



VULAMASANGO
OPEN GATES / South Africa



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Vulamasango News

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Dear Supporting Members, Donors and Interested Parties

For a year and a half now, I have been living in Germany with my family again. My work in Switzerland as the Managing Director of a social psychiatric facility for adults with mental impairments is demanding and I enjoy it very much. It is refreshing to see how much the state is committed to helping people in society who need care. The funds provided to us by the government allow us to create a professional and high-quality environment for our clients, where they can feel comfortable and where all human desires and sensitivities are covered. Far from the R3000 per child per month that we received from the South African government at the time for caring for the children in the orphanage. After more than two decades of social work in South Africa, it feels very good to work in this financially secure environment.

And privately, of course, we also enjoy the peace and quiet, the "regulated life" and everything that the beautiful Lake Constance has to offer in terms of quality of life. My children, now 6 and 4, enjoy going to kindergarten and are learning the new language diligently. And above all, I don't have to worry anymore when my wife leaves the house with the children. And so a new chapter has truly begun for me, which I appreciate very much.

But of course the work in South Africa continues, and as the last few months should show, the project has by no means completely "let me go" as I had imagined. So now to the developments since my departure in April 2024. First up was the Vulingoma concert tour. Unfortunately, not everything went as we had imagined at the beginning. My daughter, Nokuthula's, German passport had been stolen during a burglary in South Africa and she had not managed to renew it in time. This led to the fact that she unfortunately could not go on tour. That was a pity, because she was supposed to play the important role of the narrator. The role that I have always had on stage in the past. Her absence, not only as a narrator, but also as an organiser and director of the tour, was clearly noticeable, and many things did not go as smoothly as in the past. On top of that, two young choir members had not received their visas in time and were therefore missing from the harmony. Nevertheless, the stage performance was a great success! "Brilliant!", as an

enthusiastic member of the audience wrote to me by e-mail. It was important that we showed ourselves as a choir in Germany again, that the people and supporters could experience us here again after all these years of concert break. Therefore, once again, a big thank you to everyone who donated generously to the crowdfunding campaign via Fairplaid! Without this financial injection, the tour would not have been possible.

Nokuthula, who had taken over the role of CEO from me in April 2024, had set about acquiring important donations with a lot of enthusiasm. She blossomed in this role and was able to achieve a lot in just a short time. The fact that she was able to take on both roles – that of project manager in South Africa and that of fundraiser in Germany – seemed like a blessing for the board and me at the time. What we could not foresee, however, was the impact that the enormous pressure of leading such a project, with all its problems and obstacles, would have on her. Through this work, she was confronted with too much of her own past in the townships as a child, which became more and more of a psychological burden for her. And so, after a little over a year, she decided in June to relinquish the position of CEO and return to work in the tourism sector, where she originally came from. It was certainly the right decision for her and her life, but for us it came as a shock and was a great loss for the project.

Finding a new CEO was not difficult. In 2021, I had hired Mrs. Jen Rousseau as the director of the orphanage. We always had a good working relationship, and she was a great asset to the project. Therefore, it was not easy for me to have to dismiss her again in June 2023 as part of the orphanage closure. We had remained in personal contact afterwards, always with the thought of a possible renewed co-operation. When I called Ms. Rousseau and described the situation in the project, she was immediately willing to take on the role of CEO. So at least we still had the feeling that the project was in good hands.

Nevertheless, it became clear very quickly that the project had suffered somewhat after my departure, and that a clear, new direction had to be found urgently. The closure of the orphanage, the two changes in leadership within a year and a half, all of this was noticeable in the project. And so the 8 board members of the two sponsoring associations and the Vulamasango project have been working since June in tightly timed team meetings on the new vision and direction of the project, which will then have to be implemented on site with the help of Ms. Rousseau. It quickly became apparent that the board members simply lacked a close connection to the project itself, as most of them had not been in South Africa for over 10 years. This gave rise to the desire for a "retreat" in the project in Cape Town – an intensive week of realignment with all board members, employees and ultimately also the young people in the project. What happens next? What is the vision for the future? The rough direction – youth education, teaching, skills training, training – is right, and between 80 and 120 children and young people still come to the project to benefit from our offerings. But where exactly do our values lie? What are we aiming for in the future? What specific goals and projects do we want to implement in the medium and longer term? All this needs to be discussed.

After an application to a foundation was approved in July with the request for funding for this retreat week, which is so important for the project, we were able to start planning this retreat in South Africa. In January

2026, 8 board members will now fly to Cape Town. The mood is positive, and we are looking forward to working with Ms. Rousseau and the Vulamasango team during the professionally facilitated retreat at Vulamasango.

And while we have been working so intensively with Ms. Rousseau on the redesign of the project, something else has also happened in the project that has affected me deeply. The long-time employee and choir director Pinky, who joined the project at the age of 14, who was already on stage in 2007 at the age of 15 on the first choir trip to Europe, who has experienced the crèche and the orphanage for many years, experienced all tours except 2010 and has taken over the choir as director since 2021, was caught misusing funds from the project. And even though these were not large sums – about 250 € a month over a period of several months – this was unforgivable for me. The project is still in financial difficulties, every month I talk about a deficit and how difficult it is to keep the project financially afloat, and then one of my closest and most trusted employees of many years steals money – the breach of trust was great!

Especially in view of the events that are currently taking place at the political level in South Africa, Pinky's actions were unforgivable to me. Since the police commissioner of the South African state of Kwa-Zulu Natal, General Ntlanla Mkwana, decided in July 2025 to come to light with huge accusations against the top management level in the police, the parliament, and various ministries up to President Cyril Ramaphosa, South Africa has been witnessing more and more corruption cases taking place at the highest political level on a daily basis. The Minister of Police and several national police commissioners are suspended and have to testify before the specially created "Madlanga Commission" and the "Ad-Hoc Committee" in parliament. Every day, new accusations and evidence come to light about decades of corruption worth billions, deeply rooted in politics and the police. Political murders of "whistleblowers" and prominent artists. Over 2.3 billion rand stolen from the huge Thembisa Hospital in Johannesburg alone – the state hospital for the poorest people in the population. Almost a billion rand of that money apparently went directly to the president's nephew. So, many people now believe that the ANC – Nelson Mandela's political party, which has ruled South Africa since 1994 – will not survive the next elections.

And so Pinky's breach of trust became symbolic for me of what is happening at the highest level in South Africa right now. An upheaval of the old guard and an important process of innovation and purification. But of course, the separation from Pinky came abruptly and surprisingly and was very painful for both the team and the young people in the project. The choir for next year has been selected and everyone had been looking forward to the next tour with Pinky. Here in Germany, too, many people have come to know Pinky and come to appreciate her as an artist, and will be equally surprised. But some things in life are incomprehensible and in this case we couldn't help but part with Pinky. The significance of this retreat in the project in January became all the more important.

And so I am still very closely connected to the work of the project on a daily basis. I accompany Ms. Rousseau's work in Cape Town, form the link to the boards of the associations, and in the meantime do the complete fundraising again, since Ms. Rousseau does not have this connection to Germany or the

ability to speak German. There is still a monthly deficit – also an issue that we must and will look at in January – and I continue to strive to promote the project's work and fundraising here in Europe.

Admittedly, it has often not been easy for me in the last few months to find the strength, time and will to continue to supervise the project so "closely" even after my departure. My daughter's departure, Pinky's breach of trust, the financial difficulties – all of this was not easy to deal with. My demanding job in Switzerland and the "Master's in Management of Social Services, which I am completing part-time at the University of Applied Sciences in St. Gallen, are currently keeping me on my toes. Finding the strength to take care of "my baby in South Africa" in the evenings and weekends is often not easy. But then I remember again how important this work is for the young people of Vulamasango. How much we can achieve here with very little. How much success we have had over the years. And how hopeful the children still are, who stream through the gates of Vulamasango every day to escape the violence and neglect in the townships. Then it's worth every hour and every feat of strength and I know what I'm doing all this for. Giving up is simply not an option.

As explained in previous letters, HIV/AIDS is no longer an issue in South Africa. Corruption and economic mismanagement have destroyed the labor market and driven unemployment to staggering heights. With an unemployment rate of 42.9% and youth unemployment of 62.2% among 15-24 year olds, South Africa has one of the highest rates in the world. There is no apprenticeship system, training is not offered enough or is unaffordable. With youth unemployment, crime among young people is increasing and young girls are becoming pregnant at an early age. We see the effects in the environment of the up to 120 young people who come to our project. And since we know from 20 years of experience what a positive impact such an after-school care programme as ours can have on the young people from the townships, we have of course long since recognized the direction that our project must take. Education, training, apprenticeships, youth education – everything that can help young people not to break down because of the consequences of this high youth unemployment, but to find their way in this difficult labour market.

What this means in concrete terms and how we can get there – except, of course, by expanding what already exists: crèche, gardening, carpentry, sewing project, music project, sports project – we will work out during the retreat in January. Until then, we know that the mere fact that the young people are with us every day, instead of being exposed to the dangers of the townships, has an immense impact on the lives of these young people. We continue to enjoy the many positive stories of our alumni who are now studying at universities or are already anchored in the job market and are making their way in life and often still visit or write to us and report on how much the security of the project offered them at the time. The teaching of values, knowledge and social skills, music, nature, sport, and above all being together every day in the same group of young people who have to deal with the same difficulties at home every day – the financial hardship of their parents, alcohol abuse, drugs, violence, crime... And when I then consider how well my two children are doing now here in the kindergarten in Constance, then I know again why I am still so deeply connected to this work and will remain so as long as there are supporters like you who allow us to continue this work in South Africa. The results are recognisable and mostly positive. And the negative things that have to be overcome are exactly the reason why our work there is still so important!

As a ray of hope for the future: our alumnus Sindiswa Ndlovu, who was on the tour as a choreographer in 2024, has agreed to take over the entire choir direction and to carry out the tour next year as planned. Her experiences as a young choir member on the tours of 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2012, her co-direction of the 2024 tour, and of course her diploma in Performing Arts with a major in Musical Theater qualify her well for this task, and we are looking forward to the concerts in the European spring!

And finally, I would like to thank all supporting members who support us with consistent, monthly contributions. Every month, I still record all donations myself in our donation file and know many of your names by heart, even if I usually don't know you personally. But every time I send a big "thank you" in my heart to all the people who have believed in us for so many years and make our often not easy work possible down there. Your contribution counts and is appreciated! And as long as you support us, my work in South Africa will continue.

I wish you a wonderful Advent season and a Merry Christmas, and we are very happy if you think of us as always during the Christmas season!

With warm regards,



Florian Krämer

(Please note that our website is currently being updated to remove the orphanage information and expand on what has been mentioned above)