

MEDIA RELEASE

I want to be “Alive” girl gets final goodwill payment from UNICEF

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, January 4, 2008: World Famous UNICEF poster girl Selamawit Gebreyes was given a goodwill gift of US\$3, 500 yesterday as a gesture of thanks from the organisation for the unprecedented publicity and resources gained by using her image.

Now 26, Selamawit was the focus of world attention after a chance meeting with a photographer in the mid-1980s, when she was growing in poverty Ethiopia’s capital Addis Ababa. After taking her photo the photographer asked what Selamawit wanted to be when she grew up. Instead of saying a doctor or a teacher, she replied with “alive!”

“Selamawit’s photograph and shocking statement revealed the stark reality of life in the developing world and highlighted the plight of children globally,” said UNICEF Ethiopia’s chief Bjorn Ljungqvist at a hand-over ceremony yesterday afternoon.

“Countless people have been fascinated over the years by the pixie-like image of a small girl with an important message. The gift we are humbly presenting Selamawit with today is on behalf of not only UNICEF, but also the thousands of children who are alive and well today due to the generosity her picture provoked in people.”

Her image has been reprinted for countless publicity campaigns and is still in use today as an enduring image of human suffering and hope. She once accompanied the then UNICEF Executive Director Mr James Grant to a meeting of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), where she made an emotional appeal to the continent’s leaders to do more to help children like herself.

During her childhood years UNICEF supported Selamawit’s education in recognition of the huge benefits she gave the organisation. Now with children of her own, UNICEF’s presentation of a final payment marks a show of gratitude for past services and best wishes for her future life as an adult.

In Ethiopia, many more children remain vulnerable to hunger, disease, violence and lack of opportunities. UNICEF works with the government of Ethiopia to provide essential life-saving interventions for these children in the hope of securing a better future for the country.

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