

The Visualising War and Peace project presents

Picturing Peace in CONGO

*an award-winning photography exhibition
by Hugh Kinsella Cunnginham*

Showcasing the courageous work of women fighting to
restore peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo

5 - 27 June 2023, Byre Theatre



Age recommendation 9+

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Peace is a seemingly simple concept.

But how would you define it?

Whom do you associate with peace-building?

How does peacebuilding differ from conflict resolution?

And what does it take to build a lasting peace?

The Visualising Peace Project

The University of St Andrews' Visualising Peace Project studies how people in different communities and contexts experience, understand, represent and work towards peace. Our aim is to spark more conversation about what peace means to each of us, where it can be found, how it can be promoted, and what peace-building and peace-keeping actually involve, at domestic, local, national and international levels.

'We think that talking about different kinds of peace and different forms of peace-building is an important step in empowering everyone to play a part in fostering more peace in the world, no matter who they are or where they come from.'

<https://peacemuseum.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk>



You can find out more about
our project via our website:



<https://peace-dr-congo.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk>

Picturing Peace in Congo

The Visualising Peace Project is collaborating with photojournalist Hugh Kinsella Cunningham to shine a light on a conflict zone that is often overlooked in Western media. Our aim is to pose important questions about what sustainable peace-building involves; what impact women and other marginalised groups can have in peace-building processes; and what we can learn by picturing peace-building from new perspectives, through empathetic and empowering photography.

Nearly 20 years on from a conflict that killed five million people and upended tenfold more lives, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is once again sliding into chaos. As renewed conflict with the M23 rebels, massacres and regional militarisation catch the world's attention, the vital contribution of women to peace-building remains invisible. Despite escalating violence, some women are working to create dialogue between armed actors and communities. They track human rights violations, warn of impending violence, and plead with rebel leaders to stop attacks. In doing so, they take immense risks.



Hugh
Kinsella
Cunningham

Hugh Kinsella Cunningham has spent the last five years in the DRC, documenting many different aspects of conflict and peace-building. Pairing rare visuals of the frontlines with portraits and in-depth stories from women, this long-term project follows activists and the slow work of building peace in an extreme context. The project was created with writer Camille Maubert and produced with local correspondent Sifa Bahati.

Hugh Kinsella Cunningham is an award-winning photojournalist who has published work with National Geographic, The Guardian, BBC News, The Sunday Times Magazine, The United Nations and Save the Children. A grantee of the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, he was a finalist for the Amnesty International Media Awards in 2022 and 2023, and he won 1st place for documentary projects in the Sony World Photography Awards 2023 for the photographs in this exhibition.

Peace Photography



'Photographing peace is far more difficult than photographing conflict. Peace-building is an inexorably slow process of dialogue, agreement, with repeated failures, and yet more discussion. The dramatic moments of a frontline, with rifles held aloft or panicked civilians, are replaced with subtler details such as a wagging finger or eye contact between negotiators.

Power dynamics also reveal themselves in photos, with many images from this project showing activists with deferential body language in front of military officers. The fact that the meetings are even undertaken, and the willingness of these activists to put themselves in harm's way, hint at the long and nuanced process of subverting this power dynamic.

Only a few of the activists I have been following for this project are associated with any international organisations or funding. The majority are unsung, and working directly with, and for, their communities. One of my aims is to record their work for posterity. The broader narrative of conflict is visually tied to publications publishing rapid fire images from news wires of displaced civilians. But narratives which emphasise urgency and action are blind to the slow work of peace. The successes of peacebuilders are neglected and their courageous actions have never truly been seen and applauded nationally or internationally.

The photos I have taken open up a world of tens of thousands of words worth of interviews and testimonies that explain the story of each activist, their beliefs and their intense experiences. This project is intended to create a history, both visual and oral, of war and peace in the DRC, across generations and across multiple cycles of conflict, told by those who know it best.'

Hugh Kinseffa Cunningham

As conflict spirals out of control across multiple provinces, peace activists like Liberata Buratwa are some of the only individuals working to protect their communities from the worst of the violence. Liberata, with 20 years of experience, is one of the few people in the province with the social cachet to directly engage with the power of the military hierarchy. In a previous war, she negotiated a ceasefire with CNDP rebel General Laurent Nkunda, telling him: ‘My son, rebellion will lead you nowhere; the bush is for animals, not for people.’

This photographic project focuses on people undertaking acts of bravery for the good of their community.

**‘I have been working
for peace since I was
very young.’**

Peace activist Liberata Buratwa
poses for a portrait
in her garden.

Rutshuru, Rutshuru Territory,
North Kivu Province, May 31st
2022



Visual Politics

'We live in a visual age. Images shape international events and our understandings of them. Photographs, cinema and television influence how we view and approach phenomena as diverse as war, humanitarian disasters, protest movements, financial crises and election campaigns... This omnipresence of images is political and has changed fundamentally how we live and interact in today's world.'

Roland Bleiker (2018b) 'The Power of Images in Global Politics'

Photographs are world-building. They don't just reflect the world around us: they shape what we know, colour how we think, and impact how we feel. They focus our gaze towards certain events and people – and away from others. The perspectives they take frame our perceptions, direct the questions we might ask, and prompt particular emotional reactions. In both positive and negative ways, photographs – like many other kinds of storytelling – influence how we engage with the world and with each other.

The study of 'visual politics' is important in alerting us not only to the impact that images can have on our own mindsets and behaviours but also on the political world at large. Widely shared images can influence voting patterns or trigger new protest movements; they can promote or undermine governmental policies and international strategy; and they can determine who is included and who is marginalised from political decision-making.

In doing so, they have a profound impact on individual lives: for example, on whether or not someone fleeing a war zone is met with hostility or hospitality; or on whether funding is released to mitigate the impacts of a humanitarian disaster, and to whom those limited resources get directed. Each image has the potential to become a political intervention

References to our sources can be found on the final page of this booklet.

‘Moving the discursive focus from war to peace is a necessary precondition for the political move from war to peace.’

In his 2019 book *Peace Photography*, Frank Möller discusses the role that different kinds of photography have played in determining how we visualise and approach peace and peace-building. Noting the enduring influence of ‘war photography’, he argues that some photographic trends have obscured our view of the many different ways in which people make peace, even amid conflict; but he also points to photography’s capacity to reframe our vision of the world in ways that make peace and peace-building more visible and realisable. Peace photography can actively contribute to peace, Möller argues, by making it better understood and more tangible; and by pointing their lenses – and our gazes – towards the creative work of grassroots peace activists, photographers can harness valuable support for them.

The Ethics of Representation

This kind of photography involves careful ethical reflection. Particularly where victims of conflict are involved, photography can objectify, exploit and undermine; or it can humanise, support and empower.

‘For the last few decades, humanitarian campaign imagery has been dominated by stereotypical images of impoverished children, of mothers cradling their starving babies, and of boats overflowing with people seeking asylum. These visualisations are problematic because they represent people as passive, needy and devoid of the capacity to help themselves and their community... In an industry-leading initiative, Australian Red Cross has moved away from such needs-based approaches, embracing, instead, strength-based photography that seeks to empower those depicted.’

Bleiker et al. (2023) ‘How do photos of our work make a difference?’

Ethical, empathetic and empowering representation is key to Hugh Kinsella Cunningham’s work. His photography treads a careful line between reflecting real threats and vulnerabilities and celebrating the strength and agency of the activists whose peace-building work he shines a thoughtful and caring light on.

Belligerent peace-keeping



Congolese Republican Guard tank units head North to the frontlines at Kibumba to repel an attack by M23 rebels.

Goma,
North Kivu Province
May 25th 2022.

‘This photograph was taken in May 2022 on the main road heading out of the city of Goma, North Kivu, in the DRC. An offensive by M23 rebels, likely aided by Rwandan troops, had gained momentum and thousands of civilians were fleeing the fighting, carrying their possessions under heavy rains. In the opposite direction, Soviet-era tanks and trucks full of troops raced to respond, cheered on by bystanders.

At first glimpse, the image could signal strength. The imposing tank takes up half of the frame, and there is a strong sense of forward momentum, as troops push to the frontlines with a drive and pride. Within days, however, the rebel offensive had been successful, a key town was lost, and in the aftermath I visited a military hospital overflowing with wounded, broken soldiers. This tank unit had failed to change the course of battle, and one of the vehicles was abandoned, later to be used as a prop in an impromptu photoshoot by rebel troops.

For me now, the photo speaks of fragility. Despite the display of force, it shows the precariousness of a dysfunctional army with these soldiers rushing into an untenable situation, their vintage equipment no match for their well-trained adversaries.’

Hugh Kinseffa Cunningham

Everyday Peace

A wedding procession
in the hills of Kaniola,
Walungu, South Kivu
Province, November
27th 2022.



'I was photographing a workshop in the area, when sounds of music and singing drifted in. Looking out, this colourful procession walked past. I ran after the crowd and walked with them for a while, taking a few photographs and soaking in the elation.

The town is very isolated, in the wet season the roads are barely functional. Arriving in town had taken an entire day's drive, as jeeps surf on slick mud, occasionally becoming cemented into the wet earth. Despite this environment, the bride and her party were pristine, with her friends holding her dress up above the mud. I hope the image speaks of happiness, with a joyous groom and laughing bridesmaids.

The local history of this image is darker. A few hundred metres behind the couple is a monument to those massacred in a previous war. 500 people were killed in this one town alone by Rwandan FDLR rebels and war crimes were committed against captives who were taken to the forest and tortured. Here storytelling is important to place this single image into a bigger picture. The meaning of this image – the continuity of life in a war zone – comes from the layers of interpretation contrasting the vibrant atmosphere of a wedding party with the darker history in which it is embedded. Though taken unwittingly at the time, the photo has become one of my favourite images. There is a spectre of historical violence as the area is still plagued with local rebel groups. But the sons and daughters of the victims of war are celebrating important life moments. The work is attempting to do justice to the nuance of the community, and a statement that joy is as much of a right as security.'

Cycles of conflict

Civilians in the DRC often experience multiple displacements throughout their lives, as they repeatedly have to flee armed violence and, in doing so, abandon everything they own. They find shelter in schools, camps, or – like Marie below – in churches.



Marie, displaced by the Ituri Conflict, cleans the altar of the Kilo-Mission church. Dozens of families have taken shelter in the church, with their villages unsafe to return to due to the presence of CODECO militants. Kilo, Ituri Province, November 6th 2021.

Several months on, in February 2022, at least 18 civilians were murdered in this church during a CODECO raid.

The peace activists featured in Hugh Kinsella Cunningham's photography project seek to break this recurring cycle in multiple ways: by advocating for the protection of civilians but also by teaching communities about human rights, encouraging armed groups to release child soldiers, or mediating local disputes before they turn to yet more violent conflict.

Nelly MBANGU - Dynamique des Femmes Juristes, Goma

'In Rutshuru women peace activists endeavour to get children out of armed groups. (...) Women explained to the group leaders that they are waging war, sure, but in whose interest? They said children who are in the forest will fail their studies, and so they should be allowed to go home and start a normal life. And they listened to them. You know, when it's your mother who comes, when it's the lady from your neighbourhood who comes, your friend's mother, men cannot say no. Women speak with their heart, they are here to help not judge.'

Top-down Peace-building

For much of the 20th century, ‘top-down’ peace-building dominated approaches to conflict resolution around the globe. Characterised by peace conferences, the brokering of agreements between rival political and military leaders, physical reconstruction programmes, and the promotion of democratic elections, top-down peace-building is usually driven by external, international actors – powerful states and leading international organisations, with international financing.

Top-down peace-building often begins with securitisation (Peacekeeping Support Operations). Around the globe, United Nations peacekeepers are deployed in conflict and post-conflict areas to restore stability, promote justice, protect human rights and support rebuilding. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) took over from an earlier UN peacekeeping mission in 2010, and today involves around 12,000 military personnel and 1500 police, drawn from multiple countries. This is one of the largest and most expensive UN peacekeeping missions in the world.

Tasked with disarming and demobilising armed rebels, protecting civilians from violence and facilitating humanitarian access, UN peacekeepers in the DRC have had some positive impacts. However, the UN’s top-down approach has been criticised for dismissing local initiatives, and for relying on the misleading assumption that local communities don’t have the tools and knowledge to participate in peace. They have also been involved in deadly crackdowns on protestors, and they have been implicated in the sexual abuse and exploitation of local women and girls. Rather than bringing an end to conflict, some UN peacekeepers have been perpetrators of violence, increasing the threats and insecurity faced by civilians.

Typically re-active rather than proactive, influenced by international political agenda, modelled on a one-size-fits-all principle, and structured around asymmetrical power relations, top-down peace-building tends to have limited success in the long term. Peace processes that are designed or imposed by external actors are rarely as sustainable or inclusive as peace that is built from the bottom up, informed by members of the communities most impacted by the conflict.

Women and peace building

In October 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted a Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325).

It expressed concern that civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements.

It reaffirmed the need to implement fully international humanitarian and human rights law that protects the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts.

It recognised the urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations.

And it reaffirmed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.



Nama Fenerenda and Georgette Ngabusi lead their women's association walk back to Savo displacement site after a dialogue with soldiers. The association pleaded for extra sentries and patrols at the camp in the wake of a brutal massacre by CODECO rebels. Bule, Djuğu Territory, Ituri Province, May 21st 2022.

UNSCR 1325 was intended to mark a turning point for the representation and inclusion of women in politics and peace-building; but more than twenty years later, its implementation has been limited. Women remain marginalised from many decision-making spaces; they continue to face structural inequalities even when included in dialogue; and as a result, their experiences, concerns, hopes and ideas continue to be overlooked. In the meantime, they not only suffer ongoing sexual violence, economic deprivation, displacement and other such impacts of conflict; they also struggle to secure justice and recompense for the wrongs they have endured. This is what women peace activists in the DRC are trying to change.

Grassroots Peace-Building

In contrast to top-down peace-building, bottom-up (or 'grassroots') peace-building tends to be more informed by local knowledge and experience, more inclusive of diverse voices, and – because it involves and is shaped by community members – more likely to gain traction over time. Hugh Kinsella Cunningham's photographic project on the women's peace movement in the DRC helps us to picture grassroots peace-building in practice. As he explains:

'Since 1996, multiple wars have been triggered by a proliferation of armed groups, weak state institutions, a dysfunctional army and local struggles over power and resources. Peace deals, elections, the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission and the efforts of hundreds of humanitarian organisations have failed to transform these dynamics.'

'Confronted by the horrors of war, a small movement of women peacebuilders emerged over the years and is working to create dialogue between soldiers and communities, track human rights violations and advocate for an end to impunity.'

Women play a central role in protecting their communities because of the deep knowledge they have of the situation and the actors present in the area. They share information across their networks about where fighting is taking place, where families are fleeing, and how operations are evolving. By contrast, soldiers deployed from the distant capital, Kinshasa, do not know the area they operate in. By leveraging their local knowledge, women peace activists can advocate with authorities, army commanders and community leaders on behalf of displaced people and their communities to reduce violence and protect civilians.

Justine Masika

Synérgie des Femmes pour la Lutte Contre les VBG, Goma

'It is important to work with women because the people who are fighting are the children of women. They are their sons and their husbands. Women have a role to play as the mothers of humanity and they must be involved [in peace] at all levels. We have been living in conflict for 20 years and we saw what women are doing for their families to survive, for life to continue, because men are killed.'

When we first started working [for peace] women were scared. They couldn't speak up because of the culture. But today women know they are essential and must be active for peace to come back. Still, I don't think they are really listened to. Even when people recognise that we cannot do anything without women, the weight of the patriarchal culture continues to limit us. But we must continue.'

‘On the frontlines of the M23 conflict, in Rutshuru territory, peace activist Liberata Buratwa led a delegation of displaced women to meet with the Congolese general in charge of operations against the rebels in the zone. She asked that the military respect civilian rights in the area, and lamented that little was being done to protect displacement camps from a wave of fighting. The fighting between the Congolese army and M23 is large-scale, with both sides utilising heavy weaponry such as rocket artillery and mortars. Civilians can be caught in shelling, trapped behind shifting frontlines. I have even spoken to civilians who claim that the frantic passage of military convoys has knocked down and killed individuals on roads.

Challenging military authority and speaking ‘truth to power’ is rare and these meetings between soldiers and civilians are fraught with tension. Practically, creating images such as this one is only possible with long-term storytelling. Access is contingent on establishing trust with contacts, knowledge of which local figures to shadow, and how to be at the right place at the right time, all of which comes with years of experience and a lot of preparation.’

Hugh Kinsella Cunningham



Led by peace activist Liberata Buratwa, displaced women meet with Congolese army General Cirimwami. The dialogue was intended to amplify the voices of women displaced by a wave of heavy fighting with M23, and lobby for increased protection for civilians in the area.

Rutshuru, Rutshuru Territory, North Kivu Province, May 31 2022.

Words not war

The women whose stories Hugh Kinsella Cunningham shares – peace activists such as Wivine Bayengo, Faila Kataliko, Justine Masika Bihamba, Liberata Buratwa, Rose Kahambu Tuombeane, Love Kpakay and Lydie Kake – not only seek to bring cycles of armed violence to an end but also to mitigate the secondary impacts of conflict, such as displacement, theft, extortion and sexual violence.

Dialogue is at the heart of their work. They cross frontlines to talk with rebel leaders, advocating for ceasefires and asking that they do more to protect civilians, particularly women. They monitor crime rates and set up community conversations with government forces to address complaints from locals about the intimidation and exploitation they are experiencing from soldiers stationed nearby. They gather and share information about new outbreaks in fighting, routes that have become unsafe, and rumours of upcoming offensives. They work locally to resolve small-scale disputes and local tensions, to prevent further escalation. And they talk to new recruits to armed groups, persuading them to surrender rather than perpetuate an ongoing cycle of violence and revenge.

‘Women who speak on behalf of peace are always in danger’, says peace activist Espérance Kazi. ‘But we continue because nobody will come to solve our problems for us.’

This work is challenging. It takes time to build trust and establish positive channels of communication; women’s voices have not been taken seriously in the past; and they run significant personal risks in crossing frontlines and engaging with armed personnel. They persevere because they see no other option. As one activist, Justine Masika, explained, **‘One day we told each other that we women can no longer keep our arms crossed. I say the women of Congo are strong because they don’t remain victims. They become actors of change.’**

Despite the challenges, activist Love Kpakay is optimistic: **‘We need to find the courage to sit around the same table. You will see that we will find solutions.’**

Quotations are taken from the National Geographic article where Hugh Kinsella Cunningham’s photography project was first published: Bahati, S., Maubert, C. & Kinsella Cunningham, H. (2022) ‘These women are bringing some peace to war-stricken Congo’.

Which photographs in this exhibition impacted you the most? Why?

Have any of the photographs in the exhibition changed how you picture peace or peace-building?

What new light does this photography project shine on conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

What can it tell us about women's involvement in peace-building?

What does it reveal about the impact of photography on how we understand peace and conflict?

Please tell us what you think by filling in the feedback form on our project website:



The photographs and stories in this exhibition reference some very distressing experiences. Please take a moment to reflect on your own wellbeing, as well as on the lives of the women you have been learning about. Self-care is an important part of peace-building. When we look after ourselves, we are better able to support and work towards peace with others.

Picturing Peace in Congo was curated by Visualising War and Peace director, **Dr Alice König**, and **students in the 2022-3 cohort** of the University of St Andrews' Visualising Peace project. Particular thanks go to **Viktor Lopez-Roso, Margaux de Seze, and Mary Woodcock Kroble** for their contributions to this booklet and our project website.

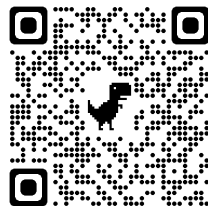
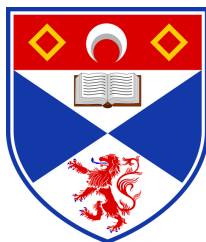
It has been a privilege to bring **Hugh Kinsella Cunningham's award-winning work** to St Andrews. The Visualising War and Peace team is grateful to him for teaching us so much about the power and potential of peace photography, and to his colleagues **Camille Maubert & Sifa Bahati** for generously sharing their work.

Our curation of Picturing Peace in Congo has been informed by a **wealth of scholarship** on visual politics, peace and conflict photography, and the women's peace movement in Congo. You can find references to some of this research on the following pages.

We are grateful to the **University of St Andrews** for supporting this project with Research Impact and Innovation funding, and to the **Byre Theatre** for hosting our exhibition. Our thanks also go to the **VIP (Vertically Integrated Project) team** at the University of St Andrews for creating an innovative learning environment where citizen scholarship can flourish.



Director of Visualising War and Peace



The following publications have been particularly helpful in guiding our curation of Picturing Peace in Congo:

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Peace is a necessary condition for all

‘Peace is at the center of our work because it is always in the minds of women. Even when we work on entrepreneurship we always think about peace and security because in order to be able to sell, women who bring food and produce from the forests and from the fields must be able to use a road that is safe and where there are no armed groups.’

Josephine Malimukono, Peace Activist

Bahati, S., Maubert, C. & Kinsella Cunningham, H. (2022)
‘These women are bringing some peace to war-stricken Congo’

