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JAMES AND OTHER APES

A Benetton communication campaign, a book, an exhibition by the Natural History Museum of London in 2005

UNITED COLORS
OF BENETTON.

London, 7th October 2004. Arron, 11 months, male, was born in Cameroon; Fizi, two years, female, is from Congo. Bonny, a five year-old male, is Indonesian; Shanga, a two year-old female, was born in captivity in Germany. With Pumbu, Tatango, Jackson, James and dozens of other orphans, they share similar experiences of violence and pain. But the eyes of each of them tell a personal story of suffering and express a unique identity. They are the primates -gorillas, chimpanzees, orangutans and bonobos- who feature in United Colors of Benetton's new communication project, by James Mollison for Fabrica. A very close "face to face" with the living beings who share our planet and over 96 percent of our DNA.

James Mollison has taken close-up pictures of the orphans, who were confiscated from illegal traders and form the population of at least seven sanctuaries in Africa and Asia. Many of them saw their mother killed before their eyes. Together, and each captioned with his or her name and biography, they testify to the importance of saving the various species of great apes, because even if just one should become extinct, we would lose a significant part of the "bridge" leading back to the origins of humankind.

"If we don't do anything to save them, in ten to 15 years the great apes could disappear from the majority of the areas where they now live", says Jane Goodall, renowned primatologist, conservationist and United Nations Messenger of Peace, who has given her support to Benetton's communication campaign. "There were about two million chimps in Africa one hundred years ago, now there are little more than 150,000. They are dying out as a result of the expanding human population, deforestation, the destruction of their habitat, hunting and traps. The situation of mountain gorillas and orang-utans is even worse. The number of wild apes is falling while the number of orphans in sanctuaries is rising."

With this initiative Benetton has chosen to extend its reflection on diversity as a wealth of our planet, from the human races to our nearest cousins. With anthropological rigor, the portraits by James Mollison invite us to reflect on the fundamental issues of humankind, mirrored in the enigmatic gaze of the species closest to us in the evolutionary chain.

The entire project is being presented today at the Natural History Museum with the participation of Jane Goodall. Together with the campaign, which will be seen on billboards in major cities around the world from 15th October 2004, the book "James and Other Apes" will be published by the British publisher Boot. An exhibition featuring James Mollison's photographs will be presented by the Natural History Museum from May to September 2005.

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