

Notre Dame de Paris, pray for Cyclone Idai's Children!

(A collaborative poem on Notre Dame Fire and Cyclone Idai)

Feed the hungry, clothe the naked and house the homeless,
Your Son taught us, Notre Dame de Paris - Mother of the World.
But when Idai swallowed over a 1000, Westminster Abbey was mute.
Because black lives deserve mass death?
Because white bells don't ring for black lives?
Because black lives bore?
Oh yes, because black lives don't matter!

Notre Dame de Paris, pray for Idai's Children –
That African chiefs blind to Mozambique do not see Paris.
That black thieves eager to please masters do not see Paris.
That philanthropists who ignore Louisiana do not see Paris.
That no one rebuilds empty cathedrals while millions are roofless.
That no tyrant weeps over empty churches while roasting his people.
That no billionaire drapes touristic interests in religious garments.

Why do
Oceans of tears
Now flood the world
After *zéro mort* in Paris
Whilst on those same eyes
A dreadful drought descended last month
When Idai swept across southeastern Africa devouring
Over a 1000, injuring countless, & affecting millions?

Notre Dame, Mother of God, pray for us to our God of Justice
For the acts of God have caused us death.
It's been a month but your children still suffer
To recover and cope from their pain –
They are sick and hungry in a world of plenty!
Oh children of Idai, wipe your tears and be strong to die!

Perhaps, the stone walls in Paris are worthier than your lives.

Yes, it sounds unfair to say this, but today fairness isn't fair.
Their money is for their glory,
But for that glory were our ancestral sands
Watered with the blood of our forefathers and foremothers.
Oh children of Idai, wipe your tears and be strong to die!
Perhaps, Notre Dame doesn't care? Or her God isn't yours?

But who's fault is it? Who's meant to care for us?
Where're those leaders their democracy has given us?
Who're quick to weep for wooden crosses and roofs ...
Who're mute to our agonies and pains and sorrows...
Who're keen to sell us and our resources and our sweat ...
Who're fast to procure sweet doses of oppression to soothe our hearts ...
Oh children of Idai, wipe your tears and be strong to die!
For with this ink we pledge to cry & tell our stories to generations unborn.

They owe us reparation for years
of slavery
of colonisation
of extraction.

Notre Dame de Paris, pray that Paris keeps controlling
our resources
our money
our army
our society
our education
our religion.

That great power shouldn't come with responsibilities!
Oh children of Idai, they stand aloof and watch us die!
Perhaps, only oil, diamond and gold matter, not life!

But we understand your shock! It hurts to lose her to flames!

Notre Dame de Paris was hypnotically beautiful.
But those houses in Madagascar were also beautiful.
But those men in Zimbabwe were also beautiful.
But those women in Malawi were also beautiful.
But those kids in Mozambique were also beautiful.

While the beautiful Lady in Paris has counted 800+ years...

Those kids had climate-shortened futures before them...

Life is just beginning for those houseless, displaced kids...

Ms Donor, do you also see the fear in their eyes?

Mr Donor, do you also see the desire to live in their eyes?

I hear you've already dropped something into our Lady's account,

To get her back on her feet! What have you done for the kids?

Raise funds to feed refugees in Cameroon – no one cares!

Raise funds for Cyclone Indai's black victims – no one cares!

Not that we command your wallets, anyway. We're just wondering!

We eh! Life is so funny! Raise funds to rebuild cathedrals – whoops...!

Where is my credit card? #nonsense.

Nonsense indeed,

For there's just no way the world could say that

It didn't know the roofs were leaking in East/South Africa!

No way!

The nonsense began ages ago when

The visitors had all surveying eyes planted to the feathers of clouds—

First, they swirled down turbulent Atlantics

Like eagles surveying every inch of the cradle of Man.

The Holy Book in one wing, a plough in the other.

This giant bird of multiple cha'cter swooped over hectares knitting

Nests in God's wide expanses.

So there is no way Idai could soak half of this Holy

Land without the eagles' discernment—the eagles merely

Choose what not to see!

We hold no grudge that you live

The best of life and pledge whatever defrayment—
But while Notre Dame around you danced in the flame,
There was
And still is
Stinking
Nauseating
Misery to bear the testimony of Idai.

You can pretend, after all, East Africa is a season's
Pilgrimage to the seat of Notre Dame.
The hurt is the pretention flu... our foremen have contracted it.
Bow down, dear world, let us preach "Thy kingdom come" first
Before we give food to chewed bodies of Idai's regurgitation.
And may we be blind to your intentions to milk us more and
Breastfeed your never-ending thirst of fame— your version of holiness!

Now we know so well that Judah's DNA runs in every wallet;
We shall pull ourselves up and rise like the Eastern dawn.
Even the seeds in our groins know that the sun only sets westward,
But life rises eastward.
A seed is never too important than the land from where it is taken,
Mark ye this.

Let Notre Dame keep the change of measurable generosity.
A child always finds his way back to his mother's hut;
A man too, finds his way back into the laps of his mistress.
That we are the landlords here and you pay your rent,
There's disparity especially for overbearing tenants!
Your eyes were and still are on the landlord's ocean,
Black ball holes and every unborn marine life.
The cry of our forests,
The fall of our timbers,
The restlessness of our gold, diamond...
Even black stones— can you deny that not a dime from
Your pledge to Notre Dame came from here, where Idai killed

Months ago...and you did nothing?

For new technologies, battles heat the earth,
So dig and dig and dig for free
But in the end
Send back small pieces of our stones when nature gets mad
And our leaders set up communities against each other.

What is this my brothers tell?
Even my sisters wail a soul-wrenching dirge?
Curse are the lips of deceit sang against us
And the mouth that has eaten our bread before it is baked.

These tales have been told long ago but we refused—
Yes, we did refuse to start life with hatred for aliens.
When our grey hairs laid us on age-old mats before their
Bare feet and basked in the golden moon of the cradle of mankind,
We still refused to blame our troubles on strangers.

Until Idai preceded Notre Dame.

But we were mute when sharks started eating our siblings
In the Mediterranean, and some auctioned to prodigals who
Found their way back to finish the family fortune.
With chicken change from brothels, the prodigal captured the eldest
Son in the fancy of his unholy dance.
Now the first son pledges the family will abroad.

Ele, and we the new born soaked in our piss!

We shall survive Idai, just like we did for centuries of forced crossing
Of the Atlantics and yet smiling with darkened teeth, yet with peaceful hearts
seeking out bloody come-backs or vengeful demands.
But we can forgive your lies—because we curse your lies
To the devils in your eyes.

And his incarnates on cathedral's sculptures.

We know better now, that Idai couldn't unlock any wallet,
Yet old rocks could empty a nation's treasury!
We see clearer through the window of our ignorance, that there is a
Transparent shield between northern and southern handshakes.
No more shall Igede the palm wine tapper claim to have killed a panther.
Ode, the hunter dread.
Miracles are real here, especially when you can still hear the voices of
The trees when they commune with the evening breeze.
But in your world of expensive rocks, fame is bought—
When you are tired possessing fame with wallets, come and have peace here for free.

And we heard that shapes of beings
Hideous like the wife of sin
Stare at higher man from the corners
Of God's house, called Notre Dame, no sisters

Horned beasts, chiselled from stone
Smile and eat kinds like its own
And seemingly, they dance to calls from the Cathedral's bells
Beckoning on souls to lessons on how to escape hell

HELL!

The demise of sleepy kids
Awoken to tremors of earth breaking earth
Lives buried under rubble from homes beaten to dust
Hurried to hospitals weary with endless entry
And churches calling their sisters to building Idai in urgency

But, in fancy French, Luisa told me
That in her maid's robes, she saw in the streets

Tanned faces and black Ferraris
Staring with fear, spitting with eyes which spoke anxiety,
Screaming “Chers Gargouilles, nous sommes perdus,
Si vous ne résistez pas à ces crimes !”

Gargoyles?

Truly, mankind needs an eternal retreat.

Retreat! Retreat?

In a cloud of prayers to an old lady whose bones can no longer carry our tears,
They flooded,
Oceans of tears hanging on eyelids chant melismatic hymns,
Lamenting the collapse of

- a Roof
- a Spire
- stained Glass windows

What would you say, brothers? – “A Terrible Tragedy?”

Oh, did you see the sad face of the Vatican?

Did you listen to the loud sounding bells from churches in Paris?

It happened during the Holy week, remember...

Was Idai’s week Holy?

Was it even on a Holy ground?

Did St. Thomas harbour pilgrims?

Did you hear a sound from a bell in Chimanimani or Beira?

Brothers, Sisters,

Ours was

Thunder

Wind

Rainfall

Casualties ...

Oh, give me a bouquet of roses there!

I want to throw a rose on this soil

And that

And that

And that

Give me kola nuts to break!

Our ancestors need to wake up from their sound sleep.

Kindly open the keg of palm wine,

We need to cleanse our land.

Where are the cowries?

Now brothers, sisters, let incantation begin ...

Indeed, we need ancestral incantations

After Our Lady of Paris wept in flames

After murderous Idai, the raindrop turned storm of tear drops.

Was Idai a devil's threat or a climate scheme?

Was Idai a neo-weather threat aimed at depopulating African climes?

Idai, you were an agent of thuggery and quandary.

Idai, you hatched eggs of penury

And we stretched our trauma-burnt palms like beggars.

We reaped tears and collected bones.

We harvested sorrow and gathered nothingness.

Idai, whoever gave you a name and totem, we know the scheme.

Idai, are you a political fart or conspiracy belch?

Idai, are you just a climate fart or a climate wind?

Is Africa cheap to stretch for handouts after your fart?

In Africa we stretch for gifts and claim sovereignty.

We pimp intelligence and mineral abundance for donor crumbs.

We thrive on corruption and extortion is our best sanction.

We're a double-standard earth that requires cleansing.

Notre Dame of Paris, unravel the flames of your fire.

Our ancestors were never liars.

The needle may sew;

The hole remains in its back.

The cathedral may be rebuilt;

Our eyes cannot unsee!

Sobs from Notre Dame wet the graves in Mozambique.

Songs of faith-merchants ping dirges in Zimbabwe.

Screams from the world mock in Malawi.

Checks from wealthy hypocrites inflame our words.

The tongue is no knife

Yet beheads the truth for our gain.

Mozambique shall rise!

Zimbabwe shall rise!

Malawi shall rise!

Notre Dame, mother of their Jesus!

Behold our tongue!

There is no need crying the victim with piteous

Eyes weeping their blood into the seas of hypocrisy.

This is not the time when we trade words with overgrown
Children who eat the scrota of their siblings and their fathers.

Since we've refused to learn from the old bark of history,
Since our brains have grown heavy with democratic pneumonia,
We now leave our daughters in the care of those
Who graced our wives' huts while we were in the field muscling with logs
And scratching the thighs of mother earth to feed grunting machines
In the suburbs of Bordeaux.

Two hands they say wash each other—
Yesterday Idai peeled the skin from African soles in the East,
Wreaking havoc from yard to yard.
Disgruntled Idai moved like giant agama licking weeping ants,
As if sent by the gods to test our resilience. Our Comrades were
Quick to our rescue! Media rating rose, heroes created from its
Massive media coverage, and the stocks raised smiles across Dawning Streets.

That was yesterday, when friendship and service were tested—
Today was Notre Dame, dancing the fever of a dragon's spittle.
A fellow asked me why I carry a stone head that is
Too adamant to Notre Dame's plight.
"Is it my mother?" the sounds fell off my lips ere I knew it!

Then he went on: "But your leaders are weeping..."
"Hark! Not my leaders! If you will have me play the Peter
At 5am when the Christ is kissed and sold, then I will kiss
And wash the wounds of Idai's victims, who are my true leaders."

Notre Dame, whose woman is she even?
The woman who begot the weeping victims of Idai?
The Woman who ferried smoky pipes into the forest of Congo?
Welcome to the auction of vanity, my brothers!
How happy to see you with fat wallets,

Ready to buy holiness from lip-service!

Hark kindred! Kindness too, also discriminates!

So many times we have wept, so many times the

Media ratings have filled pockets—and so many times the intestinal

Dragons have roared in the middle of the night; nothing to be done!

Idai, comrade Nsah Mala, was not the first to expose abjectness.

Dear Cham Formoukum, Notre Dame was meant to be,

For Ngaba knows that the dance of the dragons came like mating eagles.

Ekpe my dear venerable bard, it is a man-eat-man stage

On which media ratings determine who has the best dance step.

Star Okpeh, my graceful golden parrot of the ancestral gong, even the

Demise of sleepy kids awoken by the breath of the heavens could

Not shake the sympathy of the wallets and cheque books!

Hail Agogho!

The tears of the living licked up brittle gothic dust of an

Interred eight-plus century giant coffin in the heart of heartlessness,

And the debate, dear Mbizo, was never a hoax—Idai wasn't a lie (they were!)

Because the heavens cry too much these days and the eyes

Of the sun have become too sharp for the skin.

Have you heard this plea of a forgotten infant in the middle

Of wild waters, Nnane Ntube? So sorry, dear bard, our ancestors shall not get

Up today if we are not able to wake them up.

Our ancestors, dear Ntube, will not get up if we keep a firm handshake

With the charm doctors who sent them to sleep—it is our very

Constant handshake with the paws that hunted and pulled the trigger

Against Lumumba, Sankara and Oumnyobe into the shrines of

The Gods and slew them that wade off the ancestors from the kola nuts feasts

of the African child.

Venerable J. Ash, the tongue, you say, is no knife yet its immobility cuts

More hearts than its restlessness!
The needle pulls its tail through herculean paths,
Yet the hole is forever hollow.
There is consolation that breaks the heart more than the tragedy that
Hurled it— some come in the guise of cheques that sustain dependency.
But then, bard Ash,
Malawi and co. shall shake it off like the duck in monsoon.

Forgive a beaten soul of mother earth, dear world, but when
Water slew our kinsmen, and our fathers went to sleep, I lost my mind!
When Idai softened Mozambique and neighbours, and our fathers dreamed
Of more hollow mandates to eat from the farm they hardly cultivate, even
The dragons from Game of Thrones pissed up and chased their demons
Into the halls of Our Lady whence resides the roots of our woes:
What noise! What cackling of old bones of the dead lady!
And their yelling woke us up— but never ask me why I didn't cry,
But if I must say, my system is allergic to *grand discours*.

Our fathers, most venerable fathers have an eye for foreign grandeur,
And there was never a place for the pariah of the world as to cry foul
Over our Lady's ashen house.
But when Idai jumped from the Gods' ducts and swept the yards of
Our siblings, it took 850 years to hit the screen of our colonial investment.

Paris is the world Centre of culture— even Vladimir and Beckett
Graced its towers and drank its beer with relish...
But Paris is also a nest, an ancient nest with twigs from different bushes
Gathered with the progress of millions of moons...
To the admirable regression of 3rd-world countries – poor Africa!

So, don't ask me why rich people chose to put their currencies
In the rebuilding of Notre Dame—who doesn't want to cleanse his
Soul after eating human pythons since 1830s to 2019?
Why did our fathers pledge to put the masses' money into

The rebuilding of Notre Dame? My brethren, leaders are the
Guarantors of their citizens' souls—even in ancient Hebrew chief priests
reigned, so can our prodigal fathers dish out to mourners of old Damsel.
Well done our fathers, well done moulders of unknown future!
But for the African child, it was Idai first, then old Paris second.
Whether they like it, Africa must rise; Idai's kids must rise & survive!

AUTHORIAL NOTE: This long poem was co-authored by ten poets, from Africa and the African diaspora, following the global outpour of grief and rapid, huge financial donations after the fire accident at Notre Dame de Paris on 15 April 2019 vis-à-vis Cyclone Idai's deadly devastations in south-eastern Africa in March 2019. The poets include Nsah Mala, Cham Formoukum, Laura Ngaba Tinzoh, Ekpe Inyang, Star Precious Okpeh, Agogho Franklin, Nnane Ntube, Mbizo Chirasha, Joyce Ash, and MD Mbutoh.