

Seen, but not Heard:
Placing Children and Youth on the
Security Governance Agenda

edited by

David Nosworthy

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Chapter 2

Health Indicators and the Impact of Insecurities on Children

Aleya El Bindari Hammad

... if children live with tolerance, they learn to be patient; if children live with encouragement they learn to have confidence ... if children live with fairness they learn justice; if children live with security they learn to have faith ... if children live with acceptance and friendship, they learn to find love in the world. (Author unknown).

Introduction¹

In recent years, security and protection systems have gained in importance as the need to guard people against a broad range of hazards – crime, accidents, disasters, sabotage, subversion, civil disturbances, bombings (actual and threats), hijackings and criminal networks engaged in trafficking of arms, people and drugs – has become the hideous truth of our present landscape. Most of the time, the security sector has focussed its efforts on national security issues such as conflict and post-conflict areas and the threat of terrorism, sometimes at the expense of ensuring security in the lives of people as they go about their daily activities.

Of particular concern has been the protection of children, which has been seriously compromised and inadequate. Children are victims of unbelievably horrific atrocities and injustices. While the consequences of insecurity affect people of all ages, they have dramatic impact on children. Every 20 minutes a child under five years old dies, leading to over a million deaths a year. This is not to mention the many more who suffer the consequences of injury and trauma throughout their lives. The majority of these deaths and the suffering are preventable.²

The succeeding paragraphs will illustrate the impact of insecurity on children and their healthy development. As early as 1986, The World Health

Organization (WHO) in its General Assembly adopted Resolution WHA 39.22 calling on member states to use health status indicators within the population and in particular their changes over time among disadvantaged groups as an indicator for assessing the quality of development and its impact on the environment.³

Health – an Indicator of Insecurity

Children's vulnerability stems from the fact that they must rely on others for meeting their physical needs for survival, including their daily requirements for food, water, personal hygiene and shelter. In this sense a child or an infant cannot survive and develop on its own – somebody needs to take care of them. Regardless of where children live, or cultural differences in care practices, all infants require warm, responsive, linguistically rich and protective relationships in which they can grow. The quality of the relationship between the caregivers and small children no doubt affects the development of the child's brain, the psychological capabilities and social adjustments.⁴ The literature contains ample information and data on the basic requirement for children's normal growth during the various phases of their development, starting from *in utero* to infancy childhood to adulthood. Whereas there are many factors affecting the normal growth and development of children that do not fall within the scope of this chapter, it should be mentioned that insecure environments tend to accentuate and aggravate an already precarious environment affecting disadvantaged population groups, especially women and children. It is these women and children who are disconnected from mainstream development, facing the brutal realities of their daily lives that are further affected by divisive forces, social exclusion and insecurity enlarging the hard core of vulnerability.⁵

The WHO taskforce on health and development recognised the need to give the right to health more substance and operational content by introducing the concept of health security that 'is needed throughout the entire life span of human beings and encompasses all aspects of the right of every individual to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including the right to food in sufficient quantity and of good quality, the right to decent housing, the right to live and work in an environment where known risks are minimised, and the right of access to education and information on health'.⁶

In many parts of the world, living conditions are deteriorating due to the persistence of chronic and worsening situations of abject poverty as well

as communities fraught with violence, instability and insecurity. This state of affairs compels thousands of people to flee their homes each year in search for food, water, safety and a better life. The image of countless women collecting their few belongings in a bundle and, carrying their children on their backs, fleeing hostile environments is an all too familiar one.

The impact of these conditions affecting homeless children and those exposed to violent conditions such as wars and conflicts can be seen in different ways and at different levels of severity, namely morbidity and mortality rates. While no indicator can tell us all we need to know about children's health, nor can we develop indicators for everything, global estimates of the burden of disease that are derived from national statistics can be monitored for trends. These provide us with the major causes of death and illness.

One of the defining features of fragile states is that they are performing least well in achieving the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).⁷ MDG 4 aims to reduce the global under-five mortality rate by two thirds by 2015. In 2006, the most recent year for which firm estimates are available, close to 9.7 million children died before their fifth birthday. Meeting MDG 4 implies that during the next seven years the number of child deaths must be cut in half – to fewer than 5 million per year. The number of deaths per 1,000 live births in 2006 was six in industrialised countries compared to 79 in developing countries.⁸

Child survival and primary health care for mothers, newborns and children lie at the heart of human progress, serving as sensitive barometers of a country's development and well-being, and providing telling evidence of its priorities and values.⁹ Investing in the health of children is not only a human rights imperative, it is also a sound economic decision and one of the surest ways for a country to set its course towards a better future.

Some of the main categories of disease are: *perinatal illnesses*, including low birth weight and congenital malformations and birth defects¹⁰; *respiratory diseases*, such as pneumonia, tuberculosis and asthma; *diarrhea diseases*, including E-coli infections and cholera; *insect-borne diseases*, especially malaria; *physical injuries*, including impairments due to cluster munitions and landmines¹¹, burns etc.; *mental/emotional trauma*, such as post-traumatic stress disorders; and *sexually transmitted diseases*, such as HIV/AIDS. Together, these kill some 8.5 million children below the age of 15 every year, of which about 90 percent are under the age of five and account for the major causes of morbidity in children.

Table 2.1 Health and the MDGs

Goal	Health Targets	Health Indicators
Goal 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	Target 2 Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger	Prevalence of underweight children under five
Goal 4 Reduce child mortality	Target 5 Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate	Under-five mortality rate Infant mortality rate Proportion of one-year-olds immunised against measles
Goal 5 Improve maternal health	Target 6 Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio	Maternal mortality ratio Proportions of births attended by skilled health personnel
Goal 6 Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases	Target 7 Halt and begin to reverse, by 2015, the spread of HIV and AIDS Target 8 Halt and begin to reverse, by 2015, the incidence of malaria and other major diseases	HIV prevalence among pregnant women 15-24 Ratio of school attendance of orphans to school attendance of non-orphans aged 10-14 Prevalence and death rates associated with malaria Prevalence and death rates associated with tuberculosis
Goal 7 Ensure environmental sustainability	Target 10 Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation Target 10 By 2020, achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers	Proportion of population using an improved water source, urban and rural Proportion of population using improved sanitation, urban and rural
Goal 8 Develop a global partnership for development	Target 17 In co-operation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries	Proportion of population with access to affordable essential drugs on a sustainable basis

Source: Adapted from WHO, Health and the Millennium Developmental Goals, Geneva, 2005.

Evidence now shows that the seeds of ill health in adulthood and old age are sewn during infancy, childhood and adolescence.¹² This constitutes a human tragedy whose effects can endure for generations.

The proceeding paragraphs will focus on events that lead to large scale death or lessening of life chances undermining international security. Among these are economic and social threats, including poverty, that compel people to migrate, legally or illegally, and enable transnational organised crime to thrive. As stated by Kofi Annan, 'Development and security are inextricably linked ... extreme poverty and disease provide a fertile breeding ground for other threats including civil conflict'.¹³

Populations on the Move

Land and poverty pressures, political instability and natural disasters are combining to displace millions of people every year. In both developed and developing countries, internal and cross-border movement has become a key factor in changing the demographic and socio-cultural profile of countries and regions.

There are more than ten million refugees in the world today, up from 8.4 million in 2006. For example, Chad, Sudan and the Central African Republic have been plagued by decades of political instability and armed conflict. Today, a transnational exodus of civilians and combatants in all directions is destabilising the region, leaving vulnerable populations without the most basic resources. Collectively, Chad, Sudan and the Central African Republic are bound together in an interlocking calamity that constitutes one of the world's single largest concentrations of displaced people.¹⁴

In all three states combined, more than 2 million people are now displaced – more than 200,000 Sudanese have fled into neighbouring Chad, escaping the ongoing violence in Darfur. In Chad, over 50,000 routinely flee increasing attacks in the east, some crossing back and forth into the Central African Republic. From there tens of thousands have escaped into Sudan and Chad amidst growing insecurity and chronic poverty. Many end up in crowded camps, living in tents with little food, water, health care and often lacking protection.

It is not uncommon to find that those entrusted with their security are often the first to aggress especially women and children. Children have witnessed their mothers being repeatedly raped; others have themselves become victims of sexual or physical abuse. Some may have experienced the loss of a mother, which has dramatic consequences on a child. It has been shown that when a mother dies it doubles the death rate of her surviving sons and quadruples that of her daughters. In high-mortality settings such as in refugee camps and conflict zones there may be thousands of motherless

children.¹⁵ What is disturbing is the failure to provide them with their basic needs for food, water and health care, and the inability to protect them against violence that threaten them even in exile.

Similar to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) are forced to leave their homes because of persecution, seeking sanctuary in more secure parts of their own countries. Many of the IDPs suffer from extreme poverty, brutal suppression and growing insecurity. Because they have not crossed international frontiers, they are not considered refugees protected by international refugee law and often cannot access international humanitarian assistance.

Refugees and IDPs are not only perceived as an economic burden, competing for scarce resources and services with the local population, they are even at times treated as a security threat.¹⁶

Migrant Children: Targets of Violence

Child migration has a long and chequered history surrounded by controversy and scandal. This remains true today, and although many children may seemingly be travelling as dependents with their family, along legal and secure routes, the reality behind may be less clear. Many children are victims of migration for reasons of trafficking through criminal networks, or as pawns used by their families to gain leverage and asylum, the so-called 'Anchor Children', voluntarily abandoned in airports or international transit zones for their parents to have a link with developed countries.

More recently, due to an increase in South-North migration and the growing trend of women migrating as household providers, an increasing number of children are being left behind, some for years before they get the chance to reunite with their parents. The social impact of this phenomenon is still under survey but there are links to school drop-out and increases in child and teenage delinquency, drug abuse and general vulnerability linked to the absence of traditional role models.

Just recently an article highlighted the violence perpetrated against young children trafficked within and outside of their continent. In Mali a house was discovered with a number of young Ivorian boys, held there until they could be sold in Europe, lured by promises of high-paying contracts in athletics.¹⁷ More common are cases of internal trafficking for labour purposes; Ghana comes to mind immediately with the traffic in the fishing 'industry' around Lake Volta.¹⁸ Young girls are often sold as household slaves or for child prostitution and thus at high risk of physical and psychological abuse.¹⁹

The numbers of cases are difficult to assess, but they are consequential. Particularly in the case of labour-induced trafficking, the criminal networks rely on local traditions to encourage the parents into giving their children into 'foster' care as they would traditionally with their family members.

For all three of the aforementioned cases there are bodies of international law that prohibit such abuses or abandonment, but not all have been ratified, and fewer still integrated into national legislation.²⁰ There is an urgent need for action (judicial, educative/preventative, curative) at the local level to raise awareness among the people and communities involved who, for reasons of either poverty or lack of education, do not understand the implications of their actions.

Turning a Blind Eye to Forced Labour

A recent report by the International Labour Organization has shown that the normal dependence of young children on adults is dramatically increased when they move away from their home environment, across a social or national frontier, making them even more susceptible to coercion at work. In many parts of Africa, there is a strong tradition of children moving away from home. Current evidence suggests that children may represent a higher proportion of forced labourers in Africa than in other regions of the world.²¹

International law strictly prohibits forced and exploitative labour of children.²² Moreover, in most countries laws have been enacted that specify the specific minimum age at which children can start work, the appropriate hours that they can work, and their rights to rest and medical examinations. Some countries have gone a step further by specifying the industries that are considered hazardous and in which children are strictly prohibited to work. However, there is a big gap between these policies and their translation into action and the enforcement of child labour laws that protect children and their total needs. In some cases children are preferred to adult workers because they are more docile, do not grumble and revolt, are agile, and can be paid less than adults (and at times are not paid at all on the pretext of training). For families, income from child labour can play an important role in augmenting the overall family income, and some children may have been forced to join the labour force at the insistence of their parents. In addition, it is sometimes difficult to penetrate home industries that escape formal supervision. At the same time, the law enforcement sector turns a blind eye

to home-based industries that are encouraged to flourish as an important means of generating income and reducing poverty.

Children are usually employed in industries such as match-making, diamond polishing, fish scaling, glass works, plantations, brick works and handloom textiles. Common characteristics of their working conditions include exposure to toxic powders, metal dust, paint or paint thinner, noxious fumes which burn the eyes, late-night work, exposure to high temperatures and deafening noise and industrial accidents. While hard data is scarce, nevertheless there are known potential effects on children. For example, accidents in the lock industry with bodily injury, such as loss of fingertips, occur as a result of exhaustion and carelessness when carrying out the tasks of polishing, electroplating, spray painting and working on hard presses.

Due to exposure to toxic chemicals, children suffer from asthma and other chest diseases, accidental poisoning and mental disorders. In pencil factories, the incidence of silicosis in children has been reported, and in the agate industry, pneumoconiosis has been recognised as prevalent, and directly related to the duration of exposure. Children handling microscopically fine wire develop marked visual impairments within five to eight years. Children using hand tools designed for adults face higher risk of fatigue and injury, while children using seats and workbenches designed for adults have more problems in the musculoskeletal systems.²³

The purpose of citing these health consequences is not to consider the technical responses required, but rather to provide powerful pointers as to where development has or is going wrong.

Child Labour to Order

Failure of macro-economic policy and the free market system to ensure equitable distribution of wealth has led to a process of poverty 'creation' that has swelled in urban areas. Rapid urban growth has produced pockets of deprivation and subhuman living conditions that are at times more severe than in rural areas. And at the same time, the poor have been portrayed as a net burden on the process of growth. Not only have poor people remained poor but so have large numbers of poor nations.

In addition, the measurement of success in materialistic terms and lack of human solidarity are often seen as prevailing characteristics in many regions of the world. The pursuit of materialism at the cost of more traditional values of caring and sharing is having a marked impact on human behaviour. The institution of the family is undergoing unprecedented change.

The multigenerational family of traditional societies is giving way to the nuclear family which in turn is increasingly giving way to the single-parent family and to the no-parent families of street children. Armed conflict and natural disasters result in tens of thousands of unaccompanied refugee children who are often permanently separated from their families.

In this climate the pursuit of high levels of profit is permeating nearly all institutions of society. The need to ensure, for instance, essential foreign currency has led some governments to turn a blind eye to illegal business activities and the risk and harmful effects they may have on the lives of people such as young girls and children. Trafficking in human beings, especially women and children, has led to the amassing of quick fortunes and in some cases to the corruption of social institutions such as the judiciary and security sector.²⁴

Illicit trade permeates all societies and has evolved into a new form of commerce that is sprouting everywhere. Modern forms of slavery are thriving in the context of coerced sex, domestic work, farm labour and construction work, often performed by illegal migrants forced to work off never-ending debts levied by their traffickers. Many of the victims will have been chosen from among the poor and the destitute who cannot fend for themselves – street children, orphans, homeless children and young girls. Some are coerced and others are just abducted to be shipped across borders.

This billion dollar illicit industry has opened up new trade routes, with a chain of suppliers that includes recruiters, extortionists, hired muscle, transporters, safe ‘houses’ and online dispatchers that can procure a child, girl or boy, responding to any specification desired – colour, age, nationality, physical characteristics. These are ‘delivered’ just as you would a parcel across continents in as little as 48 hours!²⁵ Once delivered these victims are subjected to merciless violence, beatings, rape, sadistic treatment, working long hours deprived of seeing the light of day. Some succeed in escaping, others prefer to end their lives, and still others, who end up by contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, are sometimes put back onto the market and resold at a cheaper cost. The health consequences are horrendous, and many can never recover from the trauma endured. Their lives are shattered and their dreams blown away.

This illicit trade is profit driven and could not thrive without the involvement of corrupt officials and the growing demand of a market to draw from. Like drugs and arms dealers, these networks make full use of the most up-to-date technologies, and features of globalisation such as porous borders. As with those who smuggle illegal migrants in response to demands for cheap labour, the traffickers of women and children cannot be tackled by

simply taking the moral high ground. And although there is no doubt that those involved are criminals, what drives them to engage in this despicable business is purely the profits that they will derive.²⁶ The strategy to be adopted must be one that reduces their incentives, such as diminished demand, lower margins of profit, much higher stakes and risks, and laws that regard this trade as a grave criminal activity that carries with it the harshest and most severe penalties for the suppliers, but also some form of punishment for the consumers.

Implications for the Security Sector

Child victims of abuse are not new. What is new however is that today we are learning more about the magnitude of child abuse. Our access to new information technologies has led to more transparency with, day by day, new facts and figures emerging. Child abuse can take place in the home just as it does outside it. When it does happen in the home, it usually is at the hands of parents or caregivers or relatives. Information is still difficult to obtain because of many societies' view on the sanctity of the family and the reluctance to intrude into this private domain.

However, both in traditional and non-traditional societies, child abuse and sexual exploitation are a common occurrence, just as physical assault and violence on women by their partners continue to take the heaviest of tolls. Today, somehow, the facts available constitute the tip of the iceberg – much more needs to be uncovered. This will shed light on the magnitude and depth of the scars marking children who may themselves become abusers later in life and exhibit violent behaviour towards others as adults.²⁷ Unfortunately, as facts are uncovered, we realise that it is society that will have to pay the ultimate price and bear the eventual burden!

Where Have We Gone Wrong?

Child abuse follows closely that of women. Even in the light of heightened awareness of gender issues it is a disturbing reality that the gender gap has not been eliminated, primarily because it is a grinding process that challenges one of the most entrenched of all human attitudes, namely changing people's mindsets. It requires far more effort than just changes in law or stated policy. Succeeding will entail changing practices in the home, community and in the decision-making environment. At present, just as rape and sexual assault on women have gone unpunished in many parts of the

world, so too has sexual slavery gone unpunished for very young girls. Women's particular vulnerability to violence is perhaps the most obvious aspect of reduced physical security and integrity of the person and is carried on to the offspring – *in utero* and when the child is born. In many countries, even those where there has been marked progress in the enactment of violence-related laws that protect women and children, there have been reports of spotty persecutions, vague statistics, old-fashioned judges and unresponsive governments.

The complexity of the social and cultural issues, combined with the stigma and fear of disclosure, lead to a situation where only a small proportion of crimes of sexual assault and other forms of child abuse get reported. It is not uncommon for women and girls to be blamed for provoking the violence perpetuated against them by men, with tacit approval of the judiciary and of the police. These victims become stigmatised and isolated from their own societies, and in some countries are sent into 'camp' so as not to contaminate innocent children. Still others, especially in the Middle East, are forced into marriage with their violators, with little or no control over their person. Cases have been reported of rapes committed by elderly guards of orphanages (as old as 70 years), where the guard ends up by marrying their 15-year-old victim! Each year, young girls who have no control over their bodies are subjected to female genital mutilation in spite of it being regarded as a criminal offence!

Recently, facts are emerging that have brought to light the extent to which social and cultural settings are conducive to the perpetuation of what others would consider as abusive behaviour. In some regions, such as West and Central Africa, it has been reported that poor parents may sell their children for money having been assured that they will be treated well. Others have accepted to give up their children for a specified period of time in return for a token sum or gifts. So-called bonded placement of children is the reimbursement for debts the parents have accrued.²⁸ In the minds of many parents, placing children does not constitute an act of selling.

The purpose of bringing up the above examples is to underscore the importance of understanding the contexts, patterns and backgrounds of families and communities that have, so to speak, facilitated migration and trafficking (both of which intersect at a given point). These fall into the following categories:

- Social cultural factors, such as the social acceptability of putting children to work, traditions of migration, educational levels and preparation for marriage.

- Economic factors, such as inequities between population groups and desire to escape poverty.
- Juridical and political factors, such as absence of legislation, mistrust of the laws, ignorance of parents as to their rights under the law, corrupt officials and porous borders.

In response to the above, it is important to raise awareness among families (with full appreciation of intra-household decision-making processes), communities, chief religious leaders, ministers and law enforcement officials.

What Can Be Done?

Throughout this chapter it has been argued that the process of globalisation, which has brought about liberalisation of economies, facilitating the mobility of capital, goods and services, has not been matched by social protection measures, particularly for disadvantaged segments of society, especially women and children. Globalisation has given rise to conflicting rules covering the legal migration of individuals, many composed of highly skilled professionals. Those denied freedom of movement include the masses of unskilled or semi-skilled persons who are trapped in poverty, but this can also impact on those fleeing political persecution or conflict zones. This situation has contributed to the creation of networks facilitating clandestine movements by opening corridors for the illegal transport of people as one of the most lucrative ways of acquiring huge profits made from human helplessness. It has also been argued that health indicators are the most powerful indicators for illustrating the price these people pay, by analysing mortality and morbidity rates. For while health is not everything, without it there is little left!

There are specific actions that can be done by institutions entrusted with security and intelligence services and ensuring democratic accountability. Ideally they should be protected from political abuse, but at the same time should not be separated from executive governance.²⁹ It is important to stress that the effectiveness of all relevant institutions involved (the executive, the legislature, civil society groups, parliament, etc.) will be influenced to a great extent by a political culture that ensures transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation and responsiveness to the people. This presupposes that there exists a code of behaviour that goes beyond that of laws and regulations. Unfortunately, in many countries, democratic

regimes are still in their infancy. They have a long way to go in ensuring a culture of openness, respect for human rights and the dignity of their people.

Due to the complexity of the problems facing children exposed to insecurities, three regulatory regimes need to be ensured as a whole, namely human rights protection, crime control and economic efficiency. This will require dealing with several perspectives simultaneously:

- Ensuring legislative reforms
- Policing and penalising violators
- Improved border controls that ensure authenticity of identification papers and passports
- Strengthening public order through awareness campaigns, with the involvement of the media
- Changing cultural practices
- Better sensitisation of the general public of the risks involved

Also, it means adherence to international labour standards and working conditions, and their effective monitoring. It requires above all strict adherence to the abolishment of child labour.

The above necessitates each country to identify the different forms of abuse faced by women and children. It requires the creation and/or strengthening of institutions, including civil society organisations, to effectively track down any deviations from policy directives and, if necessary, to devise specific policy instruments to counteract problems identified. Because there are several actors and institutions involved (the military, the police, border guards, etc.) it is important to establish new forms of co-operation between different agencies involved in the security of people, and children in particular. Finally, perpetrators or complicit agents must be located and receive the harshest punishment – impunity must not be tolerated. All these measures require training for border patrols, police and social workers, and direct support to victims, which includes interception, rescue, socio-economic reintegration, health care (both physical and emotional), and reintegration into education.

Improper handling of cases involving abused children (girls and boys alike) that are driven by traditional social and cultural values that carry stigmatising effects must be dealt with as a matter of urgency. One of the important means of improving the efficacy of those entrusted with security functions is to ensure that a gender perspective is introduced, allowing for competent men and women to enter this field and receive effective training

and orientation, required to ensure a more humane, just and victim-friendly approach.

Raising Awareness and Combating Impunity

The role of parliaments cannot be underscored enough. Many are not aware of their pivotal role in curbing these abhorrent practices of child abuse, and their capacity to foster a secure environment for children. In this context, institutions whose mandate is strengthening the security sector among countries, whether nationally, regionally or internationally, should consider collaborating with parliaments in order to empower them to deal with this important issue. Special programmes should be devised similar to the ones undertaken by institutions such as DCAF, broadening their perspective to include the security of children.

A few promising developments have occurred in some countries and selected examples are worth mentioning. In Africa, Niger introduced a law in 2003 amending the Penal Code that specifically addresses the predicament of persons whose ancestors were enslaved and who are described as still being of 'servile status'. The amended law also dealt with the issue of debt bondage, imposing severe penalties in the form of lengthy prison sentences and heavy fines.³⁰

Under its 2001 Penal Code, Mali provides severe penalties for child trafficking. In India, its Bonded Labour System Abolition Act of 1976 provides for imprisonment and fines for those who compel others to render bonded labour and, in August 2004, the Government of India reported 4,859 prosecutions for forced labour offences.³¹

In Egypt, in 2006 a strategy for eliminating child labour was elaborated that rested on three pillars, namely identifying the children and channelling them to continue their schooling; compensating the families' income loss; and bringing to justice those responsible for the employment of children in their enterprises. In addition, SOS help-lines have been established throughout the country that operate on a 24-hour basis and provide immediate assistance for any child requiring protection or emergency assistance.³²

In Bahrain, a law was enacted in 2007 declaring human trafficking a criminal offence, and a strategy for combating this scourge was elaborated by a special task force that reported to parliament.

In Brazil, the government of President Lula Da Silva has introduced stronger measures to combat forced labour and impunity. A Special Mobile Inspection Group has been strengthened and inspectors assigned to priority

areas. In the United Kingdom a new immigration offence of trafficking in prostitution was created in 2002, followed in July 2004 by a second new offence of trafficking people for exploitation. Both carry a maximum penalty of 14 years of imprisonment – equal to the penalty for drug trafficking.

Other European countries, especially the Nordic countries, spear-headed by Sweden, have been at the forefront of qualifying child abuse as a crime and have introduced major laws protecting women and children – laws that have subsequently been used by a number of countries as exemplary. The role of civil society in these countries has been a major force to reckon with, along with the involvement of the private sector.

There are many more initiatives within and between countries that are working to curb various forms of abuse. International institutions, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Europol, Interpol and others are playing a vital role. Resources in support of such institutions are essential, but also commitment by countries themselves in dealing with these issues, especially those affecting children, is of paramount importance. And while important headway has been made, enforcement of laws is still very weak. In spite of some successful investigations, such as discovering and dismantling paedophile networks, prosecution rates remain low, victim protection mechanisms are not available, and lack of harmonisation between law enforcement authorities and the judiciary is a major flaw. Corruption also remains a major impediment.

New approaches may be needed to deal with new challenges. One example is the involvement of the private sector in areas that have been traditionally considered public domains. The fight against human trafficking is a case in point. Human trafficking represents an illicit form of business negatively impacting the functioning of legitimate business and thus putting the development of sound economic systems into danger. Therefore, there is a lot at stake for legitimate business if human trafficking continues to flourish. Most anti-trafficking initiatives have been undertaken by governments and non-governmental organisations, but very few programmes have so far engaged the business sector and harnessed their global reach and connections. Examples of programmes aimed at responsible business conduct upholding human rights include the Global Compact launched by the United Nations Secretary-General in 1999, the Anti-Trafficking Programme on Public-Private Co-operation initiated by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and most recently the End Human Trafficking Now! Campaign launched by the business community in 2006.³³ It remains to be seen what difference can be made by such new approaches, but it has been increasingly recognised that it is more likely that a complex

scourge such as human trafficking can only be diminished by the combined efforts of all players concerned.

Governments must assume their share of responsibility. They must not only enact laws, they must ensure their enforcement by exerting their legal authority and coercive powers. The security sector – police, legal experts, cross-border intelligence, etc. – must be strengthened and appropriately trained to be alert to many of the tactics used, and all must work in concert to give priority to this scourge and provide the necessary support to children victims of abuse. Child psychologists, medical experts and others must be brought in to support children who have endured abuse and suffering. To date it is mostly civil society that has come forward and filled this void.

Reduction of poverty and dealing with inequities within the countries themselves is a political commitment all countries must make. For it is when these are solved within countries, when disadvantaged groups are pulled out of their predicament, and when adequate services are provided that enable all to be self-reliant, that we will see a net improvement in the quality of life of people, with fewer choosing to flee or to migrate, legally or illegally, and fewer children being continuously plunged into and exposed to precarious and risky conditions that jeopardise their lives.

While acknowledging the importance of protecting our borders, by and large, too much emphasis has been given to catching illegal migrants rather than the traffickers and smugglers who exploit them. For many of those who violate immigration laws, their main crime has been to trust those offering them the chance of a lifetime – the promise of a better job in a far-away land – and it is they that have ended up in brothels, as domestic workers, or as illegal workers in sweat shops.

Given its complex and holistic approach the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, with its Optional Protocols, offers an excellent tool in identifying the present loopholes in the system.³⁴ These must be rectified through better co-operation with civil society and institutions, both within and among countries and through expanding the traditional role that the security sector has had. Positive experiences need to be generated, which provide examples of the ways and means of meeting the needs of children.

Conclusion

Children throughout the ages have always occupied a central place in society's value systems. Politicians regularly use children to convince their

constituencies that their foremost commitment is ensuring the youngest of their societies a happy and secure future. Yet, paradoxically, they are the largest group that suffers the consequences of inaction, neglect, abuse, exploitation and greed. As an indicator, children's health status provides us with a staggering set of statistics that catalogue preventable death, disability and suffering. These are the results of our collective failure to commit ourselves to doing what should and could be done. Most of the failures are fundamentally political ones, not technical ones. Whether looking at conflict and wars, migration, refugees or any other serious issue that is being faced today, it is basically about access to and distribution of power and resources, within and among countries. These failures are also due to the structure of global governance, but can be found in actions and inactions of individuals, families and communities.

Until the challenges of anchoring the protection of children, and people in general, are faced up to, we will not be able to seriously resolve the many issues affecting them. Foremost among these is providing security for all those in need – within daily life, in situations of crisis and disaster, and during conflict and war. And while the obstacles loom large, it is not an option to continue 'business as usual' – ways of working differently need to be identified.

It is hoped that by documenting these issues and committing to change within these pages, that space can be found to forge a pathway for all committed persons to join, and contribute to, the kind of world where our children and future generations have a chance to feel protected, where their rights and dignity are respected, and where they are offered every opportunity to live in a healthy and peaceful environment. It is those who hold power, and the people who demand their accountability, who must take the first steps.

Endnotes

- 1 This Article was prepared with the assistance of Ms. Eva Lutara, Communication and Research Officer of the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement (SMWIPM), Geneva.
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- 5 Ibid.

- 6 World Health Assembly (WHA), Resolution 39.22 adopted by the Thirty-ninth WHA (May 1986).
- 7 UK Department for International Development, 'Why we need to work more effectively in fragile states' (2005), <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/fragilestates-paper.pdf> (accessed October 2008).
- 8 UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2008: Child Survival* (New York: UNICEF, December 2007).
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 It is believed that depleted uranium was one of the contributing causes to the rise in children's cancer rates in Iraq that spiralled 300 to 400 percent following the Gulf war in 1991. Leukemia incidents began rising dramatically around 1994 and 40 percent of cancer victims below the age of 15 years have leukemia, more than double the figure for lymphoma the second most common pediatric cancer. According to a survey by UNICEF, the death rate of children in Iraq rose to 130 persons per 1,000 during the 1990's after the Gulf war. In addition to depleted uranium and other environmental factors, such high death rates must be also attributed to the economic sanctions. See: Uranium Medical Research Centre (2002).
- 11 As for accidents, among the most lethal are those resulting from the use of cluster bombs during wars and conflicts. For example, in the last war in Lebanon, 359 separate cluster-bombed locations were contaminated with as many as 100,000 unexploded bomblets. Bomblets come in interesting shapes that attract children's curiosity: some cluster munitions look like tiny bottles with short ribbons; some are yellow with tissue parachutes; some look like little grey tennis balls; some are small canisters with a white ribbon attached. All are deadly for children. A report by the non-profit organisation Handicap International, which studied the effects of cluster bombs in 24 countries and regions, found that 27 percent of casualties were children.
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- 18 Sharon La Franciere, 'Africa's world of forced labour, in a 6 year-old's eyes', *The New York Times*, 28 October 2006.
- 19 Human trafficking should be distinguished from human smuggling. Human smugglers facilitate the illegal entry of an individual into a country for a fee. Traffickers however use physical force, fraud or deception to obtain and transport people, and often use legal migration procedures to realise their exploitative aims. See H. Montgomery, Z. De Sas Kropiwnicki and R. Evans, *Trafficking Women and Children: Overcoming Illegal Sex Trade* (Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, 2005).
- 20 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational and Organised Crime (2000); Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish

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- 26 *Ibid.*, 257.
- 27 See for example, John F. Hough, *Understanding and Preventing Family Violence: Background Briefing Report with Seminar Presentations* (Sacramento: California State Library Foundation, 1996).
- 28 Thanh Dam Truong, *Poverty Gender and Human Trafficking. Rethinking Human trafficking in Sub Sahara Africa* (Paris: UNESCO, 2006), 62.
- 29 Hans Born and Ian Leigh, *Making Intelligence Accountable: Legal Standards and Best Practice for Oversight of Intelligence Agencies* (Oslo: DCAF, 2005).
- 30 ILO, *A Global Alliance against Forced Labour*.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *SOS Helpline*, unpublished report, on file with author.
- 33 See for example, <http://www.endhumantraffickingnow.com> (accessed October 2008).
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