

Library of Congress

Kenya Research project by Robert M. Press [see: Press, Robert M. (2006) *Peaceful Resistance: Advancing Human Rights and Civil Liberties*. Aldershot, U. K.: Ashgate.

Transmitted to LOC April 2009

Interview conducted and recorded by Robert M. Press (bob.press@usm.edu; press.bob@gmail.com)

Location of interview: London office of Abantu, a non-government organization.

Date of interview: June 28, 2002

Interviewee: Wanjiru Kihoro, wife of Kenyan former political detainee Wanyiri Kihoro. She was active in mounting opposition publicity from the U.K. against the government of President Daniel arap Moi.

Note: BP =interviewer (Bob Press); WK = interviewee Wanjiru Kihoro. The interview was tape recorded. Transcription includes bracketed research notes and occasional tape counter numbers made by Bob Press. The double ?? indicates uncertainty of a detail or unclear words on the tape.

[Impact of exile groups]

BP The question would be whether you think the activities of the [Kenyan] exile groups had any effect?

WK I think they had tremendous effect in maybe three very key ways. (1) They actually were able to **dent the very carefully-cultivated image of the Kenyan government**. The government had managed to create an image of Kenya as being a haven of peace in a region where there is a lot of insecurity and being a very democratic regime. So the activities of the exile group were able to dent that image and highlight to the international community the human rights violations, the lack of democracy and the effect of bad governance on Kenyan people.

(2) The other thing that exile groups actually managed to do was to **give voice to the many forms of resistance that were taking place in the country**. There were all kinds of activities which were going on and which were never reported in...the newspapers and which were never seen as resistance to the oppressive regime. There were strikes, for example, there were protests of different kinds, there were church groups and faith groups that had protested, like the Catholic Bishops, for example, the National Christian Council of Kenya, all of these were activities that were taking place within the country. And the exiled groups amplified those activities. There were activities by the Law Society of Kenya. You know, there are a variety of things that were happening within the country...From afar, it may have looked like they were isolated incidents. And what the exile groups were able to do was to show that there was a pattern to these incidents; they were not just sporadic acts of protest. And they were able also to show that there was quite significant resistance to the regime.

(3) I think the other thing that the exiled groups were able to do was to strengthen **the opposition to the regime, internally and externally**. Those are the three key things.

BP How did they strengthen the opposition, say internally?

[Establishing a culture of resistance: exile groups showed Kenyans at home they “were not alone.”]

WK By the mere fact of echoing what the opposition was doing in Kenya and helping to push the democratic space, to push for the opening up of democratic space. That actually created space for better coordination, more coordination among the different voices that were being heard by documenting the different pockets and different activities of resistance... **The exiled groups were able to show Kenyans that they were not alone.** Sometimes you would have an activity say that would happen at the University of Nairobi, because that for a long time was the center for dissent. Then you'd have something happen with the National Christian Council of churches; you'd have something among the lawyers, or you'd have a lone activist protest about something.

[Linking resisters]

And once you began to see that there was more than one voice, even while you were inside the country, you began to see the possibilities of linking up the different voices, the different people who are resisting the regime.

BP And was there in fact a linking up that took place or did it not take place to the extent that you wanted it?

[Exile groups learned from each other]

WK I think it took place, to a very large extent. I mean if you look at the forces that came together even in the early '90s to struggle for some minimum reforms. There was a **coming together of civil society** organizations, some private sector – some businesses, some churches, women's' organizations; university [academics]...some coming together of ...faith groups [including Moslems]. And these are the forces that have continued to call for more democratization and [unclear]. I should also mention one other important thing exile groups did, by linking, here in the UK with university students, trade unions, parliament, women's groups, faith groups, not only did they broaden their understanding of Kenya, they also learned from those groups.

BP They being who now?

[Patterns of resistance and oppression worldwide]

WK I'm talking about the exile groups. They were learning how better to organize. And their activities were again strengthened by that solidarity. And the solidarity was not just with organizations here in the UK. Certain patterns were also emerging, like [resisting] with the Philippines, the Chileans, and **you began to see patterns of oppression and patterns of resistance that were similar.**

BP So would you describe Kenya as being unusual in terms of the efforts to try to change the human rights situation or was it similar to some other countries?

WK I don't know what you mean.

BP Well, you said with contacts you began to see some similarities. With what respect?

[Domestic and exile committees to release political prisoners]

WK They were active challenging their own situations. [There were exile groups] from those countries. There were quite a number of joint activities between the different groups - here in London. The Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners in Kenya [which she said was not the same as the RPP

in Kenya]. It's not the same. The Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners in Kenya was formed in 1982 July, the one chaired by John LaRose?? In London. And that is not the same as Release Political Prisoners in Kenya [formed in 1992 around the mothers' strike]. It's two different groups but with similar aims. The Committee here spun off other committees in Sweden, in Norway, in Denmark, in the Netherlands, in the U.S. in India, in Lesotho, in Japan, in Nigeria – similar committees doing similar work [mostly with the same name].

BP Was there some advantage to having other groups in other countries like that?

WK A great advantage. In the first instance...they were able to lobby, pressurize their 'own' government and the Kenyan government for the improvement of the human rights situation in the country.

BP Were these Kenyans doing that?

[Non-Kenyan support]

WK It was a mixture. In some countries there were no Kenyans, like in Japan. They were just people from those countries who –

BP Would the appeal for activity – where would it originate from: from domestic groups in Kenya or from the exile groups?

WK It depends. The Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners was set up with very, very specific goals and objectives. So it would have its own activities in keeping with its objectives. But one of the key objectives was [to] support Kenyan people in their struggle for democracy. And of necessity that would mean that they would be supporting whatever initiatives that came from Kenya. And the Committee had its own activities that it was undertaking. I will give you what was the first publication of the Committee.

BP So sometimes the initiative would start here in London?

[Tactics]

WK Most of the time it would. It would be closely linked with maybe an historical event in Kenya. Or it would be linked to some action that had taken place in Kenya. As I said, the Committee did do its own activities.

BP So its really a combination. Sometimes it would start here; sometimes you were responding to a request for help or supporting their – Was there coordination in Kenya among the various organizations that were working for an improvement of human rights?

[Makali said the 'formal' organization in later years accomplished little; earlier there may have been informal contacts among activists – review transcripts]

WK I wouldn't be able to answer that.

BP My impression was that there was not until they worked on constitutional reforms [1997].

WK I would say its difficult to say. If people were working underground, you couldn't tell if there was coordination or not. You wouldn't know.

BP Well, in terms of the overt?

WK In terms of the overt? I'm not sure that there wasn't coordination; I'm just not certain that there was. I don't think they'd have done the things they did without some kind of coordination.

BP Well, its an interesting question because its interesting to see – you mentioned some of the lone activists, for example, sometimes. It seems sometimes there were lone activist before organizations were ready to step forward or at least publicly. Sometimes the brunt of the repression came on individuals. Sometimes it was on organizations. That's another question I wanted to explore: was there any time during the, say '88 or before that. Were the activities before that primarily activists acting on their own or were they supported in a real sense by an organization?

WK Say that again?

BP Well, between an individual activist who may be doing their own thing, maybe a publisher, or whatever, or a lawyer, compared to a group, organized activity, did you see both occurring: sometimes individuals and sometimes organizations.

[Individual vs. organized resistance: hard to know the roots]

WK You see, the way you would see an activity happen, it would be through people, so unless one went behind the scenes and found out who is behind this person addressing a meeting, and who has supported this person addressing a meeting, I'm not sure that one would be able to say, definitively –

And I'm not sure I understand what you mean when you say supported by an organization or not.

BP Well, for example, it's one of the things I was discussing with one of my professors at the University of Florida. I think that in the early stages, most of the activities were...individual. But there were some organizations. Now some of them were underground [WK (yes)]... [Some were above ground] But my impression was there were some individuals who were actually doing their own thing. Gibson [Kamau Kuria] I know was a member of the Law Society [of Kenya], but when he acted sometimes, I'm not sure he had the full support of the organization. So you can ask whether an individual is doing something with ...support from an organization in terms of money, or people, or publicity or [unclear] or in fact doing it pretty much on their own, even though they were members of an organization.

WK I think, to be fair, the only way I could answer that question is [based on] my own experience and not presume to know what others –

BP OK, that's fair enough. That's something I will learn as I go; and I don't know yet; I really don't.

[Organizations provide more “clout” and “uplift” the activist]

WK I know that for my activity and my involvement was through organization and that is because from my idea **I believe as an individual I only have so much limited influence** that to actually **having an organization behind me – not necessarily funding me, but if I'm operating [in their name] it does**

give you more clout and it uplifts me as an individual. So I would say **for my part – [it was organizational]** and that's what we set out to do from the beginning.

BP And the organization you're talking about is basically **CRPP**.

WK That, at the very beginning, was what was working on release political prisoners, and that was open to Kenyans and non-Kenyans. And then we formed our own Kenyan organization which was UMOJA [UMOJA (UK). Umoja wa Kupigania Demokrasia Kenya; United Movement for Democracy in Kenya)
BP Tell me a little about Umoja.

[Arrests of 1982 pre-coup]

WK Before I tell you about Umoja, let me try and answer that one about individual action. When we came to this country in 1982, my husband and I, he'd already been in custody for three weeks. And when he came here, basically for him to get away from the heat – it was temporary and we were supposed to go back – and then we met up with **Ngugi** [wa Thiongo] when we arrived who was here to receive an award. He had actually come from Germany and he was going back to Kenya. He wasn't going to stay. But before he returned, he was informed that the situation was getting worse. A lot of our friends had been arrested. '82, before the coup. And my sister was visiting. She was a lecturer at Kenyatta University at that time.

[British journalist plays a key role in resistance]

And when she came, and as our friends were being picked up, the three of us, my husband and she and I would compare biographic information and send that information to a woman friend who was working at the Guardian, her name was Victoria Britain [correct]. She played a very, very important part in exposing what was going on in Kenya. And she was involved with the Committee from the very beginning... We'd send the same information to Amnesty; we'd send the same information to our group in France that was working on basically... political prisoners. And then there were more and more numbers [being arrested] And because we were new in UK we hardly knew anybody. We wanted to connect with the people who had been organizing Ngugi's campaign. And LaRose was essential now. And we met in John's house, with Ngugi and a few other Kenyans. And John brought people from the Caribbean, people from Britain, from Nigeria and that is how we now formed the Committee. We started discussing the formation of the Committee in June (1982) and we launched on July 2 in '82. [The attempted coup in Kenya was August 1??, 1982]

[Resistance expands; committee grows]

So, yes, its true, that people do start off working – and we did start off working, the three of us, but we were very clear that we needed to link up and form an organization and bring other people in. [Her sister is Wanjiku Matenjwa. Wanjiru, Wanjiku and John started the Committee; they joined with Shadrack [B. O.] Gutto, Abdelatif Abdalla?? and ??.] The list expanded. But initially, and this was to protect peoples' identities, none of the Kenyans on the Committee took a public profile. The only person who did that was Shadrack Gutto in December of 1982 when we had an event commemorating Independence but we thought it would be a good occasion to highlight what was going on in the country. And Gutto, having been a lecturer at the University of Nairobi, and had come from Kenya, was in a very good position to talk, to tell people about what was happening [in Kenya] first hand. He's now based in South Africa.

You don't have much effect as an individual, even in Kenya. You're much better off working as an organization, and that's why we formed the Committee.

[UMOJA formed]

BP Then you started **UMOJA**. When did that start?

WK 1987; that's when it was launched. Inevitably, as we were meeting within the Committee, we would discuss what was going on in the country and we would be talking about what role can we play. And the time was right, in **February of 1987 to launch UMOJA as a Kenyan political party**, as opposed to a solidarity group [the Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners in Kenya] in opposition, in exile.

BP Because at that time no political parties were allowed. Section 2 [A of the Kenyan constitution forbidding opposition parties] was still there. Was it pretty much a small, London-based organization at the time?

[Exile resistance grows in other countries]

WK It wasn't a small organization; it was London-based. And coincidentally, at the same time as we launched UMOJA...similar things were happening in other centers where there were Kenyans and where there was a solidarity Committee, in Sweden, in Denmark, Norway, in the U.S. It just so happened that there were Kenyans who had congregated around the Committees and they had formed themselves into different groupings and different organizations of Kenyans, still working within the solidarity organization.

BP Did they also form branches of UMOJA? Was that the sort of the new metamorphosis of –

WK I'll come there. I was saying, this was happening almost simultaneously, that as we formed UMOJA in 1987, at the beginning of the year (but we started discussing it before); as **we launched it...February 18**, there were other things happening in the other countries. Throughout that year there were intense negotiations and discussions between the different Kenyan groups that existed in the different capitols, including Australia. **And in October of 1987, those groupings decided to merge and form a united grouping, and I've given you the results of that. It was still UMOJA...**it was no longer just London; it was this bigger group.

BP So things expanded. You started with some individuals, then a – there was always a kind of growth there. And more nations involved than I ever realized.

[Mwakenya]

WK The other thing that also was happening as the voice of exiled Kenyans was becoming louder, internally within Kenya there was an increasing resistance. And this actually, I think, culminated in – 1986 was like the peak of the resistance and also the coming together of the different, apparently disparate groups that were existing in Kenya...In '86 there was a huge clampdown on Mwakenya, which was an underground movement. But obviously the government could not have had a clampdown if Mwakenya was not having an effect internally. And the manifestations of that – the effectiveness of Mwakenya – was that there was an increase in strikes, an increase of resistance from different quarters,

and the government began to realize that they had an underground movement that was catching, and that was linking different people and different groupings together. And so they had to clamp down on it.

BP A lot of the arrests were made in '86.

WK A lot of arrests were made early, in '82. And '86 was...another peak.

[Impact of Mwakenya claimed]

BP What other evidence was there of Mwakenya having any impact. The strikes were at universities?

WK Workers' strikes, peasants' strikes. One of the documents I've given you actually documents all that resistance. [see the green folder of her documents].

BP I remember when I was there in '87, the only thing the government kept pointing to was a couple of derailments.

WK That was one [example of Mwakenya activities].

BP So Mwakenya itself was started, would you say, mostly by academics at the beginning?

[Ignorance of Mwakenya roots claimed]

WK I can't tell you that. Mwakenya is an underground movement. I am not privy to who started it.

BP There was even a press conference when we were there of Mwakenya...they came and talked to us... Was it ever a very large organization? That's one thing I never got a fix on it.

WK And you won't get to know. It's an underground movement. I keep on saying to you, a covert organization. Who knows how large it is: I don't. Then it stops being underground.

BP So then what happens after UMOJA. Were there continued activities from London.

[Resistance focus shifts from exile (and underground Kenya) to Kenya openly]

WK Yes, and the Committee continued, but at the same time, what was happening in Kenya was, there was 'space' for more and more people to come up and to have very overt activities against the government, and the need for such a loud voice of exiles was beginning to disappear, if you like. And there was a lot of focus in the country as to what was happening in the country. So that even the exile groups in UMOJA were continuing to highlight what was happening – and **there was almost like a shift from 1989, there was a shift of emphasis on activity within the country in the exile community.** And that came with a press conference that was called by Jaramogi [Oginga Odinga] and a whole lot of other people. That was before Saba Saba [1990]. So that kind of shifted the focus to the country.

BP Odinga made some very strong statements from early '90. And he was almost immune from arrest; he was one of the few people who could do that.

WK...He defied a restriction order because he was, you know in Kenya we had something similar to the South Africa [controls on movement]. So he just defied it.

BP He just drove into Nairobi one day and released one of those press statements. And we were all excited as journalists; finally someone was saying something openly.

WK He just defied the government.

BP So your point was a very interesting one, that there really was a kind of shift because the only space for a voice, at least an open voice, was in exile. Then as people began to stand up and speak out [in Kenya]

WK Then there was no need to compete.

BP If someone wanted to hear the voice they didn't need someone translating...So at that point, what was the role of the exile groups?

WK They continued to support what was going on internally [in Kenya]...publicizing what was going on, issuing press releases, supporting in different ways what was happening internally.

BP Rather than creating events or reporting events yourself, you were kind of mirroring what was happening. That's interesting because there was a parallel shift among human rights groups, Amnesty and Human Rights Watch in that their importance of their report was really big in, say, the late '80s until the '90s...then the importance diminished a little more as local groups took the role of providing the information. So if you ask if they [international human rights reports] are as effective as they were, the answer is, no, they're not...There was a shift there internationally and the shift in terms of activism.

[Comment: But the question could be asked differently. Are the reports from the international groups more dependent on information from local groups in the 1990s as compared to earlier years? The answer would be yes. But are the international reports, using more locally-produced information, any less effective? The answer is probably not.]

BP Is there in Kenya an ideology to the politics of opposition, or is it a matter of trying to promote who's in power...and it's a question of power...

[Marxist ideology used by some; but current parties may not have an ideology]

WK I don't believe there's any party that operates without an ideology. So there is of course an ideology. **There's definitely an ideology that informs most of the opposition. And I'm not talking about the current [2002] opposition necessarily.** I'm talking about the opposition movement abroad, the movement for justice and democracy. It was informed by certain ideological positions. If I speak for myself, I came from a Marxist background and that is what informed the actions that I took. And that's what informed my activities...And that ideology has [enabled me] to analyze what is happening and ...[unclear] And not in a simplistic way as it is presented as a matter of one tribe against another tribe. And we struggled very hard to try to convey to people that if you reduce the struggle in Kenya to a struggle between different nationalities, which is called tribalism, you miss the whole point. You don't understand what is going on in the country. Most of the media portrays – even what's happening now – as tribal – and I hate the term because I think its actually a racist term – and they refuse to understand, they refuse to go beyond that very simple; and ...its simple; it's a stereotype of Africa, it's a simple way of understanding; simple minds, simple African minds. But it really misses the point.

BP To what extent do you think ethnicity plays a part in the politics in the eyes of Kenyans?

445

[Ethnicity used by politicians]

WK I can not speak for all Kenyans. I can tell you the politicians use ethnicity as a tool to divide when it is convenient for them.

[unclear point on ethnicity]

But they don't use ethnicity when it is dividing up what they have looted from our nation. For example, you will see that during Kenyatta's time, during Kenyatta's regime, among the ruling class, all different nationalities were represented and all benefited from it. And it's the same thing during Moi's time. So its not a clear-cut, this is a Kalenjin affair and this is a Kikuyu affair. It is not

[Comment: Some Luos and Kalenjin, among others, would disagree]

BP If the divisions are not along ethnic lines, what are the divisions along? How are they formed; on what basis?

[Kenya class divided: policies help (or hurt) across ethnic lines]

WK There are different types of division, but I believe the main division is along class lines, along the haves and the have nots. The politicians confuse the ordinary Kenyans and use the issue of nationality and the issue of ethnicity as a tool to divide people. But when you come down (they use it for getting votes) when you come down to the reality, there's absolutely no difference between the lives of a peasant in Nyeri and the lives of a peasant [elsewhere]. And when government adopts policies that are detrimental to the people, it is not in a position to say – Moi's not in a position to say, I want to protect all Kalenjin from this policy. He can't.

[Comment: But Moi's policies undermined, intentionally, Kikuyu economic strength]

BP Some of the poorest people are Kalenjin.

WK Thank-you.

BP I think [the late Bishop Alexander] Muge made that point.

WK And he died for it. [He was killed in a vehicle crash after being warned by a senior KANU official not to go to an area where he preached. The family of Muge suspected the crash was planned by the government??.] The person who is the chair of the Release Political Prisoners in Kenya, Tirop Kitur, was jailed for being a member of Mwakenya. [He is a Kalenjin]. He was jailed in '86 or '87, and he actually said in court he was a member of Mwakenya.

[Comment. Many confessions were obtained under torture.]

[Wanjiru gives me a manuscript of a forthcoming book: check with her]

[She suggests visiting her at her home where she has "a lot of information"]

[Wanyiri's 1998 book on his torture:]

BP I've read your husband's book [on his detention and torture]. It's a hard book to read.

[Resistance chain: a sympathetic guard]

WK Yeah, it is. But you know how he came to write it? When he was inside I had a way to communicate with him through **a guard and this guy, a very young man**, he wouldn't really tell me that Wanyiri was being tortured, but I suspected that he was. And there was one day that the young man came to me – and he was really agitated.

BP That's the one who brought you out to the car [in the parking lot of Nyayo House where Wanyiri was being tortured, where the guard arranged a meeting between he and Wanjiru where he asked for an attorney]

WK Yes.

BP You had a brief visit with your husband.

WK Yes, that's the guy. And he told me, please, if you know anybody, you must issue a statement, you must issue a statement and say that you suspect your husband is dead, to force the government to say something. And I said, why do you want me to issue such a statement. And he said: just do it, just do it. But I said, why? Is he dead? He said, no, no, no; just do it. And he was really agitated. And I said there must be something. Anyway, I did a press release. I sent it here to the Committee and John. I sent it to the Nation [in Kenya]...I said I suspect that my husband is dead because I hadn't seen him...I hadn't talked to him, I didn't know what was going on. And then, a few days later I met up with him [the sympathetic guard] and he said, oh, I'm glad you did what you did. Then he said, what happened. He said you know, he had actually collapsed, he had lost consciousness. Then I said to him: I've been asking you, is he being tortured. And you've been saying no. And he told me, do you really expect me to come and tell you what is going on inside there? I'd be very [inhuman?]. But do you think they are there on holiday? They are not. And so I realized then that he had been very badly tortured. So I said to him, please take a note to him, to Wanyiri. And I wrote to him, I want to know what's going on. He wrote back and said he's fine; nothing is going on. I wrote back to him and said, please, I'm going through a lot of torture imagining that you are being tortured. Why can't you just tell me what's going on. So if you could even put it down like in a diary and tell me what's going on. He wrote back to me and said if I did I wasn't going to be able to cope with it. I said, no, I'm already suffering enough and I'm already not coping, so please put it down. Why was I saying to him to do that? I felt that if he had recorded what he was going through it would be like, very cathartic; it would get the thing out and he'd be able to withstand whatever else would come. And that's how he started writing. So he would send me all these written pieces that he was writing every day. And I kept them very well and I typed them up. And the first person that I showed them to was Tony Gifford, and he just wept; he could not believe it. And I gave it to the Committee here. And in order to protect Wanyiri, because he was still inside, they had to alter a few things, not the substance. But they just had to – like they didn't put the exact number of days he was in. But for him it was a whole diary of what he was going through, every single day. And I used to receive this every single day. He was writing it down. He didn't sit back and remember, he was writing every – I have the documents at home, I have the letters – diary... And that is how. And when I sent them to Amnesty, Amnesty said this is the first very complete information we have of what is going on. And Martin [Hill of Amnesty] is just a wonderful person because we had to protect Wanyiri. He used the material very, very, very discreetly, but they used it in the report.

End of Side A, Tape 1 of 1
Start of Side B

BP He [Wanyiri Kihoro] struck me as a gentle person.

WK He is; extremely so [spoken softly]...he's a lawyer...and a politician. He loves [politics]. He's doing what he likes to do. But I would say it was easier for me to cope with his detention and – OK, the torture, I've never accepted that; being able to cope with it, I found it so hard. But his being detained, because I was clear politically what it is that we were doing, I expected that. What we were doing would earn the wrath of the regime. And I also – I expected to be arrested myself. I very nearly got arrested. But I think they [the government] thought it would be very embarrassing...If I got arrested and they say to him when he was undergoing torture, we think we got the wrong person. The person who should be here is your wife.

BP You two were close, or are close.

WK Very, very.

BP Ideologically, organizationally

[Love story: the Kihoros]

WK We are friends, we are friends. I always tell people how I met my husband and how I decided I was going to get married to him. It was at a political rally. I'm serious. It was at the funeral of J.M. Kariuki [assassinated under the Kenyatta regime; suspicion pointed toward the government] and my husband was a student leader. And he delivered the eulogy. And I had gone to that funeral against my parents wishes. Everybody had said I shouldn't go because it was dangerous but I was so determined to go. JM was a very good friend of mine; I had to go. And when my [future] husband got up at the podium to speak, before he finished, I told my girlfriend, you know, I'm going to marry that man. And she said to me, you are so crazy. You don't even know him; you don't like Kikuyus, and you're going to study. So she said, how on earth – and I said: you just watch. And honestly, I didn't even know I was going to meet him. I was just telling my friend. Anyhow, I was introduced to him. We said hello and chatted a little bit, and that was it. And then I left...And I went off to the States, but I think it was meant to be. I went off to study two months after I met him. We didn't keep in touch. Then we met in 1978 and it was like we'd never parted. And we met at Koigi's; Koigi had just been released from detention. I went to look for Koigi and we bumped into my [future] husband there, and we took off from there like we'd never gone our separate ways. And the rest, as they say, is history.

[Motivation: Wanjiru's interest in politics]

BP What got you into political circles...?

WK I suppose I was political myself. I was involved – I came to get involved in Kenya politics through work in solidarity with South Africa, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and so on. I was working for the All Africa Council of Churches. I think I was about 18...and this man called [Paul van Liro??] who is a film maker had just shot a film in Mozambique during the struggle against the Portuguese. And it was still a rough cut and he came and shown it to the...AACC meeting. And I actually remember being so moved that this was a country just one country away from us- and people were being so brutalized. And we in

Kenya didn't do anything about it. So I then started getting involved immediately. We formed the Churches Committee for Southern African Revolution ?? and I was very, very active in that. So that's how I got involved in Kenyan politics.

Then I met people like Sam Kobia of the NCCK [National Council of Churches in Kenya, Kabila Kinyanjui??, Kabila Kinyanjui?? politicized me. I went to a lecture, a lunchtime lecture at the NCCK. And he was the one...he was talking about the education system in Kenya and how it created a certain class in Kenya and how it perpetuated the class differences. And I sat there and I was so fascinated. And I said, I thought I was educated. I had just finished high school and I had gone to some of the best schools in Kenya. And I said to myself, I've gone to school and I'm just so ignorant, and it's my own country. So now a combination of [van Liro's??] film, the exposure through the work of the NCCK and meeting people like Dr. Kabila Kinaynjui and Sam Kobia and another – then he was a young man – from Uganda called James Okwaro??. That really opened up my mind to politics. And that's how I got involved. And I started reading on it.

BP What did you do, though, once you got opened up.

WK It really just got me very involved in issues for social justice...in Kenya as well as abroad. When I went to the States I was very, very young in the struggle, supporting solidarity movements, El Salvador, Nicaragua, in the '70s. And really got – I really got into it. Some of our favorite music is from Chile...by a man called Victor Hala??

[Mothers resistance international]

BP Did you see some similarities between the mothers of Plaza de Mayo and Chile and Argentina and Guatemala.

WK And some of the things that were happening in Kenya with the mothers? Definitely.

BP There are some similarities. Educated and uneducated people working together.

[Resistance – mid 80s church prayer protest by women]

WK And people deciding – there was a demonstration in a church at St. Paul's led by women. Mobi Maina?? was key in this. What they did was – it was the day of commemorating the day some political prisoners had been arrested. They went into church. And they had these cards in the church. And all they said was, we're here to pray and reflect on our loved ones who are detained or in prison.

BP You don't mean the mothers' strike?

WK No [emphasis]. I'm talking about before. It was definitely after 1982. I've recorded it and I'll get it for you if it's not in one of the things I've given to you. I've recorded it. I even have photographs of it. It's very significant. They sat in the pews and they had on – in Saint Paul's [on University Way and Wayaki Way intersection, a Catholic church??] And they just sat and prayed and some journalists took photographs. [she looks for her documents on it]. And they came with their children.

BP And it was for releasing political prisoners.

WK Yes

BP Do you remember anyone who participated?

WK Mombi Maina?? was definitely one of them. I think Njeri Kababere was there...Njeri probably doesn't even talk about the things that she did, but my Mom used to call her the Mother of the Nation. Njeri went round and [visited the families of political prisoners] – all of them. And when you were asking me about support from an organization, she was working as an insurance broker. And she used to go and visit people in prison...But that was long before...

BP How did they let people know they were protesting; they would look like just ordinary worshippers.

WK They told people...and some friendly church people came and talked...there was a photograph in the paper. It was before the '86 crackdown. I'm telling you why it is significant; it's because it happened during the height of repression. That is why it is significant. Right when nobody could say anything.

I have so much material all over the place.

131

[Impact of exile groups: blocked Moi visit and Scandinavian aid]

BP The groups in exile, working with the other groups...did they have any effect, or seem to have any effect on donors?

WK Yes. I'll give you one example. Moi was supposed to go on a trip in [year uncertain; late '80s] to the Scandinavian countries. And there was heated campaigning. In fact I was invited by some Danish group, and there is a woman who was the wife of Stephen Baraka Karanja who died – who was tortured to death- and she was also interviewed. And we were featured on a TV program. And there was such a hue and cry in Denmark and the other Scandinavian country that the governments actually cancelled Moi's visit and decided to suspend assistance to Kenya.

[Comment: verify this account with donors; Danish??]

BP Who suspended the assistance? Denmark?

WK All the Scandinavian countries used to work together.

BP Denmark often took the lead. You don't have any contact with the Danish, do you?

WK One of the people I have given you his name, and I need to find his contact: he's a Kenyan based in Denmark. I'll give it to you to put you in touch with some of the Danish...Kikuvi Mbinda ??

BP at least the Danes were listening to these protests.

WK This [reading in English from a -Danish newspaper?? – criticism of an election in Kenya.] This was the direct result of Kenyans there [in Denmark].

BP And then of course Koigi had good relationships with the press in Norway. Where is Koigi these days?

WK He's in the US, New York. He's writing. Jackie Klopp should know. I spoke with his wife; they are at Columbia.

BP Well, I'll end it there so I can keep my welcome.

WK All these are Swedish newspapers.

BP This is the beginning. You've gone through this as a student. I want to do it well. You don't do it well without a lot of help. I really appreciate your help...I'm going to contact the other London people. Thanks for sharing this. That's very kind...

WK [showing a document] That was the chairperson in Japan. Okeiko Miamoto??

BP So who I'll contact here if I have the time: Tony Gifford, Martin Hill (Amnesty), Malcolm Harper (UN Assoc. of the UK) and Nigel Walk?? (no contact for him).

Well, I think its wise of me to just let you go.

[WK OK]

End of interview