

May 24th 2021

We are sending you this update on the recent volcanic eruption of Mt. Nyiragongo in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo.



The eruption happened on Saturday evening as the skies turned red. Though tragic, it was not as devastating as the major eruption in 2002 that wiped out over 50,000 homes and devastated downtown and the airport as well as IM's partner, Heal Africa, and their 250-bed hospital and adjoining school and ministry campus where we work. Mt. Nyiragongo, overlooking the town of Goma, has one of the largest active lava lakes in the world (you can see the red glow most evenings), but has been quietly simmering and steaming for the past 18 years. The eruption on Saturday was from that large pool of molten lava through 2 fissures on the sides. The lava flow ceased about 3 km outside of town after burning schools, churches, and an estimated 500 homes in its path. Part of Goma's population (1.5 to 2 million), with memories of the 2002 eruption, rapidly fled to neighboring Rwanda or further inland; it was a long and troubled night. A number of children (estimated 180) were separated from their parents in that panicked exodus and are still missing.

Sunday morning a number of children showed up at Sunday School, looking for safe haven. Thankfully, several teachers were there to welcome them.



Most of the women we have been working with (Fungua Maisha Rotating credit and goat projects) have been struggling to eke out a living on the rocky lava flow at the base of the volcano. We hear all the homes in one of those neighborhoods were burned to the ground. We're hoping to be able to get out and better assess the situation soon. Sadly, there has been a wave of crime as well; many who fled, vacating their homes, returned to find their meager possessions pillaged. The poor are the most vulnerable and remain the most affected by these tragedies; our hearts go out to them. We've remained in place at our home in Goma since Friday, not wanting to add to the congestion and uncertainty within town. When the

tremors cease, people will again start to put their lives back together and we will be here when that happens.



The view when dawn came on Sunday morning



At least 500 homes have been destroyed

There have been frequent seismic tremors (rattling windows and doors) since the lava flow ceased, which continue into this second day (Monday morning).

The concern from the National Volcanic Observatory this morning is that the continued seismic activity could further stress the volcano bringing a repeat of 2002, when over 50,000 homes and the center of the city and airport were destroyed. That is the current concern and one we are closely watching. They're evacuating Heal Africa Hospital (in the footprint of the 2002 eruption), the airport is closed, as are schools and businesses. Most are staying home and many contemplating departure.



We're well and still connected by internet and have electricity, though one of major lines was cut off by the lava; that too is being rationed. The Heal Africa housing campus where we reside is in a fairly safe location and we are in constant communication and supported by IM, the national IMA headquarters, and Heal Africa staff who have also remained.

We have a vehicle and could cross over into Rwanda if necessary, but at this juncture we prefer to stay. We are well and have much to be thankful for... including our colleagues in Goma, IM, IMA, and the ABC network of churches, family, and friends.

Update: as this was being written, the border town of Rwanda (3 miles away) and the epicenter of the tremors, just experienced a 4.5 earthquake with destruction of some homes and stores. It only shook our windows and doors but adds to the anxieties of those in our midst who have already lost so much. With more and more tremors we have been advised to remain outside for the time being.

Please pray for the people of Goma and the entire area. They have seen so much tragedy... war, armed militia attacks, Ebola... and now the eruption of one of the 6 volcanoes surrounding the town. We have great admiration for them as they persist through trials and continue to trust and praise God.

With love and hope from Goma,

Ann and Bill Clemmer