

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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***I Am Alive*—Child-survivors' stories of war and hope**

Berlin / London, November 19, 2020 — 'My neighbours were worried when the refugees arrived. But I said: We must show solidarity across borders with people in need. Nobody leaves home without a good reason.'

This is the message from Erich Karl, 107, who survived near-starvation after the First World War thanks to school meals provided by Save the Children, when he is asked what he thinks of the Syrian refugees living in a container building next door.

He is one of eleven people from around the world whose stories of survival during wars and conflicts over the past century make up the extraordinary illustrated book *I Am Alive*, published by Save the Children.

The result of two years of research and reporting, *I Am Alive* tells eleven powerful stories of hope across a century of conflict—from Erich Karl, a survivor of the First World War, to Rajiya*, a newborn Rohingya girl living in the world's largest refugee camp. Every survivor helped document how their childhood experience of war, and the support they received, deeply affected them and helped shape their lives and identity.

The book *I Am Alive* is being published exactly 100 years after the opening of the first international office of Save the Children in Geneva, and a year after the centenary of the international child rights organisation.

Martina Dase of Save the Children in Germany came up with the idea and overall concept for this unique project, and the portraits were shot by acclaimed Swiss photographer Dominic Nahr. Prominent guest authors—including world-renowned violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter from Germany, former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon of South Korea, Danish European Commission Vice President Margrethe Vestager, legendary British war correspondent Jon Swain, German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Dr. Gerd Müller, and Nigerian Nobel Prize-winning writer Wole Soyinka—were shown a single photo of one of the survivors and, without any background knowledge, delved into the story they saw in the image.

Save the Children's patron, Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal, wrote the book's introduction. "We will not be able to end all war and conflict," she notes. "But through the eyes of each survivor, we are reminded of the impact we can have."

In its report *Stop the War on Children*, launched on the same day as the book, Save the Children discloses that 426 million children live with war or in a conflict zone, more than at any time since records began. The people in *I Am Alive* have experienced the same harrowing hardship that millions of children around the globe are enduring every day—but they lived to tell their stories to the world.

"This book is also an invitation to the reader, in our image-saturated time, to look at our war-ravaged century in a new way—not in black-and-white terms but cinematically, from multiple perspectives. We hope to make people understand how crucial, how life-defining it can be when children in dire need receive support. We want to add a new dimension to the visual language of NGOs," says Martina Dase, Director of Strategic Communications at Save the Children Germany, the initiator and artistic director of the project. "Our survivors are not portrayed as victims, they define how they want to be seen by a global audience. They all share an admirable strength and confidence."

"When we speak about children in war, we immediately think of current conflicts, like those in Syria, or Yemen," says photographer Dominic Nahr, explaining his motivation for being involved in *I Am Alive*. "But we wanted to go deeper, to travel into the past and find people who've survived all the horrors

that children today are living through. How has this experience shaped them? That's what we wanted to find out."

The biographies of the survivors of the defining wars of the past century could not be more different. Each individual found their own way to deal with trauma, tragedy, and the loss of their home.

But there are also connections between the people who are brought together in this book. It becomes clear that those who were helped went on to help others. Erich Karl (now 107) views the refugee centre next to his home with empathy and understanding. Vichuta Ly (53), who lost 30 members of her family to the terror of the Khmer Rouge, has become a human rights lawyer, helping victims of violence. Vanessa Ntakirutimana (29), a survivor of the Rwandan genocide who still does not know what happened to her parents, wants to be the mother she lost to her own children.

"We show these witnesses to history as ordinary people who live, or have lived, under extraordinary circumstances. Their stories show how different our lives could have been if we had been born in another place or time," says Martina Dase. She chose the title *I Am Alive* to emphasize the hope that carries through these stories of suffering and survival.

Despite all the successes achieved over the past century, humanity has not been able put an end to war and the suffering of children. That is why Baby Rajiya*, born in 2019 in the Kutupalong Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, is the 11th child of conflict, representing a symbol of hope for a new, less war-torn century.

The photographic book has a unique visual aesthetic—every survivor has been assigned their own colour to reflect their character. As the reader flips through the pages, they move through a multi-coloured "global family" where there is always more to discover.

Dominic Nahr, the photographer, staged portraits and on-site photojournalism, used current and historical material, colour and black-and-white photography, analogue and digital images, in a way that emphasizes the universal character of the experience of war, and that connects places and times. Together with the accompanying essays and the personal contributions of the prominent guest authors, the images form a poignant overall composition.

With the book *I Am Alive - How Children Survived a Century of War*, Save the Children is also honouring its British founder, Eglantyne Jebb. In 1919, she defied her compatriots' fierce opposition in London to bring Save the Children to life and help the starving children of Britain's former enemies in Germany. Just a year later, in 1920, the social reformer opened the first international office of Save the Children in Geneva, next door to the headquarters of the League of Nations. From there, Eglantyne Jebb began her tireless lobbying on behalf of the rights of children, knowing that 'help alone is not enough'.

The book I Am Alive is 324 pages long and will be published on November 25, 2020 in German and English via Kerber Verlag. It will be available in stores in December.

*Name changed

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Contact:

Save the Children Media Department, Susanne Sawadogo
+49 (30) 27 59 59 79 – 120
susanne.sawadogo@savethechildren.de