

ANGELICA*

(DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO)

“We don’t all have the same opportunities.”

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

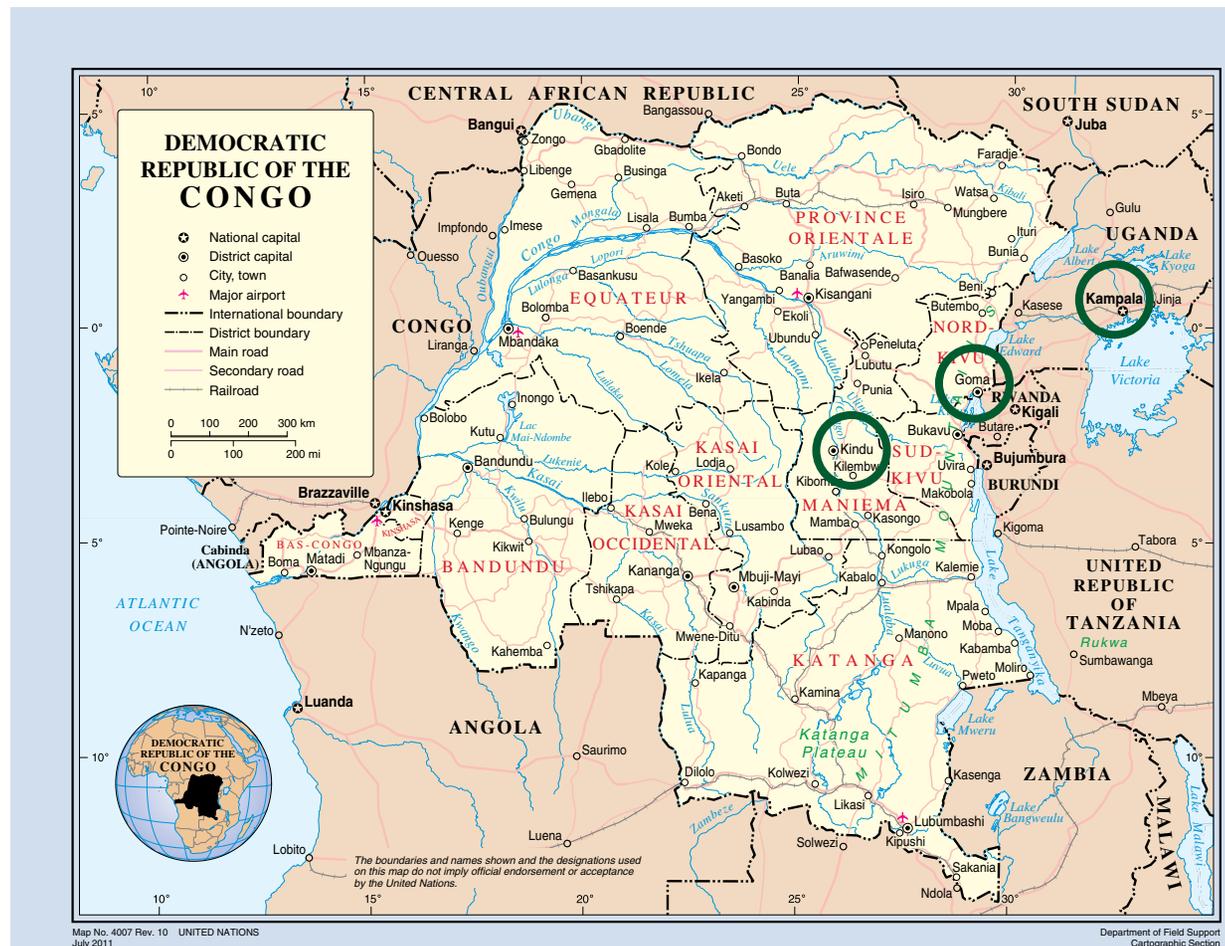
Life before Canada

Birthplace and Family

Jambo, Bonjour, and Hello. My name is Angelica. I was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), in Kindu, Maniema, on February 1, 1994. Before coming to Canada, I lived in Goma, and in Kampala, Uganda. I’m Congolese, but I belong to a tribe that is part of the Kindu-Maniema region and belongs to the Barega Group. My family speaks five languages. My father speaks French, English, and Swahili. I speak French, English, Swahili, Uganda, and Lingala.

I don’t remember too much about our village—I was only there for a few years. I also lived in Goma City for about two years, but I don’t have many memories of that place. I do have a few pictures, but I was only seven when I left the Congo and went to Uganda (Kampala). What I remember the most is my friends, our neighbours, and the people. We shared everything and I knew everyone.

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



© United Nations/Department of Field Support, Cartographic Section. Map No. 4007 Rev. 10. July 2011. Map of Democratic Republic of the Congo. CC License. <www.un.org/depts/Cartographic/map/profile/drcongo.pdf>.



© UNICEF DRC/Cornelia Walther. July 15, 2014. A picture deploring the recruitment of child soldiers painted by former child soldiers managed by UNICEF-partner CAJED in Goma, DRC. <<http://speakjhr.com/2014/07/goma-despite-supervision-former-child-soldiers-still-pose-danger/>>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.



© UNHCR/G. Katende. Photo ID 7548400218. July 5, 2012. Congolese cross into Uganda at Bunagana to escape the latest fighting in Eastern Congo. <www.flickr.com/photos/unhcr/7548400218/>. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Everything is different in the Congo. People are friendly, they don't care what you look like, and everybody helps each other. We were a community.

When I went to Kampala I didn't really know anyone, except for my cousins who lived in Kampala. I had met my cousins before moving to Kampala, but I had not seen them for a while. So I really didn't know them and we had to restart our relationship again. In the end, everything went well and we became friends. In Kampala, I learned Uganda and I also began to learn English.

I was just turning eight when we left the Congo. We stayed in Kampala for about five years, so I was 13 years old when I came to Canada. Kampala is not a really a big city. It's a small city, but very crowded. The buildings were made of brick and cement, like here.

The best part of living in Africa was the relationships I had. My relationship with my family was good—very close. I liked the friendships I had in Kampala—we shared things and we helped each other. For example, with my neighbour, who we only knew for a few months, when she had a baby and had nobody to help her, and needed some help, I helped her out! That is the way we do things there. That is why I was very happy living in Kampala and in the Congo.

School in Goma, North Kivu

I went to school while in the Congo, but not in Kampala. I started school when I was about six years old and attended until I left the Congo. In all, I went to school for two to three years. I didn't attend school in Uganda because the school was too expensive and my dad had to find a new job.



© Andrew Regan/Wikimedia Commons. May 20, 2010. Downtown Kampala. CC License. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Uganda-Development.JPG>>.



© Simisa/Wikimedia Commons. August 26, 2009. Suburban Kampala. CC License. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kampala_26.08.2009_12-52-00.jpg>.



© Simisa/Wikimedia Commons. August 26, 2009. Street views in Kampala. CC License. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kampala_26.08.2009_12-39-51.jpg>.

THE ERUPTION OF MOUNT NYIRAGONGO IN 2002

Mount Nyiragongo is a volcano located inside Virunga National Park, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, just 20 km north of the town of Goma and Lake Kivu and near the border with Rwanda. Nyiragongo and neighbouring Nyamuragira jointly are responsible for 40% of Africa's historical volcanic eruptions. Mount Nyiragongo, since 1882, has erupted at least 34 times, with significant eruptions in 1977 and 2002.

A major eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano began on January 17, 2002, when a fissure opened in the south flank of the volcano, from which lava flowed in a stream 200 to 1000 metres wide and up to 2 metres deep through Goma. 400,000 people were evacuated from the city across the Rwandan border into neighbouring Gisenyi during the eruption.



© Cai Tjeenk Willink/Wikimedia Commons. May 7, 2011. Lava lake of the Nyiragongo Volcano in Virunga National Park in Eastern DRC. CC License. <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lava_Lake_Nyiragongo_2.jpg>.

The school in Goma was like a bunch of little single-storey cement houses that were grouped together. We were about 25-30 children in a classroom. Everyone had their own desk and their own books. My dad had to pay tuition. Everybody wore uniforms and had lunch at school. In Grade 1, we had the same teacher for the day. In Grade 2, we had one teacher in the morning until lunch and then another teacher came in the afternoon.

In the Congo, the students attended school during two different parts of the day. The first section was from 8:00 a.m. until noon and the second section from 1:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. I was in the morning section and attended classes then. There were lots of kids. In Grade 2, we studied French, Swahili, math, science, and geography. The languages used at the school were French and Swahili. But, French was the predominant language. I always liked going to school. My favourite subjects were math and science. I do not recall having any difficulties in school.

The school year was pretty much the same as in Canada—September to June, but we had more holidays. Summer vacation was two months long and we had a two to three week break at Christmas. We also had some time off in the spring, very similar to what we have here in Canada.

I stopped going to school in Kampala, because the tuition was more than in Goma, and my dad had to pay for this, and we had a big family. There are 14 children in my family and I am number 7, right in the middle. We all needed to go to school, so my dad had to make a decision as to who could attend. He tried to find work in Kampala, Uganda, but it was a new country and it was hard. He wasn't able to work as a doctor and my stepmother couldn't work as a nurse, as in Uganda they didn't accept their certification/credentials. So I was out of school from the age of 8 when I left the Congo until I immigrated to Canada at 13 years of age.

In Kampala, we lived in the city. Life was different as I couldn't go to school. I felt bad, but I did understand that some of my siblings could go to school, and I couldn't. We didn't have the money. Those that attended school brought home books and homework, and I was able to look at those and learn a bit.

I was always so cold in Uganda, and I had nothing to do. Every morning I had to help with the younger children, and that was it. So I spent a lot of time sewing. That was why my aunt told me I should become a clothes designer. I did it for a while, but I didn't really like it, even though I did it well. It was fun, but I didn't want that as a job. I always wanted to be a doctor, like my dad.

The Volcano

Our family was not really affected by the war in the Congo. The event that caused us to leave the Congo was the volcano that erupted near Goma. Lots of people had to move because of the volcano. That is why we left the Congo. We went to Kampala. First, we walked from Goma to Rwanda (there were no cars leaving Goma). Then, from Rwanda, where we stayed for about seven months, we took a bus to Uganda.



© Henk Van Wellem/hvhbxi. November 24, 2004. Lava Flow, Goma, Congo. CC License. <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/hvhbxi/1670828/>>.

Immigration to Canada

I don't know how my Dad decided to come to Canada. I didn't know anything about Canada then. I had heard about it, but didn't know anything about it. I was kind of happy to come to Canada, but I missed my friends and my life in Uganda. But when I did leave, at least I had my family. Twelve

children and my parents came to Canada together from Uganda and after two years, my two brothers came directly from the Congo. I do have some family in Quebec; some of my aunts, uncles, and cousins live there.

Life in Canada

A settlement counsellor from Welcome Place met us when we arrived in Winnipeg. We arrived in June. The adults went to English classes. I stayed home during the summer, but I really wanted to get going again. It was two months before I could go to school. We first lived in one place, and then got a permanent place. We lived on Victor Street for about two years.

Some of my first impressions of Canada were that the houses were all very big and I noticed that there were a lot of white people everywhere! The thing I liked best about being in Canada was being able to go to school. When I finally could attend school, I almost cried. Not because I was afraid, but because I was so happy. The one thing I still like least about living in Canada is the cold and the winter. I never have gotten used to the winter.

I went to a French/*Français* school. I went right into Grade 8, but I just was not at the same level as the students in Grade 8. As I had stopped going to school at the beginning of Grade 3, I found it difficult. I knew French, but after living in Kampala for five years I had almost forgotten it. I didn't listen and I didn't know what the teacher said... or anything. The other students understood, but it was hard for me. For example, when we did reading and other stuff, and I was the one person in the class who struggled and when everyone understood and I didn't, it was very hard. In my classes, everyone spoke very fast, especially in English Language Arts, but I would tell them to slow down,



© Marie Frechon/UN Photo. Photo ID 185631. April 4, 2008. Aerial View of Camps for People Displaced by Conflict. Mugunga I and II (in the foreground) and Bulengo (in the background) Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). CC Licence. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/un_photo/5737272258/>.

and they would. The teacher did try to help me. Happily, in the end, all went well. I graduated from high school in June 2012.

When I moved to the high school in Grade 9, I found it to be very different from my experiences with the teacher in Grade 8. In high school, I had more than one teacher and I found that some teachers, a few, tended to focus on the students who understood and got it right away. Some tended to ignore the students who needed more help like me. So in high school I wasn't getting the same type of help I got before in Grade 8. As a result, I had to ask some of the teachers for help, and sometimes—really, mostly—I went to my friends or to those students who understood the course work and got help that way.

School is my number one priority in my heart. I didn't have much opportunity to go to school from Kindergarten to Grade 8 unlike others here, so school is very important for me. I didn't work outside of school because of that. I like school; I like the subjects; I like to get involved; I like to learn new things.

I found it easy to make friends at school even though I was the new person at the class. For example, if I was in gym class, I would talk to other students, including students of different races. Some students would just approach those of the same race. But I believe that if you need something, you

have to show it and reach out to them... and don't just hide. Some of my friends were from Africa. Some were from the Congo and some from Uganda. When we were together, we could talk about our lives before coming to Canada and we had something in common.

I got involved in many school activities in high school—sports, Spirit Day, Pizza Day, and other events. I noticed that the students in Grade 8 with the highest grades at the school went to such events and so they got me involved. Well, to be truthful, they didn't, I did it myself! I just wanted to fit in and be part of the school and did anything that would help. An example of this is how I got involved in badminton. One day, I went to the gym and I saw other students playing badminton. I watched for a while. I didn't know what game it was—but I always want to try new things. So one day I tried playing it and I did very well.

This involvement continued to my last year in high school. I can say that I was 100% involved with all the activities going on in the school, such as student counselling, sports, ministry, and many others in my last year of high school. For example, for school leadership class, I had to coach a team for my school. We did a lot for leadership class—we even had to fold jerseys.



Thebahatizz—Almost 10 years after fleeing the violence in Congo, the Mulimbwa family arrived in Winnipeg in December 2012. The family of nine arrived in Winnipeg after waiting for years as refugees in limbo in Kampala, Uganda.

The four oldest of the children, sisters Sylvie, Francine, Odette, and Rachel, were already a well-known gospel hip-hop group called Thebahatizz that performed in churches around Uganda.

In May 2014, the group released an EP album of six songs. Among them, is a humanitarian song “La Violence.” Proceeds from the sales of the album will go towards The Panzi Foundation, an organization that provides funding for a hospital which helps victims of war and those who have been sexually abused, and is especially driven to improve the overall health and well-being of the women and children who have been affected.

The group wants to use “La Violence” as a platform to raise awareness about the violence that exists all over the world.

See Thebahatizz—La Violence (Official video) at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uL50a_2HLc>.

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Paul Kambaja is a teacher with Congolese origins who is a very committed volunteer and one of the founders of the Congo Canada Charitable Foundation.

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Life Today and Hopes for the Future

Looking back, the schools and teachers helped me a lot. They provided a lot of help and resources. My principal helped a lot too. If I sometimes found myself without something, I would just ask them and they provided it for free! It's quite amazing!

In the end, I think the teachers did a good job. I think that they did everything they could, and did everything I needed. There could always be something more that could have been done, but for me personally it was enough. But I also believe that some high school teachers need to recognize that they need to pay more attention to the students who are having difficulties. I know teachers don't have a lot of time in high school, but they should pay more attention to students like me. It's very easy for teachers to figure out by just the first test who really doesn't understand the concepts of a particular subject. They should pay more attention to those kids. They should not do what some did in my school—they shouldn't wait to help until the end of the year. Some teachers were always doing that. A month before school ends that's when they would come to see you and tried to help you to do better in their classes. They should have started giving that help from the first day of school. I know they

tell students on the first day of school that "If you need help...", but they do so only once and then they never talk about it again. They should provide more support. I think most teachers do a good job, but it is not enough for students like me.

It is important that teachers have more information about newcomers who come here without any education, or much less education than they should have had. Not everyone who is in our schools had the opportunity to go to school from age five. We don't all have the same opportunities. In many countries only some people get the opportunity to go to school.

I also have a few suggestions for students from immigrant backgrounds who like me have missed school or have limited schooling. Feel free to ask for help! It's okay to know nothing and no one is perfect. Feel free to ask about what you don't know, and someone will help you, and they will correct you. It's okay to ask, and by asking for help and getting it, it will increase your self esteem. Never feel like you're stupid—no one is stupid! Everyone goes to school to learn!

Plans for the Future

I am looking forward to volunteering and working at a camp this summer. I will be involved in planning activities for all the six weeks of summer camp and I will be a staff member. The students at the camp will be from 13 to 17 years of age. I did the same thing last year. The main purpose of the summer camp is to help newcomers. It will help them with academic skills, reading, information, et cetera.

I first got involved when these camps started in the Congolese community when I was in Grade 8, and I attended as a participant. The camp helped me with my math and science skills and prepared me for other subjects before entering high school. I really liked the summer camp. That made me want to become a staff member and I was able to do so last year.

I helped with math and science, and sometimes I supervised the children and youth who attended. Later in September of that year, after the camp ended, the schools with students who attended the summer camp wrote a letter in which they said they could see a difference in achievement for the students because of the camp! I'm real happy I played a part in helping the students. We were all really happy!

I am not employed right now. In part, that is because while I was in Grade 12 this past year, I was also training to obtain a

certificate to be a Health/Nursing Assistant at the university, so I was very busy. I went to school from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. I completed the training and I graduated from the Health/Nursing Assistant program just one week before my high school graduation.

My dream now is to be a nurse. I plan to take a year off to work so that I can pay for my university studies. My plan is to apply for a job after the summer camp ends. I am going to look for a job as a Health/Nursing Assistant at a hospital or somewhere else, and work for a year. After that I am going to go to the university and enter University 1. University 1 will help me improve my skills and improve my grades from high school, so that I can be accepted in Nursing. Nursing takes four years, and then one year for a Bachelor. So, I have six or seven years left to go.

I am feeling positive about my future. I achieved everything that I wanted to do so far. I am happy with my experiences in Canada and I have a plan for a career and my future. I feel confident about the future because I have confidence in myself. I know that I have a lot to learn yet. I learned to ignore people who said that I was not good enough. I know I had to improve, but I wanted to do it myself, and I'll do it. I just said to myself, in my head, you can do it and I did it... and look at me now! I'm sitting here after graduating—after two graduations in the same year!



Newcomer Youth Educational Support Services (NYESS) Coalition Summer Program: The Congolese along with their Sierra Leonean, Eritrean, and South Sudanese community partners, formed a coalition that offers summer and after-school programs for newcomer and war-affected youth. Along with language and academic programming, sports and healthy living activities are a major part of the summer programming offered.

Accueil Francophone du Manitoba in collaboration with the DSFM (Franco-Manitoban School Division) also offers a summer camp dedicated specifically to children from immigrant and refugee families at Collège Louis-Riel in St. Boniface.

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VIDEO RESOURCES

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

The Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Everyday Emergency: Africa's Deadliest Conflict (DRC) by Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) is the first of a three-part series that deals with the plight of Congolese in Eastern Congo and the extreme challenges they face as refugees. Several refugees share their experiences.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebGjxYZLiNI>

A Silent Genocide—Democratic Republic of the Congo is a video by CongoJusticeLasVegas. Although in 1994 it was widely reported that the situation with refugees fleeing into eastern Zaire (now Congo) was creating a humanitarian catastrophe, the crisis continues today unabated. Reaching epic proportions of casualties, the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has seemed to vanish from the mass media.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5Wo0WYEQVI

Uganda's Silent War, by TheBIRorg, is the winner of the 2008 Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award. This BIR report looks at the impact of International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrants on the civil war and peace process in Northern Uganda. It also highlights the challenges faced by former child soldiers.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8ZxHQLA0ww

Nyiragongo Volcano

Nyiragongo Volcano and the Volcanic Observatory of Goma, Congo, by TVE Asia Pacific, is a video depicting the Nyiragongo volcano eruption.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZLSvO6vJZ0

Refugees and their Experiences

Children Of The Congo: From War To Witches, a video by Renderyard, documents the plight of street children living in Kinshasa and confirms the widespread accusations of child witchcraft, torture, and child prostitution. The film also examines efforts to reintegrate demobilized child soldiers, displaced refugees, and orphaned children following the eruption of the massive Nyiragongo volcano, near the city of Goma in Eastern Congo.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNPKLekfYks

Delivering as one for Congolese refugees (2013), by UNICEF, is a look at how Congolese refugees are arriving at Rwamwanja settlement in western Uganda.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xvv8JeoPj78

Democratic Republic of Congo refugees in Uganda 'rise to 70,000'—*Red Cross*, by BBC News Africa, shows how a rebel attack in Eastern Congo in 2013 led to a mass exodus of refugees to Uganda.
www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23310192

Congolese refugee camps in Uganda are 'unbearable' by eNCAnews, documents the experience of Congolese refugees in camps in Kyangwali, Uganda including a boat accident that resulted in the deaths of 251 Congolese refugees who were on their way home to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Npp22ow7IZ4

Refugee Camps—Gulu, Uganda by littleaexchange, shows an aid worker who is personally impacted by the story of a young child who now has to care for younger siblings.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=78sM-qGozds

Kahuzi-Biega Environmental School—Congo Classrooms for a Brighter Future by Canadian Ape Alliance, is a video of Dominique Bikaba speaking on issues in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Kahuzi-Biega Environmental School run by the Canadian Ape Alliance.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3WZYXTsmLU

Congolese Diaspora

Congolese refugee sisters build music career in Winnipeg by CBC News, is about a group of sisters who escaped a deadly civil war and have turned their difficult past into success as singers in Winnipeg.
www.cbc.ca/player/News/Canada/Manitoba/ID/2445888506/

Thebahatizz—La Violence (official video) is a video dedicated to all the women who are going through sexual and domestic violence and children victims of war who can't access formal education due to the war in their home countries.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uL50a_2HLc