

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**NEW DOCUMENTARY CHRONICLES**  
**ROSE MAPENDO'S MISSION**  
**TO HARNESS THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS TO HEAL**  
**HER FAMILY AND MEND A DIVIDED NATION**

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New York, NY (June 12, 2010)—*Pushing the Elephant*, Arts Engine's next Big Mouth film, will premiere at Human Rights Watch International Film Festival on June 12, 2010. Both a portrait of a powerful woman and an intimate portrayal of the refugee experience, *Pushing The Elephant* takes us on a journey from the cul-de-sacs of suburban Phoenix towards peace in the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo.

Rose Mapendo, matriarch and peace advocate, is a refugee from Congo living in Phoenix, Arizona, with her ten children. They are Banyamulenge, a tribe of Congolese Tutsis that have frequently been at the center of the conflict in eastern Congo. Since their relocation, they reside in an airy home on a quiet street. The children play basketball in the driveway and skateboard in front of the house. They attend the local schools, worship at the local church and work at local businesses. There is enough food on the table and new clothes for everyone.

Today they are worlds away from the death camp in South Kivu where they found themselves more than a decade ago. Taken at night with no shoes on their feet, the Mapendo family was imprisoned in 1998. Rose's husband and the father of her children was executed there, a few months before Rose gave birth to twins, Andre and Galor.

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Their eldest son, John, was beaten repeatedly by the prison guards, and one of her children became so bloated with hunger his body stiffened.

But the assumed safety of their new home so far from Congo is not enough to heal these wounds of war. Memories of her family's hardships combined with news from Congo about continued violence have galvanized Rose to work for peace in her homeland. As an international advocate to bring peace to Congo, Rose Mapendo is a towering figure representing the power of forgiveness to change the world. The United Nations and the White House, among others, have recognized her impassioned work. And yet Rose's faith in forgiveness is not limited to her work on the international stage. Her family comes first.

Nangabire, Rose's second oldest daughter, was separated from the family during the conflict when she was only five years old. She arrived in the U.S. as a teenager in April 2007. Today Nangabire struggles to fit in at a typical U.S. high school, but has flashbacks and dizzy spells that stem from her previous life. At home, she is searching to find her place in the family and the history and values that have shaped it. While she watches Rose living a life dedicated to the healing power of forgiveness, Nangabire must look deep inside herself to see whether she can accept her mother's message and thus move forward. As the film watches this mother and daughter story evolve over the course of the film, the themes of the film are viscerally experienced through Rose and Nangabire's intimate relationship.

Rose's eldest son, John, is fast becoming a leader for the family. He has embraced life in the U.S. and does not agree with his mother's agenda to go back to Congo to make peace. Forgiveness, he says, does not require that she endanger herself by returning to the place that had harmed them so much. As the film progresses, Rose turns her faith to her family and then to herself.

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And here Rose finds a deeper truth, a more unsettling realm of the refugee experience that she eventually uncovers. At the most intimate point of the film, Rose reveals that she must first forgive herself for decisions she was forced to make while being held prisoner, decisions that may have saved the family from death, but have left deep and indelible wounds that have only just begun to heal. *Pushing The Elephant* is about inspiring action in oneself and others, about spiritual redemption, about the power of forgiveness to not only mend divided cultures, but to heal the vengeful hatred engendered by persecution.

### **About Arts Engine**

*Pushing the Elephant* is Arts Engine's ninth Big Mouth film. Arts Engine is a trusted source of media that matters, driving change by connecting media, technology and community. In addition to Big Mouth Films, Arts Engine includes: Media That Matters, MediaRights.org and DocuClub. For more information, please go to: [www.artsendine.net](http://www.artsendine.net).

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