

## YMCA of Greater Montreal 2007 Honorary Peace Medal Recipients



**Alusine Bah** was 14 years old when his town was attacked by the R.U.F (Revolutionary United Front) rebels. He fled into the forest and it wasn't long before he was found by the Sierra Leone Army and forced to become one of their many child soldiers. Alusine was a child soldier in the Army for two years before he was rescued by the Catholic Church's "Children Affected by War" program (C.A.W). He was sent to a rehabilitation centre to begin the long and difficult recovery and normalization of his life.

In November, 1996, Alusine was chosen to come to New York to speak at the United Nations about how children's rights are being violated in war-affected countries and the impact of war on children. While there he met Bob Wright, a Montrealer who later sponsored him to come to Canada.

In 2003 Alusine started a new life in Montreal. Since then he has returned to school after an eight-year interruption. Alusine also helps "Youth in Action", a Montreal chapter of "Free the Children". He wants to raise awareness of Canadian youth to the history and reality of his country, and to the plight of children and youth affected by war everywhere.



**Ishmael Beah**, born in Sierra Leone, was 12 when the civil war came to his village and changed his life forever. After several months of trying to escape the Rebel army, he arrived in a village occupied by the Sierra Leone Military Forces. This meeting, which at first seemed like a sanctuary from the threat of the Rebels, soon became the beginning of a living hell for this young boy. Ishmael was forced to become one of the many child soldiers used by both sides to fight the war. After two years, rescue came in the form of UNICEF and a demilitarization program to rehabilitate child soldiers.

In 1996 he was chosen to represent the youth of Sierra Leone at a "Young Voices" conference at the United Nations. It was here that he met Laura Simms, a facilitator at the conference, who decided to adopt this young man and became his American mother.

Since moving to the United States, Ishmael has completed his studies and a memoir of his life, "A Long Way Gone; Memoirs of a Boy Soldier". By telling his story with such honesty he has given a voice to the many voiceless children who are used as tools of war all over the world.