**International Letter-Writing Competition for Young People –** North Macedonia

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**Age**: 11 years

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GOOD DAY, KIND SIR!

I am just a normal, 11-year-old girl. I delight in the small things, yet there are a fair few other things that make me sad. I find joy in seeing my friends, in eating ice cream in summer, skiing in winter, riding my bike in spring, and... going to school in autumn?! I did not know that *going to school in autumn* made me happy. I realized it recently, ten days or so ago. Something very strange happened: our school closed its doors. And not only here, other schools shut too, all over the world! They told us of the deadly virus. We, the children, have stayed shut away at home. No going outside. No playing with our friends, no enjoying spring and its flowers. Now, we see the world around us only through our windows. Our noses pressed up against the panes, we spot, with sadness, the blossoming trees and follow the swooping birds. The noise of children playing no longer fills the streets. Ah! How wrong we were, kind sir, thinking that we knew the world we were growing up in. As if this world would never change. And yet, it has changed... in one day, one moment. So, what are we to do?

I dream of fields swathed with flowers of every colour where we run until our legs can no longer hold us, spinning round and round, dancing with the breeze, smiling and singing, with the echo of our songs resounding far away, far far away... Then, kind sir, I think of white-flanked mountains, blanketed in snow which we play in, snowflakes melting in our hands. The cold reddens our cheeks but nothing more than that. It cannot stop us from doing what is most important to us – playing and being happy. And oh, how we are happy! I also imagine the crystal clear water of lakes and seas, the waves and rays of sunshine. And us, the children, building magnificent sandcastles. And oh, how we are happy!

My dream, kind sir, has it come true? Or is it my childish thoughts tricking me, as I cannot go outside? Yet now, as I find myself confined to these four walls, I also recall another world, a different world... an altogether uglier world. It is a world of widespread pollution of rivers, lakes, seas and oceans, where tonnes of multi-coloured plastic waste float on the waters’ surface. And of the aquatic world underneath fighting against this plastic waste, trying to find its place and escape the fishing nets. I remember the crumbling mountains, their trees felled and slopes stripped and burnt. I also recall the darkened, polluted winter air, forbidding me from breathing deeply. I remember the yellow mask on my face, its cheerful teddy bears saddened as they failed to purify the air. And the black plumes above the towering chimneys of the nearby power station, billowing upwards, like a cruel threat of what was to come. I also recall the mountains of rubbish built by man’s irresponsibility, and the starving dogs scouring the piles for scraps of food.

I remember many things, unfortunately, both good and bad.

Kind sir, is the world I imagine not better? I do not want to remember the bad. Can my dream become reality? I do not want the world around us to stay as it was when we left it ten days ago! We, the children, love the multi-coloured fields, clear streams, green mountains and soaring birds. We love the blue lakes and choppy seas, we love living in a healthy world. A world coloured by rainbows, where infinitely different voices blend in perfect harmony as we sing together: waters, birds, insects, wind, rain, animals and people.

With all my best wishes, kind sir,

Your normal, 11-year-old girl