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UNICEF Photo of the Year 2022

Taking Refuge in Books

The UNICEF Photo of the Year 2022 captures a rare moment of happiness in the midst of the conflict in northern Ethiopia. Although destroyed, this elementary school library in Ethiopia's Tigray region is where a girl and a boy have taken refuge in books. In this year's winning photo, Argentinian photographer Eduardo Soteras captures what the children in northern Ethiopia share with children all over the world: the need to be allowed to engage their curiosity, to occupy themselves peacefully with something, something that brings them joy.

The second prize is awarded to a picture taken by American photographer Ron Haviv in a basement in Kyiv (Ukraine). There, a group of children has sought refuge from the attacks and is looking at a children's book that is being shown to them. German photographer Daniel Pilar is awarded the third prize. His photo series accompanies schoolgirls in a secret girls' school in the Afghan capital Kabul.

"Children want to discover new things, want to learn. This desire is so strong that it often makes them forget the threatening nature of a situation. This is the message of the UNICEF Photo of the Year," said Elke Büdenbender, patroness of UNICEF Germany, at the award ceremony in Berlin. "This year's winning image reminds us to do everything we can to ensure that children can play and learn, even in the most adverse circumstances. It is only by doing so that they can they maintain their hope and confidence in times of war and other crises."

"The hunger for knowledge and education is the element that unifies this year's winning photos," said Peter-Matthias Gaede, a member of the jury and the German Committee for UNICEF. "Especially in conflict and crisis regions, children find hope and strength in schools and psychosocial support services."

"The winning images highlight that which is positive in the current chaotic state of the world," explained Prof. Klaus Honnef, chairman of the jury. "The children in these photos symbolize the strength and will to persevere and continue striving for a better future."

The winning picture: Ethiopia's Children in Times of War

Argentinian photographer Eduardo Soteras has been documenting the situation of children in northern Ethiopia since 2020. In doing so, he captures such rare moments as the one we see in the winning picture. Although destroyed, this elementary school library in Ethiopia's Tigray region is where two children have taken refuge in books. This little moment of happiness shows in their smiles. It is a rare moment in the midst of destruction and violence.

The conflict in northern Ethiopia has put the civilian population in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The majority of the approximately 5.2 million people living in the Tigray region have suffered from violence and displacement, malnutrition and drinking water shortages and damaged health clinics and schools.

The second prize: I Once Had a Home

A teacher is reading stories to a group of girls and boys in a basement in the capital Kyiv. Perhaps it is an exciting fairy tale reflected in the eyes of the children. But it could also be a sign of all the emotions triggered by the children's experiences: fear, horror, and disbelief.

In his photo series, US photographer Ron Haviv shows people who have to flee and bid their homes and friends farewell, but also abandoned prams, destroyed bridges, and shelled residential buildings. And they show basements and metro stations where children are born. Where they play. And where they learn.

Millions of Ukrainian women and their children have been displaced within their own country or have sought protection in neighboring countries. As of November 2022, nearly 1,000 schools have been damaged, nearly 130 completely destroyed. At least 400 children have lost their lives to artillery fire, 800 have received serious physical injuries.

The third prize: The Secret School for Girls

The photo series of German photographer Daniel Pilar portrays a secret school for girls in the Afghan capital of Kabul. He discovered it in a makeshift building on the outskirts of Kabul, hidden in a backyard. Here, a young and courageous teacher also teaches 7th and 8th grade girls. Their hunger for education is stronger than any ban. Just like the brave teacher, however, parents who send their daughters to such schools must ensure that they remain anonymous.

Since the Taliban retook power in Afghanistan in August 2021, girls have again been banned from attending secondary schools. As a result, more than one million girls are being denied the chance of an education, while the risk of exploitation, abuse, and early marriage increases. But solidarity with the girls still exists, even if it has to remain hidden, as the secret school shows.

The jury also awarded honorable mentions to seven other photo series:

- **Agoes Rudianto**, Indonesia, photo series: The Silver People (Indonesia)
- **Amnon Gutman**, Romania, photo series: Run For Your Life (Ukraine)
- **Fabio Bucciarelli**, Italy, photo series: Toxic Stress (Ukraine)
- **Federico Rios Escobar**, Colombia, photo series: Green Hell (Colombia)
- **Irina Werning**, Argentina, photo series: The Promise (Argentina)
- **Mads Nissen**, Denmark, photo series: The Price of Peace (Afghanistan)
- **Shayan Hajinajaf**, Iran, photo series: Two Wings of a Butterfly (Iran)

An exhibition of all award-winning works can be seen until mid-January at the *Haus der Bundespressekonferenz* in Berlin. The photo series will then be exhibited by the *Freundeskreis Willy-Brandt-Haus e.V.* and starting January 18, 2022, will be on display for the general public at the *Willy Brandt Haus*.

UNICEF Photo of the Year

For the 23rd consecutive year, UNICEF Germany has held the international competition UNICEF Photo of the Year. It honors photos and photo series by professional photojournalists that document the personalities and circumstances of children in an outstanding way. To take part in the competition, photographers need to be nominated by an internationally renowned photography expert.

An overview of all of the award-winning photo series can be found at www.unicef.de/foto.

Editorial service

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