



Art work by  
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On **World Children's Day** we celebrate the **Declaration of the Rights of the Child** that was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1959.

Our appeal to world has been written by Deborah Soria, Anna Sardone and Paola Iarosa, who are IBBY volunteers at the IBBY Library on the island of Lampedusa.

His name was Youssef, he was only six months old. He died like thousands of other people, other children, in the Mediterranean a few miles from the island where we live. Now he is buried in Lampedusa. Yet another life sacrificed because of frontiers.

Some people on the island went to say a prayer for him, took him a flower, said goodbye. They huddled round his mother like a family. They cried as if he were a lost nephew or a little brother.

When these things happen, we are helpless and the only thing we can do is to continue to insist that tragedies like this are brought to an end, for people to be allowed to travel and move around safely and legally across frontiers; and ensure that plans for safe rescue operations at sea are immediately implemented.

Above all, that children are protected at all costs. We cannot resign ourselves to accept the huge burden and the sadness of when a child is denied the right to live.

On the other hand, we would like to be able to protect 'our' children and young people from news like this. We would like to find the way to make the stories less painful. But there are no suitable words for gently telling what happens, there is no way of making it less hard or cruel, or making the weight of these tragedies lighter for our children.

We cannot make the truth any less harsh and unfortunately, nor can we cannot erase it.

Youssef, a baby of just six months, died a few miles from us, yet another victim of an endless massacre. And we are witnesses, here on the island, once again.

People who live on the frontier are 'skinless', forced to endure events, dramatic or extraordinary, without any mediation, without the protection that the two-dimensional images that the press and TV offer the public. There is a great risk that the emotions that affect us may become unbearable. But adults must work to give all children, boys and girls, a protection in life and this protection should never be indifference. Speaking openly and listening, being willing to answer questions, even the most difficult ones, and being ready to look for answers together when we cannot find them: this would be a big step forward.

Native Americans had a rule: whoever saved a person's life became responsible for that person forever. This rule may seem illogical: if anything, it should be those who have had their lives saved should take care of their saviour.

We know now that this ancient wisdom is right, because being responsible for someone else is not a duty, but an inevitable consequence of a relationship that is created when, even in completely random circumstances, we participate in a central event in somebody's life.

Perhaps this is what we need to explain to our children: the responsibility that comes with being witnesses. The transformation of this island into a frontier has assigned this role of being a witness to those who live here. It is up to us to live in this role in the best way, grasping and living to the full this extraordinary opportunity that has been given to us. Because being 'responsible' means that we care about someone – we create a relationship. And relationships are at the core of our human existence.

Today on International Children's Rights Day we want to remember every Youssef, every victim, every child who has crossed the border only to disappear in the indifferent tangles of politics and our inadequate system of receiving and welcoming. We want to remember this day at the IBBY library on Lampedusa – a place to explain, to tell and to collect the memories of this time. No child should grow up without the possibility of understanding the world he or she lives in.

Books, space, listening and thinking will be the tools that we can use to make sure that no one will ever have to say that Youssef's life was wasted.

We will keep alive the memory of his short life forever.

*Lampedusa, 20 November 2020*

For the original Italian text go to: <https://www.ibbyitalia.it/2020/11/18/la-responsabilita-di-essere-testimoni/>

Translated by Deborah Soria