



**1000 displaced in the Don Bosco Centre of
Ngangi, Goma
3800 children and adolescents in the Don
Bosco Centre**

The Centre des Jeunes Don Bosco Ngangi, located in the area of Nyragongo, 5 km from the centre of Goma, D.R. Congo, was created in 1988. It was founded by a Salesian Father from a nearby community who had rented some land for a football team and wished to start an alphabetization course, supported by the referees coming from the technical school. With a little fantasy a woodwork workshop

was also established. Day after day, the Centre turned into one of the major shelter and rehabilitation centres for children in the whole region. At first the Centre would help a small number of children, most of them from Ngangi or from nearby villages.

From 2008 the war worsened and the area of Goma, where at the time lived around 200,000 people, became the crossroads of armed groups and of refugees fleeing from the near Rwanda; the inhabitants of the small town therefore reached 3 million. From then onwards, the Centre started to host ever more children from all ethnic groups and also from remote areas of the country; children who fled or got lost during the raids against their villages, after having witnessed the assassination or abduction of their family members. Still today, many babies now in the Centre, were are found in tears beside the lifeless bodies of their parents.

The Centre Don Bosco has been and still is a gate of hope for many boys and girls: from the beginning of its activities, more than 25,000 children aged between 0 to 16/18, of various ethnic groups among which Hutus and Tutsis, received food, clothes, assistance, education and today the daily arrivals have increased threefold. During these years, most of the children that have passed by Ngangi have been reunited with their families or have studied, learned a skill and are today self-sufficient men and women.

The children and adolescents of Ngangi, Goma

Today the children and adolescents of Ngangi are around 1600/1800 and can be divided into three categories:

1. The interns: around 600 children aged between 1 and 16, boys and girls. Among them there are the so-called "transit" children, the families of whom are still searched for. The others are orphans of one or, most of the times, of both parents. All interns live in the Centre where they receive three meals a day, they sleep, they receive clean clothes, they can wash themselves and attend school. The children in transit are on average between 80 to 100 per month. They are hosted in the Centre in cooperation with the ICRC (International Red Cross) that takes care of family reunions.
2. The "amido" (semi-interns): on average 300/500 children who live mainly in the streets: they have been abandoned by their families or their families have severe problems (one parent is dead, divorced, is an alcoholic...). They do not sleep in the Centre but its doors are always opened for them. In the Centre they receive three meals a day while in the evening they go back home or to the families that are hosting them. Many of them regularly follow the courses, others come to the

Centre when they need to eat, to have a shower, to see a doctor or need to solve a problem.

3. The externals: over 600/800 children and youths coming from "normal" families but poor due to the war and to its direct consequences (misery, unemployment...), or due to natural disasters. These children cannot go to school for financial reasons and they therefore come to the Centre to study, here they also receive food and all the assistance and care they need.

On the whole, most of the guests of Ngangi are street children, often driven out of their homes accused of witchcraft. To such a situation certainly contributed the family disintegration and the absolute social decay of the country, where the value of mutual support and of family solidarity has virtually disappeared. Many of these children are accused to be the cause the death of one of their family members and are violently repudiated. Often the children themselves end up believing they possess some wicked power, being these sorts of beliefs so deeply rooted in the local mentality, and they go astray engaging in small criminal activities. However, according to the circumstance, there the refugees, the displaced due to the eruption of Nyragongo in 2002, child-soldiers, etc.

Despite the great welcoming capacity even in the most difficult circumstances - e.g. in 1996 when over 15,000 ENA (Enfants Non Accompagnés), survivors of the killings in Rwanda, have been accepted in the Centre Don Bosco of Ngangi supported by the ICRC, HCR and UNICEF - there are still many children who cannot be helped due to the lack of space, of equipment for vocational training, or of resources and goods for basic needs.

The structure, built on 5 hectares of land, develops around a perfect large courtyard in the middle of which is located a bell that, operated by the hand of one of the boys of the Centre, beats the times of the various activities. On one the sides there are the 4 multipurpose areas hosting the boys and girls divided by age group.

In another wing of the Centre there are the rooms where the teachers take care of the children and adolescents, starting from pre-school level; whereas inside other sheds there are held vocational training courses - woodwork, masonry, metal work and tailoring.

In Ngangi there is also a well equipped clinic, managed by a doctor and three nurses who in addition to monitoring the healthcare of all the children hosted at the Centre, visit and offer medical care to the women and children of the district, and stand in the frontline in providing food for the undernourished that come to the Centre and in giving advice to the mothers as far as nutrition is concerned.

Again, there are sports fields: soccer, basketball and volleyball, and a small coffee roasting place where one of the 5 Salesian Fathers roast the coffee produced by the Centre itself.

A small area accommodates the Salesians and the volunteers of VIS who work in the Centre.

The activities

1. **The street:** a group of educators regularly visit the streets to meet the youth, to establish a human contact, to introduce the Centre to them and to invite them to go, thus leaving the street. This is why in 2002 an "antenna" was opened in Virunga market, in cooperation with other urban associations, a fundamental standpoint for assistance and contact to guarantee support to the street children.

2. **Welcoming:** an individual, generally an educator, accepts the daily cases: the same children that arrive alone after having been encouraged by the friends met in the street, or accompanied by an organisation (e.g. ICRC) After a short interview, the educator registers the child to the Centre and studies his/her needs such as food, shower, clothes, visit to the clinic, search for his/her family, somewhere to sleep, somewhere to study...
3. **The support:** the child is immediately integrated into a group or into an activity that responds to his/her needs:
 - Hygiene: the child can wash him/herself and receives clean clothes. If the child stays in the Centre as an intern or semi-intern, he/she will be given three clothes changes and soap. He/she will be responsible for the cleaning (except the smaller ones or the sick ones who will instead receive the help from the others). The supervisor of the group will check that the child is clean and that he/she can distinguish the clothes for: work and sports, school, evening, feast days.
 - Health: all the children are treated in the clinic of the Centre or in the hospital except those with serious diseases, those who need special care or those brought in by ICRC.
 - Food: three meals a day.
 - Small works: many children at their arrival cannot join the school activities. The organisation of their time is followed by an educator, helped by the other youths: cleaning of the dormitory, help in the kitchen, care of the younger children, painting, educational games, etc.
 - Accommodation: for the most urgent and desperate cases: children without any relative, with nowhere to stay, children in transit who will later be reunited with their families or who will return home, sick children, children in danger.
 - Education: the children in the Centre attend free primary school or vocational training courses.

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