

## **GENERAL (RTD) JEREMIAH MUTINDA KIANGA**

### **Report #K01**

#### **SURVEY**

General Kianga was the third most frequently mentioned non-clergy Christian leader with maximum impact in our survey and was rated fairly highly on love of others and knowledge of his local context.

#### **ABSTRACT**

Jeremiah Kianga, a married father of four, served over 40 years in the Kenyan Army, rising to the rank of general. After retirement, he went into private business and established a program for destitute children. He does farming mostly and is a board member of various institutions that together with his family he helps to resource. He is currently the Chairman of the Kenya Railways Board.

#### **BACKGROUND**

In most parts of Africa, many consider the institution of the military as indisciplined, inept, corrupt, and self-seeking. Over the years, the Kenyan Army has transformed into one that is characterized by professionalism, service, and discipline. This is the account of one of the people who led that transition, a quest that has put him on the list of the most influential people in Kenya. This is the story of General (Rtd) Jeremiah Mutinda Kianga as explained by the man himself.

##### ***Childhood Home***

General (Rtd) Jeremiah Mutinda Kianga was born on April 26th, 1950 in Nduluku sub-location, Kisau Location, Mbooni District—Makueni in South Eastern Kenya to Mzee Kianga Ngumbau and Martha Kianga. He was born into a polygamous family and had eight siblings from his mother. He grew up doing the normal things any child would do at that time, looking after cattle, working on the farm with his mother, and occasionally with his father who was a businessperson. His father commanded some respect in the locality, as he became the Chairman of the school's board of governors. Often his father was away on business, so the major influence in his life was his mother who stayed at home most of the time. The general describes his mother as "very religious." She ensured that all her children attended Sunday school. On the other hand, his father was very keen on education and ensured that all his children went to school. The general grew up having membership in the Sunday School Choir, School Choir, and Church choir. While trying to conform to what everyone else in the family did, going to school and church, the general considered these activities as having a very powerful influence in his formation and thinking to the point that he asserted, "this influenced my thinking and formed what was later to become my values." Reflecting on his childhood, the general described his father as one who did not permit children to play around; hence, he described his life as "very controlled."

### ***Countries of Residence***

General Kianga has traveled extensively and has lived in the United Kingdom for four years, in the United States of America for a year, and for three months in India.

### ***Current Family***

Kianga is married to Christine. They have four children...one girl and three boys. The general receives a lot of support from his family who helps him to undertake the orphanage project, a farming project, and in his many responsibilities in the community as a board member in various institutions.

### ***Educational Background***

The general (ret'd) started his education at a primary school in Nduluku and then proceeded to Machakos Secondary school until 1970. From Machakos Secondary School, the retired general failed to start his dream career of becoming a lawyer and reluctantly joined the Armed Forces of Kenya in April 1971 as a Cadet Officer. After two years of training in the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, he was commissioned and posted to the 5th Kenya Rifles as a Platoon Commander 1973. Later on in his career, he joined Kansas University and earned a Master's degree in Military Arts and Science.

The general's early and secondary education were sponsored by his father while the military supported his degree and postgraduate studies. He states that he never really encountered financial challenges in the entire course of his education.

### ***Personal Testimony and Calling***

While the general could not point to a time in life when he was not a Christian, his testimony is indicative of one who has grown in the Lord in his military career. The summary of his testimony was vividly captured in his parting words to his colleagues shortly before his retirement. The Nation Media captured the general as saying, "The day has finally reached and I thank God for it. It has been coming for the last 40 years...I am glad I have arrived at this point of my life alive and well." He continued: "Despite the twists and turns, trials and tribulations of a soldier like me, I have arrived this far because of God's blessings."

### ***Influences***

Apart from his parents, the general acknowledged the significant influence of his elder brother on his life. He claims that he learned from his brother the keenness to learn and the desire to help others. He narrated his elder brother's quest for knowledge that made him move to Uganda because of the limited number of Secondary Schools in Kenya at that time and subsequently to the United States of America. The keenness to learn and the desire to help and protect others is the job description of a soldier and the general claims to have learned that from his brother. He accepts that he has seen many people helped and that he is personally involved in helping others because he thinks that is a great thing to do and in his words "I am happiest when I'm helping other people." This attitude he claims he learned from his elder brother, and this has influenced his life greatly in all the things he does.

## **CURRENT MINISTRY**

### ***Work/Ministry***

Jeremiah Kianga is a retired general of the Kenya Armed Forces. He had worked in the military for 42 years, and he is currently the chairman of the board of directors of Kenya Railways, a government-owned corporation.

During his career, the general has served as Directing Staff in Army Staff College in the United Kingdom and Defense Staff College in Kenya. He also served as Defense Advisor in Uganda and Chief of Military Intelligence at Defense Headquarters in Kenya. In 1999, as Major General, Kianga was appointed General Officer, Commanding (Eastern Command); then became Deputy Army Commander and after that served as Assistant Chief of General Staff in charge of Personnel and Logistics. In March 2003, he was promoted to Lieutenant General and then appointed Commander of the Kenyan Army. He was subsequently promoted to full General and appointed Chief of General Staff. In recognition of his outstanding service to the nation, and in recognition of his service of diligence, commitment, and dedication, the general was awarded the Elder of the Order of the Golden Heart of Kenya (EDH).

In retrospect, the retired general indicated that what motivated him most in service of the army was the desire to see the Kenyan army always in the first position in everything. He said “Soldiers in Kenya must never come second...it’s like accepting defeat...it should never happen.” To keep the Kenyan army first, the general acknowledged that the leadership must be committed to that cause and must create the environment for that to happen. He had a clear vision of what the military will look like at the time of his exit from the force, and he dedicated himself selflessly to attain that vision. Consequently, he instilled professionalism in the army. He transformed the army into a dedicated, committed and disciplined force that puts Kenya first in all things amidst the challenges that abounded. Perhaps it is his dedicated service in the army and to the people of Kenya that placed him on the list of most influential people in Kenya.

### ***Mission/Vision***

But that was then; now the general (retd) is in private business and does dairy farming at home. As a retired person, the general is now foremost inward looking into supporting his family to be independent and then outward looking to ensure that other people also succeed and become independent. Though not succinctly articulated, the general sees himself as an elderly statesman trying to help on critical issues relating to the community. He has set out to transform his community through agriculture and education.

### ***Organization***

The retired general is involved in many things. He does not have what can typically pass as an organization. He is more of a philanthropist. He has a farm, supports orphans, and serves on the boards of many schools. He works as chairman of the Board of Directors for Kenya Railways.

### ***Impact/Success/Assessment***

Foremost, through his farming, the general is providing “a place for educating the farmers around to adopt better ways of farming.” He is not only producing his own food, but he is also helping others to learn better ways of doing farming. The general believes that if people learn

new and improved methods of farming, they will be able to increase their farm yields and have enough food to feed themselves and their families. This is one way he is empowering more than 100 families in his community towards food security.

Second, the general in view of his social responsibility is helping orphans to live decently. He indicates that he spends most of his time working on the project for the orphans. He has not provided a permanent home for them yet, but his model involves helping the guardians of the children to do “things in a business manner like raising chickens, goats, and dairy cattle that we donate to them.” He has embedded over 300 orphans into guardian homes and is providing support for the guardians. Also, the general and his family teach the members of the guardian homes some basic business practices. The general’s model of intervening in the lives of the less fortunate ones in society goes way beyond providing sustenance; he ensures that the children get good education until they complete secondary school and continue to ensure that they enroll in college or in a polytechnic. When the children finish tertiary education, the general settles them in their own farming related business in which he starts them off with farm animals. The general and his family do not only educate the orphans but after their school, they provide to them the “seeds” to prosperity.

Still on his social responsibility, the general is involved in development in the education sector. He is a patron of three schools that he has helped in diverse ways. Through his efforts, the schools have acquired science laboratories, boreholes, computer labs and water storage tanks.

### ***Training/Leadership Development***

Commenting on his personal influence on other people, the general remarked that his intention has never been to replicate himself. In his profession, he trains people to fit into ranks. Nevertheless, even in that situation, his influence on people has been to the extent that he trains them to do the right thing and to be upright even as he has grown to be. Without naming any particular person, the general remarks that he is having significant impact on the orphans he has dedicated his life to serve. He works with them to put them into productive careers through his own hard work, dedication, and sacrifice. He believes he is having an impact on each of those 300 hundred children he is taking care of.

### ***Professional Relationships***

The profession of the general gave him a little freedom to have membership in fraternities. He did not consider himself to belong to any organization other than the military. He describes his relationship with other military persons as good. He acknowledges that he belongs to a golf club and a Church congregation where he attended Bible Study. Though not belonging to any fraternity, the general acknowledges his ability to mobilize people and institutions for a just cause.

### ***Partnerships/Links***

The general disclosed that he has been seeking partners in the project, and he was able to get the partnership of American Peace Corp to help the community in running and developing it. With the Americans onboard, the general describes his responsibilities to the project as advisory and providing leadership, which ensures that things are “going the right way.”

The general also, partners with another American organization, called Baraka. He says that at the start-up of the orphanage program, this group donated some chickens and some money, which was a matching grant. He raised funds locally to match the grant that was provided, and hence he was able to establish the chicken project. He describes the project as well managed and a successful model for many to emulate.

Quite recently, the project also received another partner, Heifer International. Heifer International has shown a keen interest in helping the project regarding the provision of resources.

The general is keen only in making funding partnerships as he is very protective of his initiatives from derailing.

### ***SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats***

On a personal note, the general cannot comment on his own strengths believing that other people should do that. He, however, believes that his ability to work hard as his father taught him, and the ability to “sit down and plan well” the things that he wants to do and once he gets to do them, he “gets very serious about them” had paid off for him. He believes he cultivated these competencies in the military.

The general identifies underdevelopment and the backward mindset of people he is working with as the greatest challenge to his ministry. People have been socialized to think in one way and to get them to think otherwise especially in terms of development is difficult. This the general identifies as his greatest challenge. However, he believes that one's approach can exacerbate this challenge. The general observes that one cannot change this mindset by coercion or confrontation but by understanding and encouraging. He says “because local people might not think alike this does not mean they are stupid, or they don’t want to see things done and move forward. If you want to help them, you’ve got to go down there and come up with them and understand their position by encouraging them.”

### ***Reading and Writing***

The general’s interest in reading is mainly in biographies though he reports that he has read many books from diverse writers. Talking about reading biographies, the general remarks that people’s memoirs are very interesting and that they teach lessons on how significant people in the world have made it. His favorite authors are Chinua Achebe and Africa leaders like Julius Nyerere and Nelson Mandela.

Though an avid reader, the general has never written a book. He again attributed this to his career in which most of what he knows is classified material and he cannot put that into books. He further recognized the Security Act as a hindrance for him to publish. He also believed that as just retiring from the military, there are many things he has that he is not proud enough to write about. Also, all throughout his life, he has not kept a journal or a diary from which he can recollect his life experiences and form them into a book. His life has been one thing after the other. He describes it as “I just get something done, and then I look at the other issues that need to be tackled. I never thought of writing and keeping of any records. So if I write, I will only be

writing stories because I don't have the records." He confides that a lot of people have approached him to write his memoirs, but he has not consented, and he is still thinking about it.

### ***Electronic Media***

The general finds the internet a very convenient way to communicate and to do research. He confesses to transacting very serious business over the phone, which he calls "modern technology." With the phone and computer, the general states that he can work anywhere. He is even contemplating building a community development center where they would have enough ICT for people to go to and learn. Specifically, he believes that ICT provides research information from various sectors of the public, like the agricultural shows in Nairobi, and makes such information available to the people in the village.

### ***Finances and Other Resources***

He solicits funds for the development of the schools, for the chicken and orphanage project. He discloses that he has done personal fundraising through harambees for schools. He is also keen on ensuring that part of the Community Development Fund meant for his area goes toward the improvement of education in the area. He has also worked with organizations like Safaricom (they funded the building of a science lab and equipped it; they also provided water storage tanks); Kenya Commercial Bank (provided computers for schools); Barclays Bank (built a computer lab and equipped it).

Working with these diverse partners, the general revealed that the only restriction he has on them is to ensure that the project remains focused, and it remains "our program." The general continues to say, "We just have an understanding that they will fund us to achieve our objectives." The general asserts that they do not question or take into consideration the credentials of the partners since their role in the projects is very limited to funding with no further stake. The general actively continues to solicit help from other non-governmental organizations to come to the aid of orphans.

The general remarked that he does fundraising on three platforms. Within the local community of influence, he solicits funds for his chicken initiative. In regards to the schools, he solicits funds on a national platform because of the volume of resources required and for the orphanage; he solicits funds and other help internationally. Success in the development of funds is integrity and efficient use of the resources that one already has revealed the general.

Apart from his prowess and exemplary output in the ministry, his involvement with these schools and community provides a broader platform of influence in the community.

### ***Political Arena***

While the general is not opposed to Christians going into politics, he acknowledges that Kenyan politics is very difficult, immoral, and corrupt—fit only for the strong who cannot easily get lost "because the pressure is too many." The responsibility of Christians in politics is to "clean it up." He cited a good Christian friend who went into politics. His position is that he welcomes Christians who go into politics if the need is to serve God and the community.

### ***Future***

In talking about his outlook for the nation, the general acknowledged the challenges the nation of Kenya has gone through and hoped that Kenyans have learned a very painful lesson (in reference to the postelection violence). He believes it is only when Kenyans become united that they will preserve and protect the integrity of the nation. He further believes that each leader has the responsibility to lead their people to protect and preserve Kenya because by so doing the nation will prosper.

### ***Report Preparation Information***

Interview was done by Dinah Nyamia on October 6 at 10:30 am.

Person interviewed was General (Rtd) Jeremiah Mutinda Kianga in the presence of wife

Time interviewee was available is 45-60 minutes

Report was prepared by John Jusu

Other sources consulted

<http://usacac.army.mil/>

<http://africadefensejournal.wordpress.com/>

