

# 10 Years in Exile



O death, where is your victory?

Today, with a heart filled with living hope, we commemorate ten years of forced exile. Ten years since the shadow of terror descended upon our beloved country, Burundi, claiming thousands of lives and forcing nearly half a million souls to flee the land of their ancestors.

These men, these women, these children... their only "crime" was to have peacefully defended the foundations of peace. They fell, not in hatred, but in dignity and with faith in a better future. Their cry for justice still echoes today, like a prayer rising to heaven.

I remember, as if it were yesterday, the first martyr of this terror: a child, Komezamahoro Nepo, 16 years old. An angel on his knees, hands raised, unarmed, struck down by a bullet to the head. That day, I saw an entire nation weep. I remember the immense crowd that came to bid him farewell, hearts torn but united in love. It was the beginning of a long procession of pain... Nepo was followed by so many others. Hundreds, thousands. And it continues, alas.

I myself resisted with all my strength the idea of leaving. But I had to flee when I realized my life was in danger. On the day I left, I carried an immense sorrow in my heart. I will never forget the distress of the first refugees I met on the road: whole families, exhausted, destitute, wounded in body and soul. I wondered, "Lord, how will we survive? Where will we find the strength?"

But it was there, in that darkest night, that the light of God began to shine even more brightly. Yes, He was with us. In every outstretched hand, in every compassionate glance, in every act of solidarity, I saw His love at work. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). It is in this promise that we found the strength to stand.

Ten years later, despite the tears, despite the pain, we chose love over hate, forgiveness over vengeance. We celebrate the victory of hope, the divine strength that allowed us to transform pain into courage, exile into a mission of peace. Through our commitment, through Ubuntu, we have sown the seeds of a new future. We have encouraged the victims to rise, to rebuild themselves, to become artisans of peace and justice, in the image of Christ, who forgave even those who crucified him.

Today, hundreds of young refugees are pursuing university studies, while others are mastering dignified trades. Through the "École Sainte-Anne de Kigali", Burundian and Rwandan children, without distinction, are receiving a quality education in love and respect.

None of this would have been possible without the generous hearts of the host country. We have been blessed to be welcomed by men and women driven by love for others. To them, we owe so much. We also thank our partners from around the world, our faithful friends. Thanks to you, we have been able to build, heal, feed, educate, and above all, restore dignity to so many human beings wounded in body and heart.

We think with immense compassion of our brothers and sisters who are refugees in countries where their lives remain in danger. Let them know that they are not alone: they live in our hearts and in our prayers. I cannot close these words without expressing my deep gratitude to the Maison Shalom team. You are the living witnesses of love in action. Your commitment is a blessing.

Today, a new generation is rising. It is ready to build a reconciled Burundi, a Burundi rooted in love, in truth, in justice. A new Burundi in which forgiveness is stronger than hatred, and light stronger than darkness.

For yes, we believe in a God who restores, who lifts up, and who comforts. And it is in Him that we have placed our trust.

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