

**"life is filled
with endless hope"
(Lilha Gitty Akita)**

Brian Roberts

"We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty deprivation, suffering gender and other discrimination"

– Nelson Mandela

This year Kath and I visited South Africa as part of our extended trip from Australia. I was really excited as I had heard so many stories of how this country, which had suffered so much under apartheid, had managed to put so much suffering behind it and move forward.

My illusion was immediately shattered when we arrived in Durban. The local people were quick to tell us about the true state of the country. The dreams of Nelson Mandela were long gone to be replaced by ever growing corruption, cronyism and an invisible apartheid system ever bit as bad as that which had taken place under the old regime. The infrastructure of the country is crumbling; debt is spiralling out of control. Crime is uncontrollable. Ordinary people have to have armed guards to take their children to school. Houses are ringed with electric fences and CCTV cameras just to stop thieves. It was the same story in Cape Town and is reflected across the whole country. In Durban two of our fellow travellers were robbed and injured on a busy street whilst members of the public stood back and watched. The Police were called but no one came.

We were reliably informed the president has over 400 charges of corruption levelled against him with members of his family and compatriots to follow.

The wildlife in the games reserves is being decimated by poachers. The Rangers told us that there was very little funding to stop them and one told us with a tear in his eye.

"In a few years the only big cats and rhinos you will see will be in zoos outside Africa. We cannot protect them."

We saw at first hand beautiful white rhinos which had been sedated by poachers and their horns sawn off.

Townships such as those in Johannesburg are no go areas for the Police and while crime and deprivation continues, the "greedy" continue to make themselves rich.

It is a very sad story for such a beautiful country.

Our next country to visit was neighbouring Namibia, a country which had been part of South Africa before gaining its independence in 1990.

After our experience of South Africa we expected conditions in this developing country to be similar but as we entered Walvis Bay it was clear that this was different. The docks were thriving and dry docks full with large ships for repair. We had pre booked a tour to the Mondessa Township. Concerns were raised about safety and security but we were assured that it was safe and we would be welcomed by the locals.

On our journey to Mondessa approximately 100km from Walvis Bay we could see that there was a growing industrial base evolving, good roads and new houses being built. Our guide was quick to point out that since independence, apartheid had been all but eradicated and that all local tribes and other members of the community had come to live together.

There is a general misconception that apartheid was levelled whites against blacks but this was not the case. Under the "Population Registration Act" of 1950 all South Africans are classified by "Race"

1. Bantu Black Africans 2. Coloured (mixed race) 3. Whites 4. Asians which included Indians, Pakistanis and Chinese.

It was in the government's interests to keep all the black tribes apart so they could not prove to be a combined force against the ruling minority. Segregation and inequality even in basic needs such housing, education and health was introduced. A tribe which was in "favour" with the government would get better housing. Hence tribes were in a continuing warfare state which suited the government.

In Namibia the 1950 Act has been repealed and the country is going forward. When we talk about housing, those being built are only basic, one bedroom or two bedrooms with very basic amenities but after living in corrugated or cardboard structures this is a massive step forward. Most have shared toilets between as least four families but to them it is a luxury.



On our arrival at Mondessa Township the scale of the task ahead was obvious. On this dusty landscape over 25000 “cardboard” houses were home for 500000 people. No basic sanitation or amenities. No social security, so everyone has to scratch a living but it was clear the Government is making progress. New roads are being constructed; a thriving community centre provides help and advice on everyday subjects such as filling in job applications. A Kindergarten has opened to allow parents to travel daily for work in the nearby towns. At the community centre it was obvious from those involved that at least the people had hope for future generations. A programme from the local choir contained nothing but songs of happiness and hope.



We visited the local Primary school where we met very excited young children they shouted “The white people are here” and mobbed us as we entered the school grounds. The welcome we received from staff and children was overwhelming. They were very happy well nourished little children. Every child is entitled to free education and at least one meal a day.

We took gifts of basic education needs. Pens, paper, books. All the things we take for granted but for this school it is like gold dust. Even photo

copy paper was very gratefully received. One of the teachers, a German lady who is on attachment for a year told us the school had a very optimistic feeling for the future and providing the Government stays stable the children should have a good future ahead. When the children start secondary school each child is given an identical uniform free of charge so there can be no discrimination.

No alcohol is served in the township after 14:00 and crime is very low. As one resident told me “look around you we have nothing to steal. We may be poor but we care about each other.” I am not so naive to believe that everything is perfect but there was a note of sincerity in his voice which made me believe that at least they were trying to create a better life for their families and future generations. I sincerely hope so.



Our time in Mondessa proved to be a great experience. I think we all left with a different perspective on life. I remember saying to myself “We think we are so clever in our so called developed society but we have so much to learn from these people.” Humility, pride, hope and respect for each other was abundantly clear.

We saw a group of at least 12 people sitting around a table sharing a meal outside a makeshift home. Our guide said “In the township we share everything. When you consider that a family of six has to live on 50 cents a day. If they get 1 euro from selling their meagre wares they will share their good fortune with others”

It is very clear that it will take many years for those hopes to be fulfilled if ever at all.

Yes the dreams of Nelson Mandela have long disappeared in South Africa but where there is hope just maybe in the future another great man such as he will emerge and provide hope for people who rightly deserve it.

So as you are enjoying our wonderful Festa please give just one second thought to all those people round the world whose lives are filled with endless hope.