

Newsletters - Children and War

Editorial

A recent report by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General concludes that in as many as 50 countries around the world children are suffering in the midst of armed conflict. From 1986 to 1996, war killed more than two million children, injured or disabled more than six million and left more than one million orphaned. "At the present moment there are over 22 million children who have been displaced by war within and outside their countries. Increasingly, children are specifically targeted, recruited as combatants, or abducted to serve as sexual slaves. The number of child combatants under the age of 18 is estimated as 300,000. Each month, some 800 children are injured by land mines." The report points out that traditional authority figures and value systems, which have buffered children and women from harm in the past, are no longer respected. During fighting, little distinction is made between civilians and combatants. The vast majority of victims, up to 90%, are women and children. Rape appears to have been used as a political weapon and there has been soldier-on-civilian-violence on an unprecedented scale.

Articles in this newsletter tell some of the stories behind these statistics, giving glimpses of the horror. As one contributor points out, no one can (or should) remain unaffected. Nor can the West be complacent. A report from the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers singled out the UK for its use of 17 year olds in the regular armed forces and in hostilities. Although these are volunteers, the point was made that this weakens attempts to get an international agreement to raise the minimal age for recruitment into the armed forces to 18. There is now such an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but it applies only to participation in hostilities and compulsory recruitment. Nor has it been ratified by many Governments. Parties to armed conflict continue to violate such international standards with impunity.

The terror and fear caused by the forcible abduction of even young children in areas of Africa was made clear to the Archbishop of Canterbury when he visited Northern Uganda:

"When we travelled to Gulu in northern Uganda in 1998, the village we visited had been raided during the night by soldiers from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Some dozen or so children had been abducted, and my wife and I spoke to the numbed and crying mothers. But no amount of caring words and affirming prayers could take away from the reality that their children of eight to twelve years old were gone and were unlikely to be found. These are people who have more than enough grief in their lives - but what really causes them the greatest misery is to have their children violently wrenched from them." *

Archbishop Carey went on to argue that "Although we cannot - and should not - detach our concern for children from the rest of the human families we are reminded that, among suffering and marginalised peoples, children are the marginal of the marginal. Children are defenceless and vulnerable and therefore from the divine and human perspective deserve our particular attention."

Former child soldiers and child victims of war face an uncertain future. They have little or no skills, many can not read or write and some are traumatised by their experiences. Those who are disabled have even less chance of finding a job and supporting themselves. As a report from World Vision Cambodia states, "Across six continents such children have been robbed of their childhood and thrust into a nightmare world of conflict which even adults find terrifying. The message is clear: the only uniform suitable for children is a school uniform. "

There is hope: the newsletter tells stories of individual rescue and support for traumatised children by Christians and Church organisations. But the size of the task is immense. Let us all pray - and work - towards the goal of giving children protection, health, education and a peaceful environment.

**Extracts from Archbishop of Canterbury's address to World Vision Conference, 23rd May 2000.*

Burundi

"What is the war?" asked a journalist in a children's broadcast.

"It is a monster which eats everything it meets on its way," replied a young boy.

"Why do you say so?" asked the journalist.

"Before, we did not live in this place. We left our home because people were fleeing the war. We are told that those who did not run away are no more. The war has eaten them. We cannot go in our village because it is still there. Everybody is afraid of it. Even my parents!"

Though childish, this definition has a certain truth in it. The war destroys everything. We have the experience in Burundi since 1993. The country has been destroyed: people, animals, buildings, forests, culture, to name but a few. The legendary hospitality is no more, the smile of children has disappeared, and even birds have migrated. Instead of joy and happiness, we read melancholy and fear on the faces of children. Traditionally, a child was looked after by everybody; today he is after by his relatives: no relative, no care.

During this war, children have been the most affected. Some have lost the most important thing in their lives: their parents. They became orphans deprived of love and affection. Teenagers became responsible for their families whereas they need also to be educated. Today we have 5,000 teenagers looking after their young brothers and sisters. Are they able to give suitable care? Of course, no.

Some children have assisted in the killing of their parents or relatives, and are now traumatised. They left their families and became street children. 65% of street children are traumatised. In the street, they develop unsuitable behaviour with all the effects: hunger, drugs, sexual abuse, pick-pocketing.

Generally, children are consumers and not producers. This is no more the case in Burundi. The majority of children - and especially orphans - have given up schools and found jobs to survive. Some are householders; others carry more luggage than they weigh themselves. What they get in return is not enough to cover their needs. The consequence is the increasing rate of child mortality, with children doomed to malnutrition, lack of health care, and shelter.

The problem is too important: none could remain insensible. The government, UNICEF, Churches and NGO's are working hard to save these children. We pray for the work to flourish and mainly for the end of the war. We call for help to save the future generation. Remember that our Lord told us: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me." Matthew 25:40

Sierra Leone

Since the beginning of the rebel war in Sierra Leone in 1991, children were connected or associated with this war in different ways: either being conscripted as a child soldier or being a victim of the war. During the January rebel incursion in Freetown, children were victims of serious abuses committed by all parties of the conflict. They were not spared from any class of abuse and were, in some cases, purposefully targeted because of their age. Some of the atrocities committed by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) were unthinkable. Infants and children were thrown into burning houses; the hands of toddlers as young as two were severed with machetes; girls as young as eight were sexually abused, and hundreds of children of all ages were traumatically separated from their communities and forced to walk into hills with strangers whom they had seen kill family members.

In some cases children, many of them originally abductees, participated in these abuses. Child combatants armed with pistols, rifles, and machetes actively participated in killings and massacres, severed the arms of other children, and beat and humiliated those old enough to be their grandparents. Some of these children were often under the influence of drugs; they were known and feared for their impetuosity, lack of control, and brutality. In some cases, these rebel child soldiers were summarily executed by ECOMOG and government forces, other children suffered physical abuse while in detention. Some child soldiers were even beaten to death after being caught by members of local communities.

As children abducted by the rebels have been released and managed to escape, they have described the process of psychological and physical formation used to turn victim into perpetrator. They described a life of physical hardship, forced labour, substance abuse, and military training. For those hundreds of children who witnessed family members murdered in front of them, were forced to watch as a mother or sister was raped, or had to leave a wounded relative behind in a burning house, these events, during this period of war, have no doubt produced deep psychological scars these children will live with for the rest of their lives.

Here are some true stories of atrocities which affected children and which the child soldier also committed:

Lucia, (10) described how she and two of her friends were chosen out of a large group, taken away, and had both of their arms amputated. Saramba "We were hiding under the bed when they eventually found us. They ordered me, my sister Sarah and a friend Sia to follow them to a truck. A few minutes later we picked up four more girls being held by another group of rebels. They took us to a big house a few miles away and all of us were raped."

Gibril was in Form Four when he was conscripted by the RUF. He said, "In the RUF I was basically a hard core fighter who committed many atrocities. As a result of my education attainment at that time, I used to act in the capacity of an adjutant at various fronts. I was 15

years old when I was forcefully conscripted into RUF and stayed with them for a period of two years. In combat I most times used AK 47, SMG and Beretta and served as a gunner as well."

In collaboration with International NGOs, medical services, counselling and skills training are provided for girls and boys particularly school – going children. These children are placed in homes where trauma healing, counselling and scholarships, where possible, are provided for their rehabilitation. The organisations which are involved in this work are: Children Associated with War (CAW)/Catholic Mission, Sierra Leone. Over 2,000 children had been registered through CAW to the programme for rehabilitation and reintegration. CAW had been able to foster some of these children whose parents and families could not be traced. Other NGOs such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists [FAWE], Don Bosco, UNICEF, UNHCR, work in collaboration with the ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children Affairs.

The Council of Churches, Sierra Leone, which embraces all denominations, has been collaborating with other NGOs in sensitising the government and the nation on the need for gun control. One of their activities was the request for toy guns from children in exchange for more acceptable toys. This was very successful. There are still over 2,000 children in rebel-held areas and as a Church we need to do more for the rehabilitation, physical, psychological, social and emotional needs of the children caught up in our armed conflict. Just as Jesus said in St. Mark's Gospel chapter 10 verse 14 "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God."

Congo

Millions of children world-wide who have survived armed conflict, have grown into adulthood not knowing what peace means. As they grow older, they carry with them the psychological and physical scars of their experiences. Many are not 'fortunate' to survive the ordeal of war.

Armed groups use children to cook, clean, spy, carry supplies, fight and commit atrocities. All this means that from a very young age children are separated from their families and have to rely on their own resourcefulness in order to survive.

The case of Roget Kambule from the Democratic Republic of Congo illustrates how one child was robbed of his childhood. In 1994, when he was ten years old, he was taken from his hometown in Goma to Rwanda and given military training for two months. He then joined Laurent Kabila's forces who were marching westwards from the Ugandan border to overthrow President Mobutu Sese Seko.

As a ten-year-old, his promotion was rapid, and for the courage he displayed he became one of the young personal bodyguards of Kabila. When he was not looking after Kabila's security, he guarded the diamond mines that provided Kabila with his income. Soon after taking power, Kabila turned his back on his erstwhile supporters Rwanda and Uganda and so Roget became a rebel fighter for the second time – this time to fight against Kabila. But then when the rebels split into two (one backed by Rwanda and the other by Uganda), Roget found himself on the side of the Ugandan-backed rebels under the leadership of Jean-Pierre Bemba.

A truce has come into force since the assassination of Kabila and Roget – a veteran of three rebel armies – has been demobilised. He may have reached the end of his combat career, but

one cannot help wonder what future lies ahead of him. He has been skilled for war not peace. He says that he is looking forward to school and normal life. "I can't do it again. I've seen that war doesn't make any difference. It doesn't mean anything," says Roget.

Roget is not an exception. There about 300,000 child soldiers who have been gang-pressed or persuaded to take on a combat role by government and rebel forces. The adult world must become more serious about protecting and nurturing its most vulnerable members of society.

The civil and tribal wars have swept up some of our villages. Some of our population have fled from the country to Uganda, and some have gone far away within the country. Many were completely uprooted, their houses burnt down, their properties and even whatever planted in their gardens destroyed and looted by warriors and thieves.

It is a pity to see some children wandering everywhere in the country especially in the towns and villages. Some are homeless orphans. Some are hungry, naked, anaemic, dehydrated. Some are suffering from malaria, kwashiorkor, and every kind of dermatitis. These children are very difficult to recuperate morally and spiritually. All their speeches or preferred games are about fighting one another. They have developed a kind of hatred and jealousy. Seeing someone coming to them, they start to suspect him as their enemy or rival. Some aged between 12 and 15 went to military service. Some are still very young and unable to carry guns properly. Among these, some fled the military service and became children of the street with every kind of abuses. Some children are fostered by people who are not their proper parents and are given bad education. Some are losing Christian and moral habits and embrace secular and pagan ways. We remark this, because sometimes they don't accept to forgive one another.

The Mothers' Union is trying to recuperate them by dialoguing with them and delivering a social gospel so that sometimes they can be given food once a month or be cared for freely once a month in Health centres. The Mother's Union is thinking about starting a camp and trying to collect them together for teaching them some handwork and Christian morals and providing second hand clothes. But we lack the necessary means.

Rwanda

War does not allow children to be as they should be, because it denies them their rights. When war breaks, it uproots them from their homes and families and exposes them to fearful dangers. Worse still, some children see their parents killed: they are left with no where to go and no one to be with. Some young children are taught how to use guns and even forced to kill people, as is the case of what happened here in the country of Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. They are further sent to fight alongside the soldiers in war and are forced to take drugs and alcohol.

As I look at the many orphans our country has as a result of many wars that have been taking place, I find that the future for most of them is uncertain. Some children living in orphanages do not know who their parents are, and no one else around them knows. Another group of orphans live on the streets: some beg to get food, others eat dirty food from the dustbins, they take drugs and alcohol at a very young age. They are exposed to sexual abuse by bad people; already there are young girls who live on the street, with babies conceived on the street, they give birth in the hospital and then return to the street. The street has more meaning to them

and serves as a home they lost. Will they ever live with other people? There is another group of orphans living in homes of relatives or working for money. These ones are also mistreated to the extent of hating life and saying "If only my parents had lived, I would be looking like so and so..." They are made to remember the people who killed their parents and think of revenging them when they grow old. Sometimes they end up joining others on the street or committing suicide. All these groups grow up with resentment to the normal life, saying God does not exist or does not love them.

I would like to appeal to international decision makers like the UN, Heads of states and governments of the world to try and stop any conflict and ban the training of children for any war, so that wars are minimised for the sake of God's children whom He loves so much.

Tanzania

Our diocese of Western Tanganyika borders the warring countries of Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire. We have the sad experience that children aged between 14 to 18 years are recruited to become fighting soldiers. Instead of fighting for entrance to learning institutions and instead of being facilitated to fight poverty, they are trained to fight and kill their own people in civil, religious, tribal and other conflicts. Apart from killing each other, the children learn cruel and criminal acts such as armed robbery, drug abuse, looting, and raping.

The result of the wars is the creation of more orphans, uprooted, displaced and disabled children who shall be a burden for surviving poor communities. Most of the children born in war-torn countries who manage to survive, grow in abject poverty and are deprived of their rights. Living in horror with hunger, and being continuously on the run without guidance, expose the adolescents to undesirable acts that may lead them to be criminals, get infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS. Such phenomena are a process of self destruction of present and future generations which is against the will of God.

In response to the plight of people affected by war, the diocese has established Samaritan Enterprise Keepers Organisation (SEKO) that deals with refugees' welfare. Among the services provided are: tracing of children to reunite them with their parents or relatives; provision of primary and post-primary education. For the under fives there is a pre-school programme for Burundi and Zairean refugees.

For those who have lost their limbs, there is an orthopaedic unit that provides supporting materials for the victims of war. By January 2001, nine refugee camps in the diocese had 97,404 children aged between 5-18 years. 47, 396 of them are girls. The Ministry for supporting refugees needs solidarity in prayers and deeds, so that our Lord may bless our efforts and bring peace in the troubled neighbouring countries of Burundi, Rwanda, Zaire and the world at large.

We kindly ask all good people of the world to unite and pray for those nations and people who create wars by manufacturing weapons, instigating people for hate with subsequent wars; so that the Lord our God may touch and turn them into a new Christian life of peace and love.

We welcome advice, contributions and any ideas on how better to help our neighbours.

Uganda

In countries where economic recession is experienced, there is living below the poverty line. Such countries can be manipulated by economically and politically stale states to accomplish their ill motives; for instance a country is forced to declare war with another just in the name of getting assistance.

There will be an increase in the demand of soldiers for war. When adults have all been recruited, they will step down to children. Parents without understanding escort their children to be recruited so that they can earn money to save the fainting family. Children, being immature in their minds, are exposed to the knowledge of the gun and how to shoot. The need to educate children to higher academic levels in order to better their future is ignored. Some children have had to be recruited by the state without the knowledge of their parents.

Child soldiers are less intelligent, informed about life. They can easily quit observing morals in the society. They get taken up with the uncontrollable, bush-like behaviour from other immoral soldiers. Many child soldiers run crazy and lose selfcontrol and bump on others, as if they are animals. The danger is that they will appear to be above parental guidance and counselling.

Their position as soldiers makes them become alienated from traditional family life. Soldiers will forfeit the ability to converse and exchange views with their fellow but ordinary age mates.

Child soldiers are less informed about the economic part of life and can end up squandering their salaries on pleasure-inducing leisure. There is a high chance of creating economic instability in their adulthood.

Child soldiers in an attempt to satisfy their sexual lives, just like other sexual abuser soldiers, lose the ability to choose their partners wisely. Their money will lead them blindly to any woman. This increases chances of contracting deadly sexually transmitted diseases.

Child soldiers recruited for war take short time for training. They will have had inadequate exposure, little or no warring tactics, and this would facilitate their deaths.

Christians have a huge role in rehabilitating the victims. They should ensure that children are brought up in the fear of God to enable them increase in the knowledge and wisdom of God. They should ensure that children grow up with morals, being responsible right from helping their parents with domestic chores to participating in development projects in the society. Presentations and drama can be educative to the entire community if performed by their children. This would also identify various talents which can be promoted and encouraged.

Uganda as a country has for a long time had a history of insurgency. In 1986, President Museveni came to power and there has been relative peace and stability. However, the entire Northern Uganda has not been peaceful since that time. Western Uganda, especially Kasese, is also undergoing a lot of sufferings due to insecurity. Many school children have been abducted: some from home, while at times rebels raid schools and abduct students. In June 1998, ADF burnt at least 50 students of Kichwamba College in Western Uganda. An estimated 150 were missing, and many were feared to have been taken captive. In June 1999, 39 girls, students of St Charles Lwanga Kabongo in Kitgum district, were abducted.

Children in these war-torn zones have suffered. Many have been abducted by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) and forcibly recruited as child soldiers. Children as young as nine have had to travel long distances in the bush. Many have died in cross fire, while many more have died in the hands of the rebels who killed them when they tried to escape, or when they failed to walk due to hunger and fatigue. Many more suffered a lot of trauma as a result of seeing people being axed to death.

The experiences of those who escape from the bush are so bad. Many tell of their sufferings while in the bush and they are greatly affected psychologically. Even when they return home, society sometimes enhances their sufferings. One of the girls abducted from a secondary school in Northern Uganda, who escaped from the bush, narrated her experience of how she was received in the school after returning. She said "We were nick-named by our fellow students as "Kony rebels" and many teachers and school administrators suspected us of being HIV positive."

In Acholi land, many families have been forced into protected villages where parents and children are forced to sleep in one tent. They are exposed to poor sanitation and they are under-fed, since they depend on food distributed by donors. Schools are operated in temporary shelters in such camps. Many innocent children have also been maimed as a result of land mines. It is indeed a sorry state.

In Northern Uganda, World Vision has set up a reception centre for those returning from the bush. They make efforts to give psycho-social counselling before sending them back to join their families. Older ones are taught skills like carpentry. However, one wonders whether counselling for a period of about three weeks can help such children to overcome the trauma they have gone through.

The only permanent solution to such suffering should be the restoration of peace. For the last 15 years, Government forces have been trying to put an end to the insecurity by military means. Unfortunately, there are still rebels committing atrocities.

Attempts are also being made through other means. There is call for a "blanket amnesty" for rebels reporting back so that they are settled without any punitive measures. The Acholi religious leaders being facilitated by the Carter Centre in America are making efforts to talk peace. Local institutions, through traditional leaders, are also playing a significant role. The Acholi in the diaspora, through the support of some of the international community, are also trying to seek for peace through meetings. However, there is need for all the interest groups to cooperate if there is to be any meaningful solution to curb the suffering of the people and the children in particular.

Gulu, North Uganda

In any war situation the people who suffer most are the women and children.

Maria was abducted on June 23rd 1998 from Gulu Primary School, where she was a baby sitter at the home of a teacher. She was abducted with many others. For three years she was in captivity in Sudan; she was among the lucky people who returned to Uganda in May this year. Right now she is at Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO). According to Maria, on

reaching Sudan she was given to a man, not of her choice but dictated upon her by the soldiers, and she said " If you conceived then, you count it a blessing because you are exempted from hard work, going to war, or looking for food. It's more blessing if you are given to someone who has rank in the army; then you are properly cared for, almost everything is brought for you. But if your husband is a private or lower rank, then you really suffer." Maria escaped and managed to be back home in Uganda but many more children are still suffering.

For over a decade now the Diocese of Northern Uganda has been experiencing armed conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the government soldiers. In an attempt to protect the innocent people, and at the same time to curb the rampant rebel activities, the government ordered and coerced the majority of the people to move from their villages into designated camps and protected villages. As reported by the camps' residents, the move was also to deny the rebels' food supply in form of goats, chicken, and staple foodstuffs, for they used to rob people. Another move by the government was to eliminate the abductions of young people, who were converted into the rebels' army or concubines depending on their sex.

In Northern Uganda, It is estimated that 5,000-10,000 children were abducted between 1994 and 1998. Some have died, while others are still in captivity in Sudan. Some, who managed to escape, tell stories of how they were forced to kill their fellow children, who were caught escaping. Others found themselves having sexual relations with men of equal age as their parents. Some of them tell stories of how they walked very long distance without food or rest. if they ask you "Do you want to rest" and you answer "Yes", then you are killed. Many left school before even Primary Four. After staying in the bush for over 10 years, they see no future.

Even those in the camps have their rights to a secure and happy childhood denied. If you visit the camps you will witness the suffering of the children; many stay in the camp the whole day without their parents, for they often go long distance to cultivate and look for foodstuffs leaving these little ones without food. The majority of the camps where these children live lack adequate land, resulting in overcrowding and congestion. Unplanned temporary small grass-thatched huts with unburned bricks, wattle and mud walls, are built so close to each other that they are very susceptible to fire outbreaks. Most huts lack basic furniture, the majority of the children sleep on papyrus mats, polythene sheets, and empty sacks. Many do not cover themselves at night because of lack of blankets; many children below the age of six, walk naked.

The Acholi used to practise a mixed economy, but this came to an end when thousand of cattle, goats, sheep, pigs and poultry were raided by combatants in the civil war. This has greatly affected the children in that malnutrition has become rampant. To address the problem of malnutrition in the internally displaced camp at Pabbo, which has a population of 46,000 people, the Mothers' Union started selling fish in the market and digging in a group. The Acholi women in London donated \$150 (Uganda shillings 371,250). It appears apparently a small thing, but with God behind it, it is of the outmost importance. The Mothers' Union will make optimum use of the money to increase their production and possibly reduce the number of children who die in the camps due to poor medical facilities; most parents cannot meet medical bills in town.

Sudan

Most children here in Yambio in Sudan at large are affected by war in one way or another. Most children don't know what a town is although some old town buildings still exist. More than two thirds of them have single parents or are orphans. They don't go to school because they cannot pay school fees. They get their food from rubbish or steal from neighbours. They sleep anywhere, and dress in what rags they can find. Very few of them go to live with pastors or Mothers' Union members. They are always violent and disobedient.

They have not experienced parental love, and we are afraid for the future of these children and the community. They have no respect for anybody because no body respects them either; no love, as nobody loves them.

But they are real children of this land and are due for respect and love. War has made them homeless and fatherless, and sometimes they loose their mothers during delivery. There is no doctor, no good maternity services. Children wander about looking for safe and comfortable places. Some can walk over 3,000 miles across borders for a peaceful place or a free school, but end up involving themselves in the behaviour that ends their lives very quickly.

Girls get pregnant at the age of 13 and die during delivery or become deformed. Worst of all, many small girls are mentally affected; they run to the bush, shouting and screaming. The Church has a lot of counselling and prayers. We are trying to open some boarding schools or orphanages so as to reduce this trauma in children, but these have not yet been supported.

Meet Malauk Marial Malek, a 14 year old Sudanese boy from Cuibet, who, in 1997, endured the Khartoum Government atrocity on civilian targets, when Sudan Government forces attacked his home in the Bahr El Ghazal region of Southern Sudan. Marial, who described the invasion of his home village by the National Islamic Front (NIF) regime as disastrous, lost his father, his mother, his two brothers and his only sister, kidnapped in the attack. His home village was left ablaze. Marial, then aged ten, fled the area with cattle settlers to Yambio, a journey that took them 42 days in the bush.

In Yambio, Marial went from house to house, seeking a child labour job in order to survive. "I came to Canon Eliaba's house, the provost of All Saints Cathedral in the Episcopal Diocese of Yambio, who adopted me after listening to the story" said Marial, shedding tears. The eyes of Marial, who has since been baptised and named "Samuel" could tell his suffering experience. Now at the age of 14, and in class 3 of a primary school, Samuel is optimistic and determined to study hard in school. But who will fund his studies? Samuel's foster parents have over 30 dependents. "We had to adopt him (Samuel) because he is an orphan and was moving from home to home seeking food to eat when he got to Yambio. We know that if his parents were alive they would have cared for him", his foster parents told me in an interview.

Samuel Marial Malek is just one of the many children in Southern Sudan that the 17 year civil war has made homeless. Many are dying in the wilderness, in displaced camps and have no livelihood. Children in war-torn countries like Sudan are subjected to the abuse of their rights: the right to have parents, to be educated, to eat free food, and to freely decide on their careers. Marial is lucky to have escaped being a slave or child soldier in his own country. Marial hopes to return to his home area one day to collect the remains of family members for burial.

Iraq

All too often 'war' is defined as involving a military confrontation between two or more warring factions. Yet 'war' can also entail the non-military use of force such as sanctions. Although sanctions may represent a low-cost alternative to war in financial terms, they are all too often as damaging in humanitarian and development terms as armed conflict. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of Iraq, which has experienced 11 years of comprehensive sanctions imposed by the United Nations as a response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1989.

The following report reflects the findings of a six-week secondment to the United Nations Development Programme in Iraq (March 2000). The access granted by UNDP provided useful insights as to household structure and consumption, which allowed an accurate picture to emerge as to the vulnerability of differing sections of Iraqi society under sanctions and their aspirations for the future. Although this article is specifically concerned with the position of children, it is important to note that the condition of the Iraqi people as a whole can only be described as desperate. In 1991 UNDP described Iraq as a state which was fast approaching the standards of a developed country. After 11 years of sanctions, much of this progress has been retarded. It is questionable whether international security should be achieved by continuously degrading a country's infrastructure or by impoverishing the vast majority of a country's population.

The cumulative impact of sanctions is probably best seen at the household level. Insufficient incomes and rising food prices mean that those who can leave the country have already done so, while those who cannot, have been forced to take two or even three jobs. It is not uncommon to find university lecturers and doctors working as taxi drivers, and waiters. The economic impact of the embargo has disrupted the structure of the family. Financial pressures have forced many families to sell their possessions and move back to live with their in-laws. It is not uncommon to find one wage earner supporting a household of ten persons. Many children live in houses which lack toys, books and other opportunities to learn and flourish. NGOs observe an increase in family conflicts, divorce and polygamy. Children are under increasing pressure to drop out of school. According to statistics provided by UNICEF, in 1999 school enrolment for students aged 6 was 66%, whereas in 1989 it was 88%. Although no figures are available, there are increasing numbers of working and street children.

All Universities are finding it difficult to fill their university places, as teenagers eschew higher education and the debts that this entails, to eke out a living. Those that do go on to University realise that the chance of finding employment at the end of their course is slim. There now exists in Iraq a whole generation of trained doctors and scientists who have had no opportunity to practice their chosen careers, and who cannot be expected to make up the critical years of lost experience. While conversations with older generations of Iraqis reveal a people self-confident, educated and keen to engage with the outside world, similar conversations with Iraqi teenagers reveal a population who have had little or no such contact. There now exists a whole generation of Iraqis who have no experience of life outside of the present regime.

The country's social services are so stretched that there is little government response to new social problems like child and juvenile prostitution. UNICEF and CARE International is working

with the Ministry of the Interior and the Minister of Health to ensure that street children who are detained are not held in adult prisons, which are basic even by Middle Eastern standards. A number of child detention centres have been set up in Baghdad, Mosul and Basra, yet the combination of a lack of finances and bureaucratic inertia means that the success of such pilot projects remains limited.

Indigenous Churches are responding, as best they can, to the humanitarian crisis by distributing supplementary food parcels, clothing and bedding to those most in need. A number of religious orders have also developed outreach programmes. The Chaldean Sisters of the Immaculate Conception have a number of convents throughout Iraq, which service the sick, minister to the poor and provide pastoral care to abandoned girls. The Chaldean Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus have six convents in Iraq which offer social and health care and take care of illiterate girls and women. These are important but piecemeal efforts, which testify both to the healing power of the Church and also to the immense societal problems currently facing Iraq.

Brazil

Armed conflict is a very present reality as I write. In this last week there have been three murders in the small, poverty-stricken district of Aguazinha in Olinda, N.E. Brazil, all very close to the Anglican "Living Waters" church.

As we drove in to church on the Sunday morning, for once it was not the reality of human beings living literally on the rubbish tip that shocked, but the pool of blood that had flowed from a youth's throat just hours before. He had become the third statistic of the week, his life seized from him by the blade. A few days earlier an elderly lady from the church had pleaded with her would-be killer, "Don't shoot the boy" – her words fell on deaf ears as both she and the boy were mercilessly gunned down.

With over 400 murders in the first three months of this year in the state of Pernambuco alone, it is perhaps understandable that the Brazilian people seem at times somewhat desensitised to death. The victims are usually boys or youths caught up in the drug wars of the favelas and the city streets. Many are shot in gang disputes, others at the hands of "exterminators", hired thugs allegedly employed even by local politicians to "clean up" the streets. Guns are everywhere and are often bought cheaply in the school yard.

Vast unemployment, abuse in the home, homelessness, starvation, disease and an overwhelming sense of hopelessness may not excuse the murder and the drugs, but do go some way towards explaining them. The response of the Anglican Church is to reach out to a broken people at root level, providing practical and material support combined with the gospel message of spiritual liberation and salvation in Jesus Christ.

The "Living Waters" church is one example of a brilliant light shining out in spite of and in the midst of the darkness. There, many children and youths have discovered a new life, the new life gained only through Christ.

Emmanuel Boys' Farm, run by SAMS missionary Revd. Ian Meldrum and his wife Revd. Siméa, is another example of Christian action. The project exists to rescue orphans and children at risk

from the blade and the bullet of the street. It is set in over 30 hectares of farm land, well away from the city, in a peaceful and quiet location. There are currently 30 boys with us on the Farm, many of whom were formerly exposed to the dangers of the drugs and the gangs. Today the shadow of death does not loom over them so ominously, rather they are free to learn, to work on the land, to go to church and of course to play football! Our "old boys", now young men of faith, are living "normal" lives, working in the city which once offered them nothing but the likelihood of a bloody end. We want to take on more boys, but need more resources.

Where the police refuse to go through fear and a lack of compassion, God's people are going, demonstrating, living and learning that "perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18), and that in Christ the threat of death must give way to the assurance of life.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a small island located in the Indian Ocean with a population of about 18 million people. One of the major tragedies we have faced as a nation, is the ongoing war for more than 18 years with a death toll of 64,000 persons excluding the wounded. In addition to the war, which continues until today in the Northeast of the country, there was also a major conflict in the South of the country which was repressed by the Government using brute force during the mid 80's.

The ongoing war in the Northeast has disrupted, and continues to disrupt, family life in which children and women have to bear the pain and dislocation. The scars of the ongoing conflict are visible on the faces of children and in the behaviour and attitudes of many of the victims. The civil strife is a continuing feature in the Northeast and my focus on children will be confined to that region, although I am aware that the impact of the war continues to shake the very foundation of the entire Sri Lankan society.

As a result of the ongoing conflict in the Northeast region, the major casualties are the children, as they are deprived of education, medical care, nutrition and are the victims of trauma, with many ending up as orphans. As there is constant military confrontation and aerial bombardment, civilian life is disrupted, uprooting thousands of people who have no choice but to live in refugee camps.

It is a fact that many of the children in these regions are born into, live and grow up in refugee camps. They wake up everyday knowing no other world besides their camps, and grow up without experiencing what it is like to laugh and play. Many of the children, especially those who are born into poor families, are born into misery, live in misery and grow up to become miserable. There is also evidence that some of the parents cannot afford to raise their children, and because of the fear that children will be abducted to become child soldiers, they are sent away or taken away to secure places, where quite a lot of them end up becoming domestic help in homes of the rich and the middle class families.

It is within this context one has to examine and appreciate the work of the churches. The mainline churches, like the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Church of South India, Jaffna Diocese (CSI), the Methodist Church and Navageevanam (new life) and Karuna Nilayam (a place of

mercy) Homes based in Killinotchi, have opened homes to provide care, shelter and security for children (girls and boys) who are either orphans, poor, or uprooted from homes. The ministry of the churches in this setting is to share the love and compassion shown by Jesus Christ to children and to give them education, security, nutrition and the sense of belonging to a community. This ministry is a sign of hope and a ray of light in a broken nation and a powerful witness to the love, life and compassion of God amidst the forces of death and destruction.

Cambodia

There have been child soldiers in Cambodia for at least 30 years. During the Lon Nol regime from 1970 to 1975, children were used as combatants by both sides in the civil war. Cambodian children suffered very much both from conscription into military, and as victims of the American saturation bombings in the countryside.

In the genocide that followed the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975, child soldiers as young 10 years old, who had been brainwashed into following orders without questioning, were used to guard and control the population and carry out executions. Children were especially chosen to be soldiers because they could be easily influenced and would not dare to disobey.

Interviews with Khmer Rouge defectors in 1995, revealed 60 children under 18 who had been in the Khmer Rouge army. Girls as well as boys were forced to join the military. Young girls were used as front-line troops. One 17 year old-girl told us that she had been with the Khmer Rouge and given military training since the age of 5: when she was 13 she was sent to the front line with 300 other young girls, and forced to fight. If they tried to escape, they were beaten or killed.

A current UNICEF survey has found that in Khmer Rouge areas right up to the end of the fighting in 1998, all young boys aged 10 to 18 were pushed into doing military service: if they did not agree, they were starved of rice and other supplies. However in more recent years most of them served in the camp as cooks or guards rather than in the front line.

There have also been many cases of children recruited into the government army throughout the 1990s. However, most of these joined voluntarily due to poverty and the lack of other job opportunities in the conflict areas. They work under a false name and age, and earn around R 40,000 (\$10) per month, most of which they send to their families. The UNICEF study in 1999 has found that of 102 child soldiers interviewed in Battambang province, only six had been to the front line, four as porters and only two as combatants. Most of them are used for odd jobs around the camp. However in previous years there were many reports of children involved in the front-line fighting, particularly at times of heightened military conflicts such as July 1997.

In 1999, LICADHO, with support from World Vision (a Christian organisation), brought together 15 former child soldiers aged 16 to 20 for a workshop to discuss their experiences. They had been in the army for an average of four years. All were volunteers: 12 of them had been involved in front line fighting, and four had severe injuries or amputations. Here is one of their stories:

My name is Soeun. I have been serving in the Army from 1996 until recently. I was in active service on the battlefield, and I stepped on a landmine in Preah Vihear province. I did not

volunteer to serve in the Army. I came to visit my uncle who was a soldier stationed in Stung Treng province. After his death, my name was listed in the Army. From there to my house village is very far in distance. I did not have any money to go back home. I was very young. I had no idea of what to do but listened to others who said serving in the Army is fun. I then got deeply involved in serving as a soldier. Being a soldier, sometimes I am happy and sometimes not happy.

I engaged in the Army since I was very young and not tall enough for the rifle that I carried. I always followed other soldiers. At times when there was a lot of rain I was bitten by mosquitoes, and I had no proper place to sleep. It was so difficult for me to serve in the Army. I could never sleep well since there were insects, rain and Khmer Rouge fighters who disturbed us. I was engaged in two or three battlefields in Preah Vihear province. Another battlefield was in Chuam Ksaan in a border province, where I lost my leg to a landmine planted by Khmer Rouge fighters.

I was so sorry for myself, seeing friends of my age have gone to school and completed exams. I asked myself why I did not have such opportunity as other children do. I cannot think of what my future will be. As I have told you already that I was already lucky that I could survive many battlefields. If I had lost both legs, I would have not been able to find water and food for myself.

I have not heard any news from my parents, and they have not heard from me either. If I visit them, they will only cry when they see me. They may remember that I was a clever and good pupil at school, and ask why now I became like this. It was my fate.

Palestine

Amina went into labour at 5:00 p.m. The closest hospital was in Ramallah, which, under semi-normal circumstances, is a forty-minute drive from her home. Unfortunately, semi-normality is a rare commodity in occupied Palestine (East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip).

Amina and her family set off in a taxi but were stopped repeatedly by Israeli soldiers, with whom they had to plead in order to continue. During one stop, a soldier allowed the family to pass only after he discovered that Amina had just given birth.

When they were stopped for the fifth (and final) time, they were ordered to get out of the taxi. Amina, who was still attached to her baby, stood up and collapsed. Several soldiers began laughing, apparently amused by the sight of the child and her unconscious mother. Finally, another soldier demanded they let the family pass, and at 8:30 p.m. -- three-and-a-half hours after the journey began -- Amina and her baby reached the hospital. The child was named Sabreen, which comes from the Arabic word for "patience."

Sabreen, who was only a few minutes old, was subjected to the stifling realities of occupation. Her tragic experience demonstrates that Palestinian children are born into a system that constricts and dehumanises them; essentially, it punishes them for the "crime" of being Palestinian. Simple acts like attending school and playing with friends are difficult and even deadly.

For example, the Israeli siege on Palestinian towns and villages has devastated the Palestinian economy and has pushed over two-thirds of the population into a state of destitution, which, according to Defence for Children International (DCI), has forced more and more children to toil in the streets.

Others, especially children in the West Bank city of Hebron, are often imprisoned in their homes as a result of Israeli imposed curfews that last for days and weeks at a time, bringing life to a standstill. Nevertheless, even when the curfews are lifted, children who live or study near settlements are threatened and sometimes assaulted by the belligerent settlers.

Hundreds more face egregious conditions while in Israeli custody. Human rights groups, such as DCI and LAW, have reported numerous cases in which children (some as young as fourteen) have undergone beatings, sleep deprivation, and position abuse, despite the fact that Israel banned torture in September 1999. A Palestinian-American friend recently told me about his ordeal after he had been caught throwing stones as a teenager during the first Intifada. He was taunted and beaten by a group of soldiers and was subsequently forced to squat for eight hours, during which he endured more insults and beatings. This flagrant injustice continues today.

Israeli weaponry has also taken a dreadful toll on Palestinian children. Since the beginning of the Intifada, Israeli forces have killed 110 and have injured 600, like Mahmoud (12) who was shot in the chest and killed while drinking milk outside his home: or Hussein (16) who was paralysed after being hit in the neck while throwing stones at soldiers: or dozens of children – like Faris (13) – who have been killed while throwing stones at Israeli forces. Israel claims its soldiers shoot the stone throwers because they pose a threat to the soldiers' lives. However, I have witnessed such clashes and know that the soldiers are well-protected in their barricades and armoured jeeps, and (in almost all cases) they are out of the stone throwers' range. Indeed, stone throwing is an act of desperation that has lightly injured only a handful of soldiers.

It is important to underscore that the injustices inflicted upon Palestinian children – in violation of the Geneva Convention and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which went into effect in Israel in November 1991 – are not aberrations nor are they some new phenomenon. They are all symptoms of Israel's thirty-four-year occupation.

Nevertheless, despite its power and virulence, the occupation has failed to colonise the children's dreams and souls. They continue to learn, play, perform, paint, write, attend rallies, march in demonstrations, defy curfew, and imagine a world without occupation. Quite simply, they continue to struggle for their childhood and humanity.

The job of the international community is not to pity the children or detest Israel. Instead, it is our duty to stand in solidarity with those who resist ideologies and systems (like the occupation) that dehumanise and oppress. Our own humanity demands it.

Israel

"You know that Jews are killing Palestinian children"

The very existence these days of a volunteer project in which Zionist Jewish students reinforce the English that Bedouin children are getting in Palestinian schools might be considered a

minor miracle: cooperative efforts between Palestinians and Jews in the Holy Land are pitifully few as we enter the tenth month of the current Intifada. When I heard eight-year old Akhmed respond with the above rebuke, it was a vivid reminder of how hard it is to grow up not hating "The Other" around here.

Our kids are not oblivious to the ongoing violence that surrounds them. As parents, we bear the blame not only for putting them at danger, but also for poisoning their minds with the rhetoric and choreography of contentiousness. The Israeli propaganda machine goes to town on the stone throwing by Palestinian children: "What kind of parent lets his/her child go to the front and face danger?" But researchers and philosophers have already shown how the Israeli educational system is basically geared to producing soldiers. I grab my kids the moment they come back from school and teach them that there is a higher authority than their teachers to which they are held accountable. In my kids' particular case, they know they have to filter out the prejudice and oneness that their teachers inevitably radiate, albeit with a smile.

"Who's on the phone?"

"Some Jew"

Years ago, when I was setting up Clergy for Peace with a wonderful Palestinian priest, I was saddened to realise that his son didn't react to my voice with greater enthusiasm. I was equally dismayed when my daughter said she'd rather learn French than Arabic, because she saw herself more likely to spend time in Europe than in the authentic Middle East. But who says she has to follow her father into the trenches. In fact, as they approach college age, I frequently remind them that, as hard as it will be for me to endure the separation, I think I'd rather they studied abroad. I was equally conflicted when my son began showing athletic prowess - here I was hoping that the army would find him too clumsy to make a combat soldier...

I became addicted to life in Israel after my first few months here as a teenage student on a year of study abroad, but I didn't know then what I know now. I've raised a family of three wonderful Israeli kids who seem likewise addicted, and they have integrated many of the widely divergent influences on their lives rather successfully. When push came to shove, my oldest daughter refused to serve in the army, and judging from my sons inability to let a mouse stay caught in a trap, maybe there's hope he wont go either.

Our children live in a land of physical beauty and spiritual intensity, but they are entitled to more: they deserve to live in peace.

Northern Ireland

Sitting on a desk four years ago chatting to friends, I definitely did not expect a large bomb to go off less than a mile away. A few years earlier my friend's dad died in a bomb planted by the IRA - and now the self-confessed former second-in-command of that organisation is the government minister who has ultimate responsibility for my education. So why is a teenager like me in favour of the peace process?

Growing up in a place like Northern Ireland was never going to be easy, and I can understand the often cynical, mistrusting and hard-line attitude of my peers. The school that I go to is very near to an ultra-loyalist area, and murals, painted kerbstones to identify areas as a certain

religion, and year-round bunting – also identifying religion – are everywhere. Sectarianism is part of life here, and for those who want to speak out an independence of mind and strong conviction is still needed.

There is so much good will from churches, ordinary people and many political leaders, but even as I write violence is escalating in north Belfast, Northern Ireland's capital. Children have been denied the human right of attending school; over 40 police officers have been injured; and the marching season – where ultra-radical Protestant loyalists often accompany peaceful marchers and incite violence against the police and innocent civilians – is now starting. And the other side is as bad. This has been the norm for so many years and often it is hard to see when it's all going to stop.

I believe in the need for peace and reconciliation, and am a member of a cross-community choir that is committed to unity and the understanding of others through music. In recent years, the choir, which enjoys world-wide support, has staged a major concert at the bottom of the Garvaghy Road, (perhaps the most famous street in the world after Wall Street because of the yearly contention over marching rights) as well as performing for former President Clinton twice.

Who knows about the future? The last election we had shows a marked move towards polarised politics. The extremes have more MPs, and therefore more influence. The major issues are still the handing-over of weapons, policing changes and the demilitarisation of our country. It is easy to see why so many young people want to go away to university instead of studying here – I am included in that number – because there is a much greater opportunity to see how others live, how others can get along.

The Belfast Peace Agreement is the hope for our nation – of that I have no doubt – but what I have seen so far is still far away from a Northern Ireland I would be happy to work, live and start a family in. We have a long way to go.

Prayer

God of Peace,
bless all children affected by war:
the injured and the untreated,
the frightened and the separated,
the homeless and the hungry,
the orphaned,
the disrupted and the conscripted.
Give them the courage to "be" -
grant them resilience of spirit
and keep alive in them the values
of your Kingdom.
Strengthen all who offer loving care
and who bring the grace of hope;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Revd John Bradford