

From Perpetrators to Peacemakers – The Sons of Congo

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Proposal

Summary

From Perpetrators to Peacemakers—The Sons of Congo will be a film and photographic exploration capturing the untold stories of men who are now peacemakers in their families and communities in the Eastern Congo.

Background

In the past five years, over 23,000 men have participated in a dynamic social program called The Sons of Congo, creating a new narrative in the Eastern Congo. The Sons of Congo tackles the root cause of violence in the Eastern Congo... the mindset of men who have been perpetrators and passive bystanders.

The Sons of Congo participants include men from every facet of Congolese society: soldiers, police, former rebels, government officials, students, teachers, religious leaders, tribal chiefs, and community leaders. While the media offers scant coverage of the Congo Conflict, absolutely no outlet has covered the remarkable story of the 538 Sons of Congo groups who are restoring peace in the Eastern Congo.

While most aid in the Eastern Congo has rightly focused on the victims of sexual violence and poverty (women and children), The Sons of Congo offers education and support to help men develop a positive understanding of masculinity and human dignity. The Sons of Congo seeks to end the maddening cycle of violence through mentoring, leadership and character development in a small class environment. The result has been a transformative difference in the lives of men, women, children and whole communities. The Sons of Congo program works without cultural, religious or professional discrimination.

Issues and Questions to Explore

Though conflict still exists in many regions, The Sons of Congo program has helped develop sustainable peace in Uvira (South Kivu), Butembo, Beni (North Kivu), and Bunia (Orientale).

From Perpetrators to Peacemakers—The Sons of Congo will visually explore key themes relevant to this story:

- **Peacemaking, Reconciliation & Restoration:** Men who have abandoned arms for peacemaking, seeking reconciliation and restoration over revenge encounter resistance and hostility in their communities. Despite such tensions, peace has been proven possible and successful.
- **Assimilation:** Women and children rebuilding their lives face unique challenges with husbands and fathers now willing to be protectors instead of perpetrators and nurturers versus destroyers.
- **Justice & Restitution:** Widespread impunity, corruption at every level of Congolese society and the lack of due process presents significant legal, moral and relational dilemmas for the men and women of Eastern Congo seeking to rebuild their relationships and their communities.

From Perpetrators to Peacemakers—The Sons of Congo will specifically pursue these questions among the peacemaking men and women in the Eastern Congo:

- How have men and women become agents of change in the Eastern Congo?
- What sectors of Congolese society have been impacted and how?
- What are the psychological ramifications for men who have left a culture of war and violence?
- How have the victims of sexual violence responded to former perpetrators and passive husbands?
- How do men and women move beyond the stigma of rape to rebuild their marriages and family?
- What does reconciliation look like between spouses, children, families, communities and regions?
- How are men passing on a healthy understanding of human rights for all to the next generation?
- What does the rebuilding of civil society look like in Uvira, Butembo, Beni, and Bunia?

Story Coverage & Outlook

From Perpetrators to Peacemakers—The Sons of Congo has a high probability for successful story coverage due to the goodwill and strength of my relationship with Camille & Esther Ntoto, the developers of The Sons of Congo program. They are both highly respected NGO leaders based in Goma, DRC.

To cover this story, I propose making two trips to the Eastern Congo. The first in early spring 2016 (March or April); the second in late summer 2016. Each trip would last 10-14 days, depending on my host's schedule. Trip #1 would first cover the story in the northern regions of Bunia, Beni and Butembo. Trip #2 would cover the story in the southern region of Uvira.

In each region I visit, interviews and photography will be scheduled with the local Sons of Congo coordinator. Interviews will include men and women from all sectors of Congolese society in the Eastern Congo region.

The goal of the project is to create a 30 minute short film and photographic essay book designed to tell the Sons of God story to create a positive, new narrative in the Eastern Congo. The short film will be submitted to the top 10 film festivals in the US and the book will be made available to Africa New Day in order to advance their work in the Eastern Congo. Books will also be made available to the general public.

My project will involve close coordination with Camille and Esther, as well as Jean Paul Kasonga, The Sons of Congo program director. The Ntotos are the founders of Africa New Day (Un Jour Nouveau), a widely respected NGO based in Goma focused on education, leadership development, vocational training, and media broadcasting.

For the past ten years, Camille and Esther have served the victims of sexual violence through Heal Africa, the Panzi Foundation, and several Goma-based NGOs. They work closely with men and women in all sectors of Congolese society: community and government leaders, military officials, MONUSCO and international humanitarian teams. Camille is also a warden for the U.S. Embassy in the Goma area.

Through their extensive network of relationships, Camille, Esther, and Jean Paul will provide introductions to the men and women whose compelling stories will make *From Perpetrators to Peacemakers—The Sons of Congo* a compelling work of photojournalism.

Sons of Congo Budget

Travel (Congo & US Film Festivals)	\$10,000.00
Film & Editing	\$5,000.00
Project Stipend	\$5,000.00
Photo Book Creation	\$2,500.00
Admin Assistant	\$2,500.00
Film Festival Fees	\$1,000.00
Lodging	\$1,500.00
Meals	\$1,000.00
Promo Materials	\$1,000.00
Visas/Health	<u>\$500.00</u>
Total Budget	\$30,000.00

Artist Statement

Joey O'Connor is the executive director of the Congo Reform Association, whose mission is inspire social action through story, film and social media to help end the Congo Conflict and create a self-sustaining, thriving Congo. He also directs the arts non-profit, The Grove Center for the Arts & Media.

Joey is an award-winning screenwriter, author, and filmmaker with a passion for transforming stories that inspire hope and social action. In July 2015, he visited the Eastern Congo for the purpose of capturing the remarkable stories of the men and women of the Africa New Day leadership team. As a filmmaker and photographer, he captured the story of a team of art therapy instructors who led the Africa New Day staff through art therapy exercises designed to help heal the effects of physical and emotional trauma on the brain. It was in Goma that Joey discovered the dramatic influence of The Sons of Congo program that has created peace in many portions of the Eastern Congo. This discovery led Joey in his desire share this powerful, life-changing story with the world.

All donations can be made to the Congo Reform Association non-profit. The CRA is fiscally sponsored by The Grove Center for the Arts & Media. All donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by U.S. law.