



Photo: Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya

The Work of Jonathan

I was walking through Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya and saw my friend, Hamid,¹ sitting outside of the simple mud brick shelter that he calls home. He called me over and asked if I remembered our conversation earlier in the year.

How I could I forget?

Hamid had invited me for tea in his home. He told me how he and his family had been refugees for more than a decade with no end in sight. His wife was suffering from debilitating depression. They were losing heart.

He introduced me to his children and asked whether they would ever be able to leave Kakuma. The question is valid. Many refugees are well into their third decade of living in the camp.

Hamid shared his very real fear of losing hope – something many refugees struggle with on a daily basis. To them, hope is as tangible and essential to life as food and water.

I'll never forget his words: "*I know you cannot open the door to America for us, but perhaps you can open a window?*"

I told him that I don't have the power to open a window or a door. But I went on to say that I know the One who has all authority and who can open doors that no one can shut. I told him how the Bible says

¹ Name changed

that God loves us and cares for us. I shared how we can tell God about our needs and struggles and that we can ask him for help in the name of Jesus. I asked if he would like me to pray for him and his family. With his permission, I prayed with him under the hot Kakuma sun. He appeared deeply moved. I left his home that day wondering what God would do.

Fast forward to the present conversation.

After recounting our visit together last February, Hamid said, *"God heard your prayer! That very day, the UN contacted us to ask if we wanted to register for resettlement to the USA! Your God heard your prayer!"* His wife then came out of their home. She too was smiling. She looked at me and said, *"God heard your prayer! Thank you!"* She was clearly in her right mind. What a transformation!

God heard. Faith projected fresh hope onto their circumstances. Hamid and his family found new strength to help them on their difficult journey.

Scripture tells us that when David was a refugee on the run from King Saul, his friend, Jonathan, went into the desert to find him and *"help him find strength in God"* (1 Samuel 23:16). While Jonathan may not have been able to rescue David or meet all of his humanitarian needs, he could still offer life-giving hope and encouragement.

Antonio Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, noted that *"...for the vast majority of uprooted people, there are few things as powerful as their faith in helping them cope with fear, loss, separation, and destitution. Faith is also central to hope and resilience."*²

Humanitarian agencies work hard to provide refugees with safety, shelter, food, water and medical care. But even when these important physical needs are met, refugees still wrestle with fear, heartache and isolation. There remains a need for people to meet them on their journey, offer relationship and strengthen hope.

One in every 122 people alive today is forcibly displaced.³ Many of these women, children and men are losing heart. They need a Jonathan. Just ask Hamid.

-by Tom Albinson, President of International Association for Refugees

² Opening remarks by Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at the "High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges - Theme: Faith and Protection". Delivered at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 12 December 2012. Page 4.

³ "Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase", UNHCR, 18, June 2015. See <http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>.