

## **UNC Based Non-profit Assists Kenyans Most Affected By Violence**

N&O Guest Column  
Rye Barcott & Joseph Nganga  
January 11, 2008

With the eyes of Americans on New Hampshire, it is easy to lose track of a presidential election a continent away. But the contested re-election of Kenyan president Mwai Kibaki and the ensuing ethnic violence have affected people right here in North Carolina.

For the past seven years, dozens of UNC-Chapel Hill students, professors and alumni—backed by hundreds of supporters across the United States and elsewhere—have worked with Kenyans through a nonprofit called Carolina for Kibera. Founded by UNC students and Kenyans, CFK works with disadvantaged residents of Kibera, an ethnically diverse slum on the outskirts of Nairobi. Kibera covers an area the size of Central Park and is home to over 700,000 people.

From a small soccer program with a hundred youths representing every ethnic group in Kibera, CFK has grown to serve approximately 25,000 residents through a sports program, two medical clinics, a waste management program, and a girls' center. These endeavors are led by residents of Kibera. U.S. volunteers assist with fundraising, networking, and on-the-ground program implementation. However, CFK's work was put on hold after the December 27 presidential election in Kenya. Before the voting, the main opposition candidate, Raila Odinga, had a slight lead in the polls. But after President Kibaki was prematurely declared the winner in a small, hasty ceremony at State House, armed gunmen took to the streets and ethnic violence broke out. More than 300 Kenyans have since been killed. In Kibera, tens of thousands are now homeless and with inadequate access to food. Food prices have risen sharply as the Kenyan shilling continues to weaken against foreign currencies.

Although ethnic divisiveness is no stranger to Kenyan politics, no one anticipated the level of violence that has engulfed Kibera and much of Kenya. While in no way underestimating the frustration that many voters have experienced with the rushed swearing in of Kibaki, it is important to note that the vast majority of Kenyan citizens have eschewed violence. Criminal opportunists are but a small percentage of the population, yet they have caused large-scale damage and insecurity.

Swaths of Kibera have been burned to the ground. To our knowledge, CFK staffers and volunteers have only suffered one relatively minor injury as a result of the recent violence. While there are no Americans currently volunteering with CFK in Kibera, many staffers and volunteers there have had their homes burned and looted. On a more positive note, a group of Kibera residents successfully deterred a gang of thugs from burning CFK's youth center.

Because of the unrest, CFK officially suspended normal operations in late December. While some observers suggest the post-election conflicts show the hopelessness of progress in Kenya, we who have worked on the ground with our brothers and sisters in

Kibera see it differently. The violence reminds us that development depends on good governance, local leadership, and effective security. Our own effectiveness, as CFK, also depends on our ability to read and respond responsibly to events, and that is why we are currently concentrating on a short-term feeding program to meet the immediate needs of our friends and neighbors in Kibera. Additionally, our medical clinic provides emergency care to residents.

Although those perpetrating the violence in Kibera and beyond are a small percentage of the population, the level of hatred and divisiveness throughout Kenya today is unprecedented. People are afraid, and many people with the means fled from Kibera and other multi-ethnic communities. This ethnic divisiveness is further exacerbated by rapidly increasing population, declining availability of land for farming and the increasing cost of living driven in no small part by oil prices.

As we play a role in bringing people of different ethnic communities together, we also call on the leaders to play an active role in asking their supporters to put down machetes and other instruments of violence. Raila and Kibaki should meet and discuss the way forward to ensure that there is peace in Kenya. The international community, including the U.S., African Union, the European Union, and the U.K. have all been involved in talks with the two leaders to encourage dialogue.

Even with the flawed tallying process, it is clear that both Kibaki and Raila received the mandate of half the country. It therefore makes sense for both of them to cooperate in the interests on the country.

As the leaders and the diplomatic community negotiate on ways to bring the two political camps together, there is an urgent need for humanitarian assistance in Kibera and around the country. The displaced Kenyans need food, water and temporary shelter. We at CFK are committed, with the help of our donors, to providing these basic necessities so that the healing process can begin.

Rye Barcott  
Founder and President  
Carolina for Kibera

Joseph Nganga  
Member, Carolina for Kibera Advisory Board

*For more on CFK and updates on new development in Kibera, visit their web site at:*  
[www.carolinaforkibera.org](http://www.carolinaforkibera.org)

*Barcott graduated with a B.A. in Peace, War, and Defense UNC-Chapel Hill in 2001. He served on active duty in the U.S. Marine Corps for five years and is currently a joint MPA and MBA candidate at Harvard University.*

*Joseph Nganga graduated in 2000 with a B.A. in Business Administration from Queens University of Charlotte. He is a Kenyan entrepreneur and resides in Charlotte.*