

Tree of Life Sculpture



Photo: Christian Aid/ David Rose/ Insight-Visual

A half tonne sculpture made out of chopped up guns and other decommissioned weapons from Mozambique has recently won a prestigious PRWeek award. The sculpture was created as part of the Christian Aid supported Transforming Arms into Tools project.

The massive three meter high sculpture, currently on display in the Great Court of the British Museum, was unveiled in February 2005 and will be in the African galleries until 2010. It is estimated that more than 25 million visitors to the museum from around the world will have the opportunity to see it

Mozambican artists spent three months creating the three metre high sculpture, made entirely out of weapons such as AK-47's, pistols and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. They see it as a way of using their art to promote peace.

The Transforming Arms into Tools (TAE) project is run by the Christian Council of Mozambique a partner organisation of Christian Aid. Christian Aid receives funding from DFID through a Partnership Programme Agreement (PPA)

There are still millions of arms hidden throughout Mozambique – a legacy of the 16 year long civil war that ended in 1992. Bishop Dom Dinis Sengulane, who was involved in the peace negotiations between the Frelimo government and the Renamo rebels in 1992, came up with the idea for a weapons amnesty project that would help people give up their guns. In the last nine years the project, which employs some former child soldiers, has collected and dismantled more than 600,000 weapons.

In exchange for their guns, former combatants are offered building materials, tools and equipment such as sewing machines, bicycles, and ploughs. One village received a tractor for handing in 500 weapons.

After being chopped up and dismantled by TAE staff, these tools of war begin their new life in the hands of Mozambican artists who create sculptures out of them. Their unique pieces of art are exhibited all over the world and include birds of peace, saxophones, chairs, monkeys and even jazz bands.

Hilario Nhatugueja, one of the four sculptors, says: 'We artists want to turn the situation around, change the story. Changing these instruments of death into hope, life and prosperity. This tree symbolises life, symbolises a future, symbolises hope'

- Christian Aid has been supporting the Christian Council for Mozambique since 1984
- Christian Aid works with eight partner organisations in Mozambique, focusing on HIV/AIDS, food security and livelihoods and strengthening the voice of local organisations to fight against poverty and inequality

Key facts

Christian Aid is an international development organisation working with 650 partner organizations across 48 countries. Its aims are to expose the scandal of poverty, contribute to its eradication and challenge the systems, structures and processes that work against the interests of the poor and marginalized

DFID provided £13.4 million to Christian Aid (2001-2005) through a Programme Partnership Agreement.