



Two Years of FORGE-ing Ahead

I received this post from my good friend, Nicholas Talarico, who is now in Africa working as the Operations Director for **FORGE**, a partner group of ONE. It was just a few years ago, as a ONE volunteer, that I sat down with Nick to discuss the ONE Campaign, and plan how two New Hampshire natives should take action on behalf of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

Now - Nick works on the ground, and hand in hand with Africa refugees, while I am stateside with groups of ONE members letting our elected leaders know about the new and fresh partnership between America and Africa.

I always find it inspiring to hear some of the many success stories coming out of Africa and I hope you enjoy Nick's post too.

I'm leaving Congo, headed back to Zambia.

It's 2:30 in the morning and I haven't slept more than a few hours each night for the last few weeks. Yesterday, I drove for fifteen hours and only made it 380 kilometers. Where there should be thoroughfares facilitating travel and trade, DR Congo has the worst roads I've ever driven... rocky and potholed, littered with destroyed army tanks and dismantled armored cars. This country, the size of Western Europe, has a grand total of 300 miles of paved roads.

I'm tired and my body hurts, but as I look down at The ONE Band on my wrist, I'm reminded why I'm here. I'm here because a couple of years ago, a friend gave me a ONE Band and implored me to explore the related issues. The past 26 months have been a whirlwind of circumstances that have brought me to far-flung places and set me in front of thousands of different people.

Leaving a lucrative job, I joined FORGE and now work hand-in-hand with refugees from DR Congo, Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Somalia, and Uganda. In what I thought would be service work, I've learned that my refugee partners help me up as often as I help them up. I've learned that we really are all connected and that we share ONE fate. Some people find themselves in a better lot than others, and it's our duty as those with access to resources to create opportunity for those who lack such chances.

In Congo I saw firsthand what these chances mean to refugees. A year removed from a democratic election, thousands of Congolese refugees are returning home. Because FORGE has given them a shot at education, many are getting jobs and beginning the process of rebuilding their nation.

Yes. I'm exhausted, but seeing these things makes it worth the work. The tide is shifting.

And all this because of a white, plastic band given to me in May of 2005.

-Nicholas Talarico, Operations Director, **FORGE**

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