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CARTER CENTER NEWS

FALL 2026



Women Rise in Zambia

Fighting Disease With Tech

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FALL 2026

CARTER CENTER NEWS

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Carter Center News is produced by the Office of Communications, The Carter Center, One Copenhill, 453 John Lewis Freedom Parkway NE, Atlanta, GA, 30307, 404-420-5100, www.cartercenter.org.

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ON THE COVER

A toxic mine spill forced Mercy Kamwazye, of Zambia's Copperbelt Province, to find an income source outside of farming. The Carter Center's SheRise project has partnered with Action for Sustainable Development to empower women like Kamwazye, who now sells fabric, nuts, beans, and more outside her home.



From the CEO, Paige Alexander

Holding Steady in Uncertain Times



Paige Alexander is the chief executive officer of The Carter Center.

How do you keep a global organization steady when the world refuses to be still?

That challenge was on my mind during this year's Carter Center Weekend, when I sat down with the two CEOs who came before me — Dr. John Hardman and Ambassador Mary Ann Peters — to talk about leadership and character in uncertain times.

I came with a list of questions and left with a notebook full of wisdom.

Their stories reminded me how often the Center has weathered chaotic storms — 9/11, wars in Sudan and Syria, Ebola in Liberia — by changing its methods while never changing its mission.

When Syria's war proved too chaotic for traditional peace talks, our team mapped the shifting conflict to ensure aid reached people. In Liberia, we leveraged our relationships with local chiefs, who persuaded communities to change behaviors that were spreading Ebola.

Each example shows what makes the Carter Center's approach special — the marriage of peace and health and the trust we earn by letting local people lead. My predecessors were willing to take real risks to do the right thing, because as our founder believed, every life carries the same worth.



CEO Paige Alexander with Dr. John Hardman and Ambassador Mary Ann Peters.

My six years at the Center have brought their own challenges. I came on board in the middle of a pandemic, yet our work never stopped. I joined at a time of growing distrust and divisions in America, so we began using our expertise here at home — setting up nonpartisan election observation networks and helping people converse across differences.

When I asked the former CEOs their advice for me now, in a time of steep funding cuts, the answer was clear: The Carter Center must be a voice for values. When challenges arise, we do not lower our heads — we keep faith with the people at the end of the road who have no other champion.

That is the charge they handed me and the promise we renew with you. The world may refuse to be still, but with you beside us, we hold steady.

Human Rights Defenders Find Solidarity in Brussels

In May, about 40 activists convened in Brussels, Belgium, for the Carter Center's 14th Human Rights Defenders Forum.

Representing various causes and 30 countries, they came from Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, Central and South America, and the United States. Their day-to-day missions and the communities they serve might differ, but the challenges they face are often similar.

Some arrived having lived and worked in exile, fighting for rights in their countries from afar. Others couldn't be photographed or named for fear of what their governments would do to them. Still more serve on the front lines at home despite political and legal challenges, the loss of funding, and even threats to their lives.

Since 2003, these forums have been held in Atlanta. Difficulties securing visas and fears about traveling to the U.S. necessitated a change of venue this year.

The three-day gathering, like those before it, provided an opportunity for participants to share strategies, build solidarity, and find inspiration. As one activist described it, the forum felt "like a hug to human rights defenders," providing the support they needed to keep going.



Amneh Khoulani, who lost three brothers and countless friends in a Syrian prison, speaks for those who no longer can. She stands beside a mural activists painted together at the Carter Center's Human Rights Defenders Forum in May 2026.

Center Deploys Expert Mission for Brazil Elections

The Carter Center deployed an election expert mission to Brazil for the country's October election, at the invitation of Brazil's Superior Electoral Court.

The seven-member team — which includes experts from Portugal, Germany, and the United States, as well as Carter Center staff — focused on election technology, the legal framework for electoral administration, and voter education. The mission visited a limited number of polling stations on election day but did not assess the conduct of voting or the process as a whole.

"Given the significance of these elections — not only for Brazil but for the hemisphere — we hope that our mission will strengthen the transparency of the electoral process," said Jennie Lincoln, the Center's senior advisor for Latin America and the Caribbean and mission director.

The team remained in Brazil through both rounds and will publish a report with its findings and recommendations.

Efforts to Eliminate Trachoma as a Public Health Problem in Ethiopia

The battle against the world's leading cause of infectious preventable blindness got a boost this summer. In a two-week period, the Carter Center's Trachoma Control Program completed antibiotic mass drug administration in 48 districts of the Amhara region, the most affected area in Ethiopia. Over 8.2 million treatments were distributed thanks to the support of more than 7,000 health extension workers and 1,000 field supervisors and coordinators.

The effort was part of a Ministry of Health-endorsed integration campaign that included screenings for eye health, tuberculosis, and cervical cancer — as well as distribution of medicines, where applicable, for lymphatic filariasis and onchocerciasis, also known as river blindness.

Amhara has seen other inroads in this fight, thanks to assistance from the Center. More than 18,000 people suffering from trachomatous trichiasis (TT), an advanced form of trachoma that leads to blindness if left untreated, received vision-saving surgery; dozens of surgeons received TT surgery training and retraining; and more than 22,000 educators were trained on a school curriculum to teach children to help prevent the disease.



SheRise: Supporting Women and the Environment in Zambia

The well that serves as a source of water for Regina Kashimba and her rural Zambian community runs dry every October. That's bad enough on its own.

Then there's the toxic waste that polluted the Kafue River, the country's longest waterway—the result of a copper mine dam failure and acid spill in February 2025. It killed fish, decimated crops, and threatened livelihoods and food and water security.

Mukumbo, Kashimba's village, is situated in an underdeveloped district in Zambia's Copperbelt Province. It's a remote area far enough downstream from the mine disaster that it didn't receive mining company reparations or government assistance—even though it took a significant hit. Outside support to address the climate crisis and environmental hazards, though limited, became critical.



Regina Kashimba is helping stop charcoal production in her remote village of Mukumbo.

Filling a Void

The Centre for Environment Justice stepped in to assist Mukumbo and other affected rural villages, thanks to a partnership with The Carter Center. The nongovernmental organization is one of 10 partners in three Zambian provinces with projects funded by the Center's SheRise project, a human rights initiative to empower women environmental rights defenders, climate-oriented entrepreneurs, and their communities.

"What took us to this area is the SheRise project," said Maggie Mwape, founder and executive director of the organization, which is working in provinces across Zambia. "The impact is highly felt because these communities are not having any interventions from others."

Her organization is training women to advocate for a safe water system and environment. It offers lessons in water purification and agroecology and has purchased irrigation pipes to support a community garden. It's also helping women build alternative, climate-smart livelihoods.

In Kashimba's case, she's working to stop charcoal production in her village. Chopping down and burning trees to make charcoal to sell is a common but destructive practice. She's reporting violators to the forestry department, teaching best practices to community members, and encouraging alternative revenue options, such as reselling maize.

In February 2025, a toxic mine spill polluted Zambia's Kafue River. Residents of Mukumbo, 80 kilometers downstream, still feel the effects.

Closer to Ground Zero

A couple hours east in the town of Chambishi, another SheRise partner, Action for Sustainable Development, is training women in financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and income diversification.

The area where many of these women live was not directly affected by the mine spill, but the rural area where they farm is ground zero for contamination. Grants from the SheRise project are helping them find cleaner, safer land.

Meantime, women are working with the organization to develop other ways to support themselves, their families, and the environment. In July, a group gathered in the home of Mercy Kamwazye to discuss what they're doing and how they can best move forward.

Kamwazye has set up a stand where she sells traditional chitenge fabric, nuts, beans, and popcorn. Others are planting avocado trees closer to home, which will generate income, provide food, and serve as a needed windbreak.

Also at the meeting was one woman who lives in the rural community of

Kalusale, the restricted area where the acid spill occurred. Friends and family are no longer able to visit her, and she must rely on rationed water distributed by the mining company to drink, bathe, and cook. She is now part of a class-action lawsuit against the company.



At a secondary school outside Ndola, girls in the gardening club fetch water for their banana plants.

Reaching Communities

About 55 miles southeast of Chambishi is the Copperbelt's Ndola District, home to Zambia's third-largest city, Ndola. Here, another SheRise partner takes to the radio airwaves to effect change.

Free Press Initiative brings investigative journalists and women environmental rights defenders together to advocate for climate justice. Radio is often the best tool to disseminate information, so the initiative has partnered with WeForest, a rural radio program, to educate listeners.

The initiative is also working with a consortium of women and journalists to advise a high school gardening club for girls, train women in recycling enterprises and waste management, and conduct campaigns in local markets.

"These are small examples of the work three of our 10 partners are doing in just one Zambian province," said the Center's Emily Broussard, who works on the SheRise project and visited the Copperbelt Province in July. "By empowering women who care about their environment, our partners across Zambia are helping to transform lives and communities."

Outside the Copperbelt

The Center's SheRise project has partners in three of Zambia's 10 provinces. Here's a snapshot of work underway outside the Copperbelt Province.

Eastern Province: Partners are helping women build financial resilience, access capital, and influence decisions on climate-related community challenges.

Southern Province: Partners are providing financial literacy training, supporting enterprise development, and assisting women-led small businesses with market opportunities.



Clara Chikasa collects boxes in her community of Kawama, outside Ndola. The money she makes is reinvested in other small enterprises.



Fighting Disease at the Speed of Innovation

A new generation of Carter Center scientists is harnessing cutting-edge tools to fight diseases afflicting the world's poorest people.

As a boy on his family's farm, Jimmy Carter fought by hand the pests that threatened their cotton fields. Moving row by row, plant by plant, he would dab a mixture of arsenic and molasses onto buds, hoping to ward off destructive boll weevils.



A scientist examines flies under a microscope to distinguish disease-carrying black flies from harmless look-alikes — work that new AI-powered microscopes are beginning to speed up.

Years later, that crude remedy gave way to pesticides, then to pest-resistant seeds — proving to him that science was a steady engine of progress with the potential to improve people's lives.

That belief helped found The Carter Center and still drives its work against five neglected tropical diseases — river blindness, lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis, trachoma, and Guinea worm — that blind and disable people in the world's poorest, most remote places. Now a new generation of Center scientists is deploying innovative tools — chief among them, artificial intelligence — against diseases the world has long ignored.

An AI-powered microscope is speeding up parasite detection in the field. Small enough to sit on a tabletop and run on solar power or a car battery, it uses AI to spot disease-causing parasites in blood, urine, and stool samples. It can tell the difference between disease-carrying black flies and harmless look-alikes, a task so nuanced it can often stump trained experts.

In the Dominican Republic, Carter Center epidemiologist Karen Hamre works to clean data in the field while other team members discuss the survey.

In one pilot in Ethiopia, a scientist used four of these microscopes to classify 80 flies in one hour. Using traditional methods, that same scientist would classify only five to 10 in the same period. It's an example of how innovation is enhancing, not sidelining, the work of a scientist.

"The scope doesn't replace humans," said Karen Hamre, who leads epidemiology, research, and innovation for the Center's river blindness, lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis, and malaria programs. "It uses what we call a 'human-in-the-loop' verification process. Every time AI flags an image, an expert confirms or corrects its call."

For trachoma, AI is helping train clinicians to recognize a disappearing disease. As mass drug administration continues to decrease disease burden in certain regions, field teams see trachoma only rarely, and newer clinicians may not recognize its signs and symptoms. To close the detection and

surveillance gap, the Center's Trachoma Control Program is using photography to capture high-resolution images of patients' eyes. Thousands of photos from South Sudan, Niger, and as far away as Peru flow into an image-analysis center in Ethiopia.

"We are using machine-learning algorithms to detect different stages of trachoma with greater accuracy and precision, which helps support our clinical teams and diagnoses made in the field," said Pallavi Kache, an epidemiologist with the Center. "These images can be used to train clinicians to detect disease, so we can ensure appropriate surveillance over time and meet elimination criteria."

Annual cases of Guinea worm disease in humans have dwindled to roughly a dozen a year, thanks to a persistent global effort over decades. But getting those cases down to zero is still a major task. The parasite now hides mostly in animals, chiefly dogs.

"There has never been a diagnostic test for Guinea worm," said Jessica van Loben Sels, associate director of research for the Guinea Worm Eradication Program. "A person can tell us, 'I think I have a worm in my foot.' But a dog can't."



A photographer captures a high-resolution image of a young trachoma patient. A growing bank of field photos, analyzed by AI, is helping clinicians detect the disease as cases grow rare.

That's starting to change. Two new field tests — operating on portable, solar-powered equipment — can now catch the parasite before a worm ever emerges. One test reads a drop of an animal's blood for signs that its body has fought the infection; the other looks for worm DNA in a potentially infected animal, revealing which have simply been exposed and which have worms actively growing in them. That same test can also scan water, flagging a contaminated source before it infects anything or anyone.

Together, these tools are doing more with fewer resources. It's innovation paired with good old Carter Center optimism — the belief that the right tools in the right hands can do the most good for the most people.

For Hamre, what's already been made possible is just the beginning: "AI for good is going to be a game changer."



Jessica van Loben Sels, center, joined staff at Chad's IRED laboratory for the March 2025 launch of the first study to screen dogs for Guinea worm exposure using the ELISA, an antibody test and the first diagnostic ever developed for the disease.



Students, parents, and community leaders gather inside a classroom in a school reopened after years of jihadi control in Farimaké, Mali.

In Rural Mali, a School Reopens After Years of Violence

A few dozen schoolchildren piled into a classroom in Farimaké, Mali, one morning in December 2025. Volunteers moved through the room, handing each child a bag of textbooks, notebooks, and pencils — a first for all of them.

The school hadn't hosted students since 2015, when jihadi violence swept through this remote corner of Mali's Mopti region. The last time classes took place, these children hadn't even been born.

Armed men with machine guns — members of the terrorist group Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin — had taken control of the school. Teachers were replaced by fighters.

The conflict isn't over. If anything, it is getting worse, but some community members decided not to wait for it to end. That's where The Carter Center came in.

Today, the teachers are back, as are more than 400 students.

A Profound Distrust

Since the conflict erupted more than a decade ago, armed groups have gained control of vast stretches of northern and central Mali, cutting off markets, health facilities, and other basic needs. The Malian government withdrew its presence in the region, leaving communities like Farimaké feeling abandoned.

"Everyone lived in an utter state of fear," said Farimaké village chief Sidi Modibo Tamboura. "We were left paralyzed."

Since 2019, the Carter Center's Mali Peace Through Health initiative has worked in the country's most volatile districts, using public health and development projects to bring alienated communities and government officials back into conversation.

In 2025, the effort expanded to Youwarou district, where Farimaké is located.

Boukary Sangare, the Center's Sahel coordinator, described "profound mistrust" in the area. People felt the government no longer worked for them, while the state worried the region sided with the jihadis.

"Social cohesion had fallen apart," Sangare said.

To rebuild trust, the Center held workshops in October 2025 that brought government officials and local leaders together to identify shared needs and possible solutions.

"We use a community-based approach, so we don't participate in negotiations," said Frédéric Deycard, the Center's associate director for Mali and the Sahel. "Instead, we help people to identify their needs and figure out how to meet them. They're in charge. They can lead — and they do."

During the workshops, the Center trained participants in conflict resolution, discussed shared concerns, and planned projects like increasing farmers' access to water. The improved relationships also helped the Center's ongoing work to eradicate Guinea worm disease in the region, allowing health programs to reach isolated areas long cut off by fighting.

"What we learned in the workshops, and the actions we took following them, have significantly improved our living conditions," Tamboura said.

A Classroom Reclaimed

One result of that rebuilt trust was reclaiming the school in Farimaké. Community members negotiated directly with the armed groups who had seized it, using the tools and confidence they gained in the workshops.

The classroom was just the beginning.

"Young people and students now feel safe," said Alpha Kassé, an educator and mediator from Farimaké who attended the reopening. "They are no longer at risk of forced recruitment, and access to education has returned. People have regained hope and the freedom to live without harassment."

For the children settling into class with new pencils in hand, that hope is no longer abstract. It's time for school.



Students pose for a photo outside of a classroom in Farimaké, Mali.

Calling All Employers: The Fight for Mental Health Coverage Needs You



Adam Nemer delivers the keynote address at an August 2026 symposium on mental health in the workplace, where The Carter Center unveiled a two-part toolkit for employers.

Adam Nemer, a former high-powered business executive, seemed to have it all. But he snapped at people, couldn't control his emotions, and assumed his behavior was typical.

Nemer's boss saw signs of something deeper, pulled him aside for a short conversation, and opened the door for Nemer to seek help for the severe depression and anxiety he'd unknowingly struggled with for nearly two decades.

"If someone is choking, we'd know what to do. But what about an anxiety attack?" said Nemer, who is now the force behind Simple Mental Health, which partners with leaders to create stigma-free work cultures. "How to talk about mental health in the workplace is just as important as how to put together a business plan."

More Than Talk

The Carter Center is in the business of reducing stigma around mental health issues and ensuring that people who need, want, and deserve mental healthcare can get it. These issues were top-of-mind for former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, who championed mental health and caregiving throughout her lifetime.

Her legacy and unwavering dedication live on in the Center's Rosalynn Carter Mental Health and Caregiver Program, which partners with advocates like Nemer to improve access to care. In late August, the program unveiled a two-part toolkit to help employers improve access to mental health and substance use disorder care for employees.

Defining the Terms

Driving this push is the simple idea that behavioral health, which includes mental health and substance use disorders, should be covered by health insurance plans just as physical healthcare is.

This concept, mandated by federal and state laws, is known as mental health parity.

If mental healthcare is subject to higher copays and out-of-pocket expenses, limits on allowed visits, or more restrictive requirements for prior authorization than physical healthcare, an insurance coverage plan lacks parity.

Getting insurance companies and third-party administrators to honor parity laws is a big part of the challenge. Employers can make a difference by holding insurance providers accountable.

"Employers need to know what parity is, why it matters, and what their responsibilities are," said Aashna Panjwani, a senior program associate in the Center's mental health program. "If their insurance plans are not following the law, they are the ones that are — at the end of the day — responsible for that."

Good for Business

It's not just the right and legally compliant thing to do. Making sure that mental health matters in the workplace and that services are available and covered by insurance helps the bottom line.

The new Carter Center toolkits, accessible online, were developed over the course of a year as a call to action. Created for a Georgia initiative, the toolkits also serve as a general primer for other states. They offer ways for employers to assess insurance plans and ask for more. One resource provides an introductory guide to the issue and an action plan for employers. The other lays out the business case for parity compliance.

When employees feel valued and their well-being is prioritized, studies show that absences decline, productivity improves, and retention rates grow.

What employer doesn't want that?

Did you know...

- 81% of workers will look for workplaces that support mental health in the future. (American Psychological Association)
- Depression alone causes about 200 million lost workdays in the U.S. each year at a cost to employers of $17 billion to $44 billion. (American Psychiatric Association Foundation)
- Employees with depression who do not receive treatment miss an average of 31.4 days at work per year and lose another 27.9 days in lost productivity. (Center for Workplace Mental Health Depression Calculator)

Find the toolkits online at georgiamentalhealth.com/resources-for-employers



Romain Ravet

Lessons in Power Shape His Work in the DRC



The city in eastern France where Romain Ravet grew up was once an industrial hub, home to ironworks and chemical plants. But in his youth, Chalon-sur-Saône was past its prime; its economy had not yet become the technological tiger it is today. Jobs had disappeared, and people were frustrated, Ravet recalled. The despair young people felt over their economic prospects boiled over into tense confrontations with law enforcement.

Ravet and his friends felt over-policed, mistreated, and powerless to do anything about it.

"The way they treated us left a print on me," he said. "To this day, I can still feel it."

Rather than succumbing to bitterness, he pursued a career in human rights law, determined to become a champion for those whose voices were being ignored. That path eventually led him to The Carter Center—with pit stops in Haiti, Burundi, and Uganda—where he has served since 2023 as the senior country representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a place where historic inequality runs through the soil.

For decades, the DRC has quietly powered the world.

Rubber from its forests put the world on wheels. Uranium from its mines fueled the first atomic bombs. Today, copper and cobalt from its red earth support the green energy transition. Roughly the size of Western Europe, the DRC has received little in return. For example, the DRC produced three-quarters of the world's cobalt last year but kept only 3% of its value.

"I hear it said that the DRC suffers from the curse of resources—countries with the most resources benefit from them the least," Ravet said. "But there is no curse. What they've experienced is the collateral effect of a global system that is not fair."

Early in his career, Ravet held a binary view of human rights: A right was either upheld or violated, and his job was to track violations and pile recommendations onto governments. But more than a decade in Africa's Great Lakes region showed him that recommendations didn't always lead to progress. Sadly, he found the projects of multinational companies often had more sway over governments than courts or democratic institutions did and could strengthen or weaken what those governments were able to do.

"I wanted to understand how a state comes to behave the way it does and what levers can be pulled to break those cycles," he said. "That's where I decided to work on development policy and how it connects with human rights."

That realization brought him to The Carter Center, which has operated in the DRC since observing the DRC's first post-war election in 2006. Then, at the government's request, the Center began reviewing mining contracts signed during the war. Taking that on, Ravet said, was a genius move.

"Cobalt and copper weren't considered critical at the time," Ravet said. "But The Carter Center had the strategic foresight to recognize that if the DRC was going to succeed as a democracy, it had to get its resource management in order."



Romain Ravet speaks to Carter Center staff during the 2026 Peace Programs Review in Atlanta.

Today, the Center takes a broad approach to democratization in the DRC, Ravet said, by helping everyday people exercise their rights and increasing transparency wherever power is concentrated.

"We're not just interested in building the agency of an individual," he said. "We're working on building the agency of an entire country."

Outside of work, Ravet's life in Kinshasa centers on his wife and two sons. They regularly enjoy bike rides along the Congo River and have trekked the Virunga Mountains, including climbing Mount Nyiragongo. But if he leaves tomorrow, it's the Congolese people he'd miss most.

"I work with the smartest and kindest people," he said. "Every person I meet has stories that could fill a book. I'm humbled that I get to know them."

Investing in Better Ways to Resolve Conflict



Bruce Firestone is investing in the future by funding endowed internships at The Carter Center.

As a longtime admirer of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's commitment to brokering peace and fighting disease, Bruce Firestone sees supporting The Carter Center as an investment in a hopeful future. By establishing an endowed internship, The Bruce Firestone Internship for Conflict Resolution, he is investing in the skills and talents of young professionals to help shape that future.

The values that drive Firestone are deeply rooted in his family's history. His father fled Austria in the late 1930s, when he was studying medicine. After completing his medical training in the United States, he joined the U.S. Army during World War II. As a battalion surgeon with the rank of captain, his father received the Silver Star with one oak-leaf cluster, reflecting two separate acts of gallantry under enemy fire.

Growing up in New York, Firestone saw how the horrors of war weighed on his father. He knew there had to be a better way to resolve conflict, and in President Carter, he found an answer.

President Carter's ability to negotiate the 1978 Camp David Accords, establishing a lasting peace between Israel and Egypt, remains an inspiration to Firestone to this day. The former president's integrity, his knack for building trust, and his determination to keep discussions alive were keys to his success.

Firestone used these qualities himself during his distinguished career as a lawyer in Seattle, Washington. He strove to find common ground, without compromising his clients' interests, and helped solve legal problems in a constructive manner. Now, he's using what's always motivated him to pay it forward.

When his father returned from the war, he started a medical practice with Firestone's mother, who was a nurse. Together, they served their community for decades. His late parents' lifelong dedication to public service moved Firestone and sparked his interest in supporting The Carter Center.

Thanks to Firestone's gift, plans for a second internship opportunity are underway, possibly centered on health.

Two endowed internships from one generous donor will both strengthen the Carter Center's work and impact — and deepen Firestone's legacy for generations to come.

European Union Grants Strengthen Civil Society in the Congo

The European Union has awarded The Carter Center 3 million euros (about 3.4 million dollars) for two projects that help citizens in the Democratic Republic of the Congo defend their rights and hold leaders accountable for how the country's natural resources are managed.

With the Center's own contribution, combined project budgets total more than $4.2 million.

The first grant will help Congolese civil society organizations open three resource centers for human rights defenders in Kinshasa, Haut-Katanga, and Tshopo provinces, where insecurity, political tension, and shrinking civic space make their work increasingly dangerous. The centers will offer training, mentoring, and practical tools in personal security, documenting violations, and evidence-based advocacy.

The project gives special attention to youth and women to help cultivate a new generation of defenders. It will also develop tools to track human rights violations and convene provincial and national forums that bring defenders and public authorities together.

The second grant supports citizen oversight of the DRC's extractive sector. Although the sector is vital to the national economy, corruption and limited public participation have long kept its natural resource wealth from benefiting the Congolese people.

Working with two respected Congolese organizations, the National Center for Development and Popular Participation and the Center for Research on Public Finance and Local Development, The Carter Center is training civil society groups to monitor extractive revenues, funding local oversight initiatives, and hosting forums that bring together citizens, officials, and industry representatives. The project will also produce public analyses and awareness materials, and it is expected to benefit nearly 1.2 million people across six provinces.

Both projects build on the Carter Center's work in the DRC, where it has been active since 2006. They run into early 2028 and share a common aim: ensuring that women, youth, and rural communities — who are often left out of decision-making — have a real voice in how their country is governed.



Residents and children work at an artisanal stone quarry in Lubumbashi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in 2022.

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THE CARTER CENTER

WAGING PEACE. FIGHTING DISEASE. BUILDING HOPE.



Yeshitila Mulugeta

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

From Fishing the River to Ending a Disease

By Yeshitila Mulugeta

I grew up on the rivers of Gambella, in southwestern Ethiopia, where I learned to fish before I learned almost anything else. My father, a policeman, died when I was young, and I helped my mother and my siblings by catching fish to eat and sell.

I loved the water. During my lunch breaks from school, I would grab my fishing line and run to the river. Once I caught a fish taller than I was.

I never imagined that the same water carried a parasite I would spend my life trying to wipe from the earth.

Guinea worm disease preys on the poorest people—those who have no choice but to drink from ponds where the parasite lurks. No drug can cure it, and no vaccine can prevent it. The only way to stop it is to change the conditions that let it spread.

As a behavioral change communication officer for The Carter Center, that is my work. I help communities learn to filter their drinking water and cook their fish thoroughly. Reaching people means speaking to them in their own words, so I rely on my ability to speak five languages, which first brought me to The Carter Center in 2010.

From the start, I knew what I had been invited to do: help make Guinea worm the second human disease ever eradicated. One day my children will ask me, "What was Guinea worm?" To them, it will only be an old story.

Finishing that story is not easy. During the rainy season, roads disappear underwater, and we wade up to our necks, supplies on our heads, to reach people where they are.

The progress is hard to believe. In 2025, only 10 human cases were reported worldwide, down from millions each year when we began. Four were here in Ethiopia—our first in three years. I felt sad, but we had not missed them. Catching them proved that our surveillance works.

Guinea worm is a disease of poverty. When we finally remove it from the world, we will celebrate—and I hope you will celebrate with us.

This story was adapted from an episode of "Far Away, Up Close: Global Stories from The Carter Center," a new podcast that brings you the stories behind the people who wage peace, fight disease, and build hope—in their own words. Find the show on your favorite podcast platform this fall.



In July 2025, the Carter Center Communications team visited Ethiopia to see Guinea worm eradication efforts firsthand. Obang Ojulu Oman (left) Yeshitila Mulugeta (middle) Owar Ojulu (right)