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ITEM 112

PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

by

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I. Introduction

I should like to begin my remarks with two tributes. The first tribute is to Mrs. Graça Machel of Mozambique and South Africa. Her ground-breaking report and deep commitment to the protection of children continue to provide the foundation and particular source of inspiration for the activities of the present mandate. We owe her a very deep debt of gratitude.

The second tribute is to the frontline work of UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, UNDP and the European Commission, together with international and local NGOs. Their role, together with the work of UNHCHR, WHO, FAO and OCHA, is crucial in translating our common concern into operational activities on the ground.

II. The Context

The Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations enjoins us “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”. Yet on the eve of the millennium, we are witnessing unspeakable abominations being committed against children in the context of armed conflict.

Today, in approximately fifty countries around the world, children are suffering in the midst of armed conflict and in its aftermath. This suffering bears many faces: children being killed; children being made orphans; children being maimed; children being uprooted from their homes; children being raped and sexually abused; children being deprived of education and health care; children being exploited as child soldiers; and children left with deep emotional scars and trauma.

All non-combatants are entitled to protection, but children have a primary claim to that protection. Children are innocent and especially vulnerable. Children are less equipped to adapt or respond to conflict. They are the least responsible for conflict, yet suffer disproportionately from its excesses. Children are the truly blameless victims of conflict. Moreover, children represent the hopes and future of every society; destroy them and you have destroyed a society.

Over the last decade, 2 million children were killed in conflict situations, over 1 million were made orphans, over 6 million have been seriously injured or permanently disabled, and over 10 million have been left with grave psychological trauma. A large number of children, especially young women, have been made the targets of rape and other forms of sexual violence as a deliberate instrument of war.

At the present moment, there are over 20 million children who have been displaced by war within and outside their countries. Some 300,000 young persons under the age of 18 are currently being exploited as child soldiers around the world. And approximately 800 children are killed or maimed by landmines every month.

The magnitude of this abomination attests to a new phenomenon. There has been a qualitative shift in the nature and conduct of warfare. This is not war as we have known it in the modern era.

Several developments mark this transformation. Almost all the major armed conflicts in the world today are civil wars; they are protracted, lasting years if not decades; they are fought among those who know each other well -- they pit compatriot against compatriot, neighbour against neighbour. They are characterized by widespread social breakdown and lawlessness, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines, and the involvement of multiple and often semi-autonomous armed groups. Most cynically, children have been compelled to themselves become the instruments of war -- indeed the weapon of choice -- recruited or kidnapped to become child soldiers. A key feature of this struggle is the demonization of the so-called "enemy community" -- often defined in religious, ethnic, racial or regional terms -- and the orchestration of vicious hate campaigns. In the intense and intimate setting of today's internecine wars, the village has become the battlefield and civilian populations the primary target. This is soldier-on-civilian violence on an unprecedented scale.

It is against this background that today up to 90 percent -- compared with 5 percent in World War I and 48 percent in World War II -- of casualties in ongoing conflicts around the world are civilians, the vast majority of whom are children and women.

These excesses are no longer exceptional; they are widespread across the globe; they are going on today in some 30 locations of conflict.

This trend of abomination can be reversed if serious, concerted measures are employed at both the national and international levels. In my remarks this morning, I should like to highlight some of the initiatives and actions we have been developing, to give concrete expression and life to this mandate.

III. Particular initiatives and actions

Engaging parties in conflict. In my visits to several countries -- from Sri Lanka, Burundi, the Sudan, Colombia, and Sierra Leone, to discussions with the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), in the DRC -- parties in conflict have committed themselves to some of the following measures: not to target civilian populations; not to block access to populations in distress within their zones of control; not to interfere with the distribution of relief supplies; to observe humanitarian cease-fires for purposes of vaccination or supply of relief; not to attack schools or hospitals; not to use landmines; and not to recruit or use children as child soldiers. It is critical that key national and international actors -- governments, the Security Council, regional organizations, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society organizations -- reinforce these commitments through their own channels of communication and influence.

But how can we ensure that these claims for protection are taken seriously by the parties to conflict? Well, we live in a world in which interdependence has become a central fact of international life. The warring parties in the different theatres of conflict too depend to a great extent on the good-will and cooperation of the wider international community, from whom they seek political legitimacy and diplomatic recognition, and on whom they rely for trading in minerals and timber, as well as the supply of arms and money, for the prosecution of their war efforts.

In other words, there are important trails that lead in and out of theatres of conflict. The question is, are we prepared to press these linkages into concerted pressure for the protection of children? The international community should be prepared to use its collective influence to deny political legitimacy, goodwill, the supply of weapons or the flow of funds to those responsible for committing atrocities and abuses against children. In today's interdependent world, no warring party could ignore the prospects of such censure and isolation by the wider international community.

Neighbourhood initiatives. Although most of today's armed conflicts are internal, the victimization of children is often exacerbated by cross-border activities, such as the flow of small arms and light weapons, the transfer and use of landmines, the recruitment and abduction of children, the movement of displaced populations, and the separation of families. Threats facing children within countries in conflict often cannot be brought under control without addressing these cross-border dimensions.

I have therefore proposed the development of "neighbourhood initiatives" to bring together actors in a sub-regional setting where countries are linked by cross-border activities affecting children. The purpose is to engage governments, insurgency groups, civil society organizations and humanitarian agencies in dialogue which would ultimately lead to specific agreements and concrete measures to protect children from cross-border threats. I have convened an informal inter-agency task force to develop those initiatives under the leadership of UNICEF and UNHCR. So far, three neighbourhood initiatives have been selected as pilot cases: Eastern Africa (IGAD neighbourhood); West Africa (neighbourhood of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia); and Kosovo and its neighbourhood.

Placing the protection and welfare of children on peace agendas. Children suffer disproportionately in times of war. They therefore have the highest stake in peace. I have proposed that the protection and welfare of children should feature systematically in any negotiations to end war and in peace accords. During my recent visits to Burundi, Sierra Leone, the Sudan and Colombia, Governments and insurgency groups have agreed to place this issue on the agendas of the peace processes currently under way in their countries.

Making the protection and welfare of children a central concern in post-conflict programmes. Apart from the reestablishment of security and the consolidation of peace, one of the most daunting challenges a country faces after war is the "crisis of young people" - - the desperate conditions of young children and adolescents. The

prospects for recovery in many countries therefore depend very much on rehabilitating these young people and restoring to them a sense of renewed hope. This is why I have been calling on key actors responsible for designing post-conflict peace-building programmes, in particular national governments, the World Bank, the European Commission, UNDP and other relevant UN agencies, bilateral aid agencies, and NGOs, to make the needs of children a central concern from the outset of their planning, programming and resource allocation.

In this context, some of the core issues around which I have been seeking to mobilize concerted and effective response are: disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child combatants; return, reunion and resettlement of displaced children and families; programmes for mine-awareness and rehabilitation of child victims of landmines; programmes for physical and psychosocial rehabilitation for the injured, the maimed and the traumatized; and provision and rehabilitation of basic medical and educational services.

Integrating child protection into UN peace operations. I have proposed that, as a general policy, the protection and welfare of children should become a clear priority in all UN-mandated peace operations. To achieve this, I have proposed the systematic incorporation of three elements.

First, the protection and rehabilitation of children must be explicitly incorporated in the mandates of peacekeeping operations. Second, in order to promote the implementation of this dimension of the mandate and to advise me in a given country, a senior child protection advocate should always be attached to each operation. I have proposed that these child protection advisers typically should be drawn from the ranks of UNICEF, UNHCR, UNHCHR or relevant NGOs. The first child protection advocate (in UNAMSIL) will come from UNICEF. My Office and UNICEF have just completed drawing up proposed Terms of Reference (TOR) for this purpose. Third, appropriate training must be given to peacekeeping personnel - both civilian and military -- concerning the protection of the rights of children and women.

I am pleased to report that the first peace operation in which all the three new elements have been brought together is UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone.

I am working with other colleagues to put into place similar arrangements for the peace operations in Kosovo, DRC and East Timor.

Working to end recruitment and use of children in conflict. The widespread participation of children in armed conflict is one of the most horrendous and cynical trends of recent wars. To stem this tide of the massive use of children as soldiers, I have been advocating and pursuing a three-pronged strategy. First, I strongly support raising the age limit for recruitment and participation in armed conflict from 15 to 18. This preoccupation has constituted an important aspect of my advocacy work within discussions with governments and engagement with all parties to conflict. Second, and in tandem with the efforts to raise the age limit, I believe there

is an urgent need to mobilize right away a major movement of international pressure to lean on armed groups that are currently abusing children as combatants. Third, I believe that it is important to address the political, social and economic factors that create an environment which facilitates the exploitation of children in this way. This must include effective programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-child soldiers, or else many of them risk the prospects of being recycled into violence.

I should like on this occasion to address an urgent appeal to all states to cooperate actively in current efforts to bring to a successful conclusion, by January 2000, the work on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Why is the completion of this project so important? Because it will set us free to concentrate our energies and action on the urgent task of curbing child soldiering on the ground.

Building local capacities for protection and advocacy. It is critical to build and strengthen local capacities for protection and advocacy for children affected by armed conflict, both in the midst of ongoing violence and in its aftermath. In this connection, I have advocated a number of initiatives in countries affected by armed conflict: the establishment of a National Commission for Children (as proposed in Sierra Leone) to ensure that the protection and welfare of children are a major priority in the aftermath of conflict, and that this will be reflected in national priority setting, policy making and resource allocation; the formation of informal groups of elders and statesmen to serve as local advocates within a country (as in Liberia); and the formation of a parliamentary caucus for the protection of children (as in Sierra Leone).

I call on the donor community, international NGOs and UN agencies to do much more to support and strengthen local NGOs and civil society organizations.

I have also been very struck by the absence of and hunger for information, recreation and entertainment among children in situations of conflict and in its aftermath. I have therefore been advocating the establishment of local radio stations or programmes - -“Voice of Children”- - devoted mainly to the needs and interests of children in such situations. This would serve to give voice to children’s concerns, offer education and entertainment, promote tolerance and reconciliation, and raise awareness about the rights and protection of children. Such projects, while locally driven, require strong support from international partners.

IV. Undertaking initiatives with key actors

Engaging Governments. The primary responsibility for protecting children lies with governments and parties to conflict. In this connection, I call on Governments to make the protection of children a prominent feature of both their domestic and international policy agenda. At the international level, I urge them to apply their

influence, bilaterally and collectively, to lean on those who are abusing and brutalizing children in situations of conflict.

Engaging the Security Council. I have made it a particular priority to work with my colleagues to ensure that the protection of children affected by armed conflict becomes a major concern on the agenda of the Security Council. Following the first open debate on this issue and the statement by the President of the Security Council in June 1998, I have continued to encourage a deeper engagement on this matter by the Security Council.

A most significant occasion for children came on 25 August 1999, when the Security Council held the second open debate on this issue and, following a day-long debate, unanimously adopted resolution 1261 (1999).

Resolution 1261 is an important milestone, a landmark, for the cause of children affected by armed conflict:

- For the first time ever, the Security Council has devoted a resolution to a thematic concern, unrelated to a specific situation or an immediate incident. In so doing, it has clearly demonstrated its commitment to the protection of children affected by armed conflict.
- Second, the Resolution sets out a number of specific and important measures for protecting and ensuring the welfare of children in the midst of armed conflict and in its aftermath. If applied in specific situations, these measures could have a considerable impact on the ground.
- Third, the Resolution clearly establishes the protection and welfare of children affected by armed conflict as an important issue that legitimately belongs on the agenda of the Council. Furthermore, the Council has clearly indicated its intent to remain fully seized of this issue on an ongoing basis by asking for a report on the implementation of the Resolution by July 31, 2000.

With this resolution in hand, I ask two things of the delegates assembled here.

Security Council resolution 1261 provides a most important tool for advocacy on behalf of children affected by conflict. I call on all who are concerned for the protection of children to fully use this new advocacy tool. Second, I call on you to actively encourage the Security Council itself to apply the measures contained in the resolution in its future consideration of specific crisis situations and in the mandating of peace operations.

Engaging the European Union. In the course of the past year, I have made it a priority to establish strong cooperation with the European Union (EU) and its institutions. The objective has been to encourage the EU to make the protection of children affected by armed conflict a significant aspect of its own agenda. My

efforts have concentrated on developing initiatives in collaboration with three main bodies: the European Commission; the European Parliament; and the ACP-EU framework of cooperation which brings together 71 states from the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions and the 15 EU member states.

European Commission. I have held regular consultations with EU commissioners in Brussels, particularly with the Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs and the Commissioner for Development, as well as with an Inter-Service Group of senior officials drawn from Directorates General concerned with external relations, social affairs, development, humanitarian affairs, human rights, and the management of aid to non-member countries. In these discussions, I have urged the European Commission to incorporate the protection and welfare of children affected by armed conflict into their advocacy agenda and into their programme activities. I also requested that a special budget line be created for the benefit of children affected by war.

In this connection, I was very encouraged to learn recently from the European Commission that the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, including those of child soldiers, had been included as one of five thematic priorities for 1999 within the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights.

European Parliament. I have held discussions with the chairpersons of the Committee for Development and of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy, as well as with a cross-section of members of the European Parliament, seeking to obtain their political and advocacy support for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The two chairpersons agreed in principle to hold joint hearings on this issue. In November 1998, at the initiative of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, I also addressed the Committee for Development on the issue of child soldiers; subsequently, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, and expressed support for raising the age limit for recruitment to 18.

ACP-EU Cooperation Agreement. In my address to the ACP-EU Joint Assembly in Strasbourg in March 1999, I proposed the inclusion of the protection and rights of children, especially children affected by armed conflict, in the successor agreement, now under negotiation, to the current Lomé IV agreement. I subsequently held a series of consultations with the key actors, within the framework of ACP-EU Cooperation Agreement, including the President of ACP-EU Joint Assembly, the Secretary-General of the ACP, and ambassadors from ACP countries.

In this connection, I was very pleased to learn recently from the Secretary-General of the ACP that several elements he had advocated have been endorsed by the ACP-EU Ministerial Negotiating Conference and are included in the current working documents:

- protecting the rights of children and youth, especially the girl child;

- helping community-based institutions to ensure the protection and development of children;
- rehabilitation and reintegration of children in post-conflict situations;
- demobilization and reintegration of ex-child combatants.

The inclusion of these elements in the final agreement would represent a particularly important development for the protection and welfare of children: it would break new ground in the context of a development cooperation agreement; it would provide a major new advocacy tool for the protection of children; and it would provide funding under the new ACP-EU Cooperation Agreement for the specific benefit of children affected by armed conflict.

Building partnerships with non-governmental organizations. I believe that non-governmental and other civil society organizations have an indispensable role in shaping the agenda for children affected by armed conflict. Their contribution is critical in many areas. I have called on them to develop activities in three areas in particular: building a movement of advocacy at both the national and international levels; developing concerted operational programmes on the ground to develop a more effective response to the needs of victimized children; and serving as an important source of information on particular situations and issues.

I have given much attention and time to NGOs, working with them and encouraging both their advocacy and programme activities. In advance of field missions, I have sought the input of NGOs and briefed them on my return. I meet with local and international NGOs in the countries I visit to get their perspectives and learn about their projects.

Reaching out to communities of faith. I believe that communities of faith - - all faiths - - have a crucial role to play in the protection of children through their advocacy and work on the ground. I invite their spiritual leaders and institutions to use their moral influence, leadership and their presence within communities to promote the protection of children and women.

I have developed an active dialogue and framework of cooperation with the World Council of Churches (WCC), a fellowship of over 300 churches active in more than 120 countries. In August 1999, I addressed the Central Committee, the WCC's principal governing and policy making body. The Central Committee adopted a resolution in which it welcomed and expressed strong support for the mandate and work of the Special Representative and for Security Council Resolution 1261 on "Children and armed Conflict"; it called on its worldwide network of member churches and church-related institutions to undertake and to support concrete initiatives for the protection of children affected by armed conflict; it resolved to incorporate this issue as a significant part of the programme and activities for WCC's Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010). Earlier, WCC's 1998 Harare Declaration called upon member churches to work to prevent use of children in armed conflict.

I welcome the strong support expressed by the Vatican for this agenda and the engagement of the Catholic Church in communities affected by conflict. I am keen to deepen this engagement through the Church's advocacy outreach as well as its worldwide network of humanitarian institutions.

I have held consultations with the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Conference, and with Islamic scholars and clerics; we are actively exploring several possibilities for engagement and collaboration.

An appeal to the business community. There is an urgent need to monitor and control the flow of arms into and the exploitation of natural resources from theatres of conflict, where it is clear that children and women are being systematically brutalized. I call on the international business community to assume its social and corporate responsibility in this context, and refrain from doing business which fuels war machines in such situations. As a start, I urge them to develop voluntary codes of conduct within their own industries to address this serious issue.

V. Agenda-setting: highlighting critical issues

Launching the “era of application” for international norms. The time has come for the international community to launch an “era of application” - - the application of international norms and standards.

Over the past fifty years, the nations of the world have developed a truly impressive body of international humanitarian and human rights instruments. As it happens, this is a year of milestones for international instruments that provide for the protection of children in situations of international as well as internal armed conflicts: it is the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; it is the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions; and it is the centennial of the Hague Conventions. Last year, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But the impact of these instruments remains woefully thin on the ground. Words on paper cannot save children and women in peril. We must therefore shift our energies from the juridical project of the elaboration of norms to the political project of ensuring their application and respect on the ground. This can be accomplished if the international community is prepared to employ its considerable collective influence to that end.

Promoting and reinforcing traditional value systems. We must not cast aside local value systems which have traditionally provided ethical bearings to many of our societies. We must always distinguish between good and bad traditional values. We must not throw out the one with the other. The most damaging loss a society can suffer is the collapse of its own value system. Values matter, even in times of war.

In most societies distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable practices were maintained, with taboos and injunctions proscribing targeting of civilian populations, especially children and women. But today, to paraphrase the poet W. B. Yeats, things have fallen apart, the moral centre is no longer holding. In so many conflicts around the world, we see a “free-for-all”. Children, women, the elderly, grain stores, crops, livestock – all have become fair game in the single-minded struggle of power, in an attempt not just to prevail but to humiliate, not just to subdue but to annihilate the “enemy community” altogether. This is truly the phenomenon of “total war.”

I believe that we must mobilize all our resources -- especially parents, extended family, elders, teachers, schools, and religious institutions to reclaim and reassert those values and taboos that have traditionally been instrumental in protecting children and women in times of conflict. The mainstay of this effort must be the local community, through community-based initiatives. This ethical renewal is an essential process if a society caught in the throes of a deep moral and political crisis is to recover, rebuild and move forward. This community-based process should then be integrated with and reinforced by contemporary norms that have been developed at the international level.

Mobilizing support for new international instruments. In discussions with governments and through public advocacy, I have to mobilize support for the signing and ratification of the new international legal instruments that provide for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict.

First, the Statute of the International Criminal Court (the Rome Statute), adopted in June 1998, provides for jurisdiction over several child-specific crimes. Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 or using them to participate actively in hostilities has been designated a war crime. Intentional attacks against, *inter alia*, hospitals and buildings dedicated to education are also war crimes. Particularly grave forms of sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery, are both war crimes and crimes against humanity. The forcible transfer of the children of a group targeted for intentional destruction constitutes genocide for ICC purposes.

The establishment of the ICC is very significant for the protection of children: it is a powerful tool that considerably reinforces advocacy for children; it establishes international criminal jurisdiction over individuals responsible for the most serious crimes against children; and it should serve as a deterrent to such crimes.

Second, I have strongly supported the move to include child soldiering among the worst forms of labour, prohibited by the ILO Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which was adopted in June 1999. The ILO Convention defines a child as anyone below 18 years of age and prohibits the forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.

Third, I have supported the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which prohibits the recruitment or direct participation in hostilities of any person under the age of 18.

I call on all States concerned to sign and ratify these three international instruments as a matter of priority.

Providing protection and relief for internally displaced communities. Most people fleeing armed conflict do so within the borders of their own countries. They are unable or reluctant to leave their homelands and increasingly find countries of asylum less willing to accept them.

The nature and scope of this problem have been well described through the important work and reports of Mr. Francis Deng, the Representative of the Secretary-General for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), with whom I have been working very closely on this issue.

On all my missions in the past year -- Burundi, Colombia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan -- I have witnessed the deeply distressing and precarious conditions of IDPs, the vast majority of whom are children and women. Over 25 million persons are currently displaced within their own national borders -- compared with some 13 million refugees registered by UNHCR -- well over half of whom are children. I believe the time has come for the international community to develop a more systematic response and framework for providing protection and practical support to IDPs.

Imperative of preventing and ending conflicts. It is clear that, ultimately, the best way to protect children is to prevent conflicts before they occur or to resolve them before they assume destructive proportions. In order to prevent the occurrence and recurrence of conflict, therefore, both national and international actors have a responsibility to take political, economic and social measures to address certain fundamental issues within societies, including: structural imbalance and exclusion; poverty and despair; manipulation of diversity; prolonged denial of democratic governance -- all of which contribute significantly to creating conflicts.

VI. Follow-up to country visits

Follow-up activities fall into two main categories: follow-up to country visits to link initiatives with the programme activities of operational agencies, and follow-up on humanitarian commitments made by parties to conflict.

Follow-up to my country visits involve several partners at both headquarters and field levels.

- *Advance planning with UN partners.* In advance of field visits, I invite proposals and input from all relevant UN partners. Upon completion of a country visit, I

work closely with the operational agencies at headquarters and in the field on follow-up activities.

- *Direct cooperation with UN Country Teams.* I consult with the UN Country Team, on follow-up activities before, during and after my field visits. At the end of every visit, I review with the Country Team the outcome of the visit to determine appropriate follow-up. The Country Team is the principal partner and implementor of the country-specific follow-up. The roles of UNICEF, UNHCR, and the Resident Coordinator are crucial in this respect.
- *Governments of affected countries.* A key partner in ensuring effective follow-up to a country visit is the Government of the country. I maintain contacts with the relevant Governments through their Permanent Missions as well as through the UN Country Team.
- *Briefing to executive committees at headquarters.* An important part of the follow-up to country visits is my briefings to relevant executive committees at headquarters, notably ECHA and ECPS.
- *Seeking support of the donor community.* Follow-up measures that have been designed in cooperation with UN agency headquarters and the UN Country Team required the support of donors for implementation. I seek the support of interested donors for specific country projects to be executed by various operational agencies.
- *Involving NGOs.* I have been actively seeking the input of relevant international and local NGOs in shaping the agenda for my country visits and of follow-up to my initiatives. I meet regularly with NGOs during country visits and after the visits, and brief NGOs in New York and Geneva.

I have recently proposed a programme of action for country-specific follow-up to ensure progressive follow-up of the commitments and issues elicited during my field visits. This is intended to bring together all the key actors in particular country situations to identify and develop a greater coherence of approach, and should also ensure “lessons learned” from ongoing efforts to protect children. Countries of focus in the first phase of this undertaking will include the Sudan, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Burundi and Colombia.

The programme of action is being collectively designed and will be executed by a partnership of UN agencies, donor countries and NGOs. Amongst donor countries, a lead role is being played by the UK’s Department for International Development (DfID). The success of this effort to ensure a concerted response to the needs of war-affected children in particular countries will clearly depend on strong collaboration with relevant UN agencies, international and local NGOs, as well as the sustained commitment of donor countries.

VII. Some concluding observations

I wish to make the following concluding observations.

First observation: My role is that of advocacy - - this means highlighting and giving prominence to the fate of children affected by armed conflict; it is that of a catalyst - - this means proposing ideas and approaches that can lead to more effective response by key actors; it is that of a some-time convenor -- this means bringing together key actors to encourage more concerted approach by key actors; it is that of a cheer leader - - this means applauding and supporting the good work that is being done on the ground; and it is that of a facilitator - - this means undertaking humanitarian and diplomatic initiatives to unblock difficult political situations and thus facilitate the work of operational actors on the ground.

I serve as a facilitator and a resource for the agencies and bodies that operate on the ground. But the responsibility for developing operational programmes for promoting the protection and welfare of children rests with the operational agencies and bodies that have the resources, the expertise and field presence.

Our activities do and must complement each other. That is why in spite of the very limited capacity of my office, my colleagues and I have invested a huge amount of time and energy in building a framework of collaboration with our key partners within the UN system, especially: UNICEF, UNHCR, UNHCHR, UNDP, OCHA and DPKO. Building genuine collaboration is hard and serious work. For my colleagues and I, this represents an absolute commitment as well as logic of our mandate. We must not pay lip service to this issue.

And delegations, including in the various governing bodies, have a very important role to play in making collaboration a serious project. They can do so by their action at various levels, and they can do so by conveying a consistent and principled message on this issue.

Second observation: My ambition and hope are that our common endeavors -- the work of governments, the work of operational UN agencies, and the work of NGOs -- to give concrete expression and life to this mandate, will result in a critical mass of activities and awareness at all levels and by all actors, activities that will become self-sustaining beyond the life-span of this mandate.

Third observation: We must not lose sight of the fact that the suffering of children in the context of armed conflict bears many faces. We must keep in perspective and seek to respond to all the main dimensions of suffering to which children are exposed.

Fourth observation: There is need to demonstrate equal concern for all children affected by armed conflict. Millions of children are currently suffering from the

horrendous impact of armed conflict in different parts of the world. I discovered, for example, that Sierra Leoneans, at all levels, are remarkably well-informed about Kosovo. I will never forget the young man from the Massakoundou refugee camp in the Kissidougou prefecture in Guinea, who quoted figures in dollars and cents about how much the international community spends on a child in Kosovo as opposed to a child in Sierra Leone. I thought that he was bluffing, and so I asked him where he had got his figures. He shot back, "From the BBC!" This demonstrates that, in order to maintain credibility and solidarity, it is critical for the international community to be seen to be responding with the same level of concern wherever children are in need of protection and support.

Fifth observation: There is a danger that we in the international community may be exposed to so much that we could come to regard as normal a phenomenon that in fact presents a radical departure from the fundamental norms of conduct acceptable to all societies. We must not allow this to happen.

We must create a political and social climate which makes the abuse and brutalization of children entirely unacceptable.

On the eve of the new millennium, I very much hope that we can resolve to make the rights, protection and welfare of children - - all our children - - a common cause that can unite us across the boundaries of our political orientations, religious affiliations and cultural traditions. We must resolve to make our world safe for our children.

I look forward to working very closely with all of you to realize this project. This is an entirely feasible project, if we want it to be so, if we are prepared to invest in it, and if we are prepared to work for it.

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I cannot conclude my remarks this morning without a word of very special tribute to Luiz Zuniga, the UNICEF Representative in Burundi. Luiz, together with Saska von Zmeijefeldt -- a WFP logistics officer and seven Burundi, were murdered in cold blood in Rutana province in south-eastern Burundi on 12 October.

I worked closely with Luiz, and he and Kathleen Cravero-Kristofferson (UN Resident Coordinator in Burundi -- another truly remarkable person -- who Thank God, she escaped alive) were my hosts throughout my visit to Burundi in February. Luiz was quite simply one of the very best UN field staff I have ever encountered. I often cited him as an example - - a model of UN field service. His enthusiasm for children was infectious -- this was his vocation. His commitment to the children of Burundi was genuine and palpable; he identified completely with the people of Burundi. In this soft-spoken, self-effacing man from Chile, the children of Burundi have lost the best friend they could possibly have.

Luiz Zuniga has payed the ultimate price for what we are discussing here today. We have all lost a rare man of commitment and service. Working with him was a very heart warming experience for me personally.
