

Sake

Donor Update



Dear Supporter,

You are receiving this report because you have donated to Comfort Congo's Sake Project - a response to the critical plight of orphans and malnourished children in the chaos of the current conflict ongoing in the North Kivu area of the Democratic Republic of Congo. We wanted to send you some information on how your donations have been used and the current situation with the children. We also want to take this opportunity to say thank you for your donation and ongoing support, whether that be through donations, fundraising, word of mouth or prayer - a little can change a life and in this life or death situation, your actions have an inconceivable impact.



The Sake Orphanage and Nutrition Centre was born out of a desperate need as violence around the Sake area increased, causing huge numbers of families to be evacuated to the area. Among these were over one hundred orphaned children and hundreds of others who, though still with a parent or carer, were suffering severe malnutrition with many tragic fatalities as a result. Our partners Comfort Congo, in partnership with the Free Methodist Church, set to work providing food, water and looking for shelter for the children to sleep, in the church or in host families throughout the area.



The cost of the project has been significant, with nutritious food needed for hundreds of children alongside clean water, mattresses, medicine, treatment at Central Hospital Rusayu, transport, hygiene materials and more and 100% of your donations have been sent to our partners to help carry this load. We received a report from Bedadi at Comfort Congo in January this year letting us know how things were going.

Bedadi writes, “Because of continued displacement, there are now 407 children that Comfort Congo are trying to look after who are either orphans or malnourished or both: 107 are complete orphans. 300 are not complete orphans but have maybe a mother, father or auntie, but due to the war and conditions at Sake have become like street children. Of the 107 orphans, 50 are being looked after at the Orphanage and 57 are with different families from local churches (these families are poor and unable to feed those children very much at all). The other 300 are either sleeping in churches or with church families. The 50 in the orphanage get beans/soya/cabbage each day. The other 357 get porridge/bread twice a week (Saturdays and Wednesdays) and also get soap and toothpaste.”



“Moise (Moses), the Nutritional Agent from Comfort Congo’s CHR hospital in Goma, goes twice a week to help with the feeding. Musafiri (husband of Murakatete for those who know her at Bethlehem church) goes four days a week to help with the project (he is a Muhunde and that helps as many of the displaced are Bahunde – the local chief though is doing well to keep peace and unity among all the different tribes), and Emmanuel Bifuko (monitor of the project) and myself Bedadi (Comfort Congo staff) go regularly to monitor the project and evaluate progress and report. At present access is difficult and sometimes Comfort Congo team members are turned back by various soldiers.”

One of the children that was being taken care of at Sake is 10-year-old Sarah*. “Sarah’s father passed away in 2016 when she was 2 years old. Their mother worked hard to raise them with her brother, but she also died in 2021. Sarah went to live with her uncle in Numbi but he died when he disappeared in the mine digging for minerals. She reached Sake following women who came to the market selling brooms, but she was very worn out and was left in the market till the late hours when a woman of good heart took her to the Comfort Congo Orphanage and Nutritional Center.”



Since January, the situation has changed dramatically in Sake. The conflict has intensified drastically, and the children have had to be evacuated from the area. Many host families have been forced to flee for their lives, and there is now no access in and out of Sake except for the military due to the road being blocked. Comfort Congo is desperately trying to find and reunite the children but the scale of the war and subsequent evacuation is making it impossible for them to reach them all. They have currently located 27 of the 50 orphan children who were staying at the orphanage and some of the other malnourished children who were being provided with food. Many of them have fled to Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps where conditions are harrowing. Food and water are scarce, with some drinking from the lake to quench their desperate thirst. Some don't have even a bedsheet to lie down on, and hygiene is almost non-existent, with infectious diseases running rampant.



Members from Comfort Congo are visiting the camps around twice a week, taking porridge or bread for the children to eat and as much food and hygiene materials as they can. They also take time to speak and pray with the children, teaching them from the bible and providing them with emotional support. However, with hundreds and thousands of families in the camps, floods of children are in serious need of help. Joseph from Comfort Congo has been involved in searching and gathering information on the whereabouts and situations of each of the children. He told us about Miriam's* (pictured right) story who is 12 years old:



“Miriam doesn't know her mother because she died long ago when Miriam was 2 years old. Her father, who fled with her here and there from multiple armed group attacks in the Masisi, died early in the morning when Kitchanga was taken. Miriam is continuously weeping saying she doesn't know how and where her father who cherished her was buried. While at Sake in the Comfort Congo orphanage, Sake was attacked also, and then Miriam with the others fled to the IDP (Internally Displaced People) camp where she now has only the clothes she wears day and night. Eating is difficult but she has become used to that as she and the other children have no other choice.”



9-year-old Lola* has also been displaced to the camps after losing her whole family and being cared for at Sake. She describes the difficult conditions, “We don't have food every day, but when there isn't Emmanuel and Moses (the Comfort Congo workers) come to tell us that we will eat the next day. Only the very little children cry when there is no food but as for us, we accept it and pray to God to give us food that next day and God gives us food. I want to return to Sake where there is food - not like over here where we eat every few days. Even if there are bombs killing people, we believe that we will go back to Sake when the fighting comes to an end.”

Some children are still being looked after by host families outside of the Sake area near Kimanchi and Mugunga and some are sheltering in a baptist church near there. For those that have not been found, the Comfort Congo team is on a continual search, speaking with as many people as possible to find out if anyone knows anything. As you can imagine, the stress on the team is extremely high and resources and energy are strained to the maximum. We are immensely proud and in complete admiration of how hard the team is working under such dreadful conditions.



Thank you so much for supporting the Sake Project. We would have very much wished to be sending you a report to say the situation was improving, children were healthy and well-fed and the project is no longer in desperate need of support. However, the danger and chaos in the Democratic Republic of Congo is as real as each one of us here, and the need is greater than ever. Your donations have undoubtedly saved many lives. Please continue to help us to work with our partners to help every child we possibly can.

Thank you, *Comfort International*

*Names changed to protect identity