

The Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP)
www.meaningfulworld.com
 NY Office
 185 East 85th Street, Mezzanine #4 New York, NY 10028
 Phone: 1 (201) 941 2266 E-mail: drkalayjian@Meaningfulworld.com

ATOP Meaningfulworld Follow up Humanitarian Mission to Africa: Kenya, Rwanda, and DR Congo Dr. Ani Kalayjian

Although our mission was full of daily inconveniences and discomfort – such as not having electricity, running water, or access to toilets and showers as well as having to drive on rutted unpaved roads and face many travel challenges – our team had a meaningful and successful humanitarian mission marked by spiritual growth and many transformative moments and social connections.

The ATOP Team was challenged by several acts of violence and mass trauma during their mission: an explosion took place in a church in Garissa town, killing 17 worshipers and injuring 66 others – Somali Al-Shabaab took responsibility. The team reached out to the Red Cross to offer their volunteer services. In another incident, four humanitarian-aid workers were kidnapped from a refugee camp at the border of Kenya and Somalia. Fortunately, the workers were released before the ATOP Team left Nairobi. Additionally, a massacre took place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo, or DRC). The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the DRC had to use two of its attack helicopters in support of the country's armed forces to deter rebel soldiers – known as M23 – near the villages of Ngugo and Nysisi in North Kivu. The group, which is composed of renegade soldiers who mutinied in April, is reportedly led by Bosco Ntaganda, an army general wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of war crimes for recruiting and using children in combat in the DRC's northeast. The M23 fighters had been observed moving south toward Goma, the capital of North Kivu. MONUSCO, the UN mission, had also received reports of human rights violations by the M23 in that area, UN spokesperson Martin Nesirky told reporters in New York on July 13. Although the majority of Congolese feel ignored by the UN the Secretary-General's Special Representative in the DRC, Roger Meece called for calm and reaffirmed MONUSCO's determination to protect civilians and support the Congolese armed forces, known as FARDC, to secure the main population centers. The fighting between government troops and the M23 has displaced more than 220,000 people, including many who have fled to neighboring Rwanda and Uganda, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported, expressing concern about reports of the recruitment of minors into armed groups in a number of towns; to date over 5 million have been killed.

The ATOP Team consisted of Dr. Ani Kalayjian and Charito Mateyko, JD, and they were joined by Stu Merkel, MPH, MBA, and Michele Merkel, MS, in Rwanda.

The ATOP Team began working in Nairobi, Kenya, on June 29, 2012.

Since our arrival in Nairobi, Kenya, the ATOP Team achieved great success as we worked with the following groups that partner with **Benjamin Mwenda, Managing Director of Youth Volunteer for Change:**

1. We worked with the ***Kwangware Women's Group***. In the largest slum of Africa, about 20 women gathered to share their experiences, stresses of life, and issues with the extreme alcoholism of their spouses. Participants engaged in energetic healing and were given tools for everyday survival and ways to engage in approaching the addiction issue as a disease, as a social outcome of unemployment, and as a cultural resignation for not being able to provide for their families. The women reported that they benefited greatly from the new tools and were invigorated with energetic balance. They shared how they will continue meeting even after the ATOP Team's departure. Garments and rings were given to the participants as tokens of gratitude, acknowledgment, and love.
2. We then worked with the ***Kibera Small Business Women's Group***, also in the slum area. Here 25 participants were given leadership skills and stress-reduction mindfulness breathing exercises, as well as Reiki energetic healing. The women said that they learned not to keep angry and aggressive thoughts or deeds to themselves. They also learned to process their feelings peacefully, release their anger and revenge, and transform their anger through forgiveness. One woman said, "I was fighting with my coworker before this training, and the entire time during the training I was thinking of going back and continuing the fight. But now that I learned a healthier way, through emotional intelligence, I am going to let go and practice forgiveness."
3. We then moved to the children's group, where 75 children were gathered and excited to greet the ATOP Team. The Four Agreements were shared to provide a framework for how to live a stress-free life, as was Martin Luther King's Non-Violent Communication (NVC) for preventing conflicts. In addition, energetic healing, yoga, and chakra balancing exercises were taught in combination with ethnic songs and dance, which they said was very fun and a learning process.
4. We then worked with the ***Kibera Youth Volunteers for Change***. This was another lively workshop of 25 young people ages 17 to 29. The Four Agreements, life processing, and emotional intelligence were shared, and NVC was reviewed and applied to their challenging personal cases. One of the cases that resonated with all the participants was how to deal with a friend who tries to take your girlfriend. This session was followed by meditation and mindfulness breathing techniques.
5. A two-day training was given in ***Mathare***, also in the slum area, to 22 former gang members. Here developing emotional intelligence and NVC were shared as well as the importance of the circle of dialogue.
6. On July 1 the ATOP Team took part in the ***Maranatha Church services in Kwangware***, a Pentecostal Church, and both team members gave sermons on love, forgiveness, and restorative vision of justice to over 700 congregation members.
7. The ATOP Team worked with ***Karika aging group in Kawangare*** (the slums), where more than 90 women and men (ages 60 to 90) gathered to learn mindfulness and breath exercises for health, reducing blood pressure, and reducing physical pain. The motto was "***old is gold.***" A generational group was recommended as well as essential oils and an ongoing practice of limbic breath. After the workshop the aged attendees shared that they felt much better, experiencing less physical pain, more inner peace, and more meaning in life.



ATOP Meaningfulworld Team working with older adult on mindful living

8. On July 2, partnering with ***Bikundo Onyari, CEO of aNDE Kenya***, we held a workshop with lawyers, paralegals, and prison warders in Halinguni. More than 25 attorneys, paralegals, and other prison personnel gathered with eagerness and insight to better their lives. Participants shared that this was the most helpful training they had ever experienced, in which all of the teachings were in line with their needs, such as how to manage anger in themselves and in those they work with, how to let go and practice forgiveness, and how to open their energy centers for optimum health and flow of vital energy – especially the throat and the heart centers to also alleviate the hypothyroidism and heart palpitations that were often expressed.



Dr. Ani explaining the importance of grounding position to workshop attendees

9. The ATOP Team was invited by the Office of the Vice-Chancellor and the Dean and the Chair of the Psychology Department to give a workshop at the ***University of Nairobi***. More than 135

students, faculty, and staff gathered and had a transformative experiential session that revealed what trauma does in the body, mind, emotions, and spirit, as well as the restorative ways to cope with it. Although at first they were uncomfortable with physical expressions of love, at the end of the workshop they were exhibiting such transformative behavior and did not leave the auditorium without hugging and giving one another their unconditional love and regard. Future collaborative plans were made for the following year for longer all-day workshops. **Dr. Kariuki, the Chairperson of the Psychology Department** said: *“It was our joy and pleasure to have met your team. Many thanks for reassuring us and our students that indeed forgiveness, reconciliation and resilience are possible and that each one of us has a role to play. We hope that we can work out longer collaboration and linkages in workshops and seminars in order to fully participate in the healing of our world.”*



ATOP MW Team conducts workshops at the University of Nairobi and Rosa Mystical Center

10. At the Rosa Mystical Center, **partnering with Eunice Olawo, Director of MA-Counseling Studies**, the ATOP Team was invited to conduct a workshop especially for psychologists, counselors, directors of counseling centers, and mental health professionals. The Seven-Step Integrative Model was shared and practiced, the theoretical rationale and foundation were elaborated upon, an in-depth discussion took place, an introduction to restorative justice and ways to enhance the work of mental health professionals was presented, and essential oils from Young and Living were introduced and applied for ultimate grounding. This was followed by the experiential session in open nature, the Center’s garden. Participants shared that although they never thought they would resume positions as “secret prayer” and the “worrier pose,” they felt so much lighter, happier, more grounded, and loving. Their backaches and shoulder pains melted away with their positive affirmation and movements.



Charito giving ATOP Certificate



ATOP Team with faculty and dean at University of Nairobi

Kigali, Rwanda

Our mission to Rwanda took place in collaboration with **Aloys Ntezimana, Director of the NGO Self-Employed Youth Organization (SEYO)**, and **Steven Shyaka, Mentee of the Strongest Oak in Kigali**. On 4th of July, the ATOP Team met with **Nyilinhwaya Faustin, the Minister of Gender and Family Promotion in Rwanda**. Although it was a national holiday – Independence Day for Rwanda, a date it shares with the U.S. Independence Day – and all offices were closed, he made a special effort to open his office for our team. He presented us with an update of women’s issues and he elaborated on the recent improvements in gender issues such as the minimum of 50 percent of women required in the parliament. He also shared the ongoing challenges, such as national policy against gender violence, high levels of gender-based violence (GBV), limited knowledge of laws by women, persistence of some negative cultural beliefs such as female genital mutilation (FGM) – which they don’t acknowledge as mutilation because they don’t cut the clitoris but rather stretch both labia for what they believe is the ultimate pleasure for both men and women – as well as rapes of domestic workers. He also emphasized their commitment to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG)-3, which aims to promote gender equality and empower women while seeking to eradicate gender-based violence, which is an impediment to gender equality and sustainable development. He also emphasized the need for psychological support and ended by inviting our team to conduct workshops in collaboration with his office.

The next day we conducted a workshop at the **Youth Employment Generation office in Nyagatare**, which is affiliated with the Rwanda Minister of Youth and engages in reproductive health, HIV education, sewing and other vocational trainings, and nurturing entrepreneurship. The goals of this agency are peacebuilding, patriotism, national reconciliation, and sustainable development. We had more than 100 participants. Unfortunately, 44.9 percent Rwandese are living below the poverty line, and the majority are young people. Principles of conflict transformation, emotional intelligence, forgiveness, and restorative justice were introduced and reinforced, and this was followed by chakra balancing, energetic healing exercises, essential oils, and Bach flower remedies. Attendees were given bookmarks with non-violent communication (NVC) messages, as well as earrings. We then were transported via motorcycles to the Youth Business Center. There were 48 men and women attending this workshop, and we shared the Seven Habits of Highly Effective Leaders (Steven Covey, 1998), emotional intelligence, work ethics, and values. The team was joined by Michele Merkel, MS, and Stu Merkel, MPH, MBA; their contribution was extremely valuable, especially because of the addition of the male perspective in leadership.



ATOP Team conducting workshops in Nyagatare, Rwanda at Kigali Institute of Science & Technology



ATOP Team being transported to their next workshop – Local delicious & nutritious fruits

Bukavu, DR Congo

Since 2010 ATOP Meaningfulworld has partnered with **PCR (Peace and Conflict Resolution)** under the leadership of **Pastor Samuel Muderhwa and his wife, Faida Mutula**. Each day our program was packed with daily training and workshops, followed by working in refugee camps, hospitals, and schools.

As soon as we arrived, we began our work at the **Kalagane Hospital for Women and Children in the Kabare District of South Kivu**. The women looked dehydrated, and children with bulging eyes and distended bellies had their arms extended to receive goodies from the Muzungus (*white people*). The major problems were malnutrition, lack of supplies such as disposable syringes and gloves (they had to wash the gloves and reuse them, as we saw many washed gloves draped on the rocks and hanging from the branches of trees), and lack of medicine, vitamins, transport for hospital staff (the camp is an hour away), seeds to plant vegetables and fruit, etc. There were many displaced women from neighboring regions due to M23 from Rwanda continuing the killing, pillaging, and raping of women. We gave the women undergarments and provided toothpaste and toothbrushes for the children, educating them about the importance of hygiene and oral hygiene. Then the ATOP Team visited the Chahi Hospital in the Ibanda District of South Bukavu. The hospital's director, Dr. Blaise, shared the challenges he is facing, such as a lack of medicine (antibiotics) and disposable syringes and gloves, as well as a lack of funding from the government, to the point where birthing women have to stay in the hospital after their care due to an inability to pay the \$30 fee. Often they are let go since they are unable to pay the fees anyway. The ATOP Team bought a box of 50 bars of soap and distributed these to the women, as there was no soap in the hospital. We were able to take blood pressure readings, educate participants about healthy diet (with a special caution to stay away from fried foods), and provide Reiki healing. We also gave Bach Natural Rescue Remedies to alleviate stress and trauma. We then visited the children's school of the displaced camps, where they greeted us with incredible drumming, songs of Karibu (*welcome*), and ethnic dances. They were displaced from the Bunyakiri (*Red Region*) due to M23 killing, pillaging, and raping. More than 100 children had crammed into a small room to hear us; we gave them peacebuilding tips, and then their creative thinking was stimulated as they shared what peace means to them: patience, development, love, and forgiveness. Notebooks and pens were distributed, as well as toothbrushes and toothpaste for the younger children, in combination with lessons in oral hygiene.



The only furniture of a home

Dr. Ani distributing much needed donations - Dehydrated children & mothers

The next day we worked at the refugee camp in the ***Mudeka village***, where displaced people came from Bunyakiri, Gahutu, Lujinja, and many other villages that were ransacked by the M23, which killed parents, raped young girls, and set villages on fire. These M23 have escaped the ICC and are exploiting the weak presence of the UN peacekeeping forces, stealing the wealth of minerals, gold, and diamonds in DR Congo. The refugees remembered our team from last year, and they recalled how they felt healed after our trauma interventions. A new wave of internally displaced refugees had arrived as a result of the recent M23 killings of 30 men and women in which their villages were burned. More than 100 refugee women, a handful of men, and about 100 children gathered to receive our messages of peace, self-care, healing, transforming trauma, generational transmission of trauma, and most of all, our love. We distributed undergarments and earrings to the women, NVC book marks to the men, and taught oral hygiene to the children, who also received toothbrushes and toothpaste. We conducted healing and chakra balancing exercises with the women, men, and children. The participants said they felt so much better, that their pain and suffering were alleviated on the physical level, and emotionally they felt strengthened knowing that we cared and returned to see them. Reiki healing was also provided for many who had extreme physical conditions such as extended and bloated intestines, headaches, and other ailments. Blood pressure screenings were conducted and special follow-up consultations held on diet, exercise, and avoiding salt and fried foods. We provided healing Bach flower remedies that are made in England and distributed by Nelsons, which are formulated specifically for trauma in the form of their Rescue Remedy in drops, pastels, and gels. These flower remedies have been trusted for over 70 years in more than 66 countries. Rescue Remedy, for example, helps alleviate the shock and helplessness of a traumatized person and contains the following natural ingredients: *Helianthemum nummularum*, *Clematis vitalba*, *Impatiens glandulifera*, *Prunus cerasifera*, and *Ornithogalum umbellatum*.



Dr. Ani taking blood pressure and teaching about nutrition & preventive health care

We then worked in the **Bagira displaced children's center**, where children came from Funu, Tchimpunda, Kaza-Roho, Chiriri, and Essence. The ATOP Team, in partnership with PCR, had worked there last year as well. More than 130 children were waiting for us with a sign that read "The Bagira/DRC/PCR Children Say Welcome." The children waited at the entrance while singing "welcome Dr. Ani, welcome Dr. Charito." Our names sounded so sweet in their expressions. Many children wore white hats with the following messages: Peace, Love, and Harmony. Even the door of the classroom where we met had a sign that read "Thank you Dr. Ani and Dr. Charito for your great love." These demonstrations of affection made us humble. Dr. Ani proceeded to talk to the children about the importance of good manners in building peace. Then Charito told a story in the way a DR Congo grandmother would tell it. We were amazed at how attentively they were listening and repeating our words with conviction. We also engaged them in activities such as art therapy, storytelling of indigenous experiences, and singing. The contents of another suitcase of gifts were shared, including crayons, clothes, toothpaste and toothbrushes, and local fruit that we purchased. We also gave the camp leaders Bach Flower Rescue Remedies especially for children, with special instructions on to use them.



ATOP Team conducting art and play therapy with children

Neighborhood children hanging out nothing to do

During our post-program debriefing, teachers and directors spoke about the need for a school for these refugee children and the availability of a parcel of land for this purpose, which costs only \$5,000 USD. We invite sponsors to take this opportunity to make a difference in children's lives in a sustainable and lasting way. With your support this dream of building a school will be actualized, and these healing groups and art therapy and storytelling sessions will continue in a more structured and continuous manner.

The ATOP Team then traveled to see a possible site for a school in Bukavu, the first free-tuition school. We provided ideas on strategic planning, reviewed the proposal, and talked about ways to support this wonderful project. Education is key for sustainable development, and for transforming harmful ideas such as "having sex, raping a young baby or a child will cure me of incurable diseases and AIDS."

On Sunday July 8, we traveled to **Funu Area, to the Fununuro Church in Bukavu**. This Pentecostal church is located at the top of a hill with no access for cars. The path to it is narrow, unpaved, and rocky, and it ran along an open sewage line. We held hands in order to maintain our equilibrium, as just one misstep could have resulted in a broken ankle. We walked through the slum of Bukavu where more than 700,000 Congolese live in dire poverty on less than \$1 a day. We witnessed children with runny noses and flies all over their faces. Some clutched a yellow container in both hands as they struggled to fetch water and others carried sticks of

wood for cooking before sunset, and all were walking along the side of open sewage that emitted a stench so strong it made us feel nauseated. The church was packed with 1,700 people. The entire congregation had gathered to receive us and hear our message. Upon our arrival the chorus was singing, drums were pounded, and guitars were played as four groups sang in turn: men, women, young people, and everyone together. The women's lyrics referred to the seeds that are planted: "We cannot expect a different fruit, but the fruit from the seed that we planted." The young people's song talked about how the Lord is there for them when they need Him: "You never leave me alone when I am in trouble." The mixed group sung about how the Lord made human beings in His image and made them different from animals, plants, or other objects: "Even different from the different animals or the mountains. You created me like You, Lord." Charito shared the message of restorative justice through Jesus's response to the adulterous woman: He forgave her because we are all human and all make mistakes. Dr. Ani shared Mathew 51:1, keeping a pure heart through actions depicting love, compassion, and forgiveness, the importance of expressing love, physical display of love through hugging and kissing, as well as practicing forgiveness. All along expressions such as "Amen" and "Hallelujah" were chanted by the faithful and committed congregation.



Harsh working conditions for survival



ATOP Team welcomed in Funu area



Testimonials of how great they felt after ATOP workshop – Pastor Samuel welcoming ATOP Team



In the afternoon we conducted a workshop with the youth, for which more than 200 people, ages 18 to 45, had gathered. We shared lectures on love, forgiveness, self-healing, restorative justice, and emotional intelligence. The youth were extremely positive about receiving the message of forgiveness and love, restorative justice, and the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model. However, at the end of the day, they had the opportunity to express their frustrations about the lack of social justice. They brought up issues such as impoverishment, a lack of jobs, roads, and access to primary education, and injustices in the form of mass violence, rape, and pillaging. During

the training the women were passive when asked to come forward and offer their questions about the problems they faced. Dr. Ani addressed family planning, domestic abuse, and male domination. Questions raised by male attendees pertained to how to use the principles of NVC, love, and forgiveness in their daily conflicts. Comments about how the UN has ignored their plight were frequently shared, how no one cares about DR Congo, how there are no scholarships for university education, and how happy they are that at least one woman (Dr. Ani) who is involved with the UN cares about the Congolese and has returned to share her love and expertise. We reinforced the importance of non-violent peaceful marches, activism, and writing letters to their government to help transform their helplessness. The church is an architectural masterpiece in itself, with its pointed roofs and different chambers; however, we noticed a culture of minimizing the importance of bathrooms. We were directed to the only available outhouse (for 1,700 people), which emanated a strong foul stench. The place was so wet (with urine) that the step was slippery. Improvisation was necessary to avoid being bitten by the mosquitoes that surrounded the place.



ATOP Meaningfulworld mind-body-spirit display - Youth gathered for the leadership workshop

The next day we conducted an all-day training seminar for more than 85 people, among them medical doctors, architects, engineers, priests/pastors, young high school graduates, counselors, and more who came from near and far for this training. Many had taken phase one of the training that ATOP provided last year. The morning section focused on leadership, emotional intelligence, and the 7-Step Integrative Model, which was followed by Charito conducting Reiki energetic healing on the attendees. The afternoon session included sharing of the participants' concerns and the much-awaited experiential session of chakra balancing, yoga stretches, flower essences, and meditation. While at first there was tremendous fear and concern in many Congolese when they heard the word yoga or meditation because they feared it was a religious practice, after explanation and fruitful debate they were eager to experience it firsthand. The majority felt relaxed, reporting a reduction in stress and an inner peace after the experiential session of yoga exercise and meditation. The audience received a certificate from ATOP Meaningfulworld. After the all-day training, the team had a special meeting with the Strongest Oak's 10 potential mentees. They shared their concerns, especially those of being unable to pay their high school exam fee of \$50, and some were concerned about their last month's tuition of \$30.



Charito providing a Reiki energetic healing session

Mrs. Faida (L) working with PCR team at the Training

That last night in Bukavo after the all-day training program we passed by a street where a portrait of Barack Obama was displayed. Additionally, on our way to return the projector that we had rented, we visited a nice hotel on Lake Kivu. After all the commotion on the streets, this spot presented us with a peaceful ambiance, the only moment of solace that we had in three weeks. We sipped on ginger drink and passion fruit juice, enjoying this reward after much hard work.

Special gratitude to all of our cosponsors in Kenya: Dr. Pricilla Kariuki, Chairperson of the University of Nairobi, Psychology Department, Benjamin Mwenda, Director for Youth Volunteer for Change, Bikundo Onyari, CEO of aNDE Kenya, Rev. Paul Ominde, Eunice Olawo, Director of MA-Counseling Studies, Kiplagat Chebii, and Calvin Nyagudi, CEO Macho Media, LTD. In **Rwanda:** Aloys Ntezimana, Director of an NGO Self-Employed Youth Organization (SEYO), Lyaturemye Aime, KIST Representative Officer, and Steven Shyaka, Mentee of the Strongest Oak in Kigali. In **DR Congo:** Pastor Samuel Muderhwa, his wife, Faida Mutula and their children, as well as the staff of PCR. In **NYC:** Lynda Prevot, Phyllis Farmer, Reuven Gershom, David Pressley, Lee Tomboulion, Steve Roberts, & ATOP Team. Their partnership made ATOP Meaningfulworld Team's work possible, organized, and meaningful, and enabled the outreach to expand to a large number of people (3,511 directly, 6,000 indirectly) in a variety of places such as refugee camps, hospitals, schools, universities, entrepreneurial centers, government buildings, churches, and other leadership centers.

Kindly visit our website at www.meaningfulworld.com to send your tax-deductible donation and support this vitally necessary outreach to Africa. Also let us know if you wish to join us on these humanitarian efforts. Your support is much needed and much appreciated.

Founded in 1990, the Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP) at Meaningfulworld, charitable organization affiliated with the United Nations Dept of Public Information, has achieved international recognition as a leader in training humanitarian outreach professionals as well as responding to two decades of global and local disasters. ATOP is committed to health and global education promoting state-of-the-art scientific theory, peace, forgiveness and consciousness research, internship, and the development of technical skills to train mental health professionals, teachers, psychologists, art therapists, nutritionists, alternative medicine practitioners, clergy, nurses, mediators, interfaith ministers, and lay persons committed to service the self and humanity. Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Outreach teams have helped rehabilitate survivors from over 35 calamities, making a daily difference in people's lives helping to transform tragedy and trauma into healing and meaning-making through post trauma growth, resilience, emotional intelligence, mind-body-eci-spirit health, visionary leadership, empowerment and artful collaboration through a new world view.

Our Motto: When one helps another BOTH become stronger