

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, February 2009

Northern Uganda featured in the CCVT Volunteer Spotlight Night

by Jason Daniel Baker

February 19th, 2009 saw the monthly Volunteer Spotlight Night at Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture host distinguished Ugandan guests Charles Larry Bongomin & Pauline Akello. These activists gave a presentation and a talk about the situation in Northern Uganda.

Specifically they focused upon how children are affected in the region including those abducted and forced to become child soldiers by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), the main rebel group in Northern Uganda as well as the government forces (GoU) the LRA opposes. The children in Northern Uganda have been affected by one of the longest civil wars in Africa-that is from 1986 to-date.

During their service they have been coerced into committing acts of extreme brutality. Those that survive and escape are traumatised emotionally and have difficulty reintegrating back into society.

Another issue discussed was the effect of children orphaned by murdered or abducted parents and households suddenly led by the eldest child. The forced migration of these child-headed households to overcrowded refugee camps in their own country, the

psychological toll upon them and the impediments to their getting proper education is hindering both the development of these children as well as the future development of Uganda.

Forced into Internally Displaced People's Camps (IDPs) with squalid conditions, inadequate or no basic social services such as health centres, many die from preventable diseases.

The cruel and diabolical exploitation of these children proved catalytic for a lively discussion. Those in attendance were visibly moved by the plight of Ugandan children and their resilience in dealing with issues no child should have to confront.

Charles & Pauline communicated a most encouraging message of hope to leave us with. We had lively discussions on the role of the Ugandan government and how we can resolve the problem.

Volunteer Spotlight Night is very helpful in providing CCVT volunteers with reminders of why we want to donate our time and assist the centre. This particular installment of CCVT Volunteer Spotlight Night was very effective in that respect to those of us in attendance.



Helping Survivors of Torture Since 1977

The CCVT Connection, which is published monthly, is intended to inform and engage the Centre's volunteers in important events, news, and meetings, and in doing so, to acknowledge the vital role they play in fulfilling the CCVT's mandate.

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Citizenship and
Immigration Canada

Citoyenneté et
Immigration Canada



EDITOR'S NOTE: The information provided in this publication is not controlled by the CCVT, and therefore may not reflect the Centre's views

The Befriending Experience from Both Points of View

Virginie...

Hi, my name is Virginie. I am from Rwanda. Since I came to Toronto a year and a half ago I have studied English five afternoons a week at CCVT.

One year ago my counsellor suggested that I join the CCVT Befriending program. CCVT has volunteers who befriend newcomers to Canada. Mostly we don't speak English, we don't know about Canada or Toronto, or the culture. It was all new for me. Everything was new for me.

My volunteer friend is Barbara. She has a big job with me. At the beginning I spoke only French and Kinyarwanda. Our communication was basic. She was patient about that. For me my

befriender took me like her daughter. She practices English with me. She helps me to keep connected to my family back home in Rwanda by using her computer phone.

Before we met, I was anxious and upset. Now I have changed. I smile. When I have something tough for me, I talk to her. She encourages me, advises me, gives me everything. Sometimes we have dinner, visit with her family, so that I feel at home.

It's more than the weekly opportunity to call my family that is important to me. When I meet her I'm very happy. It's like a dose for a week. My family feels they know Barbara. Our families are friends now even though they haven't met.

... and Barbara

And I am Barbara, Virginie's Toronto friend. Befriending Virginie has been a real pleasure. I asked Chizuru, the volunteer co-ordinator, if she could pair me with someone from Africa. I've never had the opportunity to be a friend of a black person. It is easy to forget the difference in our skin colour. We are the same inside.

I am lucky because Virginie is such a special woman. She has such a big heart. I can tell from her ready connection with me, and from her conversations in Kinyarwanda with her family. She is a wonderful mother to her 4 boys even from afar. They are living in Kigali with her mother until she gets her refugee status and brings them here. I remind her that she is a powerful woman. She has

taken on such a huge/hard life experience to begin a new life and to be separated from the ones she loves so much.

For my role, I understand how important it is for her to have someone close, and someone here who cares while she is in the waiting process. What I also love is that I benefit from having a "daughter" who I get to see regularly, who is loving and caring and with whom I can laugh.

Being a volunteer at CCVT has several advantages. I particularly love to be part of this centre with such a great staff, and to see the clients who come in to take advantage of the programs.



Charles Larry Bongomin & Pauline Akello, CCVT volunteers and recent Spotlight Night presenters

Volunteers taking in the February Spotlight Night...



Tuesday, March 17 at 6:30 pm – 8 pm
CCVT March Volunteer Spotlight Presents...

The International and Domestic Problem of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation

Workshop with

Benjamin Santamaria

Founder of Project Desert Roses

www.projectdesertroses.org



Project Desert Roses is a non profit organization whose present aim is to prevent and stop Human Trafficking in the American Continent (from Argentina to Canada), looking to expand its actions worldwide in the future. The organization offers several educational, cultural and artistic activities.

Canadian Center for Victims of Torture

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The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture aids survivors in overcoming the lasting effects of torture and war. In partnership with the community, the Centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, works for their protection and integrity, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families. The CCVT gives hope after the horror.

Welcome, new volunteers!

Rodrigo López
Kadija Sidibe
Julie Cannon
Natalie Muradian
Supresa Vrenezi
Fiona Thomas
Michelle Nelly
Mehrdad Pojhan
Vahagn Karapetyan

Rafael Contreras
Abtin Obar
Fatima Sharmarke
Silvilla Deliellis
Megan Sandhu
Hellen Jajikostantinou
Andrea Grant
Shabnam Mohsenzadeh
Charles Bongomin

Sandra Diaz
Grace Sunagawa
Justine Johnston
Ashmeet Lazaro
Rwakibaale Muhanga
Muriel Kramer
Carla Young

"To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world"
Anonymous

UPCOMING EVENTS....

In the Community:

* Human Rights Watch Film Festival
(February 24, 2009 – March 5, 2009)

* Water: A Human Right? Let's Make it Our Business! – Amnesty International (February 21, 2009)

At CCVT:

* March Income Tax Clinic

* Volunteer Spotlight night – The International and Domestic Problem of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (March 17, 2009)

DO YOU HAVE a story, a poem, a recipe, a book review, a picture, or anything else you'd like to contribute? We'd love to **PUBLISH** it in the newsletter! Drop us a line at ConnectCCVT@gmail.com

Are you no longer a volunteer at CCVT and/or no longer want to receive the newsletter? If so, please contact Chizuru Nobe at (416) 363-1066 ext. 22 or cnobe@ccvt.org.