

**CHILDREN
FIRST
ORGANISATION**



**CHILDREN FIRST ORGANIZATION
Non-profit Organization**



Esaie Joseph MUANDA

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National Children's Advocacy Center

INTRODUCTION

“Nobody is allowed to harm you.” This human rights’ booklet reminds me that life is precious. That is why I don’t need anyone to harm me, and I am not allowed to harm anybody.

Unfortunately, today’s world is full of oppressors that are operating with lack of remorse towards their victims.

Some years back, especially in Africa. Ladies and children were the most vulnerable due to lack of resources, but nowadays, and because of numerous women organizations and gender movements, a woman is no longer considered as a second and lower nature; but children are still marginalized.

This Conference has been a good opportunity for my organization to be the voice of the voiceless; therefore I am not only representing my Organization or my Country of Origin, which is the Democratic Republic of Congo; but the Children of the Whole Africa, and especially those from the Sub-Saharan countries.

LIST OF CONFLICTS IN AFRICA

Burundi	1972 Burundi genocide 1993 – 2005 Burundi Civil War
Rwanda	1990 – 1994 Rwandan Civil War April 7, 1994 – July 15, 1994 Rwandan genocide
Kenya	1980 Garissa Massacre 2005 Turbi Village Massacre
South Sudan	1955 – 1972 First Sudanese Civil War 1983 – 2005 Second Sudanese Civil War 2011 – ongoing Ethnic violence in South Sudan (2011–present) 2013 – 2020 South Sudanese Civil War
Tanzania	1978 – 1979 Uganda–Tanzania War
Uganda	1996 – 2002 UNRF II insurgency
Cameroon	2009 – present Boko Haram insurgency 8 September 2020 – present Operation Bamenda Clean
Central African Republic	2004 – 2007 Central African Republic Bush War 2012 – present Central African Republic Civil War (2012–present)
Chad	Fact (the Front for Change and Concord in Chad) 2005 – 2010 War in Chad
Congo (Republic of)	1993 – 1994 Republic of the Congo Civil War 1&2(1993–1997) 2016 – 2017 Pool War
Congo (Democratic Republic of)	October 1996 – May 1997 Massacres of Hutus during the First Congo War 1998 – 2003 Second Congo War 4 April 2012 – 7 November 2013 M23 rebellion 2016 – 2019 Kamwina Nsapu rebellion 2024 till now: M23/ AFC rebellion
Ethiopia	1963 – 1970 Bale revolt 1974 – 1991 Ethiopian Civil War 1994 – present Ethnic violence in Konso , Ethnic violence against Amaro Koore 1998 – 2000 Eritrean–Ethiopian War
Somalia	2023 – present Different Battles and Las Anod conflict (2023–present)
South Africa	Apartheid

GENERAL VIEW

Today we discuss “Abused Children Victims of Tribal Conflicts in Africa”

My presentation will be based on Africa.

Africa is the second largest continent in the world after Asia.

Some African Countries are well-known such as, the Republic of South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, ,... However, the main focus of my presentation will be in the central part of Africa, namely the Democratic Republic of the Congo. sharing its border with nine neighborhood countries: Burundi, Angola, Rwanda, etc...

Today's presentation is based on my lifestyle experience in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia. My organization called Children First Organization, is present and active in D.R.C. and Zambia.

According to UNDP “The median age in Africa is 18.8, while the worldwide median age is 30.5.” Therefore, to talk about Children and the youth in Africa is really a privilege, because these numbers are telling us the future of Children and youth in Africa are in an enormous danger. The children First Organization objectives are to assure that the children always come first. Children are the future of tomorrow; the motto of my organization is “Save children save the future.”

African children are in danger. As reported by UNDP “More than 80% of war victims are women and children.” in DRC children involved in conflicts are left orphaned, homeless, some are even killed, raped, and other forced to joined rebel groups and are made fighters.

On 28 December, 2018, UNICEF recognized that the world has failed to protect children in conflicts:

“Children living in countries at war have come under direct attack, have been used as human shields, killed, maimed or recruited to fight. Rape, forced marriage and abduction have become standard tactics in conflicts from Syria to Yemen, and from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Nigeria, South Sudan and Myanmar.”¹

¹ UNICEF, December 28, 2018.

VICTIMS OF TRIBAL CONFLICTS

According to UNICEF, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, inter- ethnic violence and clashes between security forces and armed groups/militia in the Great Kasai-region and in the eastern provinces of Tanganyika, South Kivu, Nord Kivu and Ituri have had a devastating impact on children.

The response to the ongoing Ebola outbreak has been seriously hindered by violence and instability in eastern DRC. In addition, an estimated 4.2 million children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition (SAM).

The situation is compounded by violations of children's rights, including forced recruitment by armed groups and sexual abuse”².

Therefore, the purpose of my presentation is not to explain different types of abuse, such as Neglect, Physical violence, Sexual abuse, Emotional abuse, Physical punishment, Exposure to domestic and family violence³. My presentation is based on personal experience and is about three aspects or consequences of child abuse in Africa:

- Child-Soldiers and DDR program.
- Massive children kidnapping and killing.
- Children born of raped mothers and forced marriages.

1. Child-Soldiers and DDR program

The UN, in its role of peace building and sustaining peace launched in the Democratic Republic of Congo Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration program (DDR program), so that people but mostly the children that were forced to join the army or the rebel groups can lay down their weapons and reintegrate the civilian society.

In D.R. Congo, the child soldiers are called Kadogo. "Kadogo" is derived from Swahili. It means "small beautiful one"⁴. It is referring to the East Congolese children who join rebellions and armed troops. The UN implemented Integrated DDR.

Integrated DDR processes are made up of various combinations of DDR programs; DDR-related tools; Reintegration support, including when complimenting DDR-related

² UNICEF, December 28, 2018.

³ LORRAINE RADFORD AND OTHERS, *Child Abuse and Neglect in UK today*, August 2011, p.22.

⁴ "Rainbows for the city". *Detroit Metro Times*. Retrieved 30 April 2019

tools⁵. Because children must be supported to demobilize and reintegrate into families and communities at all times, irrespective of the status of peace negotiations and/or the development of DDR programs and DDR-related tools⁶.

Five categories of people that should be taken into consideration in Integrated DDR processes as participants or beneficiaries, depending on the context:

- members of armed forces and groups who served in combat and/or support roles (those in support roles are often referred to as being associated with armed forces and groups).
- abductees or victims.
- dependents/families.
- civilian returnees or ‘self-demobilized’.
- community members.

The Children First Organization is supporting the DDR program through Counseling, schooling and food assistance, especially to the victims of the Kamuina Nsapu crisis.

Kamuina Nsapu crisis (roughly 2016-2019) if this multi-faceted rebellion instigated by Kamuina Nsapu militia against state institutions worsened the already fragile socio-economic situation in the Province of Kasai Central. Made up of several different factions fighting for various purposes, the militia bands were brutal in their methods to further their causes.

Their efforts were characterized by attacks against pro-government entities and caused the death of an estimated 5,000 people; and displaced more than a million. Schools, Health Centers, churches and homes were plundered and demolished. Entire villages were destroyed. There were tribally motivated atrocities committed, and the kidnapping of children and civilians forced into labour and fighting. During these dark times, no school, church services, or community gatherings existed. The region was in fear, mutual distrust and famine. People were divided, and many families were fragmented, traumatized by the viciousness and brutality they witnessed and lived in⁷.

Out of trauma and mutual distrust, the Kamuina Nsapu crisis caused malnutrition. Therefore, our response was not only about the feeding program, but also we tried to bring divided people together and to restore hope, peace and mutual trust among them.

⁵ The UN Approach to DDR, 19 November 2019, p.2.

⁶ The UN Approach to DDR, 19 November 2019, p.10.

⁷ Esaie BUYUNGI, « Facing Trauma and Challenges », in *Missionhurst Magazine*, Volume 74, Number 2, 2022, p.9.

As mentioned above, Children First Organization is supporting the DDR program through counseling, schooling and food assistance, especially to the victims of the Kamuina Nsapu crisis, through our own resources and the contribution of our members.

2. Massive children kidnapping and killing

On March 28, Washington State made a public safety Alert about a missing child in Everett, namely Ariel Garcia, 4. As soon as I received that message, I thought of thousands of children missing in Congo every year due to tribal conflict.

In Africa, the most popular children kidnapping is the one of Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram on the night of April 14-15, 2014, in Nigeria. 276 female students aged 16 to 18 were kidnapped by Boko Haram group. As for now 57 escaped, some were killed and over 90 are missing.

According to Amnesty International, Nine years after Boko Haram abducted 276 students from a Girls' School in Chibok, 98 Chibok school girls abducted by Boko Haram remain in captivity and More than 61 children are still being held in captivity⁸.

In order to protect our children and their future, my Organization has created School of Jesus, in Zambia, and kindergarten, elementary and vocational schools in D.R. Congo.

The School of Jesus is a training program made of a compilation of many basic lessons on Christian life for children of different ages to face the prominence of child abuse, trafficking, high dropout rates, child-soldiers and child labour, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, STD-AIDS, and more facing our youth⁹.

In D.R. Congo, my Organization created Kindergarten schools. We believe that a solid early education prepares our children for success and therefore we would like to provide our children with these life changing opportunities, by creating a proper structure for basic studies, playing, singing, practical activities such as drawing, and social interaction.

We are supporting elementary schools and high schools. We also created a girls' tailoring school. The school fosters the maturity of young ladies in order to stop early

⁸ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Nigeria: Nine years after Chibok girls' abducted, authorities failing to protect children*, April 14, 2023

⁹ Esaie BUYUNGI, « Growing pains », *Missionhurst Magazine*, 2013, p.6.

marriage, early pregnancy and gender discrimination. We do not have any support from outside.

3. Children born of raped mothers and forced marriages

In 2016, Human Right Watch announced that Sudanese military forces and militia have used rape as a weapon of war in Darfur and other conflicts¹⁰. Therefore women in general have become a weapon of war, and she is discriminated against.

The prevalence of sexual violence reflects wider discrimination against women and girls across Sudan. The security forces have targeted women in crackdowns on protesters and for political arrests. And under the public order laws, women and girls can be prosecuted for “crimes” such as wearing trousers or exposing their hair and flogged, in violation of African and international prohibitions on torture and other ill-treatment. The crime of adultery, punishable by flogging, fines, and death by stoning, is also used discriminatorily against women. Women human rights defenders have also been targeted for harassment, arrest, and abuse by the authorities¹¹.

According to Carly Brown, It is not only about Sudan, in many nations in Africa Sub-Saharan, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, rape is a weapon of war.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is accurately referred to as “the rape capital of the world”. John Holmes, the under secretary general for humanitarian affairs for the United Nations has been reported saying, “the sexual violence in Congo is the worst in the world: The sheer numbers, the wholesale brutality, the culture of impunity. It’s appalling”. With more than five million dead, tens of thousands of women raped all within the past decade, doctors and activists have called it an “epidemic.” This large-scale magnitude of sexual violence has potentially made eastern Congo the worst place on earth to be a woman.¹²

If in England, children conceived through rape are officially classified as victims of crime, in my country they are considered as bad luck bearers. That was the Concern of Dr Mukwege, 2018 Nobel Peace Prize, called “a man who mends women”.

Dr. Denis Mukwege has been a fearless champion for the rights of women caught up in armed conflict, who have suffered rape, exploitation and other horrific abuses,” Said

¹⁰ HUMAN RIGHT WATCH, World Report 2016

¹¹ HUMAN RIGHT WATCH, World Report 2016

¹² Carly Brown, BSc, “Rape as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo”, in *Torture*, Volume 22, Number 1, 2012

UN Secretary-General António Guterres. He was supporting children born of raped mothers as well.

A part from war and tribal conflict, rape is also caused by poverty and tribalism. Rape, early marriages and forced marriages have become so embarrassing for my Organization.

The most recent abuse, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, was related to the Pastor Pierre Kas Kasambakana (68) and the Artist JB Mpiana, both originally from the Great Kasai Region.

On January 8, 2024, a video showing Pastor Kasambakana celebrating his 12th wedding with an alleged minor Meda Mabiala in Moanda, Kongo Central province, went viral on social media. This image shocked public opinion and was quickly shared massively. This is a case of forced marriage, since the young girl was allegedly forced to marry the pastor despite her young age. Additionally, accusations of rape should be brought against Pastor Kasambakana.

Following the broadcast of this video, numerous women's movements mobilized to denounce this affair. They demanded that legal proceedings be initiated against Pastor Kasambakana and called for collective awareness on the issues linked to forced marriages and sexual assault. This case is unfortunately not an isolated case for Pastor Pierre Kasambakana¹³. But he will never be indicted.

About JB Mpiana (56), one of his dancers, namely Brunette Mwana Nsukka has claimed that she was impregnated by JB Mpiana at the age of 14. She gave birth at the age of 15 and she has been denied access to the baby for the last 4 years. But JB Mpiana will never be indicted¹⁴.

The Democratic Republic of Congo, with its impunity system, remains epicenter of child suffering in war, as country tops world list of grave violations against children¹⁵.

¹³ www.fatshimetrie.org/ 4 January 2024

¹⁴ www.congovibes.com/index.php?topic=24439.15

¹⁵ SAVE THE CHILDREN, "DRC remains epicenter of child suffering in war as country tops world list of grave violations against children", in www.reliefweb.int, **27 June 2023**

CONCLUSION

According to Save the Children, the Democratic Republic of Congo had the highest number of grave violations against children in armed conflict in the world for a second year in a row in 2022, with at least 2,420 children suffering from violations such as killing, maiming, abductions, and sexual violence. The UN's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, reported 3,377 children. 46% of these children are involved in armed forces or groups.

Save the Children is calling for urgent international attention to address the situation and end the impunity. But the most promoters of impunity on Child abuse allegations are the political leaders.

Therefore, following Save the Children, my Organization called Children first Organization is calling on political leaders to protect children in the DRC, and in Sub-Saharan nations.

Everything can change if you and I are aware of this, and can stand against child abuse. We should not sit and watch. Instead we should stand and act. And this is the time to act.

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