region, such as Prodad and CIEETS in Nicaragua, as they help farmers grow more drought-resistant crops and find other ways to cope with extreme weather.