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To whom it may concern,

My name is Monique Psaila, I am a 22-year-old high school teacher who recently arrived home to Australia after a 3 week volunteer experience in Kenya, Africa. During this time I spent many days volunteering in orphanages, assisting with duties such as cooking breakfast and lunch for the children as well as taking on teaching responsibilities in several different classes and simply spending time with the orphans throughout the day.

Of all my time spent in Africa, the most touching experience came out of my involvement in an IDP program, set up by the organisation I was working with. IDP stands for Internally Displaced People. During the 2008 political riots, hundreds of families around Kenya, through no fault of their own, lost everything due to the violent protesting by opposition supporters that took place primarily within the slums of Nairobi and the Nyanza Province (the elected presidents' homeland).

The death toll from these riots quickly rose into the thousands, up to 600,000 people have been displaced, many of which have never been able to go back to their land due to ethnic differences, some have tried, only to be greeted by further violent, and sometimes fatal, attacks. Those who have found their way back into big towns like Nairobi live in slum areas doing odd jobs because having been farmers, they have no practical skills to start new careers. A large number of 'street families' are beggars, thieves, hawkers, prostitutes or drug peddlers.

The IDP program I was lucky enough to be a part of involves volunteers from the Fadhili organisation getting together, purchasing bulk amounts of food including rice, flour, cooking fat and cabbages and dividing these materials into portions to be distributed to all of the families living in one particular IDP camp that is regularly visited by members of the Fadhili group. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of July, 2009, along with around 30 other volunteers and a permanent member of the IDP program I visited the IDP camp, bringing food and clothing to 104 displaced families. The following is a journal entry I wrote preceding an experience I will never forget...

*"Wow!! Today was one of the most emotionally exhausting days of my life! At about 1:30pm we arrived just outside of the IDP camp. It sent chills down my spine to view in the distance tattered white tents, now the homes to over one hundred families who lost everything during the political riots last year. My nerves started to kick in, I did not know what to expect or how the refugees would react to us. The majority of us walked over to the*



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*camp whilst our vehicles carrying the food were driven by locals who had aken us out for the day. I could not believe what I was seeing, children and adults alike spread all over the camp with an obvious look of sadness on their faces. As we got to the centre of the camp, many started to come closer, we were beside the vans of food now and due to previous visits by Fadhili the refugees knew what was inside...the first sight of food they've had since Fadhili's last visit, and the only food they will receive until Fadhili visits again. The government chooses not to acknowledge any of the IDP camps around Kenya, the Red Cross is supposed to visit, but never has, and the UN has not been seen since initially providing the tents for the displaced families. These people literally have nothing more to their name then the very few belongings they were able to flee their homes with whilst literally running for their lives.*

*We split up into two groups, half of the group stayed by the vans and spent time with the children in the camp, the other half were taken around to 3 different tents to hear the stories of the families living in them. I was amongst the first group to meet some of the families. The first tent we visited was probably the smallest one of the lot, and it was home to a family of 5. Izzo, a member of Fadhili who runs the IDP program shared the family's story with us and translated our conversation with the mother of the family. It's so hard to imagine how it must feel to be in these peoples shoes, the father was a well respected business owner (a local butchery), the mother also had a full time job and their children all had access to school. They had normal lives, and for no fault of their own it was all taken away from them. Their tent was tiny, they cooked on the same floor they slept, their whole life literally squashed into no more then 3 square metres of space. The second family we visited also a family of 5, this tent was a little bigger, still far too small to house a family. Izzo made a point of showing us there only source of light, which was this small gas powered lantern. Izzo lit it so we could experience the intensity of the fumes being let off by the lantern, within minutes the entire tent was filled with thick, toxic gas, all of us found it hard to breathe, and that was only within minutes, imagine using this light for hours at a time. As if this wasn't shocking enough, I was mortified to see that the drinking container that was donated to this family to carry water was labeled 'sulphuric acid', somebody actually donated an old sulphuric acid container to the family to use as a water jug... the children have used this jug to drink from... I could not believe it! Something that really touched me was the hope in the children, they all had dreams for what they wanted to be when they got older, I was heartbroken to hear of one child's dream of going to university to study journalism, a dream he is aware may never come true simply*



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*because his parents just don't have the means to support him through tertiary studies. His grades are perfect and would easily get him into uni, he just can't afford to go. The third tent was even more devastating as inside was a two day old child, the entire village had to ration together just to get the mother admitted to a hospital to give birth. The mother explained how the little girl was never planned, the parents were very grateful for her however they worried constantly about the harsh circumstances she would be brought up in.*

*Leaving the third tent, I was immediately brought to tears as I watched a young girl standing out in the middle of a dusty paddock, crying for her mother, who was no where to be seen. We all watched on, not knowing whether it was ok to approach the child... It was heartbreaking to hear her cries, eventually some older children went over to the girl, picked her up and brought her over to us, still her mother was nowhere, devastating! One of the saddest moments I have ever experienced. After visiting the different tents it was our turn to spend some time with the refugees. I have never met such grateful people in all my life, all so happy to share their time with us. The children were breathtaking, all equally as beautiful as the next, all so eager to play with us and have their photos taken. Their smiles were priceless, I could have spent forever with them, completely satisfied with the happiness we brought to their lives, simply by just visiting.*

*Regardless of their situation, they could not take the smiles off their faces! One girl taught me this handshake, all while carrying a baby on her back, she was very sweet. This other little one was the cutest little man I have ever met, he had a fetish for sunglasses and watches and could sit on your lap all day. He was beautiful, I just wanted to take him home with me. It wasn't long until it was time to hand out the food to all of the families. By now every member of the camp were crowded around, watching us unload the sacks of food from our cars. We got everything out and organized ourselves in a line so the families could pass us all and receive their bags of food. The majority of families received two bags of rice, two bags of flour, one cabbage and 2 blocks of cooking fat, the larger families received extras. It's a very surreal feeling handing out food, knowing you are literally feeding over 100 families for the next week. So humbling! Many who passed through said thank-you, others would just look at you, the expressions on their faces saying a thousand words. It was amazing and I could not feel more grateful for being able to be a part of it.*

*Eventually all the food was gone, it was getting late and it was time for us to leave. It was so sad to say goodbye, we had done a great thing however leaving so soon, knowing there was still so much more to be done was a hard thing to do. The car ride back to Nairobi was quiet, I think*



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*we all needed quite several moments to take in and make sense of what we had just experienced, it sure has made me appreciate what I have back home!*

*Today was one of the saddest, yet most rewarding and amazing days of my life! The food we bought to the camp will keep the families going for the next week or so and it was so special to be a part of that! Hearing the stories and witnessing the camp for myself has just made me realize how truly lucky I am!"*

In recognition of the need for the displaced families to rebuild their lives and create a sustainable means of living, several members of the Fadhili Community have set up a bank account and begun fundraising money with the intent of purchasing a plot of land a maize mill for the refugees. This would create an opportunity for the families to begin farming and producing maize, in turn creating an ongoing source of food for the camp. A plot of land has been located and together with a maize mill would cost approximately US \$10,000, a small price to pay when it comes to creating a sustainable future for these families.

It is my hope, with the assistance of many, to help in the raising of \$10,000 needed to purchase the land and maize mill for the "Internally Displaced People" currently living on leased property just outside of Nairobi. Seeing the devastation for myself has created an overwhelming desire to help, I am hoping this letter allows many to understand just how in need these innocent citizens are, and just how easy it would be to provide aide to over one hundred families who due to no fault of their own lost everything during the 2008 political riots.



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Fadhili is a Kenyan not for profit organisation working with volunteers from around the world who all share the desire to give their time and resources to less fortunate people. It is my strongest desire to return to Kenya in September and bring with me 100% of the donations to Fadhili, in particular to support the IDP program. Any donation, no matter how small or large would be greatly appreciated, and would make the world of difference to the lives of so many. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions, I look forward to hearing from you!

**Monique Psaila**

27 Christine Avenue, Torquay

Hervey Bay

Qld 4655

Ph: 0408128655

Email: [monique.psaila@glendyne.qb.com.au](mailto:monique.psaila@glendyne.qb.com.au)

In partnership with:

**Fadhili Community**

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Nairobi, Africa, 00100

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