

## Abayudaya

(From page 16)

studying in Israel and four years at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles. He became the

first ordained black rabbi in sub-Saharan Africa.

“Central to our Jewish values is saving lives,” he tells the 65 families sitting on the ground in the shade of the tree. “We wish you well and we pray that God brings this

to an end.”

Rabbi Sizomu is responding to a village elder who thanked the Abayudaya for coming “and for rescuing us.” Acegerekinei is in Katakwi, one of the 17 hardest-hit districts that the government



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Abayudaya members (from left), Eria Muyamba, Esau Wanani and Igaal Sizomu deliver food relief to famine-stricken villagers in the remote Ugandan village of Acegerekinei. JTA photo by Lorne Mallin.

says are experiencing famine.

The villagers all clutch cards from the Ugandan Red Cross, which is helping coordinate relief, entitling them to a share of the corn flour and beans that the Abayudaya trucked north from their home in the Mbale district near the Kenyan border. The Abayudaya first embraced Judaism in the 1920s and now include about 1,000 members in several Ugandan villages.

The Red Cross chose the most vulnerable in Acegerekinei to receive relief—the elderly, the disabled and those suffering from

HIV/AIDS. They line up as best they can; some are in wheelchairs fashioned out of plastic lawn chairs.

Each receives about 33 lb. of corn flour to make corn porridge and the staple dish called posho, plus about 3.3 lb. of beans. Each pound of corn flour is about enough for a meal for three people.

“Our community responded overwhelmingly to the call to donate,” Rabbi Sizomu says. “Everybody wanted to help.”

The response is considerable from a community that mostly lives on subsistence farming. Though the Mbale district has less rain than normal, crops are still growing.

“I believe that life takes precedence over everything,” the rabbi says. “God is not going to stretch out His hand physically, so we are extensions of God’s arm.”

I notice that we are here just hours before the Jewish holiday of Tisha B’Av, when practicing Jews fast for a day. We have the luxury of turning on and turning off our food consumption.

The rabbi’s son Igaal, 15, helps distribute the food we brought.

“It felt good to donate,” he says. “If we get hungry, maybe there would be others who would help us.”

More relief is coming; more food was collected than the truck could hold. And on this morning, students visiting the Abayudaya from the California Institute of the Arts of Los Angeles donated \$190.

To contribute to the food relief, donate at <http://www.kulanu.org> on the Web site of Kulanu Inc., a U.S. nonprofit that supports development in the Abayudaya community; write “Uganda Emergency Fund” in the comments field. ▲

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