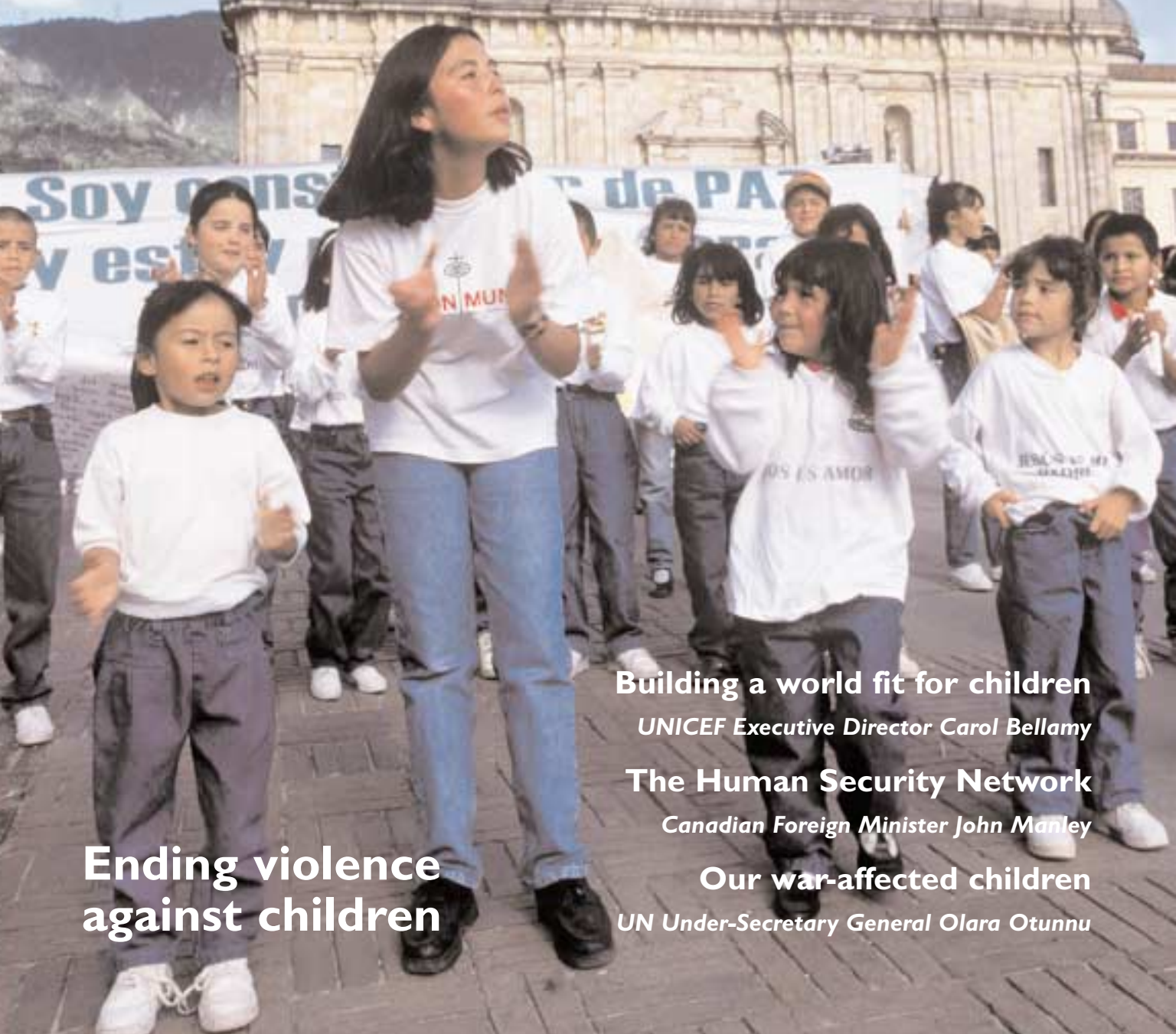


Global Future



**Ending violence
against children**

Building a world fit for children

UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy

The Human Security Network

Canadian Foreign Minister John Manley

Our war-affected children

UN Under-Secretary General Olara Otunnu

Global Future

Third Quarter, 2001

Ending violence against children

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Publisher **Dean R. Hirsch**
Editor **Randy Miller**

Contributing correspondents: Kelly Currah, Melanie Gow, Brett Parris, Matt Scott, Don Brandt, Heather MacLeod, Joe Muwonge, Alan Whaites.

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COVER PHOTO BY JON WARREN: COLOMBIA'S CHILDREN TAKE TO THE STREETS IN A DEMONSTRATION FOR PEACE.

Correspondence should be addressed to:

Global Future
World Vision
800 W. Chestnut Ave.
Monrovia, California 91016-3198
USA
Telephone (1) 626-303-8811
FAX (1) 626-301-7786
e-mail: global_future@wvi.org

OR:

World Vision
6 Chemin de la Tourelle
1209 Geneva, Switzerland
ISSN 0742-1524

For the children

WHEN CONSIDERING the issue of violence against children, images that come to mind tend to centre around conflict: orphans wandering decimated down-towns, destitute waifs in refugee camps, child soldiers recruited into rebel armies. However, most violence against children takes place where children should feel safest: in their homes.

This issue of *Global Future* takes a look at a number of circumstances in which today's children face a range of threats and attacks, from child labour to slavery and trafficking; from imprisonment in adult institutions to torture and abuse; and from attacks in the home to attacks on the world's battlefields.

Authorities on—and advocates for—today's children, such as UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy and UN Under-Secretary General Olara Otunnu, talk in this edition of *Global Future* about the status of today's children, especially those in the developing world. But, in addition to discussing the dire conditions in which children find themselves, they also talk about tools available to the world community to begin reversing those conditions. Tools such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 'Say Yes for Children' campaign, the Human Security Network, and the International Labour Organisation's Convention 182. Melanie Gow, World Vision's policy officer for child rights, talks on page 20 about a new advocacy campaign launched by World Vision to publicise and seek action on this issue.

Some of these tools are relatively new; some have been around for years, waiting for the world to sit up and take notice. And more importantly, to take action. The time to act is now. We can't afford to wait. Neither can our children. ■

— Randy Miller

Building a world fit for children

Carol Bellamy

LIKE MILLIONS of other people around the world, I believe that all children should be free to grow in health, peace and dignity. Like millions of people, thousands of organisations and scores of governments, I am committed to building a world where every child, without exception, will know such freedom. But the cause of children goes beyond the interests of children only, for it is clear that only if the international community and nations are successful in protecting all children can there be any hope of sustaining peace and security throughout the world.

We at UNICEF have a vision of what a world fit for children would look like: healthy families supported by healthy communities as they create safe and loving spaces for their children. Children growing strong, enjoying the fullness of childhood, learning and interacting in an ever-widening circle within their societies, and preparing for ever-expanding roles as agents of their destiny.

A strategy and a plan

We have a strategy. Ensure that every child has the best possible start in life. Ensure that every child completes a basic education of good quality. Ensure that every child has ample opportunities to develop their individual capacities and that all children, especially adolescents, are empowered to contribute to their societies.

And a plan. Raise the expectations within the human family that every individual, government, NGO, civil society organisation, business, regional and international agency will take the cause of children's well-being as one of their own. Move the rights of children onto every agenda. Work together across traditional boundaries, such as those of social sectors or nation

states, to transform personal commitments to do what's right for individual children into a public value to do what's right for all children.

The reality of life for millions of children who live in every region of the world conflicts with our beliefs and our vision, and challenges every step of our strategy. Despite the richness of the world's resources, nearly 600 million children live in absolute

the life-affirming importance of education, more than 100 million children are not in school, nearly 60 million of them girls.

This is the reality that must be changed, the reality that we must change.

Violence against children

Systematically and routinely, directly and indirectly, the reality of our times exposes young girls and boys in every region of the world to violence and abuse. Sometimes the violence is overt and extreme, as when children are deliberate targets of war, when they are abducted to serve in rogue armies, when they are kidnapped for the purposes of sexual



'We at UNICEF have a vision of what a world fit for children would look like: healthy families supported by healthy communities as they create safe and loving spaces for children.'

poverty in families that earn less than US\$1 a day, and one-quarter of these children are chronically malnourished. Even in the world's richest countries, about 47 million children, one in every six, live below national poverty lines. Despite the existence of vaccines and other measures that routinely protect children in the industrialised world against child-killer diseases, about 10 million children still die each year from diseases that could have been and should have been prevented. Despite a near-universal consensus on

trafficking. More than 2 million children have died due to conflict in the past decade, millions more have been maimed physically and psychologically, and more than 300,000 have lived intimately with bloodshed and death as child soldiers. Today, an estimated 30 million children are the victims of traffickers.

In May 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted two optional protocols, or amendments, to the 1989 Convention on the Rights

of the Child. One would protect children under 18 from serving in armed conflict. The other would protect children from being sold, prostituted or used in pornography. While 70 nations have already signed each of these amendments, signaling their support, the protocols have yet to be ratified by the requisite number that would make them legally binding. Together with United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, UNICEF urges that nations move swiftly to bring this protection to their children.

Less dramatically but no less harmfully, violence may be a routine part of a young child's life when they are forced by circumstances into exploitative and dangerous work settings long before their bodies are ready and long before they have completed even the most minimal schooling. Some 50 to 60 million children between 5 and 14 years old, according to estimates by the International Labour Organisation, work in what

of physical and sexual abuse that more often than not goes undetected, unreported or unpunished. In some regions of the world, girls in particular are victims of systematic female foeticide and female infanticide. In other regions, violence is subtle and quieter, and often targeted at girls, as young children are denied nutritious food, needed health care and the opportunity to go to school.

Despite the richness of the world's resources, nearly 600 million children live in absolute poverty.

Perhaps most cruel of all (if the effects of violence can be compared) is the HIV/AIDS epidemic that has robbed more than 4 million young children of life, 13 million of their parents, and millions more of care and



PHILIP JAMES

'The reality of life for millions of children conflicts with our beliefs and our vision, and challenges every step of our strategy.'

the Children, UNICEF and World Vision, came together determined to change the way the world views and treats children. Under the common banner of the Global Movement for Children, this advocacy coalition is growing rapidly as scores of other NGOs commit their support and their energies. Expanding in increasing contrast to the violence and abuse that is so much a part of so many young lives today, the Global Movement for Children is moving toward that tipping point when an idea becomes a real force for change.

In more than 90 countries of the world, the Global Movement for Children has announced itself through the 'Say Yes for Children' campaign. First launched in late April 2001, 'Say Yes for Children' has introduced a simple pledge and a list of 10 imperative actions for children into the public domain. Through national and local campaigns on the ground and via the Internet (www.gmfc.org), 'Say Yes for Children' has already enlisted millions of people in the Global Movement for

'IN TOLERATING this scourge of war against children we ourselves become complicit. Power and greed can never be an excuse for sacrificing children. No one, not the United Nations, not regional organisations, not governments, not civil society groups, has moved quickly enough or done enough. The international community, in all of its manifestations, must adopt a new sense of urgency... Children's protection

should not have to be negotiated. Those who wage, legitimise and support wars must be condemned and held to account. Children must be cherished, nurtured, and spared the pernicious effects of war. Children can't afford to wait.'

—Graça Machel, *The Machel Review, 1996-2000, a Critical Analysis of Progress Made and Obstacles Encountered in Increasing Protection for War-affected Children.*

any adult would consider intolerable conditions.

In still other circumstances, hidden from view and extraordinarily difficult to record, untold numbers of children are abused in places where they should expect to be safe: in their homes. In families throughout the world, both girls and boys are victims

protection from adults who are sick or frail. One has only to watch one person die of AIDS to realise that allowing the epidemic its deadly way is an act of violence against humanity.

A tipping point

As the 21st century began, several like-minded organisations: BRAC, Netaid.org, PLAN International, Save

Children as presidents and prime ministers, world figures and village leaders, teachers and nurses, fire-fighters and athletes, children and young people have signed the pledge: 'I believe that all children have the right to grow in health, peace and dignity.'

The Special Session on Children and beyond

The first results of the 'Say Yes for Children' campaign will be presented by Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel as leaders and spokespersons for the Global Movement for Children, during the Special Session on Children, to be held by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2001. This Session was called as a follow-up to the 1990 World Summit for Children, where government representatives made commitments and set goals and a 10-year Plan of Action for improving the lives of children. After the UN

Secretary-General reports on how the situation has changed for children, for better and, sadly, in some cases, for worse, in the 10 years since the Summit, he will lay out what needs to be done next.

By the end of this year, millions of people, including heads of states, NGOs and private sector enterprises, will have heard the message.

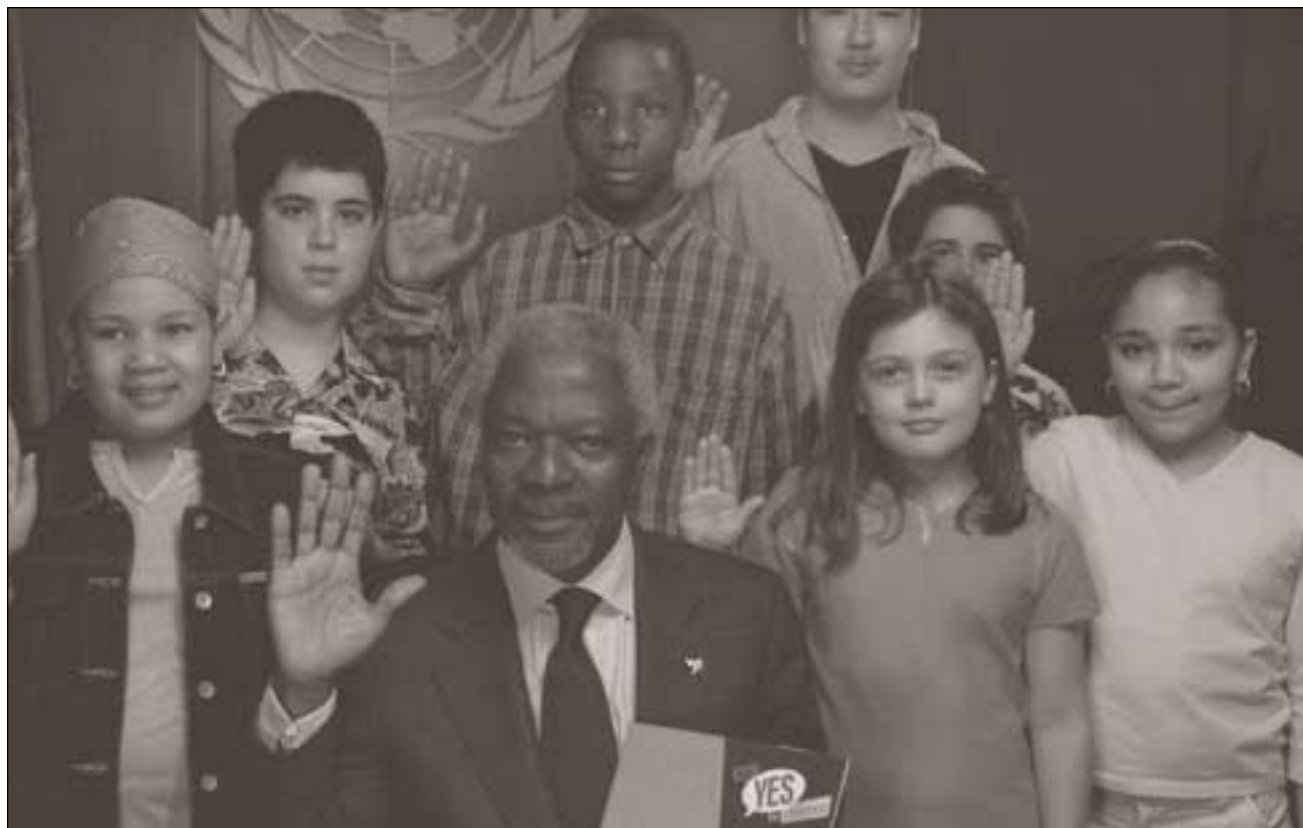
It is to this time beyond the Special Session on Children that we now need to direct our attention.

'Say Yes for Children' is about as direct a message as can be sent. Leave no child out; put children first, care for every child, fight HIV/AIDS, stop

harming and exploiting children, listen to children, educate every child, protect children from war, protect the earth for children, and fight poverty by investing in children.

And by the end of this year, millions of people, including the heads of states, government representatives, international agencies, NGOs and private sector enterprises, who will be at the Special Session on Children, will have heard the message. How we move forward will be the measure of our commitment. What we do, or don't do, to protect our children from violence and disease, to educate every child, to promote their healthy lives, will be the mark of our leadership. Whether we change the world or let it stay as is will be our legacy. ■

Carol Bellamy is director of UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund.



UNICEF/HQ01-0155/NICOLE TOUTOUNJI

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and several children pledge their support for 'Say Yes for Children' at United Nations Headquarters.

The Human Security Network helps war-affected children

The Hon. John Manley

TODAY'S CHILDREN will one day lead our societies, build our economies and raise our future generations. Children are not, however, solely agents for the future. They also have key roles in their own families and communities here and now. This reality is evident in situations of armed conflict, where children are important participants, either contributing to peace or perpetuating cycles of violence.

Regardless of the extent of their individual participation, war-affected children are forced to cope with conditions of extreme insecurity and are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Children are caught in the crossfire of modern wars and make up many of the casualties and injured. They are often recruited to serve armed forces as combatants, spies or sexual slaves. They are frequently displaced or orphaned, denied access to critical health and education services and to the very basics for survival: food, shelter and clean water.

Since the 1990 United Nations

World Summit for Children, the international community has made significant advances in recognising these challenges and in developing a framework for action. Five years ago, Mme. Graça Machel presented her study on children and armed conflict to the United Nations. Mme. Machel's groundbreaking work ultimately led to the appointment of a Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General to address this issue. What is currently most needed, in order to build on these positive advances to protect war-affected children, are practical measures to be put into action in war-ravaged regions. Such measures demand international mobilisation and co-operation in support of assisting war-affected children.

Over the last five years, Canada has helped to mobilise multilateral action. By bringing together governments, civil society and youth for the International Conference on War-Affected Children in September 2000, an international plan of action was created and endorsed by over 130

governments. Canada also co-founded, with Norway, the Human Security Network, a group of 13 countries committed to working toward international mobilisation on issues related to human security. The Human Security Network* brings together countries from northern and southern hemispheres and civil society to work in close partnership to respond to challenges such as small arms, landmines and war-affected children.

Children are not solely agents for the future. They have key roles in their own families and communities now.

What makes the Human Security Network unique is also what makes it effective. The breadth and scope of its membership allows the Network to reach across traditional divisions at the United Nations and other international fora. Consequently, the Network can act as a powerful mechanism to promote human security principles and catalyse international action. This impact is further reinforced by the outreach of each individual country within their respective regional organisations and multilateral groups. For example, Canada promotes human security within the G8, while other members promote this perspective within the EU, and still others, such as Mali, Thailand, Chile and Jordan, all have voices in a wide variety of important coalitions, from the Arab League to the Organisation of American States.

What is Human Security?

For several years, Canada has championed a 'people-centred' foreign policy based on the idea of human security. This perspective allows us to consider the growing challenges to the safety of individuals and to effectively address them, whether through security sector reform, strong partnerships with NGOs and other non-state actors, or by exposing the links



JON WARREN

between crime and war. Most importantly, this framework affirms that lasting peace and stability cannot be achieved until human security is guaranteed: when people, including children, are protected from both violent and non-violent threats.

The changing nature of armed conflict, characterised by rising intra-state conflict, loosely organised fighting groups, and a growing percentage of civilian casualties, has had a disproportionate impact on the lives of children. It destroys their families and communities and undermines their growth and development. Children are among the most vulnerable members of any society and they require special protection from dangerous threats. They are also in a unique process of growth and development, meaning that damage done to a child can have serious and lifelong implications.

For these reasons, the protection of children and the fulfilment of their rights must be at the forefront of both policy and programming for governments and international organisations. When this is not the case, the results are immediately visible and have a long-lasting impact. Nowhere is this more obvious than in times of armed conflict. A human security policy recognises these realities and promotes concrete actions to address the insecurity of children.

Since its inception in 1998, the Human Security Network has focused on the security of children, and has contributed to comprehensive efforts to address the situation of war-affected children. At its most recent Ministerial meeting in Petra, Jordan (May 11-12, 2001), the Human Security Network made children a priority for discussions in the lead-up to the Special Session on Children during the UN General Assembly in September 2001. In Petra, the



JAN DARRING

members are also committed to working in co-operation with international and regional organisations and with civil society. The Network recognises the need to act together to promote a range of inter-related actions for war-affected children, such as monitoring to prevent the recruitment of children, as well as supporting rehabilitation, education, and health programmes during and after conflict. In many cases, the regional outreach of the Human Security Network fosters actions at the regional level where implementation efforts have been the result of the efforts made by members and their partners.

The overarching goal of the Human Security Network has been to foster consultation and action on human security issues amongst like-minded governments and non-governmental

Network adopted a Statement on Children and Human Security, which will be presented by Jordan to the General Assembly, to contribute to the priority setting for children over the next decade.

The changing nature of armed conflict has had a disproportionate impact on the lives of children.

In addition to raising this issue within international and regional fora, the Human Security Network is also promoting concrete measures to address the needs of war-affected children. It has supported the development of new norms for the international community, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and has pledged to work collectively to promote the Protocol's early entry into force and universalisation.

Human Security Network mem-

bers, in regional and international fora, in particular, at the United Nations. This year, we will come together as an active force for advancing a common agenda in an important multilateral forum. Our statement on Children and Human Security, which will be presented at the UN Special Session on Children in September 2001, marks a solid consensus and commitment. Using our common voice, the Network will deliver a strong message to the members of the United Nations, and, most importantly, move one step closer to protecting children affected by armed conflict. ■

** Members of the Human Security Network: Austria, Canada, Chile, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland and Thailand. South Africa is an observer.*

The Hon. John Manley is Canada's Foreign Minister.

Placing war-affected children on the world's agenda

Olara A. Otunnu

UNITED NATIONS Secretary-General Kofi Annan highlighted the plight of war-affected children in his first report on the subject to the United Nations Security Council last year. In it, he stated:

'Almost one-half of the world's 21 million refugees are children, while it is estimated that another 13 million children have been displaced within the borders of their own countries. The number of children under the age of 18 who have been coerced or induced to take up arms as child soldiers is generally thought to be in the range of 300,000.... UNICEF data indicate that during the decade between 1986 and 1996, armed conflicts killed 2 million children, injured 6 million, traumatised over 10 million and left more than 1 million orphaned...'

Secretary-General appointed me as his Special Representative. In 2000, the UN General Assembly renewed this mandate for another three years.

Over the past three years, we have registered significant progress in moving forward the agenda for the protection of war-affected children.

Annual debate

The UN Security Council formally affirmed, through Resolution 1261 (1999), that the protection and security of war-affected children is a peace-and-security concern that belongs in its agenda. It has now established an annual open debate on this issue. In 2000, through Resolution 1314, the Council put in place specific and concrete elements for the protection of children.

the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Organisation of American States (OAS), the G8, have come to embrace this issue as part of their own agendas, through important political declarations and commitments. Previously, these organisations had not seen this issue as belonging to their agendas.

'OUR COLLECTIVE failure to protect children must be transformed into an opportunity to confront the problems that cause their suffering. The impact of armed conflict on children is everyone's responsibility and must be everyone's concern.'

—Graça Machel

A series of major international conferences devoted to the theme of children affected by armed conflict have helped highlight and develop the agenda. These have included: The London Symposium on Children and Armed Conflict (June 1998); the Tokyo Symposium on Children and Armed Conflict (November 1998); the ECOWAS Ministerial Conference on War-affected children in West Africa (April 2000 in Ghana); the OSCE Human Dimension Seminar on Children and Armed Conflict (May 2000); and the Winnipeg International Conference on War-affected children (September 2000).

Although children suffer disproportionately in times of war, until recently they have been absent from peace agendas. This has started to change. Child protection has been explicitly mentioned in recent peace agreements for Northern Ireland (1998), Sierra Leone (1999) and Burundi (2000).

The UN Security Council has systematically incorporated the protection of children into peacekeeping



Before he turned 8, Philippe buried his mother and witnessed the slaying of his uncle and his grandfather. Experts estimate that 80% of Rwanda's children suffer from trauma.

In 1996, in response to a groundbreaking report by Graça Machel, the UN General Assembly created the mandate for a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. In 1997, the

In the space of only a few years, major regional organisations: the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organisation for African Unity (OAU),

mandates. So far, this has resulted in the placement of child protection provisions into the mandates of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone, and of the UN Observer Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Witness to suffering

The establishment of the role of child protection advisers (CPAs) in UN peacekeeping operations is an important innovation. The first CPAs have now been deployed in Sierra Leone and DRC. The UN Security Council reaffirmed in resolution 1314 (2000) its readiness to include child protection advisers in future missions.

I have visited war-torn countries to bear witness to the suffering of children, to conduct advocacy on their behalf, and to raise the domestic and international profile of their agenda. Outcomes of these visits have included commitments from parties to conflict, an increase in donor resources targeted at war-affected children, and a significant growth in advocacy and programmatic activities by non-governmental organisations.

Important commitments for the protection of children have been secured from parties in conflict. During the first mandate, 36 commitments were obtained, nine of which have been fully met. On most occasions, this was the first time that the parties to conflict had given any undertaking to observe humanitarian and human rights standards. The major challenge now is to monitor and enhance adherence to these commitments.

A major victory

During the first mandate, we have seen the development of some innovative local initiatives on behalf of war-affected children. Examples include:

- National Commission for War-affected children in Sierra Leone: the first body of this kind;
- Sudanese Women for Peace: a non-partisan pressure group for peace;
- Children as a Zone of Peace in Sri Lanka;

—New law in Rwanda allowing girls to inherit property.

After six years of difficult negotiations, the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, establishing 18 as the minimum age for participation in hostilities and compulsory recruitment, represents a major victory for war-affected children. I urge all governments to rapidly sign and ratify the Optional Protocol.

Since the beginning of the mandate, I have vigorously advocated launching an 'era of application' for international and local norms for the



ROD CURTIS

Alba, a 2-year-old from Kosovo, holds a land-mines awareness pamphlet, written in colorful drawings for children.

protection of children in situations of armed conflict. This proposal was adopted by the Senior Management Group (SMG) chaired by the Secretary-General. A task force was established at the United Nations in 1999, and a report entitled 'Strategy for an Era of Application of International Law' was adopted by SMG and approved by the Secretary-General in June 2000.

I have strongly advocated the importance of local values and norms that have traditionally provided for the protection of children and women, especially in times of conflict. This has become an important aspect

of international discourse on child protection.

I have visited war-torn countries to bear witness to the suffering of children and raise the profile of their agenda.

I have made it a priority to engage and collaborate closely with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). NGOs have galvanised awareness and commitment, developed important activities on the ground, helped to strengthen international standards, published important reports that have increased knowledge of war-affected children, formed effective coalitions on various initiatives, and pressured parties in conflict to protect children.

There are serious gaps in our knowledge of war-affected children. I have proposed the development of a research agenda that focuses on the following areas: the identification of trends in the conduct of warfare that make possible the victimisation of children; reliable data on the impact of armed conflict on children; local value systems that traditionally have protected children in times of conflict; and the assessment of programme interventions made by various actors on behalf of war-affected children.

The international community needs to develop special attention and initiatives to address particular areas of vulnerability for war-affected children: to provide support for girls and internally displaced children; to obtain the release and rehabilitation of abducted children; to ensure continuous access to education in situations of prolonged warfare and immediate post-conflict periods; and to take action to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in the corridors of armed conflict. ■

United Nations Under-Secretary General Olara A. Otunnu is Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Child slavery in West Africa and beyond

Mike Dottridge

CHILD SLAVERY captured the attention of the world's news media in April. The suspected trafficking of 250 children from Benin to Gabon aboard the Etireno justifiably shocked the public. For more than a week the world looked on, anxious over the condition of the children, between 9 and 12 years old, thought to be victims of the trafficking trade. At sea for more than two weeks after being refused permission to land, the boat returned to Benin. Although fewer children were found than originally feared, 43 in all, once the boat finally docked, reports confirmed that some were being trafficked into slavery.

Human trafficking involves the movement of people through violence, deception or coercion for the purpose of forced labour, servitude or slavery. In West Africa it is prevalent and is an abuse of a traditional system in which wealthier families took care of a poor relation's child. Traditionally, these families would provide the children with education or training in return for their work.

Empty promises

Poverty is at the root of this abuse, as is exploitation of the vulnerable by those better off. Traffickers promise families that their children will be placed in good positions, that they will be taught useful skills and earn money to send home. But in reality, children often find themselves working in harsh conditions for no money, isolated from their family, community and culture. They are under the trafficker's and employer's complete control, vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation.

Anti-Slavery's 1999 study of child trafficking from Benin to Gabon, produced with our Benin partner Enfants Solidaires d'Afrique et du Monde

(ESAM), found that nine out of ten children trafficked are girls, and 95% of employers are women. Girls, in particular, are trafficked across borders to meet the demand for 'docile' and cheap foreign labour, and they can serve a dual role working in the market and as domestics. Boys are also trafficked for work in markets as well as on plantations and in fishing.

Trafficked children who sell water in Africa's markets are so commonplace, even the police buy water from them.

Action at all levels is necessary to combat this trade in children. Grass-roots programmes raising awareness of children's rights are crucial in order to make the issue and the children visible. The trafficked children who sell water in Africa's markets are so commonplace, even the police buy water from them. Parents and children in rural areas need to be made aware of the realities of life in the city. Awareness-raising programmes are key, such as the Ghanaian organisation Children in Need's drama group that travels across the country. Performances inform people about the hardships and dangers children face in the city, making them aware that the promise of wealth and good work is not the reality.

Poverty alleviating programmes are also crucial to combating child trafficking. Tomorrow Children in Ghana and ESAM in Benin have set up micro-credit systems for women so they can afford to send their children to school. Both have been successful in helping women develop local businesses. Teaching income-generating

activities to parents makes it more possible for them to support their families themselves rather than having to send their children away to work.

A global issue

But child slavery is a global issue affecting every continent. It is crucial that governments acknowledge its existence and abolish its practice by implementing international and domestic laws. Since 1999, Anti-Slavery has been actively urging countries to sign, ratify and, most importantly, implement, the International Labour Organisation's Convention 182 against the worst forms of child labour. It calls on governments to give special attention to eradicating child slavery and bonded labour, child prostitution, forced enrolment into armed forces, and health- or life-threatening work. By the end of April, 72 countries had ratified it, but the one country with more child workers than any other, India, had not. And a number of destination countries for trafficked children in West Africa, such as Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, also have not.

Much remains to be done to end child slavery, in West Africa and beyond. Campaigners like Anti-Slavery will continue to press governments to ratify the convention and to ensure its implementation, as well as raising awareness of the problem locally and internationally. ■

Contact Anti-Slavery International at 020 7501 8920, or visit our website at www.antislavery.org for further information on child slavery and other forms of slavery. To join our campaigns network, contact Sonya Maldar at 020 7501 8933, or by e-mail at s.maldar@antislavery.org.

Mike Dottridge is director of Anti-Slavery International.

Children: a forbidden weapon of war

Rory Mungoven

STARK IMAGES of child soldiers are no longer uncommon in today's society. Sometimes as young as 10, or even younger, they stare at us from magazine and newspaper pages, dressed in uniforms too large for their small frames, or sports gear that belongs in a park. They stand ready, holding high-powered weapons that are often bigger than they are.

Today, more than 300,000 children are fighting as soldiers in more than 30 countries around the world. In struggles that increasingly focus on civilian populations, children have become not only targets, but also weapons of war.

While much attention has been focused on Africa, where more than 100,000 children are fighting across the region from Angola to Sierra Leone, no area of the world is exempt from this problem. Child soldiers are fighting in many of Asia's forgotten conflicts, from the southern Philippines and Myanmar to Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Armed groups in Turkey and Kosovo have recruited children from European countries. Child soldiers have been used by governments and armed groups in many parts of Latin America, particularly Colombia, Paraguay and Peru. And, over the past two decades, countless thousands of children were sacrificed in the Middle East, particularly during the Iran-Iraq war and the civil conflicts in Algeria, Lebanon, Sudan and Yemen.

Spies and porters

Not all children end up on the front lines. Many are used as spies and porters, as 'safe' carriers for bombs. Sometimes they are used as sexual slaves. The commonly portrayed images of boys with guns

often obscures the plight of thousands of girls, used both on the front lines and in support roles.

The involvement of children in fighting often puts other children at risk, as everyone becomes an object of suspicion and a potential target. Many children suffer physical abuse and other privations. In extreme cases, child soldiers are driven to suicide or murder when they can no longer bear the mistreatment.

Many of these children are forcibly recruited at gunpoint, but often it is poverty, propaganda and alienation that drive them into armies, paramilitaries and militias. Some join armed groups because of abuse they experienced at the hands of state authorities. Even when peace is achieved, the demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration of former child combatants pose a major challenge for the long-



term stability and development of societies.

Often, conflict situations can seem beyond our influence and control. But in the past few years, governments, United Nations bodies, non-governmental organisations, and religious and civil groups have mobilised worldwide to stop the use of children as soldiers. The international NGO, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, has been at the forefront of this campaign. It was formed in May 1998 by leading NGOs to seek to end the military recruitment and participation in armed conflict of all children under 18 years of age.

Involving children in fighting often puts other children at risk, as everyone becomes an object of suspicion.

Today, with more than 400 NGOs world-wide lending their support, we have researched and monitored the dimensions of the problem in every region of the world. We have held landmark regional conferences and developed national campaigns in more than 40 countries. And we have documented and shared practical experience in prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

As a result of this campaign, there have been some important developments in the international legal framework on this issue. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child had long represented a major breakthrough in the protection of children, but set a weaker standard for those involved in armed conflict. Ten years on, governments at the United Nations have now agreed to a new Optional Protocol to the Children's Convention that will ban the use of children under the age of 18 in armed conflicts. The Optional Protocol: —prohibits governments and



JACOB AKOL

Youthful soldiers in the Liberia Peace Council forces of Major General Ruth Ateelah brandish automatic rifles. One sports a hand grenade, hanging from his shirt pocket.

armed groups from using children under the age of 18 in conflict; —bans all compulsory recruitment of under-18s; —bans voluntary recruitment of under-18s by armed groups; —raises the minimum age for voluntary recruitment by governments from the current standard of 15 years, and requires strict safeguards in its implementation.

Since its adoption in May 2000, 79 governments have signed or ratified this new standard, laying the foundation for a truly global ban. The Coalition is campaigning for universal ratification of the Optional Protocol in the lead-up to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children this September.

War crime

The past two years have seen other important developments in international law. The new International Criminal Court will treat the forced recruitment and use of children under 15 as a war crime. There will be an important first test of this principle, hopefully, when prosecutions are brought before the new Special Court being established to try war crimes in Sierra Leone.

A new International Labour Organisation Convention prohibits forced recruitment under 18 as one of the worst forms of child labour. This has already triggered action against Myanmar, one of the largest users of child soldiers in the world. The UN Security Council has called for concerted international action to end this abuse, along with a number of regional intergovernmental organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States, the Organisation of African Unity, the Organisation of American States, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Studies in military psychology show it is much easier to condition young, immature minds to kill.

More and more governments around the world are raising the age of recruitment to their armed forces to the 18 standard. The UN Secretary-General has set 18 as a minimum age for UN peacekeepers. Regional bodies are developing their own policies and

guidelines. With most military forces engaged primarily in peacekeeping duties, and using increasingly sophisticated technology, more emphasis is being placed on the maturity, education and technical skills of armed forces personnel.

Long-term consequences

Even some rebel groups, seeking recognition and legitimacy within the international community, have acknowledged the principle. The challenge is making these groups live up to their promises. Today's opposition groups are sometimes tomorrow's governments, and will have to deal with the long-term consequences of this abuse.

Some industrialised countries have gone against this trend, claiming that the move from a conscript army and declining enlistment levels means they must look to under-18 school-leavers. But the rationale for these recruitment policies is more insidious, and not so far removed from that used by armed groups: studies in military psychology show it is much easier to condition young, immature minds to kill. Ironically, this is one human rights issue on which Asian and African countries have been pressing for a higher international standard than some of their Western critics!

The time has come to put the use of children as weapons of war on the same moral footing as the use of landmines or chemical and biological weapons: simply unacceptable in any circumstances.

And the time has come to listen to the voices of those children who have been exploited as soldiers themselves. As one 15-year-old girl abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda once said: 'I would like to give you a message. Please do your best to tell the world what is happening to us, the children, so that other children don't have to pass through this violence.' ■

Rory Mungoven is co-ordinator of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. For further information on the Coalition's activities, visit their website at www.child-soldiers.org.

Violence reverberates through the generations

Watt Santatiwat

SEVEN-YEAR-OLD Sophia looked on in horror as a militiaman hacked her mother to death with a machete. The same machete then sliced between Sofia's eyes and nose, scarring her for life. Then she turned and saw her father, attempting to flee, crumple to his death after being stabbed in the back.

Sophia will carry her physical scars for life. But it is the deeper and far more wrenching emotional scars that will affect her view of the world, and probably the worldview carried by the next generations in her family.

Encouraged in 1999 to cast their vote under United Nations-supervised elections, the people of East Timor were betrayed when the international community and the United Nations fled as Indonesian troops and militia unleashed a reign of terror while briefly re-taking control of East Timor. In September that year, during the two weeks following East Timor's overwhelming vote for independence from Indonesia's 25-year rule, the militia and the Indonesian army laid waste virtually every infrastructure and building in the world's newest country. Sophia was one among thousands of children they killed, maimed or traumatised. The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, (IRCT) reports that 97% of the respondents of a survey conducted in East Timor in July 2000 experienced at least one traumatic event during the Indonesian occupation. At least 34% of that group are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Several tens of thousands, forcefully uprooted and separated from their families, still relive that horror in refugee camps in West Timor, where services are inadequate for their needs.

How could this have happened?

Had we, as an international community, learned nothing from the genocide in Rwanda, or from the violence in the 70s in Cambodia, or the many other places where children have been subjected to cruel and brutal violence? How long will it be before the world learns to protect that which was enshrined and signed by most coun-

The people of East Timor need the kind of support that was given to Cambodia by the world community.

tries in the United Nations' charter on children's rights?

Today's adults in Cambodia were children during Pol Pot's genocidal Khmer Rouge regime, and many now have children of their own. Cambodia is still going through the throes of rebirth, and the population today continues to pay a price for the violence their parents suffered.

Jump-start in Cambodia

But recovery in Cambodia has come relatively quickly. This is because the United Nations and the world community paid close attention and invested in jump-starting and rebuilding that decimated land. The world community was willing to take higher risks with its investments. Hospitals were built for children, immunisation was carried out, and training was provided to bring about a semblance of a civil society. Cambodia has not become an idyllic place for children, but it is moving in the right direction.

By contrast, today in East Timor, 20 months after the referendum, Sophia and her remaining extended family members are not sure when they will

have their next meal. Decisions on food security, access to health care, education and clean water are in the hands of a few while the majority of the population is dependent on those who hold the purse strings. While the United Nations and the World Bank negotiate infrastructure repairs and social service contracts for the pledged \$166 million for the Trust Fund for East Timor (TFET) the situation in the communities has not improved much. Little money is flowing to NGOs, who have a greater long-term commitment toward the people than transitional authorities usually do. Unlike the situation in Cambodia, NGOs in East Timor have limited or restricted access to funds. In the interest of easy administration, and to establish overall control, many donors have decided to channel their funds through the TFET. However, this single font of funding has left East Timor without the flexibility to meet needs as they arise. Many cash-strapped NGO have even left East Timor, while UNTAET continues to try to define a role for those that remain.

Today, the people of East Timor need the kind of support that was given by the world community to the people of Cambodia. Thousands of children like Sophia need post-traumatic stress counselling, but there is no funding for this. Nor is there adequate funding to sustain health care, or to bring sustainable food security. Neither has the world community been able to bring to justice those who perpetrated crimes against those like Sophia and her family.

Twenty months have not diluted the shock suffered by Sofia and her remaining family members. The world community failed to protect the rights of the East Timorese children. Sadly, their shock is being prolonged due to a lack of resources. ■

Watt Santatiwat is vice president for World Vision's Asia-Pacific Region.

Protecting their rights

Jo Becker

A MEDICAL TEAM visiting a correctional school in Pakistan reported that nearly 60% of the children there had been tortured, enduring severe beatings, electric shocks, and being hung upside down. They were also subjected to a practice known as 'cheera', (stretching apart the victim's legs, sometimes in combination with kicks to the genitalia).

A boy being detained in Guatemala reported, 'In the adult prisons, you have to pay money to get a place to sleep. Otherwise you sleep on the floor, in the garbage.... Boys who are put in with the adults are often raped. This is very common.... The guards don't pay any attention.'

Isolated incidents in remote corners of the globe? Hardly. Throughout the world, in developing and industrialised countries alike, children are subject to unconscionable violence. In their homes, communities, schools and other institutions, children are vulnerable to life-threatening abuses that are often perpetrated by the very individuals charged with their safety and well-being.

Perpetrators are rarely investigated, creating a culture of impunity, and allowing the violence to continue.

Why is violence against children so pervasive? Perpetrators are rarely investigated or prosecuted, creating a culture of impunity and allowing the violence to continue. Institutions are often closed to outside scrutiny. Children generally have no mechanisms for reporting abuse. Those who do speak out may face retaliation.

Among children vulnerable to vio-

lence are millions of abandoned and orphaned children who are dependent on the state for care. Many are placed in grossly substandard facilities where they are subjected to appalling levels of cruelty and neglect. In Russia, where children have been abandoned to the state at a rate of more than

'MASSIVE and gross violations against children continue unabated. Death, rape, mutilation, forced recruitment, displacement, injury and malnourishment are a few of the grave consequences. These atrocities must not be tolerated as either inevitable or acceptable side-effects of war. Those who wage, legitimise, and support wars must be con-

demned. Impunity for war crimes against children must end. National sovereignty must never shield those directly and indirectly responsible for committing such heinous crimes. National and international action must be taken to hold accountable all such perpetrators and those who support them.'

Children are often detained by police without sufficient cause, and

demned. Impunity for war crimes against children must end. National sovereignty must never shield those directly and indirectly responsible for committing such heinous crimes. National and international action must be taken to hold accountable all such perpetrators and those who support them.'

—Graça Machel

100,000 per year, a Human Rights Watch investigation revealed that children in orphanages may be restrained in cloth sacks, tethered by a limb to furniture, beaten, or locked in freezing rooms for days at a time. A Moscow orphan told Human Rights Watch in 1998, 'When I was little, a staff person put my head in the toilet and beat me on the behind, hips and arms.... Of course, a kid couldn't do anything or say anything. We were so afraid of her.'

Easy targets

Children are also often subject to violence at the hands of police. Street children are especially easy targets because they are poor, young, and often ignorant of their rights, and lacking any adults to whom they can turn

then subject to brutal interrogations and torture in order to elicit confessions or information. In Pakistan, in May 1998, a 13-year old boy died, just hours after being arrested, from severe and prolonged torture in a police station in Mansehra. Police conducting interrogations in Turkey have suspended naked children by their arms and applied electric shocks to sensitive parts of the body.

Once placed in juvenile and criminal correctional institutions, children are frequently subjected to mistreatment and abuse, including severe corporal punishment, torture, forced labour, denial of food, isolation, restraints, sexual assaults and harassment. As mentioned above, such cases



MIKEL FLAPPY

Children like these in Ho Chi Minh City often turn to the streets in order to escape broken families or domestic violence.

are not restricted to developing countries. In the United States, children in Georgia have been incarcerated in jail-like facilities, where they may be bound to a bed by their wrists and ankles as a disciplinary measure, or stripped and shackled to a toilet for showing signs of suicidal behaviour.

Caning, slapping, whipping

Even in schools, intended to nurture the development of children, violence may be a regular part of a child's experience. In many countries, corporal punishment is still permitted as part of school 'discipline'. In Kenya, before the government recently acted to prohibit corporal punishment in the schools, teachers used caning, slapping and whipping to maintain classroom discipline and to punish children for poor academic performance. The infliction of corporal punishment was frequently routine, arbitrary and often brutal, resulting in bruises, cuts and severe injuries (broken bones, knocked-out teeth, internal

bleeding). At times, beatings by teachers left children permanently disfigured, disabled or dead.

Children may be bound to a bed by their wrists and ankles as a disciplinary measure.

Many acts of violence are seen as lamentable, yet isolated incidents, rather than part of a global phenomenon. Attitudes have also been slow to change. While physical abuse by men against their wives and female partners is now broadly condemned, physical abuse against children is still tolerated and even encouraged as a form of discipline.

To protect the dignity, safety and well-being of children, several measures are necessary. Governments must ensure that all forms of violence against children are prohibited by law, and that vigorous steps are taken to investigate all acts of violence against

children. Caregivers and law enforcement agents who abuse children must be held accountable for their actions, and when warranted, be dismissed from their jobs and subjected to criminal charges. Abuses must be brought to light through on-going, active monitoring by governments, non-governmental organisations and the news media. And public campaigns must promote the rights of children among families, caregivers, law enforcement professionals, teachers and others who come in contact with children.

Finally, children need advocates: caring adults who are willing to support children in their right to be free from abuse, and speak out and take action when that right is violated. ■

Jo Becker is the Children's Rights Advocacy Director for Human Rights Watch, the largest human rights organisation in the United States. Over the last decade, Human Rights Watch has published more than 20 reports dealing with violence against children.

Children as targets of torture

Sir Nigel Rodley

WHILE THERE IS no evidence to suggest that children suffer torture or ill treatment in disproportionate frequency compared with adults, or that children are generally subjected to particular forms of torture or ill treatment applied uniquely to them in their status as children, there remains a real problem that needs addressing. This necessity derives from the consideration that children are necessarily more vulnerable to the effects of torture and, because they are in the critical stages of physical and psychological development, may suffer graver consequences than similarly ill-treated adults. Furthermore, like adults, children may be tortured or ill treated in a surrogate capacity, where the intended target is in fact the child's parents or other relatives or a friend. In such cases, the motive for torturing the child may be to force an individual connected to the child to confess or give information or to inflict punishment upon that person.

Some children have reportedly been subjected to lengthy periods of pre-trial confinement in police lock-ups and other places of detention. In this context, it should be noted that, as is true with respect to adult detainees, conditions of pre-trial detention may be particularly conducive to torture or ill treatment.

Children with adult prisoners

Another problem, reported to be widespread in many regions of the world, is that of overcrowding of children's cells, both in places of pre-trial detention and in prisons. The lack of adequate space and facilities has in some situations resulted in children being held together with adult detainees or prisoners, a circumstance that leaves them vulnerable to violent attacks, as well as damaging influence.

Even when children are held separately, prison personnel may lack the training to deal with the special requirements of juvenile detention.

Children are often detained in unsanitary conditions, leaving them exposed to the risk of disease and other health problems. In some cases, the provision of food is inadequate, resulting in instances of malnutrition and, in extreme cases, starvation. This problem is manifested in the not uncommon practice of child detainees being left dependent on family members bringing food to places of detention or of the detainees or their families being required to make payments to the authorities in order to receive adequate and decent food. Many prisons and other detention centres where children are kept are also bereft of any or adequate medical facilities. Moreover, the absence of recreational and educational facilities may adversely affect the mental and emotional well-being and development of detained children.

Police have resorted to severe beatings, sexual assault and, in extreme cases, extra-judicial executions.

One class of children that has notably been targeted for torture and ill treatment by some police units is the so-called street children. Such children, in order to survive, live and sometimes work on the streets without adult supervision or companionship. In operations aimed at 'socially cleansing' the streets of such children, police have resorted to severe beatings, sexual assault and, in extreme cases, extrajudicial executions.

In a few countries, corporal punishment may be administered to children convicted of certain offences. In one country, it was reported that children as young as 12 years old have been subjected to flogging.

Wards of the state

Children have also been subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in non-penal institutions. Unlike most adults, children can be deprived of their liberty in a variety of legal settings other than those related to the criminal justice system, and are thus reported to be particularly vulnerable to some forms of torture or ill treatment in an institutional environment. Foster care systems and residential institutions caring for children who become wards of the state after being orphaned or removed from parental care for their own protection are in some cases alleged to permit inhuman forms of discipline or extreme forms of neglect. Particularly in the case of extremely young children, such abuses can amount to cruel and inhuman treatment. State workers in care institutions are sometimes poorly trained and supervised, and are, in many cases, able, not necessarily with official approval, but owing to insufficient monitoring, to subject children to physical, emotional or sexual abuse that would rarely be tolerated in juvenile justice institutions.

Children being cared for in institutions can also be particularly vulnerable to torture and ill treatment not only because of their young age, but because of the over-representation of children from particularly vulnerable groups among those institutionalised. Former street children, refugee and internally displaced children, unaccompanied child asylum-seekers, children considered as illegal migrants, children from minority groups, and children who have previously suffered abuse from public officials or within the family are more likely to be cared for in institutions. As members of marginalised groups, they are less likely to be able to make formal com-

plaints of cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment. Discriminatory attitudes toward some vulnerable groups can mean that they are perceived as being less credible in their allegations or not fully entitled to an equal standard of protection.

Children have been subjected to extreme forms of torture as a result of armed conflict situations. The failure of some states to protect them has been a serious concern. Violations reported during armed conflict include severe forms of torture and other forms of ill treatment inflicted on child civilians and children recruited into armed forces, allegedly by state as well as non-governmental forces. All parties to armed conflicts, be they of an international character or not, are bound by humanitarian law principles which prohibit torture and other forms of cruel treatment, including mutilation. In one country, the latter reportedly included such brutal forms of torture as the ampu-

tation of limbs. Amnesties negotiated in the aftermath of armed conflict are argued to have granted impunity to state, paramilitary or non-governmental forces that in some cases have committed extreme forms of torture on children.

Attacks on their own families

In addition, the forcible recruitment of children into armed forces has also been reported in a number of countries. Children are said to have been forcibly recruited at a sometimes very young age, in violation of international human rights standards, and forced to carry out traumatic attacks on their own families and communities.

In addition to the international instruments which proscribe torture generally, I would draw attention to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly article 37, wherein state parties are required to ensure, *inter alia*, that 'no child shall be sub-

jected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment,' that 'every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age,' and that 'every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so.'

Finally, I would also encourage states to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 54/263 of May 2000. ■

Sir Nigel Rodley KBE is the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Torture, and a professor in the Department of Law, University of Essex in Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, UK.

The faces of violence in Latin America

David Westwood

A SPIRALLING LEVEL of violence is one of the key problems facing Latin America as this new century begins. According to the InterAmerican Development Bank, homicides in the region increased 44% between 1984 and 1994, and murder rates are now the world's second highest after sub-Saharan Africa. In Mexico, for example, violent crime tripled between 1990 and 1996, and Brazil has a murder rate comparable to that of a country in civil war.

Studies show that between 30% and 50% of women in Latin America suffer from psychological violence in their homes, and between 10% and 35% are affected by physical violence.

Of great concern is the escalation of violence against children, including

the murders of street children, and a noticeable increase in the sexual exploitation of minors. While exact numbers of children affected are unknown, available data may only reveal the tip of the iceberg.

In Colombia, increasing numbers of children are being killed, orphaned and recruited by all parties to the conflict. Out of 1.9 million people displaced by the conflict, an estimated 65% are children surrounded by violence. The availability of small arms following the military largesse of the Cold War era also makes Central America, in particular, a hotbed.

A culture of violence

Very often, the state is a complicit actor in a culture of violence, either through direct involvement or by allowing violence to be committed with impunity. In Central America, a total of 87% of abuses reported by Casa Alianza against street children have not been successfully prosecuted, and nearly 40%

of those abuses were allegedly committed by members of the police forces.

The growing levels of violence are attributable to factors such as poverty, the growing gulf between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'; the lack of educational and employment opportunities and hope, especially amongst the youth; and the increasing marginalisation of a large sector of the population. There are other exacerbating factors. Several countries in the region are suffering from the legacies of past conflicts. The existence of an abundance of small arms in countries like El Salvador, for example, greatly exacerbates the impact of the problem. Similarly, the race/ethnicity issue lurks in the background, and occasionally flares up in countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia, as evidenced by recent protests in both countries. ■

David Westwood is regional director for advocacy for World Vision's Latin America region.

Are we making progress?

Hélène Sackstein

WE KNOW that statistics can be unreliable, and that they can be manipulated to support the 'truth' of the day, be it honourable or not. But the sheer magnitude of some figures makes us pause, and cannot be dismissed. Many sources, for instance have agreed that:

—Hundreds of millions of children under age 15 work.

—Some 200 million children have no access to any kind of education—the majority of these being the girls who will bring up tomorrow's children.

—Millions of children have died in armed conflict, more have been wounded, and even more are seriously traumatised.

—Each year, at least 1 million children are trapped in the sex trade. Most are girls. However, we now know that untold numbers are also boys.

At the dawn of the 21st century, violence against children is pervasive, and sexual violence is an ever-present element of the many forms it takes.

It has been nearly five years since the first World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children opened a Pandora's Box of interconnected forms of violence against children. There was plenty of evidence in 1996 that commercial sexual exploitation of a child doesn't happen in a vacuum. It was made clear in panels and workshops that it was a crosscutting issue, with multiple causes that extend well beyond poverty, which is often cited as the driving force behind sexual abuse and exploitation.

Exponential increase

Many studies have found a link between experiences of sexual abuse in children and a pattern of either victimisation or sexual aggression in adulthood. This raises the spectre of

an exponential increase in victims and abusers with every generation.

Where commercial sexual exploitation is concerned, we are still addressing the supply side: children, but little is being done to deal with the consumers of sex with children, particularly local ones, who might be our neighbours. When they are called paedophiles, the world musters some indignation, unaware that true paedophiles represent a small portion of child abusers and exploiters.

In a market-obsessed world, we still seem to ignore the fact that demand creates supply, or that markets are made profitable through the promotion of demand, in the lucrative sex industry as in all other economic activities.

In a market-obsessed world, we still seem to ignore the fact that demand creates supply.

And we have not heeded the youths who said loud and clear in 1996 that they are not the problem, but the solution.

There may be an opportunity to reconsider all these issues at the Second World Congress Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, hosted by the Japanese government, taking place 17-20 December this year in Yokohama.

In the past few years, the world's imagination has been captured by a succession of global causes: child labour, child soldiers, women and the girl child, HIV/AIDS revisited. This year will have a Special Session of the General Assembly on Children, and another on HIV/AIDS, as well as an international conference against

racism. All of these will occur before the Second World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. By then, public compassion, and finances, may be overtaxed.

Grassroots programmes

A great deal of financial support is needed to promote new causes. This is frequently done to the detriment of previous ones, and through the depletion of initiatives already underway. The impact of grassroots programmes takes a long time to assess and measure. They need continuity in order to bear fruit, but, instead, find themselves in competition with new issues, and with donors shifting their support to the trend of the year.

Nevertheless, the Second World Congress offers an opportunity to reconsider sexual violence, abuse and exploitation, commercial and non-commercial, not as separate issues, but as problems that need to raise similar questions before we find effective and relevant responses. A first step could be more widespread support for a serious, in-depth, worldwide study on all forms of violence inflicted upon children, their root causes, dire and costly consequences, and the vicious, destructive circles they create.

In an era obsessed with productivity, we may even ask if it might be more cost-effective to acknowledge the high incidence of sexual abuse, even in the family, rather than concentrate on stop-gap measures to limit the resulting damage. This acknowledgement may also lead to the adoption of coherent prevention policies and prompt states to consider allocating the needed resources to comprehensive social programmes. ■

Hélène Sackstein is Co-ordinator of the Focal Point on Sexual Exploitation, the NGO group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This article represents the opinion of the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of the members of the NGO group.

Actions speak louder than words

Josephine de Linde

CHILDREN HAVE NOT always been on the human rights agenda. Indeed, treating children as beings in their own right, with their own particular needs, is a relatively recent development. It was just a few decades ago that the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly in 1948, at last introduced the idea that mothers and children are entitled to special assistance. The UN's 1959 Declaration states in a preamble that 'mankind owes the child the best it has to give'.

But it was the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) that, for the first time, insisted that the best interest of the child be a basic requirement for all actions concerning children.

Interest in children's welfare and protection has since become worldwide, due in part to the interest and publicity generated by the UNCRC. But that was more than 10 years ago. How has this come about?

Roots in Asia

The experience of ECPAT (End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism) provides a good illustration of how increased awareness, partnership and expertise came about through working on a specific issue within the overall framework of children's rights.

ECPAT got its start in 1990, with the combined efforts of a small number of individuals, church groups and associations in four Southeast Asian countries: Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines. These individuals had been monitoring the negative effects of mass tourism in their region. At a conference being held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, that year, they sounded the alarm. They called on 'tourist-sending' countries in Europe to join forces with them to End Child

Prostitution in Asian Tourism, and the ECPAT campaign was launched.

In August 1996, in Stockholm, the Swedish government hosted the First World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, which brought the sordid horror of sexual abuse and exploita-



PHILIP MAHER

A Cambodian girl is comforted by her mother after being rescued from a brothel.

tion of children to the attention of the world. A key outcome of the Congress was the Declaration and Agenda for Action, adopted by the 122 governments who were there. These provide a practical guide and checklist of essential actions, as well as integrated measures to be implemented.

Stockholm became the reference point for international actions and national policies. The 122 governments who adopted the Declaration and Agenda for Action committed themselves to ensuring better protection for children. Two other states that were not at Stockholm have since declared their intentions to try to meet those goals.

The Agenda for Action has become the reference point for state

parties who submit their reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to ECPAT's most recent study, about 50 countries now have prepared, or are in the process of preparing, national plans of action.

Four new treaties

Furthermore, important legislative changes, exemplified by new laws in Thailand, Italy, Japan and the United States, have been made since 1996, and there have been some key cases against perpetrators of child sexual abuse. A number of countries have adopted extra-territorial laws or have reformed laws to make them more effective against the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Another encouraging development at international level has been the adoption of at least four new treaties against one or more manifestations of the commercial sexual exploitation of children:

—The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which has been adopted by the international community, and was opened for signature/ratification in 2000.

—The International Labour Organisation's Convention 182, covering the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of

The commercial sexual exploitation of children takes many forms, and all need to be attacked.

child labour, has been adopted and is open for ratification.

—The Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the UN Convention against trans-national organised crime 2000.

—The creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was adopted in

1998 and is open to signature and ratification by states. The Court's jurisdiction is universal, but complementary to national jurisdiction.

The partnership engendered by the first World Congress began a process of inter-agency co-operation and support for millions of the world's most marginalised children.

After Stockholm, ECPAT took stock. The research and experience gained from six years of campaigning had shown that the commercial sexual exploitation of children, far from being a Southeast Asian phenomenon, was a global one, and was on the increase. It encompassed both developed and developing countries, and was linked to the forces of supply and demand that had, in their turn, become trans-national.

The commercial sexual exploitation of children takes many forms, and all need to be attacked. ECPAT's mission became to 'eliminate child prostitution, child pornography and trafficking in children for sexual purposes, and to work to seek to encourage the world community to ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights, free and secure from all forms of commercial sexual exploita-

tion.' ECPAT moved from being a campaign targeting one aspect of child abuse in a particular region of the world to being an international organisation with a broader mandate and enlarged field of activity.

ECPAT took on the role of monitoring the implementation of the Stockholm Agenda for Action, and has published an annual report since 1996. The 2000 report was published in five languages. It also helps to develop the capacity of its own groups, and that of other NGOs around the world, to combat the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in their countries, and to lobby and work toward establishing national plans of action.

Joining forces

Following Stockholm, more organisations and institutions decided to join forces to reinforce efforts to protect children from sexual exploitation. And there has been greater co-operation, too, among law enforcers in several countries, with more co-ordinated action by the international police organisation, Interpol. In addition, there has been fruitful co-operation with NGOs.

In 2000, the World Tourism Organisation adopted a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. It also set up a Task Force on Tourism and Child Prostitution. The Tourism industry has passed a number of charters and codes of conduct enjoining their members to support efforts to combat sex tourism.

And there is now greater awareness and understanding of the need to involve young people in decision-making, implementing and evaluating activities against the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Finally, some groups, the European Union in particular, have agreed to allocate new resources to protecting children.

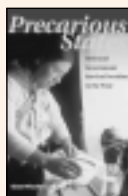
When the first Congress took place, the issue of the commercial sexual exploitation of children was hardly recognised. Today, no country can pretend to be ignorant, or claim it is immune. ECPAT and other NGOs who have concentrated their efforts on combating such exploitation have, in the process, become specialised in research, legislation, child sex tourism, and the recovery and reintegration of child victims. All the while, they have continued working to implement the Agenda for Action at national and regional levels.

The fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children is clearly on the political agenda, and is now recognised as a major concern in children's rights. The vast amount of knowledge, experience and expertise acquired over the years is there, ready to be put to work in the service of the world's children. But words on paper, whether conventions, legislation or well-intentioned projects, will always remain just that unless translated into effective action. The international community must move forward until their actions speak louder than their words. ■

Josephine de Linde is chairperson of ECPAT International.

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Alan Whaites, editor

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On the streets in Cambodia

Laurence Gray

COUNTRIES WHERE rule of law is strong have mechanisms to protect all their citizens, not just the powerful. These include not only legal systems, but also health care and human services. Public debate enables views to be expressed, and for police, the judiciary and government to be held accountable. Change is possible through mechanisms of good governance and appropriate resources.

But things are different in Cambodia.

As with other less developed countries, Cambodia does not have this level of capacity or resource. Here, the scale and nature of violence affecting children, for instance, remains unacceptably high. More than half of all Cambodian children are malnourished. Half a million children between the ages of 6 and 11 have no access to education. And between 10,000 and 15,000 children are involved in prostitution in Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital city.

Cambodia has emerged from 30 years of conflict. The parents of today's children experienced the horrors of Pol Pot. The University of Phnom Penh's Psychology department conducted a study on the mental health of children in 1999. The results of this study give insights into children's encounters with violence, and reveal, for one thing, that it's not just economics that drives children into the streets.

Extreme forms of trauma

The study surveyed 400 children between the ages of 10 and 12 in Phnom Penh and the countryside. The sample group was comprised of children of both genders from randomly selected schools. They were not at special risk, unlike children from single-headed households or those living

on the street. Among the findings:

—41% had witnessed domestic violence at home

—56% had witnessed the beating of a close relative

—3% had witnessed the killing of a close relative

—20% had heard of the killing of a close relative

—58% had been beaten themselves

—42% had witnessed a robbery

—71% had witnessed a car or motorcycle accident

—23% had been involved in a car or motorcycle accident

—8% had witnessed a rape

—49% had heard of an instance of rape

—11% had witnessed a kidnapping

—65% had heard of an instance of kidnapping

These results show that exposure to extreme forms of trauma is not uncommon in the lives of children in Cambodia. And it would not be unreasonable to expect that exposure to such incidents help form their expectations for their own safety and life choices, and cause many to end up on the street.

Between 10,000 and 15,000 children are involved in prostitution in Phnom Penh.

Despite Cambodia's Constitution and public policy, sexual exploitation and abuse of children is widespread. Of all the female prostitutes in Phnom Penh, more than 30% are children. More than half of Cambodia's prostitutes were sold by family members or coerced, by force or deception, into prostitution. Authorities take little action, and police and military involve-

ment is widespread. Perceived impunity from prosecution is one of the major factors that draws paedophiles and sex tourists to a country where children are cheap and accessible.

Brothels at border crossings

Trafficking of women and children within Cambodia and across the border at Poipet or Koh Kong is increasing. For US\$0.25, the cost of a one-day permit, traffickers can sell women and children in Thailand for as much as US\$500 for one week. Cambodian women sold in this manner have been traced as far afield as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and even Europe. Some 100 to 150 child beggars are returned to Poipet every week. And brothels at border crossings have noticeably higher percentages of workers with HIV: up to 65%, in some areas.

The international community has to take some responsibility. However, the question of who can take action to change the situation is too often met with indifference. And children, the hope of tomorrow, remain the casualties of today.

Cambodia's infamous conflicts have disappeared from the world's media spotlight, but their effects on today's children are still very real. Children are growing up in a society that provides too few schools or teachers, and encourages them to place themselves in danger in order to supplement their families' incomes. It turns a blind eye to sexual abuse and exploitation.

Advocacy alone cannot change the harsh reality of poverty, or eradicate the trauma of war. But it is needed to help redefine people's and government's expectations and, in turn, their priorities. With a collective effort of will, real change can occur. ■

Laurence Gray manages World Vision's programmes on child protection in Cambodia.

Imagine a world where children are safe

Melanie Gow



Children, like these demonstrating for peace in Colombia, must be involved in the solution.

OVER THE PAST two years, World Vision conducted four field-based research studies to examine the extent and impact of violence against children. The findings were horrifying. They reveal state complicity, discriminatory legislation, systematic abuse and widespread public ignorance.

World Vision released a major report this year documenting the study's key findings. The purpose was not just to highlight this crisis, but also to find appropriate and immediate

responses that will have long-term, positive impacts on children.

The studies focused on sexual violence, gender-based violence and domestic abuse. The report, titled 'A Safe World for Children: Ending Abuse, Violence and Exploitation', identifies seven cross-cutting recommendations for immediate action.

The recommendations suggest means for global change through national and local action. They seek to find ways to prevent violence against

children, to protect them from the violence around them, and to provide support and reintegration services for children who are survivors of violence. The report urges governments to meet their obligations to end violence against children, and to:

1. Enact laws that protect all children from sexual abuse, violence and exploitation.

Each of the studies revealed the inadequacy of national legislation to protect children from violence. In some countries, laws were non-existent; in others, they are openly discriminatory; in still others, the laws treated children as criminals rather than victims.

In line with this, World Vision advocates for:

—national laws that prohibit abuse, exploitation and violence against children, and that are in accord with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

—the universal application of extra-territorial legislation that enables prosecution of child sex abuses in whatever country that abuse occurs.

Advocating for the enactment of legislation must be done in tandem with monitoring its enforcement.

2. Train welfare and law-enforcement agencies on child abuse issues, and promote effective child-sensitive policies based on international standards. No child who has suffered violence should be re-traumatized by the welfare or legal process.

There are at least two things that welfare and law-enforcement agencies can do to protect children from violence. First, they can help identify situations of child abuse, then remove either the child or the perpetrator from that situation. They also can take a role in listening to children and prosecuting adult offenders.

The research indicated that, too often, welfare and law-enforcement agencies were ill informed and inadequately trained to deal with child victims appropriately. Too often, children's cries for assistance were ignored or disbelieved, or the children

themselves were treated as criminals.

Children must be supported in this process. Governments should be urged to develop child-protection systems that encourage the reporting of instances of violence, or suspicions of violence, against children.

3. Raise awareness of violence against children by educating the public. Help-lines, where feasible, and support, should be provided to abused and at-risk children.

The public must recognise its role in creating and sustaining an environment in which violence against children is allowed to flourish—or not.

We need more public education campaigns proclaiming that child abuse is a violation of children's human rights. Governments should develop national plans of action to tackle violence against children. These plans should contain key provisions for public education, and specific provisions to support abused and at-risk children.

4. Work with community groups, churches and civil society organisations to promote prevention, protection and rehabilitation of children from violence.

The most effective prevention strategies are community-based. They focus on education that is culturally sensitive and gender-aware. Community protection measures such as hotlines, crisis centres, safe houses and experienced counselors can prove immediate support to children in situations of violence at the local level.

Governments should be lobbied to support advocacy and awareness raising, legal reform, direct service provision (for survivors and perpetrators), training, and monitoring of interventions. And they should ensure that adequate resources are allocated for child-protection measures.

5. Seek and commit the resources, whether national or international, to protect children from violence. For example, poverty reduction strategy papers produced by poor nations should include a plan for child protection.

Governments must commit

resources to protect children from violence, and provide support for children who are the survivors of violence. This means not only focusing within their own communities, but also on co-operating on policy formation and resource flows between governments. Issues such as commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking cannot be dealt with in isolation. They require an inter-governmental response from the regional and the international level.

A reassessment of government spending priorities is required if children are to be protected from violence.

6. Support comprehensive efforts, including those by the United Nations, to study and address violence against children.

Increasingly, advocates for children's rights are joining with the calls of the UN Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child for an '...in-depth international study on the issue of violence against children ...'¹

The most effective prevention strategies are community-based.

World Vision supports calls for an international study on violence against children, supported by a global campaign to end the abuse.

World Vision believes that the Committee on the CRC's recommendations provide solid directions for developing the international study. In addition, we continue to promote the role of other international human rights mechanisms and instruments as a valid framework for child protection, to be used in conjunction with the CRC.

7. Invite children to be full participants in establishing measures that offer protection, foster development and guarantee human rights.

Children can be resilient, resourceful and responsive. Findings from World Vision's own research bear this out, indicating that violence

is reduced where children are directly involved in prevention and protection strategies.

Peer support groups

Children have been using their own experiences to help and benefit other youth, to play a role in public education, to create peer support groups, to staff crisis hotlines, to establish and run drop-in centres, and to build and staff peer networks.² Children must be participants in their own development.

World Vision's report brings evidence from the field that children are suffering around the globe, that their right to security is being violated on a daily basis, and that not enough is being done by governments and others to address this crisis. World Vision hopes that, through this report, each of us is challenged to consider the role we must play to prevent violence against children, to protect children from the violence around them, and to offer support to those children who have survived abuse, exploitation and violence. ■

For copies of World Vision's report, 'A Safe World for Children: Ending Abuse, Violence and Exploitation', please contact Policy and Advocacy, World Vision, 800 West Chestnut Ave., Monrovia, CA 91016-3198, USA.

Melanie Gow is World Vision's policy officer for child rights.

1. Committee on the CRC, CRC: Day of General Discussion, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/dd25re.htm>.

2. Save the Children Canada, Sacred Lives: Canadian Aboriginal Children and Youth Speak out about Sexual Exploitation, Toronto, 2000 page 4.

We know you're concerned... but when will you act?

Alan Whaites

WORLD VISION recently conducted four major research projects on the condition of children in the modern world. These initiatives were undertaken with families and communities across the developing world. They have each built upon World Vision's existing programming with children, and the fact that staff have long been involved in strengthening education and health provision, working with churches, caring for street children, and protecting children at risk.

The results confirm that children are not only vulnerable to the consequences of their poverty, but also to indifference. Put simply, few issues have solicited more broken promises and unimplemented Conventions than that of child rights (with perhaps the exception of the environment). World Vision's research has underlined the missed opportunities to move into a phase of implementation on both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and numerous ILO Conventions on child labour. The fault lies not just with governments who do not apply their own legislation or commitments. Instead, we must also look at the donors and lenders who not only deny the resources to make such policies workable, but also disempower the very state structures needed to regulate employment and address social welfare issues.

A powerful example of the problem has been provided by World Vision's Child Abuse and Neglect study, undertaken with ISPCAN (International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect) and Chapin Hall, University of Chicago. This study looked at communities in five developing countries and found that lack of awareness created contexts in which abuse of children could

take place undetected. In each location, no local provision existed to respond to children claiming abuse. Indeed, any child raising such concerns would routinely be disbelieved. Similarly, in Latin America, a study into domestic violence confirms existing research that many children are routinely beaten, and that those affected are more likely to drop out of school and leave the home. In both instances, critical weaknesses exist in mechanisms for child protection and awareness raising. Even the provision of safe places for children removed from their families can be absent.

Louder concerns

A more familiar issue in international debates concerning children has been the appalling problem of commercial sexual exploitation. It is likely that governments will voice ever-louder concerns on this problem in the run up to the Second World Congress against the sexual exploitation of children in December (just as they did prior to the first). Yet, in the intervening five years since the first Congress, signs of OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) concern have been relatively sparse, leaving the governments directly impacted to try to address the problem largely alone (and, for some, with the backdrop of the Southeast Asian economic crisis).

In Southeast Asia, World Vision studied the problems of child trafficking and child prostitution and their devastating effects. The problem of AIDS has increased demand for younger prostitutes, who are believed to be less likely to carry the disease, with the result that 1,000,000 children now work in the Asian sex trade. Children are lured and tricked into prostitution, where they are kept

through force and drugs.

In a separate study, World Vision also looked at the particular impact of poverty on girls. Findings revealed a disproportionate impact of violence, abuse, infanticide and poverty. This study underlined that sexual exploitation continues to disproportionately impact girls, who often pay the price through HIV/AIDS infection, and ultimately their lives.

International indifference to the problem of abuse against children is hiding a global problem that touches every society. Nearly 4,000 children work as prostitutes in Australia, some 5,000 have been sold for sex on the streets of Luanda, in Africa. In Brazil, it is believed that a staggering 3% of under-18s sell themselves for sex (as many as 2 million in any given year). Some 15,000 girls under 12 live on the streets of Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka. All are at risk of abuse. One-third of the 55,000 prostitutes in Cambodia are under 18 years old, while 40,000 children are thought to be in prostitution in Indonesia.

World Vision is committed to campaign for the rights of children suffering abuse, violence and neglect until change is achieved and the implementation of legislation and agreements takes place. Ultimately, all children should have access to at least a minimum standard of protection. That protection should include a legislative framework that clearly outlaws abuse. It should also entail access to properly trained and resourced welfare services, and to the means to voice concerns (such as helplines). Adequate protection entails working with churches and schools, and informing children of their rights to be free from danger and fear. It also crucially means a greater willingness on the part of rich donor countries to act for the defence of children in poorer nations, for without adequate resources, children will continue to be abused and killed. ■

Alan Whaites is director of Policy and Advocacy for World Vision.

CRC: A Christian perspective

Kathy Vandergrift

LIKE A NEW BABY, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) emerged from a long gestation period to an enthusiastic welcome in 1989. It was ratified by 191* countries in the United Nations in record time, and it has had strong support from civil society organisations. It took some time during the early years to figure out what difference this new creature would make in the household of nations. Now, like a family with a pre-adolescent 10-year-old, there is tension between holding it back or giving it wings. In many ways, the UN Special Session for Children will set the tone for the adolescent years of the CRC.

For development organisations, the CRC is a useful tool for working with children and governments of all political stripes. In many developing countries, children make up more than 40% of the population; they are contributing now to the survival of their nations; and at the same time they are vulnerable. In Rwanda, for example, a child rights approach helped to obtain protection for the land rights of girl children who are the heads of their households because their parents died through war or HIV/AIDS. In Thailand, working children organise themselves to work for their right to education and healthy conditions, while in Cambodia, the CRC helps get police protection from sexual exploitation of street children. In conflict zones, the right of children to be with their families can be a tool to push for family reunification.

Agents of transformation

Beyond protection, development organisations are beginning to realise the potential for children to be agents of transformation within their communities and countries. Children can be a unifying force; their well-being

can galvanise community resources to build a better future for everyone. They are catalysts for change now, as well as hope for the future.

CRC is a useful tool for working with children and governments of all political stripes.

On a global level, impact on children is the best test for the success and sustainability of public policies, including macro-economic issues like trade and debt relief. If a child were at the centre of the Security Council



SANJAY SOJWAL

table, world leaders would find the political will to prevent wars. Respect for the rights of children, as participants in development, is key to breaking the cycle of poverty and unfolding a brighter future for whole societies.

Against this background, it may

surprise some that strong opposition to the CRC at the end of its first decade comes from segments within communities of faith. The vocal opposition of a few faith-based organisations has given rise to questions about whether a child-rights approach is consistent with a humanitarianism that finds its roots in Christian convictions. The answer is yes. Understanding those roots may be a helpful antidote to the fears that drive some to block further progress in implementing the CRC.

Dignity of every child

Fundamental to the Christian faith is the conviction that every person, including every child, is created in the image of God and called by God to participate in the unfolding of creation. Children are of no less value than adults. While they are entrusted to families for their care, they also have worth and dignity apart from their families.

Love your neighbour as yourself; this most basic Christian teaching goes beyond sentimental feelings and charity to a profound respect for the other as equal in worth and calling before God. Justice and love come together in the biblical teachings about shalom, and it includes children as well as adults. Jesus moved children from the edge to the centre to demonstrate what his teachings meant for community life.

Some are concerned that rights talk is self-centred, and they fear that using a rights framework with children will breed a culture of selfish, autonomous individualism. They argue the focus should be on obligations, and the language of morality is used as an alternative discourse for social issues. In reality, however, the concept of rights is inherent in the concept of morality. Without acknowledging that others have a rightful claim, there is no basis for defining what is right and wrong. The most vulnerable groups in society are at the heart of the Bible's frequent calls to do justice. When that claim is rooted in the dignity of every

child before God, the focus is on enabling others to have their rightful place more than demanding one's own rights. A society that respects the rights of the most vulnerable, including children, is likely to respect the rights of all.

The CRC, of all the human rights conventions, reflects an integrated understanding of the relationships that contribute to healthy development, and it does not give priority to one dimension over another. It is, therefore, somewhat ironic, that the CRC should be the target for opposition. One problem is that many people who have been fired up to campaign against child rights have not read the whole document themselves.

Is the CRC anti-family?

The fear that child rights will erode family life is used to mobilise opposition to the CRC. Often, this is done without a careful reading and discussion of what the document says about family life. When children in Canada were asked in a survey which of the rights in the CRC were important for them, the right to have a family came out at the top of the list.

Throughout the CRC, the 'responsibilities, rights, and duties of parents' are recognised, and the preamble explicitly states that the best context for child development is a healthy family life. In practice, the CRC is useful to help address factors that prevent families from providing for and protecting their children. Pro-family groups could help advance the right of children not to be separated from their families, which is a huge problem faced by humanitarian agencies throughout the world.

When families do not or cannot protect the rights of their children, other mechanisms are needed. For Christians, parents do not have absolute power; only God does. Disciplining children in the Bible is balanced with reminders not to bring children to wrath or violate their trust. Boundaries on all human institutions are necessary to prevent the

abuse of power; a child-rights approach for Christians is rooted in the realistic assessment of the potential for all humans, including Christian parents themselves, to misuse power.

Rights-based approach

A rights-based approach sees the child as a whole person, in the context of family, community, the state, and other social structures. In contrast, needs-based approaches tend to put some needs ahead of others and ignore other equally important aspects of a child's situation. Secondly, the CRC brings political attention to the needs of children and helps to hold governments accountable for the way children are treated.

A society that respects the rights of the most vulnerable is likely to respect the rights of all.

In many ways, the 1990s were a hostile environment for child rights. Armed conflicts moved to village streets where children become targets and combatants, as well as unintended victims. In many countries the impact of economic factors, such as capital flight, structural adjustment, and trade upheavals, forced children into more dangerous work situations to help their families survive. At the same time, community services, which traditionally help parents support their children, have been eliminated, and governments are less able to stand up to powerful economic interests that ignore the negative impacts they may have on the environment where children live.

Promoting the rights of children provides balance in the current international political discourse, which is heavy on trade, foreign investment, and missile defence systems. It can help to set direction for this century, and prod everyone to look beyond the short-term contingencies of annual budgets and political party interests.

As the CRC moves into its second

decade of implementation, the teenage years, there is a need to elaborate on what some of the articles mean and how they fit into an integrated approach that will ensure effective implementation. At least four areas stand out for attention.

First is the need to increase public awareness of the CRC, including avenues for young people to participate in community-based strategies for implementation. Second is the development of tools for dealing constructively with competing rights and responsibilities in different cultural contexts. A more difficult third area relates to the concept of indivisibility in the CRC. And, while an integrated approach is important, the current system has no capacity to respond to violations, which are more urgent. There is a difference, for example, between the violations of the rights of children who have been abducted from Northern Uganda, held captive in Sudan, forced to kill other people, and used as sex slaves and the debates over spanking. Violations that threaten the survival and security of children during armed conflict, for example, cannot wait for a routine five-year review before a committee, which can only issue recommendations to national governments. Additional mechanisms are needed, including investigative teams that report to the Security Council and action by other UN agencies.

The CRC protects the rights of society's most vulnerable group, many of whom cannot defend themselves. But its enforcement mechanisms are weaker than those of other human rights instruments. This needs to change. Children grow up best when they know that threats to their security and rights are taken seriously at all levels by all sectors of society. ■

* 'Status of Ratifications of the Principal International Human Rights Treaties', UNHCR, as of 14 June 2001, and UNICEF.org/specialsession/rights.

Kathy Vandergrift is senior policy analyst, Advocacy and Government Relations, World Vision Canada.

Working toward a world where children are safe

Dean Hirsch, international president of World Vision

AS A CHRISTIAN relief and development organisation, World Vision finds its inspiration in the teachings of Jesus, who tells us that we have worth because God loves us. We affirm that worth by caring for one another, by loving our neighbour as we love ourselves. Children, our children and our neighbours' children, have equal claim to that love.

Jesus makes this very clear. When his disciples tried to scare away the children, Scripture tells that Jesus became indignant. 'Let the children come to me,' he said, 'do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.' (Mark 10:14)

God's sovereignty over children surpasses the authority of parents, especially parents who abuse their authority by neglecting, mistreating, exploiting or victimising their children. Sadly, parents who abuse their children are all too common. Indeed, most violence against children occurs in the home. And, when children are victimised outside the home, parents are often guilty of complicity or neglect or sheer desperation.

In my work with World Vision, I have met children whose parents sold them into bonded labour or prostitution. I have talked to children who were seized from their homes and forced to carry weapons or serve as

sex slaves for rebel troops. I have had children tell me how they were beaten, tortured, and deprived of food or sleep by the bosses and pimps who became their de facto parents. And I have also experienced the ecstasy of children weeping for joy because they have been rescued from slavery, bondage, misery or depravation.

Our challenge, as Christians, is to help children and parents achieve what God intended for them.

These fortunate children have regained the basic rights that God intended for all human beings. Children are equally entitled to what we treasure for ourselves: A loving home with the right to food, shelter, education, health care, and economic opportunity.

The Gospel asks Christians to ensure that children, 'the least among us', are afforded these basic human rights. So does the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a landmark, decade-old document signed by virtually every country in the world. The Convention affirms the role of good parents and sound

families as the best context in which children can realise their potential. Our challenge, as Christians, is to help children and parents achieve what God intended for them.

In conjunction with the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, World Vision begins a campaign this year called 'A Safe World for Children: Ending Abuse, Violence and Exploitation'. The campaign's purpose is to heighten awareness of children's rights, and urge governments to adopt measures that will prevent violence against children. Many of the measures we advocate are simple: Helplines. Better training of welfare and law enforcement agencies that deal with children. Church, community and civil society partnerships to promote prevention, protection and rehabilitation of children from violence.

Our efforts are focused on keeping children safe from: 1) child abuse and neglect; 2) violence in the home; 3) sexual exploitation; 4) armed conflict; and 5) HIV/AIDS. We are inviting the children in the many poor communities in which we work to be full participants in this process. And we invite you and all other people of good will to join us in helping create a global movement for children.

I believe that World Vision, UNICEF, and other child-focused agencies can make a big difference in the lives of children. I believe we can help do for children what the environmental movement did for the environment. And, I believe that children, in their innocence, joy, and awe, will lead us closer to the kingdom of God. ■

WORLD VISION is a Christian relief and development partnership which serves more than 70 million people in nearly 100 countries. World Vision seeks to follow Christ's example by working with the poor and oppressed in the pursuit of justice and human transformation.

Children are often most vulnerable to the effects of poverty. World

Vision works with each partner community to ensure that children are able to enjoy improved nutrition, health and education. Where children live in especially difficult circumstances, surviving on the streets, suffering in exploitative labour, or exposed to the abuse and trauma of conflict, World Vision works to restore hope and to bring justice.

World Vision recognises that poverty is not inevitable. Our Mission Statement calls us to challenge those unjust structures, which constrain the poor in a world of false priorities, gross inequalities and distorted values. World Vision desires that all people are able to reach their God-given potential, and thus works for a world which no longer tolerates poverty. ■



World Vision

- ❖ Africa Regional Office
P.O. Box 50816
Nairobi
Kenya
- ❖ Asia Pacific Regional Office
582/18-22 Sukhumvit 63
Bangkok 10110
Thailand
- ❖ EU Liaison Office
22 Rue de Toulouse
B-1040 Brussels
Belgium
- ❖ International Liaison Office
6 Chemin de la Tourelle
1209 Geneva
Switzerland
- ❖ Latin America & Caribbean Regional Office
Apartado 133, 2300 Curridbat
San Jose
Costa Rica, C.A.
- ❖ Middle East/Eastern Europe Regional Office
Engelsberggasse 4
A-1030 Vienna
Austria
- ❖ Global Relations Office
New York Address
New York, NY 12345
USA
- ❖ Partnership Offices
800 W. Chestnut Avenue
Monrovia, CA 91016-3198
USA

e-mail: global_future@wvi.org