



War causes awful human suffering. It disrupts lives and destroys homes. It makes the task of overcoming poverty and hunger all the more difficult.

And increasingly, it is the children who suffer. Armed conflict now kills and maims more children than soldiers (1), as wars are fought not on battlefields but in villages and towns. Children in war zones are deprived of adequate food and miss out on basic schooling. They experience lasting emotional and psychological effects of witnessing violence, being separated from their families, and living in fear of attack.



### **Pinto:**

#### **No more football**

Twelve year old Pinto da Cruz's right leg was shattered when he stepped on a landmine two years ago. The doctor had no choice but to amputate the leg at the hip.

Pinto spent five painful and lonely months in hospital, visited once a day when his mother brought in food she had prepared back in the village. Since being discharged from hospital with a wheelchair and crutches, Pinto has had to come to terms with the altered life he will lead. "I helped my mother build this house and I would help her collect firewood and do the shopping. I used to play football but not anymore."

Pinto's country, Angola, which was ravaged by war for three decades, has an estimated 10 million landmines.



### **Vestine:**

**Heavy responsibilities on young shoulders**

**Eighteen-year-old**

Vestine has been responsible for looking after her five younger brothers since both their parents were killed in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. They live together in their old home, which is beginning to leak when it rains. Vestine and her two oldest brothers (16 and 14) grow beans, groundnuts and vegetables in their small garden. Sometimes they help in other people's gardens to earn

### **How War Affects Children**

Since 1990

\*2 million children have been killed in wars  
6 million seriously injured

\*An estimated 300,000 children are participants in armed forces of government or rebel groups

\*Children under 18 make up 45% of the world's refugees and displaced people

\*Of more than 150 conflicts since the Second World War, 130 have been fought in the developing world, where many children also suffer the effects of poverty and ill-health(2)

some extra food or cash. There is usually only enough food for an evening meal.

### **Jasmina: Trying to forget**

My name is Jasmina Huskic and I am 14 years old. I was the victim of many war crimes. I watched my mother tortured while we were both prisoners. It is something I am trying hard to forget.

Jasmina used to live in Dobo, in the part of Bosnia now controlled by the Serbs. One day strangers took away her father, a Serb; she and her mother, a Muslim, were taken in another direction and imprisoned in an old building. They were lucky to be set free after a relative paid for their release.



### **Wisdom:**

#### **Living in fear**

I no longer sleep well. I often get this ghastly dream that the bomber jets have arrived to attack, and we have to bolt to the bomb shelter again! After the bombing our teachers told us we had spent only an hour in our hide-outs on the school compound. But

with the crush of arms and legs of squatting children, and the airlessness, it [seemed] much longer. "To me, the worst aspects of war are the maiming and killing of people. And starvation. Usually we eat only once a day, at sunset. Fearing the enemy might come at any time, we don't farm extensively. In the past year alone, my family

and I have had to flee across the border five times. Whenever possible we take along tools like axes, knives and sickles to dig up edible roots and tubers. The war in Sudan has been going almost all of 16-year-old Wisdom's life.

### Children on the front line

An alarming trend is the increasing use of children as soldiers, both by government forces and by armed opposition groups in more than 30 countries. New technology has made semi-automatic rifles light enough to be used and simple enough to be stripped and reassembled by a child of 10, and as cheap as a goat or a bag of corn.

Although most child soldiers are between 15 and 18 years of age, some are recruited as young as 10 years(3). Most come from disrupted or deprived families. Some "choose" to join, perhaps hoping to get regular meals and pay to assist their families. Tragically, some children are kidnapped or forced to fight against their will.

### Pamela, child soldier

I am an orphan and lived with my grandparents. One

night I was sleeping and the door was forced open. Four men pulled me out of my bed. In the compound there were already a number of children tied together with a rope around their waists. I was given a heavy load of groundnuts to carry with a warning that if it fell down, I would be killed. The following day, I was given mortar shells tied in a piece of cloth to carry. I feared they might explode at any time.

Pamela was 11 when she was abducted by rebels of the Lords Resistance Army in Northern Uganda (her brothers and sister had been taken a few months earlier).

### Richard, child soldier

I fought something like eight times. I am not sure how many people I could have killed. I am sure of one. One day I was forced to shoot and kill a man who was running away from a hut we had put on fire.

Richard, aged 14, was seized while hiding in the bush when the rebels attacked his home and killed his parents.

## World Vision and children of war

World Vision's key strategies to help children of war:

- in contexts of conflict, give priority to the needs of children
- network with other agencies to coordinate relief and rehabilitation
- advocate banning of landmines; support mines awareness programs
- counsel children of war to help them deal with the trauma
- try to reunite children with their parents, relatives or neighbours
- raise media awareness of children's suffering in war
- provide the basic needs of children for food, shelter, and protection

### Reuniting families: Rwanda

When large number of refugees fled back into Rwanda from refugee camps in eastern Zaire late in 1996, thousands of children were separated from their parents. World Vision, Red Cross and Save the Children Fund worked intensively to trace relatives, while the

unaccompanied children were sheltered and fed in special centres.



Meeting Elvo the Clown (Aaron Ward) brought fun back into the lives of some of Kosovo's children

### Healing the wounds: Kosovo

In Montenegro, World Vision's psycho-social programme was designed to help refugee children recover emotionally from the trauma of the war in Bosnia. Kiwi clown Elvo (Aaron Ward) performed there as part of the programme. "Elvo reminded the children that there are fun things and they can be happy", said programme head Dr Deana Beech. "Otherwise they would tend to grow up seeing other people as inevitably aggressive."

## Healing the wounds: Uganda

Children who have been freed after abduction and brutalization by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda receive counselling and practical assistance at World Vision's Gulu war-traumatized children's centre and Kiyandango farm training centre. Some require medical treatment for wounds, venereal disease and even malnutrition. In the relative safety of the centres, the children are encouraged to talk about their experiences and, gradually, to take part in cleaning, cooking and gardening. The program also includes dancing, music and sport, as well as training in tailoring, bicycle repair, carpentry and farming, so that the young people will be able to earn a living. Meanwhile, the staff try to locate the child's family and prepare them for the child's return. The children make several visits until they are ready to go home. Then, each one receives a settlement kit including clothes and sandals, a plate and cup, a blanket and soap. Some 4600 children have been assisted, and 274 community volunteers have been trained to provide long-term compassionate support for those who are very badly damaged.



War-traumatized children in Gulu, Uganda, build a make-shift hut for agricultural training.

## Assisting community recovery

Cambodia is still struggling to recover from years of violence and war, in which at least one million people died. Rural areas like Samrong Tong district lack health, education and transport services. Farmers grow barely enough to feed their families, and some areas are unsafe to farm because of landmines. Through child sponsorship, World Vision is working with the community to build wells and install latrines. Farmers are trying new agricultural methods and benefiting from a cow bank and a rice bank. They have repaired a dam through a food-for-work scheme. Their children are

attending 16 new preschools, with blackboards and furniture supplied by World Vision. Primary school enrolment has increased, due to the construction of new classrooms. A cash credit scheme has enabled small business people to pay off outstanding debts to moneylenders.

## Safety first: Landmines

In Cambodia, Iraq and Afghanistan, World Vision has helped to teach people about the dangers of mines and other unexploded arms. Mines awareness education helps reduce the number of accidents. Often children are severely injured from using unexploded devices as toys.



In Afghanistan, an unexploded device lies beside a road used by children.

## Helping child-headed households: Rwanda

In Rwanda, teenagers who are caring for brothers and sisters need special support. In the capital, Kigali, World Vision is teaching them new skills, such as carpentry, garment-making, car mechanics and driving so they can earn an income

## Rebuilding from the rubble

In countries such as East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq, World Vision has worked to re-build communities damaged by conflict. In some places children have missed out on many months of schooling. Elsewhere the fighting has caused damage to electricity and water supply. Often there is suspicion between groups accused of supporting one side or the other. When peace returns, communities begin to identify the things they would like to change, to build a better future for their children.



# Protecting the world's children

National leaders meeting at the World Summit for Children in New York 1990 recognised the need for everyone to play a part in protecting children:

*We will work carefully to protect children from the scourge of war and to take measures to prevent further armed conflicts  
We will promote the values of peace.  
The essential needs of children and families must be protected even in times of war(4).*

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by all nations except the United States and Somalia, by mid 2003 states that governments should take all steps

to ensure that the rules of humanitarian law are respected - especially as they apply to children - and that children under 15 should not take direct part in hostilities(5). The optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict states that no-one under 18 should be forced to join an armed force, and volunteers should be at least 16. Under 18-year-olds should have non-combat roles. As of November 2003, 66 nations had ratified the Protocol(6).

Sadly the world is still falling far short of these commitments. Concerned citizens have a part to play in urging governments to honour their commitments, for the sake of the children.

## Action you can take

Monitor the newspaper, radio and TV news for examples of children affected by war. How are they affected? Are they taking part in the conflict, or simply victims of it? What steps are being taken (or could be taken) to protect them?

Talk to people who have experienced living in a war zone when they were children. (Ask them if it's OK first, as some people's memories may be just too painful). Ask them what they think needs to be done for children of war now.

Celebrate living in a peaceful country by sending a donation to World Vision to help children living in a war-torn country.

## Notes on sources

1. Graca Machel. *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* – extract at <http://www.unicef.org/graca/patterns.htm> p 7
2. <http://www.unicef.org/grace/patterns.htm>
3. Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers. *Stop Using Child Soldiers*. London: Save the Children, 1998.
4. World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, extracts from a 10-point commitment; full text reproduced in UNICEF *State of the World's Children 1991*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991 p 53-57
5. By mid-2003 the United States and Somalia had signed but not ratified the Convention. By ratifying, a country commits itself to implementing the Convention. Source: [www.unicef.org/crc/convention.htm](http://www.unicef.org/crc/convention.htm)
6. <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/treaties/status-opac.htm>

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Consider this famous verse from the Bible, which is inscribed on the United Nations building in New York: "They will hammer their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning-knives," Isaiah 2:4b. What is Isaiah's picture of a transformed world? (If possible, read the verse in context, in a modern Bible translation such as the Good News Bible). What does it mean to you? Who or what inspires **you** to work towards a more peaceful world?

Learn about peaceful ways to resolve conflicts – in your family or neighbourhood. Pray for the leaders of nations, that they will also look for solutions other than war.

### World Vision resources on related issues include:

*Through Innocent Eyes – the Children of War* (1995). 17 min video on the effects of war on children in Africa and Asia. (For loan or purchase)

*The Long Way Home* (1994). 18 min video on the experiences of refugees who fled their homes, particularly in Rwanda and Mozambique (For loan or purchase)

*Landmines*. 12 min video from AUSAID (the Australian government's overseas aid programme). Looks at the global issues and uses Cambodia as a case study.

To borrow resources, or obtain other topic sheets on global issues, contact:

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