

# FAVOR\* (DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO)

*“Right now in Africa, people are not in peace.”*

*See Angelica’s Refugee Learner Narrative for another perspective and additional information on the Democratic Republic of the Congo.*

## Life before Canada

### *Birthplace and Family*

Losáko, Hello. My name is Favor. This is my story of how I came to live in Canada and my hopes for the future. I was born on April 13, 1993, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), but before coming to Canada I lived in Uganda.

I belong to the Barega cultural group. My family spoke French, Swahili, and Lingala. I am the youngest of my family that consists of eight children and my two parents. The two eldest siblings and one other younger sibling are boys. The other four siblings are girls. My father worked for the government and my mother was a pharmacist.

At first, in the Congo we had a good life. We were living then in a city in a big beautiful house surrounded by gates. We had servants and I remember that my sister used to go to school in a car. And then things changed; my mother was killed.

\* To protect the participant’s privacy, pseudonyms have been used in this narrative.



Map No. 4007 Rev. 10 UNITED NATIONS  
July 2011

Department of Field Support  
Cartographic Section

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# THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

## War and Conflict

The modern history of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly known as Zaire) has largely been one of conflict and misgovernment. Immediately after obtaining independence in 1960, the country faced an army mutiny and an attempt at secession by the mineral-rich province of Katanga.

In 1965, Mobutu, an ethnic Nebandi, was able to seize power. He renamed the country Zaire and himself Mobutu Sese Seko. Mobutu enjoyed American support during the Cold War, but his authoritarian regime and mismanagement led to the First Congo War and his overthrow in 1997.

The Rwandan Genocide was a prime factor leading to The First Congo War. In 1997, Rwanda invaded its neighbour Zaire in pursuit of extremist Hutu militias that were threatening the new Tutsi dominated government of Rwanda and refugees who had fled to Zaire. The invasion was a boost to anti-Mobutu rebels in Zaire. They soon won, installed Laurent Kabila as president, and renamed the country the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Peace did not last. Barely one year later, the Second Congo War (also known as the Great War of Africa) began in August 1998. Discord between President Kabila and his former allies resulted in a new rebellion and war. Rwanda and Uganda backed the rebels, while Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe supported Kabila.

The Second Congo War officially ended in July 2003 when the Transitional Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo took power. The Second Congo War was the deadliest war in modern African history and the deadliest since World War II. The war directly involved eight African nations and 25 different armed groups. It is estimated that by 2008, the war resulted in the death of 5.4 million people, mostly from disease and starvation. In addition, millions of people were internally displaced or had to seek asylum in neighbouring countries.

Despite a formal end to the war in July 2003 and a government of national unity, conflict and violence continues. Today the significant centres of conflict are

- Equateur with Enyele rebels
- North and South Kivu with Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels and RDC-Goma rebels
- Ituri, with numerous militia and groups
- Northern Katanga, with Mai-Mai (created by Laurent Kabila)

### References

BBC News Democratic Republic of Congo Profile. <[www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13283212](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13283212)>.

Global Security Org.: Congo Civil War. <[www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/congo.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/congo.htm)>.

Time, The Deadliest War in the World. <[www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1198921,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1198921,00.html)>.

As I said, my Father worked for the government and although he thought certain people were his friends, they were actually planning to kill the entire family. My parents attended a dinner party at a family friend's and, after they returned from the party, my mother got very sick. It soon became obvious that my mother was poisoned and a few days later she died. My father continued to work and tried to be both father and mother to us children. But, he was quite stressed by the circumstances and was very unhappy because he was missing his wife, my mother. Soon, his health began to suffer and he had a heart attack.

I remember the day I last saw my father. That day I begged my father not to go to work because I hadn't seen him for a week. I wanted to spend time with him. I wanted to go to a park and relax with him. However, my father said that he had to go to work. He gave me some money and told me that he would be back by 4:00. He told me to stay with my auntie (our maid/nanny). He kissed me on my forehead. That was the last time I saw my father alive. He was shot in his car that very day. I am pleased we were able to bury my father in a good place and we were able to give him a good burial and follow all the burial rites of our religion.

My father was a good man and looked after us even in his death. His best friend was a lawyer and, possibly because he knew that he could die at any time, my father had directed his friend to protect

and look after us, his children. After a few weeks the lawyer friend came to the house and told us that we were in danger and had to move. That is when we moved to Uganda, leaving behind many of our possessions. I was six by then.

Even though we did not live in a refugee camp, I and my brothers and sisters did not find peace in Kampala, Uganda. Kampala is Uganda's biggest city and its capital. The people who had murdered my parents followed us to Uganda and wanted to kill us. We continuously heard gun shots while we were sleeping. Our lawyer friend tried to get protection for us from the Canadian Embassy. At that time, we were in school, but we could not get protection, so it was very dangerous for us to go to school. I was having trouble seeing well and I needed eye surgery. I couldn't read and I felt then that my sight problems were caused by all the stress in our lives. Our lawyer kept returning to the Canadian Embassy, telling them about our story and our difficulties. Eventually we were taken to the Red Cross. In the end, my siblings and I lived in Kampala, Uganda for 10 years. During that entire period we never felt safe; we were never at peace.

The lawyer friend helped us a lot. He made sure that we had enough money to eat. However, we were not protected and thus we didn't have any peace. Even if you have everything that you have, even if you are living in a nice house, without peace it is nothing. When you are asleep at night and then you hear banging outside, you hear things that don't make any sense to you. That is what has been going on for so long in our lives. Right now in Africa, people are not in peace. There are some places in Africa where people are crying because they need something to drink because of politics; they aren't getting what they need. Children are

suffering. Children need school. But, they are not going to school. They are just wandering around on the streets. The situation is all due to politics.

My best memories of my life in Africa are connected to my relationship with my father. I miss him greatly. He was my best friend. We used to go out together and sit in the house and talk. He was very open with all his children.

He wanted the best for his kids. I often wonder why my dad was taken from me. Now, when I hear my friends talk about their fathers and what they are doing, I think how lucky they are to have their fathers. I often cry for him.

### *School in Uganda*

In Kampala, I attended school on an irregular basis from Grade 1 to Grade 9 because of being in constant danger. The language of instruction in the school was English. There were approximately 60 students in a class. The school was co-ed and the students rotated from class to class. It was a large school with many different teachers. The school day is long in Uganda. When I was younger, I attended school from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and then later from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. This included three breaks.

In junior high, there were four required subjects: science, math, English, and social studies. In senior high, other subjects such as biology and chemistry were added. Generally, all the subjects that are studied in Canada were also offered in the Ugandan school I attended. The school year was broken into three semesters, with the biggest vacation period in the third semester.



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© UNHCR. February 24, 2012. Solar lamps brighten future for refugee students in Uganda. <[www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/6779107620/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/6779107620/)>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.



© F. Noy/UNHCR. November 2, 2012. Congolese refugee children attend catch-up classes in Rwanda. <[www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/8181597197/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/8181597197/)>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

My sister and I would go to school on a public bus. I enjoyed going to school, but because of the cataracts in my eyes, I couldn't see well. That is why I fell behind in school. My favourite subjects were social studies and English.

## Immigration to Canada

By the time I was 16, I was still living in Kampala, Uganda with all my brothers and sisters. Because I am the youngest, they looked after me and raised me. Sadly in 2009, our house in Kampala was burned down.

Because of our difficult situation in Uganda, we had to seek safety in another country. We had no choice but to go to the Canadian Embassy for help.



© Denis Jacquerye/Wikimedia Commons. December 31, 2004. Map of the major languages of the Democratic Republic of Congo. CC License. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages\\_of\\_the\\_Democratic\\_Republic\\_of\\_the\\_Congo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_the_Democratic_Republic_of_the_Congo)>.

Eventually, we were accepted and we got the papers to come to Canada.

I was happy to come to Canada, but I did have some mixed feelings leaving Africa, because I also wished that my father could be with us. I had heard that Canada was a very nice place, a very safe and protected place. I understood that we would live in peace there, that no one and nothing would disturb us, and nothing would come our way that would disturb our peace.

All of us left Uganda, but not all immigrated to the same country. We were separated. This was not our choice. We were told that in order to get us all out safely, we had to go to different countries. This was a government decision. I came to Canada with three of my sisters and one brother. Another brother and sister went to Norway and the remaining brother went to Italy. When we arrived in Canada we were able to contact some acquaintances from Uganda when we realized that they were also living in Winnipeg.

My dream was to become an international journalist, a lawyer, or social worker. I want to do something that will be of help to my country and my people. I promised my dad that someday I would go back home to Congo and work from there. It bothers me that people are suffering. I don't mind that I personally suffer, but it bothers me greatly to see Congolese or other Africans suffer.



© E. Denholm/UNHCR. December 2007. A boy plays with a football in front of an abandoned hut, Oyam refugee camp, Uganda. <[www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/4426889972/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/4426889972/)>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

## Starting a New Life in Canada

I was 16 years old when I left Kampala and immigrated with my brother and sisters to Canada. We arrived in Winnipeg in September and I found it to be very cold, even though it was not winter yet. We were met by a settlement counsellor from Welcome Place. At first, we lived in transition

housing at Welcome Place but then we moved to East Kildonan. I kind of have two homes in Winnipeg. Monday through Friday during school days, I live with my eldest sister, her husband and their four children, my brother, and one other sister. But on the weekends, I live with a sister who lives alone downtown.

I think Canada is a very nice place, you can get what you want, and I feel safe and protected. My first impression of Canada was that it was a rich country and that I could “find money on the ground.” However, I know that if you want money you will have to work for it.

What I like best about living in Canada is the laws and that I usually feel safe and protected here, although that changed a bit when I was robbed at knife point. That was really disappointing. I also like the fact that I have the right to go to school and that I do not have to pay fees until entering university. I think education is important and I am glad that young children have to attend school. I am also pleased that I was finally able to get the eye surgery I needed. My cataracts were removed just a few months after our arrival in Winnipeg.

Our adjustment to our new home and life in Winnipeg was fairly easy. I made friends easily with many students from different backgrounds in my new school. I am still sad that our move to Canada splintered our family. I think it has been the same for my family. My brother and sisters have not expressed any difficulty adjusting to Canada. My relationships with all my family members are good. I don't feel that I experienced any emotional or health problems related to the effects of my having to flee the Congo and being a refugee. I really have not had any problems since immigrating to Canada.

The senior high school I attended in Winnipeg is very large. At first I was placed in a Grade 10 classroom. It was a bit of a challenge. While it did not require a lot to adjust, it wasn't easy either. Even though I had been schooled in English in Uganda, I still found English to be a challenge. The English used in school is different from what I was used to in Uganda. The EAL teachers at my school really helped me adjust to the school and living in

Canada. They were there for me in so many ways during the school year. They were the best things that ever walked into my life. I believe that they really helped me become the person I am today. Sometimes I found it difficult to understand what was being said. But I worked hard and if I found something to be too hard, I would ask for help. I think that the difficulty I had with Canadian English was due to differences in accents and vocabulary. In my experience, all the teachers were very nice and helpful. My teachers usually gave me work that I could understand. If I had problems understanding the material, my teachers worked with me and helped me understand. EAL students like me, were given more time for completing assignments. When we needed more help, the teachers would make time to meet with us outside of the classroom. If the subject area (classroom) teachers were very busy, then I would go to my EAL teachers to get help with the assignments.



© Newcomer Youth Educational Support Services (NYESS)/Karen Koroma. Summer Program for Refugee and Immigrant Youth 2014. Young children participating in a sport activity in the summer youth program organized by Newcomer Youth Educational Support Services (NYESS). The coalition provides hundreds of newcomer children with opportunities to continue to develop community in a healthy and active environment. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Congolese actress **Rachel Mwanza** (born in 1997). Her performance in the Canadian film *War Witch* (*Rebelle*) garnered her awards for Best Actress from the Berlin Film Festival, the Tribeca Film Festival and the Vancouver Film Critics Circle in 2012, as well as the award for Best Actress at the 1st Canadian Screen Awards. In the film by Montreal director Kim Nguyen, Rachel plays Komona, a 12-year-old girl who is abducted from her home and forced to become a child soldier: an experience shared by so many children in Africa and in other parts of the world where there has been war and conflict.

Rachel was abandoned by her parents as a child and spent several years living as a street child in Kinshasa before being cast in *Rebelle*. Due to her lack of education, she was illiterate when she was first cast in the film; however, the filmmakers made arrangements to pay for her education and housing until she turned 18. Rachel Mwanza is now living in Montreal with the line producer of the film Anne-Marie-Gélinas. She is doing well and is presently attending school. She is looking forward to completing a high school diploma.

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At first I was placed in the EAL class full time for the first few months because of my problems with my eye sight. Once I had the surgery and my eyesight improved, I was placed in regular classes. But I always felt comfortable returning to the EAL teacher for help when I felt it was necessary.

The most difficult part of school was the Grade 11 Math course. The teacher would give us examples without providing an explanation or working through the examples. She directed the students who asked for help to check the examples she had provided. As an EAL student, I was uncomfortable asking a question in front of so many students, but I did not feel that the teacher welcomed questions or was approachable. As a result, I struggled and failed the course and had to repeat the course. That to me was the biggest challenge I faced. I was able to work at a florist's shop during the summer only so I could concentrate on school. I found that the other EAL students supported each other and they made friends with any newcomer. The rest of the school programming has met my needs. I feel that I have been successful and expect to graduate this year from high school. I liked being in school in Canada.

## Life Today and Hopes for the Future

Reflecting on my school experiences, I feel that my high school has prepared me for my future. I believe that my classes were very well organized and presented in a way that I could understand. However, I think that schools should recognize the needs of EAL students. They need more time, encouragement, patience, and a step-by-step teaching approach.

I think it is important that teachers realize that students are coming from places where many haven't attended school. Many of the newcomer students haven't had the same opportunities like the Canadian-born students. Teachers should not assume that newcomer students understand what is being taught. For EAL students with limited schooling, they need help to adjust to being in school and they need the teachers to help them build a foundation for the various subjects they need to study. The EAL students have faced difficult life experiences that impact on their learning and thus they need the help and encouragement from all teachers. I know that it can be difficult; not all students are kind and not all teachers are patient.

I ask that teachers give the EAL students time and understanding. Teachers need to consider what students have experienced previously and how those experiences can continue to affect their well-being, as a result of painful memories, dreams, or flashbacks. The effects of the difficult experiences students have faced may be expressed as anger, frustration, or depression. It may cause them to question, "Why am I here?" or "Why am I even studying?"

My biggest concern at this point is finding employment. I have applied for many jobs and sent my resumé to many places. But so far, no one has called and offered me a job.

I am feeling good about my future in Canada. I am generally satisfied with my experiences in Canada and my prospects for the future because of the schooling I received and the knowledge and organization that was the basis for my success. My relationship with my family is still good and strong, and I have good relationships with others outside my family. I plan to return to high school this fall to get the Grade 12 Math credit that I need to graduate. After that, I want to go to university and possibly study nursing. I still dream of being an international journalist or a lawyer, but some teachers told me that it will probably be hard for me to get a job in those fields. I am still thinking about the possibility of studying social work.



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**Gentil Misigaro (Gentil Mis)** arrived in Winnipeg in 2010 after living as a refugee in Uganda for 5 years.

In 2014 he was one of the recipients of the Top 25 Canadian Immigrants Award in recognition of his achievements in such a short time and in spite of "starting from zero." Misigaro has accomplished much in the music and arts scene in the past few years, more than some have accomplished in a lifetime. Gentil has produced albums, formed bands, helped found non-profit music and arts organizations, written and performed songs for special events (including the Junos), and released an EP in August 2014 online. (See Gentil Interview.)

Misigaro is also a teacher who cares about the community and children. He teaches at-risk youth about the fundamentals of music, singing, dance, and guitar as the music program director for the non-profit organization Status4. Currently, Misigaro is also working on his own non-profit organization, A Better World Movement, to help people use music and art to express messages of social responsibility.

Status4 website: <[www.status4.ca/](http://www.status4.ca/)>

Baba Yetu: Gentil Misigaro—Spirit's Call Choir—Status 4 Benefit Concert Video

## VIDEO RESOURCES

See [Caution Concerning the Use of Resources about War and Refugee Experiences](#).

### **The Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

*This is Congo* by Michael McCabe, is an excerpt from a documentary film they are shooting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.  
<http://vimeo.com/39532924>

*The Displaced: This Is Congo* by National Geographic: “In the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Hakiza Ndaba, a 58-year-old tailor, lives a life of displacement, continuously running with his family from a war that has surrounded them for decades.”  
<http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/news/140327-hakiza-congo-vin>

*Horror of Congo's forgotten war 2008.03.27* by NewsRevue: “The war formally ended five years ago—but the fighting didn’t. It just carried on, ignored by much of the world.”  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=I\\_ois9rQNvE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_ois9rQNvE)

*Rape in the Forest* by United Nations: “It’s an impossible choice—feed your family, or run the risk of a brutal sexual attack. It has happened to hundreds of thousands of women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since civil war broke out ten years ago. The assaults show no sign of abating, even though a simple solution could reduce the risk.”  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXvZdTvQGil&list=PL08FC29DE58D6F860&index=10](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXvZdTvQGil&list=PL08FC29DE58D6F860&index=10)

*Security Negotiations Between Congo and M23* by STRATFORvideo: Stratfor Africa Analyst Mark Schroeder discusses the conflict between Congo and Rwandan proxy force M23 and the bigger struggle in the region.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KvxtDaYSko>

### **Congolese Refugees and Experiences**

*Urban Refugee || Congo to Uganda* by YourPlatform: “Moses shares his life as an urban refugee. A clip from the short documentary on urban refugees produced by YARID. YARID—Young African Refugees for Integral Development—is a grassroots refugee organization in Kampala, Uganda.”  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHo3yBv1UMc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHo3yBv1UMc)

*Uganda: New Refugee Camp and Arrivals from DRC* by UNHCR: “Recent fighting in eastern Congo has seen thousands of civilians flee to a new camp, Bubukwanga, in neighbouring Uganda. Food and water is scarce for the new arrivals, many of whom slept rough on the way. UNHCR are moving those they can to Bubukwanga, where they can access food and health care.”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5iYmUulpU4>

*UN, Uganda, DRC sign pact on refugees return (2009)* by PressTV News Videos: “The repatriation of Democratic Republic of Congo refugees from Uganda comes as the East African country is running out of resources to support the asylum seekers who have been in the country for months.”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nCmp73mWHk>

*Congolese refugees in Uganda* by brunodc: “Photographer Christian Overdeput describes his visit to Matande Camp, Uganda (near the border with DR Congo)—April 2009.”  
<http://vimeo.com/13643768>

*ROCKED: Sum 41 in the Congo (Full Length Documentary)* by War Child Canada: “Rocked is an unscripted account of an African country in turmoil as seen through the eyes of rock band, Sum 41.”  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgpf0ZNUO\\_Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgpf0ZNUO_Y)

*North Kivu: Education For the Few* by UNHCR: “The violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has caused more than 1 million people to flee their homes, including huge numbers of children. Efforts to make sure the displaced youngsters continue to receive an education face huge challenges.”  
<http://unhcr.org/v-49b7cbdc2>

### **Congolese Diaspora**

*Introducing ‘I am Congo’* by ENOUGHproject: “This groundbreaking series features amazing people living their lives in eastern Congo amid the world’s deadliest war. These are stories of hope. These are stories of the people who call Congo home -- in their own words.”  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jBNM37CGEM&index=1&list=PLbmFh8d5EHgouDGsnKU\\_5BCjbDeRuE1Pz](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jBNM37CGEM&index=1&list=PLbmFh8d5EHgouDGsnKU_5BCjbDeRuE1Pz)

View the entire series at:  
[www.RaiseHopeForCongo.org/IAmCongo](http://www.RaiseHopeForCongo.org/IAmCongo)

*We want peace in CONGO/ Nous voulons la paix au CONGO* by Doug Brinkman: Interviews with Congolese Canadians about the conflict in the Congo and issues related to resource exploitation and the linkage to the violence.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsE7iJII7aI>