

Democratic Republic of the Congo

New hope for youth in the juvenile detention center in Goma

After more than 20 years of civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the situation in the North Kivu province remains extremely volatile. North Kivu hosts 171,755 refugees, (UNHCR, Refugees and Asylum Seekers in DRC Statistics) mainly from Rwanda, and has about 1.6 million internally displaced people.

JRS has worked for more than ten years in North Kivu. From its bases in Goma, Masisi, and Mweso, JRS teams support national primary and secondary education by assisting with school fees, teacher training, and raising awareness about the importance of education. JRS also focuses on emergency aid – such as emergency training, protection, and psychological first aid – due to the unpredictable nature of the situation and constant forced displacement.

Over the past several years, JRS has supported a juvenile detention center, **Etablissement de Garde et d'Education del'Etat**, in Goma with initiatives including a food programme, primary and secondary educational programmes, medicine distribution, recreational activities, and the provision of hygiene products, mattresses, and blankets. In 2020, the healthcare systems and essential services are under even greater strain due to COVID-19, and the center is in desperate need of funding.

There are 82 youth under 18 years-old being held at the center, eight of whom are young girls. Most have been arrested for petty crimes and are imprisoned for several months or years without receiving any form of a trial or formal condemnation. In view of the very complex context of the country, where needs are endless and violence and suffering prevail in every sector of life, the juvenile center in Goma is a forgotten place. JRS is currently the only organisation giving attention to the struggles that the youth there face.

In light of the current pandemic, the government has shifted their focus away from the provision of basic services, which was inadequate even before COVID-19. The termination of aid has massively affected the youth.



One of the rooms where the male youth sleep



A toilet in the detention center

Specific Needs

The center is a breeding ground for infections and disease, with only two barely usable toilets and floors covered in waste, with the equally unsanitary dormitories very close by. Without functioning toilets and showers and access to proper shoes, the imprisoned youth easily spread bacteria between the bathrooms and the dormitories. Recently one boy was diagnosed with tuberculosis and is not receiving any treatment for the lack of funding, and his health is in severe condition. He shares the room with the others.

The youth are suffering from severe food insecurity and lack of clean water, weakening their immune systems and making them more susceptible to illness. There is very little awareness on COVID-19 and no protective equipment. Educational activities were paused because of the pandemic, but the need for accelerated learning and continuity of education remains. JRS is determined to ensure this, but basic health and living conditions must first be improved.

Project Objectives

Funding will address the issues of food insecurity and the unsanitary living conditions through the provision of daily meals, as well as new mattresses, clothes, shoes and hygiene kits for the youth. Additionally, sanitization of the rooms and bathrooms, as well as repairs for the showers and toilets will take place.

Hygiene kits would be urgently distributed to all the youth, especially to the girls, who all are suffering from vaginal infections due to the conditions. The boy suffering from tuberculosis will receive much-needed medical treatment, and the rest of the youth will receive check-ups.

This will allow for educational and other programmes to continue without worrying about the spread of disease and infection resulting from unsanitary conditions.

According to authorities, school activities will be allowed to resume in the center on 12 October. JRS will provide virus awareness and prevention, as well as necessary books, so the youth will have the opportunity to continue their studies. Recreational activities will also resume, which have proved to be very beneficial for children’s psychosocial state and would significantly contribute to their well-being.

Summary Budget

BUDGET CATEGORIES	PROJECTS COSTS USD
1. Food security	18,538
2. Hygiene and health	12,790
3. COVID-19 response	1,568
4. Educational support	19,739
5. Project management staffing	14,238
6. Indirect costs	10,031
TOTAL	76,904