

Children

• A N



photo: Lisa Woodsworth

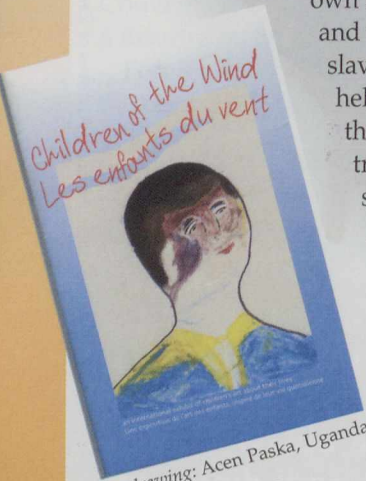
Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy and Laval West MP Raymonde Folco accepting the petition from Philippe Laterreur and Christine Plouffe of École secondaire Paul-Arseneau.

Québec Schoolchildren Take a Stand: Non aux enfants-soldats!

On February 26, 1999, at the Centre Saint-Pierre in Montréal, two students from the École secondaire Paul-Arseneau of L'Assomption, representing schools from all over Quebec, proudly presented to Foreign Minister Axworthy a weighty, barely liftable box containing some 31 000 signatures to a petition against the recruitment of child soldiers.

The moving ceremony was held under the auspices of Action des Chrétiens et Chrétiennes pour l'abolition de la torture (ACAT). Clowns from Clowns Sans Frontières, garbed in demining outfits, combed the auditorium for anti-personnel mines while the organizers and students spoke. One young student read out the testimony of a 13-year-old from Honduras, a girl her own age, who had been recruited and then forced to act as a sexual slave to soldiers: "Instead of helping me change the world as they had promised, they abused me and trampled on my dignity." Another student spoke of a Liberian boy nicknamed "Hitler killer," who by the age of 11 had already killed 10 people. The boy now feels indescribable pain: "I had nightmares thinking of what I'd done; I kept seeing their faces, then I'd collapse into tears. I don't want to kill any more. I want to forget."

Said Minister Axworthy, "Acts of solidarity by organizations such as ACAT and the Quebec schoolchildren are a great boost to Canada's approach of promoting children's security, and they encourage us in our struggle to create a kinder world."



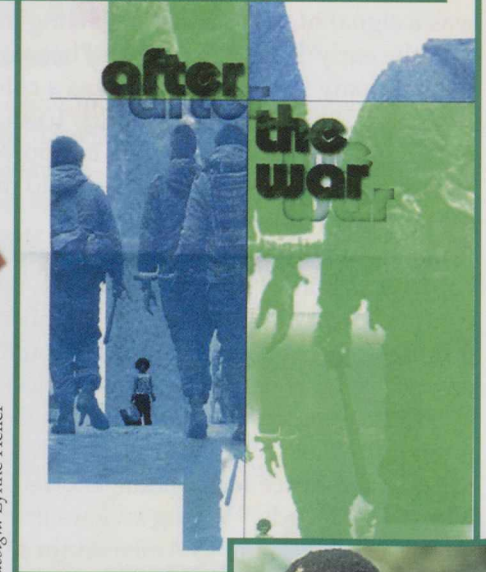
drawing: Acen Paska, Uganda



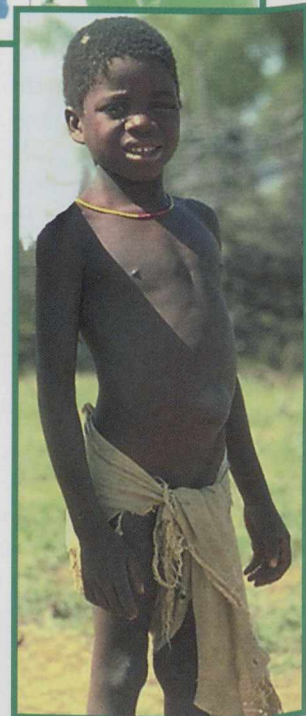
drawing: Adoki Alfred, 14, Uganda



photo: Lisa Woodsworth



design: Lynne Heller



Dwaka Dennis former child soldier, Uganda