

WOMEN'S WORLD

NO 38, 2004



Isis Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange
Linking Women Internationally



VIOLATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

(Realities Revealed)

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WOMEN'S WORLD, No. 38, 2004

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Editorial

Welcome to this volume of *Women's World*. The articles in this volume give details about war and conflict in as much as they impact on the lives and well being of women. In this volume also, the women and girls who have undergone a lot of suffering because of war provide moving testimonies that demand intervention of all governments and related institutions.

Women who attended the YMCA conference in Brisbane, Australia in 2003 provided experiences that show that women continue to be victims of violence, war and unfair restrictions meted out of conflicts they know not about. This further confirms what Isis-WICCE has found out in the many women experiences she documented. It has been evidenced that in any conflict situation women and children have been major victims. They suffer untold deprivation while living in despicable camps, where they also die or become maimed by landmines while trying to fend for their displaced families.

There is overwhelming evidence that women make up the majority of displaced populations in Internally Displaced Peoples camps (IDPs). Even in these unfortunate situations, women fail to access minimal health facilities and services. They die in childbirth and suffer from stressful conditions caused by the resultant poverty that denies them food, clothing and shelter.

In spite of these prevailing conditions and the many strategies and efforts to alleviate this suffering, the plight of women is not equitably handled. Many non-governmental organisations have attempted to respond to the humanitarian crises that have confronted women. The impact from these organisations to solve the problem of women has however, not been felt significantly because of the magnitude and daunting nature of the needs and demands.

There is therefore need to involve the national, regional and international efforts in intervening to solve the humanitarian problems being faced by women. There is need to exert more efforts, which should also be backed by financial resources and the good will of all those concerned with the affairs and the human rights of women. We once gain urge those parties engaged in violent conflicts to consider the options of dialogue in conflict resolution as a way of alleviating the suffering of women as well as ensuring sustainable peace in the affected communities.

We hope that by reading the articles presented in this volume, you will be mobilised to stand in the fore of advocating for women's rights and peace for all in the world.

We wish you reflective reading

Giving Hope to Congolese Women: The Situation in Eastern DRC

By Nathalie Kavira and Sylvie Biruru

Since 1998, when the Rwandese led forces attacked the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) from the Eastern side of the vast country, there were reports of numerous atrocities committed on unarmed civilians, especially women and children. Some of these atrocities were reportedly committed in the Goma and Butembo areas located in the north and South Kivu provinces of the DRC.

Degrading treatment meted on unarmed Congolese civilians included rape of women and young girls. Many people were killed or detained, while others simply “disappeared”. The war situation that involved many foreign actors as well as a plethora of local factional armed groups caused displacement of the population and general rapid deterioration of the human rights situation. These armed groups who included RCD-Goma, MCL, Hutu and Nterahamwe militias, Mai Mai and the foreign armies killed, raped, tortured and forcefully recruited civilians and children into their ranks.

According to Amnesty International, more than one

million people were forced to flee the region in four years, while most of the social and economic infrastructure was destroyed. The minerals like gold, diamond and coltan helped to finance and sustain the competing interests in the region, leading to further detriment of the population.

Following the 1999 Lusaka agreement and the UN Resolutions thereafter, (see Res.1341, 1304) foreign forces either withdrew or scaled down their activities. However human rights situation did not improve because there were many armed groups that were not signatories to the Lusaka agreement. As a result, the number of displaced persons with ill health and no health care, the majority of whom were women, increased. For example, Amnesty International reported in 2001 that; “thousands of people especially women and children fled the fighting and many were forced to hide in the forest”.



Following the Inter-Congolese Dialogue held in 2002 and the signing of the transitional governance agreement in Pretoria, South Africa on 16th Dec 2002, it was expected that normalcy would be established in the vast country. This would help curtail the committing of atrocities and displacements of people due to violent conflicts by armed factions in Eastern DRC. It would also lead to the respect of human rights through a national reconciliation initiative under a national unity government. As one of the transition government principles, the parties to the agreement undertook to; “respect democratic values,

human rights and fundamental liberties”.

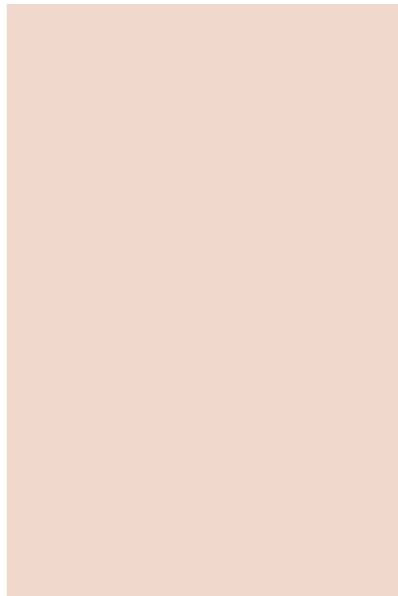
Review of Current Situation

The situation of armed conflict in the Eastern DRC and especially in Goma and Butembo towns and their surrounding areas is very confused. Although before the setting up of the transitional government in Kinshasa, all foreign troops were supposed to withdraw, elements of the Rwandese army can still be seen at Kanyabayonga, which has also been the scene of various types of violations such as rape and cattle rustling.

As part of the Inter-Congolese dialogue, all forces involved in the armed conflict in Kivu province like the RCD-Goma, Mai Mai and Congolese Peoples Army (APC) agreed to join the national army. In this respect, adult Mai Mai underwent military training at Manyongo camp, a few kilometres from Beni Town. The child soldiers have been taken in by a local NGO known as *Protect Children*, which handles their re-adaptation into society.

This NGO gives such children vocational training and psychotherapy. However, in the Goma area, there is still administrative confusion because officials who were

appointed RCD-Goma officers are not yet directly answerable to the transitional leadership in Kinshasa. This failure to respond to centralised leadership creates room for committing more human rights violations. The efforts being made to set up an army of national unity will hopefully harmonise such administrative bottlenecks in due course.



Meanwhile, according to the Network of Associations for the Defence of Women’s Rights (SAFDL), human rights violations have been observed in areas where the Rwanda army still has a presence as well as in remote areas where there are Mai Mai militias and armed robber bands. The places especially affected are Mahagi Kasugho Butembo, Kanyabayonga and the surrounding areas.

The State of Women in Eastern DRC

In general terms, women and children have been the most affected in the Congolese conflict. Apart from being neglected and impoverished, their basic rights have also been extremely violated. As heads of households, they have had to work very hard to support themselves and their families. Married women in Butembo have to shoulder the problems of their jobless husbands, some of whom are University graduates but have lost hope in ever getting any meaningful employment. Violations of women’s rights are manifested in the following ways;

- Poor reproductive health rights given the lack of access to health care,
- Higher incidence of rape and sexual violence during the conflict,
- Women displaced by the war in Bunia, while those from the far north areas of the province like Kanyabayonga, Kisugho and Butembo now live with relatives in Butembo town. There are no relief organisations at present to address their plight especially those of strained social services like health.
- Women are displaced from their rural homes into towns like Goma, Butembo and Bunia. They leave all their belongings including homes

and fields and resort to a life of destitution in these urban areas.

- Young girls drop out of school because of the extreme poverty caused by war. Often these resort to a life of prostitution as a way of survival
- In the urban areas, some women have been fired from their jobs and have been replaced by RCD-Goma supporters.

Specific Measures Taken by PAIF in Goma

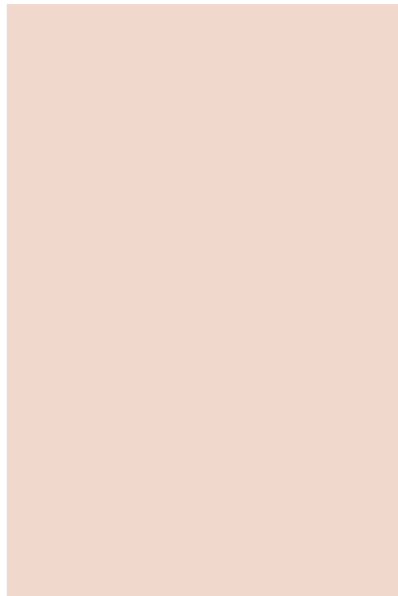
Numerous NGOs have over the years responded to this catastrophe that has befallen the Congolese people especially women. Two women's human rights organisations; namely *Action Pour la Promotion et la Defense des Droits des Femmes* (PAIF) and *Femmes Engages Pour la Promotion de la Sante Integre* (FEPSI) have been trying to address the needs of affected women in North Kivu province, and those specifically in the towns of Goma and Butembo.

Training

Through training, PAIF assists women to be aware of their rights and how to seek redress in the event of human rights violations. Through this training, women have managed to organise themselves into specific groups depending on

their areas of competence. PAIF has therefore, categorised women into groups like trade unions for women workers in Butembo, Beni and Goma, women teachers, women traders, rape survivors etc.

PAIF has also trained and assisted women to form a network known as the *Swarm*. Through this network, the



women in the East Democratic Republic of Congo are able to address issues of the violation of fundamental human rights. With the national unity and reconciliation programmes being envisaged after the Inter-Congolese dialogue, this idea could be extended into the future once the country has been fully reunified. At the moment, PAIF is working with women in the following areas:

- Orientale province like those in Ituri and Kisangani,
- Maniema province

especially those in Kindu,

- North Kivu province and the Far North especially those in Butembo and Beni,
- South Kivu province, especially in Bukavu, Uvira, Fizi and Baraka,
- Katanga province, like those in Kalemie.

Sensitisation

PAIF has been carrying out sensitisation through meetings, popular drama and radio programmes. This sensitisation deals with topics like rape, education and property rights in Goma and the surrounding areas of Rutshuru, Munova and Sake. PAIF also carries out medical, psychosocial and legal management for rape and violence victims.

Medical care: PAIF runs a health network in South Kivu Province and a small dispensary in Goma, in North Kivu province. In these health facilities, she administers care to women victims of rape, handles cases of children born as a result of rape and other forms of violence. PAIF also shoulders the expenses incurred by women victims of violence in Goma hospital.

Psychosocial care: PAIF has organised rape victims into groups through which they can get any possible assistance. She has also managed to put up a revolving fund for women's associations in Goma, Sake

and Katanga so that woman can engage in income generating activities in order to support their families.

PAIF has also organised fundraising activities in solidarity with women violence victims that are admitted into hospitals in Goma. Apart from carrying out regular home visits to violence victims, PAIF has provided housing and roofing materials for homeless violence victims.

Legal aid: PAIF makes a follow up of women's cases at the law courts in Goma and Katana in South Kivu. She assists women with legal cases in law courts and pays the honoraria for the advocates.

Mitigation Measures Taken by FEPSI

FEPSI has also taken specific measures to alleviate the suffering of displaced women and those that developed health problems due to the war situation. Overtime, FEPSI has managed to;

- Provide care for displaced women and children as well as provide medical management of trauma and rape cases,
- Open up a FEPSI run hospital in January 2003, in a bid to improve medical and psychosocial management of violence victims,

- Inaugurate an operation theatre and engaged the services of a consulting physician trained at the hospital in Goma to handle medical complications and VVF,
- Facilitate FEPSI staff to attend Isis-WICCE training, which has strengthened their potential and capacity to deliver since the organisation belongs to the 'Swarm' communications network for women's rights in Eastern Congo,
- At the local level, FEPSI has trained three other local women's rights organisations in Butembo. These organisations work with the women in Goma that belong to a network involved in the management of victims of sexual violence. This network has a listening post for rape cases in Butembo, which forwards the cases for better management.

Each network member works in a specific area and is attached to organisations like *Femmes Engagees pour la Promotion de la Sante Integrale*-Women Committed to the Promotion of Holistic Health (FEPSI), Women Lawyers Association (FSDF), Women's Welfare Association (ADDF) and Economic Aspects (Sytet).

In addition, FEPSI is engaged in training of women at the local

level. This effort aims at ensuring an enhanced manpower capacity for sensitisation, counselling and for providing direct treatment to the victims. In this respect, FEPSI has;

- Trained nurses from the health centres as well as medical officers of health in the management of rape cases,
- Held regular meetings with rape survivors to discuss rape management and preventive measures,
- Trained 24 leaders from women's groups in the far North on the "Role of women in conflict transformation and sustainable peace in the Great Lakes Region."

Handling the Situation of Congolese Women

The crisis in the DRC in general and the eastern region of the country in particular has not only been catastrophic but also has had unprecedented repercussions on women. The crisis, which involved many players over a significantly long period, disrupted social, political and economic livelihoods of the Congolese communities. Its ramifications and necessary interventions should be by women on the national, regional and international perspectives.

While internationally, women

should express solidarity with the women of DRC, communications and exchange networks should be set up concerning the plight of women in general and of Congolese women in particular for lobbying purposes at national, regional and international levels. There is need to promote human rights awareness and action to struggle for emancipation. The Congolese women in particular should wake up and aspire for decision-making positions at national, regional and international levels.

Women should work through specific national, regional and international networks to assist the Congolese women out of their plight. In concrete terms, financial assistance is required for those women's initiatives already on the ground in terms of micro project funding and training for awareness building regarding the violation of women's rights.

The Congolese civil war caused a lot of problems to the society and women in particular. It is therefore specifically imperative that organisations like the World Bank and UNDP consider funding major projects for the

reconstruction and rehabilitation of the infrastructure that has been destroyed by the war. Women groups like United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) should also assist in mobilising funds for women's initiatives in Congo. These initiatives include;

- Assisting women finance activities undertaken to reform certain civil laws prejudicial to women like human and property rights, as well as addressing the age of consent which is 15 years for girls and 18 years for boys,
- Assisting FEPSI to acquire capacity to build a hospital that would respond to health needs of women in the far North of Kivu province as well as support all projects for women victims of violence,
- Assisting Congolese women pressurise the national government to implement UN resolution 1325.

Whereas the Inter-Congolese dialogue and the subsequent formation of the transitional government in Kinshasha has brought a glimmer of hope regarding the end of conflict in

the DRC, women still need the cessation of all hostilities that continue to destabilise them and violate their rights.

It is also important to note the importance and contribution of the United Nations and that of MONUC in their efforts of ensuring peace in the DRC. In order to nurture a harmonious society, it is important those organisations like MONUC;

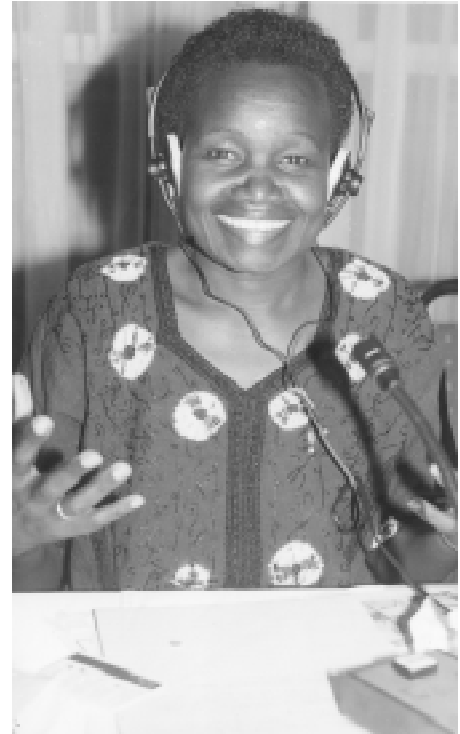
- Refrain from taking sides in analysing the conflict in the Great Lakes Region,
- Sensitise society to restore the dignity of women,
- Set up a tribunal in the DRC in the interests of peace and reconciliation. The tribunal should not have limitations in time and space in terms of seeking redress for atrocities committed. It should take cognisance of the constraints encountered by the Arusha Tribunal on Rwanda, which apart from not considering damages to the victims, it has statutory limitations like only judging one category of Rwandese.
- Avail a reparations fund for the women victims of violence through the tribunal.

The Impact of Small Arms on the Women of Southern Sudan

By Mary Apai

Mary Apai was one of the Sudanese women beneficiaries to the Isis-WICCE training programme on Documentation and Conflict Management. Through the four year long exchange programme also co-ordinated by Isis-WICCE, Mary visited areas of Southern and Eastern Sudan where she interacted with Sudanese women who shared with her their experiences about the violence they suffered during the four-decade long conflict. The use of small arms in this conflict has had a devastating impact on the lives of women and largely changed the social and economic alignment of the lives of individuals and families.

Mary attended the YWCA conference in Brisbane, Australia in July 2003 that was based on the theme, "Leading Change: The Power to Act". She addressed participants on the consequences the Sudanese conflict has had on women's lives and family structures.



Introduction

Sudan has been at war for almost 40 years, since the civil war, which started in 1955. There was relative peace from 1972-1982 before it resumed again in 1982 between the Northern and Southern Sudanese. This war has caused tremendous casualties on people and devastated the infrastructure mainly in Southern Sudan. This war affected five regions; namely Equatoria, Behel el Ghazel, Upper Nile, Southern Kordofan (Nuba Mountains) and Southern Blue Nile.

Since 1982, more than 2 million people lost their lives and over 4 million live as refugees in neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Congo, Central African Republic and Egypt. Significant numbers of people are displaced in their own country while over ten thousand people are deformed as a result of the small arms.

The civil war in Sudan, erupted because the Southerners are discriminated, oppressed, and denied rights of access to resources. People are not allowed to practice their

religions freely as the Sharia law is imposed on all, whether they are Muslims or non Muslims (Christian). This brought tension between the Southerners and the Northerners hence the later took up arms to fight the Northerners, and their government.

As is the case in any conflict situation, women and children have been the major victims in this war. Women and children are not involved in decision-making that leads to good or bad results, equals the saying that "if two elephants are

fighting the grass suffers". Therefore, the grass in this current war in Southern Sudan is women and children.

Since this conflict started in 1955, no documentation on violation of women rights has ever been carried out. There is no research, which has ever, been done on women issues, whether on the good things they have contributed during the war or bad things committed against them. Women themselves fear to expose the violence committed on them because of fear of being harmed.

There is however a small group called *Sudan Women Documentation and Exchange Forum* coming up in collaboration with the *Women's Development Desk* that intends to conduct research on violations committed on women. This group also wants to document the facts on those abuses so that there is full protection of women by the parties in power and particularly, the respect of human rights. Efforts are being made to advocate for stopping of abuses committed against the women during this armed conflict by the parties involved.

Use of Small Arms in Southern Sudan

Both the Government of the Sudan and Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) planted

thousands of land mines around towns, villages and along roads to safe guard each other. There are many areas in Southern Sudan, Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile that are mined with anti-personnel mines. The landmines were used as means of guarding a particular territory.. Yet anti personnel land mines and grenades are the most terrible weapons that destroy human life and even disrupt lives of the innocents not even involved in combat.

Women and children are victims of these small arms since they are the ones left behind to take care of house hold activities when most men are on front lines. These landmines injure and maim them when they go to fetch water or cultivating or looking for firewood. Children sometimes become victims when they find these grenades that are just thrown about and unknowingly use them as play objects.

Impact of War on Women

Women, who make 60% of the population, are the most targeted despite all the contributions they make to society. They are not only vulnerable but are also regarded as property of men in the community. The silence exercised by women about their situations because of cultural and social demands put on them due to the status in which they

are regarded in the community has hampered effective collection of enough information on violence against women in Southern Sudan. During this armed conflict however, women have experienced many abuses committed against them. These abuses include;

Death and physical disability

The land mines and grenades, which are planted strategically to keep away the army, have killed and created physical disabilities. Many women and children are killed by land mines when going for firewood in the forests and at the water points. Some are killed when trying to clean gardens or farming. Children are blown up while playing.

Displacement in the country

In this conflict many women and children have been displaced from their areas to other area where life is very difficult for them. In some of these areas, they may have no access to food or any relief. Against their will, some women and children left the country and went to live in refugee camps in the neighbouring countries.

Abduction

There are abduction of women and children by government militias. These abductions have been pronounced in the Bahar-el-Ghazel region.

Stress

Stress affects women most because they are always forced to live undecided lives and their feelings are disturbed. This leads to madness in women, as well as making children under 18 years to grow on the streets.

Forced marriages

Girls under 18 years are forced into early marriages because parents cannot afford to pay the school fees. Some are even forced into early marriages because their parents need income.

Increase of diseases

Women and children are highly affected due to lack of adequate medical facilities, distance to some of the hospitals, as well as the environment, which is polluted by the smoke of arms.

Torture

Some women are tortured on behalf of their husbands, which results into death. Some are just implicated that they are enemies by both parties to the conflict.

Poverty

Women are terribly affected by poverty. They cannot get food and clothing for children and for themselves, shelter, money and even skills of creating income. Life becomes less important for them and some even end up committing suicide because they feel they are defeated by poverty.

Documentation Process

- My organisation (HACDAD) has conducted research in two areas in the Equatoria Region on anti personnel mines. Another research regarding forced marriages on girls under 18 years was carried out in April and May 2002 in Yei and Kajo-keji. Women are brought together to share experiences among

themselves on the abuses they faced during conflict in their areas, what happens in their areas and how they have managed to resolve conflict or live with it. What is the reaction of the authorities regarding the abuse they face?

- Interviews were conducted on individuals on the abuses they experienced during the conflict. They were asked what they did and how do they feel now after all what they have gone through during that violence. And how did the authority concerned handle the problem?
- The organisation is now trying to create a forum where women can come together to share concerns and help the victims in any small way to enable them not to feel that they are not wanted in the community.
- Women are trained in conflict and management and how to document the facts regarding the violence they experienced during that conflict.

Here are some of the women's testimonies Regarding Anti Personnel Mines in Yei County.

□ Witness 1:

I am 28 years old. I am married with three children but my husband divorced me. I lived in Wonduruba but now I am in Yei. On 13th Feb-2002 at 11:00am, I was going to get firewood for cooking. In the bush, I stepped on a land mine and one of my legs was cut off. I did not hear the sound but the people who were around there heard me crying and heard the sound. They came for my rescue but it was too late though I was taken to hospital. I felt bad because I cannot help my children. Now walking is a problem and I hate the party who planted that anti personnel mine. I want this war to stop because I need peace in the country, so that fellow women do not get such experiences as me.

□ Witness 2:

I am 32 years old and married with 5 children. I live in Morobo, two kilometres from the town. On the 21st, I harvested my beans and the next day I was going to clean my gardens. When I was trying to pick the grass I was blown by anti personnel mine. But by that time, I was not sure if it was the one because I don't know these anti-personnel mines and how they look like. After I recovered the second day I was told that it was a land mine. I lost my right hand and now I feel that life is useless for me because the hands are the most important parts of the body to me. I cannot do any work. My children are the ones doing the work at home. The land mines were planted there by the Sudan Government to keep the SPLM/A from reaching the area. The SPLM/A however made it and took the area. Since then, the civil population have become the victims

□ Witness 3:

Last year in January 2002, two children who were neighbours took a shell, which was abandoned by warring parties. When they picked it, they thought it was a good thing to play with. They took a stone and started hitting the shell and then it exploded, and the two children died on the spot, their bodies scattered in pieces. When the authorities came to the scene there was nothing they could do. They only warned the community not to allow the children to play with these objects. They were also advised to report to the authorities in the area any such objects so that the authorities can take care of them.

Challenges Faced during the Documentation

- Both the two parties in the conflict planted thousands of land mines around towns, villages, and along the roads to safe guard themselves. The landmines were used as a means of guarding a particular territory. As we have seen, the results are always disastrous to the innocent women and children who are often left behind to take care of families as men are on the frontlines fighting. Another challenge is that those land mines are not manufactured in the Sudan. They are imported from some countries. They have been planted over vast areas, which are difficult to de-mine.
- The victims, who are especially women and children, are abandoned and nothing is done to them. There is less care from the warring parties involved. As such they feel that they are not part and parcel of the community.
- Women fear to tell their stories of violence because they fear that the authorities concerned will harm them. Cultures also hinder women from revealing any information because they are shy.
- Lack of more training of women who are doing the documentation process. This would give the experiences on how to get the facts on what women face during the conflict. This would provide accountability for society when peace is achieved.
- Difficulties in movement for searching for food and firewood as the fear of land mines in some areas which are not yet de-mined because the two parties have forgotten the places that they planted the mines.

Strategies to Address these Challenges:

On the national level

It is very important to stress a free education system for victims of the small arms and children traumatized by violence. This should be done by;

- Campaigning for banning use of land mines during conflict.
- Providing counselling services for women so that they can recover from the atrocities they faced.
- Since Operation Save Innocent Lives (OSIL), an organization responsible for de-mining Southern Sudan cannot meet all the demands of the people; there is need for parties involved in the conflict to work together to locate the positions where the landmines are for easy clearance.
- Location and provision of initial capital for women who are eager to embark on business opportunities.
- Establishment of vocational training centres for the victims to enable them support their families as well as create job opportunities for them to be self-reliant.
- The authorities should support and promote the

documentation program regarding women issues, provide protection of the women and children during conflict and address some of the violence faced by women by developing laws that will protect women.

On the Regional level

- Women organisations at the regional level should build close and strong networks with women at the national level and work towards creating change, which will reach the communities at the grass-roots level.
- Regional women organizations should address some of the women's protection and development issues; train the women in advocacy, lobbying and leadership so as to create conditions for

positive change.

On the International level

- Manufacturing of land mines should be banned.
- The International community should join hands with aid agencies to meet the alarming needs of war survivors.
- The International community and other goodwill organizations should support the de-mining efforts of Operation Save Innocent Lives (OSIL) in her effort of trying to demine the affected areas so as to enable the communities use the land for building and cultivation.
- Women Human Rights Organizations should establish some of their branches in the country that have conflicts.
- Funding of women organisations, even at the grass roots level should be done to support the implementation of programs that can bring total change in all the affected communities.
- Documentation programs on violence against women should be supported at the National level to enable the Human Rights bodies protect the women.
- It is very important for women to be involved in peace building processes at all levels of leadership.

Effects of War on the Girl Child: The Sierra Leone Experience

By Gloria Kabbah Bayoh

In early 2002, the West African state of Sierra Leone emerged from a decade long civil war. The trademark of this conflict was the ignominious and heinous atrocities that were committed on the population by mainly the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel forces. Women were as usual most adversely affected. The atrocities committed on women and teenage girls ranged from sexual molestation, rape, forced abortions, maiming, and forced conscription. This conflict led to the death of an estimated 50000 people and displaced approximately five million others. The end of the conflict brought out reconstruction needs and the troubles of administering the traumatised women and girls who were victims of war atrocities and had also been forced to commit grievous atrocities at tender ages. Gloria Kabbah Bayoh of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) gives her thoughts about the direction of reconstruction efforts. The challenges of reconstruction entail measuring it out with girls with warped innocence, psychological scars and those who feel they missed out on opportunities.



The Plight of the Sierra Leonean Girl-Child

The typical life of a girl child in Sierra Leone like her counterparts in many other African countries has always been that of a second-class citizen both in the home and in the community. For a typical Sierra Leone man “a girl” (woman) should be “seen” and not ‘heard’. The place of the (woman) girl is in the kitchen.

Even when it comes to education, the boy child is always given the priority especially if the family can’t afford to send all their children to school. The girl child is vulnerable to early or forced marriage, early motherhood, teenage pregnancy and domestic rape.

There is a big literacy gap between women and men in the country. According to the 1995 estimates, while the literacy

levels stood at 45.4% for males, that of females was 18.2%. Low educational attainment constrains women’s access to higher wage, employment especially professional, managerial and technical jobs, which are relatively highly paid.

Systematic discrimination against women starts in childhood. This gender disparity shows clearly why fewer girls attain education up to tertiary level. It is these attitudes and

concepts about the role of women and girls that were partly responsible for the suffering of women and girls during the eleven (11) years long war in the country.

Some Effects of the War

The just ended war in Sierra Leone has been described as a unique war. While Sierra Leoneans in general witnessed the most terrible violations of human rights, women and girl children were particularly the worst victims. They were killed, maimed, raped, abducted, used as sex and domestic slaves and forcefully conscripted into the fighting force of the RUF. The war left the economy of the country virtually crippled.

Insecurity, displacement of people, destruction of infrastructure among others cut short the education careers of many school-going children, particularly girls. A whole group of handicapped people has emerged from the war, and

majorities of these people are girls. The girls who were amputated were, most often, sexually assaulted before being amputated and left to die.

Malikah who was captured when she was ten years old, told Human Rights Watch thus; *"I was raped by an RUF rebel after being captured. I also watched my twenty-old-sister, Mawa Kamara, die after RUF rebels amputated both her hands and one foot."*

Ordeals of the Girl Children

Young girls who were abducted were not only used as sex slaves but were also put in charge of war units in the jungle. A majority of them were recruited into the Small Girl Units (SGU), which were responsible for the torture of newly abducted women and girls. The abducted girls were also supposed to initiate other girls by engraving the initial "RUF" on body parts of newly abducted girls and women. They did these in collaboration with their counterparts in the Small Boy Units (SBU).

The girls were always drugged and put on frontline positions during raids. These girls and their boy counterparts (SBU) were the ones responsible for burning houses and looting properties for their captors. Those girls, who were forced to kill their parents, were the most

hardened and capable of torturing other inductees. They also assumed the roles of adults in the jungle. According to the experiences narrated by these girls to social workers and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), rape was the most common form of torture the rebels used for their women and girl inductees. Other forms of violations like beating, being caged or hands tied and feet at the back were also prevalent in the jungle

Loss of Opportunity by War Affected Girls

According to the testimony of a girl child from Kailahun to the TRC, "many girls who were combatants during the war were not given the opportunity by their captors (bush husbands) to benefit from the NCDDR package. Some bush husbands dispossessed them of their weapons, when they realised that handing over guns to the authorities meant some compensation. Those girls who were dispossessed of their guns were not able to go through the programmes designed for them, and have not been bold enough to talk. There are others who had the opportunity to be demobilised, but because they were ashamed of their roles in the jungle, they did not come forward and therefore did not benefit from the programme". Girls in this category are only coming out now for help.

Another girl who narrated her experience at the TRC closed hearing session said she had left the jungle in the year 2000, but was so preoccupied with her past experience that she did not see the need to seek help. She only realised that she needed help when all men who came in contact with her for relationship left her suddenly because they discovered that she had a very severe sexually transmitted infection. It is after narrating her awful experiences in the jungle to the TRC, that Child Protection Agencies knew about her plight. There are thousands of such girls in the Sierra Leonean communities today. They have refused to seek help and are silently suffering in order to avoid stigmatisation.

Violence Endured by Girls in Refugee camps

Despite the fact that most of the IDP and refugee girls had at one time or another come in contact with RUF during the raids, they also faced problems like domestic violence, rape, teenage pregnancies, prostitution, lack of educational facilities in these camps.

Surveys conducted by some humanitarian agencies like UNHCR and FAWE show that male members of their families had sexually assaulted 70% of internally displaced girls living in camps. These girls are faced with the harsh reality that the

adult world is a world that cannot be trusted. The result of this is aggressiveness, shock and most times, a sense of hopelessness for the survivors.

This act of betrayal among close family members is one of the factors responsible for the high rate of prostitution among teenage girls today. Girls as young as fourteen for example can be seen on the beaches of Freetown selling their bodies for survival. Asked why she was not in a vocational institute to learn some trade, a fifteen year old prostitute replied that it is better to have sex of her own volition for money than be betrayed by a loved and trusted member of her family.

Some Specific Interventions

Conventions on the Rights of the Child

According to the convention, every is entitled to;

- Right to social security,
- Right to better education and standard of living,
- Protection against abduction and participation in armed conflict,
- Protection against sexual tortures and exploitation and drug abuse. All these rights were however, violated during the Sierra Leone conflict.

The Government, Non Government Organisations and other humanitarian organisations have tried to help. So many mechanisms have been put in place to address these problems. As far back as 1992, NGOs like Children Associated with the War (CAW) were established with support from UNICEF to demobilise and reintegrate child soldiers. FAWE, Lungi branch has recently focussed attention on the rehabilitation of commercial sex workers in the town.

Listening to their stories, the majority point to the war as a reason for making them engage in prostitution. Some organisations that sensed the problems at the end of the war established vocational and technical institutions to absorb girl victims as soon as they were identified.

Some girls who escaped before the end of the war were so traumatised by their experiences that they did not

even think of seeking help from Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or other agencies like UNICEF.

Other interventions

There are several girls who still feel this way to date, in spite of the efforts to give all available assistance made by agencies like UNICEF, FAWE, ICRC, UNHCR, and other children protection NGOs. NGOs and International agencies together with the ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs have also been active in this respect. They have tried to identify some of these girls for help; although thousands of them have not benefited from this assistance.

The Forum for African Woman Educationalists (FAWE)

FAWE was one such organisation established to address the educational needs of these girl survivors. When FAWE Sierra Leone chapter was established in 1995, it immediately opened a primary school for the war-affected girls in the western area. It catered mostly for the internally displaced girls in Freetown. Their next target was the establishment of skills training and vocational centres for teenage and girl mothers in the IDP camp at Grafton Free town. FAWE again intervened by organising programs for girls affected by the invasion, especially rape victims, majority of whom were abducted. FAWE has today established eight institutes for girls to access primary level education and ten skills training centres for young war affected girls nation wide.

Survivors who spend only a few months with the rebels came back with horrible stories to narrate. The training I had with ISISWICCE equipped me to handle the survivors who came to FAWE to seek help. During the six months period from January—June 2000, I documented the horrible experiences suffered by these girls and discovered that the majority of the survivors were either pregnant or were carrying babies for their so-called bush husbands. They all had one form of bitter experience or the other, rape being the most common.

When FAWE intervened in March 1999 after January 6th invasion, the organisation saw the need to establish a special centre in central Freetown

especially for the rehabilitation of the girl survivors of the raid. Though the number of girls targeted was limited due to limited funds, the exercise was worth it. Most of these girls are now integrated into the normal FAWE Skills Training Centre in Grafton, Freetown. Their babies are now between the ages of 3-4 years

Many other agencies have come to the aid of these girl children, though many more suffer silently. Organisations like Council of Churches in Sierra Leone (CCSL), Family Homes Movement (FHM), Christian Children's Fund (CCF), CARITAS and many others have also intervened. The government is currently implementing a free primary education scheme for all children. Apart from assisting parents to send all their kids to school, the programme helps to stop the discrimination against the girl child because of poverty.

The government has established an umbrella commission to cater for the needs of the war-affected boys and girls in the community. This National Commission of War Affected Children (NACWAC) was launched in 2002 .To commemorate the Day of African child this year (2003), NACWAC opened a centre that caters for affected children that are now street children in central Freetown. Girls constitute a good number of these street children. The idea that the government is collaborating with other child protection agencies to support these young ones is a laudable one, as these children also are entitled to care and love.

Violations of the Right to Health among the Internally Displaced Women of Kargil in India

By Pamela Bhagat

Pamela Bhagat attended the 1999/2000 Isis-WICCE Institute. The knowledge she attained helped her to undertake the task of documenting Women's War experiences in Kargil District of Jammu and Kashmir in India where she investigated the gender aspects related to women's access to health services.

Kargil District which lies in the N.E of Kashmir province is a territory that has been Central to the Conflict between Pakistan and India. Kargil is a district, which came into existence in July 1979 and is located in the North East of Kashmir valley, 205 kilometres from Srinagar city. The whole area is mountainous, rocky and devoid of any natural vegetation. The density of the population of the district is approximately seven persons per square kilometre, as against the State average of 59. The altitude ranges from 8000 ft to 18000 ft above sea level. Rugged, mountainous and rocky, Kargil district is cut off from the rest of the country for half of the year because of heavy snowfalls and poor communications infrastructure.

As a result, the district remains cut off from the rest of the country from November to May due to heavy snowfall and temperatures that dip to minus 50 degrees Celsius. People mostly live in rural areas and only 5.3 percent reside in town. Out of the 129 villages, 92 are connected by road. Population here comprises of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians.

The objective of Pamela's study was to increase awareness of the women's situation in this area and to recommend advocacy actions. In the spirit of the International Human Rights Law and the Beijing Platform for Action, the awareness would require the state as well as other actors to work towards removing those influences that negatively affect women's status and health.

Pamela notes that through advocacy and protracted information dissemination using the media, aid and humanitarian agencies intervened. Local groups were encouraged to organise health, education, communication and awareness campaigns, leading to significant achievements in the lives of women. She however argues that ensuring peace and security in the region will lead to sustainability of redress activities. She notes that the Isis-WICCE Institute training expanded her focus on women's issues in armed Conflict Situations...



The Conflict Situation

Over the last few years this area has been targeted and extensively shelled from across the border, leading to loss of lives and destruction of property. This forces local inhabitants to flee affected areas empty-handed and in panic. They have to trudge long distances to safer places, often having to climb over 13,000-ft peaks in search of shelter.

Due to this continuous shelling the delicate balance of life and livelihood is often rudely disrupted. With Indian army garrisons and camps stationed in the middle of civilian areas and near villages, the shelling often takes civilian lives alongside military casualties.

The Situation of Women

The women and children constitute more than three-quarters of the population that is affected. The women also bear a disproportionate amount of the suffering and hardship that affects families in war situations. They for example have to maintain the household and look after the wellbeing of children on meagre resources. These women do not only carry the emotional and physical burden of caring for whole families under difficult conditions, but in the process they are also more exposed to malnutrition and often become victims of violence, neglect and

inadequate health services. The women here are however, unusually industrious. They work on the fields, collect fodder, gather fuel wood and cultivate crops for the six months of the year that nature allows. Men on the other hand are expected to go out and work as porters or labourers or undertake any other employment. Most of the time however, men are lazy, redundant and unemployed.

Until a few decades ago, the average life expectancy of a Ladakhi woman was barely 25 years. Now it has improved marginally. During the study of 1999/2000, women's health was very neglected due to paucity of health care systems, negative socio-cultural influences, and archaic mindsets, lack of awareness and education and deeply entrenched negative interpretations of religion. Most of the prevalent ailments however, were preventable.

The TFR (Total Fertility Rate) here was 3.7%, almost the same as the rest of the country, despite negligible family planning and contraception methods in use. Maternal and child mortality rate was high with no access to medical aid during the snow bound months. There was complete neglect of anti-natal and post-natal care. Abdominal tuberculosis, scabies, acute anaemia, respiratory tract and chest

infections, were some of the common diseases.

According to local doctors, the threshold of pain among these hardy women is very high. This therefore makes them seek medical help only when their condition was desperate. Another reason was the long distances they have to travel to get to a medical centre. They viewed the time taken away from chores at home as deterrence.

Female literacy was about the lowest in the country at 3.14 percent. Some of the traditions were exploitative and oppressive, and had never been addressed. These include; strong societal pressure on women to have more children, consanguineous marriage; timing and frequency of pregnancy, no custodial rights over children in the event of a divorce, and contract marriage (*'mutta'*) that are sanctioned in Shiite Islam. The "*mutta*" system of marriage is a contract entered into between the parties for a definite period. This may be as brief as a week or even less. Men from the respective families and village elders take these decisions. Divorce too was common and it was understood that the father had the right to retain the children if he so desired.

Where medical centres' distribution in relation to the population is concerned, Kargil

District was probably the best in the country. There is one primary health care centre for 20,000 people. This is however very poor topographically since the density of population here is just 7 people per kilometre (against the national average of 350).

It is not just medical centres that do not cater to ground realities. Medical professionals too were woefully inadequate. Out of a total requirement of 60 doctors, the district has just 19. The situation was so acute that rules were often broken to enrol doctors. For example, according to the rules, when a departmental doctor leaves for greener pastures abroad without resigning, his services are terminated after a certain period and he is black listed. This means that he would not be accepted back. But these doctors are always taken back if they decided to return in a bid to bridge the scarcity of professional personnel!

Inaccessibility and Poor Health Conditions

Kargil District has poor accessibility because the Zojila Pass, the only road link with the rest of the country, remains snowbound and closed for six months of the year. The helipad is functional and caters to two weekly flights but these too often do not operate due to bad weather. The weather, topography and geography of

the region are hostile and to top it all there is the constant fear of artillery shelling. It is difficult to attract non-Kargilis to this region and that too when there is no monetary compensations. Kargilis on the other hand are offered income-tax exemption.

The state allocates approximately 5% of the annual budget for medical and health out of which, 73% went towards paying salaries of the existing staff. Budgetary allocation is not only insufficient but is seldom fully utilised within the tenable six months. In the rest of the year, no developmental work is possible due to hostile terrain and weather. Funds often lapse and have to be returned.

Strategies for Advocacy and Redress

Due to the specific nature of the province, there was need to network with the state health ministry. This was to ensure that it plays a proactive role in implementing a meaningful health programme for the displaced women in the province. The study demands the enhancement of personal interaction with the stakeholders and showing them documented evidence of findings and the need for change, to encourage better health facilities.

It is also important to organise a media campaign so as to

generate humanitarian interest in the region. This campaign should have weekly press releases about progress of the project in the health situation as well as constant monitoring of public interest as a feedback mechanism.

Through the undertaken advocacy efforts, Kargil district now has the Kargil Autonomous Hill Development Council (KAHDC), which addresses its peculiar and specific issues that emanate from its inhospitable geographical location. Presently, budgetary allocations are now tenable for two years while special incentives have been put in place to attract medical professionals. In reaction to community needs, the year has launched a welfare project known as *sadbhavana*, which has started medical facilities' training and awareness campaigns.

The marginalisation and silent suffering of women in Kargil is a reality of women of most conflict regions of the world who are neglected in normal times, exploited in conflict situations and forsaken in peacetime. In all situations however, advocacy remains a powerful tool for change especially in the promotion and protection of the rights of women.

Bougainville Women's Experiences of War and Conflict: A Personal Experience

By Helen Hakena

Bougainville is a small island on the Western Australian coast and formerly under Papua New Guinea. It has an estimated population of 200,000 people. War and armed rebellions affected it in the 1990s leading to serious repercussions on the lives of women. Many were victims of rape and other horrendous atrocities. Women died in labour or after delivery because of lack of medical facilities and attention. The communities were dispersed due to the conflict until women decided to intervene to rectify the situation.

Helen Hakena is one of the Bougainville women that lived through the conflict and witnessed the atrocities meted on the population especially women. She together with other women decided to form a solid force to defend their rights. Helen addressed the International Women's Development Agency in 2003 during the celebrations to mark the International Women's Day about the experiences of Bougainville women during the conflict and on measures they took to resettle the population...

The Beginning of the Conflict

Australia is Papua New Guinea's closest neighbour. Yet despite our closeness Australians know very little about the war we had on Bougainville. I know all attention is now being focussed on Iraq. But the conflict in Bougainville has many important lessons for decision-makers, and for all of us who are concerned about the future of our communities and cultures.

In 1990 when Papua New Guinea (PNG) withdrew all its services from Bougainville and

imposed a total blockade on the island, I was seven months pregnant with my fourth child. Late one afternoon the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) chased my husband from our home after he refused to give them our car. Previously, BRA elements had taken five of our company's vehicles.

Chris, my husband, managed to run and hide in the bushes but he had no time to tell me and three of my children. While we were having dinner in the house, were very surprised to see eleven gunmen come into our home demanding to see my husband. I told them we didn't

know where Chris was, but still they refused to believe, and continued to point guns at me and the children. They also kept calling us names, even threatening to shoot us if Chris didn't show up.

The village people found out what was happening and came to our assistance. The gunmen left but the next day they returned in force, beating anyone in their path and destroying homes. Our entire village fled and hid in caves on the cliffs. It was then that I felt labour pains and saw blood. I was also sick with malaria. But we were too scared to leave our hiding place.

My husband sent a runner to get the local doctor as the hospital was closed because of the conflict and there were no nurses. The doctor persuaded my husband to take me to town. The doctor gave me anti malarial drugs and then, as the hospital was locked, he took me to an old abandoned South Pacific Bank building. It was here, on a bare floor with no light or

In the bank that day, I also watched helplessly as another woman in labour died. Maria had previously given birth by caesarean section. This time her stomach split with the pressure of labour. She was terrified and cried and begging the doctor to save her. The doctor however, couldn't help Maria although he was able to save her son.

Women's Efforts in Ending the Conflict

After watching women suffer the most tragic deaths, I was determined to do all I could to end the violence and deprivation. Women everywhere in Bougainville suffered the same. Nobody ever thought that there would be a civil war. Nobody ever thought



electricity, no incubator or oxygen, that I gave birth prematurely to my son Max.

I was still lying down there when another woman, Rena, came in. She too was pregnant but had lost a lot of blood the previous night. She gave birth to a baby boy, while I watched. She however died ten days later, leaving her son.

My son Max was ten days old when our home and indeed our entire village were burnt to the ground. The family again had to flee through jungle to my mother's home in Central Buka. The village was scattered all over the island for six full months until we were brought together at a Care Centre established by the Papua New Guinea Defence Force.

that we would die at the hands of our own people.

When I joined with friends to try to stop the violence, many women came with us.

We organised a silent march to protest the war and the use of rape as a weapon. One thousand women participated – an extraordinary number given

Bougainville's small population. The Papua New Guinea Defence Force stopped us twice. They wanted to arrest someone and asked, 'Who is your leader?' We said, 'All of us are leaders. We all own this march.' The soldiers couldn't arrest anyone.

We knew the Prime Minister was in Buka and that the media would be out in force to get our views and disseminate them. We walked silently carrying banners we had sewn by hand, with messages of peace. The media saw us and told our story to the rest of Papua New Guinea. Our sisters in Rabaul were so moved by the story that they organised a boat and sailed through Buka Passage, singing peace songs. There was shooting on both sides of the passage before the women arrived. As they sailed through, the shooting stopped. Their singing stopped the guns.

Memories of War Last for Generations

It was the women who risked going out into the jungle to persuade our sons, husbands and brothers to stop the war. It was the women who really made peace, not the men folk. They were busy killing, destroying and raping women.

It is therefore important to raise the visibility of women's peace building and leadership, and the impact of conflict on the livelihood of our sisters throughout the world, including those of Bougainville. The problems of conflict do not end with war. The memories and trauma, and the culture of violence, last for generations.

Women are not passive victims but contribute actively to peace making. Women's courage and contributions have made the world a better place to live in and work. Imagine what more we could do if we women were enabled to take a more equal place at the negotiating table. It is with this belief that I encourage those of us gathered here to continue to make a difference.

The Torture Affected All

Many women from Bougainville went through bad experiences similar to those faced by my family. Our women felt the most pain, trauma and loss because of their place in society. Many were tortured, gang raped and even killed. We were terrorised for speaking out for the rights of our families.

We witnessed our sons and husbands being killed and treated like animals, by all sides in the conflict. We were accused of hiding and refusing to let sons and husbands join the authority of the day. Yet despite the atrocities, we continued to pull our families together as the basic unit of community support. We organised ourselves into community organisations and church groups.

Forming of LNWDA

It was in this context that I together with other women, formed LNWDA in 1992 (formally launched in 1995 by myself, Agnes Titus, Brenda Tohiana and Alina Longa) with the goal of creating a world safe for women and children. Our motto was "*Women Weaving Bougainville together*". We just couldn't stay and watch our sisters die in childbirth, raped, sexually harassed and emotionally abused.

In 1994 International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) came to our aid, sending Ms Rae Smart and Sharon Laura to work with us during the peak of the crisis, to document the experiences of Bougainville women in the processes leading up to the Beijing World Conference on Women. These two were the first

white women to come to Bougainville after the blockade.

This was the beginning of our valuable partnership with IWDA. In 1998 both organisations jointly devised a project called *Strengthening Communities for Peace*. The Australian Government and IWDA and its supporters have funded it since 2000. Australia AID has recently provided funding through IWDA for another 13 months to consolidate the progress and learning of recent years, and provide a basis for our future work.

In 2001 Leitana Nehan was awarded the UNIFEM Millennium Peace Prize for Women in recognition of our contribution to preventing war and building peace. We accepted the peace prize on behalf of all the women in Bougainville who have worked for peace.

Measures towards Reconciliation

We recognise the strong connection between violence against women and the militarization of Bougainville society. Because of this, LNWD is working not only with women but also with men, youth and entire communities towards reconciliation and leading the entire community to freedom from violence.

Building relationships between young people from different communities within Bougainville has been one of our approaches in healing the rifts created by war.

We work with ex-combatants and encourage men to be involved in our work to assist their recovery. This method provides the opportunity to 'balance the teams,' sharing of experiences' and to involve men in building peace.

'Hard core' guerrillas are now working with us and talking to communities about the impact of violence against women. They offer powerful role models to other young men in the community. Our anti-violence workshops help boys and young men to understand that the guns and violence of their childhood are not a necessary part of their futures.

Our workshops for young women attract participants from all over Bougainville. This has provided them with the opportunity to socialise, learn, and share ideas as well as concerns. The workshops encourage young women who have lived with violence for much of their lives to speak out, learn about their bodies and discuss issues of concern to them. They provide a safe environment for young women to discuss their feelings and realise they are not alone.

Linking Up With Grassroots Communities

Volunteer teams also travel on foot to communities and schools in more remote parts of Bougainville. They talk to communities about topics such as domestic violence, sexual assault, rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, incest, homebrew alcohol, violence and positive human development, self-esteem and healthy living.

Our awareness work in communities and schools about the problems encountered by women and girls has led to a decrease in the number of victims of violence in the areas targeted by our volunteers.

A popular 20 minutes radio program every Thursday reinforces our work with the community. We believe our program is heard by an estimated 10,000 people out of Bougainville's total population of 200,000, as well as by people in Solomon Islands.

A vital part of LNWDAs work is addressing homebrew abuse. Homebrew is an extremely potent locally made liquor, 90% alcohol, which did not exist in Bougainville before the war. It is a problem all over the island, and is closely linked to high rates of violence against women. Young men drown themselves in homebrew alcohol to block out their negative experiences. People have died or gone blind through alcohol poisoning from homebrew.

While working actively to prevent violence, LNWDAs also provides counselling services for women and girls who experience violence, rape and sexual abuse, general trauma

**Peace will
be just a
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counselling, individual counselling and couple counselling. Since the commencement of our counselling services in 2000, we have assisted some 1,400 victims.

Over Christmas alone we dealt with 12 cases of rape, 30 cases of domestic violence and 12 cases of child abuse. Our counsellors have successfully defended six cases in court, mainly on child maintenance, where women have been left without any resources even to send their children to school

In Bougainville at the moment, the focus is on disposal of arms and on the formation of the autonomous government. But this alone does not tell us that the war is over. Weapons can be containerised or disposed of. Leaders can also build expensive infrastructure, with the assurance of a better and brighter future. However, peace will be just a dream if people's minds are not healed.

Facing a Restless Society

It will take years to rehabilitate a people who have been severely affected by an uprising such as the Bougainville crisis. Indeed, one of the biggest problems we now face is that of *attitude*.

Recently, a small argument among three brothers that could

have been solved peacefully resulted in the chopping off of the right arm of the eldest, Francis Borgia. Francis was one of our first volunteers.

On the 20th February 2003 during a fundraising dance a young boy indiscriminately kicked and punched a girl who was the gatekeeper. She was badly hurt, and the boy's relatives, who are fed up with the violence, came to the aid of the young girl and beat the young boy very badly.

Again on the 22nd February 2003, drunks stoned a young woman returning from a dance. She was left unconscious on the road, and was later found by people who brought her to safety.

On the 23rd February 2003 a young girl of 15 was brutally raped in front of her small sisters in broad daylight.

Young men can still be seen wearing camouflaged army uniforms, red headbands on their heads and knives in their bags. Looking in their eyes tells us so much. These young men have not changed.

These are just some of the examples that tell us how much there is still to do in Bougainville. However, it is important to continue with all the efforts aimed at building stronger and peaceful societies.

Gender Specific Violations on Girl Children in Sierra Leone

By Gloria Kabbah Bayoh

Armed Conflict and Violence

Violence against women and girls has been an integral component of armed conflicts. During the first and second world wars, the army sexually enslaved and raped thousands of women and girls, but nobody officially spoke about them. The practice of sexual enslavement and rape during armed conflicts has been condoned for a long time. Until recently, nobody said anything about these in public. In Sierra Leone, this practice has been due to the cultural assumption that rape or sexual assault is something that should not be discussed, it is a taboo.

Nevertheless, recent inter-related events on the international stage have brought gender-based violence in armed conflict and post conflict settings into the open. The practice of combatants sexually assaulting women and girls during times of conflict is so rampant that analysts wonder whether these violations are deliberate or systematic.

In all aspects, embarrassing and horrifying atrocities are

committed on women and girls without regard to existing international laws or the human rights instruments in place. The scale of national catastrophe is inestimable even after the end of the conflict. The eleven-year war left Sierra Leone exposed girls to series of problems, which included prostitution, orphans and early adulthood, teenage mothers, street children and lack of educational facilities.

Accidental or Premeditated Atrocities?

Records available from Human Rights Watch (HRW) show unprecedented human rights

abuses by RUF rebels. Since at the time, Save the Children Fund (SCF) estimated that children constituted 60% of internally displaced people (IDP), the lives of women and children were precarious. More than 5000 parents reported their children missing in the wake of the rebel attack on Freetown in January 1999(UN OCHA, 6th Dec. 2000).

A study by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) published in Jan 2002 revealed the extent of war related sexual abuses against IDPs. One year later, a report of human rights watch highlighted the 'widespread and



systematic sexual violence' suffered by thousands of women and girls during the conflict in Sierra Leone (HRW, 15th Jan. 2003).

It is estimated that about 30,000 primary school age and 100,000 adolescent girls and boys were affected by the war. Majorities of these were either refugees, displaced or abducted by the Revolutionary United Front. More than 50% of these children abducted were girls.

Forced Abortion by West Side Boys

According to Human Rights Watch, a twenty-year-old M.K was abducted from Magbele village in Port Loko district in July 2000, when she was four months pregnant. She was raped by four West Side Boys and made a wife of a rebel who forced her to abort:

"The West Side Boys abducted me with two other civilians including my brother-in-law. We were taken to their base in Magbele Junction where there were many other abductees. At night, one of the rebels called Umaro Kamara came to me and said he wanted to have sex with me. He spoke nicely with me and said that he wanted to take me to Makeni and make me his wife. He raped me that day. The rebels saw that I was

pregnant and said to Umaro, 'we are not going to work along with any pregnant woman, we should kill her.' Umaro said that he wanted to take me, as his wife and that I should be given an injection instead. Umaro called me and tried to convince me to get rid of the baby. He said, "they will kill you if you do not agree so you better have an injection." I was taken to the doctor who gave me an injection and some pills. Two days later, I started bleeding. I felt weak and had pain all over my body. Then I lost the baby.

When Umaro was on patrol, three other rebels raped me. When we moved out to go to another base, I saw the body of my brother-in-law. After one day, I started bleeding again so Umaro took me to the doctor who gave me another injection. When we reached Lunsar, Umaro wanted to make me his wife. Even while I was bleeding, Umaro used me. He told me to wash myself before raping me".

Human Rights Instruments

Articles 34 and 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are explicit on violence against children. Article 34 states that "children shall be protected from violence, exploitation and sexual abuse". Article 39 states that "A child who has been subjected to

negligence, abuse, torture, armed conflict, or other inhuman treatment has the right to rehabilitation and readjustment".

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is as clear. It affirms that discrimination against women means any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the enjoyment or exercise by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Geneva Convention relates to the protection of civil persons in times of war (The Fourth Geneva Convention, 1949). Article 27 states that women shall be especially protected against any attack, rape, enforced prostitution or any form of indecent assault. Article 77 of the same Convention states that children must be the objects of special respect against any form of indecent assault.

These Human Rights Instruments however, were of no significance to the perpetrators of the conflict in Sierra Leone. Testimonies of Survivors given in the researches carried out for Isis-WICCE between January to July 2000 show an unbelievable gravity of the atrocities committed on women and girls.

Testimonies of the Victims

Survivor A, 25 years. Gang raped as children watched

“On January 7th early in the morning, we were still in bed when I heard gunshots in our compound. I quickly woke up my husband and called our three kids, one girl 8 years and two boys 11 and 6 years respectively. We took cover in the wardrobe. My husband was so confused he didn’t know what to do. Suddenly the rebels banged our door and forced it open. As soon as they entered the room they demanded money from my husband. He gave them fifty thousand leones (Le 50,000), which was all the money we had. They asked for more, but my husband told them he had no money. One of the rebels cocked his gun and threatened to blow his head off if he refused to give them more money. “You people thought we had gone but we are here today to kill all of you bloody civilians who refused to support us. If you have no money then let me send you to eternal rest,” the rebel with the gun said. Then he shot my husband on the chest and my husband fell shouting, “ you have killed me.” I couldn’t bear it so I opened the wardrobe, shouting, “You have killed my husband.” They caught hold of me and told me not to worry that they will take care of me.

Immediately in the presence of my kids, all six (6) soldiers raped me one after the other. After this first rape, they asked everybody else in the house to come out. By then everybody had left the compound except my own family members. My kids came out crying. One of them ordered me to march forward pointing his gun at me while we were a little bit away from the house, I saw smoke coming form its direction. The rebel who held me under the gun point started laughing at me and then told me that is our house that is now on fire, so why can’t I follow them since I had no husband and no house any more. I cried throughout, but they refused to release me. Eventually they took me to the jungle as they retreated from ECOMOG advance.

My two months in the jungle were a horrible experience. The six men who raided our house kept torturing me. They tied my legs and hands apart on a tree kicking me in the stomach accusing me of “ overlooking” (overlooking in the jungle means disrespect). They raped me again one after the other and invited other combatants to join them. Whenever I cried and begged them, they insulted me and intensified their assault. I counted 15-20 men who raped me that night. I was so helpless I kept bleeding; eventually I felt something come out between my legs. I later learnt it was my womb. I was left alone to die slowly for more than a month. With the help of other women, native herbs were prepared to ease my pain, when my condition worsened. My abductors eventually released me in March 1999.

My relatives then immediately took me to FAWE. Thanks to FAWE I am alive today to narrate my horrible experience, an experience I will never forget.

Survivor B (13years Old)

The rebels raided Allen Town in the East End of Freetown on the morning of January 6, 1999. Instead of running towards Freetown, I headed towards Waterloo. I remained in the bush together with other girls from our area for nearly two weeks. When the rebels were retreating from the city, we were unfortunate in that the SLA renegade soldiers discovered us all in our hiding place.

One of my friends, 15 years was the first to be raped by five of them one after the other at gunpoint. Next it was another’s turn, then mine. I shouted that I have never known a man. One of them immediately dragged me and dropped me on the ground and open wide my legs. ‘If you have never known a man then you will know a knife today.’ He drew a knife from his side still holding my legs apart with the help of the other rebel. He then stabbed me in my

private parts three times with the knife. I immediately became unconscious. I woke up later to discover myself in the same location. I don't know whether they gave me up as dead. But they abandoned me and I did not even know which day it was. I managed to find my way back to Allen Town. I was lucky that neither no member of my family was killed nor our house burnt. My parents immediately took me to a doctor for medical treatment, where the doctor told me that my urinary gland had been destroyed. To this day a tube is connected inside me to channel my urine to a bag attached under my dress. I feel so uncomfortable carrying the tube and bag around. (This girl later died in 2001).

Survivor C, 17 Years. Human shields

When they entered the city that night of 6th January 1999, they entered our house ordered all of us to stay put. We were all used as human shield as they were advancing towards, the centre of the city. My parents were both killed that night in crossfire. On 7 January 1999 I was abducted together with other girls. I was locked in an unfinished house where I was regularly raped by two young boys whom I came to learn later on were brothers.

During that period most of us who were abducted were conscripted into the fighting force. Everyday we used to go on looting missions. They would drug us first thing in the morning before taking us out. I was given a machete to cut people's hands and a pistol to fire at any enemy. Most of the children abducted died during those raids.

When the government forces raided our base we pulled out to another base in Mile 91. One of the men who used to force me to have affairs with them died during that raid. Another rebel, a RUF Commando, took charge of me. He used to lock me in a cage naked for the whole day, anytime I refused to honour his request to have sex with him. He would leave me in the cage after beating me. He kept threatening me in this manner until one day when I managed to escape together with a few other girls. By then I was five months pregnant. (This victim escaped in Dec 1999 and her baby is now three years old. She was among those who benefited from the FAWE skills training programme).

Considering Hope for Victims

FAWE particularly followed up the development of survivor A. Interestingly, when she came to FAWE for help, FAWE doctors fixed the womb again to its position. In Dec 2000, the womb shifted again from its position to the extent that it had to be completely removed. Recently, this survivor developed another complication in her pelvic bone that needs an operation. Fortunately, International Rescue Committee (ICR), one of the international agencies has now taken up her case, and will foot the bill for the surgery

Although her relatives took over the care for her children during her abduction, they failed to take them to school due to financial constraints. However, her eight years old girl by then has since been enrolled in the FAWE School. She is now in class 4.

It is important to consider all available mitigation measures to help alleviate the suffering of the survivors. They should for example be given some skills training support so as to enable them become self reliant for a lifetime. Provision of start-off financial assistance is crucial in addition to provision of free educational services from primary to tertiary level including technical/vocational education or skills training.

In addition, Government and NGOs should readily provide medical assistance to the victims and screen them thoroughly against STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases). Free medical care should be considered for all rape victims while special care could be given to those that were "gang raped".

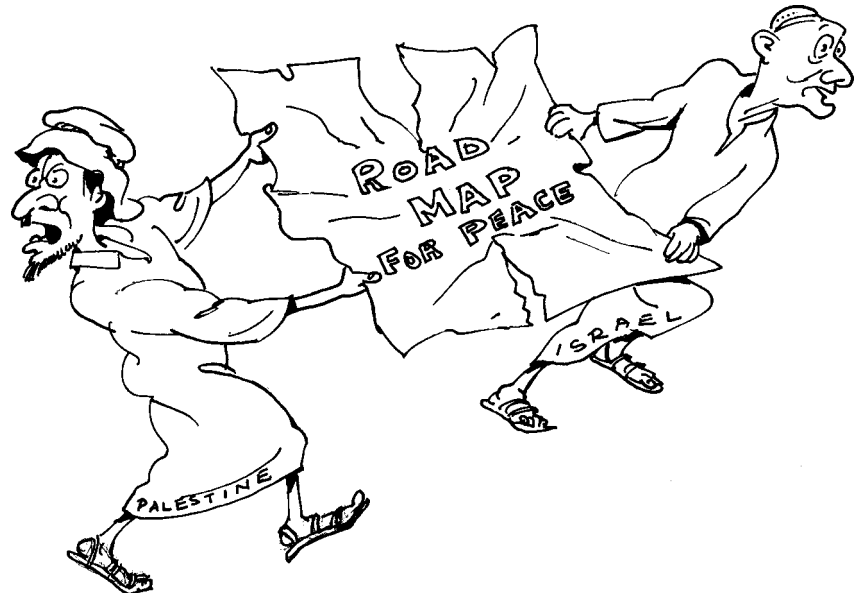
Liberation Through Justice

By Abla Nasir

Introduction

The Israel-Palestine conflict is dominated by decades of hate campaigns and destruction that stretch way back to 1948. This conflict has led to many deaths of both Israelis and Palestinians as well as unprecedented displacement of mainly Palestinian communities. Security barriers and deep trenches dot the occupied Palestinian lands. These barriers do not only hamper the free movement of Palestinians, but also deepen and escalate the hatred between the two communities.

The recent failure of the American Peace initiative, otherwise known as the “Road Map” and the construction of the barrier wall by Israel aimed at separating Palestinians from Israel communities, has worsened the conflict. Israel regards this wall as a major bulwark to protect her civilians from Palestinian suicide attacks as well as limit the number of Palestinian workers crossing into Israel territories for work. The Palestinians on the other hand regard this wall as yet another attempt to curtail their movements as well as restricting them to a “wall less” prison, there by cutting



them off from vital social services like education, and health care.¹

Human Rights Watch recognises the need for Israel to protect her civilians but emphasises the need of undertaking these measures without violating International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. After all, Israel has to a large extent flouted all pretensions to basic needs of common laws of existence.

According to Joe Stork, “Israel has a long history of severe and arbitrary restrictions on movement. The barrier will institutionalise these restrictions and reinforce the long term harm done by illegal settlements”.²

Although Israel has ratified many human rights treaties, that oblige it to uphold rights of freedom of movement and other social aspects like education, health care and work, it has not been known to adhere to any. Israel has not only curtailed the movements of Palestinians but has also maintained a climate of intimidation and harassment in addition to refusing entry to those Palestinians that are regarded as outspoken and critical to her policies.

Rev. Sandra Olevine of the United Methodist church recalls an incident of July 2002 when Marwan Abado, an Austrian national of Palestinian origin was detained by Israel authorities soon after arriving in. Abado was scheduled to attend a musical concert with colleagues at the Songs of

Freedom Festival that was to be held in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

On disembarking from the plane, Israel authorities immediately detained him. He was never allowed to leave the airport in spite of having a valid working visa issued by the Israeli Foreign Ministry. He was deported 24 hours later to Vienna.³

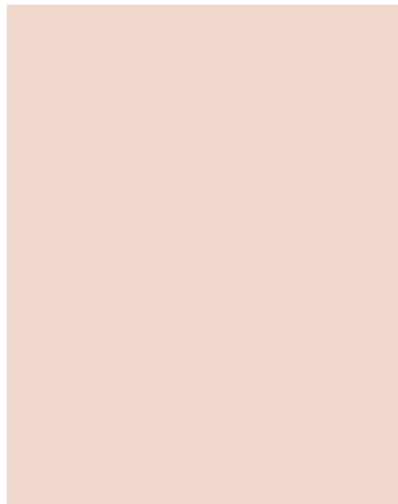
Indeed, Palestinians have given many testimonies about the gravity of the injustices committed to them by Israel's authorities. The suffering has gone on for decades consuming generations along its path.

Abla Nasir, attended the World Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Conference in Brisbane Australia in July 2003. She gave a moving testimony at the tribunal about her tribulations with the Israeli State since the West Bank and Gaza Strip were occupied in 1967. Below is her testimony.

The Occupied Homeland

I was 17 years old when Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza in June 1967. At that time, I was attending high school in Beirut, Lebanon. When the war broke out, the borders were closed and I was cut off from my family in Ramallah.

It took a couple of months before my family and I were able to communicate through a service provided by the International Red Cross. My parents, of course, were yearning to have me at home with them. I could not however take the next flight home because home had become an occupied territory. I also needed to acquire a permit from the Israeli authorities to allow me a



reunion with my family. The permit was denied. We tried every legal way and exerted every effort to acquire a permit; but our efforts were to no avail.

I left Lebanon and flew to Jordan and from there tried again to acquire an entry permit. When all legal efforts failed, I decided to infiltrate and pay someone to guide me through the Jordan valley into the occupied territories. While crossing the Jordan River, the smell of floating bodies at its banks sent scary chills through my body, but I was determined to

continue. I wanted to be with my family and did not think about the dangers of my objectives. After four hours of walking we reached an orange grove in Jericho. In Jericho I took a taxi and headed home to Ramallah.

Occupation and Harassment

I can never forget the look on my mother's face as I stepped out of the taxi outside our house. It was a mixture of anguish and joy. I risked my life to return home. Home was under occupation. But the meaning was unclear then. I have learned the meaning of occupation everyday and every moment of my life over the past 36 years.

I learnt that I was a captive in my own home. My movements were restricted. I needed to stand in long lines and for many hours to acquire a permit to move in and out of my hometown... that is, if a permit was granted. I learned that I could be locked into my house for days and not even allowed to sit on the balcony when curfew is imposed. Soldiers as young as myself had all the power to order me around and humiliate me. I learned that any display of patriotism, any expression of who I was as a Palestinian was against the law of the occupiers and could subject me to imprisonment. I learned that I could only draw

the Palestinian flag in my mind. Any display of the colours of the flag was a criminal act that threatened the security of the State of Israel. At school, our textbooks were censored and any mention of Palestine was eliminated. In our history and Geography books, whole chapters and maps were taken out. I learned that part of our history had been robbed and distorted. I learned that I had to keep repeating the history that I knew in a secret diary that was only written in my mind.

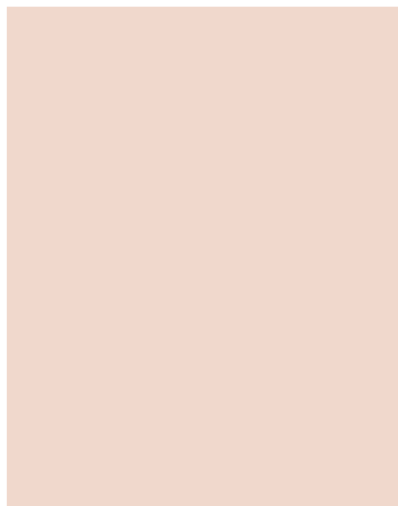
To the occupiers, I am only a resident of the land and could lose my right of residency if I left home and became a resident of another country. Whenever I leave home, I have to acquire a permit that would grant me permission to come back within a limited period of time. This permit is more precious than any valuables I carry with me when I travel because if I lose it, I could lose my right to return home. My two sisters stayed outside the country beyond the duration of the permit and have lost their right to return. They can only come on a visitor's visa.

Dismembered Nationhood

Nowadays, when my children travel, besides the usual phrases that mothers repeat to their children, I advise them where to keep their permit and how careful they should be about securing it somewhere

and not losing it. I have learned that I could not assure myself of continued existence in my homeland because such a RIGHT is threatened and I, or any member of my family could become stateless at any time.

Thirty-six years have passed since that day when I crossed the Jordan River to return home. Over that period of time I moved from adolescence into



adulthood. I became a mother and gave birth to three children who know nothing but military occupation. They did not have to learn what military occupation was. Their perception of life was the abnormal reality they were born into. I had to teach them the meaning of freedom and helped them draw pictures and images of what is "normal" against all the odds and contradictions that surrounded our life.

The agony I went through as I experienced the humiliation of occupation and loss of freedom was more severe and

excruciatingly painful as I watched my children grow under such conditions. Amid all this, I realised that I needed to search for some strength within me to help me cope and rise above the many factors that intended to bring me down. I learned that I had to hold on to my dreams of freedom and justice. That no one could touch the freedom of my soul. My defiance to occupation was my steadfastness. Such a belief was embedded in a strong faith that justice would prevail and I would emerge as a free person because it is the will Of God who created us all in His image and as free human beings.

Fostering Reconciliation

Generations have been born under the oppression of military occupation. Generations have known nothing but an Israeli characterised by its humiliating check posts, demolishing of Palestinian houses and uprooting of trees. Generations have only known Israel's confiscation of Palestinian lands to build Israel settlements/colonies that use more than 85% of our water resources. They have known abduction and deportation of thousands of people; prisons crowded with young men and women, shooting, killing... and most of all arrogance ... an arrogance that facilitated inhuman practices against... a people who were perceived as the "other".

Throughout my professional life, I have worked with young women and men. My struggle has been to help those young souls not to despair and to keep the hope. I strive to guide them through their painful and dangerous encounters into a learning process that would nurture their wisdom. However, every attempt to subdue their anger and ease their bitterness is met by multiple encounters to increase their fury.

I have always realised that what they needed was a process of reconciliation. I needed to help them go through a process of conciliation within themselves in order not to allow bitterness and anger to overshadow their wisdom and future aspiration. Every inch of progress towards that objective was met with miles of aggression to quell the development of such a process.

Cutting the Cord of Peace

In the past two and a half years, the oppressive measures were amplified and the humiliating tactics diversified. The weaponry used against us became heavier: tanks, apache helicopters and F16 fighters shelling and destroying life and livelihood. Roadblocks and hundreds of checkpoints separate all Palestinian territory in the West Bank and Gaza from each other. A wall is being built to surround all Palestinian territories in the West Bank like a roofless prison. More land was

confiscated especially land rich with water reservoirs and aqueducts; thus further robbing us from a vital source for survival.

Every village and town is closed from the other by roadblocks and deep ditches. We have to walk through dirty roads and pass through humiliating check posts to go from one place to the other. The five-minute drive to our YWCA centre at one of the refugee camps near Ramallah is no longer allowed. It has been made into an hour-long journey through dirty roads, which is very often intercepted by military jeeps blocking the road and shooting tear gas bombs.

My daily routine is my trip between Ramallah and Jerusalem. A distance of 15-20 kilometres, which under ordinary circumstances should not take more than twenty minutes by car, takes at least one and half-hours and sometimes much more.

Besides its humiliating effects, these travel and movement restrictions have paralysed our economy, which resulted in dramatic deterioration of living conditions. Poverty has increased and resulted in more than 50% of Palestinian families depending on food handouts from UN and other humanitarian agencies. Health services have been disrupted thus adding to the deterioration

of health conditions especially among children and women of childbearing age. 61% of Palestinian students are unable to attend school on a regular basis due to curfews and closures.

Amid these extremely harsh conditions, I must confess that there are moments when I feel frustrated and angry. I realise that my own feelings of insecurity and fear reflect on those around me. I therefore try not to allow myself dwell on those feelings for a long time. As a grown up, as a mother, I know that I cannot be superwoman but I know that I can be very strong to rise above the difficulties that surround me. But I have also learned that no peace can be achieved without justice.

“Since September 2000, 15 Palestinians and 5 Israelis are killed each week”

“According to the UN, a Palestinian is forced into homelessness every 2.5 hours because of Israel’s policy of demolishing Palestinian homes”

“The separation barrier encroaches on the land and resources on the West Bank with the aim of consolidating this illegal enterprise”(Joe Stork)

¹ <http://www.hwr.org>,
<http://www.ngo.monitor.org>

² Joe Stork, Acting Executive Director, Middle East and North Africa Division.

³ <Http://gbgm-umc.org>