

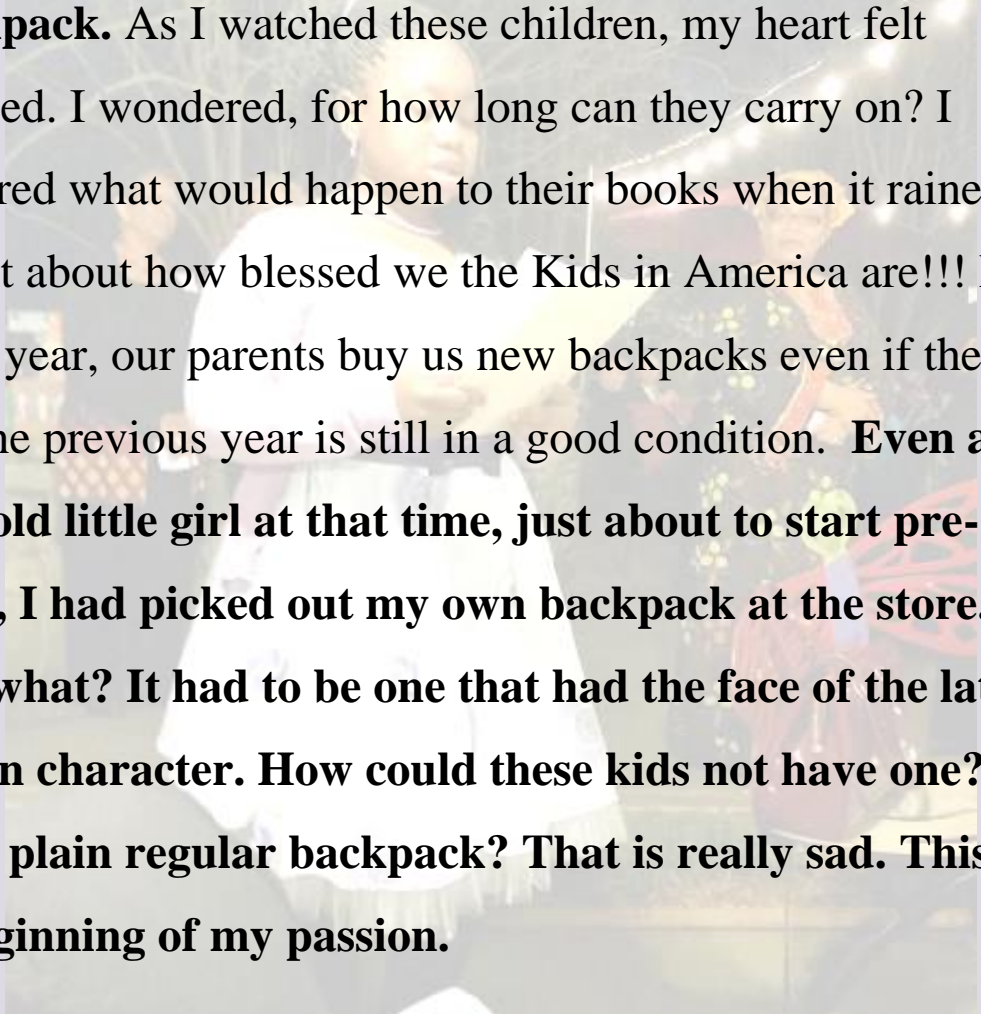
Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Mongai Fankam, and I am 11 years old. I am a student at Carolina International School.

Thank you all for being here today, and thank you to my special guest of honor Mrs. Leyma Gbowee, for making time for me, and most especially, for taking time, to ensure that many of my friends in sad situations, would not have to carry their school supplies in their hands or grocery bags. It makes me feel special to have all of you here. It reminds me that the work I have done in providing backpacks, filled with school supplies has caught the attention of important people. I mean you here present of course!!! **(Smile)**.

As some of you know, and others are about to find out, I am dedicating most of my time in helping underprivileged kids so they can go to school with hope and dignity.

My desire to help others started at the age of 3 years old. I had traveled to Cameroon in Africa with mom, when I noticed lots of young kids, walking to school, carrying their books in their hands and in plastic bags. It did not make



sense at all. I wondered if this was the style or latest fashion statement in Africa. Finally I asked my mom how come...? I was saddened when she told me that these kids carried their books in plastic bags, because their parents could not afford a backpack. As I watched these children, my heart felt saddened. I wondered, for how long can they carry on? I wondered what would happen to their books when it rained. I thought about how blessed we the Kids in America are!!! Every school year, our parents buy us new backpacks even if the one from the previous year is still in a good condition. Even as a 3 years old little girl at that time, just about to start pre-school, I had picked out my own backpack at the store. And guess what? It had to be one that had the face of the latest cartoon character. How could these kids not have one? Not even a plain regular backpack? That is really sad. This was the beginning of my passion.

Every time, I left Cameroon, I prayed and hoped that things would change for these children. I hoped that when next I went back, I would see children walking to school with their books in their backpacks. But when I came back, it was exactly the same

way as I had left it. When will this change? I asked myself over and over. Is there any hope for them?

What is hope? Today I will give you two meanings to the word HOPE.

The dictionary defines HOPE as a feeling of expectation and the desire for a certain thing to happen. As a child growing up in America we look into the future with Hope. Every day in school, our teachers educate us in many ways to prepare us for the world in which we will live. They give us the driving force that allows us to go from the difficulties of today to the promises of tomorrow. They are preparing us to move on and to strive to be the best we can. And with that we have Hope. I wondered, how can a child in a 3rd world country like Cameroon look into the future with hope, when something as common as a backpack, which we take for granted here, is difficult for them to have.

I define Hope as, “Helping Other People Exist.” When we see the word HOPE as helping other people to exist, then we realize that what is important in life, is making the world a better place for other people to exist.

Then I had a dream, and thank God, I have had the support of awesome and cool people!!! This dream has allowed me to give

hope and help other children exist and even live. This dream is now named the “No Backpack Day” Project. No backpack day is a day that students in the US go to school without their backpacks, carrying their books and school supplies in their hands or in plastic bags so as to raise awareness for kids around the world, who do not have backpacks. In return they donate backpacks and school supplies to children in need around the world. Since this movement started 3 years ago, 30 schools in Charlotte NC, Wilmington NC and Augusta Ga have participated and have donated more than 5000 backpacks, filled with school supplies to less fortunate children in Cameroon, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

We cannot forget to mention our local children, right here in the Charlotte metro area. I truly thought that the lack of backpacks and school supplies, was strictly an African problem. Then last school year, I was blessed to be a volunteer, who performed a very special duty in school. Every Friday I packed lunch, for local kids, right here in my own community whose parents could not afford a meal for them on the weekends. It then occurred to me, if these children, right here in Charlotte, need lunch, because their

parents cannot afford a decent meal, they must need backpacks and school supplies as well. Immediately, I decided that each time we collect donations, we will help the local kids. I will make sure that as we are helping the kids in Africa, we bring our local community along as well. I cannot forget the 1st grader down the street, or the 6th grader in the city, who needs the hope to strive forward, and not lose their dream of a bright future. I know that these backpacks will become a symbol of hope to all these kids far and near. And with this Hope, they will be encouraged to study hard knowing that they can become what they dream to be.

My goal for this academic year, is to rally a strong force that will donate at least ten thousand backpacks. These backpacks will be distributed to kids in Cameroon, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, south Africa and locally here is Charlotte NC. It is my wish that this project will spread to as many schools throughout the US, so that no child goes to school without a backpack. **This week 12 schools in Charlotte participated in the No BackPack day movement. We will be having another No BackPack Day week, the week of April 13th through the 17th**

which is National Volunteer week. This will include schools in Greenville SC and the state of Delaware as well.

The last 3 years have been filled with hope and much has been accomplished. We have been able to provide backpacks filled with school supplies to many school aged children in Africa. This includes thousands of children in the Ndop rural area, in the North West region of Cameroon. We also did the same for all of the 75 students who currently are attending the Annie Doe Memorial school in Liberia. We have also reached out to the Annie Walsh Memorial School in Sierra Leone.

People often ask me, ‘What are you going to be when you grow up?’ I don’t think that is the right question to ask. The question should be, ‘What are you going to do to help make the world a better place when you grow up, so that other people can exist?’ In the next 20 years or so, I know that major changes will take place in the world in which we live. Whether good or bad, I don’t know. It is going to be in our hands, the youths of today, to make decisions that will be for the good of mankind. I know that the hope and education that our parents and teachers give us today, will be the very solution for the problems that our world

will face. We will have to take what we are learning now, and apply it to improve and make the world a better place.

This brings me to the reason we are here today. It is for the less privileged children, my age and even younger.

Will we continue to stand back and watch, while they lack the very basics? I plead with all of you here today, to please become an ambassador in your corner, for this outstanding work. Each time I feel tired, lack supplies for the needy children, or think I cannot do it, I see in my minds eyes, those sad faces in Cameroon that lit up, shouted for joy, and hugged me tight, all because they were offered a backpack, filled with supplies. How I can I take this joy away from them? I cannot afford to. And so I need your assistance. With your help, we can keep these special children happy, filled with hope, cause them to exist, and even live. We can each change the world, with genuine acts of kindness. And because we all have a heart and a passion for the less privileged,

I dream of a day, when another child of African descent will stand on this very spot and tell of a different story about Africa. An Africa that blossoms and shines. I dream of a day where another child of African descent will be standing on this spot not

asking for support for the children in Africa, but rather, with pride, talking about ways they can use their talents and resources to help make the world a better place so that other people can exist. We are all paving the way for this awesome day, and believe me, it will come soon!!!!

It is my hope this evening that you will gain from my words and my example a renewed sense of compassion and generosity. It is our responsibility to support those in needs. It is for them that I make this ongoing request. Please, support me, support these children. For your contributions really have the power to lift kids out of poverty and to fill their lives with the promises of a better tomorrow. They are future world changers in different parts of the world and all they are asking is for someone to help them to exist so that they can fulfill their dreams.

Thank you all so much for being here, for listening, for giving, and for keeping hope alive. Together, we can turn the No Backpack Day Movement, into a global phenomenon, and change lives and Help Other People to exist. Because Hope really stands for Helping Other People to exist.

Thank you, thank you, and thank you very much

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