



Testimony on the occasion of the International Volunteer Day - December 5th 2007

AN INTERNATIONAL HONOUR OF VOLUNTEERING: LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

by Dieudonné Amisi Mutambala

Researcher & Practitioner in Education, Human Rights and Conflict Transformation

Member of the (global) Inter Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)

and its Adolescent and Youth Interest Group (AYIG)

(DR Congo)

- December 2007 -

ONLINE VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR 2006¹

Dieudonné Amisi Mutambala (D.R. Congo) - RESPECT Refugee Education Sponsorship Program (Canada)

December 04, 2006



Contribution to achieving MDG6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, MDG8: Develop a global partnership for development; [Millennium Campaign](#): "No Excuses, Promises Must be Kept"

The [RESPECT Refugees Education Sponsorship Programme](#) aims to raise awareness of refugee issues among youths and to build bridges between refugee and non-refugee students through pen-pal letter exchange.

Dieudonné played an important role in making RESPECT well known in the South Kivu Region and in implementing its programme there.

Between 2004 and 2006, Dieudonné coordinated a team of 30 to 40 volunteers and teachers to enable around 800 refugee students aged 5 to 30, from 31 schools in South Kivu, to exchange letters with youths in Europe and America. Despite the difficult context in Kivu (lack of electricity, bad infrastructures, etc.), he was an example of honest commitment and devotion to the task, keeping up constant communication with RESPECT via emails from cyber cafés. He planned and coordinated activities, disseminated information relevant for partners and participants, and organized an event of HIV/AIDS training for the benefit of 60 members of local NGOs.

Dieudonné contributed to educating people on the realities of refugee life and to facilitating the psychological reconstruction of youths in a country seriously affected by years of war. He helped to further integrate stakeholders' analyses and strategies into proposals of decision-makers for bringing about adequate change in the region. RESPECT stresses the fact that no programme would have been possible in South Kivu without Dieudonné's invaluable help.

“Volunteering online has opened my view on both local and international realities... It also helped me integrate the situation of my community and my country into the global context.”

¹ http://www.onlinevolunteering.org/stories/story_det.php?id=1474

AN INTERNATIONAL HONOUR OF VOLUNTEERING: **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT**

I. INTRODUCTION

Since December 5th 2006, the day I won the Online UN Volunteer Award, I began receiving a number of questions in relation with this international honour given by the UN Volunteer Headquarters in Bonn - Germany, from the nomination presented by the Canada non-profit organisation called RESPECT International.

Following the order of importance from my understanding, here are the questions which have been asked by personalities of different categories and acting in diverse areas of activities:

1. How have you succeeded to win the Online UN Volunteer Award?
2. Are there any other Congolese (from DRC) who had won the same award in the past?
3. Why “only” you?

Many times I have not been able to respond these questions and meet the satisfaction of people, especially because it requires a long (and bitter in a certain measure) retrospective in the history of my involvement in non-profit associations' dynamics. But it is also because I perceive some “sensible” aspects in the second and third questions.

Nevertheless, the bigger obstacle to narration expected by my interlocutors concerning the third question is the following:

- I have a failure of not being able to talk about myself.

For the second question, I remain with no information about the number of individuals originally from my country (the Democratic Republic of Congo) who might have won the Online UN Volunteer Award. Therefore I can not know their names, if there is any. Even the Online UN Volunteering Service Team has not released this information to me so far.

What I can share with anyone as relevant introductory information from my volunteer experience before exploring details in the following pages, and in linkage with the UNV award after a whole year since its proclamation, is here below in three lines:

- I have been working from the grassroots and within community-based initiatives and have brought some of good practices up for the attention of regional, international and global networks.
- Among 10 main institutions I have worked with, there are local and international non-profit organisations (NGOs), networks and UN agencies/offices.
- I spent at least 2,720 hours working online for volunteer assignments and 10,200 hours dealing with offline or field tasks from May 2000 to November 2006.

As this day of December 5th has become a historical day in my professional career, the award I won on this date is for me a souvenir that I consider as one of the more precious of my life. I feel comfortable and accountable of sharing my testimony with humanity because volunteering is a noble act for the collective wellbeing, and I affirm that it really pays. To end my introduction, I thank RESPECT International, the Online UN Volunteer Service, ArtHum volunteers and all those who have allowed me to work volunteerly with their institutions.

II. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE PURPOSE OF CONSIDERATION FOR THE ONLINE UN VOLUNTEER AWARD - 2006

From: The Online UN Volunteer Service Team

To: Mr Dieudonné Amisi Mutambala

Date: Friday, September 29th 2006

Dear Dieudonné Amisi Mutambala,

We have recently asked all our host organizations to nominate exceptional volunteers to be considered for the Online Volunteer of the Year Award 2006. We are happy to inform you that the organization Respect Refugees has nominated you!

The award recognizes ten outstanding online volunteers who have made an exceptional contribution to development work through their role as an online volunteer. Your host organization has explained to us why they consider that you should be a candidate for this award, and now we would like to hear from you.

We would like you to tell us about your assignment, your contributions and the influence that completion of this project has had on your life and, in your view,

on the development work of this organization. To be considered for this award, please submit a narrative which answers the following questions:

- When and why did you decide to become an Online Volunteer?
- What organization(s) have you volunteered with online, and why did you choose the particular organization(s) and assignment(s)?
- What have you done as an online volunteer?
- How much time have you spent volunteering online (in total and per week)?
- What impact do you believe your online contribution has had for this/these organization(s) and its/their development project(s)?
- How has volunteering online influenced your life?
- If you were to say one thing to a person who is thinking about volunteering online, what would you say?

Please feel free to add any other details which you feel may be of relevance. We also encourage you to attach a photo of yourself. Photos will not be used in the selection process but may later appear on the Online Volunteering website or in promotional materials.

Your experience story should be submitted by email to info@onlinevolunteering.org no later than 1st November 2006. Both your narrative and your organization's nomination will serve as a basis to assess and select the award winners.

The 10 Online Volunteers of the Year will be chosen by a jury of UNV representatives and external experts in volunteerism, development cooperation, and online collaboration that will review the nominations based on the following set of criteria:

- The online volunteer has been exceptionally dedicated and committed
- S/he has contributed innovative ideas that produced great results for the organization
- S/he has been an example to other volunteers
- S/he has made a definable difference that had a positive impact on a development initiative.

The Online Volunteers of the Year 2006 will be announced on International Volunteer Day, December 5th. If you are successful, your story will appear on the OV website as one of ten profiles of the Online Volunteers of the Year 2006. To view the stories of previous years' winners, please visit the UNV web site.

Congratulations again on being nominated, and if you have any questions, please get in touch.

We look forward to receiving your story, and remember - the deadline for submission of your article is 1st November!

Best wishes,

The Online Volunteering service team

=====

United Nations Volunteers
Online Volunteering Team, Bonn - Germany

III. ANSWERS FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE ONLINE UN VOLUNTEER SERVICE TEAM

From: Dieudonné Amisi Mutambala
To: The Online UN Volunteer Service Team
Date: Wednesday, November 8th 2006

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Here are my answers and concern in relation with your questions.

QUESTION 1

When and why did you decide to become an online volunteer?

ANSWER 1.

- I decided to become an online volunteer in 2000.
- Reason:
 - “Dialogue for Peace” (Dialogue Pour la Paix – DPP in French) is a network that was informally created in 2000 for a fruitful collaboration and an inter-communal/mutual understanding in South Kivu province of DR Congo.
 - DPP had two member organisations at its beginning and its interventions mainly used to cover the Fizi/Itombwe and Uvira zones, where the Mai-Mai combatants and Banyamulenge militia became a phenomenon in the region. It was during a period of clashes between internal and foreign belligerent forces in the eastern part of DRC, with massive displacement of families fleeing throughout the region, lack of access (for humanitarians) to people in disaster situations and difficult communication conditions between stakeholders and outsiders.
 - There was no phone facility, no post service, no Internet coverage, no radio station, no television station... This situation was the main “stimulus” and made me play an active role. I found that the ultimate way for this is volunteering in different aspects.

QUESTION 2

What organization have you volunteered with online and why did you choose the particular organisation(s) and assignment?

ANSWER 2.

Organisation 1:

Artists for Humanity, ArtHum

Period: (2000-...)

Reason of choice:

- To establish communication between war-affected people and the media, international governmental institutions and humanitarian organizations.
- To publish innovations/creation of new analysis tools through periodicals on the conflict context fluctuation in the Great Lakes region of Africa.
- To provide follow-up for the ArtHum Website update and make proposals for new pages to be posted.

Organisation 2: United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, UNHCHR

Period: (2000-2001)

Reason of choice:

- To help the UNHCHR secretariat construct and adapt principals and theories with realities and concrete situations in prospect of human rights defence and protection and promotion, in relation with conflicts in the world, specially those of my region.
- To confirm and enlighten that conflicts have got linkage with human rights abuses which derive from discrimination in the region.
- To voluntarily participate studies and exchanges that had been facilitated by the UNHCHR secretariat with the purpose of “preparation of the World Conference Against Racism” held in August 200 in Durban (South Africa).

Organisation 3: Dialogue for Peace, DPP (network)

Period: (2000-2002)

Reason of choice:

- To support peace initiatives in DR Congo, especially in South Kivu.
- To contribute as Volunteer Liaison Agents for the network within its office settled abroad in Bujumbura (Burundi), between external partners and the DRC-based member organisations and other affiliate structures that progressively joined the network.

Organisation 4: United Nations Mission in DR Congo - MONUC

Period: (2001- 2003)

Reason of choice:

- Due to my involvement in peace building activities, I also had been acting as a consultant for the French Army's officers who used to be appointed at the MONUC Liaison Office settled in Bujumbura-Burundi. The concern was:

- To monitor what happened in South Kivu Province, mainly in the Fizi and Uvira zones concerning human rights, military context, humanitarian situation and political activities.
- To analyse the overall context and provide relevant information and advice so that they (Liaison Officers) can link the situation of eastern DR Congo within an integrated cross-bordering context of conflict, given Burundi gets border with DR Congo and combatants groups used to move from one side to another, and vice-versa.
- To contribute in the “coverage” or “compensation” due to the absence of MONUC military observers, troops and other services throughout the mentioned zones. They were not deployed there yet.
- Testimonies about this work can be found from the same French military officers, former MONUC Liaison Officers in Burundi: Lt. Colonel Renard, Roland, Jean-Michel, Pohl René and Francis Janin.
- I did the same, both online and in one-to-one meetings with another UN official who had got in touch with me on behalf of the Human Rights and Political Affairs Divisions from the MONUC Headquarters in Kinshasa. His name is Ibrahima DIA.

Organisation 5: Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, INEE

Period: (2003-...)

Reason of choice:

- To directly participate with my online imputes and ideas (in relation with my field experience) and contribute during the elaboration of the MSEE hand-book.
- To be physically part of the MSEE hand-book launch during the 2nd Global Conference of INEE that had place in December 2004 in Cape Town (South Africa).
- To contribute as a volunteer member of INEE and its Adolescents and Youth Interest Group (AYIG), in researches and other activities for the vulgarisation and promotion of the “Minimum Standards for Education in Emergency” (MSEE). This work is done through awareness, advocacy, monitoring... of the standards and other kinds of contribution via research/survey related papers and sharing of good practices.

Organisation 6: RESPECT International

Period: (2003-2006)

Reason of choice:

- To connect refugee and IDP children from their schools in DRC to international youth within affiliate schools abroad. This is an initiative based on cultural exchange.

- To contribute in psychosocial reconstruction of youth in my country and to build up the understanding of others about what refugee/IDP life is like.
- To open windows of opportunity and help people gain knowledge via distance learning systems exploited by the Online University created by RESPECT International (RESPECT University) and other partners or affiliate frameworks such as RESPECT Europe (REFUGIADOS).

Organisation 7: The United Nations Security Council

Period: 2nd quarter of the year 2004

Reason of choice

- I have been asked, by an international network dealing with conflicts and human rights, to send some imputes for the purpose of the preparation of the 5th report of the Secretary General of the UN Security Council on the topic "Children and armed conflicts".
- The summary of my online contribution for this report is posted at the ArtHum web site and can be found from the following link:
[http://www.romero-online.com/respect/arhum/Enfants et conflits armes.pdf](http://www.romero-online.com/respect/arhum/Enfants_et_conflits_armes.pdf)

Organisation 8: Working To Empower, WTE

Period: (2005-...)

Reason of choice:

- To prepare a one week training event for Educators in the area of HIV/AIDS and supervise the activities of the week at Baraka in South Kivu Province, with the support and a trainer from Working To Empower.
- To gather necessary information and updates for the purpose of setting up a HIV/AIDS resource centre that is being settled in Uvira and Baraka.
- To launch a project called Ebemet Education Program initiated by WTE and inspired from a proposal done by stakeholders in South Kivu province of DR Congo, a project whose mission is to help orphans in their schooling.

Organisation 9: International Centre for Conflict and Human Rights Analysis, ICCHRA

Period: (2006- ...)

Reason of choice:

- As a researcher in Education, Human Rights and Conflict Transformation, I have got an online training offer from ICCHRA in the area of Democracy, Human Rights and Good Governance for three months earlier in 2006.
- During the course related forums/discussions, the International Director of ICCHRA appreciated my interventions and thought that my experience dealing with conflicts and my way of analysing them was relevant.

According to him this ability would be of great importance if it was used within the ICCHRA framework. Doing so would also be useful for my country DR Congo.

- Now I am acting as the Volunteer Focal Point for ICCHRA in DR Congo. I have already conducted an inquiry related to the electoral processes in my country on behalf of ICCHRA. Moreover in collaboration with the peacekeeping mission in presence in DR Congo (MONUC), I have organised a conference week and arts-based/cultural activities to celebrate the International Day of Peace. We have developed and discussed around the theme “Working a noble path” that had been proposed by the International Director of ICCHRA and exploited by ICCHRA representatives in several countries in September 2006.

Organisation 10: Department of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA Geneva

Period: 2006

Reason of choice

- I am a registered member of the Online OCHA Coordination Centre, the OSSOC network.
- In April 2006, I submitted analysis paper departing from a case study concerning irregularities noticed in the field about coordination. I published this document for the attention of the UN humanitarian coordination system and other coordination corporations. The document is entitled "*Coordination humanitaire, dilemmes et obstacles en plus: Règlements des comptes diplomatiques et Irrégularités*".

To see this publication, find periodical 9 at

<http://www.romero-online.com/respect/arthur/Periodique9.pdf> .

- The Civil-Military Coordination Section (CMCS), Emergency Services Branch (ESB), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Geneva was seeking support on a speech which had to be delivered by Mr Josef Reiterer on behalf of the Under Secretary General in Oslo. The conference was about Africa and different approaches of multilateral organizations. He was asked to speak about “the United Nations approach to Africa - ideas and implementation”.
- I have contributed, sending a paper I published in 2004 on "*Peacekeeping Mission and Local Realities*" and received an encouraging feedback form Mr Josef. To know more about this other publication, please download its French version at <http://www.romero-online.com/respect/arthur/Periodique5.pdf>

QUESTION 3

What have you done as an online volunteer?

ANSWER 3.

- In addition to the respective information you can find through the reasons why I volunteered for the organisations mentioned above, I would also say that I have been assuming liaison roles between institutions or structures on behalf and for the benefit of “needy” and war-affected communities.
- Briefly, I have been designing projects, planning and coordinating and carrying out activities while sharing/spreading information relevant for partners and participants through community-based initiatives, in prospect of their efficient interventions and effective achievements.

QUESTION 4

How much time have you spent volunteering online (in total and per week)?

ANSWER 4.

- This depends on periods but the minimum is 8 hours per week for the “real” online work. I mean this is the time I voluntarily used to spend using the Internet for communities, structures or organisations.
- To sum up my online volunteering from May 2000 to November 2006, I would make my calculation this way:
340 (weeks) x 8 (hours/week) = 2,720 hours.
- As for my offline volunteering (out of the Internet, field or onsite works), its average is 30 hours per week.
Since May 2000, the total time for this work would be the following:
340 (weeks) x 30 (hours/week) = 10,200 hours.

QUESTION 5

How has volunteering online influenced your life?

ANSWER 5.

- Volunteering online has opened my view on both local and international realities of working with non-profit organisations, academic institutions and the UN system. It also helped me integrate the situation of my community and country in the global context, so that adequate analysis and proper strategies can be taken into consideration by decision-makers from stakeholders’ proposals, in order to bring about change into society.
- The online volunteer assignments helped me practice my English with people whose English is a native or official language. I think people will remember that French is the official and academic and administrative language in DR Congo.

- I am also convinced that volunteering online does contribute in building capacity of volunteers as a “learning by doing” process. In addition, by volunteering online and the fact of being personally in touch with many other actors abroad opened windows of opportunity in terms of distance learning courses and others.

QUESTION 6

If you were to say one thing to a person who is thinking about volunteering online, what would you say?

ANSWER 6.

- I am not quite sure! My volunteering online has been a hard work, first of all because of lack of personal computer and Internet connection where I used to stay. The use of Internet is not free of charge in Bujumbura (Burundi) where I began dealing with my online assignments in 2000. I used to go to Internet Café in this town.
- While there was no wage or regular income, something gained either per day/week or per month on my side, to pay for my Internet bills I did rely on “poor” and very punctual payments from people who sometimes hired me for consultancy works. Some times I found myself into constraints of begging my wife to help me pay them, although she was jobless.
- Secondly, this working condition became harder in 2003 when I completely moved out from Bujumbura (Burundi) to Uvira (DRC) from where the organisation ArtHum was basically operating. To complete my online assignments after I have drafted them offline in Uvira, I had to travel to Bujumbura again, paying a round bus/taxi ticket and a 3 day immigration permit and sometimes a lodging bill when the work delays until later in the evening.
- Thirdly in the same year 2003, several humanitarian agencies and MONUC sub-sections deployed in Uvira and Fizi territories towards the South. A few of them installed their own Internet facilities and we – external people to these institutions – had no access to them. Meanwhile, one public Internet place was launched in Uvira. Unfortunately, the cost for the use of their connected computers – apart from the fact that people used to wait on a queue – was still so expensive: 1,500 Congo francs, the equivalent of 3 US \$ per hour. The same year 2003, one more public Internet place was available in Uvira and it appeared to be lightly less expensive than the first one: 900 Congo francs, almost 2 US \$ per hour.
- Finally with this story on the time I had spent until November 2006 with my online volunteering, I don’t intend to discourage candidates aiming to getting engaged in this noble work. Everyone is necessarily not in a complicated situation as mine.

IV. CONCLUSION

People should be aware that online volunteering – as from my experience – is not limited on its ITC aspect when one works with a computer, exchanging information and fulfils different duties via the Internet. Financial expenses do incur in this work, as well as other kinds of resources and sacrifice such as travelling internally or crossing borders. As a first step, it is true that getting involved in the online volunteering is easier when one has an available computer that should better be connected to the Internet.

Everybody may agree that conditions of work which help people perform their volunteer assignments appear to be financial resources and material facilities. Without these ones and especially when the online volunteering becomes a passion, there is a risk of one's life/family destabilization, and this situation may evolve into trouble within one's households. However, conviction and willingness and honesty are necessary to effectively get engaged. Realism is actually the essential factor for the safeguard of humanity which prevents people from scourges resulting from misconduct of human beings and natural disasters.

As a summary of my testimony and feelings on volunteering I would like to share with curious people or those interested in volunteering, I affirm that I have benefited from my volunteering and the award I won on December 5th 2006. Talking specifically about my concerns and those of the organisations I work with, the Online UN Volunteer Award have brought higher consideration to my works than what I experienced in the past. My own causes and advocacy for others are more supported internationally. Moreover, my expressions of intention and applications for attendance in international forums and training courses are withdrawing more attention and gaining great recommendations from internationally recognised institutions and personalities.

Volunteering does pay!