

“OUR CRY IS JUSTICE”

Speech by Abraham M. Keita, VI Winner, International Children’s Peace Prize 2015 Held in the Hall of Knights, The Hague – Netherlands

Dear Ladies and gentlemen, your excellencies, Children’s Peace Prize winners,

As-Salaam-Alaikum: I like to begin this speech by firstly giving thanks and appreciation to the Almighty God for keeping me alive up to this period in history and to be awarded this year's Children’s Peace Prize. I also want to thank my Mother. I love you and I thank you for all you have done and continue to do for me. And to Mr. Vandalark Patricks, my mentor, I want to say thank you for nominating me for this prestigious award.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the KidsRights Foundation family, especially the Expert Committee for selecting me as Winner for the 2015 International Children’s Peace Prize.

I wholeheartedly accept this award for and on behalf of all the children around the world who are still victims of violence and conflict and yet cannot receive justice! To Aziza and Jeanesha, the other two finalists, I say to you we are all winners and I admire your courage and resilience in the fight for children's dignity in your home countries.

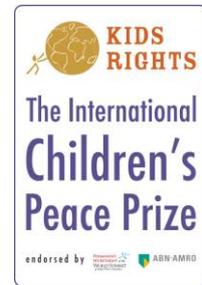
I dedicate this award to all children around the world, specifically to the children of Liberia and especially the late Shaki Kamara, a 16 year old boy of the slum community of West Point. In August 2014, Shaki was murdered in cold blood by soldiers of the Liberian Military. The Liberian army opened fire on unarmed children and civilians who were peacefully protesting for food when they were unexpectedly quarantined during the Ebola crisis.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, may we all observe a brief moment of silence in reminiscence of late Shaki Kamara and all of those children in the world who suffered and continue to suffer injustice, violence and abuse.

Thank you and may their souls rest in peace!

I was born in 1998 in Liberia’s largest slum and ghetto – the densely populated community of West Point. West Point is home to over 70,000 hopeless and marginalized people; home to ex-combatants, home to the economically disadvantaged; and home to the sexually assaulted girls and women of Liberia.

I was born during the Liberian civil war; a period that was horrible. During the war women and girls were raped and made sex-slaves. Boys were sodomized and made child-soldiers. Every Liberian starved of hunger. It was a period when humans were killed in thousands and their blood flowed like waters.



In 2003, the civil unrest was finally brought to an end. We had hope that peace, respect for human dignity and hope for children would be restored. Sadly, that has not been the case as we still witness violence against the powerless in society day after day. Little Shaki Kamara was shot dead more than a year ago. But still today, there has been no justice as the perpetrators are freely living without any form of remorse. On this historic occasion, I want to appeal to your conscience to join the children of Liberia in ensuring that our government gives justice to all the children who have died as a result of violence.

I am a victim of the war in Liberia and those memories will continue to live with me forever. My father, a driver by profession, was murdered in cold blood in 2003 by rebel forces when I was just five years old. My mom has been a widow since and we live in a slum where mosquitoes and cockroaches are our nearest neighbors. In our community, opportunities are lacking and poverty is spelled out on our faces. Let me say to you, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, slum communities are in darkness.

I have long said that I want to be the "light-in-darkness" for children in West Point, Liberia and the world at large. To give light to the darkness, I joined the Children's Parliament, wrote many petitions for children's rights and lobbied with the government. I organized several peace marches to demand justice for children. Justice for children is much needed in Liberia.

The frequency of violent acts, including sexual abuse against children is very troubling in the oldest African republic. Regrettably, the rape victims are mostly girls from 4 to 16 years of age. They account for 90% of the total number of rape cases. Every day, three children are raped in Liberia. Many victims do not dare report their cases for fear of being killed by the perpetrator or rejected by their families and community. The perpetrators are often not held accountable. Law enforcement officers are constantly bribed to ignore the rights of child victims.

I hope to transform the lives of every child around the world. "I want to see a world where every crime against children is accounted for". Justice should be given to children.

I want to use this occasion to pay a special tribute to the thousands of children who have been made homeless and were killed in Syria. The war must come to an end, as the direct victims of the war are children. I also want to sympathize with the children of Yemen, and remind you of the over 200 Chibok school girls of Nigeria and the millions of children around the world who are victims of violent conflict.

I want to remind our leaders today that children have the ability to move the world, if we are given the opportunity to achieve our full potential. Children have the undeniable weapon of boldness. And such boldness can result into benefits for the good of the family and the greater strength of a nation. All children can make a change, no matter where you are from.

I come from the most forgotten slum community, called West Point. I am grateful and encouraged that from the slum a child can win this prize. That from the slum a child can make a difference; that from the slum, a child can speak out and his voice can be heard worldwide. Although I come from



this forgotten slum community, I know that I can make a difference. I know that the slum doesn't live in me.

And I hope that me winning the International Children's Peace Prize will bring some light in the darkness in the slums of Liberia, that it can be a symbol of hope for children who are suffering from violence.

Violence must end now! Together, we can achieve this quest and make children in conflict zones smile again.

But I need your support. You have all been children. Your graduation from this social status does not distinguish you from us. You are all alumni of childhood! I, therefore, invite you today on behalf of all the children in the world to stand up for children's rights and support programs that promote our dignity. Please support me to be the light in darkness for children!

May Almighty God bless you all!

I thank you.