

Franciscan Family Association Kenya

Nairobi, Feast of the Name of Jesus, January 3, 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Franciscan Family in Kenya, we greet you with the words the Lord revealed to St. Francis:

“May the Lord give you Peace!”[\[1\]](#)

In this way St. Francis liked to address the people wherever he met them. In this way he wished to witness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. With these words we wish to greet you at the beginning of this new year 2008. But it is not so much the beginning of the new year that makes us to write to you; it is the present situation in our country of Kenya.

Prompted by the escalating acts of violence, looting, displacement of people, loss of properties and death toll taking place in our country following the elections, we want to reach all of you with an embrace of *Shalom* and with this message of peace.

The disrupting and evil forces at work in this present time have the enormous power to split our communities, our souls and our hearts. Tensions are felt everywhere, and fears are growing that what we are experiencing now might be the beginning of more bloodshed and the spreading of hatred and the recourse to revenge.

A great challenge is placed before us. A challenge that calls us to live as “children of light”[\[2\]](#) and of the common Father who loves all with the same love and makes his sun shine on all.[\[3\]](#)

This, more than ever, is the time to live out our Christian vocation and Franciscan charism to be instruments of peace, builders of bridges of communion, creators of life and not death. “Blessed are those who work for peace; God will call them his children.”[\[4\]](#)

Brothers and Sisters, let us not allow another cruel page of history, like that of Rwanda, be written into the book of our country!

Let’s do whatever is in our capacity to preserve unity in our communities and with the people around us.

Let us all, members of the Franciscan Family in Kenya, leave behind the path of aggression and violence and open a way forward that calls for relationship and peacemaking.

St Francis who embraced the “leper” and visited the “sultan”, teaches us to put aside resentments and stereotypes in order to reach out our brothers and sisters in need of

our help and of our words of encouragement; to overcome tribal barriers and fuelled differences that are the Trojan horse ridden by all those who put greed and power before people's lives.

Let us take no side, but the side of Christ. Let's not be drawn into the present escalation of political and social tensions. We need to stand for justice and truth, but without advocating in any way violent means. Such violent means are not only machetes and guns, but also thoughts of revenge and hateful remarks, inflammatory talks and one-sided accusations.

LIFE and PEACE are supreme goods that cannot be sacrificed on any kind of individualistic altar!

It is St. Francis, our little brother^[5] and servant of all, who urges all of us, Franciscans, to live out our vocation:

“The peace that you announce with your mouth may be deeper in your heart, so that nobody be provoked to anger and scandal, instead through your peace and meekness, may all be called to peace and goodness. That is what we have been called for: to heal the wounded, bandage the broken, recall the wandering.”^[6]

And “for all those who will give pardon and bear infirmity and tribulation for Christ's love, praised be you my Lord. Blessed are those who endure in peace, for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.”^[7]

Dear sisters and brothers of our Franciscan families in Kenya, and especially dear ministers and superiors of our Franciscan communities, the Lord puts us to the test today. The present situation calls upon us to make our common vocation as builders of peace a lived reality. Let us support each other; let us be without fear; let us address tensions among ourselves, and seek answers in our common Franciscan ideals and commitments.

Most of our communities are made up of sisters and brothers of different origins, different political and ethnic allegiances. These differences need not to divide us. We have found in Christ the one who breaks down the barriers of our differences.

We are members of the one body of Christ. We cannot restore the health of this body by throwing away some of the members, but only by taking care of the wounded ones. Maybe such wounded and hurting members are among ourselves. In such cases let us passionately reach out to each other and offer help, encouragement and healing.

In this way we can all, individually and in our communities, pray with renewed conviction and sincerity, not by words only but by deeds, and by our very lives in our Franciscan families:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is error, truth;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;*

*Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, Joy.*

*O Divine Master grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved, as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Those who are praying with you and sending you this passionate appeal to embrace without fear and reservation our Franciscan vocation to be instruments of peace are

Br. Isidor Peterhans, OFM^{Cap}, Chairperson FFA-Kenya

Br. Sebastian Unsner, OFM, Provincial Minister

Br. Gianfrancesco Sisto OFM, director JPIC Franciscans Africa.

Sr. Mary Frances, board member of JPIC Franciscan Africa

Br. Benedict Ayodi, OFM^{Cap}, director Damietta Peace Initiative Kenya

[1] *Testament 23*; *Mirror of Perfection*, 26.

[2] *I Thes 5:5*

[3] *Mt 5:45*

[4] *Mt 5:9*

[5] *Testament 34*.

[6] *Anonymous of Perugia VIII*, 38.

[7] Cfr. *Canticle of Brother Sun*, 10-11.