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UNICEF Photo of the Year 2016

## Defending the right to smile

The winning entry of the international competition shows the resilience of children

UNICEF awards the first prize of the “UNICEF Photo of the Year 2016” contest to Iranian photographer Arez Ghaderi for his portrait of a smiling nomad girl. The girl’s bright smile is a symbol of children’s resilience and their right to be carefree even under the most difficult circumstances. The picture of this year’s second prize winner, Cologne-based photojournalist Ali Nouraldin, shows children in the refugee camp Idomeni near the Greek-Macedonian border. It captures a moment of enchantment where children follow a movie in a makeshift cinema under the night sky. The third prize goes to Syrian photographer Mohammed Badra. His photo shows two festively dressed girls in front of a wall riddled with bullet holes in the contested Syrian town of Douma, close to Damascus.

*“Arez Ghaderi has captured a moment of ‘nevertheless’”, said Jasmin Tabatabai, a German actress with Iranian roots, during the award ceremony in Berlin. “In our world full of catastrophes, his photo transmits the hope that even the most miserable circumstances cannot completely destroy the cheerfulness and playful lightheartedness of children.”*

*“Poverty cannot make people happy. Nowhere. But the UNICEF Photo of the Year 2016 reveals a fundamental children’s right: the right to sometimes simply be carefree no matter what”, said Peter-Matthias Gaede, board member of UNICEF Germany.*

*“The pictures and photo series in the contest prove the open minds and powers to observe with which photojournalists engage with children around the world”, said Jury Chairman Prof. Rolf Nobel. “Instead of meeting our media-formed expectations with spectacular pictures, they create empathy and understanding.”*

### The winning picture: Defending the right to smile

A brave smile, maybe even a moment of real joy. It is the resilience, the radiance of a girl in an Iranian garbage dump which turns this photo by Arez Ghaderi, a photographer still not well known in the West, into a symbolic image. An expression of a sometimes desperate hope. The 27-year-old Iranian freelance photographer met the girl in a provisional camp somewhere in the Razavi Khorasan Province. Baluchi families from the border region near Pakistan and Afghanistan migrated here in search of a new life. While the adults look for work in the nearby villages, the children stray through plastic mountains looking for things that could still be useful. These girls and boys don’t have a childhood as we know it. But they play – and defend their right to smile against the overwhelming power of poverty and misery.

Over the last 25 years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has managed to reduce child mortality from 54 to 16 deaths per thousand births. In the same period, Iran's literacy rate has increased from 54 to 85 percent. As in other emerging countries, however, many children here have an extremely harsh childhood.

## **The second prize: The hour of enchantment**

Night has fallen in Idomeni. A night between further days spent in a state of waiting in uncertainty. More than 12,000 refugees, mostly from Syria and mostly children and adolescents, were stranded here in spring 2016 near the Greek-Macedonian border. Stopped on their way to Germany, the promised land. Volunteers have improvised an open-air cinema to entertain the children with movies. To allow them to escape from the camp's drab reality and to let their thoughts fly free. Photographer Ali Nouraldin, born in 1985 in Gaza, currently residing in Cologne and working for various international media, captured this moment of enchantment during a lengthy stay in Idomeni. What he found most touching were the anxious but also hopeful questions the refugees asked him. A little refugee child, for example, once took him by the hand and listened intently to his description of schools in Germany.

## **The third prize: The children who must endure**

Douma, the 9th largest Syrian city, not far from Damascus. Another war-torn city full of apocalyptic scenes - a grim canvas of blood, pain and death. Inconceivable for everyone, perhaps even more so for the children. Photojournalist Mohammed Badra, born in Duma, originally studied architecture and currently works for epa. The war changed him: he had to witness it first-hand, he provided first aid for the Red Crescent – the sister organization of the Red Cross – and he became involved with the psychological support of victims. Badras' picture of two festively dressed young girls, the steady gaze of the girl in white, the nervous gaze of the girl in red, the wall riddled with bullet holes – an almost surreal moment amidst the gunfire and explosions. It also shows in his pictures of underground playgrounds. According to UNICEF, more than half a million children currently live in besieged cities in Syria.

## **The jury also awarded honorable mentions to seven other photo series**

- Yahya Arhab, Yemen (epa, european pressphoto agency): Those who can't forget (Yemen)
- Laura Boushnak, France (Rawiya Collective): Mohammed loves to swim (Lebanon)
- Mauricio Lima, Brazil (for the New York Times): Just wanting to arrive! (Europe)
- Kirsty Mackay, UK (Institute): What's so bad about pink? (UK)
- Alex Masi, Italy (Freelance Photographer): Warriors in the making (Ukraine)
- Jordi Pizarro, Spain (Freelance Photographer): Good things come together (India)

- Benedikt Ziegler, Germany (MA Photography, University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Dortmund): When an “old person’s disease” torments children (Germany)

**Since its foundation 70 years ago, on 11 December 1946, photographers have accompanied UNICEF’s work and called attention to the situation of children with photo series and pictures. The international contest “UNICEF Photo of the Year” was initiated in 2000 by UNICEF Germany. Since then, the organization has honored pictures and photo series of photojournalists each year that document the personalities and circumstances of children in an outstanding way.**

For detailed information on the photo series and the competition “UNICEF Photo of the Year”, please go to [www.unicef.de/foto](http://www.unicef.de/foto) or find a complete press kit [here](#).

We can provide you with the winning photos on request (only one photo per series!). Free printout of the photos is only allowed within news coverage about “UNICEF Photo of the year 2016” and with copyright information of the photographers and their agency.

If you have any questions, please contact the UNICEF press office:

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