

IRFF UK: Armed rebels besiege orphanage - Children spirited to safety

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Armed rebels besiege orphanage

In early February, armed rebel soldiers kicked in the doors of the IRFF-backed orphanage in besieged Goma city in eastern DR Congo. They looted the centre clean, shattering the hopes and dreams of some 60 orphaned children aged between five and 14 years, who called the place their home. Personnel of the state-sponsored charity TAD, which ran the facility, had fled days earlier, abandoning the children.



Ben is shown in this file photo with his family

Children spirited to safety

IRFF's man on the ground, Ben (Nzanzu Saasita Bienvenu), made his way into the beleaguered city and, with his team, took the children out of immediate danger before the M23 rebels reached their part of Goma.

"They broke in the doors, stole the mattresses, plastic chairs, plates, clothes, children's shoes, pretty well everything, from our Hope For Children centre," Ben reported in an email.

The looting was systematic, Ben said. Thieves ransacked shops, stores, supermarkets, warehouses, offices, and houses. Former detainees of prison camps, released by the rebels who were enlarging their control over the territory, joined in the looting.

As IRFF-UK's liaison in DR Congo, Ben and his team not only oversee the HFC centre but are also involved in other local charity work, including running a facility for the protection and care of battered women.

In response to the crisis, Ben and his team have temporarily housed the children with some 20 households of his foster family network. The IRFF-UK seeks to collect \$150 for each foster family, which has taken an average of three children. The money will be used to provide for their needs, with a portion allocated as initial capital to help families start or develop small commercial enterprises in selling tomatoes and spices, vegetables and fruits, fish, and cereals, to provide ongoing child support.



"How can we abandon these suffering children?" Ben asked, expressing his distress. "I am very upset with this war in which the innocents are the victims. I have lost friends, and others are missing. No one is safe here."

Eastern DR Congo has been ravaged by wars since 1997, with children and women often being the

victims. Thousands have ended up on the streets without education, often joining armed groups, and females frequently become victims of rape. The region is rich in sought-after raw materials but suffers from weak state institutions, leading to continuous and extreme disorder.

The HFC centre provided primary and secondary education for some 60 former street children in Goma. IRFF-UK helped finance the building of a new home for these children and provided other financial support until May 2024, when it was handed over to the local state-run charity TAD.



Better days at the Hope For Children centre.

Most of the children are now cared for by foster parents and are attending school as part of the socio-economic reintegration project. The project is supported in cooperation with the UK-based World Cultural Association (WCA).



Ben is circled by foster parents in this file photo.

Appeal For Support

The delicate hopes and dreams of the orphan children have been shattered by the conflict around them. The foster families will provide shelter, food, and love. For your part, could you please sponsor the children and their new families? We are happy to receive any amount you can give. We are looking to meet or exceed our \$3,000 goal (around £2,400) to support the 60 children and their families. A donation of \$50 (£40) would sponsor a single child.

If you would like to donate and request an update on the situation on the ground, we will do our best to keep you informed.

Every donation counts

Empower a Child's Future: Your donation can provide the education that will transform lives. Join us in making a lasting impact—because every child deserves the chance to learn, grow, and thrive.



Your £3 donation can help provide essential learning materials for a child.



With £7, you can contribute to a child's daily nourishment, ensuring they're ready to learn.



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