

Kulanu, Inc.

**Supporting Isolated and Emerging Jewish Communities
around the World**



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Kulanu Proposal for Harare Lemba Synagogue and Guest House

Project Title: Harare Lemba Synagogue and Guest House
Total Project Budget: \$25,000 start-up funds, \$35,000 per year operating funds



House rented in central Harare, Zimbabwe by Lemba community with support from Kulanu, Inc. The large house is on 1.5 acres of land. To be used as residence for community leaders, guest house for visiting teachers, volunteers, and travelers, space for Shabbat and holidays services, study center, community center.

Organizational background

Kulanu is the Hebrew word for “all of us.” Kulanu, Inc. was founded in 1994 to reach out to groups embracing Judaism in faraway places and to help bring them into the “all of us” that is the worldwide Jewish community. Kulanu supports isolated and emerging Jewish communities in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and the United States. We help them by raising funds for Jewish education and community projects that will strengthen their infrastructure, increase their Jewish knowledge and practice and foster networking with other Jewish communities across borders and continents. We accomplish our goals through our website, our semi-annual magazine KulanuNews, email lists, Facebook, Twitter and Kulanu blog and by arranging visits to the communities by Jewish educators and other volunteers who can assist community members to deepen their connection to Jewish life. Kulanu does all of this with two part-time staff members and a network of board members, regional coordinators, supporters, and volunteers. Our connections help all of us enrich our Jewish lives. To learn more about our work and view a slideshow, go to <http://www.kulanu.org/about-kulanu>.

Harare Lemba Synagogue and Guest House

Brief description of project: We are asking you to partner in our most important undertaking in our organizational history, that of inaugurating the ingathering of the Lemba Jews of Zimbabwe. This recently discovered major group of lost Jews is exciting and important. They were cut off from mainstream Judaism for over 1,000 years and have maintained their Jewish practices and customs throughout their exile in Africa, orally and in secret. Lemba oral history teaches that the Lemba are descendants from long ago Jewish traders from Yemen who migrated to Africa. Most significantly, genetic research at the University of London has identified the “Cohen” priestly gene among the Lemba in the same proportion as Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews around the world, a gene virtually non-existent among non-Jews. The Lemba Jews observe the laws of Kashrut, ritual slaughter, the Sabbath, Rosh Chodesh, Rosh HaShana (Shofar), and Pesach (Lamb), circumcision, and family purity. Their religious way of life is now at serious risk, as the educated young leave their historical villages in rural Zimbabwe and migrate to the city in search of employment opportunities and an urban life style. They are missionized by multiple Christian organizations, Jews for Jesus and Islam. We may have already lost the Lemba Jews of Mozambique and South Africa.

To counter this geographic isolation from families and religious elders, a young Lemba leader, Modreck Maeresera, is heading up the development of the first synagogue and community center for Lemba Jews residing in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe.

What are the goals of this project? Modreck, with the assistance of Kulanu, rented a large house this last June in central Harare to be used as the synagogue, school and guest house. The building and grounds will house the synagogue, a cyber and religious education center, library, guest rooms with kitchen, chicken coops, and community garden. Since opening three months ago, the Harare Lemba Synagogue offers Sabbath services every week on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. On average 20-30 people attend the services with anticipation for

substantial growth over the next three years. The synagogue is beginning to evolve into a center for families and individuals to stay throughout Shabbat for discussions on the weekly Torah portion, Jewish learning opportunities, and socializing. Its presence has ignited the excitement of Lemba young people throughout the city.

What are the specific activities that this grant will support? The preservation of Jewish life and practice among young Lemba in Harare is the expressed goal of Lemba leaders, who are spearheading this endeavor. But they cannot do it by themselves. Kulanu has agreed to partner with the Lemba to preserve and strengthen their traditions and observance both in the villages and in the city... to foster Jewish learning and help educate all generations in their Jewish heritage. Kulanu has agreed to provide funding for operating and start up costs. We hope over time Modreck and Harare Lemba Synagogue will raise funds from entrepreneurial endeavors and membership dues to maintain the upkeep of the guest house, synagogue and grounds.

Detailed Budget

Available on request (still being finalized).



Shabbat Service led by Rabson Wuriga (standing), Modreck Maeresera (seated, left), and William Mhuka (seated, center).