

# *The Mosse Undergraduate Research and Service Award*

NED MEERDINK (BA '08)

**A**s a student in the History Department, I have come to understand that history exists in the here and now. I have cultivated an intense interest in the methods by which history interacts with present social and political conditions, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where history plays out on a very tangible, practical level. Through my education, I was well aware of the legacy of colonialism throughout central Africa and the role it plays in some of the current political conflicts and lack of economic development in Africa that limits access to fundamental rights such as education, health care, due process, and economic opportunity. Yet it was only through personal experience with Africans in Africa that I could see how these historical phenomena dominate everyday life, and to witness the lives and strategies of citizens in Uvira/Sud Kivu, Congo, some of the poorest, most threatened, and neglected populations in the world. People I met in the Congo were all too aware of the international support and complacency that has accompanied the rise of two tyrants, Joseph Désiré Mobutu and Laurent Kabila, who hold large responsibility for the 5.4 million deaths in Congo since 1998. Current statistics document that 45,000 Congolese die each month due to situations associated with continuing

insecurity and underdevelopment.

The Mosse Undergraduate Award will be used to support Mutuelle Jeunesse Active, a local Congolese organization which I was lucky enough to work with from July 2007 to January 2008, when I returned to Madison to complete my undergraduate degree. I returned to Congo this past August to continue my research on the development of local organizations in regions of the world in transition away from conflict under the direction of Professors Neil Kodesh (History) and Aliko Songolo (French).

**On October 30, Ned Meerdink sent an e-mail update, part of which is quoted below.**

“I am working for two NGOs that work on educational and

recreational programs for children, and an NGO that investigates and reports of human rights violations and war crimes (all too common) committed throughout North and South Kivu provinces. One of the things most kids here really lack is consistency, so we try to organize things that they can look forward to and depend on each week, every day. The numbers coming out about the current increase in violence in this area are shocking: in the last two months, more than 200,000 people in eastern Congo have fled their homes due to new fighting. Sixteen villages were raided and burned last week by rebels who then abducted at least 160 children to fight with them. The use of rape as a weapon of war is endemic.”



*Ned Meerdink visiting Runimgu School, South Kivu, Congo.*