

We are here because on 11 November 1918 the armistice agreement, ending hostilities on the Western Front of World War I, was signed between the Allies and Germany at Compiègne, France, at 5:45am.

It was to take effect at 11:00am—the "eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month" 1918, although it was reported that shelling from both sides continued for the rest of the day, ending only at nightfall.

The armistice was initially for a period of just 36 days and had to be extended several times. Conditions were put in place, such as the payment of reparations. It took a further six months of negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference before the Treaty of Versailles was signed the following year, 1919.

Meanwhile, the British Government continued an economic blockade of Germany and Austria in efforts to put pressure towards the signing the Treaty. The blockade had a devastating effect of civilian populations of Germany and Austria. People went hungry, children starved.

In the spring of 1919, after the Armistice but before the Treaty of Versailles, a British social campaigner, believing the British public were unaware of the suffering of children in Europe, was arrested for handing out leaflets in London's Trafalgar Square and for writing chalk slogans on the pavement, 'Fight the Famine' and 'End the Blockade'.

The leaflets, showing photographs of emaciated and malnourished children, had not been cleared by British government censors and the campaigner was arrested under the Defence of the Realm Act.

She was charged and taken to court where she conducted her own defence. The Crown Prosecutor, Sir Archibald Bodkin, found her guilty and imposed a fine of £5 for illegal leaflets. Once the court session had officially closed, but before the court had been cleared, the prosecutor pressed a £5 note into her hands. She had won the moral argument.

The campaigner's name was Eglantyne Jebb. With her brother-in-law, Member of Parliament Charles Roden Buxton, she had carried out

relief work in Macedonia after the Second Balkan War in 1913. She could never forget the price of war, especially the suffering of children.

That £5 became the founding donation to the charitable enterprise that would go on to become the 'Save the Children Fund', co-founded Jebb and her sister, Dorothy Buxton.

Jebb's arrest and trial drew public attention. It was covered by The Daily Herald, The Times, The Mail, The Mirror and The Guardian.

To capitalise on the publicity, the sisters decided to hold a public rally to seek support for the cause. Being ambitious women, they booked the biggest venue they could find: the Royal Albert Hall. Most of us know it. Yesterday's Remembrance Service was from there. Reports say there were not enough seats.

But to their dismay, the sisters soon realized many in the audience had come not listen, but to throw rotten tomatoes and fruit at the sisters who they saw as traitors for helping their former enemies.

Jebb's biographer, Clare Mulley, writes, 'At first Eglantyne nervously mumbled her words, but her voice rose with her passion, until she called out; 'Surely it is impossible for us, as normal human beings, to watch children starve to death without making an effort to save them'.

The crowd was shocked into silence, and a collection was spontaneously taken up. Several £1,000s were raised.

Within ten days Eglantyne, Dorothy and the fledgling Save the Children Fund bought a herd of dairy (milking) cows in Vienna to provide a reliable source of nutrition for the starving children.

Fast forward to 2025 ... Every year the Save the Children charity publishes its 'War On Children' report.

This year's report records that one in five children globally live in conflict zones. That's 520 million children, half a billion.

During 2024, over 41,763 grave violations against children were verified by the UN, 30% up from 2023, and just the tip of the iceberg.

The report names countries which actively sell arms to those who violate children.

Earlier this year the United Nations Security Council was addressed by a child, who shared the reality of war in their country:

'The war must end, not only on maps, but in our streets, in our memories, and in our children's toys.

I am from a generation that survived physically, but our hearts still live in fear. Help us replace the word 'displacement' with 'return', the word 'rubble' with 'home', and the word 'war' with 'life'.

God willing, we will be the last generation to live this pain. The last generation to fall asleep to the sound of missiles and wake up to fear.'

I recently asked a class of schoolchildren, 'Do we live in a beautiful world?' They all replied together in unison, 'Yes!'.

I asked them 'Is there anything in the world that is not so beautiful?'

One child put up their hand and shouted out, 'War!'

I could see the look of recognition on the teachers' faces.

We all long for peace.

We carry deep within our hearts the hope of peace.

Like a candle flame that flickers, but can never be extinguished.

That lightens up the darkness.

We all long for the peace that ends the endless cycle of war and hostility.

That disrupts the manufacture of weapons of war.

That **'turns swords into ploughshares' ...**

That works towards sustainable development, civic trust, women's rights, education.

For peace in over 60 countries where we are still removing unexploded weapons and landmines that threaten life and limb.

For the Peace that makes new friends, builds new bridges and dreams new dreams.

Peace is made whenever we shake hands together, work together, laugh together, bury the hatchet together and let bygones be bygones. We are better together. Peace is our birthright as human beings. I hope this year you will join the Mayor of Hertsmere's inaugural Peace Walk on November 13th.....

Eglantyne Jebb went on to write the first charter of human rights, the 'Children's Charter', adopted by the League of Nations in 1924. Every year on December 17th, the anniversary of her death, she is commemorated by the Church of England. Last year the City of Geneva, Switzerland, where Jebb had spent the last 10 years of her life, conferred a posthumous honour on her by moving her remains from the Municipal Cemetery to the honoured Cimetière des Rois.

Remembering is a solemn duty and a collective resolve.
Every year we explain to our children why we remember.

Not so we can go back into the past but so we can let the past journey towards us. Educate us, persuade us, ignite our hope for a better future.

Hear again the prophecy of Isaiah,

4They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Hear again the promise of Psalm 46.

'Come, behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.'

Hear again the blessing of Jesus:

9"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

<https://www.savethechildren.net/research-reports>
<https://www.europe.anglican.org/news/latest-news/swiss-honour-british-campaigner-childrens-rights>
<https://archives.lse.ac.uk/records/7EJB>
<https://www.christiantoday.com/news/her-passion-for-justice-burned-like-white-heat-who-was-eglantyne-jebb>
<https://claremulley.com/2014/05/23/eglantyne-jebb-the-woman-who-saved-the-children/>
<https://history-hub.chalkefestival.com/history-hub/the-woman-who-saved-the-children/>
<https://www.ellesmeresculpture.co.uk/the-ellesmere-sculpture-trail/1-the-jebb-garden>



The Sisters

Back to back
 In the face of attack
 We take the blows
 The stones you throw
 The insults to our face
 Still standing strong
 Speaking for those
 Who conflict has misplaced
 Side by side
 We don't stand alone
 For the children who've died
 Or still don't have a home
 Though we may bruise
 And we may bleed
 We choose
 The hungry mouths to feed
 We need no weapons
 To serve as soldiers
 Only words to reflect on
 Both shoulder to shoulder
 We may seem small
 And the risks are grave
 Through them all
 We stand tall
 There are children to save.

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Above is a poem written by Tim Johnson, in light of the humanitarian crisis of the Ukraine invasion.