

16 YEAR OLD AFRICAN PEACE ACTIVIST TO SPEAK AT SIERRA CANYON SCHOOL

Lovetta Conto, 16 year old Liberian peace activist who recently had a private meeting with the Dalai Lama at a peace summit in Canada, will be sharing her life story with our parents on November 17th, 2009, and with our students on November 18th, 2009. These are the first events to be sponsored by the 22 Upper School students of the Sierra Canyon School Creative Activists Steering Committee as part of our collaboration with the Creative Visions Foundation. The Steering Committee is divided into five sub-committees (Documentation, Facilities, Multi-media, Public Relations/Communications, and Research) and they are working diligently to create and implement educational and service programs dealing with the plight of African children.

Lovetta's drive and compassion were forged through heartbreaking personal experiences. Separated from her mother and country at the age of four during the Liberian conflict, she fled to Ghana with her father, where she lived for nine years with various families in refugee camps. She often went hungry or was sometimes beaten for trying to attend school without shoes or proper clothing. But her remarkable spirit persevered, and she eventually found her way into working with a team of American volunteers to build a school for unaccompanied minors and further distinguished herself by advocating for special education for sight-impaired children. Remaining optimistic and determined to help other children in similar situations, she became an international activist and youth advocate.

Extremely talented and tenacious, she decided to design and sell jewelry to raise financial support for other war survivors by tapping into her love of fashion. Lovetta took spent bullet casings left behind from the Liberian civil war and transformed them into exquisite pieces of jewelry, creating a line she named AKAWELLE (which means "also known as love.") Each piece includes a small leaf pendant made from melted bullet casings with the word "LIFE" imprinted on it to remind the world that "even after something as terrible as war, good can come and new life can begin." Her jewelry is worn by supporters such as Angelina Jolie, Halle Berry, Hilary Swank, Selma Blair, Mos Def, Randy Jackson, Sherri Shepherd, and Starbucks featured book author and former child soldier Ishmael Beah, as well as young people in the refugee camp where Lovetta grew up.

In November 2008, Lovetta was chosen as a finalist for the 2008 International Children's Peace Prize, an enterprise of the KidsRights Foundation with the support of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates and presented by Noble Peace Laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu. The Prize is awarded annually to exceptional children who have demonstrated great courage or remarkable actions to help protect and improve the lives of children who face great risks or injustices.

She will be doing a presentation for our parents on Tuesday, November 17th, 2009, at 7:00 p.m. in the Burtzloff Library. Following the discussion, she will be selling her jewelry from her Akawelle collection. The proceeds go to the rehabilitation of children in African refugee camps.

On Wednesday, November 18th, 2009, she will be presenting to the 6th through 12th grade students.

This is a phenomenal opportunity to hear firsthand about what is happening in war-torn Africa and a tremendous honor to meet and get to know this extraordinary young lady who believes that “ Every child deserves to grow up to have a better life.” To learn more about Lovetta, please see

www.strongheartfellowship.org/akawelle/Designer.php or
www.strongheartfellowship.org/lovettaconto.php

If you are able to attend the November 17th evening presentation, please R.S.V.P to sdeutsch@sierracanyonschool.org and/or feel free to email me with any questions.

Thank you for supporting our student led initiative and our Service Learning program.
Shelley Deutsch, Service Learning Coordinator