

Project Muinda Election Observation Team Reports

November 20 to December 2, 2011

This file is a compilation of reports from Sheila Havard, CFSC board member, who wrote each day about the experience of being in Kinshasa as part of the Project Muinda Election Observation Team. There are some added comments by other team members within the report.

Report from Team Member Sheila Havard, received November 20, 2011

Thursday, November 17, 2011

I spent today travelling to Kampala. Everything went like clockwork as I transferred from pickipicki to matatu to the Elgon Flyer from Mbale to Kampala and then to a taxi Barbara had ordered for me to the airport. There was a long boring wait at the airport – nearly 12 hours - before I got on the 5 a.m. flight to Kinshasa via Nairobi.

Friday, November 18, 2011

I slept fitfully on the plane to Kinshasa in between reading sections out of *The Trouble with the Congo*¹, and being woken up by flight attendants for this and that. I was totally unaware of the time as I did not know how many time zones we had passed through. Finally I awoke for the last time and glanced out of the window to see a great muddy river lazily meandering across a vast green plain. Could it be the Congo River already? Then the British accent of the pilot came over the loud speaker announcing that then he was making one last attempt to land in Kinshasa despite the bad weather and poor visibility, failing which he would have to land in ... and I missed his final words. We could only catch glimpses of the scenery now because of the thick cloud cover. I hoped our alternative, if needed, would be Brazzaville, just across the river and not Libreville or Luanda and I also wondered how we would be transported back to Kinshasa and how I would be able to let B---- - know that I would be arriving later than scheduled.

I held my breath as the plane rose, turned and descended again and then repeated the whole manoeuvre. I turned to the flight magazine in my nervousness and tried to immerse myself in the good news that Garambo (?) National Park on the border with Uganda was now finally open to tourists again as the Lord's Resistance Army had decamped or been driven out. Finally, we landed, engines roaring, in driving rain, causing such a cloud of splashes that it was impossible to see anything of the airport until we came to a halt. I wondered what the pilot could see. I thanked my lucky stars that we had been able to land in Kinshasa despite the dismal weather.

Formalities proceeded briskly – the plane had been almost empty – but there was a long wait for the luggage, during which I approached a gentleman who seemed to be searching for someone, but was rebuffed. It was not B----- . At last a huge box of electronic equipment poked its way through the curtain onto the carousel, but

¹ By Severine Autessere, ISBN 0521156017

the carousel still did not move. There was obviously power because the overhead lights were on. Finally, the box jerked and, violà, next but one came my huge battered suitcase of soft toys for sale from Lira, looking decidedly shabby and still coated in rust-coloured Bududa dust, just like my sandals. I was waved on by officials and wheeled it outside, surprised that I was not besieged by taxi drivers vying to give me a ride. Just as I was wondering how long I would have to wait outside in the pouring rain, B----- appeared with a large umbrella and a larger smile and escorted me through ankle deep-puddles to a Toyota. Apparently, it had been raining all night.

Half the road from the airport to this city of over ten million inhabitants is tarmacked but the first part from the airport is badly potholed. Banners bearing the names of the various candidates in the elections were fluttering all the way along our route. Black smoke from unleaded gasoline and diesel puffed out of hundreds of exhaust pipes and arose from bonfires of burning refuse. Vehicles of all sizes and in all stages of dilapidation twisted and turned and inched forwards in an attempt to negotiate the obstacles on the road and find the least damaged part of the highway. Kinshasa has very little greenery to relieve the general shabbiness. The traffic advanced in fits and starts and then came to a halt as we got into a long traffic jam. The cause became apparent when we came upon a lorry loaded with sacks of charcoal wrapped in palm leaves, which had stalled across the road in an extra deep puddle. We jerkily entered the stretch of water across the road cautiously and successfully emerged on the other side.

The Quaker Centre is in one of the poorer areas of Kinshasa. The surroundings are as grim as the worst of Kampala, but worse, as Kampala has been cleaned up in the last year whereas the muddy roads here are strewn with litter. But once we had gingerly proceeded over the large ditch (open sewer?²) along the back alley and crossed the narrow bridge constructed to enable the bus to enter the compound, we found ourselves inside the Espace Quaker, which was a little oasis. I cannot call it an oasis of calm because the din of the surrounding streets is constantly present and songs of praise and sermons peel forth from the neighbouring Pentecostal church for hours on end, making any conversation arduous even inside the house. B----- has approached the church officials concerned and the volume was reduced somewhat for a short time but it has now *repris de plus belle* and church believers apparently feel that anyone objecting when they praise the Lord is possessed by demons. One is constantly reminded here what a tiny minority we are as foreigners and whites, and the small group of Friends here must also feel like a drop in an ocean of incomprehension.

The Centre was largely funded by a Quaker from London England by the name of Judy Stuart, whose photo hangs on the wall of the sitting room. The living room is the first room you enter and it contains three very comfortable sofas and also serves as our dining room. B----- showed me the facilities and then offered me Nescafe and bananas. We are to be housed in three separate rooms. I am sharing

² Comment from Gianne: most plots in Kinshasa have septic tanks, but overflow is common during rainy season, and surges into the wide, deep ditches that run along the streets.

with Athena, a tiny vivacious attender from Toronto who is a researcher and has experience in trauma healing. In the bedrooms there is a copy of the training manual for everyone, set on a small round table with a standard African plastic chair. We all have mosquito nets. The beds have hard mattresses and harder and very thick pillows but I am sleeping extremely well. It is by no means as hot as when I was here in 2009 and the overhead fan has not been on, making hearing easier. It looks as though B----- has gone to considerable trouble to make us as comfortable as possible, and I thanked him profusely when I introduced myself at the first meeting (see below) and urged him not to go to too much trouble, pointing out that we did not need to be handled with cotton wool.

The power is mostly on but the taps do not seem to work much during the daytime, especially when it rains. However there is a garbage can full of cold water for washing.

It looks as though going out will be difficult. B----- explained that I had been housed in the Baptist guesthouse in 2009 not because of the noise elsewhere but because youths had been known to lop off hands with a panga (small machete) in order to steal purses! This certainly dimmed my usual ardour to explore my surroundings!

The good news is that, on his third approach to officialdom in the form of the CENI – the electoral commission – B----- obtained accreditations for four of us. So right now only Athena does not have her accreditation because the CENI lost her photo. It seems B----- has a replacement photo and will try again tomorrow. We agreed to register with the Canadian consulate, which B----- maintains can be done by Internet although some of us have doubts. The laptop I brought from Ottawa Monthly Meeting in 2009 still works although it needs a new battery. The staff I met then, T-----, E----- and C-----, are well. E----- is running as deputy in Western Kasai so I will not see him. T----- now has a baby son who is about six months old. I also shook hands with a number of relatives but was not introduced to them. J---- looks just like C-----, with the same high cheekbones and I later found out that he is indeed her brother. A woman I was introduced to was obviously also like C-----. Embarrassingly, I gave her a big hug, thinking she was C----- and wondering how she had gained so much weight. That evening the real C----- appeared – she got a hug too!

After the Nescafe, B----- left me to rest and I had a delicious siesta. On getting up, I found him gone. A delicious smell of fish pervaded the room. I sat at the table in the dining room to read the training manual and lifted a cloth covering some dishes out of curiosity. I found a platter of fried fish right under my nose. Although I was getting hungry, I thought it best to wait until someone turned up to share the several dishes of food with me. But when B----- returned around 5:00 p.m., he questioned the cooks as to why they had not invited me to eat and wondered that I had not touched the food. Two days later, we are finding that we mostly eat alone and he eats at some other time.

We watched television, both the government and the opposition channels – but the French was too fast for me. The independence of the CENI is in question. Its president is a former associate of Kabila's for one thing.

C----- dropped in and, as she works with Action Jeune Fille, I showed her the stuffed animals made in Lira in case she could get any ideas from them.

Saturday, November 19, 2011

The other four members of the team arrived in the night. I heard the clang of the metal gate to the compound and the slamming of car doors but just turned over and went back to sleep. There would be plenty of time to meet the others in the morning. The next thing I knew, I heard Eric's voice outside and saw his tousled blond hair through the window. I hastened to get up and join him. Athena was still sound asleep.

We spent the morning in the sitting room getting to know each other and then had a more formal introduction at a mid-morning meeting in what we had thought was to be our dormitory, a large room normally used by the seamstresses. We were joined by T----- and JP. , the associate clerk of Kinshasa Monthly Meeting, whom I had met in 2009, when he wore gorgeous long robes at Meeting for Worship. We planned our activities for the next few days, which will include a visit to polling stations very soon, and B----- asked what sort of specialized contribution we thought we could make. Athena mentioned trauma healing and Dorothy suggested a video of interviews by way of publicity back home in Nova Scotia. Both she and John are valiantly striving to speak French. After the meeting broke up we got the accreditations ready to be hung round the necks of the 100 odd national observers trained by Muinda.

In the afternoon Athena went for a long walk with J-----. Since B----- did not want us walking about his neighbourhood, as everyone would know that he had a bunch of rich foreigners living in his house, he proposed an alternative. He drove us to the enormous stadium built by Mobutu, parked the car and handed a street vendor some money to keep an eye on it. We then walked extremely slowly across to the stadium, past the parliament building and to an enormous mainstream church. Everything was huge and spread out but even here there was practically no greenery. Eric's knee was bothering him and it was rapidly getting dark so braving the chaotic traffic and crossing the wide boulevards back to the car was somewhat of an adventure and I narrowly avoided stepping into one of the uncovered ditches.

I have been typing on this French keyboard for a couple of hours and am getting quite efficient at it. However this morning (November 20) music is blaring out, which may explain any inconsistencies as it is hard to think let alone to talk. The weather is a little humid and sultry but it is nowhere near as hot as dry season. We are in the middle of the rainy season, which lasts nine months. The mosquitoes eat away at my ankles in the evening and Athena and I have captured a cockroach in our wardrobe last night and disposed of it in the toilet. Otherwise, we are very comfortable and hope we will be able to make ourselves useful here.

Report from Team Member Sheila Havard, received November 22, 2011

Sunday, November 20, 2011

This morning at 10 a.m. we had Meeting for Worship in the large room we thought was to be our dormitory, which is where small workshops are held and where the seamstresses normally work. At the moment there are a total of ten seamstresses at the two locations, the neighbourhood where we are and in the more upscale

neighbourhood, where the office is. There are seven sewing machines in working order.

Meeting was attended by some 15 to 20 people, who included family members, T---'s mother and JP. The silence was less marred by the services from the surrounding churches than I had expected and it was interspersed with hymns, which started softly and reflectively and gradually swelled to fill the hall and drown out the noise from outside. C----- led the singing of one of the hymns beautifully. Following worship, we all introduced ourselves.

The afternoon was free. Having risen some two or three hours before everyone else, I retired for a nice siesta while B----- drove off to print the remaining sections of our training, which include the election law. Athena organized an English lesson with the kids, who went round sticking bilingual labels on themselves, various car parts and other objects. John labelled himself a clown but we discovered that our hosts did not know what a clown was, which should have occurred to us. Dorothy had the brainwave of organizing the making of a family tree for the sake of the exercise itself and also so that we can finally figure out who is who.

John had mentioned that he was a retired doctor during his introduction and today he received his first patient! B-----'s daughter, M-----, asked him to look at her son, and I interpreted. Luckily he was able to reassure her that the baby had nothing more than a bit of a cold. And luckily for me as interpreter, the symptoms were nothing much more than coughing and fever and not obscure medical terms.

When B----- came back from printing the extra training sections, John inquired about our promised walk. B-----'s answer made us all laugh: Do you have to walk every day? He then offered us the use of his exercise machine, but we explained that we would like to walk, not just for the exercise, but also to see something of the city we were supposed to be observing.

It is now evening. All the team are sitting around on the deep cosy sofas drinking tea, eating bananas and croissants and talking about Congo politics and, above all, their successful or unsuccessful attempts to make contact with their loved ones in Canada. I managed to email another report. The power has been pretty reliable although it flickered off and on a couple of times this evening.

Monday, November 21, 2011

Today was a bit disorganized. Our main goal was to visit the Action Jeune Fille office and boutique, which is on one of the main boulevards through the city, but the driver of the bus did not turn up and B----- was afraid to overload the car with five people because the traffic police will stop an overloaded car. After discussing various alternatives, it was decided that Athena would travel by public transport with B-----'s son J----- and the rest of us would go by car. But first we dropped in on the seamstresses in the large room in the Quaker Centre compound. We were taken through the empty lot where B----- would like to build a large hall and crossed through the wall around the vacant lot to visit the *esthétique des cheveux*

salon on the sidewalk, which was started in September of this year. Some very elegant hairdos were being created by the trainees. The seamstresses do not pay for their training and nor do the apprentice hairdressers. The customers get their hair done for free. Some of us tried to persuade B----- that this was too much of a good deal and the customers should pay at least a small amount.

We got to see some of the nicer areas of the city today and actually saw some greenery and some urban gardens. Our first stop was the Canadian consulate (or embassy). Security was tight and we were only allowed in one by one after our cameras and cell phones had been temporarily confiscated. The staff tried hard, firmly but politely, to convince us to register online, but Eric pointed out, just as insistently, that we had no electricity (the power had been off all morning). In the end they relented and gave us forms to complete. While we sat in air-conditioned luxury, B----- waited for about an hour by the car.

The next stop was MONUSCO, where Eric tried to arrange a flight out east while Dorothy and I admired a lizard with orange spots on its side, which was running up a tree. The huge trees and palms of the consular area were so restful after the squalor of the neighbourhood of the Quaker Centre. MONUSCO, the United Nations presence in the DR Congo and one of its largest missions, is very conspicuously present in a number of locations. Their offices are surrounded by rolls of barbed wire and numerous guards and police lolling around and directing incoming vehicles to parking spaces. According to what I have read, the Mission is unpopular, at least in the east, as the troops are accused of failing to protect civilians from massacres.

B----- tried to buy Congolese francs but refused when he discovered that the rate had dropped sharply from around 900 to 800 to the dollar. I wondered if some earth-shattering event had taken place while we were living remotely from any source of news but it seems fear of troubles due to the election that might make it difficult to change dollars has caused the steep decline. Eric and I went off to photocopy our passports and were rooked twice. The photocopy man would only give us 700 francs for our dollar, meaning that we in fact paid ten times as much for the copies as we should have. We also found some very small mangoes and agreed on a steep price of five dollars but, when we took possession of them, the vendor asked for more money, which we indignantly refused. Meanwhile John and Dorothy had been yet more extravagant, having found a Western-style supermarket with sky high prices. They returned laden with juice, tea, a lettuce and four yogurts, as well as bottled water. The yogurts alone had cost them ten dollars! B----- keeps asking what we would like to eat and we always say what we are getting is fine, but John had the misfortune to mention tilapia, and that is what we found on the lunch table on our return.

Our third stop was at the office, where we met Athena, who had been waiting ages for us. John, Dorothy and Athena bought some cloth while I contented myself with photographing the premises and T----- in a gorgeous orange African robe. C----- hemmed up John's new pyjamas while they were shopping. There is a sign outside the new office but otherwise one would not know that it is a shop. The main room

or boutique is much smaller than before and one of the seamstresses was sewing in the corridor. There are two offices. B----- was sitting in the dark in one and T----- was working in the other, which had functioning lights. The roof above one office leaks and the place smells slightly of damp. Whereas the rent in the old building was 300 dollars, 500 dollars is charged for the new inferior premises.

We are trying to gain some overview of the presidential candidates. A local newspaper did not provide much enlightenment, although John got a useful lesson in French reading it with me. The main headline was that one of the opposition candidates *fait trembler Goma*. Goma is the main city in North Kivu. **One of the aspects we are expected to observe according to the latest training module is whether all candidates get a fair amount of publicity and air time. Given the multitude of candidates and banners, many legislative rather than presidential, and our lack of access to broadcast media, this is totally unrealistic. I have by now, however, managed to sort out a number of questions I had about the training. In the polling stations we can only write and not speak. We can only report any objections we may have in writing to Muinda. Anything else counts as interference.**

Athena has still not managed to get her accreditation or to contact her family but Eric did manage to get the Canadian embassy to accept a form on her behalf even though it was only partially filled out.

Report from Team Member Sheila Havard, received November 23, 2011

Tuesday, November 22, 2011

When Athena was in town yesterday trying to get her accreditation, she learned of some instances of electoral malpractice from an informant in an office who would only give his first name. J-----, confirmed the reports. Apparently, some of the polling stations listed on the CENI's list are ghost ones, or ones that do not actually exist. Thus voters will spend time, money and energy travelling to a non-existent station and be prevented from voting. Supporters of the a particular candidate, we are told, can buy voters' cards from impoverished and desperate people for around ten dollars, which they can then use to create fake voting records at the ghost polling stations by recording the card numbers as if the correct owners had voted there. This practice of ghost stations also existed during the 2006 election, but to a lesser degree. Cheating was then more common during the compilation of the results, and cases were noted involving the bribing of witnesses (who are appointed to observe by the political parties). During this current campaign, political parties have already claimed to have identified 130 ghost polling stations out of the approximately 10,000 listed for Kinshasa.

Another problem is that the CENI is behind in making the practical arrangements for the polls – distributing the election material etc. This is

why some human rights organizations had advocated for a delay in the vote.

Civil education is sorely lacking. We have not yet seen any posters in town urging the population to vote, as is done in Uganda. There are just masses of banners promising heaven if voters vote for a given candidate.

According to "Jeune Afrique", DR Congo citizens have an average of 3 ½ years of education. (Life expectancy is also one of the lowest in Africa – less than Rwanda.) People are uncertain whether there will be notices at the polling stations explaining how to vote so that one's ballot is valid – a cross, a plus sign or a finger print. As a result, many ballots can be expected to be void. Journalists (Geoffrey York of the "Globe and Mail", "Jeune Afrique") report a high degree of frustration amongst the population, particularly amongst young people, who are excluded from power – many presidential candidates are getting on in age. Disgusted voters sometimes tear up their ballots or scribble insults aimed at specific candidates on them.

There are fifty radio and television stations and all but three or four are pro-government.

The main opposition candidate is Etienne Tschisekedi of the UPDS. He is getting on in age and this will be his last time running for president. His supporters maintain that the reports of his outburst while in South Africa urging his followers to attack the prisons to obtain the release of his imprisoned supporters was distorted during translation. Whatever the case may be, the opposition is disunited, consisting of a number of candidates and parties which have been unable to join forces in opposition to Joseph Kabila. Being the incumbent, of course, he controls the purse strings to election expenses, his resources being "unlimited" according to "Jeune Afrique". Some people think that Tschisekedi is the most popular candidate throughout the country and would win if the elections were fair. Kabila has constructed a number of roads recently but nothing has been done to improve social services or the standard of living. The infrastructure is generally in an advanced state of decrepitude. For instance, the water lines date back to colonial times. There is no postal system in the DRC. No passenger trains come to Kinshasa, only goods (freight) trains from the port Matadi. Power and water have both been sporadic these last few days but the kitchen staff carry water in from a tap beside the metal gates to the street. This is also where the laundry is done. The squalour of Bumbu is in marked contrast to luxury of the upscale neighbourhood we visited with B-----.

T----- arrived this morning to provide us with our training. B----- had to leave in a hurry to drive a seriously sick neighbour to the hospital, but was soon back. We had a brief silence to hold the neighbour in the light. T----- is extremely clear and knowledgeable and we now have a better idea of what to look out for and what we may and may not do. We are not to voice

any objections in the polling station but only note them down. In the event of a serious incident, we may step outside and phone. During the dépouillement (count), we may stand up to view the ballots, but not before. We may accompany the convoy transporting the election materials, using a separate vehicle, to the higher level offices (compilation and centralization) to all levels short of the national level. Sources of information are not to be mentioned for fear of endangering people and we are not to speak to journalists until we are back in Canada. Eric will be able to observe the aftermath of the election as he will be in the eastern DRC. He has gone again today to try to arrange to fly out there with MONUSCO. I had some trouble concentrating at times as I had slept poorly due to my cold.

Instead of lunch, I went for a sleep but now, after eating and a cup of tea, I feel quite revived. We have been rather spoilt these last two days. B----- bought a lettuce yesterday and we had salad, without dressing, for lunch. I tried some out on the kitchen staff with mitigated success. They were eager to try it out but found it tasteless. John and Dorothy have really treated us with dark chocolate from the posh supermarket in the centre of town, and Eric came back from his trip to MONUSCO with some real yogurt. We seem to keep reasonably busy while all these trips to complete the formalities are being made. The family tree has been completed. Athena has been giving J-----'s children English lessons, and John tested himself to see if he knew all the countries in Africa and came up seven short. One of the children and he figured out which countries were missing. In the evening Athena and Eric have been teaching the children English, after which the volunteers played games with them. Eric commented that he had never had such keen students.

As I write, one of the ten neighbouring churches is broadcasting its service far and wide; there are ominous peals of thunder and the wind is ballooning out the curtains and producing some welcome relief after the heat. The "car", ie, minibus, on which various people have been working all morning, is being revved up and the TV is blaring out in the big hall now that the seamstresses have departed after their math and French lesson.

Report from Team Member Sheila Havard with assistance from the whole team, received November 26, 2011

Wednesday, November 23, 2011

I woke before dawn to the sound of pelting rain. Now I know why sand has been brought in to cover the courtyard. Without the sand, it would have been a sea of mud. Rain slows everything down in Kinshasa and makes getting around slow and difficult. The first of our cooks arrived later than usual and to let her in I had to remove three or four hefty metal bars securing the door, one of which was so heavy that I could barely pull it out.

The good news, however, is that Athena is now accredited and so there are five of us Canadian observers. Furthermore we learned yesterday that

Muinda is now a member of the Carter Center although we are unsure what this means in practice.

John joined me in the sitting room and I invited him to comment on my diary/report, which he proceeded to read aloud. With his help and Eric's, I was able to incorporate a number of helpful editing and factual suggestions.

After we had eaten a full breakfast, the kitchen staff arrived with two plates of omelette. Two-year-old M----- is a delight. She seems to be always hungry and hung around the table eating sardines and mango and licking off her piece of bread anything that was put on it, without eating the bread itself. She then disappeared with my malfunctioning headlamp and presented it to Eric, who was in his bedroom! Baby R-----, John's first patient and Mi-----'s son, is fully recovered. R---, an older sister of M-----, plays nicely with him and hauls him around. John has recommended a truss for a family member with a hernia problem. Talking of patients, the sick neighbour is still hemorrhaging and has been transferred to another hospital. A delegation of us Canadians visited the neighbour's family. Luckily B----- corrected our intended "condoléances" as we went next door, pointing out that "soutien moral" was more appropriate since the patient was still alive!

Rain seriously disrupts activities here in Kinshasa. It was not only one of our cooks who was delayed by transport problems. We waited for T----- most of the morning and she eventually arrived around noon. We reflected on how it is so understandable that the countries that circle the tropics worldwide are so much less "developed" than those in northern climes. Meanwhile the "car" disappeared from the courtyard for more mechanical work. **In the early afternoon, B----- drove Eric to the office of the Congolese airline, CAA, so that we could buy his ticket out east. T----- now has the lists of some of the polling stations and we dropped her off at one of them. After about an hour, Eric emerged from the CAA office with his ticket – the price was higher than anticipated. B----- then drove us to the *centre de vote* to which John has been assigned. It is in the *Institutsupérieur des beaux arts* and consists of a number of *bureaux de vote* or polling stations.**

Before returning to the Quaker Centre, we visited a cake shop and bought a birthday cake for J-----'s second oldest child. The party was very well attended and the boy seemed delighted with the cake and his new outfit, made by C----- and the sewing cooperative, and was glad to quickly change and dance with us, accompanied by the even spirited 15-year-old B-----.

With all the stops and waits, there was plenty of time to observe street scenes in Gombe and, apart from the multitude of banners, one would not know that an election was about to take place. There is no unusual police or army presence as there was in parts of Uganda prior to the February 2011 vote, and street life continues as usual apart from occasional noisy parades of one or other of the parties.

The wet weather had also interfered with the cooking and B----- apologized when we had supper at about 4 p.m. But we reached Quaker consensus that we would like to always eat our main meal at about this time. On being asked what the family usually ate when no mzungus were around, I discovered that fruit did not form part of their diet as it is too expensive. This is in contrast to Uganda, where I have been told by the African Great Lakes Initiative coordinator that Africans do not consider fruit proper food because it is so cheap and readily available. The family here normally eat a doughy bread made of maize and cassava flour, as well as occasional meat and vegetables. For breakfast they eat white bread and margarine, washed down with tea.

In the evening we had our first workshop, organized by Athena, John and Dorothy. Most family members attended. Athena explained her extensive experience with trauma work, with detailed but simple descriptions of the theory and practice of trauma treatments of all kinds, with the several methods that have been found to be effective. After this we did an Augusto Boal exercise and sculpted two groups of four people into victim, aggressor and witnesses. The "master sculptors" (B----- and Sheila) were instructed by Dorothy through Athena to "freeze" them into positions of attack and of witnessing the attack. Then they "unsculpted" them again into positions of resilience, namely complete freedom from any aggressive attack, with specific attention to how their bodies felt in their respective positions. Following this everyone was asked to share their reflections. Eleven-year-old (today) J--- as a victim said, with eyes downcast and in a very soft voice, "I felt bad" and B-----, as an aggressor, said "I was ready to kill."

This whole exercise comes from an important and well established form of adult education – that is, teaching adults outside the classroom. Dorothy has made widespread and successful use of this type of technique in her years as a university professor giving workshops and doing workshops worldwide. This particular application comes from something called "theatre of the oppressed", which has been effectively used in many oppressed populations such as Argentina, Brazil and Guatemala. Dorothy's description and application here seemed to work very well with Athena's translation and facilitation.

The evening wound up with another of Eric's popular English lessons, which totally delighted this enthusiastic and able group of children aged 15 to 7... Will many or any of them have the chance to move ahead into careers and skilled work however much they deserve to?

Thursday, November 24, 2011

This diary/report has turned into a group effort, for which I am very grateful. Today's section is thanks to additions, including entire paragraphs, by John, Athena and Dorothy and additional editing by all.

Today I observed a touching scene in the courtyard while I was standing behind the curtain in the bedroom. The neighbour's boy was standing in front of the bus mirror, preening himself. For about five minutes, he touched up his hair and

examined himself from all possible angles. The compound is always full of life: clothes are washed in buckets at the tap beside the metal gates; a stainless steel sink and drying rack have been set up for dishes beside the rooms across from the sitting room where B-----'s offspring and their families live. If someone isn't tinkering on the bus, J-----'s children are hanging around the table where we eat, playing with baby R---- or writing out pages of figures or letters.

Security is a constant concern here. It has been impossible to keep the presence of us five mzungus secret since we sally forth by car or bus at least once a day. We do appreciate B-----'s concern that our presence is a potential major incentive to robbers to break in. Of course the reality is that – despite the good wall and solid gates – our compound is far from impenetrable, and this is an extremely poor and squalid neighbourhood.

Every one of the children grabs every opportunity for learning with us, whether in Eric's "formal" classroom or just sitting on the steps outside the door. For example, B---- produced a periodic table from chemistry along with the bar of soap which we had distributed to everyone during J----'s birthday party, asking John to help him analyze the ingredients. It is hard to imagine a North American 15-year old coming up with his own homework assignment!

After lunch we did rounds of the polling stations where we were to be stationed in two vehicles, some of us travelling in the bus and others in the car. There are still problems with the bus although the brakes have been fixed. The driver had trouble starting it a couple of times. Sofas were placed inside as temporary seats.

We first visited the polling stations at the *École des Beaux Arts*, dating from Belgian colonization, where John and B----- will be stationed for the voting. There will be a number of polling stations in the central pavilion, which is actually quite a large room. We noted that the campus was plastered with statues, ranging in themes from friendship to love to busts of Belgian generals, as well as one to what we interpreted as the pain of colonization and slavery. B----- reprised the life sculptures activity from our workshop by posing as the witness beside the aggressor and victim statuary.

Interestingly, the campus was dominated by males (the ratio of men to women being very approximately 10:1). They were sitting outside with their sketch books, drawing. With the exception of ceramics, no textile arts, or other handicrafts, typically associated with women, were represented in the *beaux arts*. There was an architecture faculty on campus, which we thought was somewhat unusual, and may have been the reason we saw more men than women. Even so, we were uncertain whether total student enrolment was mainly male or whether what we saw was not representative. What a wealth of potential male "oppression" a young woman must have to overcome to make her voice and ideas heard! Athena and I also thought that there did not seem to be many posters of female candidates either.

It was a huge treat to visit the art gallery, which is overseen by a very elegant artist gentleman. All the pieces are for sale – mostly beautiful wooden sculptures in

a variety of woods but also many paintings in many styles. John and Dorothy would have liked to have stayed much longer, but in the end they settled for two boxes of dominoes of grey ebony, after B----- checked that they could return for more shopping "after the election." (There is a growing list of things that folks hope to do after the busy build-up and actuality of election day).

At the Athène Victoire station, to which J----- and I have been assigned, Athena and others talked to a man who said that his name was not on the list of voters. He had furthermore been told that this was his polling station, and he had gone (with his young son) to a number of other stations. To quote our informant, "Ça fait beaucoup de va et vient." We assumed that this travelling back and forth had cost him money, but what mostly struck us was the man's frustration at not being able to find the correct polling station. He said that he would not know where to go on election day, and he did not want to waste any more time just to be refused entry. He thanked the international observers concerned for listening to his story. We note that Geoffrey York of the *Globe and Mail* reported tampering with the registry of voters three or four weeks ago. (As I do not know the exact English equivalent to the French electoral terms used, I have adopted "registry" for the central list and "list of voters" for the lists posted at each polling station.) If, as seems very possible, this man is just one of many, you can quickly appreciate the potential for violent backlash due to this (accidental?/deliberate?) practice.

After the visit to the *Institut des Beaux Arts*, the bus stalled and therefore only the passengers in the car were able to continue making the rounds while the bus driver stopped to make the repairs. **J----- took the members of the bus team on a tour of the area, which contained a military base and a police station. We could quickly understand J-----'s injunction to us not to take photos. At one point in the tour the group stopped on the roadside to let a procession of vehicles speed by into the military base. The vehicles concerned were very big SUVs with tinted windows and very large tires. At the head of the procession was a Jeep with uniformed soldiers standing upright, pointing their guns up in the air.**

The group commented on how intimidating this was even to us as international observers and wondered whether it would have a similar effect on the inhabitants of Kinshasa or whether they were used to such displays of military force. The *New African* reports that arms are not manufactured in Africa. While on military matters, I might add that I got a peep inside the MONUSCO compound, which is surrounded by a tangle of barbed wire today. It was bristling with tanks; they were parked side by side all around the large compound. The bus was quickly repaired (those amazing on-the-spot mechanics and the street vendors that sell those spare mechanical parts!) and the polling station tour continued.

There were more signs of campaigning today. Vehicles packed with jovial supporters of the various candidates were making their way through the

city, their occupants waving flags and banners and shouting enthusiastically, often accompanied by musical instruments. At one stage supporters of Joseph Kabila and an opposition candidate nearly met on the street but things remained calm. There are unconfirmed reports that Kabila's supporters are bribing voters with twenty dollar bills and buying them drinks. A nice note – once passers-by called to Dorothy and John in the van – “Est-ce que vous êtes observateurs?” when we affirmed, they said “Soyez les bienvenus!”

Further to the uncertainty I reported yesterday, instructions on how to vote do exist. Outside one polling station three posters were displayed. One showed how voters should circulate within the polling station, voting first for the president and then in the legislative election. The other two posters explained how ballots should and should not be marked. I only noticed this poster at one location.

We also verified that the lists of voters had been posted at the various polling stations. At one location T----- embarked on a conversation with a member of the station and questioned her about how prepared the station was for voting day. The officials for the bureau de vote were in a training session while we were there. I will be with J----- at a polling called Athène Victoire. It is right beside a main road and I thought it might be rather noisy, although I believe there are further polling stations further to the back and more away from the road.

B----- has been somewhat preoccupied today; our diet has lapsed somewhat and nobody but me has yet obtained access to email. The food is, as always delicious, but has been almost entirely starch (refined grains) and meat for the last day or two. If this situation continues, we will take it upon ourselves to go and buy mangoes and/or apples even though we will doubtless choose inferior fruit and pay a higher price than if our hosts picked them.

Friday, November-25-11

The \$10 I gave to B----- this morning when he went shopping has brought us a lot of delicious fruit: 3 avocados and a pineapple for breakfast and now papaya for lunch/supper. True to our request lunch/supper has been much later today, at around 2:30 p.m.

This morning was quiet and only disturbed by metallic clanking as the mechanics worked on the bus in the yard. This seems to be the day of *grande toilette* as the children were running around more or less in their nothings and then appeared with different clothes and hairdos. The clothes line is yet more strung with clothes than usual and we took advantage of this gorgeous sunny day, the first, to do some laundry ourselves.

On getting up at 6 a.m., I took advantage of the empty sitting room to do some exercises and stretches. The unaccustomed inactivity is getting to me and others. Dorothy misses her 2-hour sessions in the gym; John his regular racketball; Athena

her running in High Park; and Eric his bicycle riding. I think we all agree that such profound differences from home comforts and activities are quite a challenging adjustment.

Everyone then pitched in reading and adding to my diary/report for yesterday so that day is really a group effort and much longer than usual!

The power was off all morning so we couldn't email, and I lay down mid-morning and drifted off, dreaming of a large, large loaf of the darkest German rye bread. The white bread here is tasty but rather monotonous, not to mention lacking in fibre.

T----- arrived mid-morning, after her usual struggle with the traffic and transportation, bearing forms for the observers to complete, one for the voting process and one for the count. We put the sheets into the observers' folders but there was some confusion over how this task was to be completed and we had to start over again several times.

Over lunch of smoked fish, with lots of vegetables this time, Muinda staff reported problems with the *cartographie*, meaning the lists of polling station locations. For one thing not all the lists were posted the legally required 30 days ahead of time. Secondly, there have been last minute changes and frustrated voters have expressed travelling from station to station, sometimes from one end of a riding to the other, trying to find their names on the list. Because of the last minute changes, a voter's "correct" station can no longer always be identified from the number on his or her voting card. This confusion will doubtless disgust voters and discourage all but the most determined from voting. Athena told us that she just spoke to her boyfriend in Toronto, and he said that CBC's *Current* had been discussing the DRC elections. She was told that the six Canadian observers had reported rumours still alive and well that the election will be cancelled for lack of preparation.

The afternoon was spent continuing the preparations for the big workshop tomorrow, when we will meet the 100 national observers. Lists of polling stations were made on flipchart paper and I inserted the national observers' bonus - \$20 - into the 100 envelopes. They will not get their expected \$10 for food, drink and transport, as a funding source did not materialize. Then a delivery of 56 chairs arrived, which we arranged in rows in the large hall. With this number of chairs, the hall was already packed and we wondered how the additional 44 observers could be fitted in. But by cramming the chairs together we made sufficient space for B----- to be optimistic that room would be found for everyone once the tires at the back of the room had been piled up and the sewing machines removed. Provided, that is, that not too many people were tall and lanky!

At 7:00 p.m. I had a very frustrating hour attempting to use email. The connection kept going and B----- suggested that I try again at 9.

The power was off today until around 6:30 p.m., when it constantly flickered on and off for twenty minutes or so. One of the Muinda computers, which had just been repaired, seems to have overheated. Since then the power has been steady – touch wood! The other day the power went off when I was in the bathroom and, having forgotten my malfunctioning headlamp, I was plunged into complete darkness. However, Athena came to my rescue by shining her flashlight through the hinges of the door, providing just enough light for me to find my way out.

Saturday, November-26, 2011

Workshop of National and International Observers

Today was the big day we have been building up to all week, the day of the workshop with the 100 national observers. It was scheduled for 9 a.m., but that was when people started drifting in through the metal gates to the street. Of the 100 plastic chairs ordered, 82 fitted inside the hall and 18 were placed outside so that those sitting there could follow the proceedings through the metal-barred windows. **We estimated that about 85 people came, and everyone seemed to stay till the end.**

We were warned not to answer questions during one-to-one conversations with workshop participants, or to give out our contact information, for not all participants would be known to B----- and members of the secret services might have infiltrated in amongst the other attendees.

At the outset of the workshop, a peace cell³ member stressed that we would have to finish early because of possible transport disruptions due to two major campaign meetings planned in the centre of town. Athena opened the workshop with a brief and very clear presentation on trauma and post-trauma (PTSD) healing. To bring home the relevance of the topic, she asked those present who had experienced some various traumatic events, either themselves or in families they knew, to stand. These included witnessing rape or murder, knowing a child who was orphaned, or being imprisoned for political reasons as a result of the war. As far as I could ascertain by scanning the audience for responses, two attendees personally knew of rapes, five of orphaned children, two of people imprisoned for political reasons, and two of people who had lost a child under the age of five. Interestingly, the two who stood because they knew of political prisoners were mother and daughter, so perhaps they were thinking of the same person. By contrast, nobody stood up for assassinations or domestic violence. By the time Athena had finished asking her questions about cases of trauma, nine or ten people were standing out of the approximately 50 who were present at the start of the session, or a ratio of about 1:5.

Floribert's story by Athena

³ A "peace cell" is a neighbourhood committee trained and supported by Project Muinda to provide informal mediation of disputes or conflicts. The peace cell work was begun in 1995.

Of interest here is a vignette told by a member of Projet Muinda's peace cell initiative, F-----, in response to Athena's question about successes members of the group had seen thus far in working with people living with trauma in their communities. F----- said that he had been working with a woman who had been systematically raped as a result of war. Upon returning to her community, she faced rejection from her husband, family, and neighbours. She later gave birth to a child who was conceived from the rapes, and the community rejected the child as well.

F----- explained that the work of the peace cell had operated on three levels. First, he encouraged the woman to tell her story. Second, he helped the husband understand that the woman was not at fault for the rapes, and that her experience needed healing and reconciliation. Last, he worked with the community to help the woman and her child reclaim their space and belonging with them. Athena expressed appreciation for F----- sharing this woman's story, as it touched on the many dynamics, complexities, and levels of trauma pertinent to the discussion at hand. On a personal level and upon reflection, Athena mentioned that she was also quite appreciative of F-----'s vignette because had she mentioned the "best way to support and intervene in community", it might have been perceived as not being a Muinda initiative. While reconciliation may be similar, across continents, goals and perceptions of reconciliation may not necessarily be the same.

Having established our interest in this interactive way, Athena then ran through the many, many symptoms of trauma, some quite unexpected, and then treatment methods, and whether they acted at an individual, family/society or spiritual level. She wound up by summarizing various theories of trauma and B----- then explained the relevance of this trauma session, namely that people involved in disputes addressed by the peace cells were sometimes trauma victims themselves. B----- is rightly very concerned that everything be put in CONTEXT. Trauma has been deep (historic) roots going back as far as slavery, colonialism, the regimes after independence, the two wars in the late 1990s, etc.

T----- then took over and ran through the electoral and count forms, which had previously been handed out to us, to ensure that all the observers would be on the same wave length when completing these forms. The names and numbers of the voting centres were all posted on the wall on flipchart paper, thanks to the efforts the previous day of Athena, John, Dorothy and Eric, and we were given the names of the supervisors for each area.

The remainder of the workshop was taken up with distribution of the badges, shirts and stipend (\$20 plus 2000 francs), and provided ample photo ops. The whole day wound up at noon with a meal of rice, doughy cassava and maize flour bread, greens and chicken. I was pleased to note that everyone got the same food although we Westerners ate in the sitting room. Actually, we were not served Fanta, this was only given to the large group. After our meal, Isabel invited us to choose a soda--*jaune, rouge, orange*. A special treat because they were COLD! Strange how food and drink I would never dream of

touching in Canada is a regular treat here. In Uganda, Ribena provides welcome relief from constant luke-warm water, but I doubt this brand of syrup could be found in a francophone environment.

I was concerned to see one young man systematically photographing absolutely everyone in the workshop, rather than picking and choosing scenes that might be of interest. When I asked B----- and John if they knew who this could be, they did not seem to be unduly concerned.

Campaign Clashes at the Airport

Over lunch, we learnt that the radio was reporting clashes at the airport. Apparently, Tschisikedi's supporters had flocked to the airport to welcome him and been met by Kabila's supporters who, B----- opined, were anxious to reduce the visibility of their opponents. A number of people have been wounded. It is possible also that it suits the powers-that-be to stir up violence so that they can put the police and even the military to work in suppressing it. As a result of the violence, the two major rallies planned for today, one for Kabila and one for Tschisikedi, have been cancelled. By law, all campaigning is to end at midnight tonight.

Answer for Gianne: Question - is there a process for judging allegations against the CENI?

According to B-----, such a process, via the *Cour constitutionnelle*, is in the works but it is not yet in place.

Addendum received Nov. 26

In brief, since the episode above was written news is not good but it is difficult to know what is confirmed and what rumour.

Sure is the disturbance at the airport, dispersed with tear gas - see episode - and cancellation of the rally. Reuters two hours ago reports Tschisekedi said he would go ahead with his rally as only Kabila's rally was cancelled. Reuters reports one death and that not all the ballots have been delivered. The same report accuses the head of the electoral commission, CENI, of pro-Kabila bias. On watching the report on Euronews of the demonstrations; J----- exclaimed repeatedly and disgustedly: "Quand est on va voir de la paix chez nous?". B-----'s contacts by cell phone report ballot stuffing.

Two workshop attendees - female - report being beaten and robbed while walking home - there was no public transport - this was not politically motivated but saddened us.

Rumour has it that there have been from 14 to 50 deaths.

B----- is sure the election will go ahead anyway because of the resources poured into it.

On a more positive note, Athena has some superb photos of the workshop.

Report from Team Member Sheila Havard, received November 27, 2011

Unfortunately; the situation seems to be worse than implied by this report but that will have to wait for tomorrow or the next day - probably the latter as we start at 5 am tomorrow and may finish very late.

Sunday, November 27, 2011

Today produced a more balanced, and we hope truer, view of yesterday's events. Tschisekedi was blocked at the airport for eight hours yesterday and there were two deaths and a number of wounded. Naturally all deaths and injuries cannot be too strongly deplored. The government and opposition rallies were cancelled. Both Kabila's incumbent party and the major opposition party have been appealing for calm.

A nurse has informed B----- that there are many wounded persons in hospital, and B----- believes this report to be credible.

We Westerners are becoming aware of the fear and tension that is the omnipresent background to the family's movements. To me it is reminiscent of Eastern Europe during the worst of the Cold War. We are very aware that we must not endanger our hosts in any way, but also that we are not very experienced in minimizing any such danger. These discussions are ongoing and include our hosts. For instance, Eric would like to contact Geoffrey York of the *Globe and Mail* about the supposed/real airport slaughter.

To change the subject, Kinshasa Monthly Meeting held a business meeting after Meeting for Worship at which we were introduced to the officials, the clerk, treasurer, overseers and an elder, as well as F----, the secretary.

Following lunch, four of us piled into B-----'s car to go grocery shopping, prudently stocking up on food and water in the event that post-election violence keep us homebound. **We noted as we were driving around that, as per national law, all the campaign posters had been removed – in some areas and roundabouts, the signs and banners had been so prevalent that seeing these areas now was like discovering a new Kinshasa. However Kabila signs and billboards were still present and untouched – not that we had an accurate count of the number and locations of where Kabila signs had been mounted, but it seemed that they were as prevalent as during the period of the campaign – on one street, we counted at least three billboards, two wall posters, and a number of banners on buildings.**

At the supermarket, some of the prices of the food were shocking: Between the four of us we spent approximately 70USD on "staples" – toilet paper, water, juice, bread, powdered milk, tea coffee, avocado, and cookies as treats for the children. We noted that while we may not have blinked twice spending that kind of money in a supermarket at home, it seemed unreasonable here – 10USD for 50g of Nescafé!

On the way home from the supermarket, we chanced upon a local artisan market, and B----- was kind enough to indulge (via u-turn) our desire to stop by. For Dorothy and John, this was a challenging experience. They could have spent many hours browsing among all the carvings, paintings, jewelry and other art objects, but of course that was impossible. They were utterly inundated in minutes by dozens of salesmen (all men) clamouring and bargaining with them and against each other. They fled to the car with 4 quite modest purchases and B----- began to drive off with one unpaid-for object + a salesman's \$10 bill in the car until finally J. thrust \$20 out at him as we drove off.....

Athena had initially stopped to admire one particular man's work in the entry of the market, indicating however that she was not at the market to buy, as she was a student accompanying her friends. After having done the tour of the market (with the requisite amount of being accosted to buy), the man called after her, and offering a little scroll, said he would like to give her a similar painting as a gift. Athena was a bit taken aback from his gesture, not having any money to give him in return; he responded by saying he wanted to give the painting as a gift, it would give him pleasure – she had reminded him of his daughter who had passed away ten years ago, and her dream was to have attended university. Giving this painting was his way of connecting him to her dream. Athena ultimately accepted the painting, and upon telling the story to the other four friends accompanying her, John gave him some francs, which the man was reluctant to take. It was a nice parting way to leave the marché, which the man told us was called Le marché d'art royale. John also noted this man's exchange was in marked contrast to the high-pressure reception of his fellows.

Monday, November 28, 2011 – Election Day

My Election Station

This was a long, tiring, and often boring day, and it was yet more difficult because I had slept only a couple of hours the night before, but it was nevertheless central to our presence here. We rose at 4:30 a.m., breakfasted on tea and bread, and made sandwiches for our lunch. We departed at 5:30 a.m. Because there were too many of us to fit into the car and overloading it could have resulted in a fine for B-----, I was assigned to take public transport with J. to I.T.C. Victoire. **However, public transport was scarce and, in the end, B----- picked us up from the minibus taxi stop and drove us to the school.**

The elections took place in a very tense atmosphere due to Saturday's events at the airport (update to follow). Many people thought they should have been deferred. The ban on party publicity during the 24-hour period

leading up to the election was not observed as advertising for the incumbent President, Joseph Kabila, could still be seen in town, although opposition banners had disappeared. I am unsure whether Tschisekedi's press conference after he was illegally detained at the airport (see above and below) counts as campaigning after the end of the campaign period.

My voting centre (*centre de vote*) consisted of the one-story classrooms with their pitted walls and rusty corrugated iron roofs that lined the school complex. These were the polling stations (*bureaux de vote*). Facilities and equipment were limited. Electoral commission (*CENI*) personnel, witnesses delegated by the political parties and observers all sat at wooden school desks on uncomfortable benches with no backs, which together with the relative heat and the boredom of quieter periods was highly conducive to drowsiness. All of us, *CENI* agents, witnesses and observers slumped down with our heads on our hands and succumbed to sleep at some stage in the proceedings, with the possible exception of the president who was, however, seen to lean back in his plastic chair, close his eyes and possibly drift off at one particularly slow point in the afternoon. The witnesses slept most of the morning and, at Athena's polling station, even the policeman on guard outside enjoyed a nap, turning his back to the crowd to rest his head in folded arms at the base of the iron-grill window.

Although we had been warned in the pre-election briefing to stay put and refrain from wandering around the polling station during the voting, I tried to fight off sleep by walking back and forth at the back of the room, which enabled me to glance through the broken window panes and keep an eye on what was happening around the other polling stations as well as monitor the coming and going of some impressively large and well maintained vehicles parked outside and belonging both to apparent voters and observer missions. Whereas I remained inside my polling station from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. with the exception of five brief minutes, J. took the opportunity to investigate the surroundings and see what was happening in other polling stations.

Monitoring our surroundings enabled me to pick out other observers. The African Union has sent fifty observers. I spoke to their very experienced man from the Comores, who visited a number of polling stations and displayed three samples of the indelible ink from them to me at the end of the day – all the ink was still there. He remarked that freedom in the 2006 elections had been so-so, but he seemed happy with procedures this time, even observing that the problem with the voters' lists was resolved at the end of the day (see below). This surprised me because neither J. nor I thought it was resolved.

Another observer mission was from *l'Eglise de toute l'Afrique*. Around noon I saw a white woman deep in discussion, also presumably an international observer. At the end of the day, two white Francophones

dropped in briefly and queried the SET party witness on the disgruntled electors sent from polling station to polling station because of the incorrect voters' lists posted outside them. I do not know whether any other international observers stayed all day in one polling station. They seemed rather to be sampling what was going on by visiting various locations. Of course there are arguments in favour of both approaches.

Amusingly, J. overheard a voter complaining that the lack of international observers undermined the credibility of the elections. The voter was reassured by a bystander that a "*bonne soeur*" (i.e., Catholic nun) was on scene so all would be well. The "*bonne soeur*" was apparently me! I have been called Chinese in Africa before but never a nun!

The major problem at my polling station, which also interfered with proceedings at other Kinshasa polling stations about which I heard, was the voters' lists. Typically, voters would visit the polling stations indicated on their cards to find that their names were not listed outside the door. The electoral officials would then refer them to another station, sometimes several times. Some disgruntled voters would give up and go home. It was difficult enough for them to get to the polling station in the first place due to the lack of public transport and then the tropical rainstorm from 9 a.m. to about 11 a.m. I could not tell how many voters were being denied entry because they were turned away outside when they appealed to the *assesseur suppléant* (backup assistant), but I did record four or five incidents of vociferous complaints from both voters and witnesses of the political parties.

One elderly witness was muttering about the electoral commission's bad organization, saying it was worse than in 2006. There was a great deal of angry shouting outside about this issue during the first couple of hours before the rainstorm. In some cases, voters were allowed to vote even though their names were not on the voters' list posted at the door to our station, because another polling station had been "*délocalisé*". This was called "*voter par dérogation*". However the practice was inconsistent as some voters from the neighbouring polling station that had been "*délocalisé*" were turned away and referred elsewhere. One reason for accepting them was to avoid "*désordres*" or trouble. I am unsure how the *CENI* agents accounted for these voters in their reports and figures.

The torrential rainstorm at 9 a.m. calmed tempers and reduced the flow of voters to a mere trickle. The school grounds became flooded and the few who ventured out waded through ankle-deep water on what had been a patchy lawn, their soaked clothes clinging to them. The storm highlighted the inadequacy of the premises. The *assesseurs* (assistants) were forced to move the wooden desks around to escape the drips. It became so dark in our room that voters left the voting booths to search for their preferred name by the light of the window, thus compromising secrecy. (In my view the voting booths were a bit close to each other for secrecy anyway

although a *CENI* supervisor did come along and get them repositioned slightly at one stage.) Voting resumed after a couple of hours when the rain finally petered out, but we were never as busy again as first thing in the morning. Only 135 out of the registered 287 voters at this station actually voted. How much of this low turnout was due to the problems with the voters' list is impossible to ascertain.

There were other signs of poor preparation for the elections by *CENI*. I saw no sign of the posters and banners urging people to vote that I was accustomed to from Uganda. Some education may have been provided on television but many people in Kinshasa – let alone in the provinces – have no reliable electricity. Many people distrusted the Commission; they brought their own pens with them rather than relying on the pens provided in the voting booths. Did they think *CENI* had somehow tampered with the ink to make it self-erasing??? *Projet Muinda* constantly stresses the poor level of civic education and holds workshops to raise awareness.

Familiarity with basic voting procedures was poor, and voters needed constant guidance and reminders from the election officials. And this was in the capital – what can the situation be like in the vast and inaccessible interior? Practically all voters had to be reminded to fold their ballots when they emerged from the voting booth. There were no posters explaining how to properly mark a ballot, although Athena did see instructions written on a board at one of her stations and at Eric's school many instructional posters were present. So all instructions at my station were verbal, mostly given to voters individually by the secretary when he gave them the large ballot to vote for a deputy for the legislature. Relying on verbal explanations paved the way for human error. One voter asked if he could simply leave his ballot in the voting booth!

The agents seemed well trained and competent, and they were impartial and patient with the electorate. The African Union representative from the Comores also thought they had been well trained.

The presidential vote went off well but there was a problem with the vote for the deputies. There were 1150 candidates! A book with about half a dozen pages had been created by way of ballot, each page being several times the size of an 8 ½ x 11" inch sheet. As a result, although average voting time for both president and deputy from verification of the voter's card to the inking of the thumb was just over five minutes, it took a maximum of about 15 minutes for some voters to scan down the double lists of names and photos on each page and pick their choice for deputy. Moreover, while the presidential ballots were counted easily and quickly, the counting of deputies was such a long and tedious process that we had to leave and were totally exhausted before the count had been completed.

Because the process of flipping through the pages in the legislative ballot book took so long, procedures which had hitherto been followed

conscientiously began to break down. First, the president began to give piles of ballots to an *assesseur* to read instead of reading them aloud himself. Then piles were picked up by the witnesses so that they could find the page where the name of a deputy had been marked, after which they handed back the ballots in question to the president. It seemed highly irregular for the witnesses and observers to be touching the ballots, as they might easily have taken advantage of the general disorder to mark one of them and make it void, although I did not observe this happening.

I was flabbergasted, though, when an observer opened a ballot book and declared it blank without checking through it a second time. Instead of this ballot being returned to an election official for confirmation of this finding, it was picked up by a witness and dropped on the pile of void ballots. This ballot was therefore never examined by anybody appointed by *CENI*. Even before procedure degenerated in this way, at the beginning of the count, the president failed to follow election procedure and appoint five electors to observe the count.

There was also a long delay between the end of the voting and the beginning of the count, whereas the latter was supposed to follow immediately. The president explained this by stating that he needed to summon the police to secure the premises and materials but I never noticed any police on scene. Instead we seemed to be waiting for electricity to be brought into the room, which was only lit with one lamp until then. Eventually, electricity materialized and the count started. The power or connection failed briefly once but resumed almost immediately.

Other Polling Stations

While there were no real incidents or troubles at my polling station, apart from the shouting over the incorrect voters' lists and a count that unintentionally degenerated into confusion, the same cannot be said of all the polling stations where Canadian Quaker observers were positioned. I will summarize what I heard but I expect that the others will want to describe their experience in greater detail. Outside Eric's station, a citizen was set on because he had 200 ballots in his possession that had been pre-marked in favour of presidential candidate number 3. At a later stage, Eric and the group at his polling station were affected by tear-gas wafting in from a demonstration in the street outside. John had to wait until about 8:30 a.m. for the election materials to be delivered to his polling station.

Athena

My station had few incidents. Other than the lack of electricity for much of the day, with most of the polling stations opening two hours late and all of them closing almost an hour and a half early, the day seemed to go rather smoothly. Each station seemed somewhat under the jurisdiction of its *président*, so while set-up, formality and timing differed between them, the general welcome was consistent towards both voters and observers, reflecting very much a sense of solidarity between people on this day – in

one station, an older *Maman* said she could not see the ballot clearly, so the *président* gave her his own glasses. Observers were called upon frequently to either directly help some voters who could not read enough to mark their ballots, or observe somebody else mark the ballot as the voter indicated.

It was also quite touching for me to see older people who could not read or write, or who were evidently tired or struggling on their feet, very carefully leafing through their ballots, spending lengths of time in the booths before walking out expressing satisfaction that they had voted and done so "correctly". A number of young women had their children in tow or carried them around their waists at the stations; I noticed that a number of female observers offered to take the children so the women could vote independently.

Overall and on average, I counted 18 votes (both presidential & legislative) per hour. I also observed three individuals who, upon presenting their elector's cards, were told they had already voted; it was explained that this could have been the secretary's error, or their name was shared by somebody else, but general rumour seemed to be that people suspected this was a tactic to undermine election credibility, or at least control the direction of the vote. These cases were resolved by registering "duplicate" voter names manually. At close, two polling stations had been consolidated where I was positioned so proceedings were even further behind than they were where Sheila had been stationed. 333 and 321 valid ballots were counted at the *dépouillement*.

Dorothy

F----- with his excellent English was my guide for the day. We were working in the district of Ngiri-Ngiri, comprising several polling stations (BV), which proved a wonderful opportunity for observing the very different organization and ambience of each one. I came to the conclusion that there was no standard protocol, e.g., signage, crowd control for line ups, sitting arrangements of witnesses, observers and journalists. We began our day at a very noisy BV held at Kwetima primary school with an open-air central courtyard surrounded by two storeys of classrooms turned into maybe 15 BVs. I went to BV "B" and F----- to BV "C". The queue at the 6:00 a.m. opening was quite short (8 to 10) growing to about 20 when the first vote was cast (by the BV President). Continuous hubbub in the courtyard. We lost power mid-morning and then had reduced power for a couple of hours (three of the four light bulbs were operating). The rain came pouring down for a few hours and I could see umbrellas in the courtyard through the barred windows. People were crowding up against the edges of the courtyard for shelter. There were several (easily 20) incidents of missing names on the voters' list, leading to noisy arguments in the queue as well as among the *CENI* officials deciding what to do. The witnesses changed every hour or so, and there were several disputes about who could stay and who could be replaced.

F----- and I then went to a few more BVs together before returning to our original BVs for the count, as we were instructed at one point in the day. It was a very hot day and F. decided on our behalf not to go to very small BVs at a school, which were nonetheless choc-a-bloc with witnesses. The *CENI* officials at two of the BVs were eager to have an international observer at their BV and asked others to leave to make space for us (rule was for only six witnesses and observers total at any given time). I noted that they also explained why it was good for a "credible" election to have an international observer.

F and I then spent a couple of hours at a BV at a Catholic girls' middle school, which could not have been more different. It was quiet, orderly and clean. They had duct tape barriers to guide voters into the BV. There was not one incident of missing names on the voters' list – was this because it was later in the day and they had already been accounted for, or was the "orderliness" something that happened before election day too? The President of the BV was *enchanté* to see us and moved out other observers to accommodate us. The *CENI* supervisor for this site came by and asked F. if we could spread ourselves around to other BVs in the school, as it was so important for the process to have the presence of international observers. We were prepared to do this but there was not enough time to do so and still get back to our original BV for the *dépouillement* (count).

F----- offered me a civic education tutorial on *dérogation*, which was not even a word in my vocabulary before. The President at this BV had announced that those who had found out they were eligible for *dérogation* and could not find their correct BV could return to the BV where they had initiated the *derogation* procedure. F. explained that there are two types of *dérogation*: 1) those who are travelling, e.g., on the voters' list in Goma, but working in Kinshasa; and 2) those who have a voter's card but their names are missing on the voters' list. (Eric pointed out a third category, those who are infirm or aged, and cannot physically come to a BV). *Dérogation*, it seemed to both F. and me, was a process that could be a source of an infraction (like double voting) and another reason for it taking a long time to get the final results of the election.

F----- and I returned to our original BVs for the *dépouillement* (count). The *dépouillement* did not begin immediately at 5 p.m. The President and police leader assembled us in the courtyard, extended the time for voting and specified the two BVs where this could happen and how these voters should line up. My BV was one of the designated BVs. As a result, the counting did not begin until 6:30 p.m. or so. Again there were many disputes among the *CENI* officials and the witnesses about the proper process. Only one witness seemed to be allowed to join in the counting. We could hear cheering and pounding of bars as the count for President came in at other BVs. F said later that he did not expect any violence in

Ngiri-Ngiri because the results favoured the opposition candidate – and that it would have been quite different had the incumbent candidate done well. F tried to call me on the cell but it was so noisy I could not hear above the counting, which at this point had moved to the deputy candidates. He appeared at the window and asked if I would mind leaving. By this time it was close to 9:00 p.m. and I was more than ready to leave. I was the first one back at B-----'s and the whole family globbed onto us, looking for election news from F, and the children looking for the company of their new friends and teachers.

Back to Sheila – reports from outside Kinshasa

Further afield the situation was more dire. J. received reports from Eric's cell phone contacts from Kasai occidental and Lubumbashi which were alarming. In the latter city two polling stations were apparently burnt down. There was a report from Kasai occidental that one polling station only received the electoral materials at 5 p.m. How many voters were deterred from voting by the thought of having to do so in the dark, I wondered. There was also a report of documents being stolen in Kasai occidental. Later: B----- told us Tuesday morning that, at some stations, the vote was continuing today because the materials had been received so late yesterday.

Eric

Eric's polling area was especially active. There were several protest events outside during the day. He was told that militia with machetes were involved. The anti-riot police were called in. Eric did see the police making an arrest. Tear gas was used and at one point a stun grenade was thrown, creating a huge noise, which dispersed every one. There was also an incident where the crowd stopped a *CENI* truck which was bringing in a new packet of voting ballots. The crowd seized the ballots and began to tear them up, convinced that they had uncovered another example of fraud. The usual examples of fraud were encountered. A woman who voted without a proper voting card was arrested. As well as the case of the person with 200 ballots, there were reliable reports of a nearby polling station where the president was caught trying to steal ballots.

John

John was with B----- at the *Académie des Beaux Arts*, where there was one main and nine other substations. Much of what took place was similar to that reported above, except that it was an extremely pleasant environment and John was free to visit all ten stations, while staying mainly at the central one. Several other international observers dropped by at various times, e.g., from the EU, who were, it seemed, professional observers and move all over Africa and elsewhere, sending back huge formatted reports almost daily to Brussels.

The biggest excitement was when, late in the afternoon, there was a huge eruption of crowds inside and outside the BV, including many journalists

and professional photographers, like a vast swarm of bees around honey. Everything was disrupted completely for about 30 minutes. The reason was that candidate #5 (VK) had arrived with his wife to vote at this, his own constituency. A Senegalese woman international observer, whom John had met, pulled him along until he was almost on top of the BT voting booth. She then introduced him as from Canada, and VK shook his hand with an "*enchanté*," before moving on outside to deliver an oration.

Meanwhile B----- had watched this uproar while leaning against his Toyota outside, and as the crowd flooded towards the fleet of gleaming black jeeps, an even greater melée gathered pace, almost breaking out in fights, and B----- told John that the candidate had thrown a bunch of money into the crowd as he climbed into his jeep. No comment, except that he was one of only three presidential candidates who got any respectable number of votes at any of the various BVs our group was observing.....

Otherwise, things passed quite calmly if slowly. For the presidential count, suddenly a whole bevy of new faces appeared among the observers while those who had been napping were suddenly at full alert. It went fine but the deputy counting still hadn't started at nearly 9 p.m., so when B----- asked John if he was ready to leave, he grabbed the chance, since they had been here for 14+ hours and John for one was no longer functioning usefully!

Tuesday, November 29, 2011

Most of today was spent writing reports. I completed my observation and count forms for the polling station in which I had sat all day and then attempted to translate John and Dorothy's forms into English, not too successfully as I managed to spill an entire cup of tea over the table while doing so. Otherwise, I revised and made corrections to my entire diary/report since arriving here and provided B----- with a copy on his memory stick.

Wednesday, November 30, 2011

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Eric had an unwelcome visitor last night: a rat ran through his bed! B--- promised to buy traps/poison but in the end we forgot.

As promised, B--- dispatched someone to get modem time this morning but was unable to load it from the card purchased. So we will have to try again tonight.

Today was rather busy with meetings but first we went downtown. Eric was again a good sport in offering to stay behind so that there were not too many passengers in the car. Our first stop was the Muinda office (Action Jeune Fille boutique) and we then dropped in at Brussels Airlines to arrange our return flights (Ah, climatisé!).

We have to check our baggage in on Friday morning at the airline office in preparation for our 10 p.m. flight

Muinda office

To illustrate the urgent need for Action Jeune Fille to find new premises, B--- showed me the mould on the walls in the corridor and in his office, and the patches on the ceiling where the roof leaks when it rains. The files piled feet-high on the shelves are beginning to stick together from the humidity and there is a slight smell from the mould. John noted that there was no sign outside the Muinda office to advertise the presence there of either Project Muinda or the Action Jeune Fille Couturier. (Note from Sheila: Actually, there is a sign but the fact that John did not notice it shows that it is not visible enough.)

This visit was specifically geared to purchasing Action Jeune Fille products to take home either as gifts or for sale. I was the only one interested in selling. C--- loaded me up with a large variety of bags, clothes and the like, which were more than enough to fill my suitcase. (As it turned out, I discovered, when we went to the airline company, that passengers are allowed two bags, each weighing 23 kg., and as I had packed a large backpack in my suitcase I was able to use both pieces of baggage, stuffing them both full.)

T--- arrived at lunch time, still coughing after a bout of flu for which she had visited the hospital yesterday.

At 3:30 p.m. we started our debriefing meeting. Not all the expected attendees (mostly supervisors of Projet Muinda who had collected the election observation forms of the Project Muinda people for whom they were responsible) had arrived. A number of our group found the meeting difficult. Clearly, everyone was exhausted and also animated by the events they had witnessed and the implications of the results for their country. The participants couldn't stick to an agenda. The Canadians gave their observations, and then, as the meeting progressed, they left one by one to attend to other things. The final report was compiled by B---- and T---.

Later, there was a meeting of the Kinshasa Monthly Meeting (*Communauté des Amis du Kinshasa*), during which the contribution by the Canadian team for the purchase of chairs for the meetingroom was duly handed over and was very gratefully received.

It was now starting to get dark and the mosquitoes were eating away at my ankles, which have become quite itchy. While Athena was giving the daily English lesson, I pinched her repellent. We are nearly out of "anti-itch" stuff. Dorothy is suffering the worst.

Yet another meeting had been going on while I was packing. Eric had received a text message from his wife begging him to come home instead of going to Goma and he was struggling to decide what to do. Five of the Kinshasa Friends advised against going and only B--- suggested he go ahead. Eric wandered around the

yard debating what to do, considering the implications of changing his plans to go east – cancelling his CAA flight, booking a flight home, forfeiting the payment for his cancelled flight etc. He telephoned his wife and made contact with various people who might know what the situation was.

However, the situation at the moment is so volatile that Eric was told by one informant in the east, M---, that there was no way of predicting what might happen in that part of the country after the 6th of December (when the current President's mandate expires and by which time the results will presumably be out). Everyone expects Kabila to "win" even though Tschisekedi is expected to get the most votes. In other words massive cheating is expected. Based on our small sample in Kinshasa, Tschisekedi would be by far the winner if the compilation of results was properly done, but we cannot speak for other areas of the country.

Dorothy, Athena and John appreciated very much Eric's request that he use us as sounding boards, and each offered their thoughts in hopefully a way that was helpful to Eric. He decided to talk at once to his wife and then "sleep on it."

As Eric was outside on his cell phone, the power went out. Athena diligently continued teaching, using all our lights for the students and the blackboard, so I sat outside in the dark, slapping mosquitoes. Despite his preoccupations with his plans for the remainder of his stay, Eric was good enough to ask his wife to let Gianne and my daughter know that we were OK, for which I was very grateful. I had not been able to email them since before the elections and goodness knows what worries might be going through their minds. After a short time, while I was considering whether it was possible to take a splash bath or find some other activity with minimal lighting, the power came back on and B--- was able to get the modem working. As soon as I opened my email, my daughter replied that she had received the message. Great work Fran and Eric!

Here are some of the problems detected by the Projet Muinda observers. This list is not comprehensive since I could not hear or record all the reports given at our debriefing meeting. See also the description of election day, namely, Monday, November 28.

- **Missing materials (posters on how to vote, ball point pens, ballots, even a lack of booths)**
- **Too many witnesses – room too crowded and hence chaotic**
- **Lack of light so people took ballots to the window to be able to read them**
- **Disputes over procedure between election officials**
- **Problem with the electoral lists (reported above)**
- **Problem with the huge size of the legislative ballots (reported above)**
- **Late opening: 830 a.m. instead of 6 a.m. at John's station**
- **Early closing**
- **Disruption and disorder when a presidential candidate voted and threw money into the crowd**

- **Incidents when the crowd, enraged at cheating or perceived cheating, tore up batches of ballots. (This was another example of the population's suspicion that the elections would be a farce.)**
 - **Pre-marked ballots in the name of a certain candidate**
 - **Blank ballots moved from one station to another because there were not enough**
- etc. etc.**

Thursday, December 01, 2011

John

Last full day. Also, Rabbits Day, according to old English tradition: it is believed to bring good luck if on the first day of the month the first word out of your mouth on waking is Rabbits! Dorothy and John had fallen asleep at 10 p.m. the previous night, but suddenly woke up at 11:57 p.m., lay silent for 3 minutes, then spoke the magic word to each other before falling back to sleep....

Athena

We had a full day of activities planned, and four of us five headed out before 9am (the earliest we had headed out yet, with the exception of election day) to accomplish a variety of activities before noon. The to-do list included exchanging flights (Eric), delivering packages destined for Rwanda (John & Dorothy), dropping off newly-tailored clothes for adjustments (Dorothy, and Athena), and seeing the Congo River (all). But the list slowly became truncated as heat and waiting in line made accomplishing all of these simply unreasonable. In the end, changing Eric's travel arrangements and delivering Dorothy & Athena's clothes to the AJF office were the only errands that we were able to complete. The remaining errands, and John & Dorothy's interviews, were *reporté* for the ever-occurring "*demain*".

Upon returning home and regrouping, we learned that (a) Eric's departure date to Ottawa is now for Saturday, December 3rd, instead of Dec 14th; and (b) all the crafts we had bought at AJF have a faint but definite smell of office mould. At the time of this writing, a few of the items are hanging outside on the clothes line, our hopes as lingering as the sun that the faint smell will recede (but not into our luggage).

John

B--- has said that of course we can exchange them (the mouldy items), but it seems only too likely that all the other products are similarly affected...

This is all in addition to our trying to get several other things done, notably, a video interview with B--- and T----, which we have made several attempts to arrange. B--- has seen all our planned questions and has said all is well. However, somehow or other it just does not happen... We are slowly, and perhaps in some cases rather painfully, adapting to the local nature of things, and accept that what is really vital to get done will get done in God's good time. Or not...

Friday, December 02, 2011

Our last day... Most of today was spent on errands. We had been advised to check in our luggage downtown to save time at the airport. In the end, checking it in was a long and tedious process that took most of the morning. Once that was done, we drove to the other end of town to the Caritas Congo office to drop off John and Dorothy's parcel for Rwanda. It was very hot and I was feeling extremely lethargic and dozing off in the car. On our return trip, B--- drove off the road into a shady compound and I caught a glimpse of the Congo River and alerted all Canadian occupants of the car. I think we had given up on ever seeing it. B--- had taken us by surprise! We were all delighted to view *le fleuve* and Brazzaville at last from the former Muinda office compound, although disappointed at being instructed not to take photos. Apparently, Brazzaville is much cleaner than Kinshasa and has more green spaces. But its inhabitants like to come to Kinshasa for the music. Lingala is spoken on the far side of the river too and also in some neighbouring African countries, including Angola.

By the time we got back for lunch, it was gone 2 p.m. We found T--- waiting for us, somewhat better after her flu but not entirely cured. Anticipating a sleepless night on the flight, I had a two-hour siesta after lunch, and then it was time to go over the accounts and disburse some funds to partially cover the deficit in the unbudgeted workshop on the 26th. We had a farewell meeting at which B--- summed up the observation experience by assuring us our presence had lent credibility to the elections and apologizing in case of any inadvertent misunderstanding. We all reciprocated by thanking him for the wonderful welcome and for making all the arrangements to make us comfortable. I contributed my gratitude for our chance to be able to stand in solidarity with Kinshasa Quakers at a crucial turning point in the country's history by living with them and experiencing the elections side by side with them. Others in our team thanked Muinda for all they had learnt during our two weeks together.

Traffic jam on the way to the airport

Getting to the airport was scary. We left at about 7 p.m., thinking we had lots of time, but almost immediately became completely immobilized by a monstrous traffic jam. Vehicles of all sizes, from large lorries to sedans were jammed crisscross and four abreast on a road designed for two lanes of traffic. The car only inches to our right was being driven diagonally across our bow as the driver attempted to get in in front of us. B--- and a lorry driver remonstrated with him that he was merely making things worse. Then he seemed to have broken down as two people were pushing his battered vehicle. In the meantime we were all feeling vulnerable, sitting exposed and immobilized in the car in a crowded slum on a Friday night with young men milling around, curious at our presence, and occasionally engaging in shoving matches, shouting at each other in a language we did not understand. It was ironic that Eric, who had stayed behind as he was flying out the next day, had only just remarked that Kinshasa traffic was much better than traffic in Dar es Salam or Kampala!

In the end B--- got an opportunity to turn round and we picked up a bit of speed. However, soon the threatening lightning turned into a tropical storm while we were negotiating the most potholed section of the highway to the airport. Rain streamed

over the windshield, reducing visibility to such an extent that B--- asked our permission to stop for a while for fear of falling into a deep pothole. "*C'est dangereux. Je ne vois rien.*" We had no choice but to agree, but he almost immediately decided he could continue if he was able to follow behind another small car – better someone else fall into a deep pothole than us! The fan did not seem to work and B--- put on the heating to try to clear the windshield for a while even though we were sweltering as the windows were up because of the heavy rain. Dorothy wiped the windshield inside non-stop with a garment of Athena's. There was no way you could see where the road went and vehicles were swerving and weaving around in all directions. At one stage all the vehicles, ours included, seemed to cross over onto the lane designed for oncoming traffic! We were doing 5 k.p.h. at the most and had our hazards on.

The risk of missing our flight was probably going through everyone's mind except Athena's – she was slumbering peacefully at my side! Worst possible scenarios were nagging at me: forking out a large sum of money for a replacement ticket if we missed our flight – how would I pay - credit cards were no use, and my remaining cash could not possibly suffice.

It was with great relief that we finally saw the lights of the airport. The exit tax of \$50 was quickly paid with no problem and then John filled out his exit form, with the help of a uniformed official who then, of course, had to be paid. B--- meanwhile bought air time, which seemed to take an age, while I continued worrying about the possibility of missing our flight. Before entering the airport, we said our final farewell to B---. It turned out that we had ample time to get our passport stamped - no bribes this time, unlike 2009, except for a few pens John was asked for and gave away.

We left Kinshasa enriched by our experience and by working side by side with Congolese Friends and election monitors. We will follow the news of developments with bated breath. Our departure almost seemed an act of cowardice, as if we were fleeing, leaving them in the lurch... One letter of thanks from Canada for this diary/report said we had courage. Our little bit of courage is nothing compared to that of Kinshasa Friends living in such a disrupted society. I will never forget J----'s impassioned cry on hearing of Saturday's violence at the airport: "When will this country ever be at peace?" May we be with them in thought and prayer during these volatile days.