

## Crying in the Dark in Khayalitsha -

By Mrembo

**T**hirty-five kilometers outside Cape Town lies Khayalitsha, an extensive area of squatter camps housing over a million



inhabitants in shacks built of cardboard, corrugated metal, sandbags, and plastic sheeting. Its Xhosa name, meaning “new home”, belies its dilapidated appearance.

In the heart of Khayalitsha, where few whites dare go, is stationed a small mission run by the Reverend Young Ohm and his wife. The mission is supported by the congregation of Montreal’s Korean Presbyterian Church under the guidance of the Reverend Tae Gon Yoon. It is the compassion of this church alone that provides food, clothing, and business education for the hungry, sick and unemployed.

When Dr. Wilhelmina Fredericks, founder of Zerf Productions, met the Reverend Ohm in Montreal before he left for South Africa, he invited her to visit his “new home” on her next business trip. She took the opportunity of touring the site with him and was introduced to the people of this poverty

stricken community. She found the experience emotionally and spiritually moving.

#### TOUCHING MOMENT

Ohm's initial task when he and his wife first arrived was to build a small centre out of corrugated metal to house a crèche (day care) where 80 children could be clothed, fed each day, and taught bible stories. Remarkably, within months Ohm was able to converse in Xhosa and through the children the couple were able to reach out to the hearts of the adults.

The most touching moment of Fredericks' visit occurred during a special farewell performance for her by the community youth "peace" choir. In a space little bigger than her living room and under a solitary naked light bulb, about 50 young people proudly sang a cappella in the haunting harmony characteristic of Africa. The message of their traditional songs seemed a plea for her to return to Canada and tell the story of their plight.

It was during one of their songs that the light went out leaving them in darkness. Instead of floundering and breaking into giggles, the choir carried on singing in the dark, confident as ever. A glimpse of the pastor's eyes shining in the murky light and the choir singing of a better tomorrow despite their misery brought tears to Fredericks' eyes.

Someone ran out to fetch two candles so that the performance could continue being captured on video and the story of their need for clothes, skill training and education told. The video is available from the Zerf archives for viewing before interested groups

Wilhelmina Fredericks – Montreal Quebec