

MOVIE REVIEW

Liberian Muslim and Christian Women Join Together to Stop Civil War

Pray the Devil Back to Hell is a remarkable movie, a story of heroism, determination and inspiration embodied in a band of woman who fought against seemingly insurmountable odds to bring peace to the war-torn West African nation of Liberia. Directed by Gini Reticker and produced by Abigail D Disney, the documentary recounts the experiences of the Liberian Mass Action for Peace, a coalition of Christian and Muslim women who came together with one mission: To end the violence that had decimated the country in a series of civil wars that began in 1989.

"Some say the war was about the gap between the rich and the poor. Some also say it was about the hatred between the different ethnic groups. Others say it was to control natural resources," says social worker and activist Leymah Gbowee. "Power, money, ethnicity, greed. But there's nothing in my mind that should make people do what they did to the children of Liberia," which included rape, dismemberment and killing many times at the hands of gun-totting and drugged boys just as young as their victims.

Conceived by Ms Gbowee whose family was forced to flee the countryside as the midst of continuing violence, the movement started in June 2002 as a pray for peace. Ms Ghowee's initial strategy was to start a dialogue the country's Christian religious leaders, and through a counterpart Asatu Kenneth, a Muslim woman and assistant director of the National Police, with imams who held sway with warlords and government officials. But as the violence escalates and human misery increases, the women, dressed in white in an appeal for peace, take to the streets.

Weaving archival film footage together with interviews with Ms Gbowee and 4 other key participants, the film follows the women's Gandhiesque efforts from the street demonstrations in country's capital that are initiating ignored by the despotic president Charles Taylor to the roadside appeal to rebel warlords and then onto Ghana where both factions have agreed to hold peace talks.

The film is a portrait of the unflinching determination of the Liberian women, but it is their innovative and

Pray the Devil Back to Hell

Director: Gini Reticker

Producer: Abigail E Disney

Editor: Date Taverna

Cinematographer: Kirsten Johnson

Music: Blake Levh

Principals: Janet Johnson Bryant, Etweda Cooper, Vaibo Flomo, Leymah Gbowee, Asatu Bah Kenneth, Etty Weah



Liberia and neighboring countries in West Africa.



Above and next page: Liberians celebrate the inauguration of the president of the Liberian Association in Philadelphia, March 2009.

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politically astute approach to each obstacle they encounter that is perhaps just as much responsible for eventual success in bringing the 2 warring sides

Liberia Timeline

1919.Liberia was one of the nations to sign the League of Nations covenant after World War I

1967.Liberian officials served on the Organization of African Unity's Consultation Committee on Nigeria's civil war.

1980.A military coup led by Samuel K Doe assassinated President Tolbert and overthrew the government that had been in power since 1847.

1989.Charles Taylor toppled the Doe-led government. Civil war started.

1997.Charles Taylor elected president of Liberia.

2005.Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf elected president of Liberia, first female in any country in Africa.

together and creating a democratic government. Whether in avoiding direct criticism of government practices in a position statement or staging a mass sit-in at the flattering peace talks, the women demonstrate a level of negotiating skill that rivals and perhaps surpasses those of many professional arbitrators.

But what is perhaps the film's most powerful aspect is the heartfelt commitment of the women, many destitute themselves, who joined arm-in-arm to end the hunger, displacement and killings that had vanquished so many children. And this they did with courage, forgiveness and love.

By Diane Ferraiolo MA, MBA

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Accra, August 18, 2003

