

BIOGRAPHY

FOREST WHITAKER

Forest Whitaker believes that, in order to attain peace and prosperity, communities and nations must heed the voices of their diverse and vibrant youth. He is the founder and CEO of the Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative (WPDI). Through WPDI, he has developed the Youth Peacemaker Network, a global peacebuilding social network with hubs in South Sudan, South Africa, Uganda, United States and Mexico. He and WPDI are committed to providing educational tools and economic opportunities to young women and men in regions touched by violence and armed conflict.

Whitaker is also co-founder and chair of the International Institute for Peace, UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation, and a member of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Advocacy Group. Whitaker is dedicated to cultivating youths' artistic talents. As a member of President Obama's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, he worked closely with elementary school students to demonstrate the limitless power of the arts to express their voices and creative energies.

In addition to his social activism, Whitaker is one of Hollywood's most accomplished and versatile figures. Through his production company, Significant Productions, he aims to support young, talented filmmakers. He believes that film can enlighten people across the globe and can start meaningful dialogues about important subjects. He has produced several award-winning documentaries that touch on a wide range of social issues. He has also received many distinctions for his acting, including the 2007 Academy Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in *The Last King of Scotland*, a performance for which he also received a BAFTA Award, SAG Award, and Golden Globe. In addition, Whitaker received the Best Actor Award for *Bird* at the 1988 Cannes Film Festival.

Forest Whitaker's artistic and humanitarian contributions have been widely recognized at home and abroad. In 2007, he received the Cinema for Peace Award for his ongoing advocacy for child soldiers and his work with inner-city youth. He was awarded the Humanitas Prize in 2001. In 2008, he was appointed at President Obama's Urban Policy Committee. In 2013, Boston University's Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center appointed him a Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellow. That same year, he was made a Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government in recognition of his work serving those affected by conflicts and violence. Over the past few years, he has also received awards honoring his humanitarian work from the Los Angeles Press Club, the Broadcast Film Critics Association, the NAACP, Refugees International, the MLK Health Foundation, the World Childhood Foundation, the Southern California Mediation Association and more. In recognition of his role as artist and activist, he has been honored with the Crystal Award at the 2017 edition of the Davos World Economic Forum and was among the recipients of the 2019

Kennedy Center Award for the Human Spirit. In 2018, the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London awarded him an Honorary Fellowship.

Forest Whitaker's commitment to peace and social justice has led him to work ever more closely with the United Nations and its various constituents. He has addressed such bodies as the Security Council, in 2014, and the Human Rights Council, in 2019. In 2011, he started an association with UNESCO as Goodwill Ambassador for Peace and Reconciliation, which was strengthened three years later, when he was appointed as UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation. In this role, he works toward global peace and community building through non-violence education, research, and training. In 2012, in recognition of his contributions to the values embodied by the UN, he received the United Nations Correspondents Association's Advocate of the Year Award. In 2014, he started collaborating with the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict as an Advocate for Children Affected by War. In 2019, this office invited him to sit at the steering committee of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers. In 2016, he was appointed to the Sustainable Development Goals Advocacy Group by the UN Secretary-General who renewed his membership in this group in 2019.

Above all, Whitaker believes that ordinary people can and must come together to change the world. In his own words, "Even a seemingly small action can cause ripples that make an enormous impact."