'What peace means to me' — by the children of Bougainville

The island of Bougainville is emerging from a long and bitter civil war. Many children have barely known what it means to live in a peaceful community. AusAID officer Boni Maywald, working as a peace monitor in Bougainville, collected these prose poems from children at Buin Community School, Bougainville.

ABOVE The children of Bougainville are experiencing peace for the first time in their lives — Judith Kuhin, Nopan village. Photo: Anne Rigby

BELOW RIGHT Chris Nawa (centre) looks on as his daughter Alexia is presented with her winner's certificate and ball by AusAID's Boni Maywald.

Nius Bilong Peace is a regular news sheet produced by the Peace Monitoring Group in Bougainville. The 29 September 2000 issue advertised a writing competition for the children of Bougainville. The theme they asked children to write about was, 'What peace means to me'.

Children were encouraged to write a poem, a song or a story, in English or Tok Pisin.

The children of Buin Community School (which caters for primary school children) responded. Their efforts were compiled by Boni Maywald into a booklet which was then presented back to the school as a measure of appreciation and admiration for the children's work.

On the following pages, along with photographs of children from Buka by Anne Rigby, a selection of their words is reprinted.

Oh Peace: the people of Bougainville need you. The people of Bougainville want fear to go and peace to remain. But will you become real in our hearts? People talk about peace, but people don't know what peace is. That's why people drink and fight, and hate one another. Peace please, speak, talk, to us. Tell us who you are. Oh, if people could only understand what peace is, Bougainville will be another Paradise. Oh Peace you will stay forever.

You came and broke the darkness. Now the people of Bougainville live in one family. Oh peace, you lead us in the way to go. Oh Peace you are the only way to go.
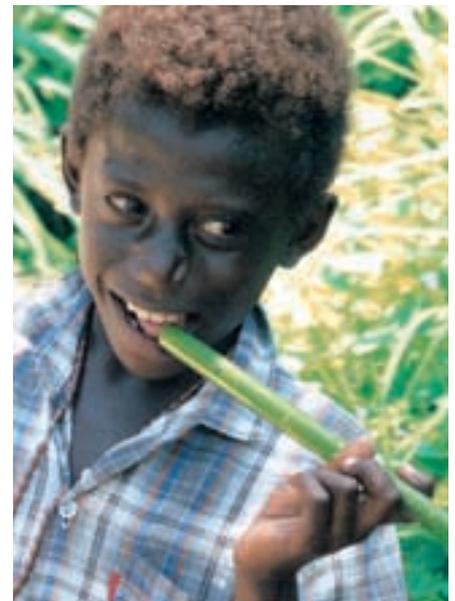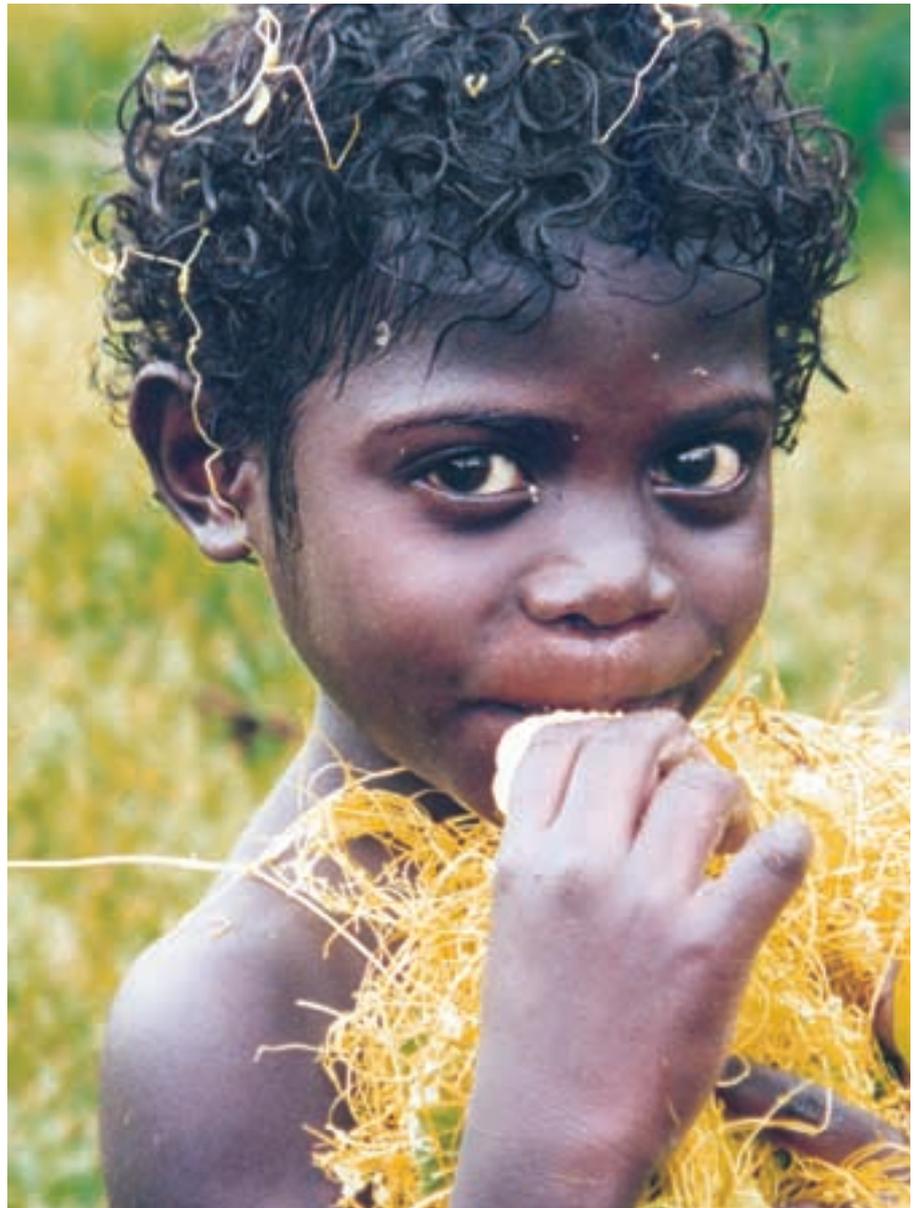
Roselyne Itanu, age 13

A river flows down its course washing always all kinds of rubbish as the white sands smile up into the sky enjoying the coolness of the water flowing over them. They enjoy the peaceful harmony below the water. As it brushes, then white as snow. Peace is like a river. To love is peace.

To forgive is peace. To smile is peace. It comes from the heart. When we love someone as we love ourselves we live in peace. We love and make friends with our enemies — we live in peace.

The peace flows over us and makes us look beautiful to one another and we live in harmony like the sands below the water.

Severina Paru, age 15

I see people of different coloured skin, white, brown and black, live together. I see them work, play and eat together. And I know there is peace. I see people walk here and there. I see them greet each other with smiles and handshakes. And I know there is peace. I see people go to work.

Doctors, teachers and other public servants. I see them work side by side and I know there is peace. I see vehicles travel far and near.

I see them loaded with goods that I see sold in shops.

And I know there is peace.

Richard Patara, Age 10

Oh! My island Bougainville you make me very proud of this time that we are living in Peace. Because of you we are able to clean our homes and see other places. Because of you we are able to buy some new things in other places and in the store. Because of you we are able to talk to our friends. When there's no peace we can't see our friends and we can't see other places.

Oh! My island Bougainville you bring happiness to our mothers who have lost their children. They cried for a long time and tears ran out of their eyes.

Oh! My island Bougainville today you look like a hibiscus flower when sun shone at last. What a lovely island you are.

Adelbertha Luen, Age 14