



**Mariatu Kamara** exemplifies the best of humanity. Soft-spoken, she is an inspirational young woman who always is concerned about the well-being of others.

When Mariatu first arrived in Canada, she had to deal with extraordinary obstacles—physical disability (her hands had been amputated by rebels during the Sierra Leone civil war), lack of formal education (she never had the opportunity to attend school) and the inability to communicate in English.

Despite these barriers, she integrated well into Canadian society and is a positive role model for other young people. She shares her heartbreaking story of rape, torture, the death of her child and having to beg on the streets, with courage and grace. Her story stands as a source of hope

and inspiration to others; they too can overcome their worst fears, find their talents, seek a purpose and live life to the fullest.

Despite the huge physical and emotional barriers, Mariatu manages to face each day optimistically. Nothing could hold her back from achieving her dream of graduating from high school in 1997, and now post-secondary studies at George Brown College in the Assaulted Women and Children's Counsellor/Advocate Program. Her memoir, *The Bite of the Mango*, co-written with her nominator Susan McClelland, tells the story of her life in Sierra Leone, her capture by rebel soldiers and how she came to live in Canada.

Mariatu is eager to speak to groups about her experiences and to educate the public about the impact of war on children. She hopes to be able to share her experiences with people of all ages. Mariatu has spoken publicly about the impact of war on children for Free the Children. She is now a UNICEF Canada special representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and she has set up a foundation to help provide housing for victims of war in Sierra Leone. These accomplishments and efforts are in keeping with her lifelong goals that include working for the United Nations and counseling abused women and children.

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