

Wycliffe NEWS

Winter 2006

*Wishing all our readers
a blessed Christmas
and a peaceful New Year!*



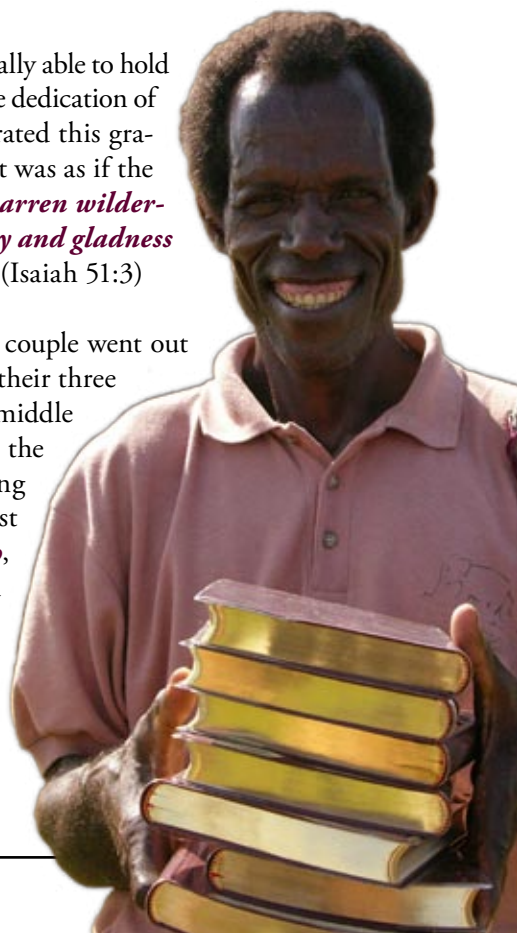
“The desert and the dry land will be glad...” Isaiah 35:1

— the Abau people's first true Christmas

12 October 2006 will not be preserved in the annals of history as a red-letter day, one that turned the course of world events. The majority of news channels and newspapers did not report any outstanding events on that day. All over the world, the events of that Thursday proceeded without incident. However, in a faraway corner of the earth, an event took place that will be remembered for generations to come. This place is in Papua New Guinea on the banks of the Sepik River where the **Abau** people live. These people's name means 'barrenness' – a place where nothing grows.

On 12 October, *after 24 years of hard work*, the Abau people were finally able to hold the long-awaited treasure in their hands. On this day they celebrated the dedication of the New Testament in their language. Several hundred people celebrated this gracious gift from God with singing, dancing, thanksgiving and tears. It was as if the words of Isaiah the prophet had come to life when he wrote: *'Her barren wilderness will become as beautiful as Eden – the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found there. Lovely songs of thanksgiving will fill the air.'* (Isaiah 51:3)

Almost a quarter of a century ago, a young Dutch-Finnish Wycliffe couple went out to these people in a small plane. **Arjen and Maija Lock**, along with their three small children, moved to this swampy, disease-ridden place in the middle of nowhere in order to make it possible for the Abau people to have the Word of God in their own language. Twenty-five Abau-speaking villages are scattered along the Sepik River and its tributaries. Vast freshwater swamps provide the people with their staple food, **sago**, but also make road-building impossible. The Abau people travel in dugout canoes, sometimes paddling for days to reach distant villages. Because of these conditions, literally years could have been added to the time it took to translate the New Testament if it hadn't been for the help provided by SIL-PNG's aviation department. These planes transported the family and their supplies between the village and the SIL Centre. ►



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Papua New Guinea

It is located in the south-western Pacific Ocean in the region of Melanesia. It occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and numerous offshore islands. The name of the island is believed to come from two sources — Papua is a Malay word for frizzy; the Spanish explorer, Ortiz de Rez thought that the natives resembled those in African Guinea. In 1975, Papua New Guinea gained its independence from Australia.

Capital: Port Moresby
Official Languages: English, Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu
Government: Constitutional Monarchy
Area: 462,840km² (2% water)
Population: 5,670,544
Population density: 12.25/km²
GDP per capita: 2911 USD
Currency: Kina (PGK)

The Papua languages demonstrate wide variations and can't be classified into one group. So far it has not been possible to prove that they belong to one language family, so they are therefore divided up.

Number of languages: 823
Languages currently being worked in by Wycliffe personnel: 185
Total number of New Testaments dedicated: 162
Total number of complete Bibles dedicated: 1

Needs met: 277
Needs unmet — projects in progress: 219
Needs unmet — no project in progress: 320

Number of Wycliffe personnel working in PNG: 628
(Of which 315 are linguists, 279 are support workers, and 34 are guest helpers)
There are 247 permanent PNG employees.

► The elderly *Obow*, who was the Lock's main translation helper, wiped the tears from his eyes as he stood at the podium with his arm around Arjen. He held a copy of the New Testament up high for everyone to see and said: 'Today I feel like Simeon.' With this he was expressing his thanks that God had preserved him to take his part in the events of this wonderful day. At the conclusion of the dedication service, so many people crowded onto the stage to get their New Testaments that the organisers feared the structure was going to crack. Within a week of the dedication, the Abau people had bought *about a thousand copies of their New Testament*. One man named Jethro bought eight copies — enough for all his children, he said.



Arjen, Maija and their Abau co-workers had worked for many years to prepare for such a response. Early on, they realized that the New Testament would be of little use to the Abau people if they could not read their language. 'It would be just impossible to give this book to someone without any preparation,' says Maija.

So, they began to establish what they called '*tokples prep schools*,' schools in which children could learn to read and write Abau.

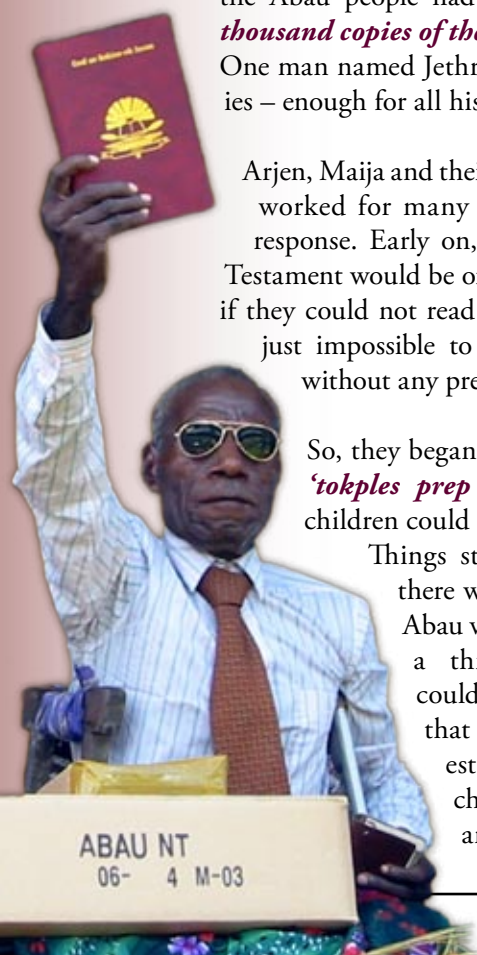
Things started slowly, but eventually there were schools in all twenty-five Abau villages. The couple developed a three-year curriculum which could be taught by Abau teachers that they have trained and they estimate that around 2,000 children have learned to read and write in those schools. ►

A few comments from people who attended the Dedication ceremony:

'I cried when I saw the people kneeling along the road as the Bibles passed them. I had never seen such a respect for God's word.' (Mrs. Lock, Arjen's mother, 83 years.)

'It meant so much to me to see the work completed. My husband and I once started on the Abau-language but had to give up. In spite of our giving up the work is now completed.' (Muriel Withell, a New Zealand missionary of the 1970s.)

'I am widowed, but I went early on for the pre-sales to secure a copy. I am so happy that I have learned to read. Now this book is open for me and it feels like I have a new trail to follow in my life.' (Mane, a graduate from the ladies' literacy school, a widowed mother of five, from Mukways village.)





► They also built the Abau Training Centre, which gives adults the opportunity to learn reading, maths, book-keeping and administrative skills. *Mane* is one woman who received training at the centre. 'Being able to read,' she says, 'feels like a new trail has been cleared for me.' 'Studying together... has been excellent preparation for the Word,' says Maija. 'When the day came, people were ready to take the book.'

During the coming months Arjen, Maija and their Abau colleagues plan to visit each of the villages to show *the Jesus film*, which is based on the gospel of Luke, in the Abau language and also to take them copies of the New Testament.

The Locks are coming to the end of their time in Papua New Guinea. They plan to hand the project over completely to Abau leadership by *mid-2007*. 'We have tried to be more and more out of the picture, and we believe they can do it. We believe that the Abau project will continue,' says Arjen. Arjen and Maija say they are thankful for the part God has given them in taking His message to the Abau people. In the end, they think not of schools or statistics but of the people who have been changed by the power of the Word. 'I don't care about numbers, or any accomplishments or buildings or anything. I care about those life-changing moments,' says Maija.

'It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it,' said the Lord in Isaiah 55:11

Perhaps as the years pass and the Abau people continue trusting in His Word, their name will come to mean not barren, but fruitful.

Based on an article by David Ringer, edited by Attila Kovács

'The greatest missionary is the Bible in the Mother Tongue. It never needs a furlough, is never considered a foreigner.'

(Cameron Townsend, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators)

Hungarian links with Papua New Guinea:

This faraway island has some Hungarian mission connections!

For example *Mária Molnár* served there until she was martyred during the Second World War.

In our autumn issue of Wycliffe News, we wrote about our Wycliffe colleague *Marilyn Laszlo*, one of the translators of the *Sepik Iwam* New Testament, whose paternal great-grandfather was Hungarian.

Wycliffe Hungary's reputation in Papua New Guinea was enhanced further in the 21st century when *Zsófia Csongor* served as a short-term worker for eighteen months there doing linguistic analysis on the *Arop* language.

Wycliffe Bible Translators, Hungary is part of one of the largest international, interdenominational Christian mission organizations.

In Hungary it operates as an officially-recognised, non-profit association.

Our activities are financially supported by donations. Tax rebates can be obtained for donations given in Hungary – at the end of every calendar year we issue a donation certificate to anyone who requires it.

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