Hubert Wetemwami and Helene Muyumbu hold a photo of their children, who remain in the Congo.
Hubert Wetemwami will never forget the machete. It came through the early-morning darkness, a lethal shadow, swinging at his head, his abdomen, his groin. With his bare hands, Wetemwami tried to shield himself from the blows. His wife, hiding under the bed with the children, clamped her hands over the mouths of the youngest ones to stifle their cries. When the invaders had beaten Wetemwami unconscious, they finally left.

Today, the former human rights worker tells the story of his native Congo, where the saga of violence continues, to anyone who will listen. Wetemwami now lives in Manchester, N.H., where he can walk the streets safely. He studies English, labors at a factory job, and comforts his wife, who weeps often. But he cannot hug his children, who remain in the Congo, living with their elderly grandmother. For more than a year, Wetemwami and his wife, Helene Muyumbu, have had only telephone communication with their seven children, all under the age of 18. They are never certain of their safety. “The pain of separation,” says Wetemwami, “is indescribable.”