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UNH Students Hold Concert To Raise Money For Second African Family

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March 24, 2005

DURHAM, N.H. – Just months after the Simwerwayi family of Manchester and the Congo were reunited as a result of a communitywide effort lead by a group of students from the University of New Hampshire, the students have turned their attention to another African family that has been separated for nearly five years because of political violence.

The Committee on Rights and Justice (CORAJ) is working to reunite Mariana Bitondo Mwisimbwa with her husband and four children, who have been stuck in the Congo but recently relocated to the Cameroons in the hope that their next stop will be New Hampshire.

The students will hold a benefit concert Monday, March 28, 2005, at 7 p.m. at the Stone Church in Newmarket. Local bands that will be playing include Soup Bone Throne and Animal Gravity. In addition, anyone who wants to join the show can perform during open mic. Tickets are \$10 and all proceeds will benefit the Mwisimbwa family. Tickets can be purchased at the door. Anyone wishing to make a donation can mail a check to Danny's Team, P.O. Box 606, Durham, NH 03824.

CORAJ was founded by UNH students and Nina Glick-Schiller, professor of anthropology, in spring 2003 after Glick-Schiller learned about the plight of Hubert and Helene Simwerayi. The couple had recently moved to Manchester after fleeing violent armed bands of militias in the Congo that have been burning, looting, raping and killing civilians. Forced to leave their seven children behind with extended family because of financial issues, the Simwerayis were in the process of gathering funds to fly the children to the U.S. when they learned their visas had expired. Glick-Schiller and her students led a communitywide effort that raised thousands of dollars and pushed through the bureaucratic immigration process, resulting in all seven children being reunited with their parents in September 2004.

CORAJ has now focused its efforts on helping Mwisimbwa. Five years ago she fled the Congo, leaving behind her husband and four children, after being raped and beaten because her law firm represented a member of the political opposition. She is eager to bring her family to New Hampshire, but still needs to get them visas and raise \$6,000 to pay for their airfare.

Breanne Langlois, a sophomore from Deerfield who is majoring in anthropology and religious studies, is just one of the students active in CORAJ.

“Meeting these people, hearing their stories and getting to know them has been such a rewarding experience for me,” Langlois said. “I can’t imagine going through anything nearly like what they’ve experienced. Knowing we can make a difference in their lives is an incredible feeling.”