

The next generation

Sleepy Eye La Framboise, Coalition for Children of the Earth

■ What is the difference between a black man and a white man? What is the difference between a person with blue eyes or green eyes? Is it true that all human beings have hearts? Is it true that all people feel pain or joy? Every person on this entire earth seeks the happiness of life. Is there any reason why people cannot live together in peace?

I know what it is like to feel hopelessness, pain and suffering. I know what it is to see your land, your culture, your beliefs, your hopes and dreams diminished before your eyes. I know the feeling of discrimination just because your skin is a different colour or just because you

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UNICEF/RODOLPHO

worship the creator of life in a different way.

These are only a few of the emotions millions of children feel everyday throughout the world.

Every single child in this room and everywhere is beautiful and deserves a chance to love, a chance to laugh, a chance to play, and a chance to feel safe and secure.

I imagine that the majority of the leaders in this world never had to carry a gun when they were eight years old. They never had to experience starvation. They never had to experience abuse or neglect. They never had to see the death of their parents or brothers and sisters. I assume that these government officials never had to go through life begging in the streets just to live day by day.

If they had experienced these brutal ways of life, then they would understand and this world would be in peace. Then there would not be killings and brutalities against these children.

The children of the world are young and innocent but they possess something that many adults forget at times. And that is they act through their hearts and emotions which means that they come into this world without prejudice. It is only as they grow older and through the teachings of their parents that they begin to hate.

We children feel that our human rights are violated, and we feel that it is vital that we are a part of the decisions that affect us. We need to be recognized and heard. If the children can continue to be united and are given a voice within the UN, generation after generation, then can there be peace on earth.

When the adults begin to act as children and love one another, then and only then will this world be exactly what the creator intended it to be.

EXTRACT FROM: Statement to the Children's World Conference on Human Rights

Squandered opportunities

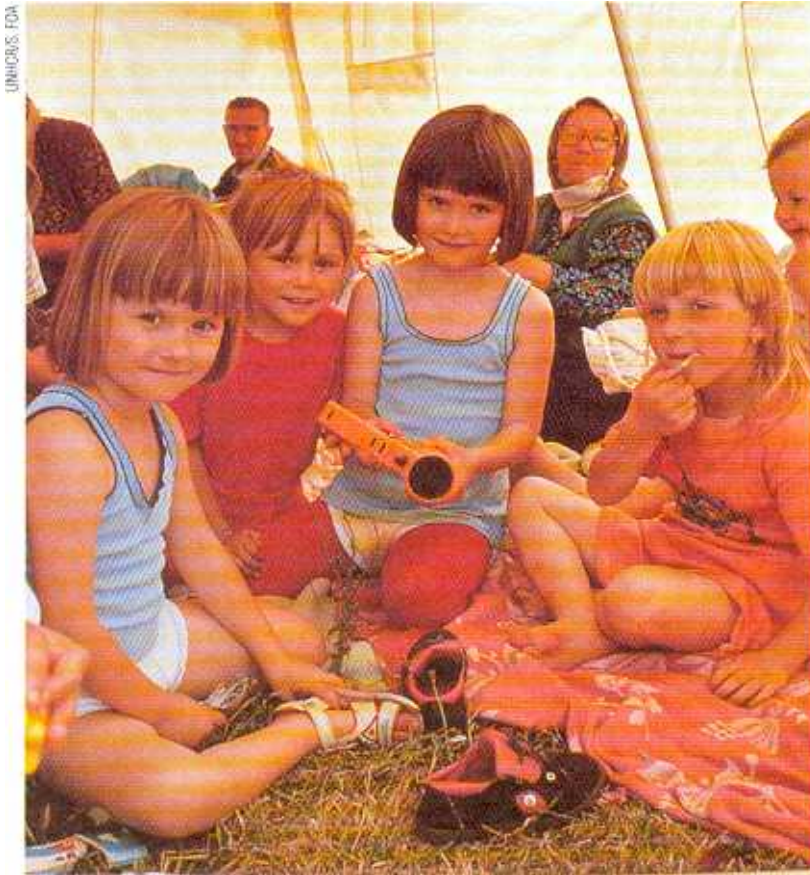
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

■ It is a shameful irony that the international community should be approaching the 21st century with so much capacity to save and to enrich people's lives while demonstrating so little practical will to do so. With the Cold War shrinking into memory and democratic principles in full bloom, it is even more disturbing that human imagination should find expression in new atrocities, gratuitously inflicted upon others and upon children and

women in particular.

There are two clearly identifiable types of emergency which shout for equal attention. They are: 'loud' emergencies encompassing natural disasters and armed conflicts, which displace and disable millions of children, and 'silent' emergencies, resulting from entrenched poverty, sickness, lack of knowledge and inadequate services, which cause many more deaths than from famine, flood or war, but which seldom make the headlines.

It has become clear in a number of conflict situations that military commanders have targeted children and women deliberately. It is not uncommon for boys of 11 years and younger to be abducted, drafted or otherwise coerced into military training and active



UNHCR/IS. FGA

Soldiers used to be the victims of war. Now women and children are killed and wounded in the greatest numbers. Even more suffer by being separated from their parents, or losing their home – like these Bosnian children in Croatia

service. There are documented cases of child soldiers who have been forced to kill members of their own families or to serve as 'cannon fodder' while storming enemy frontlines or traversing minefields. There have been reports that land mines have been disguised as toys and planted near schools, playgrounds and other places where children and women find them. The mass slaughter, rape and torture of young children and women of rival groups are also on record. And these barbarities, it seems, never end. In parts of Asia, children are being killed or maimed almost daily by the accidental detonation of mines which were sown and forgotten during wars which ended long ago.

More than 1.5 million children have been killed in wars during the past decade. More than 4 million have been physically disabled. Some 5 million are in refugee camps waiting for wars to end, and another 12 million have lost their homes. Untold numbers have been psychologically traumatized by exposure to the brutalities of armed conflict.

Before 1945, most victims of war were soldiers, but in more than 150 wars since then, 80 per cent of the 20 million dead and 60 million wounded have been civilians, and most of them have been children and women.

In developing countries, where the vast majority of wars have been fought since 1945, these events are compounded by poverty,

drought, famine and other burdens of nature.

Generations of children are being killed and disfigured physically and emotionally by adult differences in defiance of the international community's best legal constructs. This madness must end. If society is to have standards there must also be accountability.

During the past 12 months, wars have cost the lives of some 500,000 children. But for every child lost to bombs and bullets, many more suffer the indirect consequences of separation from parents and family, loss of shelter, food and water supplies and other basic services such as immunization against diseases. Hospitals, clinics, schools and the staff who run them were also strategic targets in at least one recent conflict.

Military spending, the cost of reconstruction and interest payments on debt are bleeding the world's poorest nations, siphoning scarce capital from health, education and other budgets for child survival and development.

A revolution in communications has meant that the international community can no longer plead ignorance of human rights abuses. Politicians might turn the equivalent of a blind eye, but the world sees death and suffering, up close and in full colour through the eyes of television. Unfortunately, television and the news media are drawn mostly to the dramatic profile of 'loud' emergencies and not to the far greater numbers of children who die each year in slums and poor villages from diarrhoea (3 million) or acute respiratory infections such as pneumonia (3.6 million). The atrocity here is that we know how to prevent this death and suffering for just a few cents or a few dollars per child. We have the capacity to immunize against the six main child killer diseases, to prevent diarrhoea dehydration with oral rehydration salts, and to prevent blindness and gross mental handicaps by distributing vitamin A capsules and iodizing salt respectively.

The international community also has the responsibility to draw attention to gross imbalances in the way nations apportion development resources. Gender biases which deny equal opportunity to girls and women are an abuse of human rights and an affront to any rational concept of sustained development. Of the 100 million children between the ages of seven and 12 who are not in school, a full two thirds are girls. No nation can afford to sideline half its human capacity and potential.

Another unfortunate side-effect of our ability to see the world and the suffering of those around us is that a proliferation of loud emergencies competes for our attention and resources. The impact can be seen in what is

Mankind's struggle to consolidate and extend human rights has made steady progress in recent years. Following the collapse of the totalitarian regimes, the road has opened for freedom and democracy all over Eastern Europe - even if the price is instability and uncertainty. However, a large section of mankind is still deprived of the most essential human rights. The struggle to extend political freedom and safeguard human rights worldwide is, therefore, still long and difficult. Greece, which as the birthplace of democracy is firmly committed to human rights, will do its utmost to bring about the success of that struggle.

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sometimes called 'compassion fatigue' as the public's threshold of tolerance for suffering is ratcheted upwards by graphic repetition of situations which can eventually seem commonplace.

In the roar of media attention given to loud emergencies, it is vital that the world be reminded that no war, flood, drought or famine ever cost the lives of 35,000 children in a single day. That is the toll day after day, from silent emergencies driven by poverty, illiteracy and a lack of basic, inexpensive, life-saving technologies in the world's poorest communities.

Goals in the 1990s include a 50 per cent reduction in malnutrition, illiteracy and maternal mortality rates, universal access to safe water supply and sanitation, and immunization for 90 per cent of the world's children against the main child killer diseases.

UNICEF firmly believes that these goals are attainable using available low-cost technologies, proven strategies, and relatively little new money. It is estimated that an additional \$25 billion a year would be sufficient to implement the goals in developing countries and that most of this could be found by restructuring national budgets and official development assistance to give children first call on available resources.

At the present time, only about 10 per cent of government spending in developing countries is allocated to such basics as

nutrition, health care, water supply, sanitation, primary education and family planning.

Industrialized countries also apportion less than 10 per cent of their Overseas

Development Assistance towards meeting these priority human needs. UNICEF estimates that if developing countries directed 20 per cent of their budget to the priority needs of children and industrialized nations did the same with their development assistance, some 30 million lives could be saved in the 1990s in addition to many other benefits for children. There is no excuse for failure in the face of such an opportunity. The international community has the technology and the resources to guarantee these things.

The 'best interests of the child' are universal. They include the right to survival, to healthy development, and to protection from abuse. These things are agreed. They are international standards. But what value do they have in a world which turns its back on hunger and want, on torture, rape, and the exploitation of children? Children's lives cannot be put on hold while adult society mulls over its obligations towards them. Public commitments have been made. Treaties have been written and ratified. The time to act is now.

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35,000 children a day die from 'silent' emergencies, caused by poverty, illiteracy and the lack of basic life-saving technology

