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Newsletter 117.

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Dear Friends,

Greetings to you all from Parakou town, in the north of Bénin Republic. Five months have passed since I wrote a newsletter. Five months that have been full of uncertainty for all mankind.

Here in Bénin the official figures for Co-Vid 19 put the number of deaths from the epidemic at 41. If true that means that you in UK are over a thousand times worse off (with around 45,000 deaths). I do not know anyone who has been infected out here. It is hard to understand why this might be. But nonetheless we are grateful for it. The francophone countries surrounding Bénin are similarly spared although Nigeria, to the east of Bénin, has had many more cases and deaths. Worst of all in South Africa there has been much disease and death.

When I go out in the car I wear a face mask as the police sometimes stop cars to check if masks are being worn. Whereas pedestrians are seldom seen to be protected. In the crowded markets where I buy meat and vegetables almost nobody wears a mask. Despite that no-one is getting sick. Why should that be?

I continue to be prevented from working as a doctor. Bethesda seems unable, or unwilling, to obtain my medical registration. Neither is there any news of the request for nationality. Someone even told me that he had been warned not to continue asking about it.

It is plain that I am up against forces that are determined that I should no longer practice medicine in Bénin. Nor should I be granted nationality. But, for reasons that are unclear, I am not to be given any reason for the situation. Nor am I to be given a straight 'No'. Just a tight-lipped silence.

You can draw your own conclusions.

All I will say is that my 'case' has many factors that if I were to tell you would startle and astonish.

Nothing in this country is straightforward. Nothing at all. Everyone and everything has its own agenda. Not a thing is what it seems on the surface.

So why not return to England? I admit that this crosses my mind very often. That too isn't an easy decision to take. I own property here. My house and other pieces of land and property.

Were I to put it all on the market and were I to be given a fair price (very doubtful) there would be the difficulty of transferring the proceeds back to the UK.

I would arrive back in England to be faced with an increasingly grim situation with the Co-Vid epidemic that is showing no sign of abating. No vaccine will be available for at least nine months (for general distribution) and at present there is no evidence that any immunity (from vaccination) would be long-lasting.

I would have to self isolate for a couple of weeks. Then have no activity, being 'of a certain age'. At least here I have my garden and all the possessions that I have accumulated over the past 35 years overseas. And the weather is usually warm. I can go into my garden and pick an orange or a grapefruit or a papaya or a mango and eat it. And benefit from the chapel.

For the past year my main activity has been writing. I have completed the equivalent of four average sized books/novels. Breaking into the world of publishing is proving as easy as obtaining medical registration here in Bénin.

Of course I get despondent. Who wouldn't?

I am grateful for those of you who keep in contact and for those who pray. Thank you.

And the eye clinics? Both the Bethesda eye clinic and the former CBM eye hospital continue to serve those who come to them. So my presence isn't essential at all.

The internet connection available here in Parakou is much better than it was a couple of years ago. But the connection is not stable enough for Zoom or Skype with any reliability. YouTube is much improved so I can benefit from many films, documentaries and so on when I get tired of reading or writing (or running or picking fruit or moping).

I'm pleased to say that my running keeps me fit and is an excellent remedy for stress.

I hope that this letter doesn't sound too grim. But better that you know the reality that (some) ex-pats live under in tropical Africa.

Oh shut up, Andrew. Look around you.

Many, many out here have lives that are full of true misery, illness, poverty, blocked ambitions and unfulfilled potential. So it ill behoves me to complain.

Forget all the above! I must count my blessings instead. And I do.

Andrew POTTER.

