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## **A mission shared across the sea**

Since 2015, the year I met Domitila Ayot, we have developed a way of working that is hard to explain. Our ages, races, languages, opportunities and histories are very different. However, we share the same vocation of service for these women and their children.

10/13/2024

Over the years, I have witnessed how Domitila has been the voice for the

unborn, becoming a true pro-life activist in the Kibera community. She has been invited to spread the word on numerous stages, events and conferences. She is simple, peaceful, humble, yet powerful in conveying her testimony of how real accompaniment can change the lives of these African women.

Maisha is a Chilean foundation that seeks to be an accompanying platform for pregnant women, mothers and young people in vulnerable contexts. Maisha's training has been no easy task. The logistics of setting up an organisation abroad, with scarce resources and so much need, has been one of the biggest challenges. I think that, without God's grace, this would have been impossible to achieve. Our Lady has been very generous to us, responding to our countless requests, whether it be to find a house for the women, donors to fund the projects,

or volunteers willing to work on another continent for no other reward than the joy of being able to help this community.

During my time in Nairobi, I fondly remember the Masses at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. I prayed insistently to Mary not to leave us alone in this task which to human eyes seemed impossible to carry out at the age of 23. And so it was, she never left us alone. She was always there when we needed her, guiding us, opening doors to move the foundation forward and putting in our way the people who have made this work possible.

How can we not be moved by these women? Perhaps Our Lady empathised with the fear and uncertainty of receiving the surprise news of a pregnancy, as many of the women welcomed by this project have experienced. And it is through

the "no fear", the welcome and the affection given, that the stories of these women have become a "yes". A hopeful "yes" to motherhood that transforms the story of each one for a greater good: the arrival of a new life.

On many occasions, Domitila and I have discussed that the foundation is not only a professional work for us, but also an apostolic work, something she is very clear about. She is concerned about raising resources not only to meet the basic needs of the shelter, but also to finance the transport of the mothers to Mass on Sundays, to organise the baptisms of the newborns or to give catechesis to some of them. We have understood that, although the material need is obvious, the spiritual need can never be left aside. Domitila is a woman who has deeply understood the meaning of doing apostolate and who never misses an

opportunity to speak about God to anyone who crosses her path. What a gift to have the ability to transmit the faith in such a simple but clear way, to see opportunities to bring people closer to God in circumstances that one would never imagine. Domitila has inspired many women who have already been helped to want to replicate this accompaniment to other women. Beyond the overall impact that has been achieved with each programme, what has marked us most are the personal testimonies of the mothers who have passed through the centre. I share some of them: "Despite all the struggle and stress, God has not abandoned me. My delivery went well last night. Thank you for your advice Domitila, you were like a mother to me. May God bless you abundantly."

"My special thanks to the volunteers, the mothers and Domitila for their advice, guidance and support

throughout the year. Without them I would not be who I am today. For all you have done for me, may God bless the work of your hands. The best feeling in the world is knowing that you have finally taken a step in the right direction. A step into the future where everything you never thought was possible, is possible." MM

"I take this opportunity to thank God for how far He has brought us. I sincerely want to express my gratitude for the extremely generous support and assistance you have offered me and my family. To all the volunteers, you have shown me great love, care and concern. From the day I became part of the Maisha family, I have felt very welcome. I cannot thank you enough. They mean so much to me. To my mzungus (European/American) matrons, who came just when I needed them most. Atarah and I owe them one. Now that I am leaving, I see a lot of difference

in me from the day I came here, I came as Grace and now I am leaving as Mama Atarah. I have acquired many skills, for example, sewing and the best of all is that I can prepare my favourite Chilean food for my family (Charquicán). It is very sad to leave, but at the same time I am happy to be back home. It has been a while. I am happy to have them as part of my life. I will never forget your support and kindness. I give you my deepest THANK YOU."

"I wish for my baby to become a great person in the future. I wish for her to finish the dreams that I may not have achieved. I wish that our family will be reunited and we will live together in peace and love. I really admire the founder of the Maisha Foundation, Domitila Ayot. She has really helped many girls living in slums by giving them the opportunity to see the goodness and value in them. One day I want to be

like her. I really want to achieve all my dreams despite all the challenges around me. I believe in myself. I want to work hard to achieve them, it will not only be beneficial for me but also for my family and many other people I will help in the future". VO

"They made me feel at home. Everyone was very loving and caring. Maisha's volunteers took very good care of us. Not forgetting Domitila, she was the best mother, mentor, role model and grandmother. They made me feel loved, cared for and protected. I love them and will miss them very much. MO

We will never cease to be amazed at how accompaniment can make such a difference. With Our Lady's help we will continue to welcome every mother who knocks on our door asking for help.

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