

Remembrance: A War-Torn Children Exhibition Event in association with “Naming the Children” project

War-Torn Children, the powerful exhibition in the Regional Cultural Centre highlighting the devastating impact of war on children, their families and communities, closes on 24th March 2018. The last event associated with the exhibition was held on Thursday 22nd March, 7.30-9.30pm at the RCC.

Among those attending were all the members of Amnesty International's Letterkenny group, Shaun Hannigan, director of the RCC and the exhibition curator Roberta Bacic.



Attendees at the closing event. (Photo: Breege Doherty)

Amnesty Letterkenny Group Co-ordinator, Mary Ryan welcomed attendees and spoke about the success of each event held over the past six weeks, the launch, guided tours, school workshops, the poetry readings, Bake Bread for Peace, the different guests and speakers and film screening.

The short but powerful Russian TV film: “Growing up with war: Children of Syria. The tragedy of kids who have never known peace” was then shown. A discussion on the subject of war and its consequences and the lasting effects on children such as those in the film followed. Themes in the discussion included ways in which we can help children of conflict and try to combat the problems of decreasing outrage and growing desensitization to the appalling daily scenes of carnage in Syria and elsewhere. There was a sense that human rights and justice groups such as

Amnesty and individuals who care and want to help need to come together to act, protest, campaign and take part in practical actions such as offering to assist refugees who are coming to Donegal.

The discussion widened to include how to react to increasing militarised and even totalitarian nature of governments across the globe, how to deal with hostility to refugees and asylum seekers, the effects of climate change in the developing world, and the growth of intolerance and racism as highlighted in social media.

Grace Adeogun, Donegal Intercultural Platform, spoke about her own background in her home country of Nigeria, ongoing war in parts of the country and its permanent effects on the whole of the country; and in particular her experiences as a witness to extreme violence in Northern Nigeria. She spoke about the effects constant war had on children wherever there is war, that, having experienced the loss of loved ones and living lives in daily terror and extreme anxiety, it was almost impossible to get trust and security and normality back into their lives again. She spoke of the outcomes of war on children and women too, including homelessness, trafficking, slavery, joylessness and children being used as weapons of war. It was agreed that countries receiving refugees have a duty of care to them, in terms of therapy and services for those who have suffered trauma, war and devastating loss.



**Alannah Robins, giving an overview of “Naming the Children” project.
(Photo: Breege Doherty)**

Alannah Robins from Naming the Children project (www.namingthechildren.com) spoke of the origins of this project which aims to list the names of as many as possible of the one million children who are dead because of the Middle East related wars. She gave the background to the project, and the role she and Edward Horgan played in developing it, from their feelings of great helplessness in the face of the colossal scale of tragedies across the middle east. The project is in its early stages and aims to remember the children who have died as individuals. The group visits schools and also facilitates workshops and vigils with adults. Alannah stated that the project needs to be handled carefully, without political exploitation. The hope is that the act of writing down the name of a child who has died in war will connect us on a more deeply human level to people who suffer and die in places that are so far away from us.

The simplicity and symbolism of the project's work was discussed among the attendees. It was compared to the project 'Lived Lives' at the RCC which celebrates the lives of young people who have died through suicide, through exhibitions of their own belongings. The project was also compared to the tradition of leaving rosary beads/gifts and notes at Donegal's holy wells.

The attendees then took the names of children and wrote them on white ribbons and tied them to the Naming the Children tree. It was agreed that the Tree should continue to be displayed and names added to it in public libraries, the Museum and other locations across the county where possible.

The event then finished with conversation and tea.

Taking down exhibition and future developments

On Monday 24th March, Roberta Bacic, members of Letterkenny Amnesty group and Regional Cultural Centre staff, took down and packed the exhibition which will next be exhibited in Roe Valley Arts & Cultural Centre, Northern Ireland, 5th September - 31st October 2018.

The two external installations, which complemented the exhibition will be journeying elsewhere.

"Naming the children" project remembrance tree

During the exhibition, a total of 67 children were remembered by attendees at the various events. This completed list has been returned to Alannah Robins and the tree will be displayed in either the local Museum or library. It is anticipated that the host venue will liaise directly with "Naming the children" project regarding remembering the children



**Pausing at the completed "Naming the children" remembrance tree.
(Photo: Breege Doherty)**

“Knitting corner”

This provided a very tangible focus to the exhibition. Caroline Kuyper has taken several bags of completed squares, which she will bring to the Derry Knitters, where they will be sewn into baby blankets and sent to refugee camps in Greece.



The “knitting corner”. (Photo: Carolyn Kuyper)



(L-R) Anne Hughes, Catherine Rose Hannigan and Cliona Anderson at the “knitting corner”. (Photo: Breege Doherty)



The finished squares, ready for departure. (Photo: Carolyn Kuyper)



A final message to us – “Open the borders” (Photo: Carolyn Kuyper)

Niamh Brennan, Amnesty International, Letterkenny.