

Portrait of Jérémie BARHANKABAGA CHIZA

On Monday, 4 December 2017, during a meeting between the Head of MONUSCO-South Kivu/Maniema Office and the Mission staff in Bukavu, one staff member spoke about his work and private responsibilities. After listening to him, Karan Soro, the Head of Office, immediately turned towards those of us working within the Public Information Division to propose that we produce a portrait of this staff member. His name is Jérémie Barhankabaga Chiza, a MONUSCO security guard in Bukavu since 2009.



The Head of Office's suggestion that we do this portrait came after hearing the story of Jérémie's support to abandoned children, accused of witchcraft or orphaned. Indeed, Jérémie alone injects part of his salary into the Orphaned Children and Women War Victims Recovery Center (CROFEM), which is a small structure run by his wife Joëlle Bahati Byabushi. His support allows the center to take in orphaned or abandoned children and provide them with education. The center also provides trades training to disabled persons, as well as tailoring and sewing training to helpless and abandoned women.

«My joining MONUSCO was a happy chance for me», Jérémie tells us, explaining that he was first recruited as a daily casual worker and did not know then that he would eventually sign a contract proper with the United Nations five years later. We tried to find out if there was any particular reason for him to seek a job with the Security Section. **«The vacancy announcement was for the recruitment of a staff member within the MONUSCO Security Section»**, was his



Orphaned children taken in and cared for by Jérémie and his wife

answer. Some of his security colleagues have formerly worked with the Congolese National Police, but he was a student working part time to pay for his education. After taking the different tests, Jérémie was selected and has since worked within this Section. However, explains Jérémie, the wage he earned as a casual worker enabled him finance his studies in sociology-anthropology at the Official University of Bukavu.

Within the Security Section he serves in the Security Operation Center (SOC) as a radio operator. He makes radio calls, watch movements of staff in the field, and broadcast radio alerts to warn staff in case of disturbances or demonstrations. When doing his shift, he is also the first person receiving distress calls or appeals for help from staff. His immediate supervisor, Christian Basema, says, « **Jérémie is an asset to our Unit and a valued staff member. He delivers excellent work, takes his job seriously and offers a good performance. When he is on duty, I can rest assured that everything will be done satisfactorily.** » Jérémie Chiza stands out as a great professional, continues Christian Basema who had known him for many years before he signed his contract with the UN Mission. It was in 2004 that Jeremie joined MONUC as a daily

casual worker. Basema concludes by pointing out that he has never heard or seen Jérémie exhibit any inappropriate conduct. « **Jérémie's performance is above the average** », confirms Joly Bwansolu, another colleague of his. On a scale of 1 to 10, Bwansolu rates Jérémie at 8 at least, both professionally and sociably. **"He is an understanding person and he easily accepts to back up his colleagues when they are unable to report to work"**. On a private level, Bwansolu recalls that he once requested Jérémie's assistance at 1 AM, and Jérémie joined him without hesitation! Jérémie is sociable, and not just with his colleagues.

How did this all story begin? Jérémie tells us how: « **In March 2015, I got sad news – news of the murder of my uncle Evariste Kasali Mbogo, a human rights activist in Kavumu. He died, leaving behind a widow and nine children, with no one to turn to for help** ». Nevertheless, his family continued to receive death threats. Seized with the case, MONUSCO, through the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office, advised Jérémie to relocate his late uncle's family to another place. « **Since then, I have been caring for these children** ». It is this sense of empathy and generosity that led him later to extend a helping hand to other abandoned children, currently housed at the CROFEM center, which sits on a plot of land bought by Jérémie Chiza.



Widowed or destitute women supervised by Jérémie's wife in the dressmaking and sewing workshop

Headed by his wife Joelle, the CROFEM center houses 76 children as well as 43 women now being trained in tailoring and sewing. These children are the only ones that Jérémie and his wife have, and so they have adopted them as their own. The idea of his wife as his partner in this enterprise came to him quite naturally, says Jérémie. His

understanding of the gender approach, he says, left him no other choice. « **I**

understand that the world is constituted of men and women and that both genders are equally capable of contributing to the advancement of the world. My wife is my partner in this enterprise. She does a lot for the destitute, and above all, gives them a sympathetic,



Sharing a moment over a meal

responsive ear and compassion, and encourages them to enjoy life, in spite of everything ».
Jérémie concludes by pointing out that « **this is a non-profit-making activity and I realize that I alone cannot successfully carry it out. As the old saying goes, in union there is strength ».**

Your dream for the DRC? « **As a native of this country, I do of course have a dream. It is my dream for this country to have good leaders so that we may achieve psychological stability of the populations. And it is towards this aim that I am contributing by trying to 'detraumatize' abandoned or orphaned children and to give them hope through education ».**

You do not say it, Jérémie, but we will do it for you because this story talks directly to our hearts:
"If it please you, please, dear colleagues."

**By Alain LIKOTA
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