



# St Andrew's URC (Walton)

## ARTPEACE Initiative



**NOT THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE!** It is often easy to identify problems in much of Africa either through television images or to read and hear statements by the UN on the need for intervention. Other less serious situations involving suffering often pass unnoticed. For example just before Christmas, a group of artists travelled to a mine in a mountainous region to buy a ton of quality raw stone for which they had painstakingly saved over the year. The artists left Harare in good spirits buoyed by our Harvest Collection. After selecting stone to be cut they took some photos of surrounding poverty scenes thinking this may interest their UK friends but were challenged by men in plain clothes (thought to be

war veterans). One artist was knocked unconscious as they tried to grab his mobile. He woke up in a police cell with his five colleagues. The men were interrogated separately by policemen who asked why they took photos and how they could afford a camera (a cheap used purchase from Ebay!) and who was behind their support. The authorities do not like the outside world knowing the shambolic state of much of the country due to mismanagement, greed and corruption. Our friends were beaten on the body and soles of the feet and spent 3 days sleeping on a cold stone floor without blankets - the Advent message had clearly not reached some people! A large bribe was requested in return for their freedom but the group had no money. Their lorry driver proved a hero and defended the group negotiating a smaller bribe using payment to cover transport of stone. The exhausted artists eventually returned home in pain, traumatized and degraded by their ordeal. Some required hospital attention. One young artist, beaten round the head with blood and mucus oozing from his ear could barely hear. Another, tortured several years ago, was so distressed that he told me he had had enough and just wished to go to bed and not wake up.

**URC SUPPORT:** Whilst this atrocity was happening, pleas for help were trickling in from concerned colleagues as Susan and I manned a sculpture table at Southwark Cathedral's Christmas Fair. We quickly alerted URC friends. Marlow URC had a whip round. Also, sales proceeds/donations from Kettering URC and St Andrew's totalling £930 were quickly dispatched arriving a few days before Christmas lifting morale. Andrew Nunn, the Dean of Southwark and Shop manager Jon Dollin, moved by the artists' plight, helped by creating extra shelf space for their art, no mean task in the midst of the Christmas rush.

**RESILIENCE :** Soon after their ordeal and despite injuries, some artists joined scores of



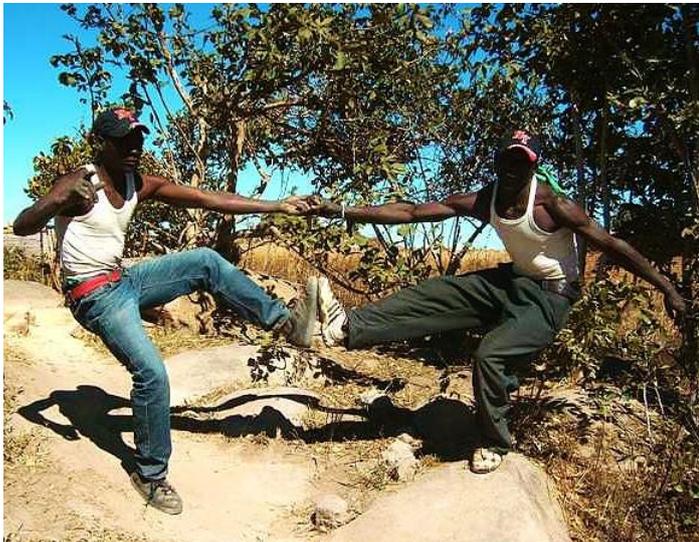
human rights defenders and took to the streets of Harare (above) to join crowds waving placards protesting against rising incidences of human rights abuses and violation of basic rights.

**ARTPEACE** were deeply touched by the overwhelming response from the URC. Sculptor Mike Masedza (left) on behalf of the group said: 'We never thought that our call for help would also



touch the young kids who donated pocket money instead of buying their favourite sweets, etc. You made our lives easier. A special mention also for **Marlow, Kettering** and **Fleetwood URC's** for their continuous support – not forgetting **St Andrew's**. Thank you very much for the huge support over the years. Without this help, we would not have had a smiling Christmas. We would like to encourage everyone, every friend of Artpeace to keep thinking about us, especially with the recent events at the mine which will send a clear message to the world that our hardships are far from over. Artpeace will continue to pray for you ALL. We love you ALL. **Southwark Cathedral** - we salute you! Without your sales we could not be where we are at the moment. Keep up the good spirit, saints: the Almighty is watching. Thanks for the special Christmas tree photo from Fleetwood depicting our struggle - it was beautiful. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you! '

**2014** looks like being another tough year as the economic situation worsens with more companies on the verge of collapse and going into liquidation. The govt. insists non indigenous



Zimbabweans give up a 51% controlling interest in their companies - not exactly a policy likely to ensure stability and investment! However, despite the relentless hardship, many poor Zimbabweans managed to celebrate the New Year – vis photo extreme left of youths enjoying themselves. Also, despite their ordeal, our friends

managed to get their hard won stone back to Silveira House ensuring their work continues, although the shoe (below) carved by Coster Balakasi may prove a challenge for our couriers! Above right, Memory (12) ref Dec. article is thrilled with her new clothes. Our 5 sponsored children have started the new term. Alice, (below right) is now a class monitor and school prefect because of her



great performance. Her brother Jonah is a school football team captain as the school said he is a good leader. The other children are also thriving - just a very small sample of the many lifted by our support.

**Note:** A few exquisite sets of the Christmas Nativity scene in stone and

metal by Luke Jimu shown in the title photo are available for sale.

