

**Learning by Ear 2009  
Children's Rights Series  
01 Child soldiers**

**Topic:** Children in times of war

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	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Language</b>
<b>IN/OUTRO</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>Unimportant</b>	
<b>Narrator</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>Ca. 25</b>	
<b>Kisembo Mukisa</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Lingala</b>
<b>Umirembe</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Lingala</b>
<b>Faustin</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>adult</b>	<b>French</b>

## **LbE Soundtrack**

### **INTRO:**

Hello everybody and welcome to this, the first episode of our Deutsche Welle Learning by Ear series on children's rights and working for peace.

Today, we're talking about children in times of war, and we're off to Uganda to meet two young Congolese boys, Kitembo and Umirembe. They used to be enemies but they shared a similar destiny -- both of them were child soldiers. At an early age, they got entangled in a conflict that was not of their making at all. They witnessed scenes of extreme violence and themselves committed atrocities that they will never be able to forget. Henri Leenhardt has this report.

## **REPORT**

### **1. Atmo pool**

**Narrator:**

We've agreed to meet on the first floor of a Lebanese cafe in Kampala. Kisémbó Mukisa and Umirembe are aged 20 now. At first glance, they don't look any different from other young men of their age. They also like to play pool. But Kisémbó and Umirembe have witnessed unimaginable atrocities. They were not even 14 when they participated in one of the most deadly tribal wars of the past 10 years. A war between the Lendu agriculturalists who originated from Sudan and the Hema pastoralists who were originally from Uganda and, further back, from south-eastern Ethiopia. The conflict took place from 1998 to 2003 in the Ituri region of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC. Kisémbó Mukisa remembers the day he his childhood came to an end.

**2. Kisémbó** (int. 1 – Lingala):

"I went out with some friends. We went for a walk in town. When I got home some neighbors told me my house had been attacked by Lendus and my father, mother and little sister had been violently murdered."

**Narrator:**

Kisémbó was scared and fled into the bushland. It was 2002. He was 13 years old. The war between the Hemas and the Lendus had been raging for four years -- ever since the beginning of the Ugandan occupation. Until the day Kisémbó lost his family, he had not felt directly involved in the conflict. But on that day in 2002 he took the road for Musipela -- an exclusively Hema area in Bunia, the capital of Ituri province. He wanted help and revenge.

## ATMO

Kisembo enrolled immediately in the UPC, the Union of Congolese Patriots, an armed political group led by Thomas Lubanga, who has since been indicted by the International Criminal Court for recruiting children. At the time, he was supported by Uganda and Rwanda.

Kisembo remembers that at the time child recruitment seemed normal:

### 3. Kisembo (int. 2, Lingala):

"When I arrived in Musipela, there were lots of militia members. They said that we had to join the UPC because we belonged to the Hema tribe. It was a duty, they said. We didn't have a choice."

### Narrator:

Kisemba was sent to a military training camp in Mandro -- seven kilometers away from Bunia.

### 4. Kisembo (Int. 3, Lingala):

"It was a life of suffering. A very difficult life. We ate bad food and could barely sleep in the huts they gave us. It was really very hard. We had to run from dawn. To do sport and to sing for hours. Then we had to do housework, chopping wood for example. When we got back, we would get food that was inedible. Sometimes we were allowed to stop for some time at 3 o'clock, for an hour or so. And then it would all start again -- running, singing late into the night. We didn't sleep much at all and sometimes they woke us up in the night to make us run and sing."

**Narrator:**

But life in the Mandro training camp was nothing compared to the horrors that would follow. Kisémbó again:

**5. Kisémbó** (Int. 4, Lingala):

« If someone made a big mistake he would be tied to a tree and shot. For less serious mistakes, the other militia members would hit us with sticks.»

**Narrator:**

Kisémbó didn't steal a weapon during his one-month training. Nor was he tempted to desert. So he wasn't shot. On the contrary, he was given a Kalashnikov and three magazines. He was sent to attack enemy Lendu villages with other Hema children.

**6. Kisémbó** (Int. 5, Lingala):

“Bosco Ntabanda, the operations commander, would tell us which Lendu village to attack. The order was to kill everyone systematically with no exception.”

“First, we killed all the Lendus we could find in Bunia. And then we went to the villages, such as Zumbé or Songolo.”

**7. Atmo pool**

**Narrator:**

The militia Kisembo belonged to, never allowed anyone to survive. Some 800 civilians are thought to have been killed by the UPC in Mongbwalu alone between 2002 and 2003. According to Radio Okapi, the United Nations radio in the area, Thomas Lubanga decreed that each family living in the zones under his control had to take part in the war effort by giving livestock, money or even a child to the UPC rebels. The enemy militias practiced the same policy of burning land and murdering systematically. The massacres in Ituri triggered massive displacements of civilians, trying to flee.

**7. ATMO pool**

Umirembe, who today is playing pool with Kisembo in Kampala, was 12 years old and just leaving school when he and his friends were kidnapped by a Lendu militia group. It was the year 2000. He too was immediately sent to a training camp.

**8. Umirembe** (int. 6, Lingala):

"Life was very hard. We had to do training exercises. Running etc. Then we would be ordered to go to such and such village, to plunder and bring back the young girls for the chiefs. We would rape them too."

**Narrator:**

The operations of the Lendu militias intensified:

**9. Umirembe** (Int. 7, Lingala):

“We attacked the Hema villages around Bunia, like Bogor, Tchei, all the Hema villages.”

“We were told that if we found a Muhema in a village or on the road we had to stop him and ask him where his possessions were. Once we had found what we were looking for, we were supposed to rob and kill him. If we found girls, we would rape them and kill them like all the other Muhemas.”

**Narrator:**

But in 2003, Hema militias entered the village of Bogoro, Umirembe's village. They killed his whole family after raping his mother. Umirembe hid in the forest for two years.

At the same time, Kitembo, a Hema child soldier, abandoned his arms to reintegrate into Congolese civilian society. He was able to benefit from a voluntary disarmament and reinsertion program that was put in place after 2004. He got 100 dollars from the United Nations for giving up his weapon.

**10. Kisémbó** (Int. 8, Lingala):

"I opened a little shop in town. But the problem was that not everyone gave up their arms. Some of us joined the national army with our weapons. They would come at night to plunder everything in town. One night, they tied me up in a bag and took everything."

**Narrator:**

Tired, alone and penniless, Kisémbó decided to cross Lake Albert to try his luck in Uganda. He met lots of exiled Congolese in Kampala, including Faustin Katanga. This former police inspector in Bunia was forced to flee DRC during the war because he knew too much about too many people who might have been dangerous. He remembers the child recruitment:

**11. Faustin** (Int. 9, French):

"The chiefs started recruiting children. It was clear that each tribe was being attacked so children, both boys and girls, had to be enrolled to fight against the other tribe."

**Narrator:**

The enrolment soon became systematic and forced. Faustin Katanga:

**12. Faustin** (Int. 10, French):

"To begin with, it was a voluntary movement, on the part of the tribes. But they started forcing people because some parents refused to send their children. But they were enrolled anyway. Sometimes, when the children were supposed to come back from school, we would find out they were in Mandro or in Sota -- those were the Huma camps. Or that they had gone to Ngéti -- that's where the Lendus were. That's how it was."

**Narrator:**

This inter-ethnic conflict was fuelled by the neighboring countries, such as Uganda or Rwanda. They were more or less directly involved. Many NGOs have condemned this fact. In a 2003 report, Doctors without Borders talked of inter-state rivalries to control the region politically and exploit its natural resources. UNESCO said that Uganda and Rwanda wanted the borders inherited from the colonialism to be redrawn so that they too could benefit from Congo's riches. A simple fighter, Kisémbó Mukisa remembers the ambiguous role of the neighboring countries:

**13. Kisémbó** (Int. 11):

"The Ugandan army was there but it was playing a double game. The Ugandan army gave us munitions to attack the city of Bunia. But they also gave weapons to the Lendus when we attacked them."

**Narrator:**

In exile in Kampala, the two former child soldiers live precariously. Sometimes, their friends or prayer groups help them.

But the warmongers in the DRC have not laid down their arms. In 2008, two of the seven militia groups were still active. 25,000 militia members and 11,000 children had been demobilized. That's why the United Nations launched a humanitarian action plan in DRC, with 10 percent going to Ituri. They hoped to get 1500 of the insurgents who continued to enroll children by force, to surrender.

Bosco Ntabanga is the former chief of staff of the UPC, the Union of Congolese Patriots created by Thomas Lubanga. He continued to enroll children even after he was indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. Kisémbó Mukisa:

**14. Kisémbó** (Int. 12, Lingala):

"The rebellion is not over yet. The recruitment of young militia members continues today but in secret. There are people in Kampala who are tasked with recruiting child soldiers. It's business."

**Narrator:**

But neither Kisémbó Mukisa nor Umirembe plan to ever take up arms again. The war is over for them. Their grieving, though, is only just beginning. Kisémbó Mukisa:

**15. Kisémbó** (Int. 13, Lingala):

"To forgive, yes, forgive... It's possible. I can do it. But the massacre of my family will always be a stain on my heart."

**Narrator:**

Between 2002 and 2003, over 8,000 people died in the massacres in Ituri and more than 800,000 were displaced. MONUC, the United Nations Organization Mission in Congo, said in 2004 that this was "one of the most disastrous death tolls in the world."

**End music**

**OUTRO:**

And that brings us to the end of this report from Kampala, Uganda by Henri Leenhart. And that's all from Learning by Ear for today. You can listen again to the programs already broadcast by Deutsche Welle by going to our website at [www.dw-world.de/lbe](http://www.dw-world.de/lbe). Don't forget to tune in next time!

**Music**