

Beat: News

## First Person: From taking lives to saving lives, in DR Congo

### An Ex-combatant Becomes A Firefighter

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#### UN News Press Release - 10 April 2022

Peace and Security

Fabien Mwingwa once fought as a child soldier with an armed group in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Today, he has turned his life around, and works for the UN peacekeeping mission in the country as a firefighter, helping to keep local people safe.

Mr. Mwingwa was 17 when a rebel group - RCD Goma - convinced him to join its ranks, and fight against the then government of President Laurent Kabila, with promises of a life of prosperity.

He was recruited in Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, and started military training in the bush. After fighting for seven years, Mr. Mwingwa, surrendered and is now an employee of the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC, (MONUSCO) as a Fire Safety Assistant.

"When I joined RCD Goma, A gloomy future was in store for me. The government was trying to impose one tribe, to rule over the entire country, and the rebel leaders promised that once we had liberated the country, we would prosper.

After recruitment, we stayed in Goma for a month and then we were sent to Rwampara military camp, located in Bunia, Ituri province. The rebel leaders realized that our parents were looking for us, and it could have been easier for them to spot us in Goma.

In 1999 the training was moved to Kisangani, before we were sent to the battlefield in Manono, Tanganyika province. The fighting was intense. We used heavy weaponry like Rocket-Propelled Grenades (RPGs). We were very young, and some of those who survived later, had mental breakdowns.

I suffered a lot. The conditions were filthy and stinking, and we were infested with lice.

I was picked to escort our leader back to Goma, along with other fighters, and when my mother found out that I was back, she pleaded with me to stay home, as family members were saddened by what they heard I went through in the bush.

But I stayed with the group, and it wasn't until 2004 that I decided to leave. I realized that life with armed groups did not bring the prosperity they had promised: whatever money we got, we had to give to the leadership, who did not even provide us with shelter.

The following year, I heard about the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme, run by the UN peacekeeping mission. I surrendered my weapons and uniforms, and followed all procedures, including visiting an office that verified whether or not I had indeed taken military training, or committed any crimes in the community.

I got a job as a security guard, where I received training in engineering and fire safety. When my contract ended, I secured several further short-term contracts until I was employed by MONUSCO as a Fire Safety Assistant in 2015.

I am grateful that MONUSCO has been with me since my surrender. I make a decent salary and I own a house. I am married, and am able to provide my children with a good education.

My message to young people is that they should not go fighting in the bush, as there are no benefits. I suffered, I wasted time. And to combatants, I say, please come home and learn various skills. You could be hired like me, and life is good".

#### MONUSCO's DDR and skills training

- The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program has been running in DRC since 2013.
- The aim of the initiative includes helping former combatants reintegrate peacefully into their communities after surrendering weapons and uniforms.
- The DDR programme provided Mr. Mwingwa with income generating skills and funds to start a fuel vending business, and prepared him to live peacefully within.

**Article online:**

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-20433/first-person-from-taking-lives-to-saving-lives-in-dr-congo.html>

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