

Presbyterian Women Palm Project

BY CHERI HARPER AND LARRY STHRESHLEY

“They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:4b).

While most people in the United States have been unaware of events unfolding in the last 10 years in the Democratic Republic of Congo, more than 4.3 million lives have been lost in the world’s deadliest conflict since World War II. The civil wars in Congo, coupled with decades of foreign invasion, economic mismanagement and political upheaval, have left Africa’s third largest country nearly devastated. Despite its rich resources and potential for growth, of the 177 countries listed on the human development index, Congo is ranked 167th.

In the midst of this desolation, however, seeds of hope have begun to take root. On July 30, 2006, millions of Congolese participated in one of the most significant elections in Africa’s history. These elections marked a turning point in which the people demonstrated their commitment to seeking stability. After years of suffering and violence, Congo now has an opportunity to pursue Isaiah’s vision. With the promise of peace in their sights, the people of Congo can transform implements of war into tools for prosperity. And Presbyterian Women can be a part of it.

The Presbyterian Women Palm Project is a new mission program in which groups can make donations for the development of palm plantations in Congo. Once the world’s largest producer of palm oil, the destruction of agricultural capabilities in Congo has forced the country to import cooking oil from Malaysia for domestic use. This change in the market has opened up an opportunity for our Presbyterian partners to develop income-generating projects that do not require huge financial investments, but can have great returns.

With funding from the Presbyterian Women Palm Project, women’s groups and hospitals of the Presbyterian Community of Congo will be able to plant new varieties of Costa Rican palm that produce three times more



palm oil than the current stock can produce. These new varieties of palm grow low to the ground, allowing women to participate in the planting, maintenance and harvest of the crop. A 20-dollar gift to the Palm Project will purchase about 10 plants. A small plantation of 450 palm trees at a high school will cover tuition costs for 60 girls. One \$20,000 investment from PW will fund 80 hectares of palm trees that will generate \$200,000 per year for 30 years and subsidize educational programs, hospitals and clinics.

As the familiar verse from *Isaiah* reminds us, with God’s help, hope for a new world cannot be defeated. Our sisters and brothers in Congo can realize the vision of ploughshares and pruning hooks replacing swords and spears. Support from Presbyterian Women can help provide the resources to make it happen.

Cheri Harper is a program associate for Presbyterian Women. Larry Sthreshley is a PC(USA) Regional Health Consultant in Congo.

Want to learn more about the Democratic Republic of Congo? See the article “Together in Congo” in the November/December 2007 issue of *Horizons*.

Donations to the **Presbyterian Women Palm Project** should be sent to



PC(USA)
PW Remittance Processing
PO Box 643652
Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3652

Make checks payable to Presbyterian Women. Write “PW Palm Project” on the memo line.

Visit the **Together in Service Web** pages at www.pcusa.org/pw for promotional ideas for this and other mission projects.

How does your PW support the mission of the church worldwide? Send your stories to Cheri Harper, PW program associate for synod support, charper@ctr.pcusa.org or 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202-1396.