

## Reflections on Pius Njawe

It is with a profound sense of sorrow and loss that I learned of the untimely death of Pius Njawe, my friend and colleague in the battle against road crashes. Pius was an extraordinary individual, a man of great personal courage and intense determination. A highly respected and well-known journalist, Pius dedicated his life to battling all forms of injustice. He believed road crash deaths and injuries to be a particularly cruel and preventable form of injustice and advocated passionately to improve road safety.

In September of 2002, Pius' beloved wife, who was 42 years old, died following a road crash at Omog II Village on the Doula-Yaounde Highway, in their native Cameroon. Jane left behind five young children. In response to her death, Pius founded JANE AND JUSTICE, an NGO dedicated to reducing road carnage. When he learned via the internet, that I had formed ASIRT, the Association for Safe International Road Travel, following the death of my twenty-five year old son, Aron, along with 22 other passengers in a road crash in Turkey, Pius communicated a strong desire to meet with me to discuss possible avenues of collaboration.

Upon discovering that Pius was in the Washington, DC area, on a short trip, in the spring of 2006, I invited him to my home, where our first meeting took place. Pius not only outlined his many road safety activities and initiatives, but also graciously agreed to be interviewed for the book, *FACES BEHIND THE FIGURES, VOICES OF ROAD TRAFFIC CRASH VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES*, which ASIRT was then writing in collaboration with the World Health Organization.

To this day, I can picture Pius, seated at my kitchen table, tears in his eyes as he described the speeding public transport vehicle which was overtaking a construction truck on a narrow road with a sharp curve, when it hit the car in which his wife was traveling. I remember Pius' outrage as he spoke of the poorly equipped hospital to which Jane was taken, where for five hours she pleaded in vain with the medical staff for treatment, saying, "Please I am losing so much blood." Pius' anger was palpable as he related that following Jane's death, a doctor on staff turned to him saying, "If I had only known it was your wife, I would have taken care of her sooner." Pius told us of his futile attempts to console his inconsolable children. He portrayed Jane as brave, a source of strength and encouragement, a mother to all of the children in the neighborhood, a true hero whose loss was felt not only by his own family, but by the entire community.

Pius informed us that since its inception, JANE AND JUSTICE has worked tirelessly to improve road safety in Cameroon by raising public awareness through demonstrations, marches and rallies. It has campaigned against excessive speeding, illegal purchasing of drivers licenses, lack of drivers' training, drink driving, distracted and fatigued drivers. It has gathered together government and civil society stakeholders, encouraging them to take informed action to decrease the escalating road crash toll. It has provided a platform for testimonies of victims and family members of victims. It has demanded improved safety of public transport and has called upon bendskin (commercial motor cycles) drivers and riders to exercise greater prudence. It has decried the narrow, potholed,

dangerously neglected roads and demanded that monies collected at tolls be allocated for road maintenance.

Those of us who attended the GLOBAL MEETING OF NGOS ADVOCATING FOR ROAD SAFETY, in Brussels, Belgium in May of 2009 will not forget Pius' passion, wisdom, dignity and personal warmth. These qualities were so clearly in evidence each time he rose to offer recommendations, provide guidance, share insights and propose actions whereby NGOs could further harness their energies and expertise to prevent others from experiencing the devastation that so many of those gathered at that conference endure.

How ironic it is that on July 12, 2010, Pius' own life was cut short by a road crash, when the vehicle in which he was riding was rear-ended by a tractor-trailer. How even more ironic it is that his death should have taken place in the United States, proving what we have always known, that road crashes are indiscriminate killers with no regard for borders, and that what we do or do not do on any given segment of road has the power to affect people the world over.

Another precious voice has been forever silenced by a road crash. Once again, our hearts have been shattered and our resolve has been strengthened. We must speak for that voice. To do so is our mission, our responsibility and our honor.

To you, our dear friend Pius, we pledge our impatience, our relentlessness and our fierce determination. We will not rest until the world in which we live is a world without road crash deaths. It is indeed a matter of justice.

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August 11, 2010