

KIMMIE WEEKS

EXTENDED BIOGRAPHY



Born on December 6, 1981 in the West African Nation of Liberia, Kimmie Weeks spent most of his early childhood faced with war, poverty, and suffering. A civil war had started in Liberia in 1989 when Kimmie was barely 9 years old. The war brought him face to face with death and the suffering of children. He recalls observing the plight of other children who seemed to suffer more than he did. He recounts, “all through the war, I saw children suffer worse than I. I watched children die, cut down by bullets or disease that in other parts of the world would be considered no

longer a threat. I saw children in my country spend long days on the streets of the capital under the blazing African sun trying to sell goods for their families to survive, while thousands of others carried guns, fighting and killing one another. I saw the growing number of young children barely in their teens who were becoming prostitutes. School for these any many others was a fantasy.”

In 1991, someone started digging a shallow grave for Kimmie Weeks he was all of 10 years old. He had been sick for days -- dehydrated, not eating or drinking because of the cholera that wracked his emaciated body. The cholera hit after the chickenpox and before the yellow jaundice. He saw no doctor, no nurse. He had no medicine, only a few herbs. This was war, after all. When they could no longer find a pulse in Kimmie’s chest, an older man decided he must be dead. He told someone to wrap Kimmie up, and some young men went out to dig a grave -- out by the garbage pile, where all the refugees’ bodies went. His mother could not bear it. She refused to accept it. She screamed. She hit at his body and kept hitting at him until he came back to consciousness.

That same night, Kimmie vowed to dedicate the rest of his childhood and adult life to making the world a better place for children. By age 10 he had already set himself on a trail of goodwill. His first achievement came when he organized a group of local volunteers to clean communities littered by debris of war. That same year, he would volunteer in understaffed temporary hospitals, caring for sickly babies and children. “It was there that a child

first died in my arms and I knew then and there what it felt like for a mother who lost her child," he says when he recounts his experience. Three years later, Kimmie would serve as co-founder of Voice of the Future Inc. (VOF), Liberia's first child rights advocacy and humanitarian organization, run by young people his age. Today, The Voice of the Future Inc., is an implementing partner of the United Nations agency for children UNICEF and works on several humanitarian programs including peer counseling for former child soldiers. VOF also provides health, informal education, and recreation for children in 3 Liberian counties using the aide of 3,000 youth volunteers.

His biggest endeavor would be a project aimed at bringing peace to Liberia and ensuring the disarmament of approximately 15,000 children who had been armed during the hostilities. In 1996 Kimmie, now 15 founded and chaired the Children's Disarmament Campaign. With support from UNICEF, the campaign lobbied a deadline for the disarmament of child soldiers, meeting warring faction, political, spiritual leaders and heads of civic societies to set a date for the disarmament of child soldiers. Several marches, indoor programs and publicity campaigns were also held to attract attention to the cause.

In 1997, with the holding of general disarmament in Liberian, Kimmie established Liberia's first children's information service, The Children's Bureau of Information, which now works along side Search for Common Ground, Talking Drum Studio and UNICEF to produce radio programs aimed at reintegrating child soldiers into the community. The 15-minute weekly broadcasts are aired on 3 local radio stations. The bureau is also responsible for the publication of a national children newsletter The Liberian Child and the annual Union of young journalist.

In December 1998, Kimmie investigated and published a report on the training of children by the Liberian military. As a result, several attempts were made to assassinate him. Fearing for his personal safety, Kimmie Weeks fled Liberia in early 1999 and has since been granted political asylum into the United States. His dream for the future of children has not died, but has only been strengthened with time. Kimmie currently serves as UNESCO's Ambassador of the Manifesto for Peace and Non-Violence, Director of the Young Environmental Ambassadors, International Coordinator of Voice of the Future Inc and as an international activist for the rights of children around the world.

As a vocal activist for children's rights and a universal end to wars, Kimmie has presented his case before several bodies including a special joint session of the Liberian Senate and Legislature, The James P. Grant Memorial Forum (Liberia), 50th Celebration of the Declaration of Human Rights (Liberia) Nations Children's Fund (New York), The Youth Leadership Forum (New York) Vice President Al Gore and entourage (New York), The State of the World Forum (Belfast, Dublin), The Youth and Peace Summit (Florida), Columbia University (New York), Florida International University (US), and the World Youth Leadership Jam (US). He has also headed several national committees including: The Universal Children's Day celebrations 98, The Day of the African Child '97, 98, Clean up the world 96, 97, 98 and The International Children's Day of Broadcasting '98.