

More than 300,000 children around the world are being used in war as soldiers. During the last decade, 2 million children have been killed as deliberate targets of war or because they have been forced to fight. Another 6 million children have been permanently disabled or seriously injured. Millions of children suffer from malnutrition, disease, and sexual violence, writes

**Farooq Munawar.**

**T**he image of the refugee child is a powerful one. Fleeing, eyes wide with terror, from exploding shells. Fighting for a bowl of grain in the camp. Standing, lost and bewildered, on arrival in a foreign country. At a stage when they should be receiving the care that their vulnerable, dependent and undeveloped state demands, these young children and adolescents have experienced horrors, physical strains and emotional upheavals that most adults would be ill-equipped to deal with.

Sympathy is not enough. Having been deprived of their most basic rights as human beings in their own countries, young people in flight are being denied their rights as children and as refugees by governments who pledged to uphold those rights under the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

In situations of mass flight, child refugees are being treated as part of an undifferentiated mass. When fleeing with a parent, they are being considered

merely as dependents. The special needs of unaccompanied children and adolescent refugees are also being overlooked. Children are being obstructed from gaining asylum and are being returned to danger.

Helping traumatize refugee children to build a future is not easy, but it is possible and the situation is urgent. Young people are more than half the world's refugees and internally displaced: the stolen future of about 20 million children jeopardizes the future peace and wellbeing of whole communities.

"I tell you, you cannot feel the pain of this suffering if you don't see it physically. If you only glance at it, a sword of sorrow will pierce your heart... What on earth is it that man today does not care for his fellow humans?"

-Ugandan schoolgirl who escaped abduction by the Lord's Resistance Army

Children have been tragic victims of armed conflict throughout history. The abuse children suffer leaves physical and emotional scars that last a life-time, leaving young people asking the questions: who is their friend, who is their foe and who can they trust?

Today, wars take place in virtually every part of the globe, either between or, more often, within nation States - with one group fighting another in the same country. These wars or armed conflicts also involve horrific levels of violence including rape, mutilation, ethnic cleansing and outright genocide. Children are frequently the targets of this violence and exploitation. Not only are they witness to this brutality, they are often forced to participate in it. In all of these cases, the human rights of children are being violated.

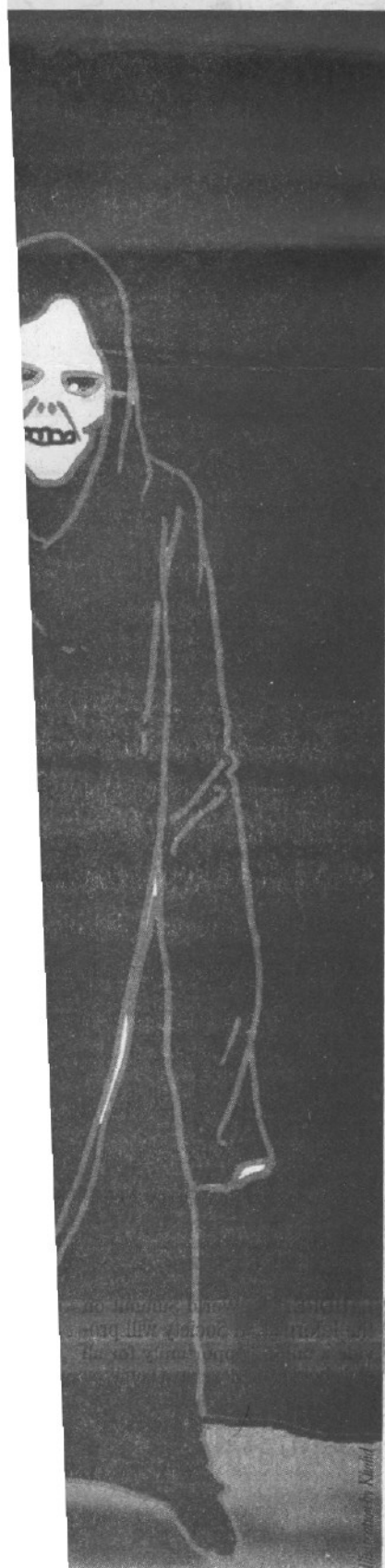
All children up to the age of 18 throughout the world have the same human rights as outlined in an international human rights treaty known as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It recognizes the fundamental rights of children including the rights to health and survival, to develop to the fullest, to protection, and to participate fully. The Convention includes specific measures to protect war-affected children. Children under the age of 15 have the right to be excluded from any direct part in wars and armed conflicts. If they are affected by armed conflict, governments have the responsibility to provide children with special protection and care.

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# 22.11.03 Children News Children and war



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around the world are being used in war as soldiers. During the last decade, 2 million children have been killed as deliberate targets of war or because they have been forced to fight. Another 6 million children have been permanently disabled or seriously injured. Millions of children suffer from malnutrition, disease, and sexual violence. Almost 20 million war-affected children have been forced from their homes, and have no schools and no communities to offer support to them and their families. Females of all ages are particular targets for brutality. Entire families and communities of one ethnic group are targeted and systematically killed - genocide.

Some of the worst human rights abuses affecting children and causing them to seek refuge occur during armed conflict, internal strife or civil disturbance. Children are deliberately killed in military operations directed at eliminating civilians who, because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion or where they live, are suspected of supporting an opposition armed force. Homes and crops are destroyed, and survivors subjected to terror and intimidation to force them to flee.

often motivated by the need for protection or food. Often they are severely ill-treated to force them into submission. If they survive, their experiences and separation from family leave lasting emotional trauma. They have to live with the after-effects of being both victims and perpetrators of violence.

Some children are forced to flee when their parents come under attack. Those forced to flee without their children often do so because of difficulties in entering a country of asylum. More and more potential asylum countries now demand visas, and it can be easier for asylum-seekers to obtain a visitor's visa if travelling alone. Those who find safety obviously hope to bring their children out to join them, but in many cases this hope is dashed. Countries with restrictive family reunification policies may, for example, grant 'temporary protection' rather than refugee status under the UN Convention and then have difficulty reuniting with their families.

Some children flee when they are targeted as members of ethnic, religious or linguistic groups. Where the state sees such groups as a threat, efforts

## *Tears in my eyes*

Rain on my windowpane  
Like tears in my eyes,  
Dying thoughts in my mind  
Like words from my mouth  
I tried to cry, but tears don't flow,  
I tried to listen but found no sounds  
I tried to touch but I've lost the sense of touch,  
Eventually, tears have taken  
The form of words, but when  
Many sorrows combine they take  
The form of tears, derived from  
Unspeakable words  
I am feeling the presence  
Of torturing solitude, lethal thoughts  
And poisonous tears OOOO  
Suffering in pinching darkness  
This demon of soul, mind n body  
Will eat me one day OOOOOO  
But I am utterly hapless n though I have everything  
Instead of feeling contented I feel lost.

— By Alina Amjad Hussain

Refugees and internally displaced children in camps are frequent targets for recruitment to the army or armed opposition groups. They are given little or no military training but face indoctrination and sometime brutal initiation ceremonies. Girls are often forced to provide sexual services to combatants. Some children may 'volunteer' to fight,

to forcibly assimilate or suppress the group's culture may be aimed at young people. Children may themselves engage in political activities, such as putting up posters, and in some countries this is sufficient reason for them to be detained and tortured in the same way as adults. In many countries, being a student is in itself dangerous.