

Economic Crisis

For many months now, North American life has been dominated by the Economic crisis! But I have to ask how deep does this crisis go? I have just spent two month travelling across Canada to raise funds to continue with the work of helping widows of the Rwandan Genocide who reside in Kimironko, a suburb of Kigali, the capital of Rwanda.

During this trip, everywhere I went, I saw healthy people, theatres and shopping centres full of patrons, restaurants and patios full of smiling, and sometimes boisterous customers. Unfortunately I also did see some homeless or less fortunate people, but there were also food banks, soup kitchens and Value Village stores available for them. Economic crisis?

I am certainly not an economist, and undoubtedly, if everyone states there is a crisis in North America, there is never smoke without fire. However, I can't help but compare this life under the label of economic crisis with the staggering increase in the cost of living that has hit Rwanda. Carrots that cost \$0.75 per kilo last year now sell for \$2! Sugar has increased from \$0.90 a kilo to \$1.40, and powdered milk has gone from \$5.75 to \$7.50; needless to say it has had a dramatic effect on us. Rice has also increased from \$1.25 to \$1.55...the list is too long.... Moreover, the wages of the widows has not increased, it averages between \$17 and \$20 per week, which means their buying power has decreased to the point where having more than one meal per day except for bananas and paste, has become impossible for the majority of the 171 families that comprise our little community. The expression of tightening the belt has taken on more than one meaning here. The mothers that decided to continue their studies still have school fees to pay, therefore many have had to abandon this as feeding their children is their priority. I realize that one's misfortune does not diminish the misfortune of another, but the comparison shows in a flagrant manner the world of difference between the two economic crises.

In Canada, even though many people continue to support us generously, many other people and organizations have used the reason of the economic crisis for no longer being able to contribute to our mission, asking me to be understanding. Without a doubt, I do understand, but the difficulty I have is that I am conscious of the two lifestyles, and I often find myself powerless with this reality.

The solution therefore lies in an increase in revenue. The widows that have learned a skill and who have rediscovered their pride and dignity while working each day at the Centre César, are not ready to return to a life of begging or of living on charity.

This is why we have been working on developing a system to sell the products that the widows have fabricated. With the assistance of volunteers, we are soliciting gift boutiques, jewellery stores and other retailers to offer to their customers jewellery made from recycled paper, crocheted handbags and various sewing products, all that are housed at our small Winnipeg warehouse. These products are also available on-line at www.unbuntuedmonton.org. As far as I know, the economic crisis has not stopped most people from purchasing gifts ranging from \$15 to \$50 from time to time.

Despite the economic crisis, we have no intention of losing what we have accomplished over the last five years! Eventually, with the help of God, and thanks to our regular donors, our devoted volunteers as well as all those who have a global conscience, we will succeed!

Maman Nicole