

FEBRUARY 2024

***“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. (Isaiah 60:1-2 NIV)***

Dear Friends,

It is hard to believe that we are already in February! I trust that you and your families have settled into the new year and are experiencing God’s grace. We continue to be deeply grateful for your support, prayers, and the interest which you take in the work our advocates are doing across the globe!

At the end of January, we took part in the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit held in Washington DC. The IRF is a coalition of organisations which aims to raise the profile of international religious freedom by bringing attention to the plight of religious adherents who are persecuted, individually and collectively.

In partnership with Jubilee Campaign and five other organizations, we introduced the “Free to choose” campaign at the Summit. At least 21 countries globally criminalize apostasy (the act of abandoning Islam or converting to another religion) - in 12 of these countries, a conviction of apostasy or blasphemy carries the death sentence. Could you please take time to read the Charter drafted as part of this campaign to raise awareness of the laws restricting freedom to choose one’s religion, to change it or to question religion or belief doctrines. <https://jubileecampaign.org/7603-2/irf-summit-2024/>. The Charter calls on States and civil society organizations to engage in the UN to speak with one voice demand the removal of the death penalty for apostasy and blasphemy, insist on the release of convicted individuals on death row or those imprisoned.

Centuries ago, Africa was dubbed “The Dark Continent” by European explorers. There are many explanations for this term ranging from the continent being a place of mystery and savagery to the notion that the phrase was intended to create the perception that Africa was a hopeless, underdeveloped place which needed to be colonized. During the 1800’s, Christian missionaries began traveling to Africa. They expected it to be easier, but when decades later they still had few converts in many areas, they began saying that African people’s hearts were locked in darkness - closed off from the saving light of Christianity.

Located in Tanzania, Mount Kilimanjaro (Kili) is the African continent's highest peak at 19,340 feet (5,895 meters). It is the largest free-standing mountain in the world. Although Kili is so close to the equator, this majestic mountain has a snowcap with no less than five climate zones spanning from the bottom to the top!

For some time, my husband Deon and daughter Blanche had the dream of trekking to the summit of Kili. In 2007 they managed to convince me to join them. Half the people who attempt Kilimanjaro fail – mostly due to altitude sickness. In our preparation and training, the experienced mountaineers accordingly told us that you should have a clearly articulated motivation to reach the summit lest you give up at the least difficulty.

While Deon and Blanche had it on their bucket list, I needed some purpose powerful enough to drag me to the summit! As I was chairing the Board of Advocates Africa at the time, one of my spiritual mentors suggested that I make it my aim to proclaim scripture from the summit of Kili on behalf of Advocates Africa.

The few months leading up to our trek in August 2007, was an intense time of physical and spiritual preparation. I learnt that, in the spiritual realm, mountains are regarded as “high places”. These “high places” are mentioned frequently in the Bible – they were altars for sacrifice built on a hill or a mountain. The Old Testament mentions them being used to offer sacrifices to the pagan deities of the Canaanites, Ammonites and Moabites – not only animals but in some cases even children were sacrificed. After the tabernacle was built, the Israelites were forbidden from sacrificing at high places (Deut 12:11-14). Nevertheless, we read in Kings and Chronicles how successive kings of Israel and Judah go into a spiral of righteous kings tearing down high places only for a next king to rebuild them on a bigger scale!

The practice of African witchcraft on the high mountains of Africa (Mt Kilimanjaro and Mt Kenya in particular) is well documented. I was thus under no illusion that the slopes and summit of Kili were enemy territory.

The scriptures which I had prepared to proclaim at the summit were aimed at: 1. **Renouncing the covenants made with the forces of darkness in Africa** (Is 28:14-18), 2. **Condemning corruption in Africa** (Is 25:10-12), 3. **Declaring that Africa belonged to God and declaring His name over Africa** (Ps 24:1, Deut 32:3-4) 4. **Declaring the knowledge of the glory of God over the continent** (Hab 2:14, Is 60:1-2), 5. **Committing the lawyers of AA to serve as a faithful priesthood to the Lord according to what is in His heart and mind** (1 Sam 2:35)

Prior to attempting to summit Kili, I had done some challenging physical things like running the grueling Comrades Ultra Marathon (56 miles). Nothing could have prepared me for Kili though – it turned out to be the hardest thing I would do and have ever done in my life!

Space allows me to only give a much-abbreviated account of the experience. I got a cold a few days before we started and on the first day of the five-day Machame route, I was already coughing. By the end of the second day at 12 500 feet, my resting heart rate was 145pm, I had lost my appetite, had a severe cough and was feeling extremely tired! While I was in denial, I was no doubt suffering of altitude sickness.

When we arrived at the Barranco camp (13 044 ft) on the evening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, our guide had to decide whether I needed to be taken down from the mountain via the evacuation route at the camp. During that day we had heard the rumbling of an avalanche, our guide said that it was the gods of the mountain speaking. The spiritual oppression on the mountain was tangible and weighed heavily on our own spirits!

Deon and I came before the throne of God and begged for His guidance. Was it worth to risk my health or even my life? Did I misunderstand the assignment? Was this not my own agenda? After making a new commitment of ourselves and our family to God, we decided to postpone the decision to the next morning.

During that night a miracle happened. I woke up with my breathing and heart rate having returned to normal given the altitude. While I was still coughing, I could manage it. My strength had returned to the extent that I could even carry my own daypack! The guide couldn't believe what had happened.

Day 4 went off without incident and at 11pm that night we started off from 19 341 ft to try to summit early the next morning. I was intensely aware that my body had been drained of all energy and that I would only reach the summit by divine influence. Painfully, slowly we made our way up the steep slopes to arrive at dawn at Stella Point on the rim of the volcanic crater. We were now so high that the curve of the earth was visible!

With another 600ft to go to the summit (Uhuru Peak) the guide didn't believe that I had enough strength to summit. He told the assistant guide to stay with me while the rest of the group went to the summit. I gave the written scriptures to Deon and asked him to proclaim them if I didn't make it there. Fifteen minutes after they left, I experienced a small measure of new strength and asked the assistant guide to take me to the summit. At an awfully slow pace of 15 steps at a time, we made our way up. Close to the summit we met the rest of the group. Deon told me that he had made the proclamations but that he would go back with me.

We reach Uhuru Peak – a magnificent view with the crater floor filled with snow on the one side and an age-old glacier on the other side! I hold the Advocates Africa banner for a photograph and then break down in tears! In a mere whisper I start making the proclamations. My voice grows stronger as proclaim Hab 2:14 "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea!"

With the escalating religious persecution and accompanying deaths, it sometimes feels to me that Africa has again become the Dark Continent. I then remind myself that God has said about Africa "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you"

Warmly in Christ



Teresa Conradie - President and CEO, Advocates International



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