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“Asante” Translates to “Thank You” for African Women



There are 25 women from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who are sporting a double message these days: “to your health” and “thank you.”

They’re wearing those messages on the backs of the lime-green t-shirts that they gratefully accepted from a troupe of volunteers with an Asante connection. Registered nurse and clinical trainer Ginnie Kim is a board member for the Perinatal Rescue Network, a Southern Oregon nonprofit that seeks to lower newborn and maternal mortality through education, access to medical equipment, funding and networking.

Ginnie is also the wife of Asante Ashland Community Hospital Emergency Department physician Milton Kim, who was given a stack of unused t-shirts from Asante’s 2014 celebration of its designation as one of Truven’s “15 Top Health Systems.”

Dr. Kim intended to take the shirts on the volunteer group’s trip to Rwanda last year, but there was no room for them. So his wife, Ginnie, took them on the Perinatal Rescue Network’s trip this year to the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo, and distributed them among women who have been victimized by ongoing warfare in the Central African country.

Appropriately, “Asante” means “to your health” in French and “thank you” in Swahili. And those happen to be the two primary languages of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

“So the shirts were such a blessing on so many levels,” Ginnie said in an email.

The women who received the Asante t-shirts are primarily victims of sexual violence that has accompanied a series of civil wars in the DRC – previously known as Zaire – that began in 1997 and have only recently yielded to a tenuous peace.

“They were sooo very grateful for the shirts,” Ginnie

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Ginnie Kim, of the Perinatal Rescue Network

said. "Even the 4X shirts were wonderful because they can make baby clothes and other sewing projects out of them if they're too large to wear."

After the shirts made the pack list for this year's Perinatal Research Group journey to the DRC, the gifts from Southern Oregon were a big hit among the women who received them.



"The people of the DRC are significantly poorer than in Rwanda, and the women in the DRC are subjected to the constant threat (and trauma) of rape by the militia," Ginnie said. "We were able to distribute most of the T-shirts to an organization that ministers to all the women who become HIV-infected from these atrocities, and the remainder to women living in shelters, raising their babies born due to rape."

Ginnie and other members of the Perinatal Research Network taught a pair of classes during this year's trip – "Helping Babies Breathe" and "Helping Mothers Survive." The

group's goal is to support and promote the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals of reducing child mortality and improving maternal health.

Safi Bakano is the coordinator of the Adventist AIDS International Ministry, the women's shelter in Goma, DRC, where the t-shirts were donated in August. She said her facility accommodates 150 women who are living with HIV/AIDS, and the visit by "Mrs. Ginnie" and her volunteer group was greatly appreciated.

"We hope that Asante will be a blessing for these women in DRC, in any way," Safi said in an email exchange this week. "Please, Asante, remember poor and vulnerable women, HIV-positive, in Africa and especially in Goma, DRC."

The Perinatal Research Network's mission regularly takes its members into some dire situations. Ginnie said the Congolese women who are impregnated by rapists, for instance, are never allowed to return to their original families. So even a surplus, neon green t-shirt from a far-off corner of the world can brighten their day.

Especially when the shirt bears a familiar word: "Asante."