

FirstNews Campaign

# Conflict Children

In partnership with



and



## First News readers give Government **230,000** letters to show support for conflict children



Left to Right: Meera Jasani, 14, Joseph Cook, 11, Tauseef Khan, 11, Natasha Rye, 11, Tiffany Perry, 11, Nicky Cox MBE Editor of First News, Mike Foster International Development Minister, Alice Rydzik, 9, Chloe Bingham, 12, Charlotte Edwards, 9, Olivia Aaronson, 12, Matt Shorrocks, 13, Dylan Hardman, 9

**THE First News Conflict Children campaign has seen the biggest number of children ever joining voices to stand up for other children around the world who are being forced to fight in adult wars.**

At the House of Lords last week First News readers handed over our campaign letter on behalf of over 230,000 UK school children who signed it on our website [www.firstnews.co.uk](http://www.firstnews.co.uk). The letter supports children who live in countries affected by conflict, and was the centre of our campaign which we have been running with Save the Children and the Department for International Development.

Nicky Cox, Editor of First News said: "Our readers told us that they wanted to do something to help children like them around the world

who are being affected by conflict. We are delighted that we have been able to give British children a voice that shouts from the rooftops that their friends in other countries should not be made to suffer because adults fight. Their message of support for child soldiers and other children living their daily lives under the threat of violence and war, will be heard around the world. I am so proud that our youngest citizens have played their own part in helping to change the lives of children just like them around the globe."

The young people who presented the letters to International Development Minister Mike Foster were winners of an art and journalism competition that was part of the campaign. Each of them won a laptop computer and a cheque for £150 for their school, as well as a tour of the Houses of Parliament which took place before the reception.

Mr Foster, commented: "I'm delighted that school children around the UK are supporting this campaign. As International Development Minister, I've seen

first hand how UK aid is helping children affected by conflict. UK aid protects children from violence, enables them to attend school safely and helps them put their lives back together. It's great that pupils in this country are campaigning on behalf of these conflict children around the world."

This ceremony recognised the involvement of so many of our nation's children in the campaign which was launched last May at 11 Downing Street. We were joined by the amazing Ben Okafor who talked

about his experiences as a former child soldier in Nigeria.

The campaign has given children in the UK an opportunity to voice their opinion on the lives of children living in conflict, and to be heard by Ministers who have the power to make a difference.

Jasmine Whitbread, the Chief Executive of Save the Children, said: "The response to the Conflict Children campaign has been phenomenal. The biggest number of children ever have joined voices to stop children around the world being forced to fight."

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## First News Conflict Children Campaign competition winners

WE asked you to design a poster or to write a report to support the Conflict Children campaign. The standard was incredibly high but, after much thought, these were chosen as the winners.

### 7-10 age group

#### YOUNG DESIGNER

**Winner: Alice Rydzik**

– St Marys Church of England Primary School, Burnham on Crouch, Essex



**Runners-up:** Joseph Cook and Tauseef Khan – Lynton Church of England Primary School, Lynton, Devon

A child soldier in Sierra Leone, his eyes haunted by the violence he has seen



#### YOUNG JOURNALIST

**Winner: Dylan Hardman** – Chorlton Church of England Primary School, Chorlton, Manchester

**Runners-up:** Charlotte Edwards – Cold Aston Church of England Primary, Cold Aston, Cheltenham, Glos  
Natasha Rye – John Ray Junior School, Braintree, Essex

### A right to peace

By Dylan Hardman, 9

**I BELIEVE** that children all over the world have a right to peace and to feel loved by parents just like mine.

Children should not be involved in war. They don't ask for it or want it.

Why can't grown-ups just stop fighting with each other all over the world?

Every time I watch the news I feel so upset. I would like to invite all the children suffering to come and live with us but my house isn't big enough for everyone!

Instead, I think we should all help innocent children by finding them a safe place to live so they can enjoy their lives and play football without the threat of a bomb or a gun.

Children are the next adults and, if they don't learn how to behave properly, then, when they grow up, they might only know how to fight in a war because that will be all they have learned from their parents.

### 11-16 age group

#### YOUNG DESIGNER

**Winner: Matt Shorrocks**

– Thornleigh Salesian College, Bolton



**Runners-up:** Meera Jasani – Kingsbury High School, Kingsbury, London NW9; Maria Tilt – Howard of Effingham School, Effingham, Surrey

### My gun is my teddy bear

**CHILDREN** are being used as soldiers in Liberia.

The children who are aged only about nine or ten are being ripped from the family and home they know and love and are being forced to fight.

The Conflict Children campaign is helping get young children out of war and safely reunited with the ones they love.

People all across the world have stood up against this devastating new way of finding cheap soldiers and that is how the conflict children campaign started.

However, there are still estimated to be about 250,000 child soldiers in about a dozen countries. The children are recruited, trained and used to kill, pillage and do other terrible things to opposing armies, sometimes children and, sometimes, fully grown men.

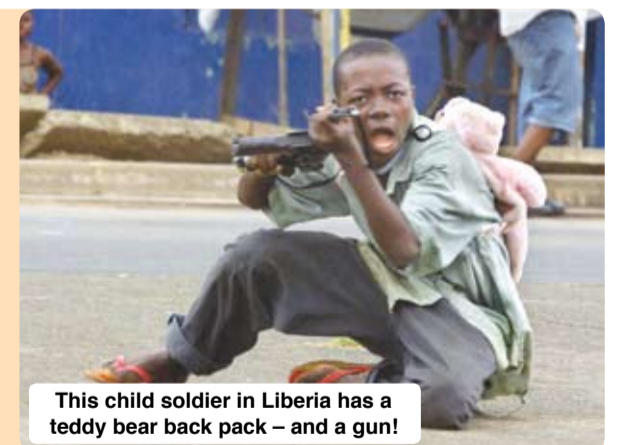
Many of the children never return from their battling and, those that do, have usually been badly injured, either with broken, or lost,

By Tiffany Perry, 11

legs and arms. Some others who miraculously return with no major, physical damage, never return to their families and homes and live the rest of their lives with poisoned minds and disturbing scenes constantly returning to their heads.

Children all across the world have the right to be children and having their say in things that could affect their lives forever. If they choose to fight, then let them fight, but wait until they have enjoyed their childhood first.

For children learn what they live. If you treat a child with justice, they learn to be fair. If you bring them up in a home that is happy, they will learn to be happy. But, if you bring them up with fighting and violence, they will learn to be violent, therefore running their chances of having a happy life in the future.



This child soldier in Liberia has a teddy bear back pack – and a gun!

#### YOUNG JOURNALIST

**Winner: Tiffany Perry**

– The Royal Masonic School for Girls, Rickmansworth, Herts

**Runners-up:** Chloe Bingham – Mount Carmel R.C. Technology College, Archway, London N19

Olivia Aaronson – St. Pauls Girls School, London W8