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# Message from African children

Children's Forum,  
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## An appeal from the hearts of the children of Africa

We are the children of Benin, of Burkina Faso, of the Ivory Coast and of Mali. We live with our families, on the streets, in children's homes, in towns and in villages. The children of Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and of Senegal have also sent us messages to tell you, the adults responsible for our future, what the rights of the child really mean for us children.

### Together we want to tell you what we need to grow up properly:

We need a 'hat'. This 'hat' is our grandparents, our parents, our brothers and sisters and our friends. They give us strength; they can give us blessings, they advise us and encourage us not to be despondent but to work hard.

Our parents also transmit their courage to us. They do all they possibly can to try to provide for our every need but sometimes they're sad because they just can't make ends meet. It's their courage which pushes us to get on at school and to become the children of tomorrow.

Forgiveness is very important among us because, without it, it's not possible to stay together as a family. We can never refuse to forgive.

We help our parents out with whatever little jobs we are able to do, in order to make our own daily contribution to the struggle against poverty. We also learn a lot of things from our family.

It's good for children to go to school. We know that school is not the only route to success but it helps us to prepare for our future. Our future is to save the world. Saving the world means helping others also to have the chance to

prepare for their own future. We love school. We learn a lot of things there – to read, to write, to count, to sing and to read aloud. All girls should also be able to go to school.

Everything possible should be done to make sure that all parents have a secure home to live in safely with their children.

We children know that in order to grow up properly it's also important to have friends to meet, play, dance and talk with... Among ourselves, we children help each other out. For example, some of us asked the adults in their area to help them rebuild the house of one of their friends. We want all children to be friends, because friendship helps you to live happily, even when you're poor, even when you don't have anything. Friendship is stronger than hunger.

### Together, we want to tell you what stops us from growing up properly:

We don't want our parents to feel humiliated by their poverty. Those who respect our parents are our friends.

Sometimes children are made fun of because their shoes are falling apart or because they are badly dressed. We don't like that. One thing we can do is give such children clothes or sandals if we have them



so that they can be like everyone else. We can also ask those who are making fun of them to stop. We can give these bullied children sweets to calm them down and we can give them advice, let them know that with time these things pass. And then we can play together.

Those of us who live on the streets don't even enjoy the respect of their little brothers. If you have a job you are respected and that's life. We live in the hope that if we have a job today we will manage to have a better life tomorrow and to look after our parents. We also need to think very carefully about things if we want to succeed in life. To succeed in life means being honest and keeping a good name. It means being someone who wants to do things for others.

Sometimes we feel discouraged because there is nothing to eat at home and then it's difficult to concentrate and work properly at school – we can't think and we can't even get to sleep. Sometimes it's also difficult to get to school because we live a long way away and have to walk. Or because our parents can't pay the extra fee that teachers sometimes charge. Or because we have no electricity so we can't study at night. We also know which children can't go to school because their mothers couldn't afford to have them in hospital or to register their birth. And you can't go to school if you don't have a birth certificate!

What's more, a child needs to have a name. Otherwise he or she just gets called 'hey!' and that's not nice.

In some of the countries where we live a night doesn't go by without violence. During the night we can't sleep and we can't move around as freely as we need to because of this insecurity. This situation brings about a brutal separation between many children and other members of their families.

We don't want a situation where a child cannot receive medical attention because payment is demanded before treatment is given.

We don't want to be put in prison. We don't want to be hit. That hurts! If someone hits another child, our friends or our parents, that hurts too. A child shouldn't be treated badly, as for example when he or she is made to carry heavy loads on his or her head.

Sometimes we are forced to grow up too quickly.

## **With these words we have a message for everyone.**

To our parents we say, "Don't lose your trust in us. Keep on loving us and valuing our opinion, because we are your children".

To children all over the world we say, "Support your family and your friends, because we believe that children don't only have rights. We also have responsibilities towards our parents, our environment and our schools".

To those who stand before us we say, "If you get involved in this struggle, many things will change. Help our parents to take good care of us and help us to grow up properly. This is your duty. In that way there will be no more separations to destroy or bewilder us".

Let those who are lucky enough to have something share it with others.

**We want peace to roam from house to house and to enter the hearts of all people. We want the grown-ups in our countries to allow themselves and each other to live in peace.**

