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This extraordinary book is an adventure into the creative minds of children. It is the brainchild of two talented photographers, Anthony Asael and Stéphanie Rabemiafara, who presented the idea of offering children in all 192 United Nations Member countries the chance to express themselves through art.

UNICEF is a proud supporter of the project, called *Art in All of Us*, which also has the global backing of hundreds of volunteers, organizations and corporations. In four years and 620,000 kilometers, Asael and Rabemiafara visited 310 primary schools and helped spur the creation of 25,000 artworks all done by children – of different cultures, religion and geographical background. The book displays some of these along with a snapshot of the 160,000 photographs provided by Asael and Rabemiafara.

The result is a colorful ensemble of creative pieces from around the world – from Belgium to Benin - that reflect the uniqueness of each background yet also the similarities that run through childhood. As one student in Syria noted after looking at some of the other artwork, “there is no difference between us and the children from other countries.”

The release of the book comes in 2009, the year the world marks the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. *Art in All of US* has provided thousands of children the opportunity to express themselves – using the universal language of art. This book showcases photography and art as a vehicle to promote respect, tolerance and peace and build a better world for children and their families.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be "Ann Veneman".

**Ann M. Veneman**  
Executive Director, UNICEF



## Introduction

I met Anthony Asael and Stéphanie Rabemiafara four years ago in Chile. When they told me about the project, its objectives, and the material that they wanted to compile, I thought it was a fantastic initiative that should be carried out. The idea of being able to create art with children from each of the 192 United Nations member countries immediately appealed to me because it is completely in line with my convictions. This is why, as the director of Fundación América, I have decided to support them, sponsoring their project with our work and expertise in the design of art books. Every day I am more certain that art is one of the best ways—or excuses—to bring people all over the world closer together and break down barriers of prejudice, geographic distance, or culture. And showing that all of us are equal through artwork done by children is even better. UNICEF also appreciated this concept and supported the project with their partnership from the beginning.

The passion and enthusiasm of these two young people brought me to trust in their sincerity and in their capacity to follow through with this immense task. They were not two hippies looking for an excuse to travel, but rather professionals with a solid project and a well-designed plan, looking to provide a window of expression for children around the world. It is not common these days, when individualism dominates, to find people like them: willing to suspend their careers and personal lives, for four years, to reach a higher goal—a simple, yet original and very powerful one. Now I see that I did not make a mistake; they were only delayed one month from their initial

schedule, and the result far exceeded my expectations, which were high from the beginning.

Anthony and Stéphanie have now reached the end of a long tour, returning with an invaluable treasure trove of photos, drawings and poems created by the children of the world. They made important personal sacrifices for this adventure, without ever knowing if they could reach their lofty goal. From all their travels, from all the places they have seen, the people they have met, the smiles they have received, they have thousands of amazing memories—no single one the same. Their journey has molded who they are today, and will without question, shape the rest of their lives.



The beginning was not easy. They resigned from their regular jobs, and after sending more than 600 letters to businesses in an effort to secure funding and contacting editorial houses and the press where they lived, they were met with the discouraging and almost unanimous response: “Come back in four years, when the project is ready.”

Fortunately, Anthony and Stephanie are not the types to be easily dissuaded—no obstacle would let them give up their dream. They met each challenge with patience and a resolve to succeed.

In their travels, the photographers have met more than 18,000 children, taken close to 160,000 photographs and collected close to 25,000 works of art, both drawings and poems. They used a similar methodology in each workshop, which included a presentation about the project, followed



by a session about composing and creating photographs. Then they held a dynamic brainstorming session so that the children could internalize and understand the notions of culture and cultural identity. They had drawing and writing workshops and interactive geography games, using photos taken in other countries of children just like them. AiA chose to target children from eight to twelve years old, the ages at which Anthony and Stéphanie had found that innocence and creativity is still expressed in a free and spontaneous way.

Every once in a while, Anthony and Stéphanie would stop in Chile to work on the mock-up of the book, and they would tell me some anecdotes from the trip. That is how I learned of many of their achievements: they started with a daily budget of 10 US dollars per person to cover all costs. With such shortfalls, they still managed to get to every country they had set their sights on, meeting children in both urban and rural areas, and never allowing closed borders or dangerous zones to limit their reach. It took two and a half years to get permission to enter North Korea, but they persisted until they were able to meet with a school of children and work with them as they had with thousands of other children around the world. AiA was the first foreign art project in this closed country.

Pursuing such a lofty dream, as Anthony and Stephanie have learnt, has come with its own set of unique complications. They have traveled through regions recently devastated by earthquakes, floods, wars, rebellions, attacks, and military

coups. They traveled in different types of violent and threatening environments, and escaped shipwrecks and muggings by a matter of minutes. Anthony even spent a short amount of time in a Jordanian jail, but not by any fault of his own.

Although the list of anecdotes creates a great adventure story, perhaps to be told in another book, Anthony and Stephanie's lives were put at risk by traveling while traveling across so many borders. Just as an example: they were hospitalized twice; once very seriously. Anthony got peritonitis during one of his stays in Santiago. All of these shortfalls have only made them work harder at completing their goal, and impacting as many individuals as they can.

After making the first steps and building on their dream, they realized that in order for AiA to be a success, a huge amount of organization and logistical planning had to be put in place. They had to constantly consider the coordination of thousands of minute practical details, and all at a very low cost. They scheduled each workshop from a distance, three to eight months in advance. They organized itineraries, contacted translators, got vaccines, secured transportation and food, kept a massive amount of information, and successfully sent hundreds of drawings and poems from one corner of the earth to another.

This project could not have been completed without the help of UNICEF, who they collaborated with and were



supported by in more than 90 countries. UNICEF staff helped AiA coordinate workshops, arrange visas, obtain authorization from ministries of education, find out about security and precautionary measures in order to travel through areas of unrest, and much more. This cooperation was critical for the success of the project. Moreover, AiA formed a network of hundreds of volunteers, made up as much by individuals as by organizations and businesses, whose generosity, trust and enthusiasm also allowed them to complete their journey.

In one of their last trips to Chile, Anthony and Stéphanie told me a story that well represents the mixture of adventure, magic and luck which has enveloped the long trip and made this book possible. They wanted to visit Nauru, a small Pacific island with only 10,000 inhabitants, which does not have its own port or airline, potable water, electricity 24 hours a day, or a regular supply of fuel. When checking in for the trip, they were informed that the return flight was canceled for an indefinite period of time. They had three options: to not travel, to go without knowing when they would be able to come back, and to go and return on the same airplane, on the next morning's flight. They took the third option at the risk of not being able to have the workshop, or – even worse – missing the flight and not knowing when or how they would be able to return.

They landed on the island at 4:00 p.m., but all the schools had finished for the day at 1:30 p.m. They only knew the

name of the school and that the teacher's name was Joanie. Like all foreigners who arrive in Nauru, Anthony and Stéphanie had to leave their passports with the head of immigration. According to local law, they could only get their passports back two days later. However, given that they would leave in a few hours, they negotiated to get their passports directly from the Minister of the Interior.

They did not find taxis when they left the airport. Since there is no fuel on the island, the only cars are those belonging to the 12 official ministers. So they started asking pedestrians if they knew the teacher, and they were successful on the third try! The passer-by turned out to be the teacher's uncle and also worked in the Ministry of Education. Therefore, they asked the minister to use his car to go to Joanie's house. They reached the teacher and told her about the schedule and their rapid departure, in less than 14 hours. It was already 4:30 p.m. and, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, the teacher suggested that they gather the students together and have the workshop that very night. They covered the entire island in the minister's pick-up truck, picking up all the children, whose parents gave them permission without any problems.

Since they had arrived at the school very late, they had to ask the Minister of Energy to provide electric lights for the three or four hours of workshops. The activities with the children were a success and the workshops took place in a room full of smiles, joy, energy and curiosity. The children, the teacher, and Anthony and Stéphanie left



the school at one in the morning. They went more than 20 hours without sleep and had eaten very little; they were exhausted, but the children could have continued until dawn. When they dropped off the last child at his house, in the complete darkness of the streets, they remembered that they had to recover their passports. They left for the Minister of the Interior's house. It was two in the morning. The minister came to the door in pajamas, with sleepy eyes, and gave them their stamped passports. There were three hours left for them to sleep before catching the return flight, and they had fulfilled their mission. I am sure that Anthony and Stéphanie will always remember, with special affection, their adventure in Nauru and the works of art created by those children.

The book that you have in your hands contains some of the magic of Nauru, and the beauty created when children are given the chance to express themselves. It is a book made by the dreams and realities of the children of the world, but it is also a product of Anthony and Stéphanie's tireless dedication and ceaseless ambition. They put every effort into each detail, from the first to the last workshop, and from the initial concept of the book design to the final result. They financed the project with their own funds, donations from organizations and individuals, by selling photos and with grants from foundations. And they got many people excited about the project along the way. Through all of this support, this book was born. They finally arrived at the Fundación América (America Foundation) office with 25,000 drawings and poems. With all of the amazing pictures and poems they had acquired from the children they had met, they then had to

undertake the enormous task of choosing only one photo, one drawing and one poem to present each country.

The number of pages was very limiting, but it was also an important exercise to define the purpose of this book. In the era of the digital world and remote access to massive quantities of information and images, it did not make sense to try to make an encyclopedia, an exhaustive and detailed representation of each country. Therefore, they made the judicious decision to designate two pages to present each of the 192 countries recognized by the United Nations through the creativity and words of children. In other words, there is a child's drawing and poem, as well as a photo per page of one or a few children from each country. They also included some reference information, such as the number of inhabitants and a map. But they left a prominent place to faithfully reflect the way the children expressed themselves, with poems written in their handwriting and letters in their native language and drawings that respect the colors, strokes and materials with which they were created.

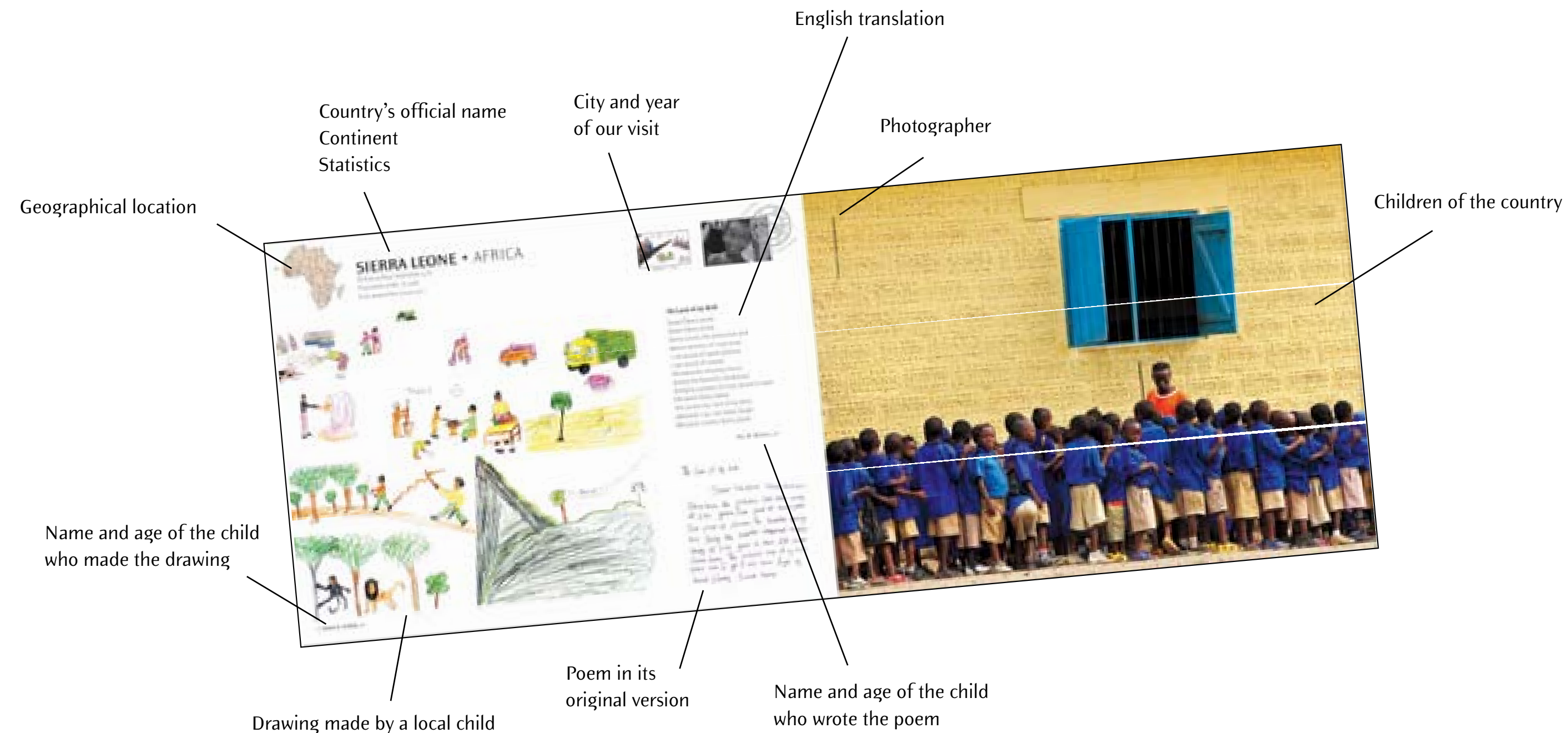
The result is a book filled with the spirit of the children of the world.

*Roberto Edwards*

**Roberto Edwards**  
Director  
Fundación América



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The world seen through the eyes and the rhymes of the children

