

Attachment 1

Transcript of Interview with Former DRC Child Soldier

Michel Chikwanine

Monday, November 9th 2020

10:30 PM WIB

Interviewer

Okay, so I have recorded the interview. Yes, so as I have explained briefly through our mails, I'm currently writing an undergraduate thesis regarding how toxic masculinity actually affected recruitment and exploitation of child soldiers in the DRC. So, I hope from this interview session I could hear from you first hand, how it felt, how was it, your experience as a former child soldier yourself.

So, the first question, actually, I have read some of your videos, and you were abducted when you were five years old. How was your life before the kidnap, like your daily routine and stuffs?

Michel Chikwanine

I think it's a very important question you asked, because many can't quite capture [this matter]. The reason why I say that is because the Congo and many countries of the world are talking about stopping the war and child soldiers, how to stop them [the recruitment and exploitation]. They never contextualize about how and where these people live. So, my life, I had a very good life, a normal life, you can call it. I grew up in what considered a middle-class family. My dad was an activist, he had a job and also a lawyer. He had a pretty good career on his own. I have two older sisters, a younger sister, a mother. We had a dog, it was a Golden-Retriever. You know, so I had a normal life. My mom traveled a lot, she was also an activist in our community, she helped women to build small businesses, so she always traveled. She always brought flowers from where she traveled. She loved flowers. We had this garden in my house. People always come for [having] weddings at my backyard. I came home from school and instead of doing my homework, I went to the backyard, because of the flowers, you know... So it was that. My home is very welcoming, I grew up with a father who always taught the importance of sharing, that in society it's important that we always share. So there were kids from the neighborhood who would come to my house and had lunch in my house. Sometimes when the parents lost them, they don't know where their kids were, they always said, "check the Chikwanines' house," and most of the time they are at my house, eating. So that was my home, you know, I grew up in a very... Congo itself, my country, was, in the 70s and all the way to the 90s, Congo was, in terms of justice, in terms of economy, in terms of jobs, was a very safe country. A very good country. It was very stable country in that sense. It was

only after the 90s when things are going a little weird, but mostly through the 70s and the 80s, it was challenging, of course, but that was my life. A normal child, likes get into trouble, with loving parents and sisters... So, a really normal family, nothing really out of ordinary.

Interviewer

A happy childhood.

Michel Chikwanine

Yes, yes, that's right.

Interviewer

So, you said that Congo was a normal country. A good country, before things went weird. So, about the culture itself in the DRC. I have read several reports that said that Congo is actually a very patriarchal country? Is that true? Or is that not as bad as what people thought?

Michel Chikwanine

I think it depends on the... One of the biggest challenges of generalizing, I think? Sometimes our biggest challenge from generalizing... You know, there are...

Congo was never a, pre-European, a lot of Congolese were actually not as patriarchal as European. You know in the Congo Kingdom, you know, near Kinshasa and the border of Angola, so, this was the largest kingdom in Central Africa, before Europeans came. So, the Congo Kingdom actually there's a time period, I forgot the time period, but there was a period when, right before Europeans came, there was a queen. And she was a queen, the leader of this large, large kingdom. And she's the leader of it. So, that's for example. Yes, sure there are some patriarchal beliefs, but it wasn't as inherent, as reinforced, as after the Europeans came into contact. Especially after Christianity. And I think as the Congo has been developed, yes it become a lot more, very patriarchal society. I think it's reinforced by, especially by colonialism that tried to reinforced gender norms, that were brought by the Europe. You know, I remember back in 1800s, Europe was very patriarchal, they are still very patriarchal. And the world in general, they are still very patriarchal. In Congo that's still very much the case, especially when you are in economy, social, and political, men are still dominating the society. Many aspects of them.

Interviewer

Okay, so, at five years old, you were playing football when you were first abducted by the armed group. Until now, have you ever know which armed group did that to you?

Michel Chikwanine

No, sadly. It was in the 90s in Congo. I suspect, there is nothing to prove, but I suspect that [those were] people who were fighting for Rwandan genocide. Because when I was abducted, in Rwanda it was the period right before the genocide was started, also in Congo it was the period when there was a lot of conflict because of the Banyamulenge Case. So, you know, Mobutu, who was the dictator of the Congo since the 60s, the early 60s, you know, in the early 90s, he was getting into conflicts a lot. It was a period when Mobutu gained a lot of support from the West, meanwhile in Congo, I guess, they didn't really need him as much, so he was feeling this pressure especially from the IMF and the World Bank. So, he was feeling all this pressure from all the different sides, politically and economically. So, that's why there were a lot of conflicts. And on the other side of the border of Congo was Rwandan issue. A lot of political issue that happened. And because of the close proximity of where I lived to Rwanda, I suspect that, what was happening was that, the people who were recruiting and taking children, or just recruiting in general, were the men [recruiting] for what was about to happen in Rwandan genocide.

Interviewer

So, you suspect that it was actually a Rwandan group that kidnapped you, not the Congolese?

Michel Chikwanine

So, I suspect that, but even today I don't know. One of the biggest challenges of Congolese state, and every other country, but the Congo specifically, especially the eastern part, is that it's very wide. It's very vast, vast space with a lot of forest, a lot of groups where it's not necessarily engage with the national context, so there are a lot of groups on the outskirts. Some of them come from Uganda, some of them come from Rwanda, some of them come from the Congolese. And there's this huge, huge people that come from that part of the world, which is why I said that I suspect there were a Rwandan [group], because Rwanda is very close to where I lived. But there's been a lot of groups, militias, that are in that region, so I don't know, who knows... But I remember some of the languages that the commander, who was kind of like leading and train us, his Swahili was not that,

Swahili was the language of Eastern Congo, his Swahili was not as... His style is not something that I recognized.

Interviewer

It's not familiar?

Michel Chikwanine

It's not familiar. So, I suspect that they were from outside of the Congo, from where [exactly], I don't know.

Interviewer

Okay, how did that armed group trained you? The training [system], was it like boot camp? Like, the methods they used?

Michel Chikwanine

I think it was just like any other group, you did as what you were told. Like, you were a child, but the initial thing was that they break [the children] down psychologically and emotionally and then they tried to rebuild you into what they want. Our initial arrival at the camp was this shocking experience, where, not only was I drugged, not only was I was forced to shoot someone, unwillingly. I was blindfolded and they gave me an AK-47 in my hand which I dropped it and they kept on laughing... So, this was to me, now that I'm older, I can reflect a little bit what happened, was that I recognized that they thought these were children, so this was [to them] like a joke, right? So, they can see what can they do to the children. So, it was kind of they want to break you [down] psychologically, emotionally, and then we [the armed group] build you. And that's kind of what they were doing. So, the initial [experience] they were so emotional, a shock, because they were kind of nice, but then they were very demanding, they told you like, you wake up very early, because I was younger I was told to clean the boots of the commander, [the boots of] the other soldiers, to bring the guns back, to clean them, put them back together... Like that was several things, that was the way I was initiate, some kind of like forced into.

Interviewer

So, it's more like psychologically trying to make you obedient to them?

Michel Chikwanine

Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer

How long were you being trained at the training camp?

Michel Chikwanine

I was very lucky, compared to so many child soldiers [who] spent their entire childhood [in the armed groups]. But luckily, and miraculously somehow, after three... Two or three weeks of training when I was there. And during these two weeks we were children [tasked] to go to a village bring guns and supplies that were needed. And so, it was during the third week that we were going to the village, when I saw an opportunity to run. And we had another kids who were talking about running, and some of them were talking about running and going back home. So, that idea [of] running came in a great moment. So, I just run as fast as I could, and somehow I managed to escape.

Interview

Where did you think do you gain the courage to just run away?

Michel Chikwanine

I don't think... Well, yeah I think it's courage, but it was more out of fear. The courage sourced from fear. You know, my father... Was a larger than life [person] in my life. And that day before I was abducted he told me to get back home before 6 PM. But, again, back then I was a troublemaker, I didn't understand the consequences of my actions, or not knowing the consequences of not going back home one day would be severe. But I knew the punishment that came with being late for a very long time. So, I didn't know what day it was, I [just] knew that it has been a long time since I was home, and that I need to go home or else my father is going to punish me. So, it was, out of the fear of my father, really, that pushed me to run. And of course the conversations that has been happening around me about running away, about getting away, that there was a possibility to run. That's it, I did it out of impulse actually, to go back home. Out of the fear to be punished by this big, big father that I had, so...

Interviewer

I also noticed that you were extremely lucky, to be able to run away and escape the armed group. And one thing that I'm extremely curious about is that, how did you find and return to your family? Like, how did you find them?

Michel Chikwanine

So, there was Rwenzori. Rwenzori is a mountain that borders Congo and Uganda. So, that was the area where, now that I get to retrace and recognize the path that I came back on, that was the area that I was in. So, the camp was around that area. And I think what was happened was when we arrived, the women in the villages, it wasn't far away from Beni. Beni was a semi-town in a region in Congo, and Butembo was like, four kilometers? From Beni. That's where my family lives. So, I, I was running through the forest. And the reason why I survived in the forest actually, when I was much younger, again it was on the 1990s. We're not like in UK, or in North America, or other parts in the world... We don't have TV and even if you have TV the signal wasn't really stable... So, I spent most of my days outside, playing with my friends in the forest, and most of the time I went with my dad who owned a pig farm. So, I was spending a lot of my time in the forest with my dad, with my family. So, I kind of know the forest really well, I knew how to navigate the forest, and so I was lucky to have this knowledge of going out with my family on farm. And so, when I was running I used that knowledge. For example, from my dad he told me all the time, "if you get lost, always try to look for a water bank," right? Whether it's a river, whether it's a lake. Because there are people who lived near a water bank. And the other one was, "always find banana trees." Because banana trees are a sign that there were people in the farm, in Congo. And so, the whole time I was running I was always tried to find water and banana trees. And I would stand up for trees whenever I could, and I would look across the horizon to see banana trees or water. And I kept following the water, you know. And there was a time when I was standing here and there were voices of people, talking. And at first I thought it was the soldiers who chased me, so I stayed up, I laid in the grass, and I stayed. But the sound was very noisy, so I looked up and the tree again and I looked, and I saw people were walking, and there were shops and then I realized that it was a road. So, I kept following the road, and it turned out it was the road of Butembo, where I ended up in a store where we buy ice cream and bread and [other] things. And my father knew the man and I ended up talking to that man. It was that man actually that took me back to my family.

Interviewer

Wow... It's extremely... It could be said that it's extremely rare, for child soldiers to escape and to return to their family. So, you were in the training camps for two or three weeks. So, during that period of time, have you ever experienced going out to the battle field? Have you ever carried out mission or was it just training?

Michel Chikwanine

The first part, in the first village, we never attacked. We never attacked. It was just pure training, well, there were other kids who go, I guess either they go to a fight or they learn how to watch, you know, how to navigate the place. Our missions at that time was... There were a few women at the camp, and they used to cook, and things like that... But they never stayed too long, just come and go, most of the time. And so, I was stay behind most of the time. But the initial, the first time we went to the village, the last time I was involved in this group was when we went to the village and when I ran. What I used to do is that I used to carry magazines. So, we put the magazines. So, like, we charged some of their guns. I would carry some of them [the magazines] on a bag. And they initially would put the younger kids, who were smaller, they would initially put you in the front. It feels, they feel that if we attack another village, the kids in the front would be seen by the people and they wouldn't shoot back. And also the younger kids were put up in front to go to scout the village. You know, the idea was that we were going to scout the other village and then comeback and tell them [the armed group], and then they would attack. It was during when I went to scout, when I found an opportunity to run save my life.

Interviewer

Okay, so, I read a report by MONUSCO, that there are several reasons why armed groups opted to recruit children. One of them was because the believe children, especially the virgin ones, have this magical ability to be bulletproof. So, the armed groups, they put the children in the front line, naked, as human shield. Was it true? Was it a common belief held by all, or most of the armed groups, or was it only several armed groups that hold onto that belief?

Michel Chikwanine

I mean, mysticism is a huge part on why children are abducted and used them, you know, in the Congo. There's one rebel group, called the *Mayi-Mayi*. It has been around for a very long time and the *Mayi-Mayi* have a mystic belief that before you're going to battle there's this water [to] pour it on your body and bullets won't go through you, or you won't get shot... It's not true, but it's all the

mystical belief in that. I don't know how many, I don't think it's everyone who holds that belief. I think even though they said that, I think part of the reason why they abducted children is because of several reasons. I think it's just opportunistic, the case that most of the population in Congo is an extremely young population, so the thing with recruiting adult, it's very hard to recruit adult. When you were younger it was very easy to kidnap. And because of the young population the rate of unemployment was also extremely high. There's so many conflicts and I think mysticism, the mystical belief, they're just stories given to people to try to entice them into getting and join these armed groups. But I think the underlying reason is much, much more important to address, which again, high rate of unemployment, very little social mobility, and the extremely young population. Which is, this is the very problem in every other countries, but in Congo specifically, this is a very huge [problem].

Interviewer

How about the armed group that you were in? Was there any mystical belief that they hold on to?

Michel Chikwanine

They definitely resort to the washing water. I remember one of the, you know, putting water on yourself then nothing will happen to you. I mean, I can't remember the details, I remember, the details I remember are the more personal details? I didn't remember if you asked me, 'everyday what happened?'. I remember the first day when I arrived, I remember the commander, I remember one of the women that used to cook, you know. I remember those details and some conversations. It has been a long time, all the conversations that had happened. But I remember for sure that the commander have the habit of putting water on himself before going to battle or to train, because he believed that it could protect them somehow.

Interviewer

Yeah, also on several of your videos you talked that you were given *brown-brown*? Can you explain it? Like, how often did you given that?

Michel Chikwanine

So, that was the night before the training. [during] The training when you have to use guns, and it was a mixture of like, cocaine and gunpowder. And I call it *brown-brown*, it wasn't called *brown-brown*, but I call it *brown-brown* because in

West Africa, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, that was the word that was used, that was what most people know. So, I use that. But it wasn't called that. It was called like a... I don't know what [the translation in English]... Something to do, something that could give you power, that superpower? And that was the idea. The idea was that they give you this thing that would give you superpower, and now I have scars in my arms from where they used to cut my arms and where they used to minister the stuff. So, yeah, that was not my favorite thing to happen, I hated it. It was awful. It affected me very deeply, it caused me a lot of headache, and at night, I would spend the night shaking and shivering, almost as if I had a fever...
It was not pleasant.

Interviewer

So, they gave you [the *brown-brown*] every time before the training began?

Michel Chikwanine

Every time before the training, yeah.

Interviewer

Wow... That must be hurt, for a five year-old to be given that? Yeah, wow... So, after you returned to your family, after you escaped from the armed group and return to your family, have you ever experienced the struggle to like, return to the society? Considering what you have experienced during your kidnap.

Michel Chikwanine

Yeah, I... The first few years were, especially first few months back were very difficult. I didn't know anything about addiction, of course, but I had some kind of addiction to the substance that I was given. So, there was a lot of withdrawal [during] the first few weeks where I literally, I couldn't sleep in the middle of the night. I was shaking. They [my family] take me to the hospital to see if I was having a malaria, but the doctors said it's not malaria, you know. So, there was several things that were extremely, extremely painful emotionally, physically for me. But my father was always there to help, so he always protects me. Whether it was being shielded from the community, so that I never leave my [house] gate. And if I did, it was [to] going to the hospital, they make sure that no one would see me. A lot of being shielded from my community. I didn't go to school for a few months and when I went back to school I started to get into fights with other kids who made fun of me or made fun of my sisters, I was getting a lot of fights with kids at school. And then I was being taken from school and return back home

for a few months, and then eventually I could moved from Beni, I moved to Goma, which is another town where I have a lot of cousins and aunts and uncles, and I went to live with my aunt and my cousins. That's where I stayed for a few months and then I went back home. So, there was a lot of disruption of my early childhood, for sure. There's not an easy way to [get] loose from that kind of brutality.

Interviewer

So, yeah, so, your father was an activist himself, right? Did he encourage you, one of the factors that encouraged you to speak out about your experience as a former child soldiers, or is there any other encouragements that you experienced?

Michel Chikwanine

I think there are several reasons why I started to speak out. It's not necessarily just one. I think it's a combination [from] all the time. The initial inspiration I'd say yes, it was my father. I think he is the inspiration that I look up to. Like I said, he was this larger than life character in my life, he was a very inspiring human-being, in terms of just how tall he was, how big... His presence was a really big presence in general. And even when I was younger he was always the person who stand up for people who are marginalized. He was always stand up for the ones who had no power in the community. That was his character. At first I thought it's hard to not to be inspired with someone who was that close to you, he was that type of person. So, my father was the initial inspiration for me to start speaking. But the way I started speaking, the reason actually I started speaking was when I first moved to Canada and I was being bullied in high school for being African. There's a lot of subtle racism and discrimination for my accent, and I realized a lot of ignorance that was happening was people actually telling me things [like] to go back to my country, people who say things like that. I remember when they said, when they told me to go back to my country, I remember thinking as a kid that they don't know that the reason that I'm in Canada, that I moved to Canada wasn't that I want to, but because the world wants access to Congolese minerals and the needs for Congolese minerals that was causing the conflicts that are causing so many Congolese people out, that caused them to be refugees. That initial pain of being bullied, of being discriminated against, and understanding how that discrimination, how that bullies is steeped from ignorance, and that I could speak against that ignorance, was the initial push for me to speak. And then another push was from my teacher from school who encouraged me to tell my story. She thought it would be a very therapeutic experience of retelling that story. So, that was another push. There are several pushes, especially in my high school, my secondary school experience, that was actually really push me over the edge to do speaking. But the initial inspiration was my father who I wanted to make proud

of, I wanted to be, as a people, I couldn't be, definitely could not be his size. I hope that I matches his desire and his belief.

Interviewer

Was he also the main source of courage for you to, you know, it's hard to open the memory box, and that's a traumatic one that is... So, yeah, how did you overcome your trauma when you spoke [about] your experience for the first time?

Michel Chikwanine

I never overcame that trauma. That's like, something that people always, they see me sometimes, they meet me somewhere, and they were like, "oh my God, you are so positive! How long did you get there?". I think when you gone through something extremely traumatic, it's hard to overcome it. It's not something you just forget or overcome, it something that becomes a huge part of you. And you either learn to accept that that has become a huge part of you and we figure it out how to deal it on day-to-day basis, or you let that dominate most of your live. And for me, and I think it's for anyone who grew up like me where you see trauma all the time, that you have no choice but to continue, if that makes sense. I, you know, I think of my mother, who was raped several times, I think of the trauma that she's going through, that she continues her life and she continues to live. And my sisters, you know, family members... A lot of trauma and if you grew up like me there's no opportunity, there's no choice but you to continue. If you stay in your trauma, then you would concentrate too much on your trauma, and it's [going to be] hard to live and there's no one who's going to help you. It's very hard. So, initially for me it was the resilience that was built inside, of just the humility that we're in, but I think talking or telling about this thing should not dismiss the fact that there's a pain that is constantly there. And as you live in the same setting, like in Congo, for example, I have no choice, I would have no choice but to just continue to live my day life, but there was certain moment when the trauma would sort of come back up. But with life in a different setting, in Canada right now, it's easier for me to reflect on the trauma because of what everyone around me. So, the conversation, the way you perceive life is different form how I perceive life, so, my trauma comes back when there was time to reflect. It comes in very different ways, it comes when I'm sleeping, for example... Not more now, but, a few years before I would have a lot of nightmares that caused me not being able to sleep, for a very long time. And sometimes when I speak, it depends on how emotionally engaged I was with the audience, for a few days it becomes really hard, so I have to really pay attention to, it takes me a few days to recover, I guess. So, it's, it can be good or bad at the same time, in talking about the trauma. So, I don't know, I think the answer is that we don't overcome the trauma, my dad, yes, he was the inspiration, a few of the

inspirations of me overcoming that trauma. And then when he died, he was killed, it brought up a lot more pain and trauma again. Until when I first started talking about my experience, in the early 2007, the result until now, it's been helpful, but again, it's not something that you can forget. You know, we just learn to deal with it.

Interviewer

Have you ever returned to the Congo after moving to Canada?

Michel Chikwanine

No.

Interviewer

No?

Michel Chikwanine

No, I'd love to, I would love to. But Congo is very... At least now Congo is very... Unpredictable? Because of the security, it's very unpredictable. I don't know who, you know, because of my father's assassination that happened in another country, that was also, primarily it was also happened because of his involvement in trying to tell the truth, about the wars in Congo and who was [involved] in the wars, and the deal between those people with the rebel groups, militias... So, I don't know who's still angry with my family. So, there's this kind of fear of going back and being in the possibility of being killed. Because I don't know who was in power, who initiated my father's assassination, you know. So, all of these are the questions that are still exist. But it's my home and I'd love to go back. I hope to go back one day. The only time I was close to Congo was in 2016, I went to, I was on a trip in Rwanda, and I went to a city called Gisenyi. Gisenyi was literally on the border of Rwanda and Congo. So, I was at the border.

I could literally see across the lake, Goma, where my family lives. And I was standing across the Lake Kivu, and across on the other side [there is] Goma and people on the other side. It was where my family [came] from, but I couldn't go.

It's a very bittersweet moment, but that was the closest I've been.

Interviewer

Last question, Michel. Is there any message or, you know, message for people about this matter, about the recruitment and exploitation that has happened in the DRC and other parts, other parts of countries in the world? Like, how to abolish this? How to raise the awareness of people?

Michel Chikwanine

Yeah, I think we need to understand that the child soldiers is not a stand-alone issue. A lot of people talking about this issue, they take it as “oh, we need to eradicate, we need to focus on just how people don’t take children, don’t take children away,”. Like, yes, that is extremely important, but the issue of child soldiers as I have explained, like about the mysticism, that’s not the only reason why people use children. I think people need to understand what’s the underlying causes of this issue, right? So, the issue of child soldiers is so much connected to the issue of poverty, the issue of hunger, the issue of lack of job, lack of opportunity, the issue of geopolitical politics. We have to understand that to eradicate from the Congo, for example, we have to see why. The reason why conflicts existed in Congo was because people want access to Congolese minerals. Coltan, which is used in our cellphones, and all of us have cellphones. And this technology, the mineral [coltan] is the essential component of all electronics. And Congo has 80 percent of the world’s reserve of coltan. In a capitalist society where we try to make profit with less cost. Companies will do their best to get cheap, cheap products for less cost, right? Because they want to make huge profit, so where they’re *gonna* go? So, you think, if Congo was the most stable country, then you would have to pay taxes, you would have to pay much higher cost to pay for these minerals. So, of course it’s in people’s interest to keep Congo in an unstable situation. Because if so then people have access to minerals. It’s a very cynical way to look at it, again, I don’t have proof, say, here’s the email back and forth saying yeah, let’s keep Congo at conflict, but you can put it together. It’s not hard to understand that people rather keep the status quo so they make more money, rather than to change the situation and have to pay more. So, that’s one of the issues. We have to understand the context, on why children are being used. Even, looking away from Congo, in other countries, other places of the world. South America, right? South American, Colombia, especially. The reason why children were used in Colombia, again, it has something to do with economy, with the economic anxiety, economic pain, economic cruelty in this country. So, when there’s the problems with hunger, with poverty, and so with this population being extremely young, young people want the opportunity to move up the social ladder. It’s very easy for them to manipulate the situations, so that young people can join. I think of the Middle East, I think of Northern Africa, for example, children that are recruited by ISIS or Al-Qaeda, for example. In Northern Africa, right, in Egypt, in Tunisia, in Algeria, in Mali, Northern Africa. A lot of the reasons were because in Northern Africa is a very plural community where the state does not

have enough apparatus, does not have social, economic, and political solution.

And so this crisis, where groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda could come in, and actually tell these young people, “we’ll pay you forty dollars,” and sometimes it was as simple as that. And all these young people look around, “I have no job, you know, I want to get married, and I’m living with my parents, I want to start my own life. And here’s he said he’s *gonna* pay me a hundred or forty US dollars, why say no?”. Are you *gonna* say no? You can’t say no, right? So, we have to understand that there’s a lot of underlining reasons of why children are recruited. It’s not just as simple as “oh, let’s stop children [recruitment]”. Okay, you may stop children, we may stop the recruitment of children. But the other [groups] will come up if we don’t address the causes why this happened in the very first place. So, that’s one of the things that we must understand. The other one, I think is, I think when we’re coming up with solutions to stop the exploitation of the children, a lot of [the solution] is to stop the recruitment, stop the integration, whether it’s a rehabilitation... So, it’s always comes from the perspective from the outsider organizations, like where do the young, the child got consulted, into the solutions on how did this happen. We make solutions of this issue. And this is a standard practice in many, whether it’s government, whether it’s NGO... It’s been the standard practice for a while. It’s more like, “We know better, so we’re *gonna* come up with a solution”. While I think it’s much more important to consult the young people who went through this experience and you can learn a little bit more about how to address this issue. And then, third and lastly I think one of the biggest challenges of humanitarianism, especially now, is that there is a lot of political interest. You know, money would be given to a certain issue, because that’s where the political interest of the country is, right? So, you know, with terrorism, for example. At the moment terrorism has been dominating the issue of national and international security for a long time. So now the money has been put to stopping the terrorism, and then we put this issue of child soldiers on the side because we’re fighting to stop terrorism. And then all the NGOs and humanitarian (organizations), because of the contracts, shift their interest from one issue, and then they will go all the way to try and fix the terrorism issue. So you twist yourself to try to fit what the donors are. And I think that’s a huge challenge that a lot of organizations have to try to resist. But it’s hard, because I have been working for an NGO before, I understand the pressure of receiving fundings, but I think that’s something we have to fight. Because we can’t chase to where the cameras are. We have to stay to actually fix the issue, because it’s a long-term process.

Interviewer

Thank you very much, Michel, for willing to share your experience. This means so much for my research. Thank you very much for making time, and have a nice day!

Michel Chikwanine

Yeah, you are welcome and when you finally finished your research I hope you would send me a copy.

Interviewer

Sure! I would send you [a copy].

Attachment 2

Documentation of Interview with former DRC Child Soldier Michel Chikwanine

