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[2013 Nansen Refugee Award]

Congolese nun to receive UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award tonight

Geneva, 30 September, 2013 – The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres will present Sister Angélique Namaika of the Democratic Republic (DRC) of the Congo with the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award tonight at a ceremony in Geneva.

Sister Angélique, through her Centre for Reintegration and Development, has helped transform the lives of more than 2,000 women and girls who have been forced from their homes and abused by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) or other armed groups. Many of those she helps suffered abduction, forced labour, beatings, murder, rape or other human rights abuses.

Her one-on-one approach helps them recover from the trauma and damage. On top of the abuse they have suffered, these vulnerable women and girls are often ostracized by their own families and communities because of the stigma attached to their ordeal.

It takes a special kind of care to help them heal and to pick up the pieces of their lives. Sister Angélique does this by helping them learn a trade, start a small business or go back to school. Testimonies from these women show the remarkable effect she has had on helping turn around their lives, with many affectionately calling her "mother."

The Award ceremony will feature a keynote speech from best-selling author Paulo Coelho and musical performances by British singer-songwriter Dido, Malaysian singer-songwriter Yuna and Grammy-nominated Malian musicians, Amadou and Mariam.

The presentation of the 2013 Nansen prize follows the release earlier this month of a report about life for those displaced by LRA violence. Since 2008, hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to flee in DRC's north-eastern province of Orientale – in some cases several times. Today, an estimated 320,000 of them are still living in displacement. The report, produced by UNHCR and the IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre), highlights why LRA violence has created such severe and long-lasting trauma for both the abductees and the hundreds of thousands of people still too afraid to return home.

Sister Angélique herself was displaced by the violence in 2009 while living in the town of Dungu, in Orientale province. She knows the pain of fleeing one's home. It is part of what drives her to work day in and day out to reach all those in need.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres commended this year's laureate, "Sister Angélique works tirelessly to help women and girls who are extremely vulnerable due to their trauma, poverty and displacement. The challenges are massive, which makes her work all the more remarkable – she doesn't allow anything to stand in her way."

Working in a location where electricity, running water and paved roads are scarce, Sister Angélique's work is exceptional. Although she lacks proper tools and her resources are almost non-existent Sister Angélique does not allow herself to be deterred. She has made it her life's work to ease the suffering of these uprooted women and girls – to give them renewed hope for the future.

Guterres continued, "These women's lives have been shattered by brutal violence and displacement. Sister Angélique has proven that even one person can make a huge difference in the lives of families torn apart by war. She is a true humanitarian heroine."

Responding to the announcement, the new laureate said: "It is difficult to imagine how much the women and girls abused by the LRA have suffered. They will bear the scars of this violence for their whole lives. This award will mean more displaced people in Dungu can get the help they need to restart their lives. I will never stop doing all I can to give them hope, and the chance to live again."

Following the ceremony, Sister Angélique will travel to Rome, where she will be received at the Vatican by Pope Francis on 2 October before proceeding to Paris, Brussels and Oslo for other meetings.

For further information:

Jieun Kim, External Relations Officer

Tel. (02) 773-7011

Email. kimji@unhcr.org