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Capturing the Essence
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The streets of Kinshasa pulsed with energy as crowds lined the course of the Africell Congo River Marathon

FROM THE CITY



A MILESTONE MOMENT FOR KINSHASA

Unforgettable moments, filled with emotion!
Excellent organization!

This 5th edition of the Africell Congo River Marathon has truly become a flagship sporting event for the city-province of Kinshasa.

An event that goes beyond just sports and tourism—it also promotes a culture of peace, fair play, and showcases the richness of Congolese culture and beyond.

Bravo to the various sponsors and partners whose perseverance has made this event a mirror reflecting the vibrant image of Kinshasa!

The involvement of the UK Ambassador and the Ambassador of Ethiopia also set a strong tone for this 5th edition.

Together, let's continue to spread the message of peace throughout our country!

H.E. DANIEL BUMBA LUBAKI

GOVERNOR OF KINSHASA, DRC

FROM THE FOUNDERS



FROM MILESTONES TO MOMENTUM

June 2025 has been a month of milestones. We successfully celebrated the 5th edition of the Africell Congo River Marathon in Kinshasa and the 3rd edition of the Semi de Lushi in Lubumbashi — marking not only races, but a powerful legacy in motion.

What began in 2021 as a dream — to host a world-class marathon on the banks of the Congo River and foster a running community in the heart of Africa — has grown into a movement. Today, the Congo River Marathon stands as a recognized and respected brand in the DRC and on the international stage.

Over the past five years, we've hosted more than 20 community races, welcomed over 8,000 runners from more than 35 nations, and raised over \$20,000 for charity. But more than the numbers, it's the values that drive us: honesty, loyalty, courage, and commitment.

Through every finish line crossed and every community run organized, we've witnessed the transformative power of sport — to build peace, inspire resilience, and connect people across backgrounds.

We are incredibly proud of how far we've come — and deeply excited about what the next five years will bring. Thank you to everyone who has made this journey possible: our Naming Rights Sponsor Africell, all sponsors and partners, our tireless team and volunteers, and above all, each and every participant who continues to write this story with us.

This is history in the making — and it's only just the beginning.

NANCY BACHMANN &
ROLLY KAYUMBA

FOUNDERS CONGO RIVER
MARATHON EVENTS



Tracing the course with Rolly Kayumba, Co-Founder and Race Director in motion

FROM THE BOARD



THE 5TH EDITION OF THE AFRICELL CONGO RIVER MARATHON

Kinshasa played host on June 1, 2025, to the fifth Africell Congo River Marathon. The event, which has grown in popularity, participation rates, recognition, and significance over the years, attracted runners from all corners of the globe, eager to test their mettle in one of the three distances on offer: the 10K, the half marathon, and the full marathon.

A Celebration of Unity and Endurance

This year's marathon, bolstered by the terrific support of sponsors, included—over the marathon weekend—a shake-out run and a day-long Expo at the magnificently decked-out Pullman Chapiteau. The Expo featured a series of panel discussions on community building and environmental stewardship, fitness and health, and sports diplomacy and tourism. If you missed these, be sure to take note and combine your bib and shirt collection next year with staying around for the talks. Fascinating conversations with exceptional panelists!

A Reminder of How Challenging Staging This Event Can Be

The 10K, 21K, and 42K course routes took runners on a series of loops along the mighty Congo River and through Gombe. The terrain presents challenges—long, flat stretches, one double-humped and another gradual incline, and one sharp descent. The lack of greenery in Kinshasa (a topic for discussion in the Expo panel) poses a particular challenge and means precious little shade when the sun is in full force. Hydration is obviously critical. This year's event's most severe test for us was the wholesale theft of water from one of the water stations en route, and the stress this caused as we worked hard to procure and put in place replacement supplies. We have had a complete rethink on how we organize water points next time around.

The Power of Community Involvement

The success of this year's Africell Congo River Marathon is a testament to the incredible community of support and engagement. We are so grateful for the generosity of our sponsors, but also for the majestic display of goodwill—in particular, the medical aid provided by Operation Smile doctors and teams, and the support and presence of the Centre Medical Diamant.

FROM THE BOARD

Africell did a fantastic job in staging and setting up so early on Sunday so that all was ready for an on-time start. The 5th edition of the Africell Congo River Marathon was marked by standout moments. The elite category saw fierce competition. Just to mention - hats off to Estefanía Unzu, known as Verdeliss, the Spanish record holder for the 100-kilometer distance, who won the women's event in 3 hours and 2 minutes. The first-place man was Alpha Mumbere, who finished in a scorching time of 2 hours and 42 minutes.

The marathon, half marathon, and 10K also offer an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of an extraordinarily diverse field of participants, which stretches from seasoned marathoners to first-time runners, each finisher with their own story of triumph and perseverance. The camaraderie and support among runners were palpable, with participants cheering each other on and forming bonds that transcend cultural and linguistic barriers.

The Congo River Marathon is not just about a race; it is about a journey, about collective action to unite people. It is a testament to the power of sports in bringing people together, fostering a spirit of unity, and promoting a healthy and active lifestyle. And our mantra for this year's run—COURIR POUR LA PAIX—could not be more timely or relevant.

A Moment to Reflect on the Preciousness and Fragility of Our Lives

We, as race organizers, were simply devastated by the tragic loss of one of our 10K runners, who suffered a cardiac arrest on his way home after the run. The feeling of profound grief and sympathy, we know, extends throughout our compatriot running community.

In the world of running, every race, whatever the distance, is not just a test of physical endurance but also a celebration of the human spirit.

This participant embodied that spirit and had, in his time in Kinshasa, emblazoned his footprint in the arena of arts and culture, touching a huge community with his commitment and immense humanity.

As we grapple with this heartbreaking loss, we extend our deepest condolences to his family and friends. May they find solace in the cherished memories and the extraordinary legacy he left behind. The running community stands united in grief, honoring the life that touched and inspired so many.

Looking Ahead

As the sun sets on the 5th edition of the Africell Congo River Marathon, plans for next year's event are already underway. The organizers are committed to making the marathon bigger, better, and safer. As we bid farewell to this year's marathon, we celebrate the achievements of each and every one of you. Congratulations!

Kimya eumelaka mingi na bomoi! Vive la paix!

DAN OWEN

BOARD MEMBER,
CONGO RIVER MARATHON
FOUNDATION

AFRICELL DRC - NAMING RIGHT SPONSOR



A RECORD-BREAKING CELEBRATION OF UNITY AND SPORT

WORDS BY MILAD KHAIRALLAH, GENERAL MANAGER OF AFRICELL DRC

A record-breaking edition that showcased Kinshasa on the world stage — with a promise of even greater things to come.

“The 2025 Edition of the Africell Congo River Marathon shone through exemplary organization and record participation — a reflection of our shared commitment.

I would like to warmly thank all participants, teams, and partners for their outstanding contribution to this great success.

Together, we put Kinshasa in the international spotlight — and the next edition is already on the horizon, promising to be even more ambitious, inclusive, and unforgettable.

The marathon is a highly symbolic sporting activity for us, and throughout the year, we work to organize marathons in every country where Africell operates. You can visit www.africellmarathon.com to learn more about all our programs.”





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“TOGETHER, WE PUT KINSHASA
IN THE INTERNATIONAL
SPOTLIGHT — AND THE NEXT
EDITION IS ALREADY ON THE
HORIZON.”



RAWBANK - GOLD SPONSOR



PROMOTING UNITY, HEALTH, AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

WORDS BY MPOZE BARAKA, BRAND MANAGER OF RAWBANK

“Rawbank is proud to have supported the fifth edition of the Congo River Marathon, held on June 1st.

As a Gold Sponsor of this event, we contributed to an initiative that embodies the values of unity, self-improvement, and the promotion of health.

This edition marked a significant milestone—not only in terms of the visibility it achieved but also through the strong community engagement it sparked around the race. By partnering with the Congo River Marathon, we reaffirmed our active role in promoting sport as a key driver of social cohesion and youth empowerment in the DRC.

We sincerely thank the organizers, athletes, and all participants who made this edition a true success. Their commitment brought the city to life in a spirit of solidarity and togetherness.

At Rawbank, we are committed to continuing this collaboration, confident in the potential of this partnership to inspire and engage our communities through initiatives grounded in positive values. We look forward to exploring the next chapter of this alliance.”





A FIVE-YEAR JOURNEY WITH THE CONGO RIVER MARATHON

FROM SPONSOR TO STRIDES

WORDS BY JULES BOLEBE, CEO OF I-NOX CONSULTING

Few people have witnessed the Congo River Marathon's evolution as closely as Jules Bolebe. From his early days supporting the race through Bracongo in 2021 to running the 10K himself and stepping up as a partner through his company INOX Consulting in 2024, Jules has been a committed force behind the movement. We sat down with him to talk about what drives his passion, how the event has grown, and where he sees it headed next.

You've been part of the Congo River Marathon journey since the very first edition in 2021—from the sponsoring side, as a runner and as part of the team through your own company INOX. What was it like to run the 10K this year for our 5th edition?

Indeed, I have a long love story with the Congo River Marathon. Being here for the fifth consecutive year, both as a runner and as a member of the team, is a tremendous joy and immense pride.

Back in 2021 and 2022 you were involved as Marketing Manager at Bracongo. What made you want to support the event at that early stage?

As I said at the time, Kinshasa—being a major hub of culture and even sport in Africa—deserves a marathon worthy of the name.





And it was this vision, carried by the Congo River Marathon, that convinced me, and BRACONGO as well, to be among the sponsors of this event.

Since 2024 you've come on board as a partner through INOX. What motivated you to stay involved and take on a bigger role with your own company?

The primary motivation has remained the same: to provide Kinshasa with a marathon that meets international standards. So, as CEO of I-nox Consulting, I contribute by giving the Congo River Marathon maximum visibility among potential sponsors and partners—whom I encourage to be on the right side of history when this event becomes the biggest in Central Africa.

How have you seen the Congo River Marathon grow and evolve over the past five editions?

Yes, I've seen the Congo River Marathon grow, improve, attract more participants, and even be recognized by World Athletics. The challenges are immense, and there's still a long road ahead, but this event—now in its fifth year—is undeniably on the right track.

Having experienced the event from different angles—sponsoring side, runner, and now as part of the team—what does it represent to you personally and professionally?

Personally, it's a feeling of achievement to participate in a competition—even if I have to admit I'm not at the same level as the others, haha. Professionally, it's about connections, challenges to tackle each year, and the opportunity to improve the experience for both athletes and sponsors/partners.

What is your vision for the future of the Congo River Marathon, and how do you see INOX continuing to contribute to its growth and impact across the DRC?

The future of the Congo River Marathon plays a big role in my vision. Knowing the challenges Kinshasa faces, maintaining an event of this caliber is quite a feat—and I believe it will only keep getting better. I see this event becoming an international reference in the very near future. I-nox Consulting wants to expand its contribution by providing IT solutions to better track performance and enhance the athlete experience. We also plan to offer the marketing tools needed to grow the Congo River Marathon's visibility—first locally, then internationally.



RUNNING FOR HOPE: ALPHA MUMBERE'S RISE TO VICTORY





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“AT KILOMETER 35, I WAS READY TO STOP — BUT I REMEMBERED THAT’S WHERE THE REAL MARATHON BEGINS. I DUG DEEP AND KEPT GOING.”

Alpha, congratulations on your impressive victory at the Africell Congo River Marathon with a time of 2h42’59! What does this win mean to you personally and as an athlete?

Thank you very much. I am deeply honored. It was my first time running a full 42 km marathon—and to win it! The Congo River Marathon gives us this unique opportunity to compete at that level. It is the only marathon event in the Democratic Republic of Congo that continues to exist and grow. We are very grateful to you, the organizers.

As a Congolese athlete, what motivates you daily—and how would you like to inspire the Congolese youth through your journey?

It’s truly this desire to get better through running that allows me to spread a message of peace and hope. Especially in light of the ongoing conflict that displaces us every day.

I encourage today’s youth—especially those from the East of the country—to join us at the Karibu training center in Kinshasa, led by Coach Zataru Ilunga Mande, a great athlete in our country. We carry the hope of winning the DRC’s first Olympic medal one day.

Can you tell us how you first discovered running? What gave you confidence in your potential from the beginning?

I was born in Kirotshé, 20 km from Goma, where I saw our elder brother Dieu Merci Makorobondo create the Kirotshé Foundation. I started there at the age of 14. He inspired me and later sent me to the Karibu training center in Kinshasa under the guidance of marathoner Zataru Ilunga Mande due to the conflict in the East. I’m not the only one from the East at Karibu. From the start, I felt I had natural athletic potential—and I wanted to make the most of the gift that God gave me.

ALPAHA MUMBERE: FIRST PLACE IN MARATHON FUELS FUTURE AMBITIONS



Congolese athlete Alpha Mumbere finishing strong as the first winner with 02:42:59

What was the toughest moment of the race, mentally or physically, and how did you push through to the finish line?

Honestly, at kilometer 35, I struggled a lot and considered stopping to walk. But then I remembered the advice from my coach Zatara Mande, who had warned me the night before that the real marathon begins at the 35th kilometer. That helped me dig deep and keep going. I held on, gave it my all, and grew from the experience.

Now that you've won this title, what are your goals moving forward? And what role would you like to play in the development of long-distance running in the DRC?

Since arriving in Kinshasa in October 2024 to train with Coach Zatara Ilunga Mande, things have moved fast. That same month I won the Fast 10K of Kinshasa, placed 6th overall (and 3rd amateur) in the 1st edition of the International 10K in Pointe-Noire, and in November I won gold medals in both the 5000m and 10000m at the National Championships. On December 15, I won the 10K in Soyo, Angola.

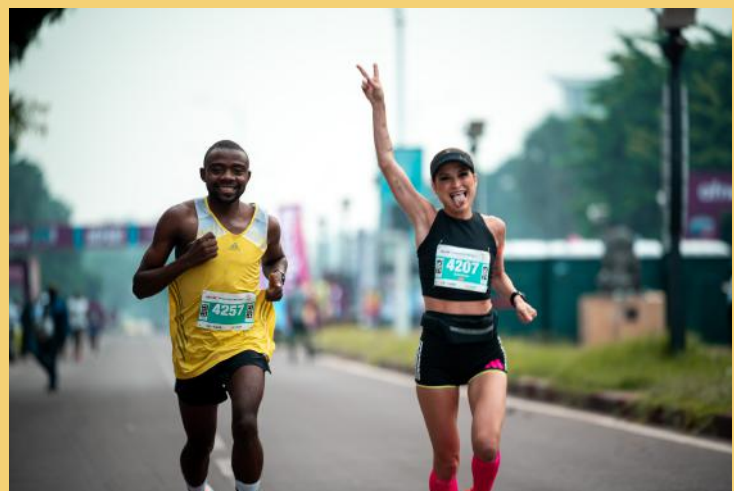


On December 31, I ran the 10K San Silvestre in Luanda and finished 23rd. In February 2025, I ran the 21K in Lubango, Angola, but had to abandon the race at the 15th km due to malaria. On May 27, I was named Best Climber at the 72 Hours of Mayombe (Brazzaville), and on June 1, I won the Congo River Marathon in Kinshasa.

On April 27, I was named Best Climber at the 72 Hours of Mayombe (Brazzaville), and on June 1, I won the Congo River Marathon in Kinshasa. Now, I've been selected for the national team to represent DRC at the African U18 & U20 Championships in Accra, Ghana, from July 16–20, 2025, in the 10,000m track event. I also plan to compete in the International Half Marathon in Brazzaville on August 14, the second edition of the 10K in Pointe-Noire on October 28, and again in the San Silvestre 10K on December 31, 2025.

I want to sincerely thank the Karibu Center, led by Coach Zataru Ilunga Mande, in collaboration with the Kirotshé Foundation and Dieu Merci Makorobondo, who are all dedicated to our development and success. And I won't forget to thank Mr. Rolly Kayumba and the entire Congo River Marathon team—thank you so much, everyone.

Alpha Mumbere (DR Congo)
alongside the female marathon
winner Estefania Unzu Ripoll
(Spain)



AGAINST ALL ODDS: VERDELISS TRIUMPHS IN CONGO

Estefania Unzu Ripoll from Spain wins
Congo River Marathon 42K in 3:02:28
despite travel and timing setbacks.8





Estefanía Unzu Ripoll, widely known as Verdeliss, is a Spanish ultramarathoner, entrepreneur, and mother of eight. She recently added another remarkable achievement to her athletic career by winning the women's 42K at the 2025 Africell Congo River Marathon with a time of 3:02:28.

This victory follows her completion of the World Marathon Challenge earlier this year, where she ran seven marathons on seven continents in seven consecutive days.

Despite her triumph in Congo, Estefanía faced significant challenges: visa complications delayed her arrival until the day before the race, and a timing system error initially excluded her from the official podium. Nevertheless, her perseverance and performance have inspired many.

In her own words:

“Everything that can happen to you in a marathon... aka running in Kinshasa. What's coming to be an immersive experience in the heart of Africa. And yet, they took away my dance!

I finished first place, but I didn't make it to the podium. Winning wasn't in my imagination — the plan was to run at a controlled pace. But it happened.

I'm happy with my 42 kilometers and the dream fulfilled of running in the heart of Africa. That was the only thing I wanted to bring back in my suitcase. That was the goal. And it exceeded all expectations.

Positive vibes filled the city. It was epic and wonderful.

What a lifetime experience to see, right in front of me, two countries divided only by the Congo River.”



**A 21K JOURNEY OF COMMITMENT AND
COMMUNITY BY UK AMBASSADOR IN DRC
ALYSON KING AND HUSBAND AYMAN JARJOUR**

RUNNING TOGETHER





For UK Ambassador in DRC Alyson King and her husband Ayman Jarjour, the Congo River Marathon has become more than just a race — it's a meaningful expression of connection, challenge, and shared purpose. Loyal participants in our growing running community, they took on the 21K side by side during this year's edition, with Alyson completing her first half-marathon and Ayman going beyond his previous 10K milestone for the first time. With determination, a sense of humour, and deep appreciation for the spirit of the event, Alyson and Ayman reflect on their experience — from the first steps of training to crossing the finish line together in Kinshasa.

Alyson King shares:

"My job is a very busy one with lots of travel and late night events - and a lot of sitting around in meetings, or in a car. So it's important to find something I can do to stay fit, which fits with my schedule. In my previous post in Beirut, I took up running and was really pleased to complete the Beirut Marathon in November 2022. When I arrived in Kinshasa, and found that the Congo River Marathon was right on my doorstep, I was very happy that I would be able to keep up running. It takes some getting used to, with the high humidity and temperatures here, but give it time.

I've done a few 5k and 10k runs here in Kinshasa, and thought with Lily that we should aim a bit further. For me, the marathon was just too much to contemplate this time round. For the average amateur, training takes 4-5 months of increasingly serious training. But the half-marathon seemed like a just about manageable challenge in the time available and so it proved.

It's really helpful to have a plan - I say to myself, that there's nothing special about me and if you just follow the plan, you'll get there. That was true. And a running buddy, to hold you accountable - a role played to perfection by both Liliane and my lovely husband. And just to pay attention to your body, and avoid getting injured. Those are my top tips.

The run itself went pretty much to plan. I was pleased that the route was two loops; it was great knowing what was coming up the second time round (thank you for putting the big hill near the start, not the end). I was a bit tired by the final two kilometres, but then the finish line appeared - and co-founder Rolly on his bike - which gave me the motivation to keep going. I can also recommend having a friend provide you with a chocolate milkshake after finishing - that really hit the spot!



Ayman Jarjour adds:

"This was my first time running anything over 10k. I have had knee problems in the past but I discovered that gradually increasing the distance, and keeping up a regular routine of training helps to strengthen the muscles, so I can go further. Having done up to 18k in training, I was happy to finish the whole 21k.

My wife very kindly said that I allowed her to cross the finish line first, in order to respect protocol order!

I would recommend the 21k as a manageable challenge to people who have got a decent base of fitness behind them, whether from running shorter distances like 5k, or other sports. We followed a training programme to get from 5k to 21k in 8 weeks which did the job very well, with 3 runs per week and 1 or 2 sessions of other activity. At the start, I didn't think I'd be able to make it. At the end, I found myself discussing the next half-marathon which may well be on the other side of the river!

So in short, my advice would be that it's much easier to split a marathon, with a friend or loved one, and/or do two half-marathons."

Thank you to the Italian Embassy for sponsoring the pasta night the night before - it was interesting to meet other runners and hear about their stories.

And a huge thanks to the Congo River Marathon team and all the volunteers and supporters who came out on the day; it definitely helps you to run faster or easier when there are people cheering you on."



RUNNING FOR PEACE AND UNITY: REFLECTIONS FROM THE SWEDISH EMBASSY



My colleagues and I at the Swedish Embassy in Kinshasa were happy to take part in the Congo River Marathon 2025, even though running in the humid climate along the Congo River was a tough challenge. As a longtime runner, I've always seen running as a great way to meet new people, build community, and discover new places. It has helped me a lot in the various countries where I've lived so far—and Kinshasa is no exception.

Under the theme "Running for Peace," this race was a powerful reminder of the importance of coming together for a just cause and of reigniting hope within each of us. Sweden, as a long-standing partner of the DRC, is proud to support and contribute to a more sustainable, equitable, and peaceful Congo.

We are also proud to support the city's growing running community and a vibrant urban life that is open to all Kinois. This event was a great opportunity to strengthen cohesion and promote health and team spirit—both within our embassy and together with the city's residents. Many thanks to the founders and organizers of the Congo River Marathon, and to everyone who participated in the race, for giving the people of Kinshasa a chance to come together and continue encouraging an active, healthy lifestyle in the city. Bravo to all!

JACOB WIMAN
POLITICAL ATTACHÉ, EMBASSY OF
SWEDEN

IN HER STRIDE: RUTH DEHOLTON

A LOYAL VOICE OF OUR RUNNING EVENTS

From the early days of vision and planning to cheering crowds and finish lines, Ruth Deholton has been part of the Congo River Marathon story since the beginning. A passionate advocate for sustainability, community, and joyful movement, Ruth has run nearly every edition — and inspired many others to join along the way. Here, she reflects on her journey, her unwavering support, and why every step still matters.

“I have been a loyal fan of Congo River Marathon from its inception. I met Rolly while he was still planning his first events, and have participated in every single event over the years (except for once or twice when I was out of the country). I’m an ambassador for CRM events, bringing a lot of my colleagues with me to events, participating in a public relations video, and even making a short video in Lingala at one point. At 67 years of age, I’m never at the front of the pack, but I make a point of never stopping over the entire 5K or 10K race. I have lobbied hard for having trash cans at the site, and for avoiding single-user plastic water bottles whenever necessary.

Fun fact: although the 2021 Congo River Marathon was apparently the first ever marathon held in Kinshasa (as far as we know) there was in fact at least one Half marathon held before that. I ran in a half marathon on the Utexafrica compound in about 1988.”





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“AT 67 YEARS OF AGE, I’M NEVER
AT THE FRONT OF THE PACK, BUT
I MAKE A POINT OF NEVER
STOPPING OVER THE ENTIRE 5K
OR 10K RACE.”



**“WHEN AFRICA RUNS FOR ITS CAUSES,
IT MOVES FASTER THAN THE WORLD.”**

RUNNING FOR AFRICA’S CAUSES



*Hon. Ebina speaking at the Community & Environment
Panel during the Health & Fitness Expo 2025*

Hon. José Cyr Ebina salutes the Congo River Marathon as a beacon of unity, peace, and progress through sport.

**“When Africa runs for its causes, it moves faster
than the world.”**

The Congo River Marathon is much more than a competition: it is a declaration of unity, peace, and vitality. By bringing nations together on the banks of the Congo River, it illustrates the power of sport as a vehicle for diplomacy, public health, and fraternity. I commend this exemplary initiative that places sport at the heart of the great causes of our time.



Hon. José Cyr Ebina running the Half Marathon — stride by stride for Africa's future.

RUNNING FOR HEALTH & HUMANITY

ISMAILI CIVIC IN MOTION



The 5th edition of the Congo River Marathon was not only a triumph of endurance and unity—it was also a milestone moment for Ismaili CIVIC DRC, whose presence was felt through enthusiastic participation, community spirit, and a shared commitment to Seva (voluntary service).

Over 70 participants & 20 volunteers, including children, youth, parents, and senior members of the Jamat (community), joined the streets of Kinshasa under the banner of “Walk. Jog. Run – For Health & Humanity”. Their message was simple yet powerful: promote wellness while supporting charitable causes.



Voices from the Ground

“Whether it was 10KM, 21KM, or 42KM — our participants embraced the challenge with energy and purpose. This marathon was more than just a race; it was an opportunity to promote a healthy lifestyle, to stand together as part of the Ismaili CIVIC movement, and to show our shared commitment to health, the environment, and community unity.”

— Vice President of the National council for DRC,
Rahim Tajdin



“Running 21 KM was tough, but incredibly rewarding. There were moments, I felt like giving up, but with music in my ears and determination in my heart, I kept pushing. As I saw the finish line, a surge of energy took over and I even passed three runners. That moment reminded me what resilience truly feels like.”

— 21KM finisher young participants

“Participating in the marathon reminded us that resilience isn’t built in a single day — it’s a mindset. Events like this are important, but what truly matters is committing to a healthy lifestyle every day. We hope to see more regular community-based health initiatives that keep this momentum going.”

— A young couple running together



“I ran 42 KM for the first time & I am so happy to be the first one from Indian community”

— A Senior participant running for the first time



“It was a proud and meaningful moment for us to participate as an official partner of the Congo River Marathon under the Ismaili CIVIC banner for the very first time.

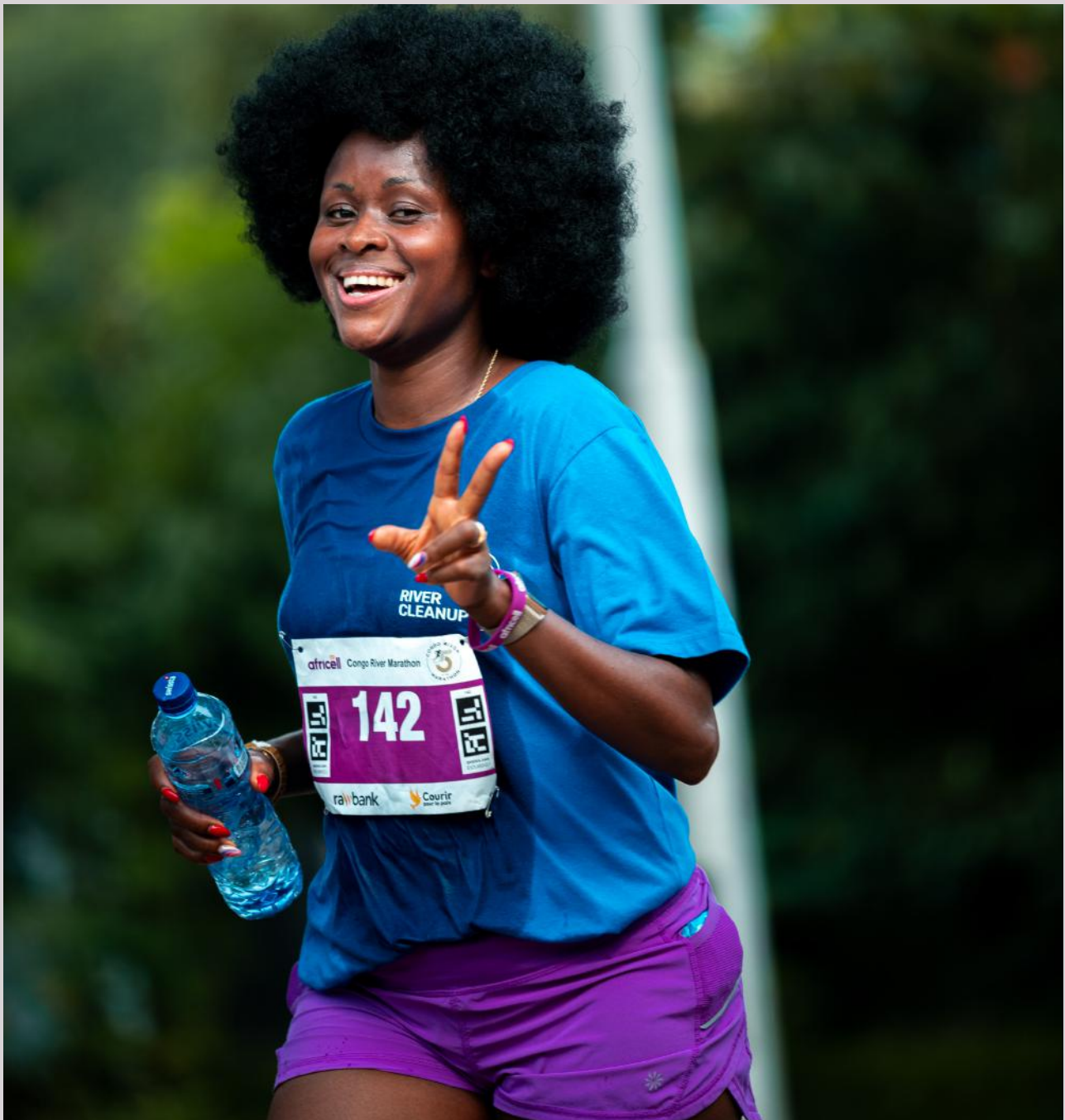
This event gave our Jamat & volunteers the opportunity to step forward publicly in the spirit of unity, service, and wellness. It also allowed us to demonstrate how civic engagement and community values can be brought to life through active participation. We hope this is the first of many such initiatives that connect health, humanity, and harmony.”

— Alkarim Samnani, Ismaili CIVIC DRC representative



**HOW SMALL ACTIONS SPARK BIG
ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE**

TOGETHER FOR CLEAN RIVERS





This year, Team River Cleanup brought their mission to the Congo River Marathon with a strong presence and a clear message: protecting our rivers begins with each of us. The team joined the race, hosted an awareness booth at the finish line, and took part in the event's broader dialogue. Representing the initiative, Dominic Trocmé spoke at the Health & Fitness Expo panel. Their presence powerfully underscored how sport, community engagement, and small individual actions can flow together to drive lasting environmental change.

“At River Cleanup, we believe that real change begins with small, purposeful actions — and we were honored to share this message during the recent Panel Talk on Community & Environment. The discussion focused on how everyday choices can make a profound impact on our planet. From simply refusing single-use plastic bottles to inspiring others to sort and dispose of their waste responsibly, each gesture contributes to a cleaner, healthier world. But awareness alone isn't enough — we must act.

That's why we invite individuals and communities to take part in cleanup efforts. Through our platform, people can register local cleanup events at river-cleanup.org, connecting with like-minded individuals and becoming part of a global movement.

These events are more than just picking up trash—they're about forming bonds, raising awareness, and taking ownership of the problem.

The urgency is real. Every single day, 10 million kilograms of plastic end up in rivers, eventually degrading into harmful microplastics. These invisible particles threaten biodiversity and infiltrate our own lives—through the water we drink, the food we eat, and even the air we breathe. On average, we now ingest the equivalent of a credit card's worth of plastic every week. Startlingly, microplastics have even been discovered in human brains. If nothing changes, by 2050 there could be more plastic than fish in our oceans.

At River Cleanup, we tackle this crisis from the source—by raising awareness, promoting prevention, and working hand in hand with local governments to drive real, sustainable change. The road ahead requires collaboration, courage, and action.

Let's not wait for tomorrow. Join us today — because every action counts, and together, we can create a future where rivers run clean once more.

WORDS BY DOMINIQUE TROCMÉ
RIVER RESPONSIBLE, RIVER CLEANUP

AT THE HEART OF THE CONGO RIVER MARATHON

OPERATION SMILE DRC



WORDS BY COMMUNICATION UNIT, OPERATION SMILE DRC

On June 1, 2025, the streets of Kinshasa pulsed with the footsteps of thousands of runners taking part in the Congo River Marathon, a sporting event with powerful symbolic significance: making each stride a step toward peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Among the partners mobilized to ensure the success of this unforgettable day, our organization, Operation Smile DRC, took part in this collective momentum with a dual mission: to protect lives and embody hope.

A STRATEGIC AND RESPONSIVE MEDICAL PRESENCE

As a non-governmental organization working in the medical field and specializing in the integrated care of cleft lip and palate conditions, Operation Smile DRC operates as a humanitarian structure, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, Hygiene and Social Welfare to fulfill its mission.

As a medical partner of the Congo River Marathon, our team mobilized early to set up an effective intervention system at strategic points along the race route. Specialist doctors, nurses, emergency responders, and volunteers joined forces to respond to various medical incidents during the event. Thanks to this effort, a total of 100 participants were able to receive timely medical attention. One of the most challenging moments was the management of two major cardiac incidents, including a sudden cardiac arrest of one of the race participants. After being resuscitated, the individual was transported to a nearby hospital for full and appropriate care.

A COMMITTED TEAM—ON THE GROUND AND ON THE START LINE

Operation Smile DRC is also made up of men and women who believe that health begins with solidarity and movement.



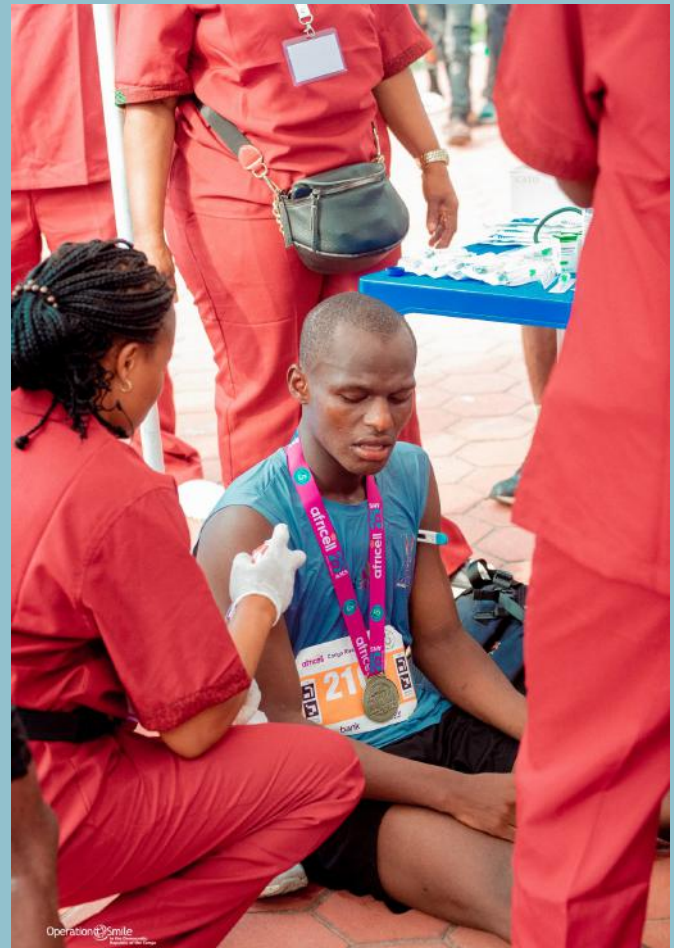
Around ten members of our team participated in the marathon as runners, demonstrating through their commitment that healing also means living fully alongside others. At the same time, our student club, composed of schoolchildren regularly enrolled in various schools throughout the capital, was also actively represented by several of their peers, whose mission was to distribute drinking water to the runners and event participants free of charge.

SPORT AS A SPACE FOR COLLECTIVE HEALING

Our presence at this event reaffirms our belief that health goes beyond medical acts. It is nourished by peace, prevention, and social connection. In this sense, the marathon becomes more than a competition: it becomes a space for fraternity, awareness, and civic engagement.

OUR THANKS

We express our gratitude to the organizers of the Congo River Marathon for their trust, to our teams for their composure and professionalism, and to all the runners for their courage. May every step toward peace also be a step toward a stronger, more humane healthcare system.



SONIA HABOUB'S VICTORY AND THE SOUL OF CONGO

RUNNING WITH HEART



IN CONVERSATION WITH ATHLETES AND AMBASSADORS SONIA HABOUB AND MUNGAI BERNA

Sonia, on winning the 21K! Could you share with us how you prepared for this race and what it felt like to win despite the challenges you faced?

Thank you! Winning the 21K was an incredible feeling, specially after everything I had to push through to get there. The preparation wasn't easy, but it was intentional and consistent. I focused a lot on strength training, not with heavy weights, but with manageable loads, up to around 8kg.

For me, body weight strength and stability were more important than lifting heavy. I wanted to build endurance and resilience without risking injury.

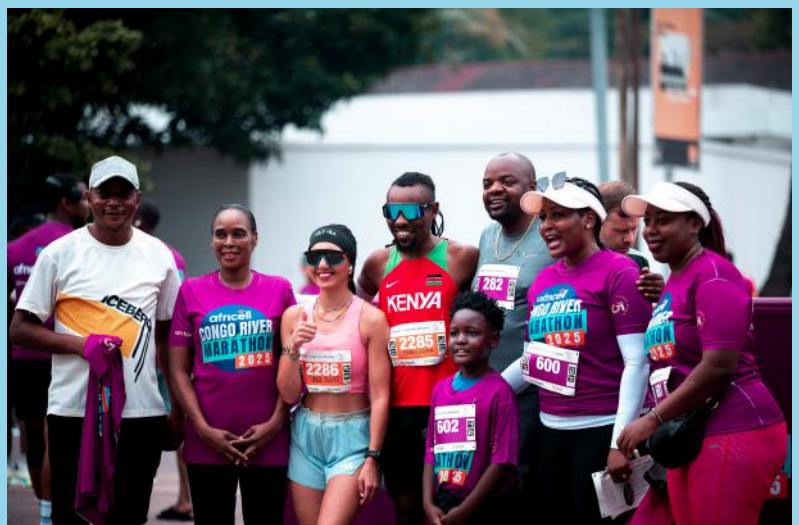
Nutrition played a big role as well. I made sure I was fueling my body with the right foods, staying consistent with hydration, and prioritizing recovery. Sleep and meditation were also key. Getting quality rest and taking time to mentally center myself really helped keep my stress levels down and focus sharp.



Mungai, as both Sonia's partner and coach, how did you support her throughout the race, and how did you personally cope with the challenges you encountered?

As both Sonia's partner and coach, my support started well before race day. I helped her find and stick to the right pace, one that would allow her to finish strong and stay properly hydrated throughout the half marathon. I reminded her not to follow the crowd, but to trust her own rhythm, focus on her own journey, and listen to her body. During the race, I stayed by her side, making sure she was hydrating regularly and maintaining her composure. The biggest challenge we faced was the lack of water stations, so hydration became a mental and physical battle. I encouraged her with positive self-talk and helped her stay focused, not on the discomfort, but on the finish line, on the small wins, and on keeping her mental stability by shifting focus away from the running itself. Personally, it was tough. I wasn't able to finish the race, and that was emotionally challenging. As a coach and partner, it's hard to accept when your body doesn't cooperate the way you hoped. But even though I didn't cross the finish line myself, my priority was making sure Sonia did. Seeing her push through every challenge and finish with strength gave me a deep sense of pride and purpose. I supported her before the race, during the race, and after the race, and while I faced my own setbacks, being there for her and witnessing her resilience made it all worth it.

During the race, the biggest challenges were definitely the heat and hydration. The humidity was intense, and staying properly hydrated became a mental challenge as much as a physical one. But I stuck to the plan, trusted my training, and kept pushing through. Crossing that finish line and knowing I had overcome all of it was emotional. It was a reminder that preparation, mindset, and self-belief can carry you through even the toughest conditions.





This was your first time in Congo. What were your first impressions upon arriving in Kinshasa? How did you experience the city's energy and atmosphere?

Arriving in Kinshasa for the first time was overwhelming in the most beautiful and unexpected way. From the moment I stepped off the plane, I was met with a rush of heat, sound, and energy that seemed to come from every direction. The city is alive, truly alive, in a way that's hard to describe unless you feel it for yourself. There's a rhythm to Kinshasa that flows through the streets, the people, the music, the chaos it's unfiltered, uncontained, and completely magnetic.

I was a stranger in a new place, yet there was something about the energy that made me feel strangely at home, like I had stepped into a space that had been waiting for me.

The people's warmth and openness struck me deeply. Even without knowing the Lingala language or the culture fully, I felt connected through simple smiles, shared moments, and the common ground of human spirit. There's a raw, vibrant beauty in the way life is lived here with resilience, with passion, and with a kind of authenticity that's often lost in more polished places. What moved me most, though, was the sense of untapped greatness. Beneath the surface of this intense, buzzing city, I could feel a quiet power a potential waiting to be awakened.

Kinshasa isn't just a city; it's a heartbeat. It left a mark on me, not just as a runner or a visitor, but as a human being. Being here reminded me of why I run, and why human connection matters more than anything else.

Mungai, coming from Kenya, a country renowned for its rich running culture, how did your experience running and coaching in Congo compare to what you are used to back home?

Coming from Kenya, where running is deeply rooted in the culture and supported by well-established training systems, my experience running and coaching in Congo was quite different, but also eye-opening and full of potential. One of the biggest challenges in Congo is the heat and humidity. Unlike the high-altitude, cooler climates I'm used to back home, the conditions here are intense and can really drain your energy quickly if you're not properly conditioned or hydrated. It's something that runners in Congo have to train specifically for, and it adds a whole new level of difficulty to long-distance running.

The running culture in Congo is still developing, and while it's not yet as deeply ingrained as it is in Kenya, that's exactly what makes it exciting. There's a huge opportunity here to grow the sport, especially for elite runners who are already showing great potential.

With the right support and resources, the running scene in Congo could become something very special.

However, one of the major limitations is the lack of proper training infrastructure. There aren't many running tracks or dedicated spaces for athletes to train safely and consistently. That makes it harder to structure high-quality training programs, especially for those aiming for competitive performance.

Still, despite these challenges, I've seen a lot of heart, resilience, and raw talent here. And that's the foundation you need to build something great.

What stood out most to you both about the culture and people of Kinshasa during your stay? Are there any meaningful moments or encounters that left a lasting impression?

What stood out most to me about Kinshasa was the people, their spirit, their warmth, and the way they welcomed me not just with words, but with open hearts.

There's a depth to the culture here, rooted in resilience, pride, and connection. I was deeply moved by the kindness and generosity of everyone I met.

Anastasia, with her strength and quiet leadership, left a mark on me. The entire Pullman Hotel team made me feel seen and supported every single day, like family.

Rolly's energy was contagious, the incredible runners, Ether, Eric, Loiza, Alain, pushed and inspired me in ways I didn't expect.

At the health and fitness expo, I met so many people who shared their journeys with such honesty, it reminded me why community and wellness matter so much.

The media team brought such professionalism and heart to everything they captured.

Honestly, there are too many people to name, but each encounter left something with me. Every handshake, every smile, every shared laugh or story, those moments are what I'll carry with me. I came to Kinshasa to run the Congo River Marathon but I left with something much deeper: the feeling of being part of something real, something human, and something I'll never forget.

You had the opportunity to visit the bonobo sanctuary during your trip. Could you share what that experience meant to you? Were there any other tourist spots or cultural activities you explored that you particularly enjoyed?

Visiting the Bonobo Sanctuary was truly one of the most meaningful experiences of my entire trip and honestly, something that had been on my personal must-do list for a long time. Being there, surrounded by these incredible beings, was nothing short of magical. Bonobos are so intelligent, gentle, and emotionally expressive, and sharing those precious moments with them reminded me just how deeply connected we are. It was a humbling experience that brought me back to something very raw and real that we, as humans, are animals too. We often forget that in the noise of modern life, but watching the bonobos interact, communicate, and care for each other stirred something primal and beautiful in me. Their vulnerability, their playfulness, and even their silence said so much.

That visit grounded me emotionally in a way I didn't expect. It was a reminder of our place in the larger ecosystem, of our shared instincts and emotions, and of the urgent need to protect and honor life in all its forms.

Sonia, you also spoke at the International Women's Club and participated in the Health & Fitness panel at the expo. How were those experiences for you, and what messages did you hope to share?

Speaking at the International Women's Club and participating in the Health & Fitness panel at the expo were two of the most powerful and fulfilling experiences of my journey in Kinshasa. These weren't just speaking opportunities they were moments where I got to connect deeply with people, especially women, on a human and emotional level.

At the International Women's Club, I felt an overwhelming sense of sisterhood and support. To be in a room full of strong, intelligent, and inspiring women from different backgrounds, yet all united by a shared desire for growth and empowerment, was incredibly moving.



I spoke from the heart about resilience, self-worth, and how physical and mental strength go hand in hand. My hope was to remind every woman in that room that they are powerful beyond measure, not because of perfection, but because of their ability to rise every single day. At the Health & Fitness panel, I felt equally energized and grateful. Being surrounded by people who genuinely care about wellness and community gave me so much hope. I wanted to share that fitness isn't just about aesthetics or performance it's about feeling whole, feeling grounded, and taking care of yourself from the inside out. I spoke about my own journey, about the importance of balance: strength training with care, not extremes; proper hydration and nutrition; prioritizing sleep; and, just as importantly, mental well-being. Meditation and mindfulness have been pillars in my life, and I wanted others to know it's okay to pause, to breathe, to reflect. It's not a weakness it's part of the strength-building process.

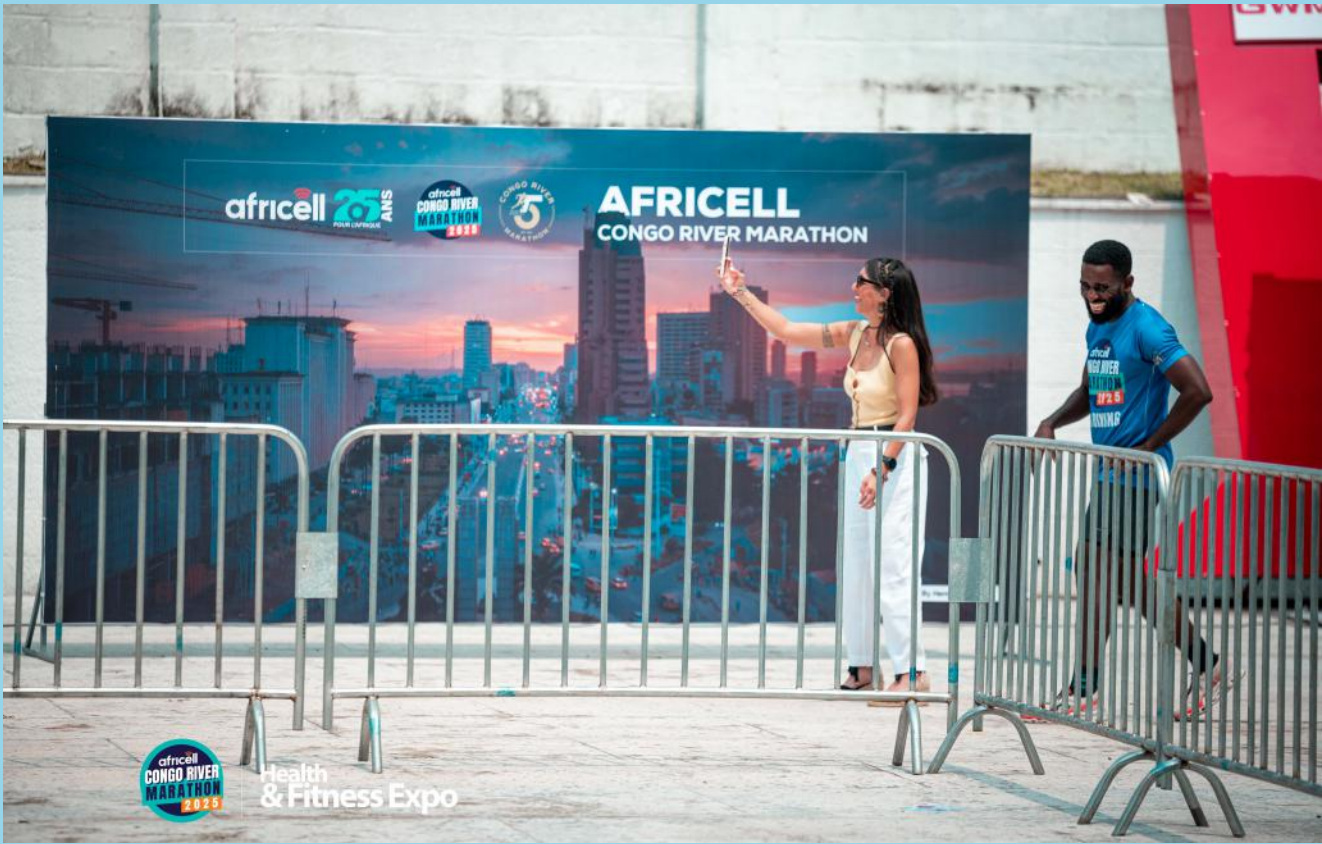
Both experiences left a lasting impression on me. The people I met, the stories that were shared, the energy in those rooms it reminded me why I do what I do. If I was able to inspire even one person to believe in their own strength or to take a step toward healing and self-care, then I know I did something meaningful. These weren't just panels or speeches they were heartfelt conversations that I will carry with me always.

Running an international race often brings surprises. What were some unexpected experiences you had, both on and off the course?

Running an international race always comes with its fair share of surprises, but Kinshasa definitely brought some I wasn't fully prepared for both challenging and meaningful. On the course, the biggest and most unexpected challenge was the lack of hydration. In a race where the heat and humidity were already pushing your body to its limits, not having regular access to water made every kilometer feel even longer. It became a real mental and physical battle not just about speed or endurance, but survival and strategy. The heat, too, was far more intense than I anticipated. It wasn't just about being hot, it was the thick, heavy air, the kind that wraps around your body and makes it hard to breathe, to think, to move with ease. It forced me to dig deeper into my mental strength, to slow down when I needed to, and to listen to my body more than ever before.

Off the course, the surprises were emotional in the best way. I didn't expect to feel so connected to the people, the warmth, the support, the way strangers became cheerleaders, friends, and even family. I met fellow runners who inspired me with their stories and their grit, and I had conversations that left a real imprint on my heart. There were moments that reminded me that running isn't just about crossing a finish line, it's about human connection, about shared struggle and collective triumph.

So yes, the conditions were tough, tougher than I imagined, but the spirit of the people and the resilience I saw, both in myself and others, made every unexpected moment worth it.





How do you feel the event and the local community reflect the spirit and resilience of the Congolese people?

The event, and the entire experience surrounding it, was a powerful reflection of the spirit and resilience of the Congolese people. From the moment I arrived, I could feel an undeniable energy, one rooted in strength, pride, and a determination to move forward no matter the obstacles. The race itself wasn't just about sport; it was about community, about showing the world what Kinshasa and its people are capable of. Even in the face of real challenges, there was no sense of defeat. Instead, there was joy, unity, and an unwavering will to rise and represent. What struck me most was how the community came together not just the runners, but the organizers, volunteers, supporters, and everyday people lining the streets. You could see the passion in their eyes, hear it in their cheers, and feel it in every handshake and smile. The event embodied the Congolese spirit: resilient, resourceful, and full of heart. People found strength not just in themselves, but in each other. Being a part of this moment, witnessing that kind of resilience and shared purpose, was incredibly moving. It reminded me that greatness isn't always polished it's often found in the raw, unshaken spirit of people who keep going, keep building, and keep believing.

The Congolese people don't just have potential, they have power. And this event was just the beginning of something so much bigger.

From your perspective, what can international runners and visitors learn from participating in the Congo River Marathon?

From my perspective, international runners and visitors have so much to learn from participating in the Congo River Marathon, far beyond just the race itself. It's an experience that humbles you, stretches you, and opens your eyes to a deeper understanding of what running, resilience, and community truly mean. This is not a race about perfect conditions or elite-level infrastructure, it's raw, it's real, and it demands that you adapt, that you listen to your body, and that you tap into your mental strength in ways you may not have before. One of the most powerful lessons is perspective. You learn to let go of comfort and embrace challenge not as an obstacle, but as part of the journey. You learn to rely on heart over pace, on human connection over competition. The heat, the humidity, the limited hydration, all of these challenges force you to run with purpose, not just for time. And when you see local runners pushing through those same challenges with so much determination and spirit, it changes you. It teaches you to appreciate the privilege of running freely, and to respect those who run with far less but give far more.

Culturally, you walk away with a deeper appreciation for the Congolese people, their strength, their hospitality, their unbreakable spirit. You realize that running is a universal language, and in Kinshasa, that language is spoken with heart, passion, and soul. It's a marathon that reminds you why you started running in the first place, not for medals or rankings, but for the shared human experience.

Every international runner should come here not just to race, but to feel, to learn, and to grow.

Looking ahead, do you see yourselves returning to Congo for future races or cultural experiences? What recommendations would you have for others considering a visit?

Absolutely yes! I see myself returning to Congo without a doubt. This trip was more than just a race or a visit; it was a deeply personal experience that left a mark on my heart. The energy, the people, the culture, it all pulled me in.

There's still so much more to discover, so many more stories to hear, and so much potential to be part of.

Whether it's for future races, cultural exchanges, or simply to reconnect with the incredible community we found there, I know this isn't a one-time visit. It's the beginning of a much deeper journey.

To anyone considering a visit to Congo, I would say: go with an open heart. Be ready to embrace the unexpected, to feel deeply, and to connect in ways you never imagined.

This isn't a place you just "see", it's a place you feel. Take time to talk to people, to learn their stories, to eat local food, dance to the music, walk the streets, and let the rhythm of the city guide you.

And if you're running the Congo River Marathon, come prepared for real challenge, but also real beauty, real resilience, and real community. It's not about the perfect race conditions or flawless logistics. It's about the soul of the experience. Congo gives you something raw and unforgettable, and if you let it, it will change the way you see the world, and yourself!



A FLAVORFUL PRELUDE TO THE AFRICELL CONGO RIVER MARATHON

PASTA NIGHT 2025



On May 31, the evening before the 5th edition of the Africell Congo River Marathon, athletes and supporters gathered for a memorable Pasta Night at the Italian restaurant A Casa Mia. Supported by the Italian Embassy in Kinshasa,

MESSAGE FROM THE AMBASSADOR OF ITALY

“The marathon traces its origins to a Greek legend, yet it continues to embody the passion, perseverance, and solidarity that unite us across the world.

The Africell Congo River Marathon 2025 perfectly reflected this spirit—especially during Pasta Night, a joyful and heartfelt moment of Italian-style sharing!



This year, we had the honor of welcoming Sonia Haboub, a young Italian based in Dubai—a true force of nature: elite athlete, CEO, and PhD-level professor.

She embodies discipline, leadership, and resilience on every front. Her presence at the starting line represents a modern Italy—engaged, open to the world, and determined to break down barriers, both physical and cultural

Congratulations to all participants! See you next year—ready to run, grow, and come together even more!”



DINO SORRENTINO
AMBASSADOR OF ITALY TO KINSHASA





HILTON HOTEL HOSTS THE OFFICIAL PRESS CONFERENCE

KICKING OFF A MILESTONE EDITION



From left to right: Dan Owen (Board Member CRM Foundation, Olivier Luyeye (Africell Naming Right Sponsor), Rolly Kayumba (Founder CRM), Tom Kisenda Matondo (Representative Ministre Provincial des Sports, Jeunesse et Loisirs)

A big thank you to our sponsor Hilton Hotel for hosting the official press conference on May 23 in Kinshasa. The event marked the start of the 5th edition of the Africell Congo River Marathon — a celebration of five years of running, unity, and community impact, alongside Africell's 25-year journey in the DRC.

Words from Saïda Feza, Community Manager Hilton:

"At Hilton Kinshasa, we celebrate endurance, ambition, and every stride toward greatness. As proud sponsors of this year's event, we applaud your determination and spirit.

Whether you're crossing the finish line or just getting started, reward yourself with a stay that inspires. Relax. Recharge. Rediscover Hilton. Located in the heart of La Gombe where Business, Comfort, and Congolese Hospitality await you."



From left to right: Khalil Manji (Board Member CRM Foundation), Pressya Ndongola (Congolese Athlete & Ambassador CRM), Ilunga Mande (Congolese Athlete), H. E. Mekuria Getachew (Ambassador Ethiopian Embassy in DRC)





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INSPIRATION, CONNECTION, AND
CELEBRATION AHEAD OF RACE DAY

HEALTH & FITNESS EXPO





Held at the Pullman Chapiteau, the Health & Fitness Expo was the vibrant heart of race weekend—home to race kit pickup, energizing community moments, and an inspiring lineup of panel talks.

Participants explored stands, connected with fellow runners, and joined thought-provoking discussions on Community & Environment, Fitness & Health, and Sports Diplomacy & Tourism.

We were honored to welcome distinguished speakers including Hon. Cyr Ebina, Sonia Haboub, UK Ambassador Alyson King, Ethiopian Ambassador Meekuria Getachew, and Tom Kinsenda from the City of Kinshasa—



each adding depth and vision to the conversations that shaped our shared journey to the start line.

One of the highlights: the Participant Wall, proudly displaying the names of every registered runner—celebrating each individual as part of this powerful collective movement.









Capturing the Essence of the 2025 Africell Congo River Marathon: most enthusiastic jump, most original sign, warmest welcome at the finish line and more unforgettable moments. Enjoy!



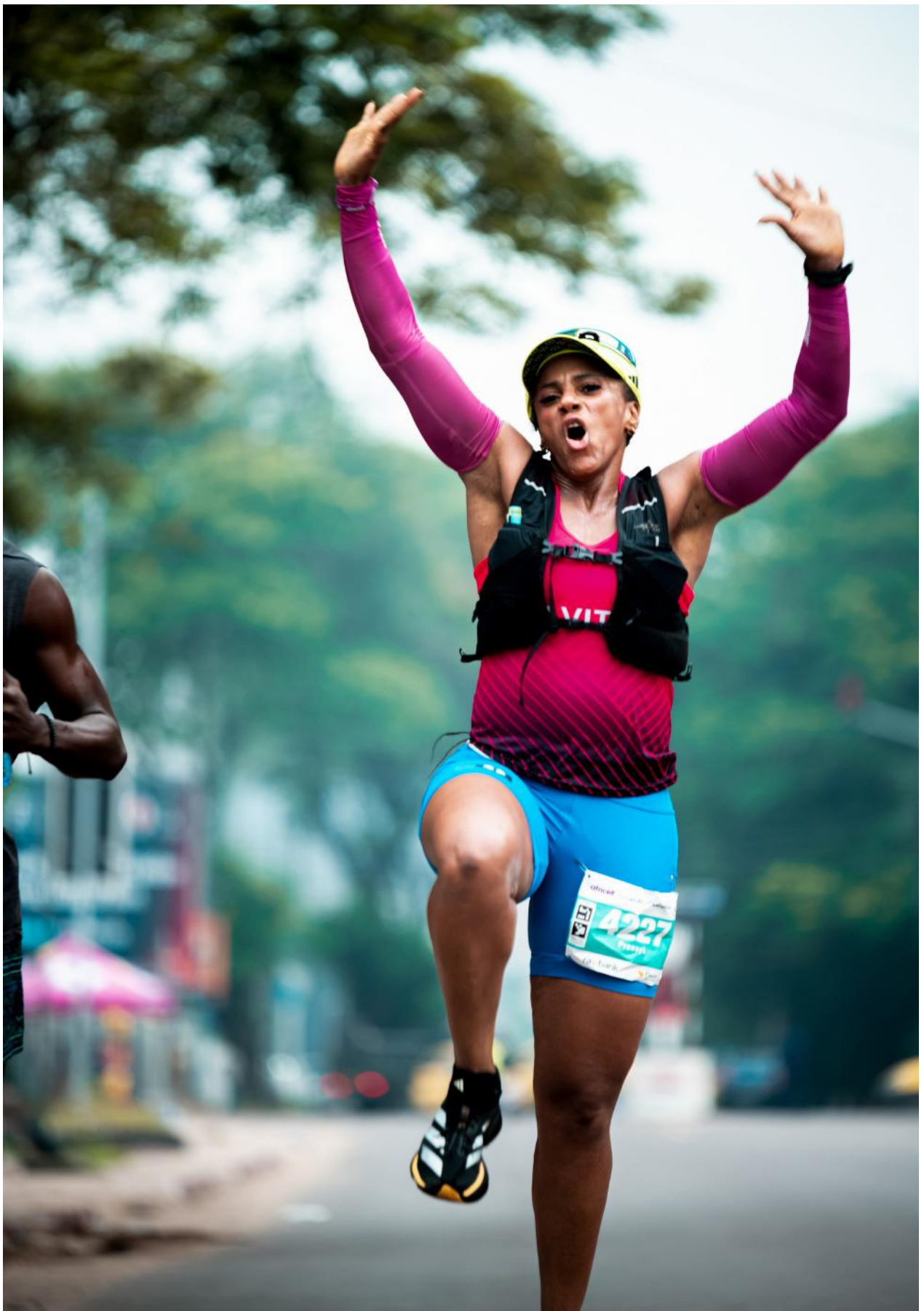
















































“IF YOU WANT TO GO FAST, GO ALONE. IF YOU WANT TO GO FAR, GO TOGETHER.” – AFRICAN PROVERB

SPONSORS & PARTNERS 2025



Thank you to all our sponsors and partners of the Africell Congo River Marathon!

Your belief in our vision and your commitment to this journey made history possible.

From the streets of Kinshasa to the hearts of every runner, your support brought strength, unity, and purpose to every step. We are deeply grateful to have you by our side.

We are honored to walk—and run—this path with you. Here's to 2026 and the years ahead, as we continue building something powerful together.

With deep gratitude,
Nancy Bachmann & Rolly Kayumba

Co-Founders, Congo River Marathon Events & The Congo River Marathon Foundation



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A man and a woman are running on a paved road in a tropical setting. The man is wearing a white t-shirt with 'RAWBANK' and 'XCL RIVER MARATHON' logos, and a bib number 4499. The woman is wearing a grey tank top and a bib number 164. They are both smiling and running towards the camera. The background shows palm trees and a white wall.

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FINISHER MAGAZINE 2025



See you on June 7, 2026!



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