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UNICEF Photo of the Year 2013

Surviving in times of war

Daniela Schadt, patroness of UNICEF Germany, honors Niclas Hammarström for his photo series on the life of war children in Syria

Swedish Photographer Niclas Hammarström is this year's winner of the competition "UNICEF Photo of the Year". He is honored for his photo series on the life of children in the war-torn Syrian town of Aleppo. The winning picture captures the look on the face of eleven-year-old Dania who was injured by shrapnel while playing on the street. The international competition is organized for the 14th time by the German Committee for UNICEF in cooperation with GEO Magazine, published by Gruner + Jahr AG & Co KG.

"The Photo of the Year shows the face of the Syrian civil war – the face of an injured and severely traumatized child", said Daniela Schadt, patroness of UNICEF Germany. "The look on the child's face is an appeal to the international community to strengthen its diplomatic and humanitarian efforts in order to prevent the loss of an entire generation of children." From 28 February to 3 March, Daniela Schadt paid a visit to the humanitarian mission for Syrian refugee children in Jordan.

"The photo series of UNICEF's competition capture more than meets the eye. They also succeed in summarizing and analyzing the story behind the picture. They enable us to better understand the reality of children under very different circumstances", said Jury Chairman Prof. Klaus Honnef.

"Too many Syrian children are growing up without an education, without skills, scarred mentally as well as physically – yet these same children are the teachers, the doctors, the engineers, and above all, the peacemakers of tomorrow, upon whom the hope for a stable and peaceful future in Syria and the region will depend", said Tom Koenigs, Member of the Board of the German National Committee for UNICEF. "Their faces are captured in Niclas' powerful images, and for whom more investment in education and protection is critical."

The winning photo series

Syria is currently one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. Despite this fact, Swedish photographer Niclas Hammarström (Kontinent Agency) has traveled several times to Syria since the war started almost three years ago to capture the life of the children caught between the frontlines. The pictures of his winning photo series were taken between October 2012 and January 2013. Last November, Niclas Hammarström and his fellow journalist Magnus Falkehed were abducted in Syria. They were released in early 2014, much to the relief of all of us.

On 15 October 2012, Niclas Hammarström met with then eleven-year-old Dania. She had played outside with her little brother and sister, when she was hit by shrapnel and suffered facial injuries. Her father and her two older brothers brought her to Dar-al-Shifa hospital. The pictures shows Dania's oldest brother carefully holding her head while she is given an emergency bandage. Dania could return home after her stay in hospital. The hospital itself was destroyed a few months later.

According to UNICEF estimates, almost half of Syria's children live in an acute state of emergency after three years of civil war. There is hardly a child who has not faced violence and destruction or lost a family member. Due to the destruction of the medical infrastructure, wounded civilians can no longer be treated and diseases such as polio are on the rise. About three million children no longer attend school. UNICEF provides help to children on both sides of the conflict: in Syria and its neighboring countries.

Honorable mentions

In addition to the winning photo series, the jury also awarded nine honorable mentions (in alphabetical order of the photographers):

Joachim Adrian, Danish School of Photojournalism, Denmark – When your family is closed. The up-and-coming Danish photographer accompanies young Mikkel whose home, a care home for unruly teenagers, is closed.

Marcus Bleasdale, VII, England – The price of precious. The British photographer shows how children in the Democratic Republic of Congo are drawn into the conflict over precious minerals such as coltan.

Chris de Bode, Panos Pictures/laif, Netherlands – Childhood dreams: “When I grow up...” This photo series shows children all over the world and how they imagine their future to be. Their dreams are both touching and encouraging.

Laura Boushnak, Rawiya Collective, Palestine – “I read, I write”. The Palestinian photographer's story documents the first taste of freedom for young Yemeni schoolgirls.

Michael C. Brown, Magnum Nominee, USA – Playground airport. In his photo series, the American photographer shows how children in the city of Goma play on airplane wrecks to escape reality for a moment in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Younes Khani, Mehr News Agency, Iran – “Father poured acid on us”. When Somayeh tried to separate from her violent husband, he poured acid on her and on their four-year-old daughter Rama. In his series, the Iranian photographer shows their struggle for a normal life.

Sara Lewkowicz, for Time Magazine, USA – Domestic violence. The American photographer uses her pictures to break the silence on domestic violence. Her photo series captures the story of Maggie and her children Memphis and Kayden.

Gordon Welters, laif, Germany – Soft revolution. With respect and empathy, the photographer shows how young volunteers try to make the everyday life of children in a Russian home for handicapped children a bit more affectionate and suitable for children.

Patricia Willocq, Corbis Image, Belgium – White ebony. The Belgian photographer, who was born and raised in Kinshasa, shows the confidence of children with albinism in the Democratic Republic of Congo who struggle to overcome their role as outsiders.

Call for action: international petition for children in Syria

UNICEF, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Mercy Corps, Save the Children and World Vision issued an impassioned appeal to the general public, urging it to voice its outrage at the devastating impact on children and alarming long-term consequences of a lost generation in Syria. The call for action on www.change.org (<http://bit.ly/nolostgeneration>) is directed at all those who have the responsibility and the ability to bring an end to the suffering of children and safeguard their future. In addition to the immediate protection of children, the call for action stresses the importance of breaking the cycle of violence and providing children and young people with the support they need now to play a constructive role in the future peace and stability of Syria and the region.

For more information on the photo series and the UNICEF Photo of the Year Award, please go to www.unicef.de/photo.

We can provide you with the winning photos on request (only one photo per series). Free printout of the photos is only allowed within news coverage about “UNICEF Photo of the Year 2013” and with copyright information of the honored photographers.

Please direct any questions and interview requests to the UNICEF press office: Rudi Tarneden, +49 (0)221/93650-315, E-Mail presse@unicef.de or Angela Rupprecht (Project Manager), +49 (0)173/5475351.