

Birmingham Container 7 Report (Rec'd 5-4-2013).

Introduction



A friend in need is a friend indeed. Container number seven from Birmingham arrived when Malawi is hit hard by the effects of Climate Change and the economic recovery plans of the government. The rainfall pattern in Malawi has changed downright, making it difficult for farmers to really determine good first rains with which to plant their crops. Many people were confused at the beginning of this rain season as to whether that was enough and timely rainfall for sowing seeds. Those who planted with the first rains suffered the drought that followed shortly, and those who planted later, crops wilted in water logged soils.

Besides plants and belongings being swept away by heavy floods, many people were displaced and still live in tents, schools and churches. Their life is now entirely dependent on the love and caring hand of Jesus—his follower, thus the church here at home and the communion as it is sometimes called.

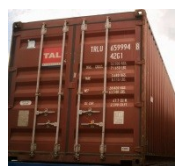
Malawi's Economic status at the time of Birmingham Container 7

The dwindling and sour relationship between Malawi and the neighbouring countries, Britain as well as America under the leadership of late President Professor Bingu Muthalika brought with it some economic hardships for many Malawians. The country ran out of forex and that caused not only the shortage in fuel rather also prices of fuels and other essential commodities keep rising. The current regime of Dr. Joyce Banda bowed down to the International Monetary Fund economic reforms which gave birth to the inflation and devaluation including the currency fluctuation and Malawi Kwacha since then floats following foreign market.

However, foreign exchange improved, fuel and other essential commodities are available but the currency fluctuation and floatation still cause unrealistic and frail market prices. Life is difficult not only in rural areas but even in urban and in the suburbs. Maize which is the staple food as you see in the picture a vendor selling in bags as well as using non standardized measures has tripled from MK3,500 to MK10,000 per 50kg pocket and this keep exerting pressure on the rural and urban Malawian equally. The government and other organization are already distributing relief items such as maize flour, beans, salt, sugar, cooking oil, matches and soap etc.



Churches in the country, including all the four Anglican Dioceses either with aid from partners and internal sources are also engaged in rendering humanitarian support services of various kinds in times difficulties as a result of the droughts and floods that left many displaced and without essential commodities. The Diocese of Birmingham's container of humanitarian support came as a true sign of—a friend in need a friend indeed—the time when the country is really in need of a friend who can help.



The Sending of the Container: The Gospel in practice

When we break the body of Christ in the Eucharistic service—the Holy Communion; the breaking of the wafer is in reality the causing of pain in the body of Christ and all who partake in that one broken body are actually sharing in the pains of the broken body as one and united people, and when the broken body gets healed in the resurrection, we who are many and partake in that one healed body get healed too and are commanded to go out to witness the living Christ in us into the world.



In the picture below, the Diocese of Upper Shire similarly distributed maize flour to the flood victims in Mangochi to demonstrate the living Christ who cares for those who are poor so that the Good News/Gospel is in its real sense the good news to those that are

afflicted. This brings the living Christ in the living partakers of the living Holy Communion, believing in fair share and taking care of one another and the earth we dwell in; to have a tangible and visible meaning in itself. The Diocese of Birmingham considering this kind of understanding of the Gospel continues among many other ministries it offers to world, sending humanitarian containers as one way of witnessing the Living Christ to those in poverty and the afflicted in the four dioceses in Malawi.

The diocese just like the Disciples of Christ after the resurrection lived together, preaching and encouraging one another, they shared food and all needful things together, so it is when we see many in Malawi believing Christians are very loving and welcoming. The humanitarian container is the gift of love to Malawian and the contents are likewise shared to the people regardless of faith and creed. As a result of the first Disciples' demonstration of love peace and joy through the sharing of needful materials, their numbers kept multiplying similarly are the Malawians upon seeing the love and care for one another by their sisters and brothers in Birmingham their faith in Christ undoubtedly keep increasing.

Many Malawians more especially now that the country faces dynamic economic hardships ever happened before, and in that kind of scenario, regardless of their faiths or creed are supported above all by people they do not visibly know but believe they love them to an extent that they are willing to share with them in the agonies of their poverty and economic hardships and various challenges, they are moved and some are in fact confessing it openly by their lips.

The support gives the hopeless a sense of happiness and amity that in their brokenness and perplexity they are still part of the one community Christ has built through the partaking of his one but healthy and resurrected body that unites all. This kind of practical Christianity is in itself something that is ensuring them of the real-world and physical reality of Jesus' care and fair share for everyone everywhere.

The humanitarian support by the Diocese of Birmingham has taught Malawians in the four dioceses to rise up and support fellow citizens in times of natural setbacks. This is clear in the efforts of the four Dioceses, as Bishops rise up each in their own way to try and address natural disasters following the droughts and heavy rains in almost all parts of the country this year. Many people who are displaced and belongings and crops lost, found refuge in churches and schools, and each diocese with support from other Christians and organizations supported the sufferers.

One case here serves as an example; Diocese of Upper Shire under Bishop Brighton Malasa recently when floods displaced many people and swept away property in Mwanza, Mangochi, Machinga, Balaka and Zomba; Corn flour and other essential things were sourced; individuals and organizations were informed and encouraged by the diocese to support the victims which in a way, encouraged people to demonstrate the Gospel practical reality of Jesus whose nature is always to identify himself with the poor and the sick.



Give a hook and teach how to fish

There is a common saying in many parts of the world that it is better to teach a people how to fish than to give them fish. Although care has to be exercised because not all that have gotten a hook will know how to preserve and control the fish catch before they see deteriorating numbers of schools and species of fish and other aquatic life in their lakes. All we would like to do here is to thank those in charge of packing the container for Malawians for including tools and implements for Agriculture, Hospitals, Education, Apprenticeship, Small Industrial or Entrepreneurship materials in every consignment.



An example of the viability of such support is probably witnessed in the conversation below:

Dear Eston

*I am absolutely delighted to receive your email and very happy to hear that the tools have been put to good use. I have taken many things to CART over the years as I admire the work they do and know the donations are much needed. It was interesting to hear about Pius and his family. Can Pius and his children read English? My youngest son is 11 (nearly 12) and when he read your email he asked could he write to Pius's sons. It is no problem if not. Thank you so much to Pius for taking the time to come and see you to thank me. Please pass on my best wishes to Pius and his family and tell him I am so pleased that he can make use of my Grandfather's tools. Many thanks to you too for emailing me with this great news. We wish you all well.
Ian and family*

Ian Prady is replying to the email below:

Dear Ian,

Two or three years down the line, today you receive this surprising email from ... and this is the first time I have seen a recipient come back with an email address gotten in the tools to say thank you ... and ask me to pass on the thank you. Pius Matemba a carpenter received a wooden box full of various tools. ... there was a light envelope in the toolbox that seemed to have been put in by mistake and Pius usually neglected it for it did not seem to contain anything carpentry.

*Two weeks ago [Early-March 2013] he looked at the envelope and saw that it was sealed, "therefore it might contain some information about the use of the tools"—he thought. He was happy to read the story behind the tools and came to me to write for him a word of thanks. Pius is a married man with four children, two of his sons are still in their late primary school and two sons are in form one and two. The tools are helping him get money for school fees for his secondary school children besides alot of family financial responsibility. Thank you he says,
Eston*



There has been many boxes of tools sent to hospitals, schools, institutions, churches and individuals from containers sent by the Diocese of Birmingham. Today as we write, Takao a women's organization under Agnes Mkoko, St Luke's Hospital, Chilema Training Centre and many individuals have received sawing machines both electrical and manual with which many have learnt skills in Design and Tailoring and are making life for their families.

Schools both primary and secondary schools are benefiting so much from the educational materials such as books and computers received almost in every consignment. Computers in primary schools is a great news and keep the Anglican Church a leader in the education sector, for as much as we know about the beginning of education, health delivery, skill training, no one individual or organization can speak with the neck high in the sky if the Anglican Church formerly UMCA did not have a vision for these before anyone else in this country. Children with the computers are well prepared to face challenges of the modern world well in advance at the tender age in primary schools.



Medical supplies and equipment such as those sent in the Birmingham Containers some even to government hospitals e.g. Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital where every consignment has had over 50 packages of various medical supplies. Our own Mission Hospitals and Health Centre have all the times gotten support from these humanitarian items sent in the

containers to Malawi. Many upon receiving the supplies have told stories of how such keep changing for better their delivery of health services to their community.



Customs Excise and Clearance of the container

It is our hope that we are probably all too well aware of the deteriorated economic situation in the country which the current regime is perhaps trying to find means upon how they can deal with it; which is a matter for prayer and concern not only for us as Malawians but with all our partners everywhere. We are also aware of the effects and impacts of the new customs regulations and the increased vigilance of MRA, their tireless

efforts to collect more revenue to meet their given targets now and previously intended to cover up on the dwindled economy after the zero deficit budget of the self-sustaining economic plan of Bingu failed.

Some items that were duty free are actually attracting some little duty now. Lists of duty free goods for charitable or Non-Governmental Organizations reduced and church finding itself having a shorter list of items to be cleared free as compared to NGOs. This therefore means it takes more time of negotiations with Malawi Revenue Authority bargaining for exemption of tax on some of the humanitarian goods in view of such being free gifts willingly donated to support not only the victims of natural disasters rather for the benefit of the majority poor rural Malawians who are failing even to buy enough food for their families a few days after their pay days.

Regarding container 7, an MRA officer standing in the picture, sent to examine the container demanded offloading of the entire container in Blantyre at JSJ Freight Services Campus for physical checkup. This has never happened before, however we complied and when we were about midway into the items destined to be offloaded at Malosa, and that it was becoming darker, again because he knew there were no lights in the store house and the hall he authorized and we stopped offloading. There was a little more work as we reloaded the container.



Offloading in all the three places went on well and many people collected their goods as they came out of the container. In Blantyre only goods for Nkhuzi Bay Trust and Queen Elizabeth Hospital remained in the warehouse after the owners made arrangements to collect them later. Below is a pictorial summary of the distribution in Blantyre:



Catholic Fathers



Diocesan Secretary for Southern Malawi collect MU items and Nasulu Primary school



Nsanje Catholic truck



Njale Catholic Truck



Mrs A Mkoko- Takao



Mrs. Maliro—Nguludi school for the blind



Fr Masina from Ndirande Parish for Mrs F Hiwa



Goods for Queen Elizabeth Hospital



The container left Blantyre and traveled safely to Malosa and we spent the night in the track until morning when recipients for items offloading at Malosa gathered and the distribution in pictures was as flows below:



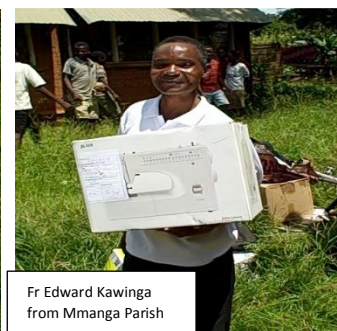
The Container arrives and offloads at Malosa



Fr Michael Malasa from Chingwenya



Goods for Balaka Parish awaiting collection by Ven Masitala



Fr Edward Kawinga from Mmanga Parish



Fr Joel Malanda from Mkate wa



Patterson Majonanga, received goods for MOET at Mchenga Parish from Fr Eston

Other beneficiaries included Chilema Ecumenical Lay Training and Conference Centre, St Luke's Hospital, Fr Grant Tebulo the Diocesan Education Secretary, St Michael's Girls Secondary school, Malosa secondary school, and Mtonda Primary school, Makobo Non-Governmental Organization and Mchenga Parish.

After the distribution exercise on 20th March 2013 at Malosa the journey continued from noon to Lilongwe where we arrived late in the evening and offloading started the following morning and most people collected their goods right away as they came out of the container at ACM offices. The Diocese of Northern Malawi and all their other recipients arranged to collect their goods later on and their items were kept safely by the hard working supervisor Mr E M'baya. The picture below show the offloading:



Special thanks go to Mr E M'baya and Fr Boniface Tamani of the Catholic Seminary in Mchinge for demonstrating a hard working spirit, I took pictures of them truly carrying heavy boxes on their heads, this is appreciated and I thank them.

Some difficulties encountered

Due to the persistence by the MRA officer to offload the whole container at JSJ campus in Blantyre, two smallest boxes of cameras were identified by those offloading, tore open and took away the contents. No body knew it, but as the three guys came out of the container afterwards, something rang in my mind because their pockets were swollen. But since there appeared no box opened we did not search them. The next morning at Malosa, just after a few items were offloaded, other gentlemen in the container called out showing two torn boxes of cameras that were marked for Fr Eston Pembamoyo and for Ivy Chirwa a Fujifilm camera. The later box was completely empty, while the former had an installation cd and a strap left.

At that point the men in the container at Malosa were told not to go out so that they will be search at the end to proof that they were not involved. It so happened and none was found with a camera, although they complained they were embarrassed with the searching but in the end when it was explained that this was done to figure out the exact place where the items might have been taken away. I told them we were going to do likewise in Lilongwe and if the cameras will not be found, then it will mean our suspicion for JSJ workers will be strong. No cameras were found in Lilongwe either.

While at Malosa I telephoned JSJ and they interrogated the workers who vehemently refused but were asked to write reports each of the five that helped in the offloading. One of the report



is in English but I will attach all of them to this final report. My simple analysis of the report gives me a picture that some of the workers are aware of who took the cameras and just do not want to reveal. The English report has some strong evidence showing that it is written in a defensive way that goes even to dismiss the



presence (loading) of the camera in the container because they are not shown in the custom declaration forms. This is typical of a defender, and the other Chichewa reports are showing that Fr Pembamoyo at one point entered the container, which may mean that Fr Pembamoyo should have seen at that brief time when he entered with the custom officer in the container that we are did not have the cameras with us or that they did not take the cameras, this is also typical of those that know the truth but are hiding it.

It appears from the look of things, that the cameras were put in the container loosely in the original boxes they were purchased in, if they had been covered in yet another box and label it as all the other boxes, it was going to minimize on the temptation among those that were offloading goods at JSJ who definitely were caught by the appearance and assurance of the pictures on the boxes. So far these are the only two items that are reported lost in this container.

Conclusion

The container like all the other containers make life very different for many Malawians and this container came into the country at the right time when Malawians needed support. Our country still suffers from the effects of the Kwacha devaluation of last April and the natural disaster faced by the country this year. The abrupt cut off of the rains and the floods will surely continue to have a bearing on the life especially of the majority rural Malawians and the container already has begun lessening the agony the poor people are facing now and likely to face in the near future. It is my wish to appeal where possible and resources permitting for a continued hand of support for our people for we still see starvation lying ahead. Once more on behalf of all recipients I THANK YOU all for coming to support us always in times calamities.
ZIKOMO KWAMBIRI!!!!

The Revd. Fr Eston Dickson Pembamoyo
(Container Consignee Contact Person)