

HISNets Gives Its 100,000th Mosquito Net to Muslim Mother in Tanzania

Editor's note: This is the second of several dispatches on the Muslim-Baptist mission trip to Tanzania. Read the first [here](#).

A mosquito-repellent net now protects a Tanzanian family in which the father bears the Arabic name of Jesus, the mother bears the name of the Prophet Mohammed's daughter, and their surname is the same as the Islamic holy month of fasting - Ramadan.

On the third day of a [Muslim-Baptist mission trip](#) to provide nets in one of the world's poorer nations, Fatimah Ramadan was randomly selected to receive the 100,000th net distributed over seven years by HISNets, a Baptist-led organization.

The young Tanzanian woman married to a carpenter named Isa - or Jesus in Arabic - told the founder of HISNets that she and her family would sleep protected from mosquitoes, carriers of the debilitating and often fatal disease of malaria.

Malaria is a mosquito-borne disease that affects some 250 million people and kills up to 3 million people annually, most of whom are children in sub-Saharan Africa.

Holding her 9-month-old baby boy, named Yunus (Arabic for Jonah) and wearing an Islamic head scarf, Ramadan consented to an interview with EthicsDaily.com.

English was translated into Swahili - Swahili was translated into English. The language barrier was breached easier than the disease barrier that the net represented.

Expressing thankfulness, the 26-year-old mother said that Yunus had not had malaria, but that her two other young children had. She said her entire family would sleep under the protective net.

T. Thomas, founder of Oklahoma-based [HISNets](#), expressed amazement at giving the 100,000th net to someone in a family with names that underscore the shared ground between Islam and Christianity.

“I thought it was the kind of irony in life that was humorous and satisfying,” said Thomas. “It was moving for me.”

The net distribution took place under a large mango tree in the yard of the Bunjub Primary School, a government-sponsored school where classes were ending for the year.

Margaret Henjewae, who helped organize the distribution, said she was a Catholic and that both Christian and Muslim students attended school together.

“It’s just normal. We live together. We share in activities,” she said. “We share in everything. We are friends.”

School principal Winifrida Caesar Rwelengela told EthicsDaily.com that 1,517 students were enrolled at the school.

Sitting in her dark office without air conditioning, she pointed out the many challenges the school faced: the lack of toilets, inadequate classroom space and widespread poverty.

Rwelengela said the school had 11 classrooms with between 120 and 130 students per class.

Asked about the relationship between Christian and Muslim students, she swatted away the perception of problems.

“We meet their demands equally,” she said. “On Friday, we allow students to have religious services.”

Imams and pastors have 80 minutes each week to teach at the school from their faith perspective to students of their faith tradition, she said.

In Kimanzi Chana, a village without electricity 81 miles from Tanzania’s largest city of Dar es Salaam, nets were distributed at an Islamic center that consisted of two cement brick buildings. One was the mosque where prayers were held. That building had a dividing wall with a rug-covered door that separates men from women. The other, much smaller white building had the word “madrasa” written in black, an Arabic word for school.

After the net distribution was well under way, Sultan Swalehe Zomboko told EthicsDaily.com that his region was evenly divided between Muslims and Christians, with seven churches and six mosques.

He said that members of the two faiths were almost like relatives in how they relate, that everyone attended weddings and funerals together.

Distributing nets was “very helpful because we are one in the same,” said Zomboko.

He explained that the main activity at the mosque was teaching and that he taught that God said people ought to cooperate.

“Be one in the worship of God. Be one outside of prayer,” he said through Gervaz Lushajy, a Roman Catholic student at the Feza Schools, who translated from Swahili into English and back again.

Although he did not attend school and did not know how to read and write in Swahili, the Islamic leader said he knew Arabic and could read the Quran.

Reading the Quran in Arabic is considered an act of worship.

Ibrahim Yunus Rashid, a university-educated advanced math teacher at the [Feza Schools](#) - which covered the in-country expenses of the Muslim-Baptist mission team from Oklahoma - reinforced the message that Tanzanians transcended their religious differences.

“Religious tolerance is very high,” Rashid said. “People are intermingled.”

Rufina Bathotmeo, a teacher by training and now executive secretary of a governmental ward outside Dar es Salaam, said she was thankful for the nets because 50 percent of her ward suffers from malaria each year.

Bathotmeo, a Roman Catholic, took away an important message from a presentation about Christian-Muslim goodwill by Thomas and Orhan Osman, executive director of the [Institute of Interfaith Dialog](#).

“We have learned from you that Muslims and Christians should cooperate,” said Bathotmeo. “We are under one God.”

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