

## A Reflection on Peace in Africa Week

By: Andrea Williamson

Peace in Africa Week began for me a year ago when I went to the Global Night Commute in downtown Orlando. At the Global Night Commute, we reenacted what thousands of children did every night in Uganda—walk to the center of their village to sleep in car parks and sewers for protection from the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). For twenty years, Uganda has lived through the terror of the LRA, who is responsible for murdering tens of thousands of civilians and for abducting and brainwashing over 20,000 children to fight in their militia. At the Global Night Commute, we watched the Invisible Children documentary that gave the children in Uganda a voice. The movie made me angry and I pledged that night to do something about it.

As the student coordinator of Join Us in Making Progress (JUMP), I decided to bring the documentary to school, which happened last Thursday. Also, with the help of my friends from 9 other student organizations, we planned Peace in Africa Week. On Thursday, when we watched Invisible Children in Dave's Downunder, I saw the faces of Rollins students change. Afterwards, we had a candle light ceremony hosted by Dean Powers by the lake. We each went around the circle and discussed our reaction to the movie. I heard a lot of people mention two main frustrations. The first is that they had never heard of the 20 year war before. They felt ignorant and guilty, some of the same feelings I first had when watching the film a year ago. The second frustration was trying to find a way to help. It's hard, as students, to go to Africa and physically help the situation. However, it's equally as hard to write your name on a petition and feel that it's enough. I appreciated everyone's frustration, but for me, I was inspired to hear their frustrations. A year ago, there were only five of us from Rollins at the Global Night Commute. It bothered me that Rollins College, whose mission statement is Global Citizenship and Responsible Leadership, was not having those conversations. Finally listening to Rollins students, faculty, and staff reflect upon the horrible situation in Africa, was a dream come true to me.

To end the week, myself and a group of about 15 Rollins students went to Displace Me at the University of Central Florida on Saturday. The event was hosted by Invisible Children in 15 cities across the country. At UCF, over 4,000 people slept outside in makeshift cardboard to reenact the 1.5 million citizens in Uganda who have been displaced because of the war. In the

displacement camps, nearly 1,000 people die per week. Disease, lack of food and clean water, rape, and lack of education are all problems in the camps. The energy at Displace Me was phenomenal. Not only did we have to make our own homes out of cardboard for the night, but no food or water was allowed except for water and a package of saltine crackers that were collected at the entrance. We arrived at 3pm and the food and water was not redistributed until 9pm. Not having water in the hot, humid Florida sun all afternoon was incredibly challenging. Most of us from Rollins couldn't fathom the idea that in Africa, temperatures reach up to 130 degrees Fahrenheit. When we were finally able to drink water, the women in each group had to collect enough for them and for the men in the group. We could only take one bottle of water at a time and had to carry on our heads. There was a huge crowd around the water, so it took a long time to get enough water. The men had to gather the saltine crackers and faced similar problems. The fact is that cooking and boiling water can take all day in Africa. How are you supposed to get ahead in life if all you have time for is to gather enough food and water for survival?

One of the coolest parts of the evening was when we had 21 minutes of silence to honor each year of the war in Uganda. The planners of Displace Me were skeptical if 4,000 people could really be silent for 21 minutes. Not only was every silent for the whole time, but without saying a word, everyone formed an entire circle around the field holding hands. It was really inspiring to see how a group of people could come together and work as a team to help those across the world. That night emphasized for me that it's not Africa that we are fighting for, but it is humanity.