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For Immediate Release

New Zealand Student Robert Hunt Wins Lions International Peace Essay Contest with Inspiring Perspective on Acceptance

(Oak Brook, Ill.) – Robert Hunt, an 11-year-old from Lower Hutt, New Zealand, has a natural understanding of what peace really means. He put his thoughts into words in his award-winning essay, *Beauty is in the Judgement of the Beholder*, sharing his unique perspective with the world. The essay explores the concept of peace and the role of perception in judging others. Hunt, who was born with severe low vision, reflects on how most people rely on sight to form judgments about others based on appearance, influenced by society. However, the young author’s visual impairment allows him to value people based on their words and actions rather than their physical characteristics and encourages others to do so in order to achieve a more peaceful world.

“The Lions International Peace Essay Contest exemplifies our commitment to inclusivity by giving visually impaired youth a platform to express their unique perspectives on peace,” said Lions International President Fabrício Oliveira. “This powerful winning essay reminds us that true understanding comes not from what we see, but from how we listen and treat others. Robert Hunt’s words challenge us all to look beyond differences and make our mark on the world, together.”

Created to give young people with visual impairments an opportunity to express their feelings about peace, the Lions International Peace Essay Contest is a staple of Lions clubs around the world. Lions work with local schools and area families to identify young people interested in participating and who could benefit from this program.

“More now than ever, I have thought about peace and how the world would be a better place if we were more tolerant of each other,” said Hunt.

The winning essay was selected for its originality, organization, merit and portrayal of the contest theme, "Peace Without Limits.”

The Lions Club of Lower Hutt sponsored the local contest that gave this talented 7th grader the opportunity to participate in this global event and share his words of peace with the world. Through his essay, Hunt argues that true peace can only be achieved when people stop judging others based on appearances and instead focus on their inherent dignity and worth. The essay suggests that if people metaphorically "closed their eyes" when meeting others, they could foster deeper understanding and ultimately contribute to a more peaceful world.

“We are all different, and it is important to listen and understand people before we judge them,” added the 11-year-old. “The Lions International Peace Essay Contest can bring new ideas to people and world leaders.”

In his free time, Hunt enjoys cross country running, swimming, playing the guitar and piano, attending church and hopes to become an astrophysicist when he grows up. As the contest winner, Hunt will receive a US\$5,000 cash prize, an award and an invitation to attend a major Lions International event as a VIP. Visit lionsclubs.org/peace-essay, to read Hunt’s essay and learn more about the contest.

About Lions International

Lions International represents Lions Clubs International and Lions Clubs International Foundation. Lions take on some of the greatest challenges facing our communities and the world through the service of 1.4 million members in 49,000 clubs and the grant-funding support of our foundation. We improve health and well-being, strengthen communities and support those in need, locally and globally. At Lions International we are serving a world in need. Lions International created the Peace Essay Contest to foster a spirit of peace and international understanding in young people worldwide.

2024-2025 Lions International Peace Essay Grand Prize Winner
Robert Hunt, Age 11
“Beauty is in the judgement of the beholder”

Many people in this world long for peace for themselves and for others. Sometimes it feels like there will never be peace. Whether that is peace between people within a country or between countries the presence of disharmony is not beautiful.

Shakespeare stated that "beauty is in the judgement of the beholder" and many people use the phrase, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder". What this means, is that the person who is seeing is judging something's worth by their vision. Scientists believe that between 75% and 90% of what we learn is from our vision. This means that we are taught to value things by how we see our family and friends, our teachers, social media and news, and government treating others. Our judgement is clouded by what we have been taught to see and value.

I was born with severe low vision. This means when I meet people, I do not know what they look like. I cannot see and cannot judge them by my eyes' perception. I do not know if they are old, if they have fair or dark skin. I do not know if they are big, or tall, nor their hair colour. I do not know if they wear clothes that demonstrate spiritual beliefs, nor necessarily, if they are male or female. I do not know if they are missing any limbs, or in a wheelchair or blind like me. I do not know if they are different or the same as me. Instead, I have learned to value people by listening to them and considering their actions to me and others.

I have never thought being blind was either an advantage or a disadvantage. But I do think, that not being able to judge someone's worth in a blink of an eye is a great advantage. To me, not seeing, is just natural and I hadn't really understood that others don't live in a non-seeing world like I do, until I was nearly 8 or 9 years of age. Of course, I knew they weren't blind like me. But it surprised me, that people were seeing and deciding how alike or different people were to themselves with their vision. Possibly what I am describing seems odd to you. However, it would probably feel odd to you to not use your eyes.

If we believe that everybody is equal in dignity and rights this means we need to learn to stop judging or being afraid of other people, because they look different to us, or we see them as not of the same value. Only when we respect and do not judge people by differences, will there be peace. I strongly believe if we could all close our eyes when we meet people, even if this was figuratively, there might be a chance we could get to know people before we judged them. Then we might just achieve peace without limits.