

[start, 00:00]

SPEAKER 3: We're going to do a clap. Go ahead Kevin! That's right. We can start.

SPEAKER 2: Ok. As an introduction, can you first tell us what you call yourself and give your consent to be filmed?

SPEAKER 1: Yes, thank you very much. My name is Mrs. Rachel Kapombo. I give you my consent to be filmed.

SPEAKER 2: Thank you very much. So now we start with the interview itself. So can you give us your name and where you live, neighborhood, city, including the country for visitors who are not Congolese?

SPEAKER 1: Ok. I am Mrs. Rachel Kapombo. I live in Kinshasa, Congo DRC, the municipality of Ngaliema, Basoko district, on the avenue of farm number five.

SPEAKER 2: Ok, thank you very much. So can you tell us something about your parents, who your mom and dad are?

SPEAKER 1: Yes. My father's name was, he was named because he already died Theophile Kapombo Ilodi, he was Congolese. My mother's name is Georgine Moulanou(ph). She was... she's half Congolese, half Belgian. She is a child who has been abandoned, a Belgian child. She never knew her father, her mother too. This was someone who was abandoned at birth and then kidnapped by the Belgians who brought her...excuse me.

SPEAKER 2: There's no problem, if you want to start again.

SPEAKER 1: I think, because I still had to know. Will there be...? Do I have to explain in relation to the association, in relation directly... excuse me, did you cut?

SPEAKER 3: No, no, no, we will not cut, you can start again, but during the editing process, we will...

SPEAKER 2: Are you going to remove?

SPEAKER 3: There you go.

SPEAKER 2: I'm actually proposing that you start by actually telling us a little bit about how your mom got to Muanda and what happened next? And in this way, thus effectively launch the beginning of the association.

SPEAKER 1: So I wanted to know... Ok. So here, as I had just said, dad, his name was Theophile Kapombo Ilodi, he died and my mother, she was Congolese. My mother is a Mixed

Race Belgian, she never knew her father. She was born in the village in the Bandundu, in the Bandundu Kongo at the time, and at the age of three or four, she doesn't really know because she was so small, she was kidnapped by Belgians where she was even taken to go and hide her in the bush to be set on fire, so as not to recognize that she was a White man's child. And afterwards she was taken, she was taken to Muanda, in Bas-Congo, in central Congo. This is where she grew up, without her mom, without her dad. And after a few years, my mother, she learned that her mom had died as a result of the abduction.

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SPEAKER 2: Can you explain that? So, Muanda, it was a boarding school for Mixed Race kids, so can you explain that?

SPEAKER 1: Yes, yes. Muanda is the colony, how... where they were going to put all the abandoned children. There was the Goma colony for boys and Muanda was for girls. It was, I think, the Sisters of Charity, the nuns, the colony of Muanda. We were going to take all the children, I think, Belgians, huh, that they had abandoned and that were brought there to be taken care of by the nuns, there you go. So she grew up there, and when there was independence in 1960, that's when this place was closed down. They asked the parents, the parents who were still alive, to go get their children back, Those who could go get their children back, they went to get their children back. But my mother in the meantime, she didn't know anyone.

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So she... she found herself here in Kinshasa to do some searching. This is where she learned that her mother had passed away. Well, she managed, eh, a woman, she managed to get by. She was at the mercy of men, I can say. It was not easy for her. She grew up without knowing her father or mother. She hadn't gotten any affection, neither paternal nor maternal. That's it, a bit of the situation. And growing up, we were trying a little to understand because we saw mom who was light-skinned, Mixed Race, and we too, we wanted to know a little about what happened.

We'd ask Mom the question so she might explain it to us, but Mom, she was so traumatized about the situation when she was asked the question. She told us, "This is a child of a tree, she comes out of a tree," that is, she has no father or mother. I know that we knew from childhood and she started crying, immediately she started crying. And it's only afterwards. People were telling us that no, your grandfather was Belgian, this is a child of a Belgian man and everything, but that the dad never recognized her. We had no information since the mom had died and that mom, she did not grow up with her own mom. She had no brothers and sisters to explain, you can say that we, there you go, it's my story and everything, but it wasn't easy for us and for her too, and there you go. Afterwards, we began to meet with each other, the children of our parents who were abandoned. There was our president, the founder, Mr. Lutula Gabriel. It was he who had the ideas to start with the Belgian Children's Association. So, he is like me. It is the children, we, the children, we rebelled against this abandonment. We decided to create the so-called

association, initially it was the Association of Abandoned Children, the “children of Belgians abandoned in the Congo”.

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Then there were people when we went to the Belgian embassy at the time, it was in 2000... we started the creation, it was in 2009, then in 2010, that's where we really started working and we went. There is one, I think, he was in charge of business at the time, he told us, “No, abandoned, it's shocking, it really is shocking. It's better to put Left Behind”. Personally, I disagreed because I think to myself when I tell myself left behind, you come afterwards to look, you come afterwards, looking, finding, it is. But when you abandon, you abandon, you turn your back, you leave, it's like us. So, it's not Left Behind, but it's really Abandoned, because after so many years from the 1960s to the present, these parents never bothered to go back to ask, at the least. Because there are, there are many, there are many thousands. We have been abandoned, all that, but there are others who don't even want to hear about the Belgians. After that, we try to approach other people to say, “Come on, we're going to work together”. They say, “No, we don't want to hear about the Belgians anymore. They're nasty people because they have abandoned us”. And every time we went to the embassy, everyone went there on their own behalf, tried a little to know what happened.

Can you finally tell us who our parents were, who our fathers were, grandfathers and all that? But there, they wouldn't receive us, we know nothing and all that. So, it was not easy. There have been others who even have certificates, birth certificates and all that. But when you get there, really, you were not considered, you were not considered and it hurts very, it hurts very much in relation to the situation. This is the why behind the creation of the Association and the creation of the Association is not only children who were born in colonial times, but it is the association of abandoned children because, in colonial times, they have abandoned until today, colonial and postcolonial even still today, there are abandonments. We have little children, there are even people, embassy agents who come here, they make children and they leave, they don't recognize these children here. Why? Because the law says that no, until you recognize your child, the child cannot bear your name, nor have nationality. And it's really sad, it hurts very much. How can they make children? You come here, that, you encourage evil!

I believe Belgium is encouraging evil. You're protecting those irresponsible dads that keep coming here to this day. Today, I am talking to you, surely there is also a child who has been abandoned somewhere, who will be born today and who will be abandoned because the dad does not want to take care of this child.

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So, being mixed with African blood, it's like you're not entitled. So, you want to eliminate the race, you want to stay, you, it's not good, it's wickedness. And we are disgusted about that. And we said, “We're not going to give up, we're going to keep going”. You have abandoned the children here, but we're not going to give up until you fix the situation. Yes, our parents are tired because first of all they didn't even want to hear about it. But us, we the children took the lead,

then they came. We are fighting, fighting together with our parents. And if you don't do it, you'll have... You already have us, behind you, and our children. We will not drop the case. Yes, as we always say, the blood shouts, "Repair!" You need to repair the drops of blood that flow through our veins. You have to repair in some way or other.

SPEAKER 2: And you think of what form of reparation?

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SPEAKER 1: Yes, a form of reparation because, compared to the resolution, we also benefited. In 2018, the minister, Prime Minister Charles Michel had apologized. He apologized for the abandonment and all that, but there it was much more than the children had been kidnapped. There's the AMB, the Association of Mixed Race People that's out there, you talk a lot more about them. But then, when we learned that, because we work in collaboration with the AMB, when we learned that, we said, "Well, that's a good thing". That's what gave us the strength and courage to say, "As they recognized, that's a good thing". And they talked about reparations, but we don't know how, how it's going to happen. And we've wanted for years to actually find out how it can happen.

What do we want? For those born in colonial times, Belgium must recognize these children and their grandchildren, the offspring and also repair in the sense, these people, they suffered violence and all that, kidnappings. Can Belgium not make a gesture, a gesture to relieve the evil? These children, they were traumatized, raised in poverty, there are most, the majority have not even been to school. Our parents are still fine, well they went to primary school. There are others who have had certificates and others not, because after it was over, there was no one left to continue paying. So we ask, for those born in colonial times, to recognize these children, to give them back their nationality because they are entitled. We have the right to Belgian citizenship, to help, to repair, to make a gesture. We can't say how much and everything. This is Belgium. There are not many, there are not many. So if Belgium can do that, it will be a good thing. What about those born after independence? Just recognition, nationality for these children, because we're entitled, that's it.

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SPEAKER 2: Uh, can you explain a little bit how the Mixed Race people were seen during the colonial era but also after, and how, for example, it impacted your mom?

SPEAKER 1: Yes. According to the history we have, it is true that we were not there, but what we are being taught, and we even live it to date. At the time, when there was independence, the Belgian Mixed Race people, I can say the Belgian Mixed Race people, it was not assessed because there were conflicts between Belgium and Congo. So, in the days of Mobutu, the... Mobutu did not want to work with the Belgian Mixed Race people, he was wary of the Belgian

Mixed Race people. He worked a lot with the Portuguese, others and everything. But the Belgians, they put these people aside. They said they were traitors and all that could create rebellions, things like that. So, it was not easy. They didn't get the chance to have positions and all that, no. If you look right, you're going to see, they're Portuguese, Greeks and all that. But the Belgian Mixed Race people, they had a hard time getting by. There were a few who had positions because at the time, maybe, you could be from Équateur who came from the people, from the people of Équateur, close to President Mobutu, I think, and they took advantage, but the others were not entitled, they did not take advantage, they had a hard time succeeding.

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That's why, if you travel, you'll see most of our relations, especially the men. They are mechanics because they haven't studied, there are many of them, it's true. There were a few cases, they studied or maybe the mother remarried someone else who could have the opportunity to allow the child to study, but the others did not. We have mechanics, it's hard, it wasn't easy for them and the women, it was complicated. They were at the mercy of men. Yes, they were really at the mercy of men. Or it could be, I don't know if you know the history of the second or third office, when you'd be taken on just to beautify the house and everything, you weren't entitled to work, no right to go to meet people, you had to stay at home. That's what I, my mother, experienced, a bit of my mother's story. It wasn't easy because she couldn't get out. She was a woman where she had to stay at home.

She didn't meet people. She didn't even get a chance to research and maybe find her father. That's it, it's sad, it's really sad. And she didn't get a chance to talk a little bit about her story. And as I told you, she was kidnapped, she was three or four years old where she wasn't even talking about that story. And it was only barely when we created the Association, she didn't want to talk. I said Mom, you still have to explain to us. Finally, she began to explain to us a little with the Association, she began to open up because there, there, is life and family, she began to find brothers, sisters. We are now with the family, she began to tell us a little bit about the story, how it was, it was not easy as she did not grow up with a mom or with her dad. Sadly, she had no one to defend her. There was no one to defend her, even in marriage.

When she got married, she did, she had failed marriages too. And my father too, he was a polygamist. There were children from left to right, women and all that. There were terrible consequences. My mother shut herself up. This is somebody that couldn't even go out and go shopping and everything. Behind, you get there, they tell you they see you as a White woman, a Munde. It was violence, violence, she had health problems, heart problems, because she kept everything in herself. She didn't want to express herself, she had no one to confide in, no sister, no brother. There's no dad, no mom, she didn't grow up, she didn't have maternal affection.

How do you want someone who hasn't had affection? And what will she give to her children? So here it is, it's sad, it's that, it's revolting, it disgusts us and we continue to live this because we are considered, we are not well considered in the sense that you will live by your skin. You come

to buy something, something that could cost 10,000 francs, I'll give an example. Because of your skin, so-called White people have left you money, despite you being in a state of suffering and you're not living like everyone else. They will increase the prices. Either you have to go through, use other people, send people to buy things. And my mother, she lived all this for so many years when she couldn't show up at the market. She was a woman locked away at home. You stay at home taking care of the children, it's really sad, it's painful.

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SPEAKER 2: Have you been able to find your maternal family?

SPEAKER 1: Maternal family? Yes. Over time, I can talk. 25, 20 years ago I think, so, 20-25 years together with mom, we started to make contact. We're told, "No, there's your uncle out there," your dad's cousins and everything--your mom, rather, the aunt from left to right and everything, good to the African, huh. Because we, here in Africa, have to live with family, we have to live with family. When family is not there, it's really difficult and we didn't know that. But we tried with time, try a little, us. My mother, it was really... she was reluctant. She thought, "I don't know him, I didn't grow up with them". For her, she did not consider him family. But we children, so much that we needed family, we tried a little to go, but it's not easy. It's not easy, it's complicated. And she represented my family. It is us, and my husband too.

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SPEAKER 2: And can you explain a little bit about the problems that Mixed Race people in general have with seeking their fathers? Not just those who were too young at the time to even have information about their dad, but you talked about nicknames and so on. So, the children did not necessarily know the father's official name. So can you elaborate a little bit on all these difficulties too?

SPEAKER 1: Yes, it's difficult, eh, it's really complicated because the majority of these people, when they arrived here in Congo, there are others who brought... They came with nicknames, they would hide their identity, they would hide their identity. It is really difficult to do research. There, with the resolution, the archives and everything, the men, it's ok, it's a bit ok, I can say more or less, because they did research, but the women, it's difficult given that they were under the control of their husband, there are others right now today. So they couldn't go do research. I give the example as my mother, kidnapped at the age of three, who could inform her, say that your father, his name was So-and-so? Yes. No one, even those who know. I can give you an example. There is one of our Moms who died in December.

The Mom, she was almost ninety years old, and she had a child with a white man, a Belgian. And she couldn't tell us what the man was called, because the man said he was called, he gave the nickname, "Mixed Race Congo". Where will we find, look for the "Mixed Race Congo"? And that gentleman there had even written on the girlfriend's arm at the time because she was a

minor. And these people come looking for women who were thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years old. And all of that was minors and all of that. So, the gentleman, he wrote "Mixed Race Congo," and the Mom was asked, she was still alive. She could not tell you the name of the gentleman who had made the child with her. It's complicated and we don't get it done, it's really difficult to find traces, it's complicated. There are others who have surnames... surnames, there are no first names, where either you find the last name, there is no first name, and there is no coincidence. Like my mother's example, always. I said we did research, we did research in relation to...

SPEAKER 3: We have to wait a bit for the noise of the vehicle. We'll wait a bit, because for the sound...

[end, 23:18]