

Your royal Highness,
Dear guests,
Dear, brave nominees,

A safe home.
A roof over your head.
Going to school.
Growing up in peace.
Time to play.
Enough to eat and drink.
A healthy environment.

This is what you wish for every child.
Because children have a right to all these things.
But sadly, in many places this cannot be taken for granted.

This is what we are reflecting on during International Children's Rights Day.

As we did for the last *thirty* years.

And that is why we award the Children's Peace Prize.

As we have for the last *fifteen* years.

And will do again today.

Two special anniversaries, and one awards ceremony.

It is a great honour for me to open this meeting, here in the historic Hall of Knights.

The very first winner of the Children's Peace Prize was Nkosi Johnson from South Africa.

Nkosi was born HIV-positive.

His mother died of Aids when he was eight years old.

When Aids was still a taboo subject.

At the time, there was no life-saving treatment.

Nkosi's mother was fired from her job because of her illness.

And she was turned out of her house, together with her sick child.

Nkosi grew up in a shelter for people with HIV.

He was not allowed to attend school because of fear of infection.

It was this great injustice that made Nkosi speak out.
During a famous international Aids conference in Durham,
that was watched live by millions of people, he spoke about
his disease.
And about its terrible effects.
He said:
*'Care for us, and accept us.
We are all human beings'.*

He died just one year later.
The first Children's Peace Prize was awarded to him after
his death.
Nowadays, each winner is given a small statue named after
Nkosi, in addition to a financial prize.

Aids is now a chronic disease and there are effective ways
to treat HIV.
To achieve this, it was necessary to make this disease a
high priority.
And to break the taboos.
Nkosi helped to raise awareness, and his actions set
something in motion worldwide.

This is true of all children who were nominated for the Children's Peace Prize.

They give a face to poverty.

To child labour.

To the effects of war or domestic violence.

To climate change and the refugee crisis.

They speak out, they raise awareness, and they motivate children and adults to work to make the world a better place.

Children such as the blind girl Saadah, who is fighting for the acceptance of blind children in Yemen.

Even though her country is at war.

Children like Sofia, who likes girls, and is fighting for gender equality in Romania.

Or the kids who initiated the March for our Lives in the United States.

They mobilized hundreds of thousands of youngsters, in their fight for safe schools.

The Children's Peace Prize originated in the Netherlands.

And we are very proud of that.

We are also proud that the Netherlands is in the top ten of countries with the happiest children.

But even in our country, there are children growing up in poverty.

Children from countries like Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq who suffer from stress, because they are not sure if they can stay.

Or children who are victims of domestic violence or a traumatic divorce.

Children do not have the right to vote.

But in our parliament, we *do* talk about their problems, to try and find solutions for them.

To make children's rights in our democracy even clearer, in two thousand and eight I submitted a member's bill for an Ombudsman for Children.

In two thousand and ten this bill was passed by the Senate and became law.

Marc Dullaert, Chairman of the Kids Rights Foundation, was our first Ombudsman for Children.

And just yesterday, we had our Question Time especially for kids for the second time – a chance for children to make their voice heard.

Children could come up with their own questions, and put them to ministers and even the Prime-Minister in the plenary hall!

That brings me back to the nominees for the Children's Peace Prize.

Brave and strong children, who give up a bit of their carefree childhood for the fight they take on.

It is fantastic that the KidsRights Foundation honours them and puts them in the spotlight.

I would like to close with something Desmond Tutu has already said to them – because he says it so much better than I ever could:

'I am in awe of you.

Your powerful message is amplified by your youthful energy and unshakable belief that children can, no must, improve their own futures.

You are true change-makers who have demonstrated most powerfully that children can move the world.'

I wish you all a very special evening.