



Benson Wereje - Youth Activist for Peace in DRC

Benson Wereje is co-founder and executive director of COBURWAS International Youth Organization to Transform Africa (CIYOTA). CIYOTA is a youth-led movement that unites and transforms communities with a focus on creating sustainable peace and prosperity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo using innovative education and non-violent leadership techniques. In 1995, Benson's village was attacked by rebels slaughtering rival tribes; he was separated from his parents and he endured unimaginable bloodshed before reaching Uganda. More than five million of Benson's friends and countrymen have been killed in his home area; he was among the few survivors to reach the refugee camp. To help his homeland, Benson started CIYOTA in 2005 by uniting youth to provide scholarships to underprivileged refugees. To-date, CIYOTA has given over 500 youth a secondary education and built a primary school and nursery school that serve over 200 students annually. The graduates of CIYOTA's schools are the future leaders of a peaceful DRC, and today the organization reaches over 10,000 people of diverse backgrounds who subscribe to CIYOTA's philosophy of peace in DRC. Benson serves on the student board of Educate!, is the program manager of Theatre Versus Oppression, and coordinated People Weaver's micro-credit program.