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**AUTHOR AND FORMER CHILD SOLDIER ISHMAEL BEAH  
TO SPEAK AT RAMAPO COLLEGE OPENING CONVOCATION**

(Mahwah) – Ishmael Beah, author of *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Child Soldier*, will be the guest speaker at Ramapo College’s Opening Convocation Wednesday, September 19 at 1 p.m. Beah has shared his memoirs and continued his advocacy work on behalf of children affected by war at numerous speaking engagements and through interviews for a variety of media outlets including PBS, ABC, “The Daily Show” and YouTube. The Convocation will be held in the Arena of the Bill Bradley Sports and Recreation Center, located on campus. The public is invited to attend; admission is free. For information, please call 201.684.7910.

Ishmael Beah was born in Sierra Leone in 1980. When he was 11, Beah’s life, along with the lives of millions of other Sierra Leoneans, was derailed by the outbreak of a brutal civil war. After his parents and two brothers were killed, Beah was recruited to fight as a child soldier. He was 13. He fought for over two years before he was removed from the army by UNICEF and placed in a rehabilitation home in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone.

After completing rehabilitation in late 1996, Beah won a competition to attend a conference at the United Nations to talk about the devastating effects of war on children in his country. It was there that he met his new mother, Laura Simms, a professional storyteller who lives in New York. Beah returned to Sierra Leone and continued speaking about his experiences to help bring international attention to the issue.

In 1998, he came to live with his American family in New York and completed high school at the United Nations International School. Beah subsequently went on to Oberlin College in Ohio. Throughout his high school and undergraduate education, Beah continued his advocacy work to bring attention to the plight of child soldiers and children affected by war, speaking on behalf of UNICEF, Human Rights Watch, United Nations Secretary General's Office for Children and Armed Conflict, at the United Nations General Assembly, serving on a U.N. panel with Secretary General Kofi Annan and discussing the issue with dignitaries such as Nelson Mandela and Bill Clinton.

Now 26 years of age, in *A Long Way Gone*, Beah tells a riveting story about fleeing attacking rebels and wandering a land rendered unrecognizable by violence. It is his personal story of redemption and hope.

All incoming freshmen of Ramapo College's Class of 2011 are reading *A Long Way Gone* over the summer and will discuss the book in their First Year Seminar Course (FYS). The course introduces students to college-level work and prepares them for the subsequent courses they will take.

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