

ABC UPDATE

God's Gift to Tanzania

The atmosphere was electric, the mood ecstatic. Months had turned into days, days into hours and any minute now, the function was set to begin. The venue: Msimbazi Centre in hot, humid and beautiful Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

On Sunday, 18th November 2007, WordAlive Publishers launched the *Africa Bible Commentary* (ABC) in the Tanzanian market in a ceremony that also marked the unveiling of the Kiswahili ABC whose translation was commissioned in August this year. The occasion was momentous—the first ever one volume Bible commentary produced in Africa by 70 African scholars – two of whom are Tanzanians – had finally anchored in the home of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain.

Tanzania's Chief Justice Hon. Augustino Ramadhani – a Christian – was the Chief Guest. It was clear from his speech that he had studied his copy of the commentary. In his address, he quoted the strengths and benefits of the ABC for the African church noting that the *raison d'être* for the ABC was “to bring to an end a lack of understanding and wrong usage of the Bible in Africa”. Moreover, he noted that the commentary has been written bearing in mind the pertinent issues that affect African Christians. “Issues such as how to care for widows have been addressed. It is the duty of the church in Africa to take that which is good and proper in African traditions and use this to



Hon. Augustino Ramadhani, the Chief Justice of Tanzania, speaks during the Launch of the *Africa Bible Commentary* (ABC) in Tanzania, on 18th November 2007 in Dar es Salaam. Hon. Augustino was the guest of honour during the ceremony.

take care of widows and orphans in the continent.” In days gone by, hospitality was highly regarded in Africa. This is slowly being eroded due to socio-political and economic reasons. Hon Ramadhani said the church in the continent needed to take up hospitality once again and even the larger duty of looking after refugees and migrants. As Jesus said in Matthew 25:35 “I was a stranger and you invited me in.”

The event was covered by the Tanzanian broadcast and print media with news of the launch appearing in the first page of the main English daily in Tanzania, *The Citizen* on Monday 19th November. Television stations also highlighted the story.

The unveiling of the Kiswahili ABC, using the James (*Yakobo* in Kiswahili) sampler was particularly poignant as Tanzania is regarded as the ‘home’ of Kiswahili in Africa. About 90 million people in East and Central Africa particularly in Kenya and Tanzania speak the

language. Many more in Uganda, Somalia, Mozambique, Malawi, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo speak Kiswahili as a first or second language. This is a huge market that will now be able to understand the eternal word of God in their

“I urge you to get a copy of the ABC. I have read various commentaries but have not come across any that touches on the difficult and heavy faith issues that affect Africans like the ABC does.”

– Hon Augustino Ramadhani
(Chief Justice, Tanzania)

language. Dr Tokunboh Adeyemo, the ABC General Editor, quoting St. Augustine of Hippo said: “God seems nearer to a people when he speaks their language.”

The Kiswahili translators had met a day before to access the progress with the translation project so far and to highlight and discuss the challenges and lessons each of the translators was experiencing. Under the leadership of Dr. Aloo Mojola, the Kiswahili ABC Translation Consultant, challenges, problems, opportunities and strengths were identified and the way forward mapped out to

guide the translation project to even greater success.

The consultation also provided an opportunity for the team members, who are from different parts of Tanzania and Kenya, to meet and exchange ideas. New members of the team, Dr Sheila Ryanga and Rev Godson Maanga, a Kenyan and a Tanzanian respectively were introduced to the team. Another new member, Dr Akiri Mwita (Tanzanian) was not able to attend as he is away in Canada on sabbatical. As Dr. Adeyemo pointed out, “There is need for transformation in the

African continent, and the Kiswahili ABC will play an important role in this aspect especially in East Africa.”

So far, the translation team has completed translating five books including the book of James—a Kiswahili sampler of *Yakobo* was produced in time for the meeting in Dar es Salaam. The Kiswahili translation project is scheduled to be completed in 18 months and having completed five books within two months is a significant step towards the achievement of this goal. The commentary is also being translated into French, Portuguese, Zulu, Hausa and Yoruba.

In his parting shot during the official launch of the ABC in Tanzania, Hon. Ramadhani urged those present: “to get a copy of the ABC” saying he had read various commentaries but had not come across any that touches on the difficult and heavy faith issues that affect Africans like the ABC does.” The full Kiswahili edition comes out in 2009.



Hon. Augustino Ramadhani receives an autographed copy of the ABC from Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo, the General Editor of the Commentary during the launch ceremony in Dar es Salaam.

Successes so far...

Translation of the following books is complete:

- James
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- Luke

The translation of the ABC into Kiswahili is scheduled to be completed in 18 months and having completed five books within two months marks a significant step towards the achievement of this goal.

Thank God for

1. The successful launch of the commentary in Tanzania.
2. The completion of translation of the five books into Kiswahili.
3. The enthusiasm and dedication shown by the Kiswahili Translation Team members
4. Dr Aloo Mojola whose leadership of the Translation Team has enabled them to achieve these results.
5. The on-going translation work.

Pray for

1. The health of each of the translation team members, most of whom have other duties to attend to, and for their families.
2. The editors as they work on the translated material.
3. The process of selecting reviewers for this project that is scheduled to begin soon.

ABC TANZANIA LAUNCH PICTORIAL



1. Rev Dickson Chilongani, flashes his million dollar smile to Fr John Simalenga. The two are translators of the Kiswahili ABC. **2.** "May God direct you in this great work." Retired Bishop Elinaza Sendoro of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, diocese of Dar es Salaam, prays for the Translation Team. **3.** David Waweru, the CEO of WordAlive Publishers speaks during the launch ceremony. **4.** Dr Sheila Ryanga, the lead editor of the Kiswahili ABC stresses a point during the translators and editors consultation meeting. **5.** Various church leaders graced the occasion of the ABC launch in Tanzania. **6.** The people behind the work together with the chief guest during the event. **7.** Scenic, magical Dar es Salaam.