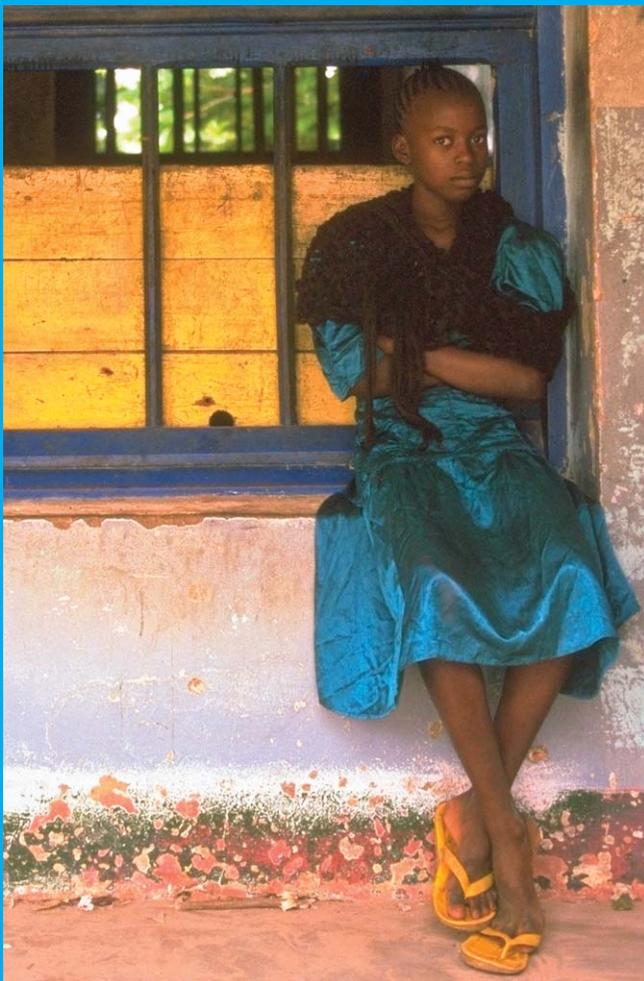


THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT

ON WOMEN AND GIRLS
IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA
AND THE UNICEF RESPONSE



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was undertaken by the UNICEF Regional Office for West and Central Africa as part of UNICEF's contribution to the 49th Session of the Commission of the Status of Women to be held in New York from 28 February to 11 March 2005. The meeting will review implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly titled Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century. Current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls will be examined.

The study was compiled by Sherrill Whittington with the support of Rima Salah, the former Regional Director, as well as Christine Muhigana, Regional Planning Officer, several regional colleagues and UNICEF New York's Gender Team who contributed substantively.

Since it was a desk review, the study was very much dependent on information and guidance from the UNICEF country offices in Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Our deep appreciation is extended to all those who responded so generously to the many requests for information and clarification.

ISBN 92-806-3865-3

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FOREWORD

As UNICEF Regional Director* in West and Central Africa, I witnessed first-hand the devastation caused by the conflicts in the region, the destruction to communities and the suffering of women and girls. Adolescent girls, the most likely to be abducted by militia and rebel groups and forced to become 'wives' and fighters, are subjected to sexual violence, vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and often stigmatized as child mothers. The process of reintegration and rehabilitation, at individual and community levels, is long and complex. We must ensure that women and girls are provided with a safe, supportive environment in which they can heal and become empowered as active agents for peace and reconstruction.

I hope that this study will contribute to our knowledge and understanding, so that these all-important issues can be addressed with sustainable programmes for both girls and women.

Rima Salah
UNICEF Regional Director
West and Central Africa

* In early 2005 Ms. Salah assumed responsibilities as Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF, New York.

OVERVIEW

During conflict and reconstruction, the impact of horrific gender-based violence at societal, community and individual levels is a critical issue.¹ Women and girls, particularly adolescent girls, need special protection measures. Their needs should be at the centre of all United Nations activities, from overseeing and implementing peace agreements to humanitarian assistance and disarmament, reconstruction and rehabilitation.

The independent expert on the impact of armed conflict on children, Graça Machel, in her 2001 report, called for urgent global action to increase children's protection in armed conflict: "The lives of children are jeopardized when women are not protected and when women's contributions to peace-building are undermined and marginalized The glaring gaps in the protection of women and girls in conflict must be addressed through better focused humanitarian relief and development assistance."² And the United Nations Secretary-General noted in his 2002 report on Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security: "The reality on the ground is that humanitarian and human rights laws are blatantly disregarded by parties to conflicts... women and girls continue to be subject to sexual and gender-based violence and other human rights violations."³

Over the past decade, the West and Central Africa region has been subject to conflict-related dislocation and extreme violence. Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone are still embroiled in, or emerging from, extensive upheaval and destruction due to long-term warfare. The region has been characterized by a "culture of impunity, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the continued weakening of the security sector... mass refugee movements and other forced displacement, inequitable and illicit exploitation of

natural resources...and violations of human rights, including the rights of women."⁴

All of these conflicts have had terrible consequences for the civilian populations. Everyone has suffered, with women and girls being wounded, mutilated and killed along with men and boys. Biological factors and the societal roles of women and girls, however, render them more vulnerable to gender-based violence. Adolescent girls are especially susceptible to sexual abuse, rape, recruitment by armed forces, trafficking, HIV/AIDS and complications from pregnancies. Such experiences have long-term devastating effects on their lives and those of their children, as many of them become stigmatized, rejected from their communities, unmarried and forced to live on the streets. Women and girls deserve special attention in healing communities as both victims of abuse and actors in reconstruction.

Rehabilitation must be given priority in all programmes, from psychosocial and trauma services to the provision of health, education and skills training. With a rights-based approach to policy development and programme implementation, UNICEF is strategically placed to uphold the pre-eminence of the rights of such women and girls, and to work to heal communities by implementing programmes that address their needs and protect their rights.

This is the first study undertaken by the UNICEF West and Central Africa office on the situation of war-affected women and girls. The study highlights a number of innovative programmes UNICEF and its partners are implementing to address the impact of the numerous conflicts that have racked the region for more than a decade. The conclusion contains recommendations on how UNICEF can take a more proactive role as the leading institution for the rights of girls, particularly adolescent girls. These young women are the most adversely affected, but they are also able to play a key role as change agents in war-torn communities.

CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

In 1994 the United Nations Secretary-General appointed Graça Machel, the former Minister of Education in Mozambique, as an independent expert to carry out a global assessment of the impact of armed conflict on children. Her report to the UN General Assembly in 1996, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* was the culmination of two years of research and field visits to war-ravaged countries. It revealed the extent of children's involvement in some 30 armed conflicts raging around the world. The report broke new ground in many respects. Using the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a guiding framework, it provided the first human rights assessment of war-affected children. It drew particular attention to the situation of children associated with armed forces and groups, such as child soldiers, internally displaced and refugee children, child victims of landmines and sanctions, and the physical and psychological consequences of conflict. It also examined the relevance and adequacy of international standards for the protection of children in conflict situations.⁵

The report found that “millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders, but targets. Some fall victim to a general onslaught against civilians; others die as part of a calculated genocide. Still other children suffer the effects of sexual violence or the multiple deprivations of armed conflict that expose them to hunger or disease... thousands of young people are cynically exploited as combatants.... Boys serve as porters or as messengers. Girls may prepare food or attend to the wounded, though they also may be forced to provide sexual services to soldiers. Both boys and girls are soon forced onto the battlefield, where their youth and inexperience leave them particularly vulnerable. In some cases children are deliberately exposed to horrific scenes to harden them to violence. Some are forced to commit atrocities against their own families as a way of severing all ties with their communities.”

The report called for a global campaign to stop the recruitment of anyone under 18 into the armed forces and encouraged governments and opposition groups to immediately demobilize all such children. It recommended that all peace agreements specifically address the need to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers into society. It also called on all governments to support the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that would establish the minimum age of 18 for recruitment into the armed forces.

In September 2000 at the International Conference on War-Affected Children convened by the Government of Canada, Ms. Machel presented a formal review of progress made and obstacles encountered since her 1996 report. This review exposed the emerging threats to children's security. It charted the rise of HIV/AIDS as the single most powerful new factor compounding the dangers for children in armed conflict. It attested to the way in which the proliferation of small arms and light weapons ignites and sustains the wars that victimize children. But it also reported on progress. It showed the powerful role women play in building peace and reconstructing their families and communities. It explored how education has brought stability into the lives of uprooted children. The report saluted the many individuals and organizations that have shown leadership on behalf of war-affected children. It acknowledged coalitions that have formed across sectors to improve children's protection in conflict. A small but growing number of governments were applauded for their commitments to children by improving the standards for their protection, mobilizing resources for their care and establishing programmes to meet their needs.

The report concluded with a desperate plea to respect childhood as inviolate and called for compassion, commitment and tenacity to protect children from the atrocities of war, stating “The impact of armed conflict on children is everyone's responsibility. And it must be everyone's concern.”

Source: Machel, Graça, *The Impact of War on Children*, Hurst and Company for UNICEF and UNIFEM, London, 2001.

I. CONFLICTS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Conflicts are characterized by a total breakdown of law, security and community structures, with gross human rights violations perpetrated against civilian populations. The most vulnerable are women and children. Upholding their rights during times of crisis is fundamental to UNICEF's work.

UNICEF's role

During and after conflicts and crises UNICEF's mission is to provide special protection for the most disadvantaged children – those who are victims of war, disasters, extreme poverty, all forms of violence and exploitation and those with disabilities. During an emergency, UNICEF focuses on meeting the basic needs of women and children, protecting their fundamental rights and preventing violations.

UNICEF works to ensure that the rights established by the various conventions are realized equally for all children and women.⁶ The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are regarded by UNICEF as constituting a broad agreement that the realization of the rights of children and women is a fundamental condition for sustained improvements in human development.⁷

The persistence of grossly unequal gender relations and wide gender gaps in the social, economic, political and civic spheres constitutes a denial of the individual human rights of girls and women and threatens social cohesion.⁸ Progress in realizing the rights of children, especially girls, can help break the pattern of discrimination against women.

UNICEF's strategic plan for 2002–2005 states that "UNICEF will expose and help rectify disparities and all forms of discrimination against children and women. It will identify key issues of exclusion and disparity as central concerns for advocacy and policy dialogues... UNICEF interventions will focus on disadvantaged populations and children and adolescents at risk... Gender concerns⁹ will be mainstreamed throughout the country programmes

with a focus on activities to empower girls and women."¹⁰ Discrimination based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status makes children more vulnerable to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Combating discrimination is inherent in all of UNICEF's work.

In order to address these issues, UNICEF is identifying indicators to document and analyse the impact on children of violence (including gender-related violence and armed conflict), abuse, neglect, exploitation, the absence of primary caregivers and discrimination. UNICEF works with governments to adopt or revise national standards on the protection of children and supports countries in taking practical and legal measures towards the elimination of child trafficking, sexual exploitation and the use of children in armed conflict.¹¹ To reduce physical and psychological violence against children, UNICEF develops, funds and implements interventions – including research and communication for behavioural change.

UNICEF now has a solid knowledge of the child protection situation in each country. This information will be used to develop and integrate child protection concerns into national policies, laws, regulations and actions. UNICEF will build its capacity, and that of its counterparts, to establish and maintain effective national, local and community-based systems to monitor critical child protection issues. UNICEF will review existing laws and regulations and advocate for compatibility with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

UNICEF seeks to prevent violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination against children by implementing programmes that mitigate the impact of those violations. This has been reinforced in *Core Commitments for Children in Emergencies*, in which UNICEF stresses the need to "operationalize humanitarian response mechanisms that prevent and limit the exposure of children and women to abuse, violence, exploitation and HIV/AIDS."¹²

In West and Central Africa and elsewhere, UNICEF focuses on the protection of vulnerable groups – particularly children and women – the prevention of violations, victim rehabilitation and accountability. The major issue for women and girls is undoubtedly gender-based violence, which should be addressed from the outset of a crisis as an integral component in demobilization, disarmament, reintegration and rehabilitation programmes, with victims requiring access to specialized education and health services.

Also directly relevant to UNICEF's post-conflict programme implementation is UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, adopted in October 2000. All actors involved in negotiating and implementing peace agreements have been called upon to ensure protection of women's rights, and the full involvement of women in all aspects of promoting and maintaining peace and security with a strengthened role in decision-making. Parties to armed conflict have been particularly requested to fully respect international laws applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls and to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence. The Security Council requested the Secretary-General to provide Member States with training guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and particular needs of women, and urged States to increase their voluntary financial, technical and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts, including those undertaken by relevant funds and programmes. The resolution also recommends specialized training for peacekeepers on the protection, special needs and human rights of women and children.¹³

The status of conflicts in the region

Over the past decade, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone have experienced extensive periods of conflict. In Sierra Leone, UNICEF is moving from an emergency programme to one of development. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo some regions are stable and under reconstruction, but others are still embroiled in conflict. Liberia, more than a year after the peace accords, is much more stable and

has a national transitional administration, but peace and reconciliation remain elusive in Côte d'Ivoire. These countries are under UN peacekeeping mandates to restore peace, stability and governance so that elections can be held.

National reconstruction entails rebuilding infrastructure, institutions and facilities, and ensuring security and the rule of law. It also encompasses healing war-torn communities and addressing gross violations of human rights. With services suspended and infrastructure completely destroyed, and millions displaced and brutalized, most basic rights have been denied – the right to life, to a violence-free existence, to health, education, economic livelihood and political participation. Extreme violence has been the overriding characteristic of all of these conflicts.

Civilian populations were and continue to be subjected to massive human rights violations and horrendous atrocities, including rape, murder and torture. Millions have been displaced from their homes and thousands of children have been forcibly conscripted or abducted to serve in armies and militias. These armed conflicts have also created large numbers of households headed by women and/or children, who were subjected to the crimes of sexual violence that prevailed throughout the brutal national wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone and, more recently, in Côte d'Ivoire. According to a 2003 report on Children and Armed Conflict by the Secretary-General: "Refugees and internally displaced children are especially vulnerable to violence, recruitment, sexual exploitation, disease, malnutrition and death. Children are being recruited and used as child soldiers on a massive scale. Girls face additional risks, particularly sexual violence. These egregious violations of children's rights take place in a pervasive climate of impunity."¹⁴

Declared over in January 2002, the civil war in Sierra Leone had raged for more than a decade, leaving half of the pre-war population displaced, 50,000 dead, 100,000 mutilated and over a quarter of a million women raped. The Peace Agreement of 7 July 1999 stated: "Women have been particularly victimized during the war [and] special attention shall

All actors involved in negotiating and implementing peace agreements have been called upon to ensure protection of women's rights, and the full involvement of women in all aspects of promoting and maintaining peace and security with a strengthened role in decision-making.

be accorded to their needs and potentials in formulating and implementing national rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programmes, to enable them to play a central role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Sierra Leone.”¹⁵

In the aftermath of the conflict, the UN completed the disarmament of 45,000 female and male combatants and agreed with the government to set up the Special Court for Sierra Leone to prosecute individuals who bore “the greatest responsibility.” The former combatants suffered a range of physical, mental and sexual abuses including separation, displacement, abductions, forced recruitment and rape. Estimates suggest that 60 per cent of the abducted children were girls, the vast majority of whom were sexually abused, yet these girls were overlooked in the demobilization and reintegration process.

Significant progress has been achieved in the peace consolidation process in Sierra Leone. Local government elections were held in May 2004 for the first time in 32 years, and responsibility for security in the northern and southern provinces has been handed over to the government by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone. The gains, however, remain fragile. Both the government and the international community face considerable challenges to ensure a lasting and inclusive reconstruction.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a complex regional conflict began in 1996 involving seven nations and many groups of armed combatants. The war directly or indirectly led to the deaths of more than 3 million civilians, making it more deadly to civilians than any other conflict since World War II. The Congolese suffered terribly during the long years of armed conflict and more than 3 million people were displaced. In the eastern part of the country the warring parties intensified sexual violence

against women and girls. As military activities escalated in one area after another, so did rapes and other gender-based crimes.

As the predominant UN presence in the country, the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is mandated to work with other UN partners to facilitate humanitarian assistance and human rights monitoring, with attention paid to vulnerable groups, including women and children, as well as demobilized child soldiers. In order to minimize exploitation of the local population, the mission strictly prohibits any act of sexual abuse and/or exploitation by members of the military and civilian staff and considers such behaviour a serious act of misconduct. In December 2002, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of the Congo circulated a memorandum clarifying the policy for all civilian and military members of the mission. It stated that sexual activity with persons under 18 years of age is prohibited, as is any exchange of money, goods or services for sex.

On 18 August 2003, the government and opposing forces in Liberia signed a comprehensive peace agreement in Accra that established a permanent ceasefire and paved the way for a broad-based transitional government. The post-conflict period has seen slight improvements in the humanitarian, human rights and political situations in Liberia. The mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia stresses the importance of addressing human rights violation, particularly atrocities against civilian populations such as widespread sexual violence against women and children. An integral part of the mission's mandate is to protect and promote human rights, with particular attention to vulnerable groups including refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, women, children and demobilized child soldiers, in close cooperation with other UN

agencies, related organizations, governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.¹⁶

The most recent of the regional conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire remains extremely volatile. None of the parties to the recent civil war have been punished for serious abuses against civilians. The Linas-Marcoussis peace accords, signed in France in January 2003, remain tenuous, with the north and most of the west of the country under the control of the three former rebel groups called the Forces Nouvelles, and the south still under government control. Despite the official end of hostilities, civilians on both sides continue to suffer from the breakdown of law as well as economic hardship engendered by the conflict. As a result of the nine-month conflict, nearly 1 million civilians were displaced and many were unable to return to their homes. There have been numerous accounts of armed robbery, looting and rape in areas controlled by the Forces Nouvelles. By Security Council resolution 1528, the UN Mission is mandated to contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights in Côte d'Ivoire, with special attention to violence committed against women and girls, and to help investigate human rights violations with a view to ending impunity.¹⁷

During war, civilians are exposed to violence and terror, risking their lives and losing their livelihoods in the process. Here is one woman's story.

Maimounata's plight

All her family's worldly possessions were wrapped up in two large sacks: clothes, shoes, cooking utensils, pots, plates, blankets and a small pile of plastic buckets. This was all Maimounata could salvage before her shanty town in Abidjan was burned and bulldozed to the ground shortly after the 19 September 2002 attempted coup in Côte d'Ivoire. She says, "My husband and I saved what we could, but there wasn't much time. Men were beaten and some women were raped. I don't ever want to go back. I'm too scared and so are my children." Maimounata has spent the morning at the Ouagadougou transit site for people fleeing the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, searching through mountains of battered belongings. Each silent, dusty sack bears a family name: Sankara, Sawadogo, Kongo, Tapsoba. "We only have what's here in these sacks," says Maimounata. "The rest has been stolen, burned or destroyed. We've got to start our lives all over again due to the war. We need to find jobs and our children need to go to school. We have nothing."

Source: Kent Page, UNICEF Regional Communication Officer, West and Central Africa, 19 December 2002.

II. PREVENTION AND PROTECTION

As stated in UNICEF's medium-term strategic plan for 2002–2005, protection is a universal imperative. Violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination threaten children's lives and impede their growth and development. UNICEF's child protection efforts are focused on addressing and preventing violence, abuse and neglect, exploitation and discrimination affecting children. Violence and abuse includes physical, sexual and psychological violence against children within the family, schools, communities and state and non-state institutions; gender-related violence and female genital mutilation/cutting; children affected by armed conflict and children in conflict with the law.¹⁸

Civilians have been primary targets in contemporary conflicts. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable, requiring significantly different protection than do men and boys. Prevention of and protection from gender-based and sexual violence need to be addressed from the outset of a crisis.

In conflicts in the West and Central Africa region, women and girls, particularly adolescents, have been specifically targeted with violence such as torture, rape, mass rape, forced prostitution, forced termination of pregnancy and mutilation. Rape as a tactic of war is a particularly egregious violation linked to the social status of women and girls and

their vulnerability. Girls who are abducted and given as 'wives' to soldiers are forced to serve as sexual slaves. Grave concern for such gross violations was expressed by the UN Secretary-General, who stated that he deplored "the fact that sexual and gender-based violence continues to be used as a weapon of war in African conflicts ... [and that] gender-based violence has reached almost epidemic proportions." He added, "Every effort must be made to halt this odious practice and bring the perpetrators to justice."¹⁹

The severity of all forms of gender-based violence has been emphasized by the highest levels of the international community over the past decade. In a 1993 resolution, the UN General Assembly declared that prohibiting gender discrimination includes eliminating gender-based violence and that States must eliminate violence against women.²⁰ The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women enumerated a wide range of obligations for States to combat sexual violence, including ensuring appropriate treatment for victims in the justice system, offering counselling and support services, and providing medical and psychological assistance to victims.²¹ Protection of children from sexual violence is recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires States parties to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, including sexual abuse.²²

The escalation of gender-based violence during conflict was recognized in 1995 in the Beijing Platform for Action, which stressed that women of all ages are vulnerable to violence and violation of their human rights such as murder, terrorism, torture, involuntary disappearance, sexual slavery, rape, sexual abuse and forced pregnancy, especially as a result of policies of ethnic cleansing.²³ The obligation to protect girls and women from sexual violence lies with the parties to armed conflict, who have been called upon by the UN Security Council to put an end to all forms of violence and exploitation, including sexual violence, particularly rape. The agencies, funds and programmes of the UN are obligated to ensure that assistance programmes are designed to meet the special needs and particular vulner-

abilities of girls affected by armed conflict – including those heading households, orphaned, sexually exploited and used as combatants.²⁴

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the epidemic proportions of gross sexual violence have resulted in such extreme psychological and physical damage that many, if not most, will never fully recover. Many women and girls have become pregnant as a result of being raped. Many have been infected with HIV, dramatically altering their future, livelihood and prospects. They may be designated as 'survivors' of such atrocities, but their future, and that of their children, is bleak. They require long-term rehabilitation, trauma counselling, health services and income-generating activities.

According to a 2001 report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, thousands of women and girls in Sierra Leone were subjected to gender-specific abuses, including rape, forced marriages and situations comparable to sexual slavery. A graphic portrayal of the extent of violence against women during the Sierra Leone conflict was revealed in field research conducted in 2000 under a project co-funded by the UN Mission in Sierra Leone. Some 733 randomly selected women were interviewed, of whom 143 (20 per cent) were girls aged between 6 and 17 years. A total of 534 (73 per cent) reported having experienced human rights abuses; 383 (52 per cent) said they had been subjected to sexual violence; 345 (47 per cent) reported having been raped; and 192 (26 per cent) reported having been gang raped. Slightly less than half (306, or 41 per cent) of the interviewees reported having been abducted and 25 (3 per cent) said they had been forced to marry their abductor.²⁵

A similar lack of protection also occurred in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the catastrophic human rights situation resulted in countless women and girls being horrendously abused. As reported to the 2004 Commission on Human Rights, "The war stripped these children, who were already traumatized by their experiences, of their childhood. Girls became mothers to children

Prevention of and protection from gender-based and sexual violence need to be addressed from the outset of a crisis.

born of their sexual enslavement; some have contracted AIDS.”²⁶ Human Rights Watch reported that during the May 2004 uprising in Bukavu, dissident troops killed civilians and carried out widespread sexual violence against women and girls, some of them as young as three years old.²⁷ Sexual violence was flagrantly used as a weapon of war by most of the forces involved in the conflict. As in other conflicts, soldiers and combatants raped and abused women and girls as part of their efforts to win and maintain control over civilians and the territory they inhabited.

Despite the fact that Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone and other countries are signatories to the child rights convention, there is no respect for such standards in time of war. One 16-year-old girl who was raped told Human Rights Watch that “there is no way to protect girls from these things. I know they didn’t target me... any [woman] would have had the same thing happen...but this is unacceptable. There are many girls who live in these conditions.”²⁸

A young mother related her experience in Kabare territory in June 2001 to Human Rights Watch: “I left my house in the evening to buy food for my children. A soldier attacked me and pushed me off the road. He threw me into the bushes. My baby, who was one month and one week old, was on my back. He threw the baby off my back and put a gun to my chest... When I reached to save my baby, he took off my clothes and raped me. I told my husband what happened. I had just had a baby and I needed help. I was treated [at a clinic]. It turns out that I got a sexually transmitted infection, and now my husband has it too.”²⁹

This pattern of systemic gender violence also occurred in Liberia during the 2003 war. Refugee

and internally displaced girls were regularly exposed to rape, sexual abuse and prostitution in the camps. The International Rescue Committee held a series of focus group discussions and individual interviews on gender-based violence in several camps in Montserrado County. They found that very young girls were particularly targeted for rape. Some participants said, “The young girls are the most wanted. Some can even rape a baby if they get a chance, [but] they like 7- to 11-year-olds.”³⁰

As reported in *The Impact of War on Children*, camps for the displaced should be places of safety, offering protection and assistance, but instead they are often highly volatile. Prior power struggles and conflicts are likely to be reproduced in camp settings, and traditional social systems can come under strain or break down completely. Violence is frequent within families, between refugee and host communities, and even from the security forces that are meant to provide protection. Women and adolescent girls are particularly affected. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ (UNHCR) guidelines on preventing sexual violence against refugees recommend measures such as locating latrines in areas that are well lit, guarded and close to sleeping areas. They also recommend providing water and firewood within the camps to limit the necessity of women and children venturing outside of patrolled areas, and appointing women guards as another essential security measure. Despite the simplicity and effectiveness of the guidelines, they have often been inadequately enforced.³¹

According to the International Rescue Committee, overcrowding and poor structural planning, such as lack of night lighting and poor placement of bath-houses and latrines, all caused sexual violence.³² In January 2003, Refugees International conducted

a survey of gender-based violence in Liberia and found that young boys were routinely forced to rape women and girls as part of the initiation process for some fighting forces.³³ The majority of rapes reported were related to the ongoing conflict, and more than one third were gang rapes perpetrated by armed members of the fighting forces. Violations such as these cannot continue to be perpetrated with impunity; those guilty of these heinous crimes must be brought to justice.

In 2003, the International Rescue Committee conducted research among Liberian refugee women and adolescents, ages 15 to 49, living in refugee camps in Sierra Leone. Seventy-four per cent of the women and adolescent girls interviewed reported having experienced at least one incident of sexual violence before being displaced, and 66 per cent said they experienced at least one incident of sexual violence during displacement.³⁴ Inside and outside camps, many parents facing economic destitution pushed their daughters into marriage at a very young age, effectively selling them off to relieve their economic burdens. With marriage came the expectation for girls as young as 12 years old to drop out of school and bear children, thereby depriving these girls of their right to education and adversely impacting their health, as premature motherhood heightens the risk of maternal mortality.³⁵

In neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, Liberian fighters from both sides of the conflict raped and forced women and girls into sexual slavery. Human Rights Watch reports that in some cases rape was used specifically as a weapon of war in order to terrorize and humiliate the civilian population. In Zouan-Hounien, a rebel-occupied territory, one informant observed: "There's so much rape [that] it's normal, we don't even talk about it. The rebels rape in front of the husband, make him watch, and then force him to thank them on his knees." Xenophobia, discrimination and ethnic tensions forced half a million people – predominately migrant workers from Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali – to flee Côte d'Ivoire as of May 2003.

Systematic sexual violations against civilian populations destroy communities and stigmatize those who have been subjected to them. A doctor in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, told Human Rights Watch that he had treated a girl of 15 who had been raped by several men. He commented: "We can do little else to prevent her being rejected. It's not her fault... Physically she'll probably get better, although we don't know yet if she contracted any other illness. On the psychological level, it remains a problem. She lost her virginity, which is something very important in the village. She can't even talk about it."³⁶ Victims of sexual violence become social pariahs. They are rejected by their husbands, families and communities, and face impoverishment and humiliation. One woman interviewed had been forced to relocate to Bukavu, where she sold avocados and struggled to support herself and her six children. Another woman who had been raped by several combatants became pregnant and was forced to flee to Goma, where she lived in the ruins of destroyed houses and eked out a living by transporting heavy loads.³⁷ According to one group of Congolese women, a girl who has been raped and given birth is "a girl no boy can marry."³⁸ The humanitarian community must prioritize specialized programmes to prevent these abuses and protect the most vulnerable.

Protection measures need to be extended to the post-conflict period to ensure that women resume their societal roles, particularly given their key role in the economic and social welfare of the community. These roles may have changed during the armed conflict. Women or girls who have been soldiers, camp followers or heads of households can often experience a backlash in the post-conflict period. Female ex-combatants are often ostracized. As men return to the communities, female providers lose their economic livelihoods and primary decision-making role. Intervention by the international community, especially the UN, is crucial at this point to preserve and support the economic, political and social gains that have been made by women and girls during conflict. Every effort has to be made to ensure that their rights and special needs are

As men return to the communities, female providers lose their economic livelihoods and primary decision-making role.

protected, and that they do not experience further discrimination and marginalization during post-conflict power struggles and reconstruction.

Protection of the vulnerable during and after conflict is one of the key responsibilities of the international humanitarian community. One of the most important recent developments has been the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children in armed conflict by UN personnel. In 2002, a report by the UNHCR and Save the Children UK assessed the behaviour of humanitarian workers, including UN personnel and peacekeepers, in the Mano River region of West and Central Africa. It reported widespread evidence of sexual exploitation of refugee children. In Liberia, the majority of children who were interviewed knew at least one other child who had been involved in exchanging sex for money and gifts from humanitarian aid personnel. The humanitarian community's shock and outrage at the findings prompted the establishment of the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises.

The UN Secretary-General captured the gravity of the problem in October 2002, when he stated, "Men, women and children displaced by conflict or other disasters are among the most vulnerable people on earth. They look to the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for shelter and protection. Anyone employed by or affiliated with the United Nations who breaks that sacred trust must be held accountable and, when the circumstances so warrant, prosecuted."³⁹ The Task Force created a list of six core principles for humanitarian agencies to incorporate into their staff codes of conduct. These principles require termination of employment for any staff member found to be engaging in sexual exploitation and/or abuse of

children; prohibit sexual activity with any child under the age of 18; forbid the exchange of any goods, services or money for sex or exploitation; and require all humanitarian employees to report abuses and all humanitarian agencies to develop systems to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse.

In October 2003, the Secretary-General's 'Bulletin on Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse' set out the minimum standards of behaviour expected of all UN civilian staff members.⁴⁰ The Bulletin defines sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and clarifies that such acts, particularly when perpetrated against beneficiaries of UN protection or assistance, constitute serious misconduct and are therefore grounds for disciplinary measures, including summary dismissal. In addition, the Bulletin obliges all staff to report concerns or suspicions of sexual exploitation and abuse and places the onus on managers at all levels to support and develop systems that maintain a preventative environment. The Bulletin applies to all staff of the UN, including separately administered organs and programmes. Since its promulgation, all parts of the UN system with a presence in the field have been working to establish a coherent system for implementation of the Bulletin.

Towards the end of 2003, the UN General Assembly, in debating this issue, deplored "all the cases of sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children, especially girls, in humanitarian crises, including those cases involving humanitarian workers and peacekeepers." It further urged "all States and the international community to respect, protect and promote the rights of the child, taking into account the particular vulnerabilities of the girl child in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict situations," and called for "special initiatives designed

to address all of the rights and needs of girls affected by armed conflicts.”⁴¹

In response, UNICEF is developing training materials to identify the factors that contribute to sexual abuse and exploitation in humanitarian crises, to provide opportunities to discuss the core principles and to develop strategies to minimize the potential for abuse and exploitation. In support of the Committee for the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, UNICEF’s office in Sierra Leone produced three manuals on the prevention and assessment of misconduct by humanitarian aid workers. Some 337 representatives of non-governmental organizations and the UN were trained on the prevention of abuse and misconduct. In addition, 414 police officers, social workers and community-based workers were trained on gender-based violence, including HIV/AIDS awareness. UNICEF trained 61 staff members on the role the organization and staff should play in the prevention of such violence. Staff training materials were developed in collaboration with the UNHCR, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and international non-governmental organizations. Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs received assistance in developing guidelines for investigating abuse, and two joint investigation teams were set up.⁴²

III. REHABILITATION

Rehabilitation of individuals and their communities is a holistic process that entails addressing immediate and long-term social, economic, educational and political rights. Issues such as health, psychosocial and educational needs must be at the core of all disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation programmes, with a specific focus on women and girls who have been affected.

One of the best examples of such a programme is in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNICEF initiated a project in July 2003 following alarming reports of large numbers of children and women being subjected to sexual violence. During the first 12 months of the project, UNICEF helped more than 10,000 children and women survivors in the most-affected areas of the eastern part of the country: North and South Kivu, the Ituri District in Oriental Province and Maniema. UNICEF raised awareness about sexual violence locally, nationally and internationally, using high-profile visits by its Goodwill Ambassadors Jessica Lange in July 2003 and Tetsuko Kuroyanagi in August 2004, Executive Director Carol Bellamy in December 2003 and UNICEF’s Executive Board in 2004. UNICEF supported international media coverage and documentaries on the gravity of the situation for women and children survivors of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

At national, provincial and community levels, UNICEF works with existing authorities and national and international agencies to prevent atrocities and support survivors. Support is also provided to community and grass-roots organizations to raise awareness and promote behavioural change at the family and community level to end the social stigma and discrimination that survivors face. With the support of local and religious leaders, social and economic reintegration efforts aim to help victims, as well as communities. Activities include: family mediation for survivors rejected by their husbands, parents and/or community; facilitating access to community schools for child survivors; providing psychosocial counselling; and supplying emergency

food and non-food items and seed funding to support reintegration. The aim is to empower survivors to resume their lives following violence and conflict. UNICEF plays a key role in supporting referral networks and coordination systems to facilitate the physical and psychosocial healing of survivors of sexual violence and their families.

These networks also contribute to the documentation and analysis of the phenomenon of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

UNICEF is assisting victims who were abducted by militia and subjected to gross violations. One girl's story follows.

Moving beyond sexual violence

"My name is Safi*. I come from Uvira, Democratic Republic of the Congo, near the Burundi border. I am 17 years old. It was April 2002 when they came to our house. It was six armed men. They pushed their way into our home with their guns. We were all there – my mother, my father, my older brother, and my four younger brothers and sisters. They told my father, 'You, papa. You must have sex with your daughter in front of us. Now!' They pushed me to the centre of the room. My father pleaded with them that he could not do that, that it was wrong and that I was just a child. The men laughed at him. Then, they shot him dead in front of all of us.

"The men then grabbed my older brother and me by the arm and forced us out of the house. We walked a little way and then they pushed me into the forest. They forced me to have sex with them many times. I felt like I was watching from the outside. Like I was watching a bad film. Then I don't remember anything. For the next three months I was held as their prisoner at their military camp. During that whole time, I felt I was going crazy. I was like a person unconscious. I was alive but not living. Every day they raped me. I stayed there for a long time – more than one year. I was like a dead person.

"When I arrived here at the hospital, I was crying a lot. I wanted to die. I did not want to have the baby of the men who raped me. I wanted to kill myself and their baby. But the people here were very nice. I met with the female counsellors who talked with me a lot. They told me that I had not done anything wrong and that I was important and that they would help me. If I had not come here, I would have killed myself by now because I hated that I was pregnant by those men and I felt I had no future.

"In my mind I could not forgive those men for what they did and I couldn't love their baby. But I have talked with the counsellors a lot and now I believe that I must forgive them so that I can free myself, and I know that my baby is innocent and has done nothing wrong and will need me when it is born. I still cry a lot, but I feel a bit better and I don't want to be sad – it's not good for my baby. I need to be strong. This is how our life is.

"Before this all happened, I was in school and I wanted to become a journalist. My father told me it was a good job because you can learn lots of things and you can tell people things that help them. I still want to be a journalist when I am through all of this. I am seven months pregnant now, and I will be staying here until I give birth to my baby in two months so that the doctors can see that everything is okay. Then I want to find a way to go back home to Uvira and see if my older brother and my little brothers and sisters are still alive. If they are alive, they will need my help, too."

*The name has been changed to protect her identity.

Source: 'Safi's Story: A courageous young woman moves beyond her past experience of sexual violence', Kent Page, UNICEF Regional Communication Officer, West and Central Africa, 23 October 2003.

The hospital in Goma where Safi was being treated is run by Doctors On Call for Service (DOCS) and is open to men and women, with separate areas divided by sex to ensure privacy and confidentiality. UNICEF provides the hospital with essential drugs and surgical materials. During construction of a large ward for women, UNICEF provided the hospital with two large tents, beds, mattresses, blankets and mosquito nets for Safi and more than 50 other girls and women.

UNICEF supports two hospitals that treat rape victims, provide medical and surgical care, voluntary and confidential post-rape counselling, and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. The hospital also facilitates medical referral and reintegration through grass-roots organizations. Medical outreach programmes enhance access to medical and psychosocial care in remote and isolated areas.

Like Safi, there were other girls at the hospital awaiting the delivery of babies conceived through rape. The majority of the girls were there to undergo surgery to repair a fistula, a hole torn between the bladder and the vagina, or between the rectum and the vagina as a result of sexual violence. Often the operation must be repeated because of the severity of damage and infection. Between April and September 2003, more than 150 fistula operations were performed in that hospital. During that same period the hospital registered 973 female victims of sexual violence, ranging from 7-year-old girls to great-grandmothers of 80, with 12 per cent of the girls and women at the hospital testing HIV-positive and 38 per cent having sexually transmitted infections.

In 2004 UNICEF completed a training module titled 'Caring for Survivors' to be used by medical workers, women's and youth groups, judicial personnel and the police force. The module, produced in both English and French, includes training on how to work with and care for survivors, along with interview techniques for collecting evidence, particularly the testimony of survivors and objective documentation. It includes identification

and referral of survivors for reproductive health problems, ensuring consent and confidentiality of results and treatment, and guaranteeing safety and respect for survivors. When and how to administer post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV infection is also covered.

The challenge of implementing a programme to respond to sexual violence demands an approach that allows for monitoring of programme effectiveness and refinement of strategies and activities. Responding to sexual violence is an emerging field, and therefore documenting the programme experience in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and drawing lessons to guide future interventions is important. To this end, UNICEF is developing a rigorous monitoring system that will provide continuous feedback. A specialist has been recruited to help staff and partners develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation component. The Eastern and Southern Africa UNICEF Regional Office in Nairobi is documenting lessons learned from programmes to respond to sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region. Significantly, UNICEF Democratic Republic of the Congo has been instrumental in promoting respect for the confidentiality, dignity and security of survivors, particularly child survivors. In addition, UNICEF has developed protocols for members of the media working with these vulnerable women and children and promotes these standards with its other partners.

In mid-2003, key UN agencies collaborated with government officials and non-governmental organizations to explore how to jointly and comprehensively address the issue of sexual violence. In August 2004, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF and UNHCR submitted a funding proposal that was approved and launched in October of that year. Focusing on the prevention of and response to sexual violations of women, girls and children, the programme aimed to cover three provinces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and some 25,000 victims of sexual violence, with an emphasis on health, psychosocial, legal and socio-economic outcomes.

Over the four-year duration of the programme, information will be gathered, communities sensitized, advocacy undertaken, and decision-makers mobilized. Political, administrative, military and religious leaders will be engaged in the struggle against sexual violence. Medical and health services will be provided to communities. Local community leaders such as teachers, midwives and religious leaders will be recruited to conduct research and provide psychosocial support to promote acceptance of the victims by their families and communities. Legislation on sexual violence will be finalized. Gender sensitization will be provided for police, lawyers, magistrates and medical personnel involved in interviewing, collecting and documenting legal and medical evidence. To ensure family, community and social reintegration, socio-economic opportunities will be sought for the victims, and assistance packages will be determined and evaluated. Mediation strategies will also be developed with communities for acceptance of those who have been subjected to sexual violence.

In Guinea, UNICEF is working with Liberian and Ivorian refugees who are victims of sexual violence. The Nzerekore region is hosting four refugee camps; three for Liberians and one for Ivorians. As of June 2004, 59 per cent of the camps' population were minors and 26 per cent women. Since 2003, UNICEF has provided technical support for a team of trainers on sexual violence. Some 3,500 people have been trained, including community leaders, aid workers, health agents from Médecins Sans Frontières, women's and men's groups for gender equality, teachers in refugee schools and the Brigade Mixte (part of the camp security composed of Liberian refugee volunteers and Guinean security forces). A system has been set up in the camps so children and women can access medical, social, psychosocial, psychiatric or legal aid services and report incidents of sexual violation. Approximately 90 cases of violence are reported and investigated every month through this system. Tracking of the cases and legal judgments remain to be documented.

A culture of violence pervades a society long after the end of formal hostilities. It can be evidenced by

an escalation in violence against women and children, particularly domestic and sexual violence. In Sierra Leone there was a significant incidence of child abuse after the civil war ended, but families often did not report it due to costs and a lack of legal support. Families who did prosecute were often frustrated by frequent adjournments. For that reason, they often accepted settlements and dropped their cases.

UNICEF developed a framework for the provision of services for sexually abused children nationwide.⁴³ The Sexual Violence Committee was formed in March 1999 to respond to the situation of girls and women raped during the invasion of Freetown by the Revolutionary United Front that same year.

Subsequently a network of services was established, and girls who registered with the programme were referred to the nearest facility for medical care and counselling.

As the emergency came to an end, new challenges arose. The Committee developed strategies to ensure a comprehensive and consistent approach by all actors regarding the prevention of, and response to sexual violence in Sierra Leone. The Committee's purpose was to provide technical support and to strengthen coordination of activities and practices, including advocacy for improved medical and legal services and processes. Implementing agencies worked with communities to build their capacity and to promote long-term community ownership of programmes.

The goal was to develop and maintain a directory of services identifying where activities were being undertaken and by whom, highlighting where gaps exist, to develop common protocols and guidelines for sexual-violence prevention and response (including standards of care for survivors), and to advocate for legal reforms. A standardized package has been developed for sensitization and awareness-raising, which included guidance on effective strategies. To strengthen coordination of services and agencies, a networking forum and an information clearing house on sexual violence in Sierra Leone are being established.

Men, women and children displaced by conflict or other disasters are among the most vulnerable people on earth.

In this programme, the safety and security of the survivor is paramount. Their wishes, rights and dignity must be respected. Any information received from the survivor or their family is confidential and to be shared only with those who need to know. Harmful cultural practices are approached with respect, sensitivity and care. Sensitization continues in schools for teachers and students, and in mosques and churches with religious leaders. This approach recognizes that for a community to be empowered to take action on sexual abuse, it must be educated about the various forms of abuse, its consequences and the steps to be taken. Key community actors such as women's groups, the police, schools and vocational institutions were trained, and children were empowered to carry out peer education. Advocacy was also undertaken with the Ministries of Health and Justice in Sierra Leone for the provision of medical care to rape victims and of legal services to be either free or at nominal cost.

The protocol governing these procedures will be an inter-agency guide applicable to all child abuse cases. Gender-Based Violence Committees have been formed at all levels, and monthly meetings are held. It is imperative that victims of sexual abuse receive prompt medical treatment. Medical referral can be made to the police or a doctor, who will examine the survivor and write a report that can be used as evidence in court. The social and psychological needs of the survivor will be assessed and assistance provided by the implementing agency. Where a survivor has decided to take legal action through the Sierra Leone legal system, the case is referred to the Law Officers' Department. If the case is to be prosecuted privately, permission must be sought from the court. Families and communities need to report abuse before any mediation can be done, and every effort must be made to ensure that the girl is not blamed instead of the perpetrator.

UNICEF's programme in Sierra Leone includes child mothers and commercial sex workers as victims of sexual violence. There has been an increase in

public awareness of these issues, but a great deal more has to be done to transform attitudes and behaviours. UNICEF has implemented or directly supported extensive awareness-raising activities by facilitating and participating in sexual and gender-based violence campaigns (rallies, radio discussions and posters), and has trained thousands of teachers in alternatives to corporal punishment.

Disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation

Many girl 'child soldiers' are neglected by post-conflict disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation programmes. In order to be successful, these initiatives must be based on a clear understanding of who the combatants are. The Cape Town Principles define a child soldier as "any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members."⁴⁴ This includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and/or forced into marriage. Programmes that have included special measures for children have traditionally tended to focus narrowly on the needs of boys and to ignore the existence of girl soldiers, who in some countries comprise up to 40 per cent of all child soldiers, thereby compounding discrimination.

The special requirements of female ex-combatants were recognized in 2000 by the UN Security Council, which requested parties to armed conflict to include, where appropriate, provisions for the protection of children, including the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child combatants. It stressed the importance of giving consideration to "the special needs and particular vulnerabilities of girls affected by armed conflict, including, *inter alia*, those heading households, orphaned, sexually exploited and used as combatants", and urged

that “their human rights, protection and welfare be incorporated in the development of policies and programmes, including those for prevention, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.”⁴⁵ This was reinforced in the same year by Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which encouraged “all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants.”⁴⁶

The needs of girl and women soldiers must be systematically assessed to reflect their roles – as fighters, cooks, messengers, spies, labourers and as ‘wives’ and sexual slaves. According to child protection agencies, girl abductees are not only used as combatants, but are also forced into sexual services or taken as ‘bush wives’, thereby increasing the fighting forces’ resistance to release them. In some situations, girl and women soldiers have been reluctant to join demobilization and reintegration programmes, fearing rejection by their families and communities. Reluctance by young women and girls to raise these issues must be foreseen and particular attention paid to the health and psychosocial implications of their experiences during the conflict. Early on, communities must be sensitized to their plight. The obstacles to their successful family and community reintegration should be identified and addressed with special rehabilitation programmes.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF is working with governmental and non-governmental partners to develop guiding principles and procedures for the demobilization and reintegration of children. A national workshop held in April 2003 included a wide cross-section of participants including government representatives, armed opposition groups, civil society and demobilized children. A working group finalized the interim national framework for the demobilization and reintegration of children, and it was approved by the government in February 2004. Despite these efforts, insufficient attention has been accorded to the needs of young women and girls.

From 2000 to 2003, the Armed Forces of Liberia recruited children, both forcibly and voluntarily, in Monrovia and other government-controlled areas. As the war intensified in 2002, Human Rights Watch reported that parents stopped sending their children to school fearing they would be recruited. In July 2003, UNICEF and the non-governmental organization Don Bosco Homes publicly denounced the forcible and voluntary recruitment of girls and boys as young as nine years of age into the government armed forces. UNICEF Liberia supported the participation of six women representatives at the Accra Peace Conference in Ghana in mid-2003, and advocated for the inclusion of gender-specific responses in the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation process and, in particular, for the prioritization and recognition of the rights of women associated with fighting forces. The UNICEF programme created opportunities for training women counsellors and raising awareness of women’s rights among community leaders in the camps for internally displaced persons.⁴⁷

At the end of 2003 the UN Mission in Liberia and the Liberian National Commission on Demilitarization, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration decided to include child ex-combatants in a cash allowance programme where they received US\$300. UNICEF and non-governmental partners objected since such payments could create financial incentives for the recruitment and re-recruitment of child soldiers, making the child ex-combatants vulnerable to theft. Another concern was that the payments could cause community tension – children and others who had not participated in the conflict may have perceived such payments as discriminatory.

Child protection agencies working in Liberia believe that only a small portion of children associated with fighting forces actually enrolled in a demilitarization programme. There were reports that girls were not going through the process because their commanders or ‘husbands’ forbade them to do so. Since girls were less likely to have weapons to turn in, or feared the stigmatization of being associated with the fighting forces, extra efforts were needed to reach them, as undertaken by UNICEF in Sierra

Leone. Long-term, multi-year programming that focuses on community assistance and rehabilitation, with a special emphasis on female ex-combatants, should be given high priority.

Since April 2004, UNICEF has played a pivotal role in coordinating, supervising, monitoring and providing technical support to the demilitarization, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration process in Liberia. Immediately after disarmament and demobilization, the ex-combatants received care and assistance, with specific arrangements made for girls and young women. Medical care, including reproductive health care and HIV education, psychosocial support and counselling were provided. Interim care activities included: the provision of basic amenities; family tracing and reunification; primary health care, counselling and access to legal services for victims of sexual and gender-based violence; life skills education; and support for female ex-combatants with children. Separate, gender-sensitive facilities were provided wherever possible.

Specific programmes for girls include reproductive health services, pre- and post-natal care, parenting support, life skills training and counselling services for sexual and gender-based violence.

The aim is for children to go home as quickly as possible in order to continue the reintegration process in a familial environment. Family tracing and reunification support is provided, and family and community circumstances are assessed to identify support required after reunification. Special support is offered to girls who face the double challenge of returning to families from whom they have been separated for long periods of time and the stigma of being perceived as fighters and/or victims of sexual violence. Active follow-up is conducted to ensure that these children adjust adequately and remain with their families.

UNICEF and the Child Protection Working Group collaborated to provide children with the information they needed to begin the demilitarization, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration process. A communication strategy was developed with the

participation of children and youth. Information was tailored to children and women, using media that would reach them effectively and sensitively. By mid-2004, 6,403 children (5,135 boys and 1,268 girls), had been processed through the interim centres, including 107 foreign nationals (89 boys and 18 girls). UNICEF cooperates closely with the UN Mission to train the military observers who admit children into the programme in basic child rights and protection issues.

The Girls Left Behind project

In Sierra Leone a special project was established to identify and assist some 3,000 girls who had not been included in the original demilitarization, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme. In 2003, 724 girls registered, 110 were reunified with their families, and 460 enrolled in skills training and/or income-generation programmes. Subsequently, in 2004 UNICEF launched The Girls Left Behind project, a short-term intensive intervention for abducted girls and young women to ensure their protection and reintegration and to offer them basic education and skills training. The project was designed by UNICEF in collaboration with the Child Protection Network, Ministry of Social Welfare, and national and international non-governmental organizations. It was implemented by the International Rescue Committee and Caritas Makeni in the Bombali and Kono Districts of Sierra Leone.

The Girls Left Behind project was carried out within the framework of the Child Protection Network and the community-based reintegration approach, and focused on girls and young women who were either still living with their captors or who had been abducted (before reaching the age of 18) and had been released or had escaped. Through intense sensitization of communities, the implementing partners were able to identify 1,014 girls and women in need of help, of which 560 (55 per cent) were provided with services and training.

In Bombali District, 50 per cent to 60 per cent of the girls and young women said they had been abducted, and in Kono, 90 per cent. More than half

said that they had wanted to go through disarmament and demobilization but they lacked the weapons or ammunition that must be turned in before one is allowed to access the programme. Those under 18 years of age did not need to exchange weapons to enter the programme, but most were unaware of this fact. A majority (75 per cent) of girls and young women claimed that the main obstacles to disarming were fear – of being arrested and/or executed – or shame in regards to their families and communities. Many girls and young women felt they would be insecure in a camp setting and most expressed a wish for secure, single-sex cantonment sites for women.

The project included an active sensitization and advocacy campaign involving interactive radio programmes run by the children. The identification and location process included girl-to-girl identifications facilitated through social gatherings, as well as close collaboration with women leaders, women's groups, peer/youth groups and female ex-combatants. Community-based groups were also brought in, such as Child Welfare Committees and Family Support Units, and the project encouraged self-referrals at its drop-in centres. The project also included a family tracing and reunification component, which aimed to assist girls in making their reunification decisions. The girls were given several options: reunification with their family, remaining with their 'husband', or living with friends. The programme also facilitated access to services such as family mediation and counselling services for those girls remaining with their 'husbands'.

Other services included basic primary health care for girls and babies, medical care for war wounds and sexual trauma, specialized care for severely traumatized children and young women, and adolescent health care. Access was provided to schooling through the Community Education Investment Programme, and to skills training, small business development, apprenticeships and non-formal literacy, numeracy and life skills. Child Protection Advisers in each district were responsible for following up on the girls in their areas. The Social Development Workers at the chiefdom level were also responsible for monitoring and follow-up. In

addition, close collaboration was encouraged with the Sierra Leone Police and Family Support Units to deal with gender-based violence.

To facilitate the process, UNICEF devised a beneficiary verification questionnaire to be completed by the girls and women who had been abducted. It included their name, current age, date and place of abduction (i.e., from parents, relatives or guardians), the circumstances surrounding the abduction and their age and grade in school at the time of the abduction. Also required were details of the attacks on the village, the name of the paramount chief at the time, the abductor's commander, as well as who the former abductee was currently staying with and her relationship to that person. If a girl was staying with a commander or 'bush husband', it was essential to know if it was voluntary or forced, along with the names and ages of any children born to the abducted young woman. In order to enrol her into an appropriate reintegration and rehabilitation programme, information regarding whether she had escaped, had been released or demobilized, when and where this had occurred, and the whereabouts of her parents or relatives was also determined.

The project was evaluated by UNICEF Sierra Leone in 2004. Some 505 girls were reunited with their families. As many as 50 per cent did not stay with their families, but returned to former male ex-combatant partners or a same-sex peer group. Information provided by the girls and women showed that 63 per cent of those who completed the programme had been reunified with their families.

Beneficiaries of the Girls Left Behind project all expected to be taught some skills, and around 20 per cent expected to learn basic literacy and numeracy. Most beneficiaries were satisfied with their skills training, but were disappointed that their literacy needs remained unmet, that appropriate child care was lacking, and that food was not provided during training. Only 1 per cent said that they had expected counselling, yet after completing the project as many as 35 per cent of the girls and women said that they had most appreciated the counselling, friendships and encouragement they received.

In Sierra Leone a special project was established to identify and assist some 3,000 girls who had not been included in the original demilitarization, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme.

According to the Family Support Unit, the number of girls and young women subjected to sexual and physical violence in Sierra Leone is still high, and further sensitization is needed. The levels of sexual and physical abuse were particularly challenging in Koidu town where there were many separated single girls and young women, some of whom had turned to prostitution to survive. And in Kamakwie, the influx of more than 8,000 diamond miners in 2004 exacerbated the vulnerability of single girls and young women. The psychosocial benefits of the skills training programmes were significant. Through group work with the guidance of a trainer and counsellor, most of the formerly abducted girls who had been suffering from severe war-related trauma, stigmatization or alienation from their families and communities were rehabilitated and reintegrated. Other reunified girls and young women did not want to stay in their old communities. Many testified that although their parents and other immediate family members were happy to receive them, community reactions were not always positive. Many girls were subjected to verbal abuse, beatings and exclusion from community social life.

Those communities that were the focus of workshops, sensitization and mediation in the early stages of the Girls Left Behind project underwent radical changes in the way they perceived and treated formerly abducted girls. In most cases, workshops and sensitization programmes were organized or facilitated by UNICEF's partners in combination with skills training projects, which were a key reintegration strategy. The majority of girls and women originally said they felt like social outcasts, but after the workshop they felt more confident, respected, more capable of settling conflicts and much happier.

Health

Often in the pre-conflict period there is a deterioration in services, particularly health and education. Vulnerability to physical abuse and sexually transmitted infections, particularly HIV/AIDS, increases during conflicts due to the high mobility of troops and internally displaced persons, and the use of sexual violence as a strategic and tactical weapon of war. In the vast majority of cases, women and girls seriously injured by rape and other sexual assaults are either unable to access appropriate medical treatment or are deterred from seeking assistance for fear of being stigmatized.⁴⁸

The abnormally high maternal mortality rate in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo – 2,000 deaths per 100,000 live births in urban areas – is an indicator of the impact of armed conflict, with pregnant women being two to three times more likely than other women to die of violent causes.⁴⁹ According to the UNICEF office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 20 per cent of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19, have had at least one child, and are at a greater risk of maternal mortality.

Before the 2002–2003 conflict in Liberia, the prevalence of pregnancy among young women was relatively high, with 213 out of every 1,000 young women aged 15 to 19 years old giving birth each year. Maternal mortality at that time had reached 578 deaths per 100,000 live births, primarily due to the lack of emergency obstetric care and poor nutrition among pregnant women.⁵⁰ Less than half of the country's primary health clinics operating are still functioning since the war. The clinics that still exist are clustered in central Monrovia and urban areas. The most common obstetric emergencies are caused by incomplete and unsafe abortions, which account for more than 40 per cent of all reported obstetric complications in Liberia.

For women and children from Côte d'Ivoire who fled into Ghana and Liberia when conflict erupted in 2002, conditions were deplorable. Clean water was unavailable and health care completely non-existent as health centres lacked both basic supplies and adequate staff. Instead of the usual staff of 15, only one health worker – a midwife – was working in the Daloa regional hospital. The health-care system had completely broken down as a result of fighting and staff departures. Maternal mortality was estimated at 597 deaths per 100,000 live births, with one out of three women between the ages of 25 and 34 dying from obstetric complications, and more than half of all women giving birth without assistance from qualified health personnel.

The UNICEF Liberia 2001–2002 country programme, prepared within the context of post-war rehabilitation, sought to reduce the high levels of child and maternal mortality and increase primary-school learning achievements, especially for girls. It also sought to accelerate reintegration of war-affected children into social and community structures and support the growing number of internally displaced persons. The programme aimed to build community capacities to better manage child, adolescent and maternal health. It supported capacity assessments and studies on childcare and child-rearing practices, to prepare communities for implementation of the integrated management of childhood illnesses strategy. In July 2003, UNICEF began a campaign to vaccinate children under five years old and women of childbearing age in Monrovia.

Liberia's maternal mortality rate of 780 per 100,000 is one of the highest in world. And morbidity levels among both children and women are estimated at around 75 per cent. Health practices and knowledge of HIV/AIDS are inadequate. Health facilities are insufficient, and medical supplies and staff are scarce.⁵¹ UNICEF provided high-protein biscuits to displaced lactating mothers in Liberian refugee camps and helped provide for more than 150,000 displaced persons and host communities in the Monrovia area through the provision of drugs, basic equipment and medical supplies to implementing partners. Technical and financial support were provided to train more than 100 nurses,

midwives and other health workers on reproductive health and case management of malaria and other childhood diseases. Health clinic assessments were completed so they could reopen to the general public.

To address the high rate of maternal deaths, training was conducted for community volunteers and more than 2,000 women in 52 communities in Bonthe, Kenema and Port Loko. The training covered growth monitoring, identification of malnourished children and referral services. Nutrition education was also conducted on weaning foods and feeding practices. Almost 1,000 women were trained as traditional birth attendants, and during 2000–2003 some 2,450 received refresher training, basic diagnostic equipment and midwifery kits.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and other implementing partners, UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund work together on a project called the Reduction of Maternal Morbidity and Mortality in Liberia. It addresses the major causes of maternal death and sickness in Liberia: anaemia; post-partum haemorrhage and sepsis; pregnancy-related complications; and toxæmia and infections associated with unprofessional abortions. Advocacy and social mobilization are being conducted at the national level for decision and policy makers.

In addition to the crisis in maternal health care that is exacerbated by conflict, rehabilitation programmes must also address the escalating HIV/AIDS crisis. As reported by the UN Secretary-General in 2003: "There is a correlation between the spread of the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and sexual violence and the exploitation of girls and women in corridors of wars. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates that rates of HIV among combatants are three to four times higher than the infection rates of the local population. And when rape is used as a weapon of war, the consequences for girls and women are often deadly. Armed conflict also exacerbates other conditions in which HIV/AIDS

thrives, such as extreme poverty, displacement and separation.”⁵²

Earlier, in 2000, the Secretary-General stated “Armed conflicts also increasingly serve as vectors for the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which follows closely on the heels of armed troops and in the corridors of conflict.”⁵³ UNICEF has identified fighting HIV/AIDS as one of the five organizational priorities in its 2002–2005 medium-term strategic plan. UNICEF aims to support and strengthen the capacities of individuals, families, communities and nations to prevent HIV infection and to ensure protection and care for children and young people infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS.

In countries exposed to conflict, the reliability of data on HIV prevalence varies widely, but it is clear that war, with high troop mobility and large numbers of internally displaced persons, significantly increases a population’s vulnerability to infection. Conflicts also cause a massive breakdown of the economy, leading to extreme poverty, with women and girls forced to sell sex for money or ‘protection’. Recent reports in the Democratic Republic of the Congo suggest that up to 20 per cent of the population may be infected with HIV.⁵⁴ At the end of 2001 the adult prevalence rate was around 4.9 per cent, and up to 200,000 children under age 15 were infected with HIV/AIDS, with the rate for girls being much higher. An independent experts’ assessment, *Women, War and Peace*, reports on a study in North Kivu that estimated HIV/AIDS infection rates of 54 per cent among adult women, 32 per cent among adult men and 26 per cent among children.⁵⁵

The presence of soldiers from countries with a high HIV/AIDS prevalence rate – Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe – is likely to increase rates of HIV/AIDS. According to a special report on human rights, 1.3 million people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are infected with HIV/AIDS, including one half of all hospital patients. And more than 60 per cent of those between the ages of 15 and 39 are likely to contract the disease by 2010.⁵⁶ According to the director of the National AIDS Control Programme, infection occurs at an early age – among children aged 10 to 14 years –

and the HIV/AIDS prevalence for the 15-to-40 age group is 15 per cent to 19 per cent higher than in other countries.⁵⁷

The prevention of HIV and AIDS also continues to pose one of the principal challenges in post-war Sierra Leone as the epidemic continues to escalate. It was estimated that 70 per cent to 90 per cent of rape survivors had contracted sexually transmitted infections. Fear of stigma related to sexual or reproductive health often prevents these women and girls from seeking health care or HIV testing. And the cost of treatment and care is often out of reach.⁵⁸ Although some 88 per cent of adolescents and youths had access to information on HIV and AIDS⁵⁹ only 7.7 per cent could name three methods of HIV/AIDS prevention or three modes of transmission. And fewer than 10 per cent used condoms. Stigma and denial about the disease are high.

In 2001 UNICEF, in conjunction with the Government of Sierra Leone, conducted a survey on adolescents’ knowledge, attitude and practice concerning HIV/AIDS. About 58 per cent of the adolescents (58.9 per cent female and 56.4 per cent male) reported having had sex. Some 44.8 per cent had their sexual debut by the age of 18 years and 1.8 per cent by the age of 13 years. Only 4 per cent used a condom during their first sexual intercourse; generally females had older partners than males, and typically the partners were within four years of their age.⁶⁰

UNICEF has implemented an HIV/AIDS prevention programme aimed at increasing adolescents’ knowledge of HIV/AIDS. Two projects focused on promoting information, awareness and life skills for youth both in and out of school. The objectives were to teach 800,000 adolescents how to avoid HIV infection, and to teach life skills to 10,000 young people. Some 240 representatives of the newly reconstituted social mobilization committees in the Bo, Bombali, Kailahun, Kenema, Koinadugu, Kono and Pujehun districts were trained and supported in HIV/AIDS social mobilization techniques. The committees serve as focal points for all district communication initiatives on HIV and AIDS. They

distributed posters, leaflets, stickers and booklets on HIV/AIDS in their respective communities.

The social mobilization committees sensitized communities on HIV/AIDS, monitored and provided feedback to partners on communication initiatives, and worked with other partners to enhance collaboration and harmonization of programme strategies. The life skills programmes focused on the development of educational and informational materials, training of facilitators, and advocacy for support and ownership of the programme by government ministries. Nationwide, some 320 teachers were trained on life skills facilitation and focal points were identified to facilitate HIV and AIDS prevention activities in schools.

The 2002 National HIV and AIDS Communication Strategy was developed jointly by UNICEF and the Government of Sierra Leone to provide basic information on causes, transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS and to reduce stigma surrounding the disease and its victims. Special emphasis was placed on empowering women and girls, and on increasing understanding of the rights of women and children. Commercial sex workers were offered training in means of income-generation.

Both Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia are likely to face worsening rates of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. In Côte d'Ivoire, HIV rates are already a major problem, particularly among women and young people. According to the UN Population Fund, national HIV prevalence rates, estimated at 12 per cent among women and 11 per cent among young people aged 15 to 29, are the highest in the subregion. Sexual relations begin early, with 50 per cent of adolescents sexually active from the age of 15.⁶¹ In Liberia, UNICEF supported a young mothers' empowerment programme in the Montserrado refugee camps, working with the International Rescue Committee to increase health and knowledge, promote self-esteem, and prevent sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. Activities have focused on facilitating the formation of young mothers' groups and training of trainers on life skills and adolescent health. Meetings and training sessions were held on gender-based violence, sexually transmitted infections and

HIV/AIDS, safe motherhood, nutrition and hygiene. Youth-friendly health counselling and referral services were provided. Young mothers were encouraged to return to school or attend adult literacy classes and given access to microcredit schemes for activities such as baking, sewing, tie-dyeing, and soap-making.

Concerns have been raised regarding gender equality⁶² in all relevant legislation in Liberia, with social mobilization and advocacy for support of the national HIV/AIDS policy. One programme goal is to lobby for the implementation of gender equity laws. Other objectives are to change negative male attitudes towards women and to improve women's ability to negotiate safer sex with their partners. These goals can be achieved through social mobilization, multimedia programmes promoting women's rights, life skills training and the provision of improved economic opportunities for women. Women are already being provided with greater access to information and services, particularly through women's networks.

Education

Education plays an enormously constructive role in healing war-torn communities. One key way to rehabilitate traumatized women and girls is to address their inequitable access to education and skills training. At the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, some 180 countries committed to "ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances [including those affected by war] and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality."⁶³

UNICEF has upheld this commitment in its medium-term strategic plan for 2002–2005, which regards girls' education as "central to the fulfilment of developmental outcomes for present and future generations of children. Girls' education is an investment that serves as a way to achieve education for **all** children, for early childhood care and education, and adolescent well-being. Girls' education provides a mechanism for families, communities and societies to escape from poverty on a massive scale."⁶⁴ UNICEF's principles and core

Education plays an enormously constructive role in healing war-torn communities.

commitments for children in emergencies aim to promote access to quality early learning and education for all children in affected communities, with a specific focus on girls.

Each of the four countries in West Africa that are still experiencing violent upheaval had poor educational achievement levels prior to the conflict, with many girls dropping out. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the admission and retention gaps between boys and girls remain high. Years of conflict have exacerbated this situation: illiteracy is now estimated at 46 per cent for women and 17.5 per cent among men. Women are extremely underrepresented in the workplace and in leadership positions.

In Sierra Leone, young people view education as vital to the establishment of peace. In 2002 demobilized adolescent soldiers threatened to return to the front lines if promises to provide education and skills training were not kept. A survey from that same year revealed that girls experienced difficulties entering and staying in school due to widespread gender discrimination,⁶⁵ with 60 per cent not attending primary school and 88 per cent failing to achieve secondary levels.⁶⁶ Parents prioritize the education of boys over girls when resources are limited. Often girls were expected to tend the house and prepare for eventual marriage rather than go to school. The absence of educational and employment opportunities has resulted in many young girls' being driven into commercial sex work, early marriages or continued poverty.⁶⁷

Although the legal framework exists for pregnant girls to continue their education, it is rarely enforced; girls who are in school and either get pregnant or married are expected to quit school. Girls who were abducted by the Revolutionary United Front and became adolescent mothers experienced stigmatization in school. The majority

of 'girl soldiers' in Sierra Leone were not included in reintegration and rehabilitation programmes; thus they did not benefit from the skills training and accelerated learning that was provided for their male counterparts.

The Forum for African Women Educationalists, established in 1998 in Liberia, has dedicated itself to addressing girls' education in Sierra Leone. Since the war it has provided girls with formal education, vocational training, counselling, medical and psychosocial care, recreation and a variety of other services. Thousands of girls have benefited, including many who have suffered sexual violence or are child mothers. The Forum continues to advocate for the education and protection of girls.⁶⁸

Other programmes in Sierra Leone that have reached out to war-affected children and adolescents include the Emergency Education Programme and the Community Education Investment Programme. The former, implemented by UNICEF and the International Rescue Committee, focused on refugees and internally displaced persons in refugee camps in Bo, Kailahun, Kambia, Kenema, Kono and Pujehun Districts. The programme aims to supplement formal education, increase school attendance, promote intellectual and physical development, and support the eventual reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons into their communities. Meetings were conducted with youth focus groups to determine the needs of girls and boys and develop strategies to address those needs according to priority and resource availability. Youth leaders moved the programme activities forward, organizing regular meetings to review progress. Young people designed and implemented peer education programmes, provided counselling, and carried out mobilization and advocacy in their respective communities.

These activities and programmes were implemented primarily through young women's social

As a result of the war [in Liberia], many schools were closed for several months in 2003. Those that remained open were usually overcrowded and often lacked equipment, materials, windows or a roof.

clubs. Many young people expressed a desire to learn more about health issues but were too timid to participate in the classroom. The social clubs were created to provide them with a space to learn about health and gender issues – and to encourage them to learn, express themselves artistically and intellectually, and develop leadership and problem-solving skills. Activities undertaken included health education and discussions on HIV/AIDS and adolescent health, with a focus on awareness of gender-based violence.

In conjunction with the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs in Sierra Leone, UNICEF has developed and implemented the Community Education Investment Programme for former child combatants, reunified children and children with physical disabilities. The partners viewed community schooling as critical to the reintegration of children affected by war. The programme aimed to assist the children for a minimum of five years to ensure they at least completed primary school. It was envisaged that as part of the reintegration programme the child ex-combatants would be included in the larger education framework established by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

Participating schools received teacher training or recreational supplies in lieu of charging fees for admittance of demobilized students. The programme also supported initiatives by parent and teacher associations and expanded local school capacity through direct support to community-based education service providers. This successfully dispelled resentment that benefits were being given to children who participated in the armed conflict over other children.

Since few girls were part of the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation process, other specialized programmes had to be developed to redress this discrimination. The Training and Employment Programme was launched in 2000 to provide skills and literacy training for ex-combatants aged 15 years and older who did not wish to attend formal school.

The Complementary Rapid Education for Primary Schools initiative was launched in 2000 to cater to the needs of children aged 10 to 14 who were not in school. The initiative was jointly developed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and UNICEF. It compressed the regular six-year primary school programme into three years to enable the children to catch up with their peers at the primary- or post-primary school level. The programme included psychosocial/trauma healing and also covered HIV/AIDS. Some 619 specially trained teachers taught the classes after regular school hours in existing primary school facilities. By the end of 2002, some 25,073 children had been reached, 42 per cent of whom were girls.

Similarly in Liberia, gender discrimination is evidenced by an illiteracy rate among women that is more than double that of men. Almost a quarter of girls in Liberia have at least one child before 18 years of age, and the country has one of the highest global attrition rates for adolescent girls, approximately 18 per cent. According to a 1999 UNICEF report, 86 per cent of those surveyed in Montserrado (one of the more developed counties) indicated that school fees were a key barrier to girls' education. In the rural areas, 68 per cent cited similar reasons. The interplay between poverty and social inequities has led to the exclusion of girls.⁶⁹ In 2002, the Accelerated Learning Programme was piloted in Liberia, designed specifically for war-affected youth.

Some 515 females and 162 males participated in the programme, which concentrated on training in basic literacy and numeracy.

As a result of the war, many schools were closed for several months in 2003. Those that remained open were usually overcrowded and often lacked equipment, materials, windows or a roof. According to the UN Consolidated Appeal for Liberia, "School facilities lack proper ventilation, lighting, toilets, libraries, laboratories and playgrounds." Approximately 50,000 displaced civilians used school compounds in Monrovia as temporary shelters during 2003. In September 2003, the National Transitional Government of Liberia ordered the displaced to leave the compounds so schooling could resume. However, the displaced were reluctant to move to camps, fearing continued insecurity.

Public schools in and around the Liberian capital reopened in November 2003 as part of a 'Back to School' campaign sponsored by UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and non-governmental partners. The 'Back to School' campaign aims to revitalize the educational system for 750,000 children. Reopening the schools provides the children and their parents with a much-needed sense of stability and normalcy in a country that had been at war for virtually the past 14 years. Some specific objectives of the campaign include the provision of educational supplies, teaching materials and equipment, strengthening the Ministry of Education's institutional capacity; encouraging girls' education to address long-standing gender imbalances; and mobilizing children, parents and communities to promote enrolment in school.

To redress the impact of conflict, displacement, gender disparity and chronic poverty, various targets were set: to increase basic education by 30 per cent for all children aged 6 to 18, and to increase gender parity in schools by 60 per cent. Activities focused on girls' clubs in schools and girls' enrolment in the Accelerated Learning Programme. The outcome was very positive, especially in rural areas, due to parents' increased awareness of the importance of girls' education. Girls were trained in peer mentoring as a means of encouraging other girls to

stay in school. UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Education to place emphasis on female role models and to make school facilities and school environments more 'girl friendly'. Throughout the country, traditionally perceived gender roles are still strongly entrenched, so continued work is necessary. The UNICEF country programme in Liberia emphasizes girls' education in all its activities and helped stress the importance of girl's participation during teacher orientation. To encourage girls' attendance, incentives were established for the girls and their families. As a long-term strategy, a Girl's Education Unit was established in the Ministry of Education.

Children's consultative dialogues were held in communities and camps to select 23 boys and 23 girls for a preparatory meeting in Monrovia that led to the formation of the National Children's Consultative Forum with branches in several counties and camps for displaced persons. As part of the plan of action developed by the children during the Forum, the group serves as the mechanism for children's participation in National Immunization Days, HIV/AIDS awareness and sensitization dialogues in schools and communities, and the formation of child rights clubs in schools.

In 2000, UNICEF recognized the massive unmet needs of the population in northern Liberia after the war. It focused on revitalizing and improving basic education, with special attention paid to internally displaced children and youth, and peace-building and capacity development of the Ministry of Education and non-governmental organization partners.⁷⁰ Child-Friendly Spaces were established in four camps for internally displaced persons, providing a sense of security amid the chaos of conflict and flight. Forty teachers were trained to provide early childhood development and basic education for some 3,660 children aged 5 to 18. These efforts provided children with literacy, numeracy, access to recreation and psychosocial support. Teachers benefited from a psychosocial programme that taught them to cope with children affected by armed conflict, as well as their own personal trauma.

The Accelerated Learning Programme, which condensed six years of formal primary school into three years, was also initiated in the Child-Friendly Spaces programme with support from the Ministry of Education. The Forum for African Women Educationalists supported displaced female teachers and children by implementing a psychosocial programme for abused girls in the child-friendly spaces. UNICEF also supported other non-governmental organizations such as Don Bosco Homes, Children's Assistance Programme, Community Human Development Agency, Child Arts Liberia and Girls in Crisis, to provide art, sports and recreation activities for 15,000 internally displaced children in four child-friendly spaces and six communities.⁷¹

One of the more effective and inclusive programmes that made a special effort to focus on girls has been the Support to War-Affected Youth, a consortium of six community-based non-governmental agencies, combining education, health and child protection advocacy for children in situations of crisis and instability. The programme, which was primarily supported by USAID, facilitated the implementation of life skills education for teenage mothers, youth clubs focusing on HIV/AIDS prevention and recreation, resource centres for girls, transit homes for vulnerable youth, early childhood development programmes, vocational skills training, accelerated learning programmes, sports and recreation activities, and the creation of products containing peace and reconciliation messages.

The programme made special efforts to reach out to both young girls and adolescents. Some 352 girls, of whom 194 were teenage mothers, were enrolled in life skills and education programmes in five counties. Some 500 teenage mothers completed life skills training, and more than 2,000 peer educators were trained in HIV/AIDS prevention. Subsequent activities focused on supporting and facilitating the Integrated Early Childhood Development programme for children affected by war. Plans include the implementation of an integrated education programme for demobilized and disarmed child soldiers through the Accelerated Learning Programme, basic literacy and numeracy, health and hygiene education, nutrition, life skills education, HIV/AIDS education, reproductive health

and services, and sports and recreation activities. The programme will be used as a hub for Accelerated Learning and will facilitate the creation of a pool of trained teachers for both community-based non-governmental organizations and school programmes for demobilized children.

The programme aims to implement integrated early childhood development for the children of participating mothers. Parents and caregivers will be trained in key components of integrated early childhood development, including human rights and gender. The programme will also focus on girls' education and the establishment of girls' education clubs, community reading corners and libraries. Girls will also receive vocational training in such areas as agriculture, tailoring, graphic design and quilting. HIV/AIDS and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, health and hygiene education, art, dance and music, peace education and recreation activities will also be components of the programme.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF supported a study in Kasai Province on the reasons for girls' low attendance in school. In late 2001, UNICEF began a girls' education programme in conjunction with the government to increase enrolment and decrease drop-out rates. In December 2003, UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy visited the country to launch a national campaign to promote girls' education called 'All Girls to School' and met with women and girls who had been victims of sexual violence.

It is estimated that 1 million primary schoolchildren and 250,000 secondary schoolchildren in Côte d'Ivoire have had their education brutally interrupted since the conflict that began in September 2002. The majority of these out-of-school children were young girls like Awa, a 12-year-old displaced girl who was featured in a radio and television announcement made with UNICEF's support. Awa said, "We, the children of Côte d'Ivoire, want the war to stop now so that all the children ... can go back to school. It's our right!"

UNICEF firmly believes that children who go to school are less vulnerable and better protected

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against violence, discrimination and abuse. Children who go to school are also less likely to be re-recruited into warfare. To that end, UNICEF helped launch a 'Back to School' campaign in February 2004 at the Ngokro School in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire. Education kits and learning materials were provided for more than 1,000 children, and recreation kits for some 4,000 children. The rights to education and recreation are fundamental to every child's development. The stability, learning and development that education and recreation provide are particularly crucial in times of conflict when children's lives are in disarray – especially those who are displaced like Awa.

UNICEF supported education and recreation activities not only in schools, but also in transit centres for internally displaced persons, such as the Mie Gou Displaced Persons Transit Centre in Yamoussoukro. Each day the Centre holds classes for primary school students and conducts recreational activities for pre-schoolers. All children are encouraged to attend no matter the length of their stay at the Centre. Addressing Ministry of Education officials, parents and the media in Côte d'Ivoire, Rima Salah, then UNICEF's Director for West and Central Africa, said: "We must remember that we are not doing children a favour by educating them. Education is their fundamental right as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF believes in a world in which all the rights of children are respected; a world where children are protected from violence and exploitation; a world where conflicts are resolved by dialogue, not war; a world in which all children have the right to quality education and health services; a world that ends the vicious circle of poverty and a world where all children participate in their full development and future. That is why we must make every effort to get girls and boys back to school to help safeguard both their future and the future of their country."⁷²

IV. ACCOUNTABILITY

Alarmed by reports that thousands of women and girls were brutally raped, mutilated and killed in the Ituri Province, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy stated in June 2003 that "these attacks against innocent civilians are being committed with impunity... those individuals and groups who are committing these horrific crimes must never forget they are accountable under international law... the world must hold them accountable."⁷³ One means of holding perpetrators of these atrocious acts of sexual violence accountable is the introduction of special measures and mechanisms that take gender-based discrimination into account when providing redress.

As war-torn countries struggle to come to terms with the past and move from a culture of violence and impunity to one based on a rule of law and a respect for gender equality, reconstructing and healing divided communities becomes paramount. It is an exceedingly complex process requiring international assistance and indigenous capacity. One means of addressing the issue of accountability has been the establishment of truth and reconciliation commissions and special courts. Underpinning these mechanisms is the belief that revealing the truth about the past in a secure, protected environment is the beginning of the healing process. The best example in the West and Central Africa region is in Sierra Leone where a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a Special Court were established.

Civil society groups first suggested the concept of a truth and reconciliation commission to the government in early 1999. By 2000, Parliament passed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, which recognizes the impact of conflict on children and calls

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended that communities be sensitized to children's conflict experiences, particularly the sexual violence experienced by both boys and girls.

for special procedures to address the needs of children who were victims, or perpetrators, of violence. The Commission was established to examine what happened during the civil war and the context in which it occurred by reaching out to victims, perpetrators and witnesses of human rights violations.

Investigators took statements, held public hearings and ultimately produced a report on the civil war that recommended ways to deal with its effects and prevent further outbreaks. This process of 'truth-telling' was regarded by many as the foundation of genuine reconciliation, peace and development, and one that would result in the culture of transparency, accountability and moral judgment fundamental to reconstruction and reconciliation.

Recognizing the Commission's unprecedented challenge in addressing the experiences of children during the armed conflict, UNICEF, in collaboration with the National Forum for Human Rights and the Human Rights Division of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone, organized a meeting on children and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 4 to 6 June 2001 in Freetown.⁷⁴ The meeting brought together national and international experts, as well as a group of children. It recommended that the Commission pay special attention to the experiences of girls, and specifically address the gender-based violence that occurred during the conflict. It advised that children's confidential statements should be taken by a social worker familiar to the child. It also recommended that the organizational structure and staffing of the commission should reflect the fact that a large number of victims of the conflict were women and children.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended that communities be sensitized to children's conflict experiences, particularly the

sexual violence experienced by both boys and girls. This is directly linked to the Commission's function: "to work to help restore the human dignity of victims and promote reconciliation by providing an opportunity for victims to give an account of the violations and abuses suffered and for perpetrators to relate their experiences, and by creating a climate which fosters constructive interchange between victims and perpetrators, giving special attention to the subject of sexual abuses and to the experiences of children within the armed conflict."⁷⁵

The Act also upheld that the Commission "shall take into account the interests of victims and witnesses when inviting them to give statements, including the security and other concerns of those who may not wish to recount their stories in public, and the Commission may also implement special procedures to address the needs of such particular victims as children or those who have suffered sexual abuses, as well as in working with child perpetrators of abuses or violations."⁷⁶ The UNICEF report titled 'Children and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Sierra Leone' noted that while children of both sexes were subjected to violations, many abuses such as rape and forced marriages were carried out specifically against girls. UNICEF recommended that the Commission pay special attention to the experiences of girls and specifically address gender-based violence. This would include amassing disaggregated data on gender-based violence in addition to data according to the child's age; appointing staff with expertise on sexual violence; and working with local agencies to ensure victims of sexual violence are not rejected by their communities.⁷⁷ UNICEF and child protection agencies worked very closely with the Commission's interviewers to obtain statements from children.

To ensure that the Commission paid special attention to gender-based violence, a Women's Task Force was formed in 2001. Members were drawn from

women's non-governmental organizations, human rights organizations, the UN Mission in Sierra Leone and UN agencies. The International Human Rights Law Group (now Global Rights) acted as facilitator. Initially the concerns of women and victims of sexual violence in relation to both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court were discussed. Members also examined the mechanisms and structures that should be implemented by the Commission and Special Court to address the concerns of women and girls and what steps needed to be taken to ensure a full examination of these issues.⁷⁸

Guidelines were developed to ensure that survivors of sexual violence were treated with dignity. Staff were trained on techniques for interviewing and recording statements in a manner that ensured the victim's dignity and safety, avoided re-traumatization and guaranteed confidentiality. The task force recommended reparations for female survivors of human rights abuses. Training on legal reform and human rights was recommended for judiciary and law enforcement officers to ensure increased protection for women. The task force stressed the need for increased assistance for women (shelter, medical care, education, skills training, mental health programmes, etc.), as well as strengthening existing women's groups through capacity-building. It recommended that Commission members receive special training on dealing with gender-specific violations and abuse and that a policy be developed on the provision of psychosocial support to the victims. Most of the recommendations made by the Women's Task Force were implemented due to strong civil society interest in the Commission's work and support from the UN and international non-governmental organizations.

The Coalition for Women's Human Rights in Conflict Situations testified in May 2003 before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's special hearings on sexual violence during the conflict in Sierra Leone. "Sexual violence has remained Sierra Leone's invisible war crime. Thousands were raped during the decade-long war," said Binaifer Nowrojee, a Kenyan lawyer who testified on behalf of the Coalition.

"The TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] is providing an important historic opportunity to give voice to the silent suffering of these rape survivors."⁷⁹ The Coalition urged the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to ensure it provided an environment with privacy and support necessary to encourage victims to come forward to testify. It exhorted the Commission to ensure that the wartime experiences of women and girls were fully reflected in the findings. In consideration of rape and other sexual-violence crimes, the Coalition urged the Commission to frame its findings within the context of the expanding international law and not to downplay or trivialize the women's experiences. In conclusion, the Coalition prevailed upon the Commission to ensure that their recommendations to the Government of Sierra Leone and the international community consider the specific needs of the women survivors.⁸⁰

The Commission has served as a vital mechanism for community healing. One of the young girls who testified before the Commission said: "I am very happy that at the end of everything my family has now accepted me back as a member of the family after a lot of mediation. For this I would like to say I am grateful to all the social workers and other parties that have made it possible for me to gain back my childhood and above all my family."⁸¹ In response to a request from children that the Commission prepare a child-friendly version of its report, UNICEF and representatives of children's groups produced an unprecedented children's guide to the Commission. 'The Truth and Reconciliation Report for the Children of Sierra Leone' is an official account of the Commission's findings, supplemented with the statements of children. The Commission found that during the war girls and women were targeted for sexual abuse, forced pregnancy and trafficking, and many did not return home and were living in extreme poverty. Most of the abductees used as sex slaves have not been reintegrated into families and communities and continue to be subjected to hostility directed at them and their children. The Commission has recommended a statement of apology from the Government of Sierra Leone for these egregious violations, with child protection agencies

encouraging communities to reintegrate these girls and provide support for them and their children. Other recommendations were that the government should pass laws forbidding the marriage of girls under age 18, and any case of sexual relations with girls younger than 16 should be prosecuted as rape. The government should also take steps to end the practice whereby rape victims are made to marry the offender.⁸²

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission closed at the end of March 2004 and released its final report in October of that year. The report detailed what the Commission had learned about the civil war from the statements of victims, perpetrators and witnesses and through its investigations and hearings. It found “the Revolutionary United Front, the Armed Forces Ruling Council...and the Sierra Leone Army ... to be the primary organizations that committed violations against children.”⁸³ It recommended reforms to prevent a repetition of the civil war and atrocities, to address impunity, to respond to the needs of victims and to promote healing and reconciliation. The Truth and Reconciliation Act of 2000 required the government to implement all of the Commission’s recommendations and stated that the government should facilitate the implementation of recommendations addressed to others, such as non-governmental organizations and the international community. A follow-up committee is to be formed to monitor the implementation of the Commission’s recommendations and, where necessary, assist in the process. This committee will include representatives from the UN and the countries that promised to oversee implementation of the Lomé Peace Agreement in 1999.

Globally, perpetrators of violence against girls and women during wartime are also being brought before courts of justice. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court explicitly states that rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization or any other form of sexual violence constitute the most serious war crimes and crimes against humanity. In Sierra Leone on 16 January 2002, the Government and the UN signed an agreement creating a Special Court to try

those responsible for the most atrocious crimes during the civil war. The purpose of the Special Court is to help create peace based on justice by showing that those who make war and commit very serious crimes will not remain unpunished.

The Special Court can “prosecute persons who committed the following crimes as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population ... Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and any other form of sexual violence.”⁸⁴ Under Sierra Leonean law the Special Court is allowed to try people for crimes including abusing girls under 14 years old and abducting girls for “immoral purposes”. On 7 May 2004, for the first time at a war crimes tribunal, the charge of “forced marriage” was added as a new count in the category of sexual violence to indictments against six defendants alleged to have been the leaders of the two major factions. David Crane, the Special Court’s Chief Prosecutor, stated, “We will show that this condition, these forced marriage arrangements, were and are inhumane acts and should forever be recognized as a crime against humanity.” Linked with this is another new charge, the recruitment of child soldiers. The Chief Prosecutor argued, “There is in Sierra Leone an entire lost generation of children, lost souls wallowing in a cesspool of physical and psychological torment. No child should be forced into situations that cause them to mutilate, maim, rape and murder.”⁸⁵

Many lessons from Sierra Leone can be applied in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia. In the former, international organizations have estimated that as many as 10,000 women and girls may have been raped by combatants. All groups recruited children for military service, some as young as 7 years old, subjecting the children to risks and trauma. The plan to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the Democratic Republic of the Congo was a result of the Sun City accord wherein it was agreed that the Commission would consider political, economic and social crimes committed. According to Human Rights Watch, investigations into and prosecutions for sexual violence and other gender-based crimes can

Globally, perpetrators of violence against girls and women during wartime are also being brought before courts of justice.

be more effective if prosecutors and judges are trained on how to investigate sexual and other gender-based violence and trained forensic medical professionals are hired to assist in investigations.⁸⁶ Prosecution of sexual and other gender-based crimes may also be enhanced by employing people with expertise in these types of crimes as judges, magistrates, investigating officers and other judicial personnel. Human Rights Watch recommends that “all judicial staff should be educated on the long-lasting physical and emotional trauma of sexual violence and other gender-based crimes, and be given clear procedures to avoid re-traumatization of the victims...counseling should be made available for victims and witnesses.”⁸⁷

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is particularly complicated because the country’s rape law excludes a number of sexual and other gender-based crimes that have frequently occurred during conflict: for example, bodily penetration with an object. Future laws should address sexual violence more comprehensively as an assault on the bodily integrity and sexual autonomy of an individual. With the widespread use of rape by most armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is essential that this law be urgently revised to ensure better protection for civilians. Further revisions are also needed to clarify which acts of sexual violence and other gender-based crimes constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. However, the most historical decisions made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone have created a precedent that can be applied to prosecutions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere, holding perpetrators accountable for their violations against children – particularly girls – during conflict.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The Commission on the Status of Women in March 2004 called for “the promotion and protection of the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women and girls at all times, including during conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building.” In addition, it called for “protection and security for women and girls under threat of violence and their freedom of movement.”⁸⁸ The challenge for UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations is how to address crises and reconstruction using a human rights-based approach. A common method must be developed so that the rebuilding of war-torn societies ensures non-discrimination and a respect for rights, particularly those of girls and women, and can provide redress for the gross violations of human rights endemic to these conflicts.

The horrors experienced by girls and women – particularly adolescent girls – violate, impair or nullify their enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. From the outset of a crisis, protection of their safety, physical and psychological well-being and prevention of such atrocities must be paramount. Care should be taken to provide psychological assistance to both women and men, and to view men not only as perpetrators of gender-based violence but also as survivors or empowered bystanders who can confront abusive peers.⁸⁹ Failure to do so fractures communities and poses huge challenges for reintegration and rehabilitation. Insufficient attention has been given to the lasting impact of gender-based violence, the correlation between sexual violence and exploitation, and the devastating socio-economic consequences of rapidly spreading diseases such as HIV/AIDS. During and after humanitarian crises, UNICEF must prioritize providing support to partner organizations that help identify and refer female victims of sexual violence to

medical attention and psychosocial counselling. Immediate support has to be provided to health centres, particularly in rural areas, with mobile teams of rape specialists who can train health centre staff, help treat victims in remote sites and provide critical equipment. Efforts must be made to ensure that providing medical assistance to survivors of gender-based violence is of concern not only to health-care agencies, but also to other actors such as the police and social welfare services. It is important that all these agencies have an adequate referral system at their disposal to inform survivors where to seek assistance.⁹⁰

UNICEF Democratic Republic of the Congo, in reviewing its programme for prevention and rehabilitation, has recommended that activities be scaled up to provide a more long-term, comprehensive and sustainable response. The capacity of actors at all levels (including government authorities) should be developed by conducting basic training on all aspects of sexual and gender-based programming using the *Caring for Survivors* training manual. Current interventions should be expanded to include the growing number of vulnerable and high-risk groups, such as child commercial sex workers, child mothers, unwed mothers, those rejected by their families after rape, HIV-positive mothers, out-of-school children, internally displaced persons, children living on the street, children born of rape and girls associated with fighting forces. There should also be recognition of the linkages between sexual violence and the spread of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS by increasing awareness-raising activities for behavioural change, particularly among survivors and their families and other vulnerable and high-risk groups.

Model programmes need to be developed to redress injustice and ensure accountability, especially for crimes committed against adolescent girls who are often forgotten. In many instances these 'child mothers' who became pregnant as a result of rape are subjected to further discrimination, marginalization and victimization. Compounded by the lack of an education and income-generating capacity, the burdens of child-rearing make their futures bleak

and call for specially designed long-term rehabilitation programmes, community healing and skills training. The children resulting from rape also require particular focus. They are more likely to suffer ill health due to lack of access to proper nutrition and services, to live in extreme poverty and to have a far greater chance of psychological trauma due to rejection by their young mothers and their communities. Rehabilitation and reintegration programmes should also give attention to the special early childhood needs of these children.

Girls must no longer be excluded from disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation programmes. Rather than adapting existing models for girls, a totally different approach has to be developed, with UNICEF adopting a key role to work closely with communities and coordinate with partners to ensure that their work is in the best interests of the girls and young women. As proposed in a 2002 World Bank paper, pre-discharge information must correspond to women's needs and cover the following topics: women's civic rights, land rights, access to credit, education and employment, how to start an income-generating project, HIV/AIDS prevention, preparation for difficult social acceptance in the community of settlement, and domestic violence.⁹¹

In addition, and as concluded in a recent review of the *Girls Left Behind* project, girls and young women who are reunified with their families should continue to be monitored, with community sensitization, mediation and counselling made available to them, their families and communities. Programme beneficiaries should be provided with guidance on the choice, relevance and sustainability of the skills they wish to learn. Basic business training should also be offered to those participating in skills training. Family planning and reproductive health education should be provided to all beneficiaries and their partners, and there should be close cooperation with the Family Support Unit of the police on matters of sexual and physical abuse. Priority should be given to the specific needs of ex-combatant girls and their particular stigmatization, by working closely with women's organizations to

The horrors experienced by girls and women – particularly adolescent girls – violate, impair or nullify their enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

train counsellors – particularly female health and educational professionals – to help reintegrate them into their communities. These girls and their communities must be active agents for change.

Providing all of these services to meet the needs and rights of these girls and young women is only one element of healing. All efforts must be made to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes against girls and women. Strong and constant pressure should be applied to all government and non-state actors involved in the conflict to observe their obligations under human rights and humanitarian law. From the onset of conflict, a coordinated approach to advocacy, monitoring and reporting on protection of women and girls is required, along with documentation of grave gender-based violations of human rights and humanitarian law. UNICEF is strategically positioned to play a key role in advocating for justice for girls and young women who are subjected to gender-based violence, as well as taking the lead in training staff with expertise on gender and rights and the rights of girls and women in conflict and post-conflict situations.

By advocating for the universal application of the definition of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and enforced sterilization outlined in the Rome Statute, UNICEF can become a strong voice for gender justice. Recognition by the Special Court in Sierra Leone of ‘forced marriages’ as a war crime should be applied in all future courts of justice, with UNICEF the chief advocate. Human rights and child protection officers, as well as legal advisers must receive specialized training in documentation, safekeeping of sexual violence dossiers and sensitization of local counterparts.

Violations of the rights of women and girls need to be central to all stages of truth and reconciliation

processes. A 2002 World Bank publication, written in an effort to fill the gap between the Bank’s work on gender mainstreaming and its agenda in conflict and development, proposes that the judiciary could help courts assist survivors and witnesses to share their experiences. This could include establishing a reporting system, protecting survivors and witnesses, sensitizing staff to dealing with survivors of gender-based violence, and developing a more equitable system of recruiting female and male staff.⁹²

UNICEF is well placed to facilitate this by establishing a special committee consisting of representatives of the international community, women’s non-governmental organizations and child rights organizations. At the national level, such a group could ensure that psychosocial support and reproductive health services for girls and women affected by conflict are an integral part of any Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with training provided for all associated with the process. It is essential that adolescent girls in particular are given special attention, and that there is a realization that they are not only victims but can also be protagonists in rebuilding communities. With sensitive and effective rehabilitation and healing programmes they can become an invaluable resource, particularly as communicators and mentors for other war-affected youth. With support from the international and local communities, they can become key catalysts for positive social reconstruction.

Given UNICEF’s mandate to uphold the rights of women and girls, programmes in war-torn countries should focus on the particularly vulnerable group comprising widows and female-headed households, many of whom are young women with children. Working with international and local partners, UNICEF can be at the forefront of initiatives for improving livelihoods and ensuring property and nationality rights. The model of Rwanda, where the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development, in

conjunction with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, was actively involved in drafting legislation on women's rights to inherit property, can be replicated elsewhere. In keeping with UN Security Council resolution 1325, UNICEF can assume a more active role in advocating for and supporting the full involvement of women in peace negotiations, the implementation of peace accords and in transitional governments. Women's civil society organizations, such as the Mano River Women's Peace Union, require support and capacity-building, with strong encouragement to prioritize adolescent girls and young women in their activities or to establish special organizations to mobilize and meet the needs of these young women.

In all of these programmes a clear set of objectives needs to be defined and communicated, with measurable indicators established for monitoring results. UNICEF should join partners such as the World Bank in their efforts to apply gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation tools to the demobilization and reintegration programmes by using a gender-sensitive approach to the logical framework

matrix and introducing a gender component to the beneficiary assessment tool.⁹³ Gender-sensitive performance indicators should be integrated into each project, emphasizing protection issues and prevention. Programmes should be monitored and evaluated regularly to determine their progress and effectiveness. It is important that there is documentation of the 'good practices' UNICEF has implemented for women and girls in post-conflict situations, and that this be extended beyond the West and Central Africa region so that the knowledge of these programmes can be documented, shared and applied to future activities. These could provide the organizing framework, motivation and tools necessary for institutional learning and improvement. Issues and guidelines for good practices need to be developed and adapted for field-based practitioners and should include reporting mechanisms, thereby encouraging a culture of learning. With such mechanisms and processes in place, UNICEF can assume a leadership role as the centre of knowledge and partnerships for war-affected girls and young women.

ENDNOTES

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Published by:
United Nations Children's Fund
Division of Communication
3 UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017

E-mail: pubdoc@unicef.org
Website: www.unicef.org

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ISBN: 92-806-3865-3

February 2005