

Change For Children

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Good afternoon everyone. My name is Riko Watanabe, a first grade student in Doshisha High School.

To start off my speech, I would like to ask you a question. Have you ever seen a movie that truly inspired you?

Two years ago I saw a movie about a Japanese doctor who went to work at a hospital in Lokichogio Kenya. There, he treated injured soldiers who were still children. During his time in Kenya, he met a boy called Ndugu. His leg was shot, but that wasn't his main injury. His main injury was in his heart. His family was killed and he was forced to kill people. That experience left a big scar in his heart. It would be a relief if this was only a true story in a movie, but unfortunately, these kinds of things happen right now on this earth. It was the first time I knew about child soldiers when I watched that movie. And that movie, made me feel that I want to learn more about them. So, when I was in my 3rd year in junior high school, I spent my time in summer vacation researching about children whose rights aren't protected.

I went to a library and found books that had stories of those children. There were many sad stories in those books. I also found stories about victims of child labor, and child marriage. Through my research of those children, I realized that there were more children whose rights aren't protected than I had imagined. Lots and lots of children were forced to work in dangerous conditions and weren't allowed to go to school. Child soldiers were given drugs so that they won't be scared on battlefields. Many girls were forced to get married with older men. Some men were the age of their fathers. During my summer vacation, I had the opportunity to talk with a doctor who went to Sudan, and visited a rehabilitation center for child soldiers. There he met an 8-year-old girl, and asked her what was the happiest thing that happened after coming to the center. She told him she was happy to be able to read her name.

The more I knew about these children, the more I realized that my life right now wasn't normal. My life has been too blessed.

All children are born equal, but in reality the equality of life isn't kept. There are children who have many chances, and a bright future, but there are lots of children whose chances, and futures are taken away. Even though I spent a lot of time in summer vacation researching about those children, I don't think I have enough knowledge about them. Because I have many opportunities given, I want to use those opportunities to learn about children rights. That's the first thing I can do right now for them.

The year of 2016 was the year of change. There was a lot of news that shocked us. The presidential election in the United States, the death of Cuba's leader, and Brexit. But were there any changes for children? Many volunteers and workers are working very hard to save these children, but the number of those people isn't enough. The volunteers and workers in UNICEF, and NGOs have made changes for those children. But, there are still many children who are waiting for those changes which will make their lives better.

My dream is to work for children. Many people told me that there are various ways being involved with them. I haven't decided yet what job I would like to have in the future, but I would really like to work to help children in different conditions.

Thank you very much.