

The State of the World's Children 1996

THESE are the words of a 15-year-old girl. They could have been written yesterday -- by a child in Bosnia or Liberia, in Afghanistan or the Sudan. In fact, they were written more than 50 years ago in the Netherlands, by Anne Frank, who died shortly afterwards in a Nazi concentration camp.

In 1996, UNICEF marks its 50th anniversary. The organization was founded in 1946 in the aftermath of World War II, as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. Times have changed -- and they have not changed. In 1996, the world's children again face the carnage of war. Millions live with shattered innocence, daily terror and stifled hopes, which Anne Frank would recognize only too well.

This year, The State of the World's Children reflects the terrible symmetry of 1945 and today. Chapter I is a report on children in war -- on their lives and on their deaths. Children wandering without their parents or wasting away in refugee camps. Children brutalized into being killers themselves.

Chapter II of the report then takes a historical perspective. It looks at what has changed in the last 50 years. The thread of violence runs through this too, for communities and children suffering the silent emergencies of

poverty and hunger. But there have also been enormous achievements.

Child mortality rates have fallen by about 50 per cent, and total annual child deaths have dropped dramatically from 25 million to 12.5 million. Since 1980, basic immunization has saved the lives of about 20 million children. As the second part of the report points out, there has also been major progress in the priority accorded to children. Officially at least, governments respect and value children as never before. The Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force in 1990 and had been ratified by 179 countries as of the end of September 1995.

If children are loved and valued, why are they still being used as cannon-fodder? A weary response might lay the blame on innate human cruelty and duplicity. A cynic would also argue that incessant television coverage has done little more than stun our sensibilities, and that all conventions and declarations will inevitably crumble before the barrel of a gun.

UNICEF takes a different view. It believes that this gap between rhetoric and reality represents a historic challenge. In response to so much destruction and pain, there have also been unprecedented efforts at peacemaking and caring for



A child, whose family was "displaced" by the war in Nicaragua, sits on an abandoned tank. The decades-long civil war ended in 1979 but poverty remains a problem, due to the country's damaged infrastructure. UNICEF supports community programmes in primary health care and education, as well as projects for improved water and sanitation in many countries whose community services have been disrupted by war.

the victim. The urgency now is to vastly enhance the means both to prevent future conflicts and to better support victims.

UNICEF argues that concern for children is one of those means. We believe that love and respect for children are key to humanitarian and

political progress. Many of today's most intractable disputes, for all the ethnic or religious character they acquire, are at heart struggles

for resources and for survival. Today's problems of poverty and violence will never subside unless we invest in the physical, mental and emo-

tional development of the next generation.

Concern for children is also a way of addressing today's violence. Wars are not going to disappear overnight, but we can at least mitigate their effects and ensure that they do not target children and women. To that end, this report sets out UNICEF's Anti-war Agenda -- a series of steps that we believe to be both realistic and effective and that would dramatically improve the well-being of children in situations of conflict. Vital measures here include removing child soldiers from the battlefields, and banning the manufacture of weapons such as anti-personnel land-mines that target civilians. Better information can also play a part: we can publicly recognize and systematically document genocide and instances of torture and rape to warn potential perpetrators that the world is watching -- that there will be no impunity.

Beyond defending children, we should also use child protection as a means of opening up dialogue. The idea of children as 'zones of peace' has already proved its worth with temporary cease-fires to allow children in war zones to be vaccinated, or to allow food supplies to pass through enemy lines.

At the same time, we need to address rehabilitation. Many children have immedi-

ate needs for food or shelter. They also require psychosocial support -- to help them recover from emotional wounds. Communities, too, require social rehabilitation. In many of today's chronic disputes violence does not cease, it merely subsides -- sustained partly by the persistence of weapons and the pervasive military ethos. Avoiding future conflicts will require not just caring for the youngest victims of war, but also educating them for peace.

The Anti-war Agenda rests on the proposition that much of the tragedy befalling children is preventable. The evil deeds that this report documents are, after all, driven by human behaviour. Children are suffering as a direct and immediate consequence of the decisions of adults. If conflict seems, at times, to be inevitable, there is nothing inevitable about children bearing the brunt of its consequences. Brutality, violence, rape and torture -- all would stop tomorrow if the will to stop them existed, or if the rest of us devised means to compel them to be stopped.

In so doing, the world would be living up to the fundamental purpose of the United Nations Charter: "... to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War

VIOLENCE against women, especially rape, has added its own brand of shame to recent wars. From conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina to Peru to Rwanda, girls and women have been singled out for rape, imprisonment, torture and execution. Rape, identified by psychologists as the most intrusive of traumatic events, has been documented in many armed conflicts including those in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cyprus, Haiti, Liberia, Somalia and Uganda.

Systematic rape is often used as a weapon of war in 'ethnic cleansing'. More than 20,000 Muslim girls and women have been raped in Bosnia since fighting began in April 1992, according to a European Community fact-finding team. Teenage girls have been a particular target in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, according to The State of the World's Children 1996 report. The report also says that impregnated girls have been forced to bear 'the enemy's child'.

In some raids in Rwanda, virtually every adolescent girl who survived an attack by the militia was subsequently raped. Many of those who became pregnant were ostracized by their families and communities. Some abandoned their babies; others committed suicide.

Sexual violation of women erodes the fabric of a community in a way that few weapons can. Rape's damage can be devastating because of the strong communal reaction to the violation and pain stamped on entire families. The harm inflicted in such cases on a woman by a rapist is an attack on her family and culture, as in many societies women are viewed as repositories of a community's cultural and spiritual values.

In addition to rape, girls and women are also subject to forced prostitution and trafficking during times of war, sometimes with the complicity of governments and military authorities. During World War II, women were abducted, imprisoned and forced to satisfy the sexual needs of occupying forces, and many Asian women were also involved in prostitution during the Viet Nam war. The trend continues in today's conflicts.

The State of the World's Children 1996 report notes that the disintegration of families in times of war leaves women and girls especially vulnerable to violence. Nearly 80 per cent of the 53 million people uprooted by wars today are women and children. When fathers, husbands, brothers and sons are drawn away to fight, they leave women, the very young and the elderly to fend for themselves. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Myanmar and Somalia, refugee families frequently rape or the fear of rape as

a key factor in their decisions to seek refuge.

During Mozambique's conflict, young boys, who themselves had been traumatized by violence, were reported to threaten to kill or starve girls if they resisted the boys' sexual advances. Sexual assault presents a major problem in camps for refugees and the displaced, according to the report. The incidence of rape was reported to be alarmingly high at camps for Somalia refugees in Kenya in 1993. The camps were located in isolated areas, and hundreds of women were raped in night raids or while foraging for firewood. UNHCR (the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees) has had to organize security patrols, fence camps with thorn bushes and relocate the most vulnerable women to safer areas. Some rape victims who were ostracized were moved to other camps or given priority for resettlement abroad. UNHCR has formal guidelines for preventing and responding to

sexual violence in the camps, and it trains field workers to be more sensitive to victims' needs. Refugee women are encouraged to form committees and become involved in camp administration to make them less vulnerable to men who would steal their supplies or force them to provide sex in return for provisions.

The high risk of infection with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS, accompanies all sexual violence against women and girls. The movement of refugees and marauding military units and the breakdown of health services and public education worsens the impact of diseases and chances for treatment. For example, one study has suggested that the exchange of sex for protection during the civil war in Uganda in the 1980s was a contributing factor to the country's high rate of AIDS.

War and civil unrest also contribute to violence in the home, according to recent studies. Death, upheaval and poverty increase tensions within the family and the likelihood of violence against girls and women. Men who feel that they have lost the ability to protect their women may compensate by exercising violent control over them at home.

UNHCR, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF are promoting reproductive health services for refugees to counter high birth rates, maternal mortality, STDs and HIV/AIDS. UNICEF provides support for women affected by armed conflict in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Croatia, Georgia, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia and the Sudan.

The post-World War II Nuremberg trials condemned rape as a crime against humanity. —UNICEF

South Asia

One quarter of all the children in the world live in South Asia. In spite of lingering poverty, their survival prospects have improved considerably over the past three decades: in 1960, 1 in 4 children died by age five; by 1993, the number was 1 in 8.

Life expectancy at birth rose from 39 to 60 years between 1950 and 1990, but women do not significantly outlive men, as they do in all other regions.

The girls' net primary school enrolment ratio increased from 29 per cent in 1960 to 62 per cent in 1990. But the gender gap in education remains wide: a girl is

20 per cent less likely to attend primary school than a boy. Child labour is a major obstacle to education.

By the early 1980s, 28 per cent of children were immunized against vaccine-preventable diseases; by the early 1990s, the immunization rate had almost tripled to 85 per cent. In Bangladesh, coverage soared from 1 to 74 per cent during the 1980s.

Strong disparities persist. A child born in Sri Lanka can expect to live 72 years, one born in Bhutan 50 years.

Malnutrition affects 60 per cent of children, by far the highest rate of any region.

Children in War

THE establishment of the United Nations after World War II raised hopes of a new era of peace. This was over-optimistic. Between 1945 and 1992, there were 149 major wars, killing more than 23 million people. On an average yearly basis, the number of war deaths in this period was more than double the deaths in the 19th century, and seven times greater than in the 18th century.

War and political upheaval have been tearing whole countries apart -- from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Cambodia to Rwanda. And this vortex of violence is sucking in ever larger numbers of children. Entire generations have grown up in the midst of brutal armed conflicts. At the end of 1995, conflicts have been running in Angola for over 30 years, in Afghanistan for 17 years, in Sri Lanka for 11 years and in Somalia for 7 years.

Children have, of course, always been caught up in warfare. They usually have little choice but to experience, at minimum, the same horrors as their parents -- as casualties or even combatants. And children have always been particularly exposed. When food supplies have run short, it is children who have been hardest hit, since their growing bodies need steady supplies of essential nutrients. When water supplies have been contaminated, it is children who have had the least resistance to the dangers of disease. And the trauma of exposure to violence and brutal death has emotionally affected generations of young people for the rest of their lives. Recent developments in warfare have significantly heightened the dangers for children. During the last decade, it is estimated (and these figures, while specific, are necessarily orders of magnitude) that child victims have included:

- 2 million killed;
- 4-5 million disabled;
- 12 million left homeless;
- more than 1 million orphaned or separated from their parents;
- some 10 million psychologically traumatized.

The increasing number of child victims is primarily explained by the higher proportion of civilian deaths in recent conflicts. In the wars of the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, only about half the victims were civilians.

In the later decades of this century the proportion of civilian victims has been rising steadily; in World War II it was two thirds, and by the end of the 1980s it was almost 90 per cent.

This is partly a function of technology. Aerial bombardment has extended the potential battle zone to entire national territories. World War II saw a massive increase in indiscriminate killings, with the bombings of Coventry and Dresden, for example, and the atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And this pattern was repeated in the Viet Nam war, which is estimated to have cost 2.5 million lives.



In Afghanistan, two land-mine victims learn to walk with artificial limbs. UNICEF helps provide prostheses and orthopaedic services. Since 1975, land-mines have exploded under more than 1 million people and continue to kill 800 civilians every month. Because children's bodies are more vulnerable, they suffer greater injury and are more likely to be killed by mines than adults. UNICEF is calling for an international law banning the production, use, stockpiling, sale and export of anti-personnel mines. UNICEF/Isaac

A further cause of the rising death toll for civilians is that most contemporary conflicts are not between States, but within them. Rather than being set-piece battles between contending armies, these are much more complex affairs -- struggles between the military and civilians, or between contending groups of armed civilians. They are as likely to be fought in villages and suburban streets as anywhere else. In this case, the enemy camp is all around, and distinctions between combatant and non-combatant melt away in the suspicions and confusions of daily strife. In 1994, the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 13 countries had ongoing 'complex emergencies' of this type, and it classified over 20 million people as 'vulnerable'; it also listed 16 other countries with potential emergencies.

Families and children are not just getting caught in the crossfire, they are also likely to be specific targets. This is because many contemporary struggles are between different ethnic groups in the same country or in former States. When ethnic loyalties prevail, a perilous logic clicks in. The escalation from ethnic superiority to ethnic cleansing to genocide, as we have seen, can become an irresistible process. Killing adults is then not enough; future generations of the enemy -- their children -- must also be eliminated. As one political commentator expressed it in a 1994 radio broadcast before violence erupted in Rwanda, "To kill the big rats, you have to kill the little rats."

In these circumstances, classifying such processes as 'complex emergencies' is incomplete. To say they are complex is true enough, but this would cover most forms of human activity. It also obscures the fact that these are fundamentally political disputes. Even to say that they are 'emergencies' is optimistic, suggesting that they will soon be over. Rather, these are chronic forms of social conflict whose violent repercussions in the form of 'total war' could be felt for years or decades ahead.

Social Goals for 1995 and 2000

Goals for 1995

THE following goals were accepted by almost all nations for achievement by the end of 1995. Great progress has been made.

1. Immunization against the six major vaccine-preventable diseases of childhood to reach at least 80 per cent in all countries.
2. Neonatal tetanus to be virtually eliminated.
3. Measles deaths to be reduced by 95 per cent and measles cases by 90 per cent (compared with pre-immunization levels).
4. The elimination of polio in selected countries and regions (as a step towards worldwide elimination by the year 2000).

5. The ending of free or low-cost distribution of breastmilk substitutes in all maternity units and hospitals, and the achievement of baby-friendly status for all major hospitals.
6. The achievement of 80 per cent ORT use, as part of the effort to control diarrhoeal disease.
7. The virtual elimination of vitamin A deficiency.
8. The universal iodization of salt in countries affected by iodine deficiency disorders.
9. The virtual elimination of guinea worm disease.
10. The universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Goals for 2000

THE end-of-century goals, agreed to by almost all the world's governments following the 1990 World Summit for Children, may be summarized under 10 priority points.

1. A one-third reduction in 1990 under-five death rates (or to 70 per 1,000 live births, whichever is less).
2. A halving of 1990 maternal mortality rates.
3. A halving of 1990 rates of malnutrition among the world's under-fives (to include the elimination of micronutrient deficiencies, support for breastfeeding by all maternity units, and a reduction in the incidence of low birth weight to less than 10 per cent).
4. The achievement of 90 per cent immunization among under-ones, the eradication of polio, the elimination of neonatal tetanus, a 90 per cent reduction in

measles cases, and a 95 per cent reduction in measles deaths (compared with pre-immunization levels).

5. A halving of child deaths caused by diarrhoeal diseases.
6. A one-third reduction in child deaths from acute respiratory infections.
7. Basic education for all children and completion of primary education by at least 80 per cent -- girls as well as boys.
8. Safe water and sanitation for all communities.
9. Acceptance by all countries of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including improved protection for children in especially difficult circumstances.
10. Universal access to high-quality family planning information and services in order to prevent pregnancies that are too early, too closely spaced, too late or too many.

All articles and photographs courtesy of UNICEF



Garfield®



by Jim Davis

