

For Immediate Release – June 30, 2009

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Advocates for Tucson Refugees visit Kakuma Refugee Camp in Northern Kenya.

Dr. Barbara Eiswerth, Director of Iskash*taa Refugee Harvesting Network / Saint Francis Refugee Ministries and Pastor Rolland Loomis of Saint Francis in the Foothills United Methodist Church recently returned from the Kakuma Refugee Camp. Kakuma has a population of almost 50,000 and is one of the oldest camps still in existence. It is maintained by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees and the Government of Kenya. Kakuma is located in extreme Northern Kenya, near the border of Sudan and Uganda. Kakuma gained early fame for becoming the home of many of the “Lost Boys of Sudan.” Kakuma is now home to folks from many different African nationalities, the majority being from Somalia and Sudan. Contrary to the perception of many humanitarian aid agencies, Kakuma is not closing due to the decrease in the influx of Sudanese refugees. The camp is in fact preparing for another wave of Somali refugees and is expected to grow in population.

The two justice advocates were guests of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees and Stayed in the UNHCR compound within Kakuma Camp. They were able to make connections with the families of many refugees who now live in Tucson. The Kakuma families were able to make video statements to their relatives in Tucson.

While in Nairobi, before traveling to Kakuma, Dr. Eiswerth and Pastor Loomis had the privilege to spend time with Valentino A. Deng, a “Lost Boy of Sudan”, who’s story has been recently chronicled in the NY Times bestselling book, “What is the What.” More than 2 million copies have been sold. The book has been translated into over 20 languages and will soon become a motion picture. Deng gave the Eiswerth/ Loomis team an extensive interview and spoke of his personal journey, escaping warring factions in Sudan and eventually settling in Kakuma Camp, where he stayed for several years before finally immigrating to the United States. He now resides in San Francisco and maintains a home in Nairobi, Kenya. President Obama recently read “What is the What” and has recommended the book to his cabinet.

Dr. Eiswerth and Pastor Loomis met with many refugee families and heard many stories which they hope to share with the Tucson Community so as to raise awareness of the challenges of our refugee sisters and brothers.