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**Ten Thousand Villages establishes pioneering trade relationship in the  
Democratic Republic of the Congo**

Unique business model brings one-of-a-kind products to North American customers

(AKRON, Pa.) – Ten Thousand Villages is one of the first North American companies to resume trade with artisans in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) after years of political and civil upheaval in the Central African country.

In September 2006, Ten Thousand Villages stores will begin selling a handmade copper star ornament from artisan Nyembo Mbope’s workshop near Kinshasa, capital city of the DRC. Nyembo learned the traditional art of copper embossing from his father. Though copper is an abundant natural resource in the DRC, the country’s mining industry has declined in recent years due to corruption and political turmoil. Artisans at Nyembo’s workshop now collect recycled copper from discarded transformers in order to carry on their traditional art.

From 1997 to 2003, Ten Thousand Villages imported traditional masks, whimsical wire toys, and hand carved wood furniture from artisans working with Artisanat et Développement in the DRC. In 2003 Ten Thousand Villages was forced to temporarily stop importing from Artisanat et Développement as a result of local trade barriers including corruption and lack of infrastructure.

While Ten Thousand Villages did not resume its imports from the DRC until 2006, Ten Thousand Villages buyers continued to work with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) offices in the DRC and Debo Botwas, Director of Artisanat et Développement, to build the artisans’ capacity. With the support of Ten Thousand Villages and MCC, Debo and the artisans he works with have overcome extraordinary obstacles to export their first order to the U.S. marketplace in over three years.

In light of the presidential and parliamentary elections held in the DRC on July 30, 2006, Ten Thousand Villages trade has resumed at an auspicious time for Congolese artisans, who are optimistic about the future of their country. On a recent trip to Ten Thousand Villages headquarters in Akron, Pa., Botwas said, “What I am doing here is important. It is a whole generation [of artisans] that we can now help to move forward.”

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The copper star ornaments sold at Ten Thousand Villages represent opportunity for Congolese artisans. Ten Thousand Villages West Africa Buyer, Susan Shu, said, “Through a long-term trade relationship with Artisanat et Développement, we have developed an exquisite product that preserves Congolese artistic traditions and is crafted using sustainable natural resources.”

Ten Thousand Villages leads the fair trade movement with 60 years of experience in providing vital, fair income to artisans in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Ten Thousand Villages markets home decor and gift items, handcrafted by skilled artisans, and works with more than 110 artisan groups in 32 countries. Sales for Ten Thousand Villages fiscal year ending March 31, 2006 totaled more than \$20 million.

For more information about Ten Thousand Villages, contact Juanita Fox, media coordinator, at 717-859-8120 or visit [tenthousandvillages.com](http://tenthousandvillages.com).