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The Right to Peace

Children and Armed Conflict

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The Working Papers provide in-depth analysis of current advocacy, development and relief issues to help enhance collective understanding of these issues and to provide a resource for World Vision's international audience.

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Executive Summary

CHILDREN TODAY are increasingly deliberate targets, as well as unintended victims, in armed conflicts around the world. Between 1985 and 1995:

- 2 million children were killed;
- 6 million were left seriously injured or permanently disabled;
- 12 million were left homeless;
- 1 million were orphaned or separated from their parents;
- 10 million suffered from serious psychological trauma as a result of war; and
- 300,000 served as child soldiers.¹

World Vision believes that the protection of all children from armed conflict is essential, and addresses this concern through four avenues:

¹ UNICEF, *State of the World's Children 1996* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 13.

- humanitarian assistance to children during and after conflict,
- child-focused community-development work which helps to address some causes of war,
- peacebuilding and reconciliation activities in conflict-prone and post-conflict situations, and
- advocacy to improve public policies and practices that impact children.

In the ongoing search for effective strategies to address the issue of children affected by war, this discussion of recommendations is addressed to national governments and international organisations, and focuses on practical steps within a comprehensive approach.

World Vision believes that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides a positive framework for action. The CRC combines a recognition of the responsibility of adults to protect children and adolescents with the right and responsibility of young people to participate in their own development. Within that framework, implementation

of the recommendations of the Graca Machel report *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* (submitted to the General Assembly of the UN in 1996) is a high priority.² This working paper recommends additional steps to strengthen compliance and public accountability for respecting the rights of children.

Children need not be merely victims of war; they, along with their families and communities, can be active participants in the prevention of conflict and in the development or rebuilding of their countries. World Vision advocates a comprehensive strategy which will:

- prevent the involvement of children in armed conflict;
- protect children from the impact of armed conflict when it occurs;
- practice child-focused post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction; and
- promote the active participation of children and their families at every step.

² UN, Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989, the most ratified UN international instrument. The CRC has been ratified by 191 states, with only the U.S. and Somalia not having ratified.

Why Focus on Children and Armed Conflict?

“Let us take this opportunity to recapture our instinct to nourish and protect children. Let us transform our moral outrage into concrete action. Our children have a right to peace. Peace is every child’s right.”

(Graca Machel, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, p. 93)

When their community becomes the battlefield, children bear the brunt of the impact of war. That is the current situation in more than 30 countries in all parts of the world today. Since the beginning of this century, civilian casualties in war have risen from 5 percent to 90 percent, and a third of these are children. Recent UN reports state that half of the 30 million refugees and displaced persons in the world today are children.³

³ UNICEF, *State of the World’s Children 1996*, 13.

World Vision works with local communities in many of the countries where children are affected by armed conflict. This experience is the basis for the proposals presented in this paper. World Vision grew from one person's concern for the war orphans of Korea to a partnership of Christian relief and development agencies in more than 80 countries. That original commitment to children caught in armed conflict has remained a primary focus of the partnership for over fifty years.

Children are part of the larger civilian population affected by war, but warrant special consideration for the following reasons:

- Children are affected differently because of their vulnerability and the fact that they are still in the formative stages of personal growth. What happens during childhood shapes one's understanding of the world, human society, and one's future role in it. Everyone under 18 is considered a child under the Convention on the Rights of a Child, but the impact of armed conflict differs by age and stage of development.

These factors have to be considered in effective strategies to protect and restore the well-being of children and to allow them to participate in their own development.

- Children who grow up living in violence are more likely to turn to violence themselves as a method of problem-solving. Investing in the prevention of violence for children is an investment in human security for everyone.
- Children represent the majority of civilians affected by armed conflict, and the number of affected children is growing.
- Caring for children is one of the most basic foundations of society. Failure to protect children calls into question the primary ethical values of civilisation. Positively, focusing on the protection of children can be a powerful way to break down barriers between peoples, restore community values, and contribute to peacebuilding.

Protecting children is a basic value in most cultures and religions. World Vision draws inspi-

ration from the priority Jesus gave to the place of children within the community. Throughout Jesus' ministry, he demonstrated respect and love for children. Exercising responsibility for the next generation is a recurring theme throughout the Scriptures. Similar themes recur in other religious texts and ethical codes of conduct.

Respect for and protection of children is a responsibility to be shared by parents, local communities, governments and the international community. In keeping with this principle, World Vision seeks to address the problem of children in armed conflict at all levels. Local communities participate in the provision of humanitarian assistance to children in need and in child-focused community development, which in turn helps to reduce causes of conflict. At a national and international level, World Vision joins with other organisations to advocate public policies and practices which respect the right of children to grow up free of the negative impact of armed conflict.

Policy Context for Children and Armed Conflict

WORLD VISION advocates a comprehensive policy framework, in keeping with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recommendations of the Graca Machel study on *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, commissioned by the UN Secretary General.

The Graca Machel Study

In 1993 Graca Machel, former Minister for Education in Mozambique and, until recently, South Africa's First Lady, was appointed to undertake a study of the impact of armed conflict on children. In 1996, after two years of intensive research, the report *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* was submitted to the General Assembly of the UN. The findings were devastating.

They highlighted the urgent need for particular protection from armed conflict of those under 18.

The Machel Study concludes with a series of recommendations which form the backbone for a comprehensive international action plan for war-affected children (summary of recommendations in Appendix 1).

What has happened since the Graca Machel Study?

Progress has been made on a number of fronts, including the landmine treaty and the establishment of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict. In August 1999, the UN Security Council passed a resolution dealing specifically with Children and Armed Conflict. Children are receiving more attention in specific situations, such as in Kosovo. For the first time, children were specifically mentioned in the provisions of a peace agreement, the Lome Agreement in Sierra Leone.

At the judicial level, steps are being taken to hold people accountable for war-time violations of the rights of children. Statutes of war crimes for the International Criminal Court include rape, torture, and forced recruitment of children. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention of June 16, 1999, prohibited “forced or compulsory recruitment of children under 18 for use in armed conflict.” The challenge now is to achieve ratification and active implementation of these provisions.

A number of initiatives have also been taken to improve programmes for children in situations of armed conflict. In 1997 practitioners at the Cape Town Conference identified specific strategies, which were further developed at an international Conference on the Protection of Children and Adolescents in Complex Emergencies, in Oslo in November 1998. In many countries, NGOs are working together on research and training projects designed to identify the best practices and to learn lessons

from experiences in different cultural contexts.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers was established to address the specific issue of child soldiers; World Vision is an active member of the coalition. It has sponsored three regional conferences in Africa, Latin America, and Europe to help country officials and community practitioners develop legislative and programme initiatives. A fourth conference will be in Asia in May 2000.

The small arms issue is being pursued by another coalition, the International Network on Small Arms (IANSA). Controlling the supply of arms is the focus; reducing demand is a parallel area of increasing interest. World Vision is contributing to this through a research project examining strategies used by one area development programme to reduce demand for small arms.

On a regional level, The African Charter on the Rights of the Child has come into force with strong requirements for states to take responsibility to prevent involvement in armed conflict of children under age 18. It includes a mecha-

nism for investigating complaints, which is a stronger enforcement mechanism than what the CRC provides. In a similar vein, the Inter-American Children's Institute, in accordance with a resolution passed by the Organisation of American States, received a mandate to work on specific national plans with member states and bring them to the next Summit of the Americas in 2001.

In summary, the problem is recognised, and there is no shortage of ideas for improving the situation. The significant challenge ahead is a lack of political will to turn verbal commitments and strategies on paper into reality on the ground. In addition to outlining components of a comprehensive strategy, this paper proposes mechanisms to put some muscle behind the rhetoric regarding war-affected children.

Convention on the Rights of the Child as a framework for action

“War violates every right of a child—the right to life, the right to be with family and community, the right to health, the right to

the development of the personality and the right to be nurtured and protected.”

—Graca Machel

The CRC provides an important framework for developing effective strategies. It covers all aspects of a child’s life, each of which is also affected by armed conflict. Attention to all aspects is essential. This needs emphasis because of a current temptation among donor agencies in the field of international development to divert funds from basic needs to special, short-term initiatives with a high public profile. Based on 50 years of field experience, World Vision puts high priority on an integrated, community-based approach as the most effective and best investment for limited funds.

It is not a coincidence that most conflicts involving children are occurring in countries where people do not have adequate resources to provide for their children. We know that the children most susceptible to recruitment into the military are children at risk even under normal circumstances, such as street children, unaccom-

panied children, child prostitutes, child labourers, and children deprived of education. Significant progress in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child would address root causes of many armed conflicts that threaten children today.

The resolution on Children and Armed Conflict passed by the Security Council, along with other declarations by governments and UN agencies, are important political commitments. The challenge is to turn these commitments into action that makes a genuine difference for children.

Developed countries frequently make official statements about the importance of children, but at the same time they continue to reduce the amount of resources available for basic community development in poor countries. In addition, their representatives in international agencies such as the IMF adopt policies that force fragile countries to divert resources from meeting the basic needs of children in health and education to meeting debt payments. If developed countries are serious about stopping the involvement of children

in armed conflict, they will invest more in basic development for children, such as health and education. They will also examine the impact of their fiscal and trade policies on children at risk for involvement in armed conflict and children already affected by armed conflict.

Implementation of the CRC

The CRC is the first international legal instrument to incorporate both human rights law and humanitarian law. The wider CRC provisions are equally applicable in times of armed conflict, since the convention does not allow for derogation in times of war. This position is supported by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.⁴ As stated by Thomas Hammarburg, “There is no derogation clause in this Convention, it applies in its entirety also in times of war or emergency. The child has a right to a family environment, to go to school, to play, to get health care and ad-

⁴ Carolyn Hamilton and Tabatha Abu El-Haj, “The Protection of Children Under International Law.” *International Journal of Child Rights* Vol. 5 (1997): 1-46.

equate nutrition also during the armed conflict... and that the right to life, survival and development be protected.”⁵

The difficulties of monitoring and implementing the CRC are well recognised and mean that a legal response alone is insufficient. The enforcement provisions are weaker than those provided in other international human rights treaties. Countries report once every five years and a committee established by the UN reviews the report and makes recommendations for improvements.

Thus, in addition to using the CRC as a framework for programs, World Vision suggests that it is time to consider additional mechanisms to improve accountability for compliance, especially in cases of serious, massive violations, such as those that occur during armed conflict. In addition to seeking stronger accountability mechanisms under the CRC, the protection strategy

⁵ Thomas Hammarburg, keynote speech, “Children as a Zone of Peace: What Needs to Be Done?” in Aldrich and Van Baarda, eds. (1994), Conference on the Rights of Children in Armed Conflict, mentioned in Hamilton and El-Haj.

proposed in this paper is that violations of the rights of children be taken seriously under other international laws that provide stronger enforcement mechanisms.

First, it is helpful to consider the range of basic rights and responsibilities affected by armed conflict. This analysis provides the basis for the strategy which follows.

Specific Rights and Responsibilities and the Impact of Armed Conflict

The Right to Life, Survival and Development (Article 6, CRC)

“The most fundamental challenge for any...system which wishes to mitigate the suffering of children in war is to ensure their very survival.”

—Carolyn Hamilton and Tabatha Abu El-Haj

Article 6 of the CRC states that “every child has the inherent right to life. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.” UNICEF states, however, that the proportion of child deaths during armed conflict has been rising steadily since the end of World War II.⁶

⁶ Hamilton and El-Haj.

Use of humanitarian cease-fires can help protect the survival of children. Agreements have been reached during conflicts to allow for delivery of humanitarian assistance and health care, immunisation of children, safe passage, and identification of safe zones. Greater use of such initiatives was advocated by the Secretary General of the UN in the *Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, presented to the Security Council in September 1999. Now the challenge is to incorporate and implement these tools in the strategies adopted for specific conflicts by all agents in the international community.

Violations of agreements to allow access to vulnerable populations for humanitarian assistance and to exempt schools and hospitals from attack must be taken more seriously. In the case of Sudan, for example, violations of this nature have been documented and reported by both human rights and humanitarian agencies, but little serious action has been taken.

Use of landmines has also contributed to an increase in the number of children affected di-

rectly and indirectly by armed conflict. The indiscriminate nature of landmines has led to particularly high numbers of childhood deaths and amputations. Children injured when they are gathering wood, walking to school or playing make up to 30 percent of landmine injuries in Cambodia and Laos.⁷ According to UNICEF, landmines cause 800 deaths or serious injuries every month, and children in 68 countries live with more than 100 million landmines.

Progress has been made to ban the use of the landmines through an international treaty adopted two years ago. Much remains to be done to implement it.

⁷ World Vision Briefing, *Landmines: The Year of Missed Opportunities* (1996).

The Right to Food, Health and Basic Necessities of Life (Articles 24 and 27, CRC)

“It is a sad fact that infants and young children are often the earliest victims of...diseases and malnutrition which accompany population displacement and refugee outflows.”

—Sadako Ogata,
UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Direct physical trauma causes 5 percent of child deaths overall; 95 percent result from starvation or illness, mostly preventable with reasonable access to basic services.⁸ (In specific attacks the percentage of children killed directly may be higher.) One factor is the increasing manipulation of food supplies and assistance as weapons of war. Medical centres and community health services may be destroyed. And there is an imminent risk of contaminated water. Immediately after the recent Kosovo conflict, a preliminary

⁸ David Southall, “Children as the Focus of a United Nations Protection Force.” *New Statesman* (August 21, 1998).

rapid nutritional assessment conducted by World Vision indicated that 15 percent of children were severely or moderately malnourished. Children 2 years old and under were found to be particularly at risk because of lack of weaning foods and proper sterilisation facilities, and disruption of breastfeeding due to long marches, poor maternal nutrition, stress and fatigue.⁹

- World Vision has food security programmes in many countries, some of which are located in areas recovering from conflict. World Vision Rwanda, for example, has set up a seed multiplication programme and is working with child-headed households to ensure that these children's basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothing and educational materials, are met.
- In Sierra Leone, World Vision focuses on long-term food security, but also provides emergency food, including food supplies

⁹ World Vision, Proposal Report (1999).

for people affected by conflict in rural locations and for displaced people trapped in Freetown during a rebel attack.

The Right to a Stable Family Environment (Articles 20 and 22, CRC)

“Those who belong to caring and supportive families withstand severe psychological stress better than others. Stable, affectionate relationships between children and their closest care-givers are a protective factor against psychological disturbance.”

—International Save the Children Alliance¹⁰

Article 7 of the CRC states that every child “shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality, and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.” Article 16 provides that “no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with

¹⁰ International Save the Children Alliance, *Promoting Psychosocial Well-being Among Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement: Principles and Approaches* (1996), 3.

his or her privacy, family, home....” Articles 8, 9, 20 and 22 require States Parties to “provide assistance and protection to re-establish a child’s identity and reunite the child with the family.”

In a recent report UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated that 30 million people are now in refugee and displaced-person camps, and half of them are children. Children and adolescents are often overlooked and not given high priority during massive population shifts that accompany armed conflict. Survey studies have pointed out that some unaccompanied children wait years for family reunification.

Birth registration, prevention of separation whenever possible, and early family reunification are basic elements of a child-focused strategy. The Oslo Conference developed detailed recommendations for improving co-ordination and implementation of family reunification programmes.

Family reunification of children who have been involved as child soldiers or of children who have been severely traumatised by war requires special assistance. Effective, community-based

programmes will respect the cultural context, provide health care, psycho-social support and skills-training, and liaison with the community to help with transitions back to normal life.

While humanitarian agencies know what needs to be done, political leaders are turning a blind eye to the situation of children, especially in some parts of Africa. Strong public support for the right of children to family life would help create political will to allocate resources for family reunification. As an investment in future security, this would provide a higher return than much greater amounts invested in sophisticated weapons technology.

- In Rwanda and Burundi, World Vision works with children to prevent separation, reunite families, and help communities care for their children.
- In World Vision's Gulu Child Rehabilitation Project in Uganda, more than 5,000 children have been reintegrated with their respective families and guardians after having received psycho-social support, medi-

cal attention and vocational skills to help them go back to their community with self-esteem. After documenting names, parents and home villages of children, the centre is able to send this information to local community leadership committees who trace parents or next of kin and prepare for reunification. Community development programmes in the same area provide additional support for reintegration of the children.

- World Vision family reintegration projects in Bosnia include poverty alleviation measures such as micro-credit to provide an economic base for the family.
- In Kosovo, the World Vision Community Services Programme encourages families to stay together through activities that strengthen positive coping mechanisms and community education.

The Right to Protection from Violence (Article 37, CRC)

Child D has seen enough inhumanity to crush the spirits of an adult. After the provincial capital where he lived had fallen to UNITA rebels, he survived on scraps of food or none at all. A family friend suggested getting out of the area and walking to the government-held area of Dondo. D went with his 14-year-old brother, his sister and her one-year-old baby. On the third day they were surrounded by UNITA soldiers. D watched whilst his brother was shot dead and his sister bayoneted. The baby was clubbed to death with a rifle butt. D ran through the bush in absolute terror. For hours he lay concealed, listening to victims of the soldiers screaming. He finally arrived in Dondo. For the first weeks he cried much of the night. He dreamed of killings. Now he lives with the remainder of his family in Luanda.

—World Vision International

“No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment” (Article 37 of the CRC). States also specifically commit to “take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of such treatment” (Article 39).

In situations of armed conflict, children are subjected to various forms of violence and degradation or are eye-witnesses to these atrocities. Sometimes, to guarantee their own survival or safety, they may be required to carry out acts of violence against members of their own family or other adults or children.

Child soldiers are trained and forced to kill and torture. Once trained, they can prove to be highly effective killing machines. According to a Khmer Rouge commander, “It usually takes a little time, but eventually the younger ones become the most effective soldiers of them all.”¹¹

¹¹ Hamilton and El-Haj.

Gender-based violence

“One can only be outraged by the abuse of children, sexually or otherwise, but when it is committed collectively by soldiers within the conditions of war it is doubly abhorrent.”

— Michael Harbottle,
The Centre for International Peace Building¹²

Young girls in the context of armed conflict are vulnerable to sexual violence as a crime of opportunity. In Uganda and Sudan, girls as young as 12 are given to soldiers as “wives” and subjected to sexual and physical abuse. Sexual violence is also used as a weapon of war. In Kosovo, young girl refugees waiting at border crossings were systematically raped by Serbian soldiers as part of a programme of ethnic cleansing. Refugee children in countries of asylum also experience an increase in sexual violence. In Albania, for ex-

¹² Michael Harbottle, “Proper Soldiering: The Ethical Approach.” Written contribution to the report on the Armed Conflicts and Sexual Abuses of Children Roundtable by the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Focal Point on Sexual Exploitation of Children.

ample, refugee girls were at risk of attack or abduction by certain groups within the host country population. In other situations, such as in Cambodia, research has shown that an increase in child prostitution accompanied the presence of peacekeepers in the country. Children may also be required to witness sexual violence against family members or be forced to take part.

“I was only 15 when I was abducted by rebels. . . . I lived in captivity for almost three years. Three days after my abduction I was given to a man to be his fourth wife. He was quite old and was a bad man who was harsh and rude. Twice he beat me and I almost died. In December 1995, I had a baby girl. Despite this I was given a gun and sent to the war front to fight with my baby strapped to my back.”

—Former child soldier, Uganda, 1998

Victims face physical and psychological trauma. They are vulnerable to infection by HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. Girls

who are raped may be ostracised by their families and communities, and there are few reproductive health care services to meet their needs. A World Vision report on Traumatized Children of War, highlighted in the UN Secretary General's report on the abduction of children, noted that approximately 85 percent of girls who arrive at the Gulu Trauma Centre in northern Uganda had contracted sexual diseases during their captivity.¹³ Sometimes, as a result of rape and rejection, children turn to prostitution for survival.

Since the Machel report, Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court has classified rape, persecution, torture, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation or any other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity as crimes against humanity. Article 8 deals specifically with gender-based crimes as war crimes.¹⁴ While this is a

¹³ UN Economic and Social Council Document 27, Report from the Secretary-General, January 1999.

¹⁴ D. Robinson, "Defining Crimes Against Humanity," *American Journal of International Law* Vol. 93, No. 1 (1999).

positive step, more has to be done to prevent sexual violence in time of war as well as times of peace.

Right to Education **(Articles 28 & 29, CRC)**

Child A could not imagine ever being at school again. When the Sierra Leone Revolutionary United Front attacked, they cut off one of his arms and severely wounded his hands when he tried to protect himself from the machete attack. Through education, Child A was reintroduced to the discipline of daily life. He had to go back to school because his disability prevented him from going back to farming. He now wants to be an accountant and go to business school when he finishes his primary education.

—World Vision Sierra Leone

Education provides a return to normalcy as well as providing skills for survival. Experience also shows that education is effective in prevent-

ing recruitment, abduction, and gender-based violence, and therefore serves as an important protection tool.

Education should be restarted as soon as possible in situations of conflict. Many donor countries consider that education is long-term development, and do not fund it as part of emergency response. In situations where conflict endures for many years, and children are forced to remain in displaced-person camps for years, interruption in their education puts them at a permanent disadvantage, even after the conflict is over. In southern Sudan, for example, education has been disrupted for many years. While schools cannot be built in temporary settings, there are mobile, flexible, less formal ways to provide basic education.

- In Rwanda, Sierra Leone, northern Uganda and other countries, World Vision programmes advocate for and support children's attending school or vocational training.
- In Burundi, World Vision assisted second-

ary school children who suffered effects of civil unrest by meeting individual needs and organising school-based activities.

Right to Be Heard, Non-Discrimination, and Identity (Articles 2, 8 and 12, CRC)

Article 12 of the CRC requires that “the views of the child be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.” Non-discrimination is a basic principle of the CRC, and other provisions protect freedom of expression, religious freedoms, and the right to preserve one’s cultural identity.

In modern conflict, children are often targeted in campaigns to exterminate particular groups of people. In some cases, local media and school curricula are used to foster prejudice. Earlier intervention to prevent discrimination and protect the civil rights of children could help to prevent attacks on children as part of ethnically or politically motivated conflicts. Local media and school curricula can be used positively to foster respect for other people.

During conflict, children are not only objects upon which suffering is cast, but are active agents of influence. They must be allowed to participate in efforts to prevent conflict and in programmes designed to address their needs during and after armed conflict. Experience in World Vision programmes in Latin America and the Philippines shows that children can be effective peace-builders and active participants in the process of reconciliation after conflict.

Child participation in programme planning and implementation is an area where more can be learned from experience and research. More training for staff of development organisations would be helpful.

Comprehensive Strategy: Prevention, Protection and Reintegration

BASED ON THE CRC, World Vision supports the use of comprehensive strategies for the prevention, protection, and reintegration of children. Circumstances in each country are different and must be reflected in country-specific strategies. A recommendation at the Oslo Conference called for UNICEF to facilitate country-specific strategies, and to include other NGOs and civil society organisations in both development and implementation.

Some common components for effective strategies are outlined below, with recommendations for consideration in the development of specific plans for specific situations. Other components are universal and must be implemented through the UN.

Prevention

Stop the use of child soldiers

“Military necessity cannot provide a justification for conscription or the use of children in combat.”

—Guy Goodwin-Gill¹⁵

One of the most alarming trends in contemporary armed conflicts is reliance on children as combatants. A child soldier is defined as any person under 18 who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, fighters, as well as girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage.¹⁶

A profile of child soldiers today

- More than 300,000 children under age 18 can be categorised as child soldiers.
- Participation of child soldiers has been re-

¹⁵ I. Cohn and Guy Goodwin-Gill, *Child Soldiers: The Role of Children in Armed Conflict* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Graca Machel, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, UN, August 1996.

ported in 33 current or recent armed conflicts in almost every region of the world. In 26 of the reported countries, the children are under 15. Some of these child combatants are as young as 8.

- The increase in light automatic weapons and easy access to arms make child soldiers an increasingly popular choice for armed forces.
- Shortage of military personnel, especially as a conflict drags on, often leads to forcing children into battle.
- Some commanders specifically note the desirability of children as they are “more obedient, do not question orders and are easier to manipulate than adult soldiers.”
- Particularly vulnerable to recruitment are children at risk even under normal circumstances, such as children separated from families, street children, children in displaced-person camps, children in minority groups, poor children. These are the

same groups vulnerable to exploitive child labour practices in peacetime.

- Forced recruitment may occur through conscription, press-ganging, or kidnapping. Young people may also be recruited “voluntarily;” in some circumstances, however, it is questionable how voluntary such recruitment is. A lack of realistic alternatives for getting food, helping the family, social status, etc., may incline young people to choose military means to survive.
- In case studies in El Salvador, Ethiopia and Uganda, almost a third of all child soldiers were reported to be girls. Girl soldiers are often raped or given to military commanders as “wives.”

The abuses

Child soldiers are often induced to commit atrocities under the influence of alcohol and drugs, which leads to subsequent addiction to these substances. In addition, children are easily

exploited physically and sexually, with high incidences of sexually transmitted disease, HIV/AIDS, and pregnancy and abortion among the girls.

Physical wounds reveal little of the deeper emotional scars these children sustain when surrounded by violence, as perpetrators, victims and witnesses. The World Vision northern Uganda psycho-social support programme has shown that it can take years for these children to recover from what they have endured. Community workers note that former child soldiers often exhibit profound psychological trauma and inability to adjust to normal life, at levels exceeding that of adult soldiers.

Even in situations where voluntary rather than forced recruitment is the norm, children carry the scars such experiences bring.

Optional Protocol to stop the use of child soldiers

“The argument that the age of recruitment is merely a technical matter to be decided by

individual Governments fails to take into account the fact that effective protection of children from the impact of armed conflict requires an unqualified legal and moral commitment which acknowledges that children have no part in armed conflict.”

—Graca Machel

In 1995 the UN Commission on Human Rights established an open-ended working group to draft an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. The objective was to raise from 15 to 18 the minimum age for recruitment and participation in military activities for any armed force, whether government, opposition, rebel or guerrilla.

Recent negotiations in Geneva concluded with the adoption of an Optional Protocol raising the age for active participation to 18 and the age for voluntary recruitment to 16. The Protocol includes specific provisions for non-state actors and requires states to provide assistance in the demobilisation and reintegration of existing

child soldiers. This agreement is a step forward; it reflects the fundamental principle that young people under age 18 should not be involved in armed conflict. At the same time, failure to adopt a consistent age for all categories and limiting state responsibility for enforcement to “feasible measures” results in a protocol that is fairly weak.

Attention must now be focused on ratification by as many states as possible and on effective implementation in order to achieve more universal acceptance of the basic value that children and war do not mix.

Progress is occurring on other fronts. In October 1998 the UN Secretary General announced a new policy regarding age limits for UN peacekeepers, military observers and civilian police. The UN asks that:

The troop-contributing countries do not send civilian police and military observers younger than 25 years to serve in peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, national contingent soldiers should preferably be at least 21 years old, and definitely not below

the age of 18, when deployed in a United Nations peacekeeping operation.

In a statement to the UN Security Council on February 12, 1999, UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy applauded the UN position as a model for country forces and emphasised the importance of a universal standard:

We would be derelict if we did not reiterate, in the strongest possible terms, that until the minimum age of recruitment is universally set at 18, the ruthless exploitation of children as soldiers will continue.¹⁷

Recent ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child provides an additional tool for use in Africa. It is the first regional treaty that obliges States Parties to the charter¹⁸ to take all necessary measures to ensure that no one under age 18 takes part in hostilities and

¹⁷ Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy to the UN Security Council on Minimum Age for Peacekeepers, February 12, 1999.

¹⁸ Article 22, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (adopted in 1990, came into force in 1999).

that states refrain from recruiting anyone under 18 into their armed forces.

Why age 18?

Arguments for adopting a consistent position of 18 as the minimum age for recruitment and deployment include the following:

- All other provisions of the CRC use age 18. It is the most commonly accepted age for recognition as an adult around the world. It is inconsistent to lower the age for just one article.
- Voting age in most countries is 18. The age for participation in military activity should be consistent with the voting age.
- A higher standard will help to prevent illegal use of younger children, even given the difficulty of establishing the exact age of older children based upon physical characteristics. A military commander, for example, can easily pass a 13-year-old off as a 15-year-old; but a 13-year-old is unlikely to be mistaken as an 18-year-old. Raising

the age limit is, in particular, aimed at protecting the youngest and most vulnerable children and is especially effective in countries where children do not possess legal documents to prove their age.

- Only children who are non-combatants are entitled to benefit from the protection of civilians established in the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols. If children do participate, even in cases of forced recruiting or merely in support functions, they lose their inviolability as non-combatants and become legitimate military targets.
- Of the 191 states that have ratified the CRC, fewer than 50 currently have laws permitting recruitment of combatants under age 18.¹⁹
- Experience in internal conflicts shows that children who start in support functions can easily be assigned to direct participation.

¹⁹ Machel, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, 1996.

The line between direct and indirect participation is blurred, and absence of a clear definition prevents effective enforcement. A straight-18 position would eliminate ambiguity and allow for more effective enforcement.

In her report, Graca Machel advocated immediate adoption of the Optional Protocol and a straight-18 position. The report shows a direct correlation between standard-setting in the international human rights framework and use of child soldiers. Machel saw raising the age of recruitment and participation as a crucial intervention in the overall strategy to stop the use of child soldiers.

Recommendation

World Vision recommends ratification and effective implementation of the Optional Protocol to foster universal acceptance of age 18 as the minimum age for participation in any kind of military force.

Control the small arms trade— legal and illegal

“Arming children, directly or indirectly, should not be tolerated and those countries which are exporters of arms should ensure that they are not sent to countries which arm children in violation of international law.”

—Mary Robinson,
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights²⁰

A recent report on small arms estimated that there are about 500 million small arms in the world; they have been used in 43 of the last 47 conflicts.²¹ Small arms can be bought cheaply; they are simple to use; and they make it easier to arm children on the front lines. Approximately 90 percent of civilian casualties are caused by small arms.²²

²⁰ High Commissioner on Human Rights. *Report* (Geneva: UN, March 1999).

²¹ T. Rowell, *Small Arms: Trends and Statistics*. A report for World Vision, University of Leeds, Work Place Co-Operative Project GEOG 3530, April 1999.

²² S. Eskidjian, ed., *Small Arms, Big Impact: A Challenge to the Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998).

In some countries it is not uncommon to meet young children who can assemble these weapons in a matter of minutes but who are unable to read properly. In some parts of the world, guns can be bought for the price of a goat or a bag of corn and are less expensive than books. The increased participation of children in armed conflict has been linked to a proliferation in the availability of small arms.

The UN Security Council, in Resolution 1261 on Children and Armed Conflict, calls on member states, particularly those involved in the manufacture and marketing of weapons, to restrict arms transfers that could aggravate existing tensions and to collaborate in combating illegal arms flows.

Welcome efforts are being made by governments to stop the illicit arms trade. Greater effort is required to control legal sales of small arms. Signing of the European Union Code of Conduct on Small Arms provides a policy framework, but sustained work is required to tighten loopholes, to call brokers to account, and to increase

the transparency and accountability of those who have signed the code. Work is also continuing to build support for an International Code of Conduct.

Recommendations

World Vision endorses the call of the Security Council to nations involved in the manufacture and sale of small arms to “restrict arms transfers which could aggravate existing tensions . . . and collaborate in combating illegal arms flows.”

World Vision recommends that the UN Secretary General include in his report back to the Security Council on Resolution 1261 detailed information on the trade in small arms. The report should provide specific information on transfers from individual countries, including members of the Security Council themselves.

World Vision asks member states of the Security Council actively to support

practical strategies being developed by members of the International Network on Small Arms and to implement its recommendations, particularly recommendations for their own countries and spheres of influence.

Reduce the root causes of conflict

World Vision firmly believes that the best way to prevent the destructive impact on children of armed conflict is to invest in reduction of root causes of armed conflict, which include poverty, inequality, violations of human rights, poor governance, and need for alternative mechanisms to resolve disputes. World Vision itself works internationally to tackle many root causes of armed hostilities, focusing on long-term, sustainable development in partnership with communities and governments.

Investment in children and young people is a good investment in human security, especially in countries with a large and growing population of young people. In their country-specific devel-

opment strategies, the IMF, the World Bank, donor countries and development organisations should give higher priority to basic development needs of youth.

Resolving root causes of conflict is possible. In a report entitled *Urgent Issues for the Children of the New Millennium* (summary in Appendix 2), World Vision asserts that it is feasible to remove some of the major causes of conflict by the time a child born in 2000 reaches adulthood. The biggest problem is a lack of political will to take the necessary steps.

Recommendations

World Vision recommends that the international community allocate more attention and resources to reduce root causes of armed conflict, starting with central issues outlined in *Urgent Issues for the Children of the New Millennium* (summary in Appendix 2).

World Vision urges governments in developed countries to increase support for

long-term international development programmes seeking to break the cycle of poverty and injustice that can lead to armed conflict. Governments are urged to renew their commitment by meeting the UN's goal of allocating 0.7 percent of GNP to international development assistance.

In the case of national governments which refuse to fulfill their obligations to protect children under the CRC, funding organisations should consider directing available funds to NGOs and other civil society organisations in the country which are prepared to work with local communities to improve conditions for their young people.

Make the IMF accountable

Along with other members of the Jubilee 2000 network, World Vision wishes to draw attention to the implications of debt burdens on the ability of countries to invest in their own children. The IMF and finance ministers of developed countries must consider the impact for children at risk of fiscal policies forced upon indebted countries. It is unfair to hold countries accountable for compliance with the CRC when their resource allocation is directed and controlled by the IMF; the IMF must accept its share of accountability for consequences of its actions. In many cases, structural adjustment policies have left children more vulnerable to the devastating impacts of armed conflicts. If developed countries take seriously their statements about the importance of children they will do a child-impact assessment of the macro-economic policies they support.

Most developed countries are spending far more on promotion of trade and foreign investment than on investment in development assis-

tance, and only a small portion of that goes to children. It would be a good investment for developed countries to shift some of the resources spent on trade promotion to investment in child-focused community development and community security initiatives.

Recommendations

Developmental needs of children, in the context of family and community, should be given greater priority in country assistance strategies developed by the World Bank, the IMF, and donor countries.

Immediate implementation of debt relief could free resources to be allocated for basic education and health care.

World Vision recommends that the Committee on the Rights of the Child ask the IMF to present public child-impact assessments of their fiscal policy prescriptions for conflict-prone countries to demonstrate how they are helping to achieve international commitments to children in the CRC.

Give adolescents higher priority

Prevention strategies in conflict-prone countries will pay particular attention to adolescents. In many developing countries, young people constitute a growing percentage of the population, but they are ignored in national and international decision-making processes related to those countries. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to military recruitment and sexual abuse. Adolescents in poor countries may face difficulties moving from basic education to a sustainable economic livelihood and a meaningful role within their social structures. In other cases they may be forced to take on adult roles prematurely, as in the case of child-headed households, and miss educational opportunities. At the same time they are increasingly conscious of the gap between images of “the good life” portrayed by global media or advertisers, and their own reality.

What takes place during adolescence shapes basic values and future attitudes. Unfortunately, once they are finished with basic education, adolescents are often overlooked in community-development programmes.

On a positive note, there are examples of communities working with young people, especially those likely to be drawn into armed activities, to provide constructive activities. Effective strategies, based on understanding the role of adolescence in a particular culture, develop ways to channel youthful energy into peaceful and constructive activities. Use of micro-credit with older teens is being explored as one means of providing economic livelihood. Sports and community leadership-training programmes are constructive alternatives. Helping adolescents obtain age and identity documentation can be part of awareness-raising since evidence shows that youth who are aware of their rights are less vulnerable to forced recruitment. While respect for existing social structures is important, it may also be necessary to allow room for developing new structures, particularly where adolescents constitute a large percentage of the population.

The reproductive health and risk of sexual exploitation of adolescent girls requires particular attention.

Recommendation

World Vision recommends that governments and development agencies give higher priority to needs of adolescents, especially in situations where they constitute a significant portion of the population and where they are at risk of becoming involved in armed conflict.

Increase investment in peacebuilding

Investment in peacebuilding initiatives can be effective as a preventive measure. As a child-focused partnership, World Vision believes that young people, along with their communities, have a role to play in building a culture of peace, in using alternative methods for conflict resolution, and in reconciliation initiatives once conflict has occurred.

The Canadian International Development Agency and a Canadian NGO network have developed an analytical framework for child-focused dimensions of peacebuilding activities (available

on the website of the Canadian International Development Agency at www.acdi-cida.gc.ca).

- World Vision UK has undertaken a study of the role that community-development programmes can play in building peace and preventing violent conflict amongst ethnically, politically and religiously diverse people groups.²³ Positive findings are being incorporated into programmes throughout the world.
- World Vision Colombia has facilitated involvement of children in a national peace initiative; the children speak as Ambassadors for Peace.
- Intensive reconciliation programmes established by World Vision Rwanda bring together former enemies. The programmes focus on working through the process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

²³ Siobhan O'Reilly, *The Contribution of Community Development to Peacebuilding: World Vision's Area Development Programmes* (World Vision UK, 1998).

Recommendation

World Vision recommends that donor countries and development agencies increase their investment in preventive peacebuilding activities, incorporate these activities into sustainable community development programmes, and encourage active participation of children in preventive peacebuilding. More applied research is needed to teach conflict resolution skills effectively to young people in conflict-prone situations.

Protection

“For too long we have given ground to spurious claims that the involvement of children in armed conflict is regrettable but inevitable. It is not. Children are regularly caught up in conflict because of conscious and deliberate decisions made by adults.”

—Graca Machel

Strategies of protection focus on helping children already at risk of involvement in armed conflicts. The international tendency to turn a blind eye to violations of international norms has led to a culture of impunity in which abusers think that they will suffer no disciplinary action. Governments and NGOs must work together to dismantle this culture of impunity. Practical measures must reflect the basic principle that no amount of conflict justifies abuse of children. Even in times of war, values and rules and standards matter.

During times of armed conflict protection of children must become a primary consideration

in diplomatic initiatives and foreign policy, as well as in humanitarian and development policy. Effective implementation of the CRC requires more attention at the community level, in bilateral diplomatic relations, and through international channels.

National governments have a sovereign responsibility to protect children, and recognition of national sovereignty is an important part of the system of international law. At the same time, national sovereignty is not an absolute right. If violations of basic rights of children are on a large scale and serious enough to cause permanent damage to the children, and if a government does nothing to stop the violations, that government sacrifices its right to national sovereignty.

The UN also has a role to play. As stated by the Secretary General, “The [Security] Council recognises that massive and systematic breaches of human rights law and international humanitarian law constitute threats to international peace and security and therefore demand its attention and action.” The Report on the Protection of

Civilians during Armed Conflict resulted in recommendations including: that the Security Council “consider deployment in certain cases of a preventive peacekeeping operation, or of another preventive monitoring presence;” that it investigate disputes at earlier stages; that it take concrete action in response to threats against peace; and that it make use of human rights information as “indicators for potential preventive action by the United Nations.”

In keeping with this direction, World Vision puts forward the following suggestions for consideration as additional mechanisms to improve compliance with the CRC and existing humanitarian laws developed to protect children.

Early-warning systems

*“What does prevention entail? . . .
It means having early warning systems in
place so that signs of tension and potential
conflict are spotted early enough to do
something about them.”*

—Mary Robinson,
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The UN and regional defence organisations are recognising the need to strengthen their early-warning systems and to develop strategies to prevent escalation of conflict before it threatens masses of the civilian population. Other players, such as international NGOs active in conflict-prone countries, can provide valuable assistance in development of appropriate, non-military strategies to diffuse developing conflicts.

World Vision recommends giving more attention to serious violations of the rights of children in the early-warning system. Any attempts to recruit children for active deployment in armed conflict should be reported immediately and a

strategy developed to deal with it. Organised campaigns of hatred against particular peoples, which often justify attacks on children, need to be countered in the early stages. If embassies, which focus the majority of their attention on trade-related matters, could be asked to give some attention to the situation of children and young people and to make serious violations of rights of children a matter for bilateral diplomatic relations, this would show that governments regard the development of children as seriously as they regard economic and fiscal issues.

Recommendation

World Vision recommends international co-operation to strengthen early-warning systems and to monitor the situation of children at risk, and the use of diplomatic initiatives to bring attention to violations of children's rights. Diplomatic initiatives could help provide for the basic needs of children by resulting in such measures as humanitarian cease-fires.

A child-focused early-intervention team

Consideration should be given to establishing a highly skilled team of child-rights monitors for deployment on an early intervention basis. Their proactive, aggressive monitoring would be followed up promptly by appropriate UN officials. This team would operate under the direction of the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, and would report its findings to the Security Council in public sessions in order to enhance public accountability to take appropriate action by both country governments and the Security Council.

In a published article, David Southall, Honorary Director of Child Advocacy International, went one step further and proposed the establishment of an apolitical international armed force designed specifically to protect children from war crimes. This proposal for an International Child Protection Force (ICPF) grew out of experience in Bosnia and Afghanistan and is based upon the fact that war crimes against children at the beginning of a conflict are often committed by a small

number of dangerous and abusive people, spurred on by politicians. The ICPF would adopt an approach similar to that of a country's police force in these situations. Since death and damage to children occurs early in a conflict, often in areas where humanitarian agencies have difficulty obtaining access, early intervention by the ICPF could also assist in providing access for humanitarian workers, in keeping with international law.

One advantage of such a child-protection force is that it would be hard for a political leader to argue against reasonable efforts designed to protect children. By focusing on children, regardless of their ethnic, religious or social affiliation with any faction in the conflict, members of the international community are less likely to be accused of taking sides. Of greatest importance would be the speed and efficiency with which a small, stand-by force could be mobilised, along with commitment to support its actions as necessary with strong diplomatic and (in worst-case scenarios) appropriate military responses.

The primary objection to this proposal re-

gards the question of sovereignty. States will argue that it is their own responsibility to protect their own children. In situations of armed conflict, however, the evidence is clear that they are often unable to do this. Ideally, agreement for the use of the ICPF would be sought from all factions in a conflict, but if that were denied, deployment could be mandated by the Security Council in response to evidence that children were not being protected in accordance with international law.

This would be dangerous work, and soldiers engaged in it would have to accept considerable risks. In time, the record of such a force might act as a deterrent to the abuse of children by belligerent groups.

While debate about establishment of an international armed force will take some time, it may be possible under existing laws to deploy child-rights monitors as a preventive measure, as a first step in the direction of serious international action to protect the rights of children.

Another question is the feasibility of hold-

ing non-state actors accountable for violations of the rights of children. Globalisation means that even rebels and non-state actors depend on the goodwill of the international community from whom they seek political legitimacy as well as their arms and funding. Examples of such groups' responding to pressure include the Tamil Tigers, the SPLA and the Bouganvillian Revolutionary Army, which have openly denounced recruitment and participation in armed conflict of those under 18.

Examples of non-state actors' being held accountable for other human rights violations include the decision of the Inter-American Court in the case of *Velazquez-Rodriguez -v- Honduras*, dealing with disappearances. Taking similar action under the CRC would require stronger enforcement mechanisms.

Reports by the UN Secretary General have recognised that strategies such as targeted sanctions and public pressure could be used to cut off non-state groups from the international support and legitimacy most of them desire. The diffi-

culty in getting a strong political consensus to implement such strategies consistently reflects the fact that protection of children is still a matter of rhetoric rather than serious action.

The Secretary General has also proposed that the UN consider establishing a new mechanism to hold abusers financially accountable for damage done to victims, including capacity to seize assets such as equipment and bank accounts.

Recommendations

UN agencies should consider establishing a well-trained early intervention team to focus exclusively on child protection through aggressive monitoring and appropriate reporting of violations of child-rights in conflict-prone situations. Further discussion of the concept of an International Child Protection Force is also warranted.

Use of child-focused humanitarian cease-fires and similar strategies should be promoted and implemented at the earliest

possible stage in specific conflicts, based on the concept of children as “zones of peace,” even in times of conflict.

Support child-protection networks

Within the context of community-development programmes, greater attention needs to be paid to development and support of child-protection networks. The Africa Network for the Prevention and Protection of the Children against Abuse is a good example. Effective strategies build on local leadership to support advocacy for children at regional and national levels. Such networks where they exist in vulnerable circumstances require active support by the international development community. They are an effective way to emphasise respect for children.

Local media and children themselves can help to increase awareness of the dangers of involvement in conflict and promote alternative ways to resolve conflicts.

Recommendations

World Vision advocates greater support for existing child-protection networks and development of new ones, especially in conflict-prone countries.

World Vision recommends using the active participation of young people themselves, and the local media, to make young people aware of the risks and consequences of involvement in armed conflict.

Compliance mechanism for the CRC

The CRC is highly regarded and has been ratified by every nation except for the United States and Somalia. The Geneva Conventions are widely ratified, but the additional protocols specifically protecting children have been ratified by fewer countries. The main problem in both cases, however, is weak mechanisms for ensuring compliance.

Enforcement mechanisms of the CRC in particular are weaker than those provided for in other

human rights conventions. Countries are required to report on compliance once every five years. A committee established by the UN reviews the country report and reports by other agencies, meets with the country delegation, and then issues a report with recommendations for improvement. Five years is a long time in the life of a child suffering serious impacts from armed conflict. Five years or even one year can inflict permanent damage from which children will never recover.

Supporters of the CRC emphasise education and community work to achieve voluntary, progressive compliance with the spirit of the CRC as an integrated web, rather than pursuit of violations of individual provisions. World Vision agrees that it is preferable to work through education to achieve implementation of goals expressed in the CRC. However, when large-scale and severe violations threaten survival or do permanent damage to children through armed invasions or forced abductions, there must be an avenue for earlier and stronger action.

Under the present system, UNICEF provides

protection programmes for children at risk in many countries and highlights abuses, but in some circumstances, criticism of a government may put its programmes at risk. In difficult circumstances, it is not realistic to expect the same agency which runs programmes in a country to pursue complaints which may result in risk to those programmes. The same difficulty faces humanitarian agencies providing programmes in difficult circumstances. A separate mechanism for hearing petitions and conducting investigations would give the freedom to put interests of children first.

Consideration should be given to establishment of a sub-committee of the Committee on the Rights of the Child with a mandate to hear and act immediately on complaints of violations of rights of children, especially those that threaten their survival prospects in situations of armed conflict. If the committee, with the authority of the UN Commissioner of Human Rights, could not achieve agreement to end serious violations, the Security Council should be granted the right to consider other measures. Public pressure could also

be used because governments and rebel groups alike rely on international support for legitimacy.

As part of a child-protection strategy, consideration should also be given to using other international laws to pursue violations of the rights of children. This would reinforce the principle that children are as important as adults. The UN Secretary General has emphasised the non-derogable rights in article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which prohibits torture and cruel and degrading treatment. The Convention Against Torture includes stronger enforcement provisions, and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women could be used to pursue violations affecting girl children. Violations of children's rights occurring during contemporary conflicts certainly warrant the attention of other tribunals besides the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Violations of the rights of refugee children could be pursued under refugee conventions and, in some cases, violations of the rights of displaced

children could be pursued under national human rights legislation. The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 clearly includes children, but the definition of refugee and the grounds for protection are limited. Under The African Charter, however, a broader definition of refugee would also apply to children who are internally displaced. The CRC committee should also pay more attention to upholding specific provisions of the CRC regarding the rights of children who are refugees.

Recommendations

A sub-committee of the Committee on the Rights of the Child should be established to hear and act immediately on complaints of violations of the rights of children, especially violations that threaten their survival prospects in situations of armed conflict.

Steps should be taken to prosecute serious violations of the rights of children under other human rights legislation in addition to the CRC.

Follow up the work of the Special Representative

The work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict has resulted in a higher profile for the needs of children. Development of specific country strategies should follow high-profile visits made by agencies responsible for action, regular monitoring, and reporting of progress or lack of progress. NGOs active in the country would be asked to contribute both to development and to implementation of the strategy. In addition, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict should make earlier visits to conflict-prone countries with the aim of putting protection systems in place. In the case of East Timor, for example, there were warning signs. NGOs, as well as UN agencies, need to ask what could be done earlier in such situations to protect children.

Recommendation

**The Office of the Special Representative
of the Secretary General for Children and**

Armed Conflict should facilitate development of specific country strategies to follow up on visits made, and consider earlier visits to conflict-prone countries.

Attacks on schools, hospitals and playgrounds

Facilities where children congregate or which have a significant responsibility for children, such as schools, hospitals and playgrounds, should be considered battle-free zones. Violations of relevant provisions of the Geneva Conventions need to be taken more seriously. This will, however, involve more than invoking the Geneva Conventions and the CRC. It will take concerted international pressure at an official and public level to compel those who ignore conventional restraints to cease targeting children.

Recommendation

The report of the Secretary General on implementation of the Security Council Resolution on Children and Armed Con-

flict should include specific recommendations to improve the Security Council's performance in upholding restraints agreed upon in the Geneva Conventions.

Protect children in displaced-person and refugee camps

In camps for internally-displaced persons and refugees, children are the most vulnerable members of a population, succumbing to malnutrition, diseases, abuse, and psychological trauma.

According to law, internally displaced children are eligible for the same protection as other children in the country. In reality, displaced children receive little effective protection. Nor are displaced-person camps temporary. In some cases, children spend many of their developmental years in camps, with minimal nutrition, poor health care and no education. When and if they return home, they are at a permanent disadvantage compared with other children, which can be a cause of future conflict.

Words on paper, although important, do not protect children. Additional political will and re-

sources are required to address the abysmal conditions faced by millions of children in camps for displaced persons and refugees. The UN Special Representative for the Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons, Dr. Francis Deng, is raising the profile of these issues, but has no resources to take effective action.

Although international guidelines for displaced persons explicitly forbid recruitment of children—Principle 13 states that “in no circumstance shall displaced children be recruited nor be required or permitted to take part in hostilities”—implementation of the guideline is a major challenge.

Recommendation

Member states of the UN need to provide additional resources to protect the rights of internally displaced people, starting with children and their families. Particular attention should be paid to nutrition, health care, family reunification, non-formal education, and support for especially vulnerable children.

Training peacekeepers in protecting children

World Vision acknowledges the significant and positive role that UN peacekeepers play in missions throughout the world. World Vision encourages the UN to undertake more deliberate training of peacekeepers in respecting and protecting the rights of children. NGOs, such as World Vision, with experience in working with children in difficult circumstances, could assist in the training and in the development of civilian partnerships to meet the needs of children in the best way possible. An important issue to be addressed in developing effective strategies is an early transition to civilian police forces and community-based organisations which can also protect children after the peacekeepers leave.

Similar training would help humanitarian workers and support staff who do not specialise in child care. Their actions often have significant impact on children. With some training, they could also provide a larger pool of people who could advocate for the rights of children.

Recommendation

Current plans for training peacekeepers through the United Nations and member countries should add a special focus on respecting the rights of children and include mechanisms for disciplining soldiers who violate the rights of children themselves.

Reintegration

How well children are treated in post-conflict situations affects the likelihood of future conflict. Focusing on children post-conflict is essential and a good investment in long-term stability, yet it is often ignored. As the Machel report highlighted, many countries recovering from armed conflict fail to make adequate provision for children. The Machel report recommended that peace treaties and agreements should recognise the existence of child combatants and make suitable provision for their demobilisation.

Some progress is being made. In Sierra Leone,

the Lome peace agreement included specific provisions for children and young people involved in that conflict. Delays in implementation, according to NGOs and government officials in the country, are leaving many young people with few alternatives to the use of force in order to survive. The challenge now is to implement the agreement in a way that will prevent future outbreaks of violence.

World Vision suggests that taking children seriously in post-conflict peace and reconstruction processes would include the following steps:

- Give high priority to children's issues early in the peace process, including providing civil society advocates for children to help draft specific, practical provisions for inclusion in peace agreements.
- Implement without delay child-specific components of demobilisation and reintegration to provide a clear rupture with military life, but with a long enough time frame to allow for successful reintegration, and with the active participation of the affected young people and communities.

- Avoid the stigmatising of child soldiers by providing help in the context of assistance for all children impacted by the war.
- Establish education as the fourth component of emergency assistance.
- Pay special attention to replacing the economic incentive of participation in conflict with other forms of economic livelihood for young people's survival.
- Use community-based approaches to deal with psycho-social impacts of conflict, with respect for children's cultural context. Preparation for family reunification must be followed with family support and poverty reduction to ensure successful reintegration. Long-term individual planning is required for children who cannot be reunified with their families. Culturally appropriate approaches will include attention to the spiritual dimension of child development. Research in Liberia showed that programmes incorporating the spiritual

aspects of Liberian culture, including the concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation, proved effective. Programmes that shied away from the spiritual inclinations of the children were strongly influenced by the children themselves to incorporate such elements.

- Pay special attention to the needs of girls, including reproductive health services, and work with communities to accept them, especially when rape results in shame and rejection by the community.

In Rwanda, World Vision is engaged with Johns Hopkins University in a research project to find practical methods for reintegrating war-affected children. The goal is to establish programmes which combine cultural practices of local communities, respect for the spiritual dimension of child development and useful elements of Western mental health practices and which respect the right of children and their families to participate fully in their own healing and development process.

Conclusion

It is a mistake to treat children and their families as merely victims. Experience shows that active participation is the most effective approach to development and re-development. In addition, World Vision's experience shows that children can be active agents for reconciliation and peacebuilding so as to avert future conflicts. Therein lies hope for the future.

It is also a mistake to think that involvement of children in armed conflict is inevitable. Implementation of prevention, protection, and reintegration strategies presented in this report would go a long way in allowing children to grow up free from the impact of war.

Summary of Recommendations

Prevention

- Stop the use of child soldiers through ratification and effective implementation of the Optional Protocol for universal acceptance of age 18 as the minimum age for participation in any kind of military force.
- Implement the call of the Security Council to nations involved in the manufacture and sale of small arms to “restrict arms transfers which could aggravate existing tensions . . . and collaborate in combating illegal arms flows.”
- Include detailed information about trade in small arms in the report on implementation of Resolution 1261, being prepared by the UN Secretary General. Specific in-

formation on transfers from individual countries should include members of the Security Council themselves.

- Actively support practical strategies being developed by the International Network on Small Arms. Member states of the Security Council could focus on implementation in their own countries and spheres of influence.
- Give developmental needs of children, in the context of family and community, greater priority in country assistance strategies developed by the World Bank, the IMF, and donor countries. Child-protection networks and education are essential.
- Give higher priority to needs of adolescents, especially in situations where they constitute a significant portion of the population and are at risk of becoming involved in armed conflict.
- Allocate more attention and resources to reduce root causes of armed conflict, start-

ing with the central issues outlined in *Urgent Issues for the Children of the New Millennium* (summary in Appendix 2).

- Increase support for long-term international development programmes to break the cycle of poverty and injustice that can lead to armed conflict. Governments of developed countries are urged to renew their commitment by meeting the UN goal of 0.7 percent of GNP to ODA.
- Ask the IMF to present public child-impact assessments of fiscal policy prescriptions for conflict-prone countries to demonstrate how it is helping to achieve international commitments to children in the CRC.
- Invest more resources in preventive peacebuilding initiatives in the context of community-development programmes and with the active participation of children.

Protection

- Strengthen early-warning systems, monitor the situation of children at risk, and pay attention to violations of rights of children through diplomatic initiatives. Promote and implement strategies such as child-focused humanitarian cease-fires to provide for the needs of children, based on the concept of children as “zones of peace,” even in times of conflict.
- Establish a child-focused early-intervention team to monitor aggressively and report appropriately systemic violations of the rights of children.
- Establish a sub-committee of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to investigate immediately complaints of violations that threaten the survival of or do permanent damage to children during armed conflict and pursue appropriate action through other UN channels, such as the Security Council.

- Prosecute serious violations of the rights of children under other existing conventions which have stronger enforcement measures.
- Follow up the work of the Special Representative of the Security General for Children and Armed Conflict with development of country-specific strategies and frequent monitoring. Consider preventive missions to conflict-prone countries and follow-up visits.
- Enforce Geneva Convention prohibitions against attacks on schools, hospitals and places where children congregate. More actively protect children's right of access to humanitarian assistance.
- Allocate more resources to needs of children in displaced-person camps. Particular attention should be paid to nutrition, health care, family reunification, non-formal education, and support for especially vulnerable children.

- Strengthen efforts to make young people aware of the risks and consequences of involvement in armed conflict. Include active participation by young people themselves in awareness programmes, and utilise local media.
- Add a special focus on child-protection in current training programmes for peacekeepers through the UN and member countries. Include mechanisms for disciplining soldiers who violate the rights of children themselves.

Reintegration

- Give high priority to children's issues early in the peace process, including civil society advocates for children to help draft specific, practical provisions for inclusion in peace agreements.
- Implement without delay child-specific components of demobilisation and reintegration to provide a clear rupture with

military life. Allow a sufficient time frame for successful reintegration, and promote active participation of the young people themselves and their communities.

- Avoid the stigmatising of child soldiers by providing help in the context of assistance for all children impacted by war.
- Establish education as the fourth component of emergency assistance.
- Pay special attention to the needs of girls, including reproductive health services, and work with communities to accept them, especially when sexual abuse by enemy forces results in shame and rejection by the child's home community.
- Replace the economic incentives for participating in conflict with other means of economic livelihood and survival for young people.
- Use community-based approaches to deal with psycho-socio impacts of conflict, respecting children's cultural context.

Appendix 1

Ten Key Recommendations from *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* by Graca Machel, 1996

Peace and security

The needs of children and women must be at the heart of all actions aimed at resolving conflicts and implementing peace agreements.

Monitoring and reporting violations of child rights

Children in armed-conflict situations must be treated as a distinct and high-priority concern in all monitoring and reporting activities.

Health, psycho-social well-being and education

These are the pillars of humanitarian assistance. Psycho-social well-being can best be assured through a community approach. Education should be maintained during emergencies.

Adolescents

Their needs require a high priority in order to prevent their participation in armed conflict, prostitution, and drug abuse. Participation of youth is essential. Child-headed households need special focus.

Gender-based violence

All incidents of war-time rape and other sexual torture must be prosecuted as war crimes.

Special training should be in place for military, peacekeeping troops, and humanitarian personnel.

Internally displaced children

One organisation should lead in each situation. UNICEF should provide leadership, with particular reference to family tracing and preventing family separation.

Child soldiers

Calls for a global campaign to stop the recruitment into armed forces of children under age 18, to ensure demobilisation, and to include them in peace agreements. Early adoption of the draft Optional Protocol raising the age of recruitment and participation to 18 years.

Landmines

Launch an international campaign to ban landmines, promote landmine clearance and rehabilitation.

Prevention

Monitor arms transfers and impose a total ban on arms shipments to conflict zones.

Address the root socio-economic causes of conflict and support social infrastructure that protects children.

Special Representative

Appoint a Special Representative of the Secretary General to monitor implementation and keep these issues high on international agenda.

Appendix 2

Synopsis of *Urgent Issues for the Children of the New Millennium*, World Vision International

World Vision proposes the following “to do” list for the new millennium:

A liveable income

More than half the world’s six billion people subsist on less than US\$2 a day. Small business development, access to credit and investment in education and training increase income.

Food for everyone

In poor nations, malnutrition stunts four out of every 10 children. Increased production of food-crops, investment in rural infrastructure, better food distribution and land reform are proven measures to reduce hunger.

Primary education for all children

More than 120 million children grow up unschooled; another 150 million drop out before Grade 4. Money invested in children's education today is reaped tomorrow in jobs, development, and economic growth.

Clean water

Contaminated water causes 80 percent of all disease and claims the lives of five million children a year. Investment in wells, tanks, water-purifying systems, and reduction of wasted water will secure safe water for everyone.

Debt relief for poor nations

Thirty African nations now spend more on debt payments than on education. Cancelling unsustainable debt frees money for basic social services.

Peace-building

War victimises everyone. Programmes that promote co-operation within and between communities are a cost-effective means to prevent social and cultural differences from escalating into violent conflict.

Equal opportunity for girls

Around the world, girls are likely to be fed, nurtured and educated less than boys. Yet the evidence is clear: communities are richer and healthier when girls are valued and treated as well as boys.

A sustainable environment

Poverty intensifies environmental destruction by forcing the poor to clear forests and use marginal lands. Sound and proven policies can reverse pollution, soil erosion, deforestation, global warming, and depletion of natural resources.

An end to child exploitation

More than 250 million children work as prostitutes, drug traffickers, and indentured labourers. Enforcement of laws against child exploitation, a liveable family income and consumer education can end this disgrace.

Freedom to believe

The right of all people to believe and act on their beliefs through full participation in society is fundamental to human well-being.

