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Caught in the Crossfire: Children and Armed Conflict in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

Strengthening Co-operation between UNICEF and OSCE

When the lives and fundamental rights of children are at stake, there must be no silent witnesses

Graça Machel¹

Introduction

In 1996, Graça Machel, in her report to the UN General Assembly on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, spoke of the “desolate moral vacuum” into which more and more of the world was being sucked. This, she said, is “a space devoid of the most basic human values, a place in which children are slaughtered, raped and maimed”.²

What has happened since she made those comments? Graça Machel said recently: “In the years since the publication of the Report, the situation has only grown worse, not better. Conflict is proliferating - and it is now a routine fact of life that children are targets, not incidental casualties of conflicts.” This sad truth has been only too apparent in recent years.

Children and Armed Conflict: The Global Context

In the last decade of the twentieth century, some two million children died as a result of war, while a further twelve million were left homeless and six million were injured or physically disabled.³ Each year, about 6,000 children are killed or maimed by landmines planted where children live, play and go to school.⁴ Those who survive these traumas suffer the long-lasting psychological effects of war's brutality.

More than 300,000 children below 18 years of age currently participate in ongoing conflicts around the world, forced or coerced to serve as soldiers,

1 Graça Machel, *The Impact of War on Children*, London, 2001, p. 4.

2 *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*. Report of Graça Machel, Expert of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, United Nations 1996.

3 Cf. Machel, cited above (Note 1), pp. 1-2.

4 Cf. UNICEF, *Annual Report 2000*, New York 2000, p. 14.

porters, messengers, cooks or sexual slaves.⁵ Children who are recruited into armed forces as soldiers are often compelled to administer or witness atrocities, suffering not only physical but also psychological trauma with severe and lasting effects.

Children are the first to suffer the poverty, malnutrition and ill health that result from the disruptions and dislocations caused by war. At least half of the world's estimated 40 million displaced are children, of whom about a third have been displaced within their own country's borders.⁶ More than one million children have been orphaned or separated from their parents by war. These children are often compelled to wait out interminable years in refugee camps. Their most basic rights to survival, well-being and development are threatened.

Still other children are the deliberate targets of campaigns to terrorize and subjugate. Girls are especially targeted for the rape and gender violence that serve as weapons of war. For adolescent girls who have suffered sexual abuse, their pain is often compounded by the badge of shame that can lead to ostracism by their communities. The rise of sexually transmitted diseases, and particularly of HIV/AIDS, adds a deadly dimension to their suffering.

Children and Armed Conflict in Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS⁷

War has continued to be a scourge in the lives of millions of children in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS). Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, armed conflict has broken out in one third of the 27 transition countries. These conflicts include: Armenia and Azerbaijan (1988-94), the Ferghana Valley of Central Asia (1989-91), Georgia (1990-94), Moldova (1992), Tajikistan (1992-97), the North Caucasus (1992-present), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1991-95), Croatia (1991-95), Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1998-99), and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2001).⁸

By late 2000, 2.2 million people in the CEE/CIS region were registered as internally displaced. Almost one million people had become refugees as a result of recent wars and conflicts among states and within them. Hundreds of thousands of children have been killed, injured, traumatized or orphaned.

5 Cf. Machel, cited above (Note 1), p. 2.

6 Cf. UNICEF, UNICEF Actions on Behalf of Children Affected by Armed Conflict, New York 2000, p. 2.

7 Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Turkey is included in the UNICEF regional administrative and programmatic structure for Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic states.

8 Cf. MONEE Project, A Decade of Transition, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2001, p. 5

Children have been deeply affected by all of these conflicts, and directly involved in many. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers notes: "In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh, south-east Turkey, Kosovo, possibly in Daghestan and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, children have spied, conveyed messages, carried weapons and ammunition, and, inevitably, killed and been killed."⁹ Details of how specific conflicts in the region are affecting children appear below.

Reversing the Tides of War

What is the point of reference for people who are committed to helping innocent victims of conflict? First and foremost, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) would argue, we must have as our standard the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the most extensively ratified human rights instrument in history. The Convention sets out clearly what needs to be done when conflicts involve children: Children must not be recruited or forced to participate in armed conflict; the rights of child asylum seekers and refugees must be protected; support must be provided for child victims of war and their families; and there must be promotion of tolerance through education to prevent future conflicts. The CRC makes it UNICEF's business to ensure that children are identified as an explicit priority in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

UNICEF has taken its commitment to children in armed conflict to a new level in the last decade. In 1996, Graça Machel released her groundbreaking report to the UN, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, which spelled out in excruciating detail the scale and scope of the problem. That same year, UNICEF launched its Anti-War Agenda, followed by its Peace and Security Agenda for Children, which was presented at the UN Security Council in February 1999. The latter agenda focuses on seven key elements: ending the use of children as soldiers; protection of humanitarian assistance and humanitarian personnel; support mine action; protection of children from the effects of sanctions; ensuring that peace-building specifically includes children; challenge the impunity of war crimes, especially those perpetrated against children; and promotion of early warning and preventive action for children.

Children's concerns have been given increasing significance by the UN Security Council in its recent resolutions and statements. Since 1998, the Security Council has held four debates on children affected by armed conflict and adopted three resolutions on the issue (Resolutions 1261, 1314 and 1379). In these resolutions, the Security Council has asserted that children's concerns should be taken into account in all aspects of peacebuilding, peacemaking and peacekeeping.

9 Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2001*.

The United Nations have taken an increasingly active role in protecting the rights of children. In May 2002, the General Assembly held an unprecedented three-day Special Session on Children, during which world leaders took measures to strengthen the protection for children in armed conflict. Also in 2002, two Optional Protocols to the CRC entered into force: The first forbids the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the second, "on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict", outlaws the compulsory recruitment and involvement of children under 18 in hostilities (see box at the end of this article). A number of nations used the occasion of the UN Special Session to ratify these Optional Protocols.

Other recent international agreements have also raised the profile of children's rights in the context of armed conflict. The Ottawa Convention bans the use of landmines; the ILO Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999) prohibits the forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; and the International Criminal Court (ICC) has labelled the conscription of children under 15 and their use as participants in hostilities as a war crime.

UNICEF has collaborated with the OSCE and/or with the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to address the problem of children in armed conflict in the CEE/CIS and Baltic region, at both the regional and country levels. UNICEF has advocated for the strengthening of the OSCE's policies and programmes in support of children's rights, with an emphasis on those children who are affected by armed conflicts. In 2001, UNICEF and OSCE/ODIHR joined forces to conduct the 35-country Young Voices Opinion Poll of Children and Young People in Europe and Central Asia, to gather the views of children aged 9-17 on a wide range of issues. At the national level, a number of OSCE Missions and UNICEF Country Offices jointly launched the results of the poll and organized round tables and conferences on issues such as trafficking in children, development of national plans of action for children, conflict prevention and citizenship education.

This growing global effort on behalf of children in armed conflict represents a milestone. Children, once the invisible casualties of war, have now been given a face, a voice and the right to live in peace.

"Children present us with a uniquely compelling motivation for mobilisation", writes Graça Machel in her revised study, *The Impact of War on Children* (2001). "Our collective failure to protect children must be transformed into an opportunity to confront the problems that cause their suffering. The impact of armed conflict on children is everyone's responsibility. And it must be everyone's concern."

Protecting Children's Rights in Armed Conflict

With a strong presence in 161 countries, UNICEF is in the field before, during and after a conflict. Its actions are therefore guided by a clear perception of the need for links between relief and development and of the importance of promoting sustainable peace and stability. The principal goals of UNICEF's emergency-related efforts are to:

- prevent risks to children by addressing the *root causes of conflict*;
- ensure the survival of the *most vulnerable children and women*;
- ensure *protection against violence, exploitation, abuse, rape and recruitment into armed forces*;
- promote *demobilization, recovery and social reintegration of child soldiers*;
- support *landmine awareness and community-based rehabilitation programmes* for child victims of landmines;
- promote *lasting solutions* through the greater *empowerment* of families and communities, with particular support for women.

*Children in the CEE/CIS Conflict Zones*¹⁰

Armenia

Armenia is home to a sizable population of war-affected refugees. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 264,327 ethnic Armenians are registered as refugees in Armenia. Of these, 26,978, or ten per cent, are children under 17. Refugees comprise nearly one fourth of the student population of rural schools in Armenia, and they have a grade repetition rate several times that of the average Armenian student.

In 2001, UNICEF supported local and international NGOs to establish community-based centres for socially vulnerable children and their families. Special emphasis was given to 85 refugee children living in isolated, poor communities in Yerevan and the surrounding regions. These community-based centres supported the vocational training of vulnerable children and helped them integrate into the communities by organizing out-of-school activities involving families at risk.

UNICEF also contributed towards the printing of a Human Rights Education Manual for children and teachers. The project encompasses printing of both pupil and teacher manuals and training of teachers, with the aim of educating children and their families about children's rights.

10 All data in this section comes from reports from UNICEF Country Offices and Regional Offices.

Azerbaijan

By the end of 2000, there were 220,241 refugees and 568,989 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Azerbaijan, 540,387 of whom were children and women. These people were displaced as a result of armed conflict with Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh province of Azerbaijan. The majority of the displaced have inadequate shelter, poor access to clean water and sanitary services and severely limited supplies of energy.

Poverty is particularly intense among IDPs and refugees. Only one third of all working-age IDPs are employed, and nearly three-fourths of the women are out of work. The prospects for income generation remain dismal. IDPs and refugees are entitled to a monthly "bread subsidy" of about 4.50 US dollars per person, and a subsidy of about two US dollars for each child whose per capita household income is less than 3.75 US dollars.

Displaced children are especially vulnerable to the scourges of poverty. Diarrhea is particularly prevalent among IDP children. A recent survey found that over one quarter of IDP children under five had suffered from diarrhea in the previous two weeks.

About 197,000 IDPs - or 35 per cent of the IDP population - are children of school age. The traumatic experiences of these children, their poor living conditions and limitations in their access to quality education have jeopardized their prospects for healthy and appropriate development. A 1995 study found that about one third of children working in the streets were IDPs or refugees.

UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) jointly support multi-functional centres for preschool-age IDP children in an effort to ameliorate the psychological damage of war and displacement and to improve their educational prospects. The Office of the UNHCR is rehabilitating schools in IDP communities, and UNICEF is supporting programmes to educate children in peace and tolerance and provide vocational training for young IDP adults. In the absence of accelerated measures to improve their desperate living conditions, however, many displaced children may be drawn into crime or delinquency.

There are hopes that progress in peace negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia may lead to the occupied territories being restored to Azerbaijan. The option for uprooted people to return to their places of origin - freely, safely, voluntarily and in dignity - is a basic human right, and surveys have consistently found that the great majority of Azerbaijan's IDPs want to return to their homes. Enabling IDPs to return is thus a national priority.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina still struggles with the effects of a war that devastated the country and its population. In a country of 4.37 million people

(1991), the figures tell a tragic story: By 1996, up to 2.7 million people - nearly two out of every three citizens - had been displaced or became refugees; 1.5 million of these were women and children. A quarter-million people were killed, and 200,000 injured. In a conflict notorious for targeting civilians, children were frequently victims: An estimated 16,800 children were killed (nearly ten per cent of these were in Sarajevo alone), and 34,700 children were injured. An estimated 45,000 children lost one parent, and there are today 3,350 registered orphans. Half of the schools suffered major damage during the war. Some 10,000 professionals, including doctors, nurses and teachers, were killed in the war or fled the country. The enormous social upheaval endures: As of 2000, only about 40,000 displaced people had made it back to their original homes. At the end of 2001, there were still 500,000 IDPs within Bosnia and Herzegovina and 213,000 refugees in surrounding countries.

Restoring basic health care is a critical first step to ensuring the survival of children in conflict zones. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the pre-war immunization rate for basic vaccines of over 90 per cent (1991) fell to an estimated 35 per cent or less during the war. By 2001, thanks partly to intensive immunization campaigns by UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO), immunization rates returned to their pre-war levels. UNICEF and WHO sponsored a national polio eradication strategy that succeeded in immunizing nearly 90 per cent of children under six in 2001.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is the most heavily mined country in Europe. The over one million landmines laid throughout the country pose significant danger of causing death and disability among children. The UNICEF Mine Awareness Campaign has helped to raise consciousness of the problem. This new awareness has saved lives: The number of landmine accidents decreased from 453 in 1995 (including 15 child fatalities and 68 children injured) to 79 in 1998, including two children killed. In the post-war period (1996-2001), a total of 237 children were killed or injured by landmines, including twelve children who were injured or killed in 2001.

Since the end of the war, UNICEF has supported a secondary school trauma project that is now in 30 per cent of primary and secondary schools country-wide. Surveys conducted by the project have shown that in some areas, up to three-fourths of children were forced to leave their homes, 59 per cent experienced their homes being bombed, and one fourth had seen somebody killed. The programme is run by specially trained counsellors and teachers under the supervision of psychologists and psychiatrists working in the community. The curriculum is designed to identify and support adolescents with histories of severe war trauma who continue to experience psychological problems after the war.

Croatia

An estimated 400,000 children were affected by the war in Croatia, and more than 50,000 were directly exposed to its horrors. The war in Croatia lasted from 1991 to 1995, but its long term effects are still felt. These include the traumatization of families, physical and social damage to communities, displacement, and the proliferation of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO).

The war also took a more direct toll: 303 children were killed, and 1,280 children were wounded, including 298 who suffer a permanent disability.

Many children experienced the disintegration of their social networks. Some 4,455 children lost one parent and 131 children lost both parents. The parents of 900 children are still missing.

Children were exposed to sustained artillery attacks and aerial bombardment. A study carried out by UNICEF in 1994 revealed that 27 per cent of displaced children spent more than a month in a bomb shelter, many of them separated from their families.

Displacement of children was the most common effect of the war. In early 1992, when forced displacement within Croatia reached its peak, an estimated 185,000 children were displaced. In 1992 and 1993, large numbers of refugees, many of them children, fled to Croatia from neighbouring Bosnia. In a third wave of forced migration, ethnic Serbs fled from Croatia in 1995.

The majority of the people who fled the conflict have now returned home. However, in Croatia there are still about 25,000 IDPs and 20,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 1996, some 86,000 refugees have returned to Croatia from Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina under the organized repatriation programme.

Weapons continue to disrupt the social fabric of Croatia. Approximately one million landmines and UXO are strewn over eleven per cent of the country. Many families continue to keep weapons in their homes. Landmine incidents, the widespread availability of firearms and an increase in family violence are causing new traumas. These problems, together with a poor economy and high unemployment rate, continue to hinder post-war development.

For the last decade, UNICEF has supported various school- and community-based psychosocial programmes aimed at alleviating the lingering effects of the conflict. Mine awareness programmes were implemented through schools and the media. UNICEF funded school-based programmes to promote tolerance, peaceful problem solving and conflict resolution.

Ferghana Valley: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

The disputed borders between the Central Asian republics of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have been contaminated by the extensive use of anti-personnel mines. This border region has been destabilized as a result of a

fundamentalist insurgency which began with armed forays in 1998 that have affected all three countries. Although the underlying social and economic impact of these mines has been relatively low, dozens of civilian casualties, including children, have already been inflicted, mostly in Tajikistan. Figures for Uzbekistan - whose national armed forces continue to lay mines - are not known. Untold numbers of cattle have been killed. Tajikistan is additionally affected by landmines and unexploded ordnance left over from the civil war in the mid-1990s. Those at greatest risk from landmines are adolescent and adult shepherds and farmers; a number of children have also fallen victim to mines while playing. Most incidents appear to be the result of ignorance about the mine threat, or at least the location of mines.

The long-term solution to the threat posed to civilians in the region is, *firstly*, to end the mine-laying; *secondly*, clear contaminated areas to humanitarian standards; and, *thirdly*, adhere to and implement the Ottawa Convention that bans the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of mines. So far, of the three countries mentioned, only Tajikistan has acceded to the Convention, but there are doubts about whether the ban will be applied nationally. Kyrgyzstan has given positive indications of future adherence.

While moving towards the ultimate objective of eliminating all mines in the region, a series of interim measures could help to protect the civilian population, particularly children. Marking of known affected areas is an obvious starting point; to date, there has been little signposting of mined areas despite the requirements of international humanitarian law. Clearance capacity exists in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (and presumably Uzbekistan) - the provision of maps, on which mine laying was recorded, would greatly speed the clearance process.

Community mine awareness education is a priority for UNICEF. Trained community teams can engage at-risk communities in a dialogue where information is exchanged, priorities are identified, and resources mobilized. Community risk mapping, where communities themselves identify dangerous areas and suggest possible solutions, will play a key role in the process.

Georgia

By 2001, there were 272,000 IDPs in Georgia - 80,000 of whom were children - as a result of the conflict in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia). There are also approximately 5,000 Chechen refugees in Georgia. All of these conflicts remain unresolved, and there is still the possibility of renewed fighting in several parts of Georgia due to the general instability in the country. Children living close to the conflict areas thus remain threatened. The war, displacement, drought, and subsequent economic collapse has left much of the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia vulnerable. Significant numbers of people living in these regions and adjoining areas face serious food shortages due to their poverty. Orphans and large families are at

greatest risk. Food insecurity has led to a higher degree of stunting among IDP children.

There are some programmes addressing the trauma and psychological problems resulting from the armed conflict and economic hardship faced by the IDPs and local population in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In addition, there are a few programmes addressing the special needs of vulnerable children, many of whom are orphans living in collective centres.

While enrolment figures for IDPs are similar to the local population, some villages in war-affected areas lack schools (which were damaged or destroyed during the armed conflict) and adequate teaching materials. Many children are unable to attend schools due to lack of clothes, shoes and school materials. UNICEF has provided essential school equipment in the hardest hit areas, benefiting some 10,000 students.

In addition to UNICEF's support for health and educational interventions for the most marginalized women and children, UNICEF has also helped establish a mobile club on child's rights. The club has travelled throughout the conflict regions providing special education on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a result of the project, about 7,000 children in the region, including IDPs, have been educated about the rights of children. In addition, a 40-hour training course on child protection was conducted to enhance the capacity of 200 child-care providers to work with children in need of special protection, including IDPs. This has contributed to a better understanding and recognition of the special needs and problems of war-affected children. And it has given children an understanding of how conflicts can be resolved peacefully, in the hopes that this new generation can break the cycle of violence.

In 2000, UNICEF and its partners conducted a mine awareness campaign in the Zugdidi region, adjacent to the Abkhazia border. The education effort involved training teachers in landmine awareness, disseminating mine awareness posters, using mobile puppet theatre groups, TV broadcasts and distributing information leaflets at border-crossing points and in communities. The campaign resulted in the creation of a special task group, "Children Against Mines", which has continued disseminating mine awareness information in the region. Over 3,000 children benefited from this project.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: UN Administered Province of Kosovo

In the two and a half years since the end of the war in Kosovo, UNICEF has implemented one of its most complex and successful emergency and rehabilitation programmes, in the midst of continuing instability in the region and rapid political change in the province itself. The promotion of human rights - and child rights in particular - is perhaps nowhere more important, and is fundamental to securing the future of a territory that lies near the heart of Europe.

Approximately one million Kosovars were affected by the 1999 conflict, half of them children (Kosovo has the highest youth population in Europe), including internally displaced and refugee returnee populations. The violent experiences to which children and women were exposed caused widespread trauma and stress. Thousands of UXO and the planting of mines also pose great danger for the returnees.

Most of Kosovo's health and education infrastructure was damaged or looted, including 40 per cent of the schools and nearly a quarter of all immunization centres. The lack of functioning health, education and social services structures along with the breakdown of the judicial system had, and still have, serious long-term impacts on the life of women and children in Kosovo.

Kosovo now poses a critical development challenge. It remains the poorest territory in Europe, with some of the worst socio-economic indicators. Infant and maternal mortality rates are the highest in Europe, and chronic malnutrition rates (stunting) are also unacceptably high. Less than ten per cent of children with special needs attend primary school. By the age of 13, nearly one third of girls drop out of primary school. Pre-school education is almost entirely absent.

Kosovar youth represent the best hope for a prosperous and tolerant future for the province. A recent UNICEF survey found that Kosovar youth are the most optimistic in the region and the most willing to engage in civil society and to participate in decision-making processes, especially those concerning education and recreation. Nonetheless, young people are poorly equipped to face some of the most serious contemporary issues: HIV/AIDS awareness is extremely low, and drug use, involvement in organized crime and violence among youth is on the increase. Unemployment is high and few opportunities exist for young people - especially from poor, rural communities - to acquire the skills necessary for the job market.

UNICEF is linking the development of modern, child-centred education practices in its 35 pilot schools with the creation of a new school curriculum to lay the foundations for a quality, inclusive education system. UNICEF is also developing a comprehensive life-skills education programme, which teaches respect for human rights, conflict resolution skills and tolerance, and other vital life-skills such as HIV/AIDS awareness and reproductive health.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

In 2001, FYR Macedonia faced the biggest threat to its existence in its recent history. Inter-ethnic tension developed into a military conflict between ethnic Albanian armed groups and Macedonian security forces. Although a framework peace accord brokered by the international community is being implemented, the potential for violence by extremists on both sides remains a continuing possibility.

During the height of the conflict, over 120,000 Macedonians of all ethnic groups were internally displaced or became refugees in neighbouring countries. Although most have returned to their homes, the forced displacement and return to damaged homes, schools and health facilities in the former conflict area has had a traumatic effect, particularly on children.

Children suffer from high levels of stress and anxiety, leading to problems such as bedwetting, aggressive behaviour and tearfulness. UNICEF has organized an overall psychosocial response and facilitated the needs of these affected populations.

Landmines and unexploded ordnance in the former conflict areas have resulted in over 30 deaths and injuries, including five children. As of May 2002, over 60 villages had yet to be cleared of landmines and UXO. As one of the key agencies involved in landmine and UXO safety awareness, UNICEF, through support to the UN Mine Action Office and ICRC, has sought to ensure that all returnees to the former conflict zones and families at risk are informed of safe practices in areas with landmines and UXO.

Given the circumstances in Macedonia today, it is vital to prepare children to respect cultural differences as they are reintegrated. Through its well-established network of government and NGO partners, youth centres and family support centres, UNICEF has promoted reconciliation and reintegration that includes psychosocial support, mine awareness, conflict resolution workshops, and a "back-to-school" initiative for returnee and displaced children and their families.¹¹ UNICEF has also undertaken a campaign to create awareness about children's rights among displaced communities, especially during this very complex period in their lives. Advocacy on child rights and respect for implementation of the CRC and its Optional Protocols is ongoing with government counterparts.

Since the start of the conflict, UNICEF has continuously provided access to primary education to refugee and internally displaced children in local schools. As populations return to the former conflict areas, UNICEF has worked with the government and other international agencies to repair and rehabilitate damaged schools. Throughout the country, UNICEF has initiated curriculum reform to include peace education and conflict resolution.

Providing continuous access to education for all children in Macedonia, including displaced children and children returning to conflict damaged areas, is critical. The classroom provides an environment of normalcy to distressed children and helps ensure that their education - and their future - is not cut short.

11 In this connection, it is worth mentioning that a survey conducted in 2000 by a Macedonian NGO revealed that 61 per cent of women reported that they had been victims of psychological abuse within their families, and 24 per cent had been victims of physical violence.

Russian Federation: North Caucasus Region

About 150,000 people are still displaced in the Republic of Ingushetia, some in organized camps, others in spontaneous settlements or staying with host families. Approximately 160,000 of the 600,000 people still living inside Chechnya are internally displaced. The city of Grozny, which had 350,000 inhabitants in the 1980s, now has a population of about 90,000 people, and its infrastructure is almost completely destroyed. A continuing lack of security inside the republic has deterred IDPs from returning to their homes.

There are currently about 32,000 internally displaced children in Ingushetia between the ages of seven and 17. About 9,000 of them attend classes in regular Ingush schools, and another 12,000 are enrolled in alternative wooden or tented schools in the proximity of the IDP camps and settlements. Both systems are supported by UNICEF. In Chechnya, there are approximately 200,000 children enrolled in around 400 school facilities. Up to one third of school buildings in some areas have been totally destroyed, and many others have been severely damaged. Children often attend classes in totally unsuitable premises that lack basic equipment. UNICEF has developed a rehabilitation programme for the school system in order to increase the enrolment capacity of the less damaged school buildings. In addition, textbooks and school materials have been provided to all IDP children enrolled in Ingushetia and Chechnya.

UNICEF has supported the creation of "Child Friendly Spaces" (CFS) - safe-havens where children of pre-school and primary school age can study, play, do sports, eat, receive counselling and generally live in a normal atmosphere. Small-scale CFS were developed in Grozny for more than 200 vulnerable children, and three kindergartens vacated by the IDPs have been rehabilitated in Ingushetia. UNICEF has also supported several recreational centres for adolescents to help reduce the risk that they may be drawn into risky activities.

There are approximately a half-million mines laid inside Chechnya. To date, 7,000 to 10,000 people, including about 4,000 children, have been injured by mines and UXO accidents. With the hostilities continuing, new mines are still being laid.

In 2001, the UNICEF mine awareness campaign reached out to approximately 52,000 IDP children in Ingushetia and about 20,000 children in Chechnya. UNICEF has also supported training of health care professionals in Ingushetia and Chechnya in community-based counselling techniques for mine victims. Throughout 2001 and 2002, a comprehensive programme for assisting child and youth mine victims has been developed in collaboration with a prosthetic workshop and a rehabilitation/physiotherapy centre. These centres enable victims and their care-givers to receive psychological counselling whenever needed.

UNICEF, in collaboration with a Polish NGO, has developed a large programme for the production and distribution of potable water in Grozny, where the urban water system was damaged during the conflict. Recently, a garbage and sewage collection system has been added to the programme. The focus of the water distribution and sanitation efforts is on schools and health facilities. Latrines and incinerators for destroying dangerous medical wastes have been built close to several hospitals.

The population in Ingushetia still suffers from a lack of adequate health care for women and children and a significant need for mental health rehabilitation. In Chechnya, the health needs of the population are largely unmet. The emergency situation has led to a total depletion of resources among the existing health facilities. The epidemiological surveillance system barely works. UNICEF is helping to restore one of the building blocks of the health care system: the immunization programme for young children. UNICEF is rehabilitating the vaccine cold-chain (the system of transport and storage used to maintain the efficacy of vaccines) and the Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI) system both in Ingushetia and Chechnya. The programme has been adapted to the fluid political realities of the region: New vaccination cards have been distributed that can be carried in case of displacement and allow parents to keep an accurate record of the immunization status of their children. As always during war and displacement, UNICEF is urging parents to safeguard their children's health, and their future.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Excluding Kosovo)

UNICEF programmes in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have two linked foci: assisting refugee and internally displaced children, and protecting children from the impact of sanctions. UNICEF's strategy has been to support social services to cope with the increased caseload caused by the influx of IDPs and refugees, as well as by the strain on resources caused by economic sanctions.

Social services were seriously affected by the NATO bombing in 1999. During the bombing, 384 schools (including 242 primary schools) were damaged, children lost an average of 50 school days, and schools were closed for about one month due to the lack of fuel and teachers' strikes.

Some 40,000 IDP primary school children came from Kosovo to Serbia and Montenegro after the NATO bombing. This resulted in school overcrowding and led to a system of three school shifts. Ten per cent of children in Yugoslavia express serious symptoms of trauma due the armed conflicts.

The overall goals of the UNICEF-assisted education programme are: a) to ensure that every child has access to a basic education; b) to promote tolerance and children's rights through education; c) to help create conditions for schooling as a vital step in creating a normal atmosphere for children who have been affected by the upheavals of wars.

The UNICEF education programme has funded actions that resulted in the provision of 1,000 classroom furniture kits, 200 teaching aids kits and repairs of the heating system in 40 schools. In addition, 3,500 teachers were trained in active learning methods and 300 were trained in non-violent conflict resolution. 10,000 students have participated in the "Education for Peace and Tolerance" programme. This latter programme is aimed at breaking the cycle of violence that has continued from one generation of Yugoslavs to the next.

"A world fit for children", writes UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "is a just and peaceful world."¹² Yet in parts of Central and Eastern Europe, the CIS and the Baltics, peace seems a dim and distant pipedream. UNICEF and its partners have worked to bring some normalcy and hope to children whose lives have been shaken or shattered by conflict.

The lasting solution to the problems of children and armed conflict lie in the hands of political leaders. But too many of those leaders have placed warfare ahead of welfare. "In tolerating this scourge of war against children, we ourselves are complicit in their suffering", declares Graça Machel. "No one (...) has done nearly enough to counter the power, greed and political expediency with which adults countenance the criminal sacrifice of children in war."¹³

As the CEE/CIS and Baltics wrestle with conflicts past and present, Machel's *cri de cœur* is fitting: "The international community must address the plight of war-affected children and women with new urgency. Their protection is not a matter for negotiation. Those who wage, legitimise and support wars must be condemned and held to account as surely as children must be cherished and protected. Children cannot afford to wait."¹⁴

12 Kofi A. Annan, *We the Children*, United Nations, New York, 2001, p. 101.

13 Graça Machel, *The Impact of War on Children*, p. 188.

14 *Ibid.*

Major International Conventions and Protocols Protecting Children in Armed Conflict

Signatory countries in Central and Eastern Europe, CIS and the Baltic States*

The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)* has been ratified by all countries in Europe and Central Asia.

Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (Landmine Ban Treaty):

Albania*, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Bulgaria*, Croatia*, Czech Republic*, Hungary*, Lithuania, FYR Macedonia*, Moldova*, Poland, Romania*, Slovakia*, Slovenia*, Tajikistan*, Turkmenistan*, Ukraine

Non-signers: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Russian Federation, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Yugoslavia

Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography:

Azerbaijan, Belarus*, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria*, Croatia, Hungary, Kazakhstan*, Latvia, FYR Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania*, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine, Yugoslavia

Non-signers: Albania, Armenia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict:

Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria*, Croatia, Czech Republic*, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, FYR Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine, Yugoslavia

Non-signers: Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

Ratification/accession countries are marked with an asterisk (*)