



THE
ENOUGH MOMENT

FIGHTING TO END AFRICA'S
WORST HUMAN RIGHTS CRIMES

John Prendergast *with* Don Cheadle

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHORS OF *NOT ON OUR WATCH*

Ryan Gosling

"If You Make a Big Enough Noise, They Will Listen"

JOHN: I know you're self-critical about how much you are actually doing, but you've done a lot, going to Africa twice, and lobbying on Capitol Hill and at the United Nations. What made you initially get involved?

RYAN: It was around the time that I met Don Cheadle. I had worked with him on a movie. So I went to see the *Hotel Rwanda* premiere. And Paul Rusesabagina, the gentleman that the film was based on, was there.

First of all, I was really impressed with the film, and with Don, not only for his performance but also because he had become so involved with the issue afterward. And he just seemed to have such a sense of purpose. Not that he didn't have one before, but he had come alive after that experience. Angelina Jolie gave a really powerful speech at the premiere about what was going on in Darfur. I ended up talking to her about the film she was making, and she asked me if I would go to Chad to film something for her movie. I don't think that was actually my Enough Moment, but I think I was going more out of curiosity, just to see what all of this was about.

I had a moment when I went to the first camp, which had thousands of kids, and I had been briefed on what they had probably been through, a list of things. I tried to prepare myself for that. I wanted to be respectful, and I didn't want to be too prying. I wanted to try to figure out how to be in the situation. I ended up being surrounded by something like a hundred kids, who were all looking at me with this look in their eyes, as if they were thinking that if I just flew away at that moment, it wouldn't surprise them.

It was really quiet. They were all just following me and watching me. And there was this one little girl who was kind of getting crushed, squeezed, by the group that was trying to be close. And I said, "It's okay, it's okay." And in that exact tone, they tried to mimic me and say, "It's okay, it's okay." A hundred kids at the exact same time. And then, I kind of laughed, and I said something else, and they mimicked it. And I realized the potential of this. So I kinda taught them that part to "Sweet Caroline, Bah, bah, bah." And I started singing the song. So when I pointed to them, and they would sing the "Bah, bah, bah!" We ended up having a really fun day after that. We made little films together. I gave them the camera, and they filmed each other. They were just really cool. One kid made sunglasses out of a piece of unexposed negative film, and so when he looked through the glasses, he could see pictures. Another kid made a hat out of vodka bottle labels. They were just really creative, and cool. And I liked them. And so, when I left, they weren't just these faceless kids anymore. There was a small group of them that I felt I got to know. And so I felt invested in them after that experience.

When I got back, I began to try and figure out more of what they had been through. And I found this book, *Innocents Lost*, written by Jimmie Briggs, and it was all about child soldiers. I was really impacted by those stories. I didn't even know that that was going on, and so I started doing a lot of research on it. I found their perspective on what they had been through compelling. Most of the kids from Uganda didn't seem to have any bitterness about what had

been done to them. There were no revenge fantasies. The fight had been taken out of them. Not in the sense that they weren't willing to fight for their freedom, or they weren't fighting to keep their spirits hopeful, but they weren't interested anymore in physical fighting.

They were able to forgive each other in a really amazing way. Or at least it was amazing to me that I had heard stories about kids sharing the same bunks in rehabilitation camps after they had been in the jungle together, and you know the kid on the top bunk had been forced to rape and kill the mother of the kid on the bottom bunk. And beaten him to an inch of his life. Yet they were able to be best friends as soon as they got out. Because they both had the understanding that this was something they had to do, and had they not, they wouldn't have survived. There isn't a lot of resentment there, although it's not completely idealistic. These kids are very traumatized, and so sometimes they act up. And it's not always that way, but it seemed to be the major theme of most of the interviews I was reading. It was so different from how I think I would experience that, so much more evolved. Just so different from us. We are so revenge-fantasy driven. I was compelled by them.

I really wanted to go back. During that process, I met you. So when you and I started plotting, I was very inspired by you. And it's difficult to do this because you asked me what keeps me inspired, what keeps me going, and the truth is that it's you. Haha. I'm truly grateful for that. You are that kick in the ass for me, and for a lot of people. And you should be proud of that.

JOHN: Thanks, bro. Let's go back to this whole issue of why you said yes to Angelina, not that anyone would say no to Angelina. You said it was curiosity that made you decide to go to Africa. What was piquing your interest?

RYAN: I just felt compelled to do it. It's not because I felt as though I would be of any service. But it's just not that often that people are given an opportunity like that. Most people hear about these things, but they don't have someone saying, "I'll fly you there, and I'll connect you with all these aid agencies and workers, and they'll give you a tour and access." It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that would be stupid to turn down. But I had no idea how to be effective, if I could be effective, or any of that. I wasn't really educated on the situation. I didn't know what I was getting into. And when I got there, I was kind of struck with the reality of it. We landed kind of in the middle of the desert, and we had to take a two-hour detour because two days before, the UN vehicles had been shot at by Janjaweed militia. We couldn't take the main road. We realized how immediate the danger was when we got there. It was not relatable to home. We were right in it, and there was a real sense of fear among the aid workers because these vehicles had been shot at. And they were wondering if they should be there, let alone us, and so we hit the ground running when we got there.

A lot of the stories that you hear, although they are incredible, they aren't real to you. You don't have a personal connection to those people. But now that I have gone there, and I've been able to hang out with these kids, getting to know them, I can plainly put into perspective what they have been through. Suddenly it all became possible. It seemed impossible before I went. It seemed like a fairy tale. You and I have used this analogy before, but the child soldiers

and the night commuters in Uganda were kind of like something out of a Grimm Brothers fairy tale. It was hard to understand how this could be real.

JOHN: In the Darfur refugee camps, were there people you connected with? Was there any particular story that impacted you in any way?

RYAN: There were two sisters, twins. Zena was the girl I got to know. We were set up to interview them. And when we came into the tent to interview them, they were afraid of us. This was the last thing we wanted to do, to add any stress to them, so we left. We didn't want to impose on them. But one of the girls told an aid worker that she was protecting her sister because her sister was afraid of us, but that she would be willing to talk to us. But I didn't want to interview her, and have her relive her experiences, even if she had been asked to do so a thousand times.

So we just kind of gave her a camera, and I asked Zena if she would be my camera person. She could film her friends, and it would give viewers more of a sense of what their lives are like if they were to just film each other. So I got to spend the day just with her. Not talking very much, just shooting. Asking her to shoot something, her pointing, asking to shoot something. She started wearing my sunglasses, wearing my buddy's hat. Over the course of the day, her personality totally came out. You could tell she was a real character, you know? She was just really dynamic, completely aware, so fast and smart, just a really impressive young lady. And I didn't really know what had happened to her until the day was over. I asked the refugee camp worker about Zena as we were leaving, after we had spent the day together: "So what's the story? How did they get here?" And the camp worker told me that the girl and her sister had been raped by a bunch of the Janjaweed militia and left for dead. But they had found a way to escape this village. And they walked by night, in the direction of Chad, hoping to find the refugee camp because everyone in their village had been killed. They were traveling by night so that they wouldn't be seen in the day by the Janjaweed. And it was a miracle. They picked the right direction and landed into this camp.

JOHN: How old was Zena?

RYAN: Maybe twelve or thirteen.

JOHN: Whom do you remember from northern Uganda?

RYAN: Patrick was this guy from northern Uganda. He was a young guy, really cool and funny. And he was showing us around. And it wasn't until a few days into it that I found out his story. And it was a really crazy story. He was one of Joseph Kony's bodyguards in the LRA. The first time Betty Bigombe, the Ugandan mediator whom we were with, met Patrick, he was pointing a machine gun in her face, and now she was employing him. She basically hired him to show us around. I was asking her, "So how did you and Patrick meet?" And she said, "Well, he had a machine gun in my face."

Patrick had heard about some fellow rebels in the LRA setting a little girl on fire, where they killed a family in a car and set the car on fire, and this little girl Joyce, I think she was two or three, crawled out of the car when it was on fire, and she was on fire. And they threw her back in the car, but somehow she got out again. So the rebels wrapped her in a carpet and set the carpet on fire. Somehow she was able to hold out long enough for the government army to arrive, and they fought off the rebels and rescued her. She had 80 percent of her body covered in burns. Patrick heard this story, and he decided that this was his Enough Moment, which is probably the one we should really be talking about, because he did this really amazing thing where he escaped from the LRA, which is punishable by a pretty brutal death. And I'm sure Patrick had been a part of doling out some of those punishments, so he knew what he was risking, but he escaped and found her. And he decided he was going to spend his life taking care of her. Because her father was an army soldier for the government, he decided he would be her substitute dad.

So when we met him, he kept telling us, "I want you to meet Joyce, I want you to meet Joyce," and we were so busy and overwhelmed, that we kept saying, "Yeah, yeah, yeah," though we didn't really make a plan to do it. And then we finally showed up to see Joyce, and we saw this beautiful little girl, just covered in burns, and he told us her story. So that became our focus. She was very sick, and we tried to take her to the hospital. It was an interesting but very frustrating process because you could see why it's difficult for people living in a displaced-person camp in Africa to stay healthy. Thousands of people all just stacked up on top of each other. There is literally no room. They are just packed into this place. And they are not starving to death, but they are certainly malnourished. And disease spreads so rapidly.

Joyce was just so sick. So we took her to the hospital. I think we waited for like a whole day, and we couldn't find a doctor to look at her. It was just so unorganized, so we took her to another place the next day and found out she had bronchitis. We had to take her to another doctor, and I just can't convey how frustrating it is, how many lines we waited in. You get there, and it's like they are selling tickets to some show...It's not even a line for the doctor. And, you know, it ended up taking weeks to get her blood tests to figure out the diagnosis. And we were on our second to last day when we got the blood tests back and found out she had HIV, which was a total shock obviously to us. But it was even more of a shock to Patrick, who now just really didn't know what to do. It was because she had received so many blood transfusions for her burns. She had received contaminated blood. The next day we went to see her, and she had a bloody nose. And she was playing with a bunch of kids, and they were all wiping the blood off her nose. You can see how difficult it is to stay healthy there.

We tried to put her in a hospital. And we got her a room, and all these things. And at night, she and her family would sneak out and go back to the displaced-persons camp, because for them, from what I understood, community and family were everything. Isolating her from her family and community to keep her healthy was our intention, but for her and her family, there was no point in living if she could not be with her community. They are a unit; they aren't individuals. I'm not trying to speak for the whole culture, but that is the experience we had with this particular family. And there was a certain point we reached when we said to ourselves, "What do we do? It's not our place." Joyce should have had a doctor looking over her. And at the

same time, for the other kids, they can contract either bronchitis, or potentially HIV, and a ripple effect comes from that.

JOHN: With all the communication tools that the new information age provides, what are the most promising things out there that can help make it easier to teach people about what's happening and connect them to these communities, to these people?

RYAN: I think that the Internet is going to play a huge part. Not just in this but in everything. In the future. Haha.

JOHN: Very profound insight.

RYAN: And from what I understand, there are kids who have pen pals, iChat pals, kids from the United States who can iChat with kids in the camps. So I think people in these kinds of situations are now so much more accessible, and that's definitely something that you can build on. It's going to keep growing. There are ways to build personal relationships without having to travel all the way to Africa. It seems to me that there is a shift and that people are becoming more globally minded—because we must be and because we are so accessible to one another now. The borders have sort of all come crashing down because we have access to everyone and everything, to all information, whenever we want it. So I hope that this will help.

JOHN: It would be a grotesque failure, through the media that exist now—through the pictures, and stories, and videos, and everything that exists—if we could not resolve these crises. Does anything stick out in your mind from all those experiences that might have wider relevance to people and give them hope that our voices can actually make a difference?

RYAN: Yeah, that experience when we lobbied Congress was really great because we got a crew together and we walked around Capitol Hill and knocked on doors, and we talked to quite a few representatives and senators. We explained the issues of northern Uganda and what we had seen. The reaction from the representatives was fascinating. Voters think that these officials don't get their calls or letters, but they do get them. It was interesting to actually see that they do have an office. And if you have sent a letter to that office, they have received it. And if they get 100 letters in that office, they pay attention to that. A few of the representatives said, "Look, it would be embarrassing for me if I got 100 letters in my office and I didn't deal with the issue." So it was nice to go and put perspective on this place that seemed so inaccessible to me before and to realize it is just a building with a bunch of people in it, and yeah, if you make a big enough noise, they will listen.