



*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
EMBARGOED UNTIL 31 OCTOBER 17:15*

Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration

Together in Hope – Rose Lokonyen – Testimony

My name is Rose Nathike Lokonyen, I am 23 years old. I am a South Sudanese by nationality, and I now live in Kenya as a refugee. I became a refugee in 2002, when I was 8 years old. My family and I fled from our country because of war and started a new life in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya.

When I was 14 years old, my parents went back to South Sudan to look after my grandparents. I lost contact with them and began taking care of my siblings because I am the oldest. I am also the only girl, and according to our culture boys do not do housework. So I went to school, and when I came back I was doing everything even collecting firewood on the weekend. You have to be very careful, because sometimes women get raped in the forest. So you sneak around and cut, and when you see someone, you run.

After doing the housework I would run to the football field and play. I like sports, and when we won I got awards to support my younger siblings. One day we went to play in Nairobi, refugees against Kenyans. We won. LWF was organizing the games; they started the Kakuma football league where I played. That has given me a lot of opportunities, sports has taken me so far.

I managed to finish high school, and after that, I joined computer training at the Don Bosco Center in Kakuma. After that I started working with the LWF. My job was to talk to the girls in the communities and to motivate them to go back to school. Many drop out because they are taking care of their parents or younger siblings. I know what that is like. When someone gets sick, you miss school looking after them and you risk failing school. Some also do not come because they do not have shoes. Others think: I do not have a book and a pen to write, so I am not going. Some also do not know how important it is to have an education, so they do not go to school.

I tell the girls how important it is to finish their education. We tell them about HIV and AIDS and about gender-based violence. Many of the young people take drugs, and drop out of school. That happens especially to the boys. In Kakuma, the LWF is organizing football games and handing out balls so they can play rather than loitering around. When you are on the football field, you concentrate on the game, and when you go home in the evening, you are able to sleep. We are in a refugee camp, but you have to use the time well.

In 2015 there was a race organized by the Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation. It was a ten kilometer race, and we were running barefoot on a tarmac road. I came in second. A month later it was announced that I had been selected to go to the Olympic training camp in Nairobi. There five of us were selected to participate in the Olympic Games. I am now an Olympic athlete and I was selected to be the flag bearer for the team refugees at the Olympic Games in

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Rio de Janeiro this summer. We were very proud, because of all of us came from Kakuma. In the Olympic Stadium there was a very warm welcome. We felt that we are real people and there are people are supporting us all over the world. We were able to spread hope to the people because even as a refugee you are just a human being like any other.

I am very grateful for the support of LWF, who are running the schools and the cultural activities in Kakuma. It is not enough for a refugee to have food and shelter. We are human beings, we need opportunities to learn and to grow and to live instead of just surviving.

What does hope mean to me? Hope gives me strength. It helps me achieve my goals in the future and make me a better person to be able to help our community and my fellow refugees, and of course my family. In a way sport means hope to me, because through sport I have learned so many things, it has given me a future.

I am grateful to share this with you. Please talk to the leaders of the world, because we need peace. We who are displaced from other countries need education so we can go back and help rebuild. We are the young generation now. If we cannot go back to our country, who will rebuild it? No one. The war will just continue. In South Sudan the blood is just flowing, like a river. Every day, I pray for peace. We are all human and we are all called before God, and it is not right to kill and to die like this. We need schools for the young generation, and to construct roads so we can visit our neighbor countries, and organize sports events. Give us the opportunity to come back and rebuild our country.