

Prof Wajackoyah addresses Jewish Congregation

By Carl M. Bendroff, M.Ed. and Jaclyn Bendroff, California, March 14 2009

On Saturday afternoon, March 14, 2009, at Congregation B'nai Israel in Tustin, California, Professor George Wajackoyah of Kenya was interviewed before the congregation and several guests by Rabbi Elie Spitz. The guests included a group of 11 and 12 grade students from Tarbut V'Torah (a Jewish Community Day School in Irvine, CA), along with their parents, teachers, and the school's Rabbi. The students, staff, and the school's Rabbi will be visiting Kenya this summer (2009) as Ambassadors of the Oprah Winfrey Foundation. The purpose of their visit is to build a secular school in Masai Mara for all students of all grades and ages. Other guests included professionals from Kenya: Dr. James Ouma, M.D. (Loma Linda Hospital), Dr. Rev Willy Kilu, Mr. Patrick Munyai and Rev. Gilbert Muraguri. Others on Professor Wajackoyah's team were Professor Tony Ogiamen (President of American Heritage University), and businessman Mr. Ivano Stagmena.

Prior to the interview, Professor Wajackoyah attended the Shabbat services as a guest of Carl M. Bendroff, M.Ed. The interview began following the Oneg luncheon.

One goal of coordinating this interview is to fulfill the dream of Mr. Bendroff, which is to 'End Anti-Semitism One Country at a Time'.

The interview began with Professor Wajackoyah describing the political crisis of Kenya, which is due to the corruption that occurred during the recent elections:

"...the winners became losers and the losers became winners..."

As a result of the recent elections:

"...corruption exists in which politicians embezzle state funds and hoard essential commodities such as maize and sugar.

"...the people of Kenya now dread the Majimbo/Federal Constitution.

"...they held a referendum and decided to go for an economic based Indian style of constitution where the economy is fixed from the regional level.

"...the current arrangement of financial and physical governmental development plan is an outdated model which was adopted from colonial heritage. This system is indivisible, not inclusive and is full of surprises as cannot question its purpose and yet they cannot purposely avail themselves for legal protection. This so-called five-year development blueprint does not provide safety mechanisms of accountability and lacks the legal infusion, as people cannot question its legitimacy in courts of law. Simply, people cannot question government motive in the court of law as there is no legal basis to do so in constitutional terms."

However, Professor Wajackoyah was optimistic that Kenyans would be given a new constitution before the end of the year. He urged the two principals, Hon Raila, the Prime Minister and Hon. Kibaki, the President to provide this constitution in order to remain relevant in Kenya's history. He also urged the Israeli government to engage the Kenyan government in development so that

"...we will be able to redeem our semi-arid areas into agricultural zones. Food and economic infrastructure were top priorities for our country."

Professor Wajackoyah directed reassuring comments to the students and staff members of Tarbut V'Torah who will be visiting Kenya. He assured them of their safety. Professor Wajackoyah told them to take advantage, learn from, and to enjoy Kenya's cultural and geographical diversity.

Following the interview, Professor Wajackoyah answered questions from the congregants and guests.

A student from Tarbut V'Torah mentioned that when he told people about his upcoming trip to Kenya, several of them asked him the same question: Why not visit Israel instead? The student asked Professor Wajackoyah for advice on how to respond. He told the student:

"First, Kenya has a spiritual connection with Israel as is evidenced in the Torah. For example, in the Book of Leviticus, 16:10, Aaron is instructed to release a goat into the wilderness. It has been interpreted that releasing this 'scapegoat' is a symbolic act of atoning for our sins. Similarly, the Kikuyu People of Kenya, a people of Bantu origin whose history can be traced to Israel, practice this religious ritual by placing their hands on a goat, confessing their sins, and then releasing the goat into the wilderness. Secondly, Kenya was earmarked as the fall back alternative by the League of Nations when the British offered Kenya to be the new Jewish Nation, in case the plan failed in the Middle East."

Professor Wajackoyah then explained the important relationship that exists between Kenya and Israel:

"Kenya is considered to be an important security zone for Israel because of Kenya's strategic location on the Indian Ocean. Israel's protection is strengthened by the presence of the British and American Marine military bases in Mombasa.

"Israel and Kenya are partners in trade. They have a bilateral relationship regarding imports and exports. For example, Kenya purchases military and technology equipment from Israel. Israel trains the Kenyan Security forces. Israeli tourists vacation in Kenya. Kenya sells produce to Israel.

"...similarly, the Jews and the Kikuyu, have common cultural practices. One needs to read Facing Mount Kenya by Jomo Kenyatta to gain this wonderful comparison. The Kikuyu observe circumcision rights. While worshiping, they face Mount Kenya, as the Jewish People worship facing Jerusalem. It was on Mount Kenya, where Ngai, the Deity of the Kikuyu People, spoke to their ancestor Agikuyu. This parallels the belief that God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai."

Finally, a congregant of Congregation B'nai Israel asked Professor Wajackoyah about the availability of electricity to the citizens of Kenya. The Professor's comments included the following:

"Electricity is not a necessity for everyone. For example, the Masai are a pastoral group of people who raise livestock. These people rely on natural resources, specifically rain and grassland. When the season turns arid and the land becomes overgrazed, Masai families travel several hundred miles with their livestock in search of pastures with new growth from recent rain. These people have no need for electricity. In fact, electricity would hinder the lifestyle of the Masai."

After Professor George Wajackoyah's interview, the staff and students of Tarbut V'Torah Jewish Community Day School in Irvine, CA invited him to speak at their school. Professor George Wajackoyah will speak there on Friday, March 20, 2009 at 1:00PM. The Jewish 11th and 12th graders attending his presentation will include the entire group of students and staff members acting as Ambassadors of The Oprah Winfrey Foundation who will be building the school in Kenya, but who were unable to attend the interview at Congregation B'nai Israel. These ambassadors will be building a school in the Kajiado district.





