

ISHMAEL BEAH
CHILD SOLDIER FROM SIERRA LEONE / AUTHOR

Ishmael Beah was born in Sierra Leone on November 23, 1980. When he was eleven, Beah's life, along with the lives of millions of other Sierra Leoneans, was derailed by the outbreak of a brutal civil war. After his parents and two brothers were killed, Beah was recruited to fight as a child soldier. He was thirteen. He fought for over two years before he was removed from the army by UNICEF and placed in a rehabilitation home in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. After completing rehabilitation in late 1996, Beah won a competition to attend a conference at the United Nations to talk about the devastating effects of war on children in his country. It was there that he met his new mother, Laura Simms, a professional storyteller who lives in New York. Beah returned to Sierra Leone and continued speaking about his experiences to help bring international attention to the issue of child soldiering and war affected children.

In 1998, Beah came to live with his American family in New York City. He completed high school at the United Nations International School, and subsequently went on to Oberlin College in Ohio. Throughout his high school and undergraduate education, Beah continued his advocacy work to bring attention to the plight of child soldiers and children affected by war around the world, speaking on numerous occasions on behalf of Unicef, Human Rights Watch, United Nations Secretary General's Office for Children and Armed Conflict, at the United Nations General Assembly, serving on a UN panel with Secretary General Kofi Annan and discussing the issue with dignitaries such as Nelson Mandela and Bill Clinton. He is a member of the Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Division Committee.

In *A Long Way Gone*, Beah, now twenty-six years old, tells a riveting story. At the age of twelve, he fled attacking rebels and wandered a land rendered unrecognizable by violence. By thirteen, he'd been picked up by the government army, and Beah, at heart a gentle boy, found that he was capable of truly terrible acts. Eventually released by the army and sent to a UNICEF rehabilitation center, he struggled to regain his humanity and to reenter the world of civilians, who viewed him with fear and suspicion. This is, at last, a story of redemption and hope. Said *Newsweek*: "Perhaps all that need be said about Beah's skill as a storyteller is that while we know how he made it out—the book in our hands is proof of that—we are glued to every page by the very real possibility that this story is not going to end happily...Read his memoir and you will be haunted...It's a high price to pay, but it's worth it."