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Author C. Böhmig

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

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Epilogue

While writing these last pages in summer 2009, US President Obama visited Ghana saying, "We will fight neglected tropical disease. And we won't confront illnesses in isolation - we will invest in public health systems that promote wellness, and focus on the health of mothers and children." He also stressed, that there need to be ways to keep African nurses and doctors in their country. The future of Africa, Obama claims, depends on Africans in the first place and their development and well-being does matter for the whole world. Is this an empty phrase or a call for recognition of the complex reality in a globalised world? While Ghana's economic situation is stable and the recent presidential elections took place without much social unrest, the country is still highly dependent on the industrial countries. The shortage of nurses continues and the acceptance of the health insurance scheme is slowly catching on, leaving health workers and patients in critical situations as before.

My last visit to Ghana dates back to 2007. Revisiting the ward, the nurses welcomed me in a friendly way. "By the grace of God, we are all doing fine. How is your research going? When will you bring the book?" Initial reserve made place for pride to appear in my writing. They briefed me on the latest news. This patient had finally died; that nurse had been transferred to another department; another colleague left the hospital for further studies. The retirement of some senior nurses had led to a shift in the hierarchy, but only few new nurses had been added to the medical department; the shortage still existed. Most health care assistants are still assigned to the ward, doing their work, smiling and chatting. After five years, the ward was still on its temporary site. Construction work was going on, but nobody could explain the delay. Maybe the upcoming presidential elections next year would speed up the process. Everybody hoped the medical department could soon move back to its original site in a four-storey building, with sufficient space and modernised equipment.

I left the hospital and joined the nurses whose shift has just ended. We picked a trotro and rode back to town crossing the Korle Lagoon. For the last five years, I have listened to their stories, heard their cries, worked and prayed with them. Which direction will Ghanaian nurses take in the years to come?

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⁹² http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/africa/07/11/obama.ghana/index.html on 11.07.2009