

# Bring JOY this Christmas



'The angel said to them, 'Do not fear; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.' Luke 2:10

The people of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have had a lot to fear. Despite huge deposits of minerals (such as diamonds) and an abundance of natural resources (such as timber), 80 per cent of the population live on less than 13 pence/14 euro cents per day. Fragile leadership and escalating conflict over recent years have resulted in large-scale civilian massacres, widespread rape and sexual violence, and many thousands of people forced to abandon their villages.

And yet, while the DRC has sometimes been publicised in our media as a place of nothing but despair, Christian Aid partners are telling stories that speak of deep joy and profound hope, even within this challenging context of poverty and violence.

## Seeking shelter

Shukuru Binguru was only 12 years old when she heard rebel soldiers approaching her school: 'I heard explosions and shouting. I said to the others "can't you hear that? We must leave and go and find our families".'

She ran home to find her three younger siblings distressed and alone. Their father was out working in the fields and their mother was away at market. Shukuru and her siblings joined the crowds of people leaving for Goma. In an unknown city, with no idea whether their parents were alive or dead, they had a lot to fear.



Shukuru, far left, is now reunited with her family after fleeing from fighting in her village to Goma. While she was there, she was cared for by Christian Aid's partner Central Africa Baptist Community (CBCA)

Then Shukuru heard of Pastor Patrick who works with Christian Aid partner CBCA. She went to his home with her siblings to seek shelter. And they were not alone. Over the next few days more and more children started to arrive.

Some were alone, some were in small groups. But all of them told the same story of being forced to flee from violence. Within just a few days the number of children had totalled 129.

## 'The joy was enormous'

CBCA built a centre to house the children and contacted local schools so the older children could continue their education. And as soon as it was safe to do so, CBCA sent out messages to its network of churches to try and get news of the children's families. Broadcasting on the radio and reading out lists of names in churches, it fastidiously combed the region for the families.

And amazingly, word started coming back to the CBCA centre that parents had been found. Within six months, the sight of large groups of excited children, dressed in their best clothes, piling into minibuses outside the CBCA centre became a regular occurrence. They were taken back to their villages and to emotional reunions with their parents. 'We were full of an indescribable joy,' says Nyampuga Siperant, Shukuru's mother. 'We wept

together for 20 or 30 minutes and we shared embraces all round.'

Soon only two children remained at the centre. Two months later, they too had been returned to family members. The plans for an orphanage were abandoned. Désiré Safari, the head of CBCA, tells us how the outcome exceeded all their expectations: 'We had expected that some of the families would not be found.' But every single child was reunited. 'The joy was enormous.'

## Good news of great joy

In this situation of dislocation, pain and fear, we witness good news of great joy. So this Christmas, please consider a gift to Christian Aid to bring joy to families like Shukuru's. You will be helping to bring hope in some of the most desperate circumstances, and restoration and reconnection where there is brokenness and pain. But it is in stories like Shukuru's that you may also be able to witness some of the ancient truth of the promise of joy that comes to the world at Christmas.

**In the Democratic Republic of Congo, it cost:**

**85p** to feed a child for a day at the CBCA centre.

**£9** to provide medical care for one child for six months of their stay.

**£36.50** to provide the total lodging cost for one child for six months.

**Elsewhere around the world, your money will help to bring hope to other poor communities.**

**£8** could help families caring for children who have been orphaned by HIV in Kenya to save with a cash box.

**£47** could pay for a health promotion workshop in Haiti, allowing communities to learn about how to protect themselves and their families from infection and illness.