

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

WORLD CLASS

A FORMER MODEL LEAVES A JET-SET LIFE IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA TO BUILD A SCHOOL FOR GIRLS AT HOME

Noëlla Coursaris Musunka learned the importance of education before she ever stepped into a school. After Musunka's father died when she was 5, her mother sent her away from her home in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to be educated in Europe. "Had my mother been educated, she might have been able to keep me," Musunka says. "It was a sacrifice to send me off, and it didn't have to be that way."

These days, U.K.-based Musunka is doing her part to make sure it isn't that way for fellow Congolese women. In 2011, after a career modeling for the likes of Agent Provocateur, she cofounded the Malaika School in Kalebuka, Congo, a village just minutes from the city of Lubumbashi, where she grew up. The school offers free education to more than 230 girls ages 5 to 11. The rapper Eve joined Musunka to fete the opening of a new library in March. "It was



Noëlla Coursaris Musunka with Malaika students, 2014

important to have a place where the girls can read, relax, or be tutored outside the classroom," she says.

It's also important to Musunka that the students have a strong support system. The Malaika foundation, which oversees the school, has built a handful of wells to provide clean water to the village, as well as a community center where family members can attend classes. Locals were employed to make bricks for the school's construction, while mothers were taught to sew uniforms. "You can teach the kids all you want, but you need their parents to have a good understanding of what they're learning so they can reinforce it at home," Musunka says. As her own experiences have taught her, it takes a village. —*Feifei Sun*
For more information, visit malaika.org.

BANGLADESH

FORCED TO FLEE

HER LIFE AT RISK, A BLOGGER FIGHTS BACK WITH HER KEYBOARD

If you think it's hard out there for feminist bloggers in the U.S., consider that in Bangladesh, posting online about women's rights can get you killed. In 2013, Shammi Haque was concerned about the rising power of Islamic extremists, who were rolling back women's rights. "I realized I had to protest," she says. "I had to raise my voice against the male-dominated culture." Using a blog, Haque has voiced support for a variety of causes and led a movement against sexual harassment after dozens of men publicly groped women at the country's New Year's celebration last April. She's done her work in

the face of extremists who warned publishers against hiring women last fall, and she's received many rape and death threats. In August, her good friend and fellow blogger Niloy Neel was brutally murdered. "I couldn't sleep for a month," Haque says. "Every time I closed my eyes, I saw his dead body." In 2015 alone, four bloggers and one publisher were killed.

After her friend's death, Haque went into police protection, but still felt uneasy. "My mother [was warned] about my safety—that I'd be the next one killed," Haque says. "I felt like I had to leave my country." She fled to Germany in October. Days after arriving, she



Bangladeshi blogger Shammi Haque protesting against war criminals in Dhaka, 2013

learned her name had been added to a "hit list" back in Bangladesh.

Today, Haque, now 22, is writing her firebrand posts from Europe, wishing for the day she can return home. "My dreams are of the Bangladeshi people," she says. "I have so many plans for women's rights, for poor people. My one hope is that my country will get well soon so I can go back." —*Jennifer Chowdhury*

MCSPOTLIGHT

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