



101 DEGREES WEST

During the worst of the violence, flames reached within 50 meters of the HATC in Iten.

*There Has Been Blood* cont'd from p.90

released a report about violent militias in Kenya, claiming in February that "several informed sources suggest these groups now have wealthy athletes as new benefactors." The ICG even suggested that Lucas Sang had been a leader of one of the militias. Francois Grignon, the Africa program director for ICG, asserted that the idea that athletes in the Rift Valley were not involved in the violence is "naïve," but when asked if he'd turn ICG's evidence over to the police, he responded, "Our job is not to prosecute."

Athletics Kenya immediately branded the ICG charges "outrageous." Athletics Kenya Chairman Isaiah Kiplagat stated, "Athletes are ambassadors and they do duty for the country. These claims have no basis." Former Boston and New York City Marathon champion Ibrahim Hussein retorted, "There can be no justification for one to accuse [athletes] of bringing about these wars. People behind this are convincing the international community to deny them visas." Paul Tergat, who is the World Food Programme Ambassador Against Hunger, released a statement stressing that "I abhor and condemn any form of violence anywhere in Kenya, and protest at unwarranted linking of athletes to violence without evidence."

From what we could deduce, from speaking to persons who could not go on the record, the truth is a bit murky and complicated, but nowhere near as dastardly as ICG suggests. With the kind of sporadic and spontaneous violence that was erupting in Kenya, complete lack of involvement and neutrality is not always practicable and safe. Under duress, athletes may be asked by

mobs to provide food, or in some cases help with transportation; refusal to assist could prove to be fatal. But not even the Kenyan police have any prominent athletes on their list of violent suspects during this post-election period.

But Wesley Korir recounted to Louisville's *Courier-Journal* how, on a visit back to Kenya, he'd been at his brother-in-law's home when men from his Kalenjin tribe knocked on the door, telling him he had to join them in protesting President Kibaki's re-election. Korir was told to bring a weapon. He put two stones in his pocket – and managed to keep them there, not actively engaging in any violent act. But Korir saw people being killed, and many Kenyans now have visions of that kind of activity etched in their memories.

At the end of February, after negotiations that did not always go smoothly and seemed destined to derail at times, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan worked out a power-sharing agreement in which Raila Odinga, the supposed "loser" in the December 27 election, will take over the post of prime minister and have powers to "coordinate and supervise" government activity. It's more than President Kibaki wished to grant him, reportedly – and Annan had to prompt the two men to shake hands for the cameras. The gesture drew kudos from U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other members of the international community amid hopes that aid could help reverse some of the damage done to Kenya's economy during the crisis.

Martin Keino, the son of legendary Olympic 1500m and steeplechase gold medalist Kipchoge Keino, and a fine middle-distance runner in his own right, works as a journalist now and expressed the belief that "sport is a powerful catalyst for

promoting peace and cooperation and must be one of the tools that should be utilized to bring the now-polarized country together." And *The Nation* newspaper editorialized, "Our suggestion to our leaders is to use sports as part of the healing and reunifying process. Sportspeople know no tribal or political boundaries." That last comment may be belied by the actual experience Kenyan athletes had in January and February. Patrick Sang noted that "sports and tourism are what have given this country a name internationally. But with these problems, things will never be the same again." He feared that "the scars will last forever."

Perhaps, but hopefully not. Kenyan athletes have resumed training and traveling freely, and this year's contingent in Boston, led by defending champion Robert K. Cheruiyot, will be typically large and talented. Back home, after several attempts to stage Peace Runs had to be cancelled, the philanthropic and humanitarian outfit Shoe4Africa made definite plans to stage one for 500 children in Iten in March. "We acted quickly to establish Run for Peace, as the need for peace and happiness in Kenya is more pressing now," said Shoe4Africa's founder, Toby Tanser. "This young community is excited about the race, as it will lessen their pain." Actor Anthony Edwards, Shoe4Africa's Chairman, hoped the event "[would] bring positive awareness to Kenya's healing process."

As we write, we can only guess at what's transpired in the past month, but can only hope that the healing process has indeed begin. ●

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