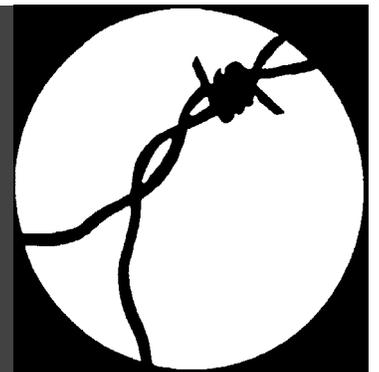


Photographs courtesy of John Donoghue

First Light



A Quarterly Publication of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT)

Fall/Winter 2000

First Light, which is published quarterly, is intended to inform the interested reader about torture, its effects and what we can do in aiding survivors to overcome their experience of torture and war. CCVT views itself as part of a larger global community and is committed to the struggle for human rights, justice and the end of the practice of torture.

We chose to call this publication *First Light* because as the first light before true dawn, it symbolizes the first ray of hope for survivors of torture.

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We need your words!

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Mandate

The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture aids survivors in overcoming the lasting effects of torture and war. Working with the community, the Centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, advocates for their protection and integrity, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families.

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Making Whole: Broadening the Definitions of Justice for Victims of Sexual Torture

By
Tina Lopes

Survivors of torture who settle in Canada demonstrate awe-inspiring strength, courage and resilience in their determination to build new lives. Many of these survivors are women who, as single parents, shepherd their children through the frightening maze of a new country with a new language and an often unrecognizable culture. The capacity of women survivors to learn a new language, deal with immigration authorities, find housing and interact with the educational system demonstrates the resilience of the human spirit, and the women's enormous determination to survive.

Unfortunately, this resilience and courage is rarely honoured and supported by the families and communities to whom these women return. Given how deeply the dignity and merit of women have been tied to their survive sexual torture are communities. In many at the very least, deeply explores the need for a justice than is currently to victims of torture: this would recognize that their munities often ostracize sexually tortured. There is, redress that re-establishes of value and honour in the them to develop sufficient begin the process of recov-

Restoring the survivors of sexual torture tions for a wide range of private, governmental and tors at community, national The support given to the vived torture must not only cal needs but must ensure gration into society.



Illustration by Reza Sepahdari

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Experiences of Women Victims of Sexual Torture

The severe after effects of sexual torture are well known, and there have been numerous studies documenting the long-term trauma and disability caused by such torture. Rape that occurs outside the context of torture is acknowledged as the physical, psychological and moral violation of the person. Sexual torture can be described as "the use of any sexual activity with the purpose of manifesting ag-

gression and of causing physical and psychological damage.” The stigma associated with sexual abuse and rape intensifies the shame and self-blame common to all victims of torture.

Women who have been tortured, and sexually violated in the course of torture, experience moral degradation in addition to physical violence. The break down process is often carried out by forcing the prisoner to take part in humiliating types of sexual relations and inflicting physical pain to the genitals, causing the prisoner to associate pain and shame with sexuality. The trauma of torture does not end when a woman is released and returns to her community. The position of a tortured woman is often altered from that of a woman of good standing in the community, to that of a “prostitute”, a woman rejected by the community. The consequences for victims in societies that place great value on women’s virginity are extreme; they are viewed as women without honour who cannot be redeemed. In some cases, women are so isolated and harshly treated by their own families and communities that they are driven to suicide.

In discussing justice for women survivors of sexual torture, it is important that any definitions of redress must recognize the differing needs of women in different countries. While this paper cannot address the entire spectrum of women survivors, it attempts to capture some of the issues in an examination of the experiences of women from Bosnia, Ethiopia and Tibet. The issues that arise for women from these three countries have some important similarities, yet there are also sufficient differences in their political, economic, cultural and social contexts to warrant distinct interventions.

The physical consequences of rape may be similar in most cases, but the extent of the psychological trauma depends on the subjective meaning of rape that is dependent upon the historical and cultural traditions that surround it. Interventions and measures for redress must address the specific ways in which the ethical and cultural meaning of rape has been used to defile and destroy the woman’s sense of identity, as well as her relationship with her community. In addition, diverse communities and cultures have different ways of dealing with problems and providing support to each other, and it is important to develop interventions that are appropriate to each community.

Bosnia

The rape of women in times of war is common throughout history but this practice has not often received the attention it requires. However, in the cases of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Croatia, sexual torture has been such as systematic method or organized violence that the international community can no longer ignore the issue. The European Community Council sent a delegation to the area in December 1992 and January 1993 to conduct an investigation.

In the report of the Warburton Mission, the delegation states that the rapes of Muslim women have been perpetrated on a wide scale as a new method of ethnic cleansing. UNHCR reports estimate that over 35,000 women were believed to be held in rape camps, and they acknowledge that this figure may be low given the women’s reluctance to speak about such events. The rape of Bosnian women was intended to humiliate and punish Muslim men and break down the Muslim national, religious and cultural identity. Men who are related to the raped women were humiliated by their apparent inability to protect the women from the enemy. Women were being impregnated by Serbs to bear Serbian, not Muslim children, in order to break down the Muslim line of descent.

Staff working with these women in the BOSWOFAM (Bosnian Women and their Families) Project in the area have noted that numerous women were raped on more than one occasion and by more than one person. Mass rape was a part of organized violence and took place in the presence of family members and neighbours. According to the women survivors participating in the project, these rapes often occurred in the course of other kinds of physical and psychological torture, such as forcing the women to eat pork or kiss a cross.

A number of women feel shame and disgust for their bodies, and blame themselves for not leaving the area earlier; many were reluctant to seek help, preferring to keep their sexual assaults a secret. The rape victims feel disconnected from the rest of society, feel helpless about the future, and constantly fear

rejection. A number of women have attempted suicide and many comment that death would have been preferable to the treatment they suffered.

The more public nature of these atrocities resulted in greater sympathy for the women survivors in their communities. A significant intervention on their behalf occurred when Muslim religious leaders publicly declared the women innocent and deserving of support. However, this has not been enough to protect several women who were cast off by their husbands, families and neighbours. Some reports indicate that women who have been raped have been harshly judged and have themselves been blamed for the attacks; they have also been particularly badly treated by the authorities to whom they reported the crimes.

In their assessments of the survivors, the BOSWOFAM staff have affirmed that the social environment influences the extent to which symptoms develop in the women. Factors such as social stigmatization, lack of social support, dependency on other people and financial problems, can increase the stress and symptoms of the survivors.

This confirms that any efforts to assist victims of sexual torture must reinstate them into their communities and prevent the further mistreatment of the women by their own communities. Advocacy with religious leaders is particularly important since the community judges the women on the basis of cultural religious norms. When these norms equate sexual violation with sin and corruption, regardless of whether the women were forced or not, the consequences to survivors are severe.

Ethiopia

While international humanitarian law provides extensive protection to women during armed conflicts, in reality, there is little refuge provided to women either in the area of conflict or in countries of asylum. In the years following the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974, Ethiopian and Eritrean refugee women at the Sudan-Djibouti border had to submit to the sexual demands of border guards. Women were also subjected to harassment and rape at the hands of administrators and soldiers in refugee camps.

Women continued to experience aggression, isolation and exploitation at the hands of government authorities and the police while in exile. In the cities and towns of Sudan, Ethiopian women were at the mercy of police who would demand to see their identity cards, and would assault them during the interrogation and arrest.

Rape victims who are citizens of a country hesitate to bring charges against their rapists because they are often not believed and have to prove their case. In her book *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees*, Helene Moussa points out how much more difficult it is for refugee women with no legal rights to seek justice from the state. She comments that it was often the officials who had the power to determine the status of the women in the country who would assault them.

Refugee women who are completely without protection from the state or from non-governmental organizations are forced to extreme measures to find protection. Moussa describes how many agreed to marry men they hardly knew, even abusive men, because they thought this was preferable to the risk of sexual violation outside marriage. Those who were divorced or abandoned by their husbands after they had been told of the rapes were forced to resort to prostitution in order to provide for themselves and their children. Some would find employment as housekeepers but the employers would make the women work long hours and then refuse to pay them.

In 1980, a Tripartite Commission that included the UNHCR and the Ethiopian and Djibouti governments was established to examine the voluntary repatriation of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees in Djibouti. While this repatriation would not be without problems, for the women who had been raped or who had resorted to prostitution, the possibility of returning to their home towns did not exist because they would not be accepted by their families or communities.

Despite such harsh and debilitating experiences, these women would demonstrate great courage and resourcefulness in finding ways to provide for themselves and their children. There were few alternatives for economic survival for Ethiopian and Eritrean women in African cities and towns. The most common work available was housekeeping; others made and sold traditional alcoholic brews. Many lived in extreme poverty. When asked what sustained them, a number of women said that their faith in God gave them the strength to endure these hardships.

The plight of these women indicates the need for greater legal protection for refugee women in countries of asylum. It also demonstrates the need to create viable economic opportunities for these women when they seek sanctuary from armed conflict. Though the physical and psychological symptoms of survivor may make it difficult for the women to learn new skills or another language at a rapid rate, these and other women around the world overcome these obstacles in order to care for their families.

Tibet

Authorities in the Tibetan Autonomous Region frequently use torture in the course of investigations, detentions and prison sentences. There are thousands of Tibetan torture victims both in Tibet and in countries of asylum, and many are women and children. Nuns, as well as monks, who have been very active in the struggle for Tibet's independence, have experienced particularly severe forms of torture.

The mistreatment of Tibetan women includes not only the torture of political prisoners but also the forced abortions and sterilization of women. Chinese law allows abortion even in the ninth month, causing severe physical and mental health problems for the mothers. The abortions and sterilizations are performed without anesthesia and under unsterile conditions that give rise to infections that sometimes lead to death.

In his study of Tibetan torture survivors in India, Timothy Holtz examines the extent to which "survivors invoke coping strategies and build resilience to trauma by drawing on religious and cultural resources." His findings suggest that victims are consoled and can find strength to endure when they are able to confer meaning to their experience of torture. For many Tibetan survivors, the fact that their right to practice Buddhism was threatened by the Chinese government made their struggle for the independence of their country a spiritual, as well as political, action. Furthermore, Buddhist teachings on suffering and karma hold forth the possibility that one's suffering can be of benefit to oneself and others; this may have decreased the tendency to self-blame and shame that affects most victims of torture. This religious and cultural framework was vital and created a supportive community network for the survivors.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Implication for Women Survivors

The Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing in September 1995, and a number of recommendations were made to further the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. While any effort to implement the Convention would have a beneficial impact on women survivors, there are some specific recommendations that are worth noting here.

Section 125 of the Platform of Action states that governments should "condemn violence against women and refrain from invoking any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination as set out in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women." It suggests that governments exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons. This section also suggests the need for governments to fund training programs for judicial, legal, medical, social, educational, police and immigrant personnel to avoid the abuse of power leading to violence against women.

Section 127 states that governments, employers and other appropriate organizations develop educational programs to raise awareness that acts of violence against women constitute a crime and a

violation of the human rights of women.

In response to the violations of women's human rights in situations of armed conflict in many parts of the world, the Platform of Action makes the following recommendations:

Section 141 suggests that governments strengthen the participation of women in all national and international conflict resolution processes, and in particular as members of international tribunals established to develop peaceful settlement of armed conflicts.

Section 145 (1) states that governments should provide women who have been determined refugees with access to vocational/professional training programs, language training and small-scale enterprise planning, as part of the rehabilitation programs for victims of torture.

These sections are embedded in a very comprehensive platform for Action that suggests a broad range of activities not only for governments and international bodies, but also for legislative bodies, academic and research institutions, the media, trade unions, cooperatives, non-governmental organizations, women's organizations and professional associations.

Rebuilding Shattered Lives

Women who have survived torture and have found asylum in another country are often confronted by a social, cultural, economic and political context that is totally foreign. They must build a new social and economic network despite the fact that most interactions are a source of fear: the language, the culture, social norms for women, the employment, health and educational systems.

When international and non-governmental organizations attempt to provide support and assistance to women survivors, the focus is often on providing the essentials of life and assistance in dealing with psychological symptoms such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The broader questions of what may be necessary for these survivors to reestablish their integrity as women and human beings are rarely addressed.

Studies of post-traumatic stress disorder indicate that the most effective way of dealing with emotional damage is with the assistance of a social network that offers support. Therefore, any system of justice that seeks to compensate women who have survived sexual torture must establish these women as full members of society who have been the victims of a crime. It must also protect these women from further trauma and hardship that may result from social, religious or cultural norms regarding women's sexuality.

What is of equal importance to women who have been victims of torture is to assert the injustice of what they have experienced and to affirm their rights as human beings. One of the most powerful healing experiences is for the women to gather together and advocate for changes to policies, practices and attitudes that keep them ostracized from the rest of society. When women gather and speak publicly, they are reclaiming their rights as full members of the community to speak their view of what is required for a safe and healthy society. In Canada, for example, Somali refugee women were successful in changing the Ministry of Housing's policy on providing housing to refugee claimants, many of whom were single mothers with children.

In his work on torture survivors in Montreal, Canada, Dr. Cecile Rousseau describes the importance of assigning meaning to traumatic events as individuals, families and as a community. Rousseau states that our understanding of what has occurred is a product of our culture, political convictions and our moral and religious values. If a woman survivor and her community have a shared meaning of events, the sense of isolation and rejection associated with self-blame and shame can be prevented.

In situations in which the community and family attribute a meaning to the sexual torture of women that is different from the meaning given to other torture experiences, there is great harm done to all members of the society. The women are denied the compassion and solidarity of their social network that is so essential to recovery and rehabilitation, and the entire community perpetuates an unjust view of rela-

tions between men and women.

Broadening the Definition of Justice

Torture strikes at the heart of a set of deeply held beliefs about what constitutes a human being. Sexual torture attacks the humanity and value of women as individuals, and reduces them to sexual property. Yet, sexual torture does not exist in a vacuum; it rises out of ongoing violence against women that continues even in times of peace. Nothing short of transformation at the deepest level of our societies is enough to effectively challenge violence that is aimed at destroying the will, identity and soul of women. It may be that the structures that prescribe torture, or at the very least, have condoned it through silence, are too deeply embedded to be touched by political activism or even mass education. Certainly the various conventions that are supposed to protect women prove ineffective since there is little political will to enforce them.

Perhaps something else is called for when searching for “justice” for survivors and effective deterrents to the widespread violence against women. There is an elusive quality that Indian scholars name as *viveka*, medieval European writers call *discretio*, and what we now speak of as discernment. It describes the ability to see into the heart of things and make a decision or judgment that is especially sound because it provides what is needed to restore the individual or community.

We are gathered on a continent in which there is an enormous respect for the divine feminine. The devotion to goddesses of great strength, beauty and compassion are evident everywhere in the images of Sarasvati, goddess of music and eloquence; Lakshmi, goddess of wealth; Durga, destroyer of demons, and Kali Maa, goddess of transformation.

It is also the home of one of the world’s greatest epics, the Mahabharata. A prominent character in the epic is Draupadi, a princess whose husbands were the princes of the Pandava clan. The eldest of these brothers had a weakness for gambling, and one day he lost all his possessions in a game of dice. He bet his own brothers and even himself and lost again. Finally, he bet his wife, Draupadi and she fell into the hands of his opponent. Draupadi is dragged from her chambers in front of everyone, and one of the brothers of the man who had won her begins to tear off her clothing. Draupadi is humiliated as her menfolk sit by and do nothing to intervene. This is the pivotal moment in the entire epic. What follows is a war in which the entire warrior caste perishes.

In contrast to this is the description of a well-governed state as one in which “women, adorned with all dress and ornaments, and unaccompanied by men, can move freely and fearlessly in its roads and lanes.” For women to be safe good laws are not enough; there must be in the culture and the norms of that society a recognition that there is a connection between the just treatment of women and a society that is truly civilized. The Mahabharata teaches us that the desecration of women is the sign and symptom of a state that is unstable and will not thrive.

This story also reminds women of the power of which we are capable when we rely on our connection to the sacred. Draupadi evokes aspects of the divine feminine in response to her plight. She evokes Sarasvati, goddess of eloquence when she argues with the court and stuns them with her legal expertise. She maintains that since her husband had bet himself and lost before he bet her, he did not have the right to gamble her away. Finally, she prays to her Lord Krishna, and the sari which covers her becomes an endless garment that her aggressor cannot remove.

Women have allowed the barriers of race, class and language to divide them, and we have failed to speak out strongly on behalf of women who are ostracized because they have been sexually assaulted. When women remember their connection to the sacred, they also remember their connection to each other. In their positions as politicians, educators, physicians and lawyers, they can act to redefine justice for survivors of torture.

Finally, there is cause for concern when religious practices that are meant to inspire its followers to greater wisdom and compassion result in the further persecution of the victims of torture. When we

revisit the sacred texts of various religions, we find that, contrary to societal norms, they are filled with stories of women who are not only exemplary devotees, they also bring blessings and prosperity to their people. When women are safe and are able to fully participate in their communities, the entire community benefits.

Recommendations

- Institutions for the advancement of women should participate in the development of public policy and programs aimed at reintegrating women on the margins of society.
- Women's issues and gender perspectives should become integral to the work of medical and legal associations.
- Women members of medical associations be given greater authority in defining issues of health and the determinants of health, and in the development of policy governing the provisions of services to women survivors.
- Women members of legal associations be given greater authority to review their country's implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- Medical, legal and other professional associations should not support any custom, tradition or religious practice that either permits or promotes discrimination and violence against women.
- Medical, legal and other professional associations should assist in the development of national educational programs that address the human rights of women.
- Medical, legal and other professional associations should advocate with local and national levels of government for stronger economic development programs for women who have survived torture.
- Legal associations develop proposals for penal, civil, labour and administrative sanctions in domestic legislation to address wrongs caused to women who are subjected to violence.

This article was written by Tina Lopes, an organizational change consultant, educator, CCVT Board member and Chair of CCVT's International Committee. The article is based on a paper presented by Tina at the VIII



CCVT Women's Support Group

Women and Oppression

By Magda Hatteb

The condition of women in the Middle East has become a frequent topic of discussion. Indeed, the specific subject of women in the “Arab World” and Iran has assumed major importance in the media and in international humanitarian organizations. This article discusses the economic, political and social conditions that determine the lives of women in their respective countries of origin. I will also emphasize some particular factors in their fight for human rights.

Despite the existence of old laws emphasizing the submission and subordination of women, major changes have taken place in family life. One significant change in the lives of women dealt with the economic transformations in employment. The emerging bourgeois classes, which seized power after their liberation from colonial domination, required a large labour force in order to exploit available economic resources and opportunities. At this time, women enjoyed increased participation in the workforce. However, the economic boom in the Arab countries was soon followed by crises in the 1970’s and 1980’s such as:

The 1973 Egyptian war against Israel

The Gulf War (Iran and Iraq 1980)

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982

Economic inflation, growing debt and increased military spending

These factors resulted in the failure of development policies and strategies in the Arab world. Women immediately became the victims of these failures, losing jobs to men as work opportunities dwindled; with downsizing in health, men’s health issues were given priority over women’s. In education, men (as before) were given priority, forcing many women to give up their education.

The legal system supported the increasingly oppressive economic structures and consequently, the rights of women were trampled on.

This suppression of women’s rights has paved the way to resurrecting backward practices, ideas and concepts in regards to the place of women within society. In many cases, the situation of women has become so abject, that it is almost inconceivable that such conditions can still prevail at the beginning of the 21st Century.

Some examples of customs in the Arab world, Iran and other countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and India include the following:

1. In cases where the man can no longer support his family, poverty may force him to allow his wife or daughter to work outside the house as a servant or as an agricultural labourer. Such as man is considered by himself and others to be a pimp.
 - In the middle class, women perform duties outside and inside the house (as do women in other countries). If she is educated and living in a city, she may be able to work. However, the only professions open to her are nursing, teaching or office work.
 - Educated women are supposed to marry rich men and live their lives under the supervision of the spouse's parents.
2. As priority is accorded to men in employment, so it is in the provision of health facilities and education (which has always been inadequate among the poor). The situation has not improved, and in many cases made worse, with the retrenching and withdrawal of women's rights.
3. When it comes to sharing family resources, men are given preference in all aspects of life. They even receive more nutrition than the rest of the family as they are given the largest plate of food at meals.

In marriage, family and criminal law, women do not enjoy equal legal rights. This leads to injustices such as:

Compulsory marriage: women are obligated to marry when they reach a certain age

Prohibition of marriage or divorce without family consent

Polygamy: men are allowed up to 4 wives

A man can divorce his wife at will, but a woman cannot divorce her husband

Imposition of the veil

Temporary marriage: a form of contract marriage where the man sets the duration

Restrictions in being able to fully participate in social and political life

Laws of inheritance: a woman may only receive 1/3 of a family inheritance while a man receives 2/3

Court testimony: a man's testimony is equal to that of 2 women since she is considered to have only 1/4 of a man's brain power. A woman cannot give testimony in criminal cases and the testimony of women alone is not accepted

Freedom of travel: women have no right to travel alone without the consent of her husband or father. In some cases, they are not allowed to travel alone at all.

These laws and customs come out of Shari'a Law as interpreted by particularly extremist Islamic groups. The resurgence of such groups developed over the past few decades in reaction to deep economic and political crises, the bankruptcy of nationalist agendas, and the failure of various development policies as promoted by the West. As a result of these failures, the general populace turned to Islam, and to fundamentalist

Islamic groups in particular. Accordingly, social, political and legal life changed dramatically for women. The basic rules are simple:

While a man is obliged to support and maintain the family, he may do so as he sees fit, either inside or outside the home; the woman must care for the family and perform her duties in the home

Men are made governors over women; women must be obedient

Here are a few examples that show how these rules affect the lives of women.

A few months ago, a judgment was made in Iran against a couple condemning them to death. Accused of adultery, the woman was sentenced to death by stoning. This means being buried from the waist down, allowing the stone throwers easy access to the victim. The woman's friend, accused of illegitimate relations, was sentenced to receive 100 lashes and then to be executed. Any form of association or even friendship outside of marriage is punishable by flogging, imprisonment, forced marriage and/or stoning to death.

In Arab countries, rape within a marriage is not a crime while domestic violence is considered a private matter. In all cases, Shari'a Laws affect women much more than men and deals with such matters as rape, fornication, adultery, prostitution and appropriate Islamic clothing. In the case of rape, four witnesses must testify to the occurrence of the incident, otherwise the victim's experience may be considered adulterous – a crime punishable by stoning to death or by flogging.

Nevertheless, it appears that rape and assault continues to happen on a grand scale. For example, the United Nations discovered that of 153 Kuwaiti women who were asked if they had been assaulted, 1/3 answered yes. When asked if they knew friends or relatives who had been victims of such violence, 80% responded in the affirmative. In Algeria, current estimates are 200,000 children born as a result of rape. Contemporary Islamic revivalists have attempted to reform family law through denying rights to women. After their failure to gain power, their attacks on women became more concerted and involved controlling their sexuality and their right to a future.

It is estimated that about one million women and girls undergo female genital mutilation (FGM) each year. Every five minutes, there is a girl between 4 and 12 years of age who is exposed to this crime¹. This practice takes place in most Middle Eastern and some African countries. It is commonly believed that FGM is the same as the circumcision of men and that the two practices provide similar benefits to each party. It is also believed that FGM prevents the woman from making too many demands on her husband and from seeking sexual satisfaction if she is widowed or divorced.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, as in all of the Middle East, honour killing is a practice that has claimed the lives of over 9,000 women in the last decade. With little protection, women have experienced horrific fates:

Killed by their husbands, brother, other male relation

Burnt by their husbands or other male relative

Publicly executed

Stoned to death

Disabled or disfigured

In a state of depression and despair, seeing no other alternative that to commit suicide

Even when they do escape death, the women are often locked up and chained by their families.

In spite of these circumstances, women do fight back. Since being founded in 1992, the Independent Women's Organization (IWO) has been striving to provide all possible support to women. The group decided that the only way to overcome their problems was by acting in solidarity with other individuals and organizations. Through their advocacy, they even managed to gain support from opposition groups in Iraqi Kurdistan. In 1998, they were able to establish a women's shelter in Sulemaniya. This was the first safe haven in the Middle East for victims of abuse. To date, the shelter has saved 47 women from certain death at the hands of their own families.

It is clear that women's organizations have an important role to play in the struggle for political rights and legal reforms. There is also no doubt that in the effort to improve their situation, the women's movement will lead this struggle. There must be a complete transformation of the legal systems and social norms, to equalize the power relationships between men and women and to ensure that women achieve and wield real power within state, community and religious institutions. Religion must be separated from the state, and civil laws must operate independently from Islamic laws. With these changes come the increasing and meaningful presence of women in politics, business administration and the judiciary, which in turn will lead to an immense difference in moral and ethical decision-making.

Source

1. United Nations, **The World's Women 1970-1990**, Trends and Statistics, p. 19



Illustration by Reza Sepahdari

Children – The Silent Victims

By Mulugeta Abai

Who are they?

They are the boys and girls who study day and night to become a teacher, engineer, doctor – the decision they made after the war, or after the disappearance, torture or burial of their parents, brothers or sisters.

They are the 14-year-old boys and girls who cry alone after learning that their younger brother, childhood friends, neighbours, or classmates were drowned while escaping, or who lost their lives after the explosion in the school or in the playground.

They are the children who never speak above a whisper.

They are the 9-year-old boys and girls who miss school to take their parents to the doctor, lawyer, bank, landlord or welfare office because their parents can't speak either English or French.

They are the boys and girls who suffer sleepless nights because of terrifying nightmares.

They are the children whose stories are not told, whose scars are not visible on their faces and who have learned at a young age that the world is not a safe place. They are the silent victims.

Article 5 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights points out that no one shall be subject to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. However, the violation of this principle occurs on a daily basis and still affects millions of people in many areas of the world.

Children are one of the principle victims of war. They are killed, maimed and traumatized during indiscriminate attacks on civilian communities, schools, etc. They are frequently subjected to abhorrent practices, including torture, rape, detention, and conscription in to military service to carry ammunition or to act as scouts for military patrol. They also suffer disproportionately from the after effects of conflict, torture and separation from parents and familiar environment, malnutrition and disease. They are the silent victims whose cries for help are unnoticed.

Those refugee children who are survivors of torture and who have witnessed war live in a different world from other children. During the vulnerable years of childhood, they have lived in situations where terrorism and death have become the norm. Most have been forced to fend for themselves, and to make decisions far beyond their years, when parents were no longer able to provide security and protection or when there was no one to provide the basic necessities of life. They may even take over the role of caregiver for their younger siblings, act as the head of the household, and are forced to assume adult responsibilities because of their quicker adaptation to the culture and language of the country where they have fled to. In assuming these adult responsibilities, they become the critical link between their parents and the new community.

It is true that refugees and immigrants face a difficult process of building new lives in a new environment, with a changed socio-economic status and often experiencing discrimination. However, those who have survived torture or war have unique problems in addition to those associated with the process of migration. Some arrive after a long stay in refugee camps, others have been severely tortured, detained for several years or were raped, exploited as sex objects during exit, flight or in the country of first asylum.

Some children might have directly or indirectly been affected by these traumatic experiences. Some may watch their parents or grand parents become anxious, fearful and powerless when faced with cultural and linguistic barriers and exhaustion from stress while trying to deal with a traumatic past. This can overburden parents who may then become unable (even though they try very hard) to provide support as they would under normal conditions, because of their own stress, grief and loss.

We all know that the family provides the basic security a child needs which ensures normal development (physical needs, love and protection from harm). The ability of the family to provide a strong sense of safety and support and to serve as a buffer against external threats plays a large role in how well the child functions and develops. However, circumstances like war, torture, detention, separation, etc. may make it difficult, if not impossible, to meet their children's needs as many parents have suffered greatly themselves and may experience depression, anxiety and other problems associated with their traumatic experience. Family disintegration can occur in several ways: part or all of the child's family and or friends may disappear, or the child may be sent off alone while the parents remain behind. Children may themselves be left behind temporarily or they may be abducted into the army. Many months or even years may elapse before the child finally rejoins the family. The situation may become even more complicated if a new family has been established in the meantime.

The Role of Service Providers

Service providers play a significant role in the resettlement process. To effectively assist survivors of torture, we must strive to achieve the following:

- * A guarantee of confidentiality.
- * A balance between mainstream and specialized services. This requires collaborative efforts between all agencies.
- * Service to children/youth must not be provided in isolation from parents and families.
- * Programs must be supported, not only with fiscal staff resource, but also through federal, provincial and municipal policies that reflect an understanding of the unique needs of these communities and a solid commitment to providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services.
- * Establish linkages with community leaders and representatives in order to be aware of the unique identities and dynamics, for the community to understand the services, and to offer opportunities to enhance the redevelopment of natural support systems for the children.
- * Respect for their cultural identity and traditions.
- * Establish trusting relationships, identify linguistic and cultural barriers to communication and their experiences.
- * Willingness to be creative and flexible.
- * Recognize the success of refugees as survivors and affirm their wisdom and strength. This is crucial to improving their self-esteem.

Mulugeta Abai is the Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture.

The Voice of Rwanda

In the howling of the wind, in the silence of the night, in the cries and tears of those who have lost their loved ones, do you hear my voice? I am the spirit of those who died in Rwanda. I have known pain and suffering, hope and despair, love, hatred and fear. You ask why? Because my skin was too soft, because my nose was too long, because I was too tall, because I was a Tutsi. Listen, listen carefully and you'll hear my voice.

I am the voice, the voice of the fetus torn from the inside of my mother and thrown to the dogs. I have never known my mother who is dead as I am. I never took my first breath and I have never tasted of the pleasures of life, I only partook in the horror of death. Tell me why was I the victim of such an injustice? Had I not the right to live as all human beings do? Or was I not a human being in their eyes for being a Tutsi?

I am the voice, the voice of the child wrestled from the arms of her mother. My last memory is that of my mother kneeling in the dust, her face a mask of horror as they hacked me to death with machetes. My poor, helpless mother, so shocked that tears would not flow but her cries, oh her cries and moans of pain I hear them still! Before they killed me they couldn't spare me because I was like a small snake that would grow up to cause problems in the future. I do not understand why did they make me suffer so?

I am the voice, the voice of the teenager whom they burnt alive. I was removed from class after having been given the impression that some policemen wanted to speak to me. The so-called policemen took me to a hut in which I was locked in with other kids my age. As soon as we felt the heat from the flames we threw ourselves on the door screaming but to no avail. Nobody, nobody heard us. Or perhaps it's just that nobody bothered to help us. Yet I desired to become a doctor one day so I could save lives. Why did mine have to be taken away?

I am the voice, the voice of the man shot on his way to work. That day I found myself before a road-block. Two men in uniform approached me and asked to see my ID. As soon as they realized I was a Tutsi, they hauled me out of my car and shot me. Does anybody know what became of my family? I hope their fate was not as cruel. If only I had killed my wife goodbye that morning, but she slept so peacefully I did not want to wake her. I hope she at least survived.

I am the voice, the voice of the old man to whom no mercy was shown. I at least had lived life to its fullest, I had nothing to lose and I had no fear of death. But my dear grandchildren, my daughter and her husband, why them? They were massacred before my sight and then I shared their demise! They were my joy, my reason for being and I was incapable of saving them! Ah, my long life had not prepared me for those atrocious moments. How I envied my wife dead for 20 years. She escaped that agony that only ended at my own death.

Yes, I am the voice of a million innocent people whose only crime was to be of Tutsi blood. I am the same voice that speaks here and now. Do not stay desensitized and do not close the doors of your heart. Do not remain silent before the injustice of which I was the victim. Denounce with me the abomination of genocide. Never forget the voice of Rwanda.

By

Patrick Karuhige

(translated from French) from the Winnipeg Roundtable on War Affected Children, coordinated by the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture and the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

Children in Situations of Political Violence Effect of Trauma on Development

By
Dr. Marlinda Freire, M.D., F.R.C.P. (C)

The impact of political violence on children is not only a result of direct physical harm to them or their families. The effect is a much more pervasive one, which affects the whole universe of the child, and every aspect of his or her development. In my work with displaced, highly traumatized populations, I have found that many of the children clinically assessed have never experienced their culture, community and family life under normal circumstances. Therefore, all their milestones, in terms of psychosexual and socio-emotional development have been reached under very anomalous environmental circumstances.

Factors that seem to play a role in terms of impact on the child's development and general emotional functioning are related to a number of areas such as: nature of the conflict, population involved, magnitude of the violence and con-

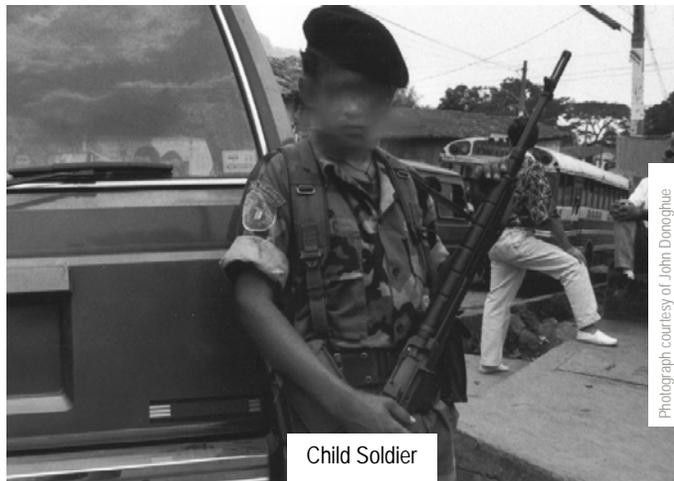
terial and human casualties) and the degree in the conflict. "I have seen children who have witnessed conflicts in terms of 'the good guys' versus the bad guys." They may have tremendous difficulties in processing the fact that their parent(s) have been punished, executed or when they were on the

The direct and the violence on the within the family, along own forms of participation to a large measure of the child to the trauma. Most often children

which increases their sense of lack of control and victimization. For example, studies done with the children of the Intifada indicates that those children who go on the streets to protest, chant or throw stones fare much better emotionally than those whose parents keep home for protection.

Children may be direct victims, they may witness the victimization of loved ones or others and they may also hear second hand about people's traumatic experiences. According to available research, children respond emotionally with an array of reactive symptomatology which is not necessarily specific to the traumatic event (PTSD, DSM IV) regardless of the child's involvement in said event. The stages of development at risk are related to psycho-physiological regulation (sleeping, eating, control of sphincters), establishment of basic trust, sense of existence as a separate being, regulation of aggression, gender identity and socialization. There is a spectrum of medical problems described as sequelae in the area of physical development such as stunted growth or premature aging.

Childhood comprises most of the developmental stages of the individual and the physical and psycho-emotional changes during development occur rapidly in the first 18 years of life. In the process of growth and maturation, children assimilate and transform the world around them, so it becomes part of their person-



Child Soldier

Photograph courtesy of John Donoghue

flict, degree of destruction (including compromised ideology) Children comprehend of "the good guys" They may have tremendous difficulties in processing the fact that their parent(s) have been persecuted, made to disappear, "good guys" side.

indirect effects of community and with the child's participation will determine emotional responses in traumatic situations.

play a passive role,

First Light

ality. According to some authors working in the area of violence and child development, traumatic experiences, if extreme and sustained (chronic in nature) may become engrained as part of that individual's psychological structure. According to documentation in the general psychiatry literature, psychological problems of adulthood are based on real trauma and adverse events in childhood.

Some negative events are so overwhelming that they surpass the individual's capacity to cope with stress and violence generally begets violence. It is also known that poverty is the most powerful threat to physical, social and mental health, that death of a loved one, separation from parent(s), other losses, illnesses or any major life changes may create psychopathology, and that cultural conflicts, minority group status and discrimination also have a tremendous impact on people's mental health.

Children and families whom I see in my practice are overloaded with all these factors affecting mental health. This, in addition to having survived life-threatening situations, fleeing their country, finding a place of asylum, and going through all the stresses of resettlement in the context of a new culture and new language. At the same time, the resilience and survival skills possessed by this population, children and adults alike, never ceases to amaze me.

It is difficult to predict, in the long term, the effect of trauma on the individual's development since this is a multifactorial process. There are many factors that I have not mentioned here and there is no consensus on the issues involved in the research available at this time. However, there is consensus that the massive abuse of children's rights involved in situations of political violence (or any other situation of abuse) worldwide must end in order to ensure developmentally healthier future generations.

Dr. Marlinda Freire is a child psychiatrist and is a member of CCVT's Health Network.



CCVT's Summer Picnic

Kale

Hello, my name is Kale and I'm 16 years old. I came to Canada three years ago from Nigerian with my dad, my three brothers and my sister. My mom and one of my brothers were not with us at the time we escaped death to the Benin Republic. I am writing this article to let people know why and how I came to Canada.

My dad was a member of an organization called the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). MOSOP is a peaceful organization that was formed by the Ogoni leaders who were concerned about the well-being of their people. They wanted the Shell Company to pay some compensation and clean up the devastated land that was damaged by the oil drilling company.

The Nigerian government felt that the MOSOP leaders were a threat to the business they had with Shell and ordered their arrests. MOSOP members were often arrested and tortured and sometimes killed by the military men.

The military men were sent by the government to destroy the houses of members of MOSOP. They were on their way coming to my house and people came and informed us and we managed to escape. When we came back to get some things that we needed, our house was being destroyed and the windows were broken and they stole some money and properties in the house.

In 1994 my dad was arrested with a lot of MOSOP leaders. He was beaten and tortured and he wasn't allowed to have any visitors until he stayed in prison detention for 2 years. I missed him a lot and I was always worried about him. My family was in jeopardy.

My mom and siblings were constantly hiding; if not, they could be arrested as well. I had to stay in my relative's house by myself all the time. I didn't get to see my mom and my brothers and my sister for days and sometimes weeks. And I missed them a lot. I wanted to go to school, but no one was financially able to pay for my school fees. Sometimes I felt very hopeless and alone.

My dad spent two years in prison and he was later freed but a lot of MOSOP leaders were hanged to death. I was very happy when my dad was released but I was sad as well. I was happy that we will all be happy together again. A few weeks after my dad's release, we went to sleep in the night and later someone knocked at the door.

We didn't know who it was, but we heard a voice saying we should run, they were coming to kill us. My dad opened the door and he didn't see anyone. But outside, it looked like something was going on. So we all woke up and ran to the bush and hid and later it was getting brighter so we tried to come out of the bush.

We went into a much deeper forest and tried to leave the town and we couldn't find my mom and my third older brother. Because they were in Port Harcourt, and they heard the army was coming after my family, they ran to another state to stay with my mom's uncle. I was very angry and worried and I wished everything was a nightmare and wasn't real. I prayed for God to help my mom and my brother to be all right. Finally, we made it out of the town and found someone who paid our transportation to the Benin Republic.

We made it safely to the UN office and we were taken by them to a refugee camp. We spent

almost one month in the camp before we were considered to be among those that might be brought to Canada. It was a long process; we had to go through interviews and medical examinations. We passed the required criteria and were accepted. But we still stayed in the camp for almost two years before we were brought to Canada.

We didn't have any choice of where we would like to be brought to in Canada. The refugee camp was very boring and lonely. There wasn't anything to play with and I missed my mom and my friends in Nigeria a lot. The camp was very depressing for me and it seemed like I had nothing to look up to. There wasn't any school but there were some Ogoni children in the camp so I made friends with them, but I missed my friends in Nigeria.

I think about home all the time. I came to Canada in November 1997 and it was very cold for me. I thought the weather was weird and annoying. I wanted to write a letter to my mom and my brother but I didn't know where they were. I started school in Winnipeg a few months after my arrival. They put me in a very low grade. I hated the grade they put me into. School was very hard for me. I had missed a few years of school without attending any lessons. I have to live a new life. The school system was different from home in Nigeria. I felt like no one cared about me and they didn't want to help me and I always had to ask for explanations when I didn't understand how to do my assignments and some teachers thought I was refusing to do my homework. School was very lonely when I started.

Sometimes I refused to ask for help because I wasn't sure what the response would be and I didn't want to be insulted. Sometimes I didn't feel like going to school at all because nobody understands and no one cares. Sometimes it is hard to concentrate because I think about my mom and my brother and how my old friends are doing. I recently spoke with my mom for the first time by phone and it was a big relief and I hope they come here some day, and soon too. I really want to say it clearly that the kids in Canada think of developing countries as jungles and places where there are no nice houses. There are nice houses and lights in developing countries, but the problem is that they have no good leaders or good systems of government.

And the war and poverty is just too much over there. I honestly and truly appreciate the fact that I was brought to Canada and thank God for helping people to help me. I sincerely appreciate what the people and government of Canada have done for me and I hope they should continue.

By

Kale Vizor

from the Winnipeg Roundtable on War Affected Children, coordinated by the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture and the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development



Living Under Occupation: The Daily Struggles of Palestinian Children

By Dania Majid

Introduction

The first intifada began in 1987, as Palestinian youth took to the streets in mass demonstrations to protest against the Israeli occupation. The uprising ended in 1993 with the Oslo Agreement. The following years saw relative calm but little improvement in the living conditions in the territories as a result of the Middle East peace process. However, the calm ended September 29, 2000 marking the beginning of a new Palestinian uprising, the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Again, Palestinian youth frustrated with the peace process, angered over expanding Israeli settlements and depressed by the deterioration in their economic and social situation, and the ongoing denial of their basic rights, took to the street in mass protests. Although condemned internationally, Israeli military forces confront protesters with live ammunition. Funerals for the dead turn into mass protests resulting in more casualties and the deadly cycle continues. Media coverage of the Al-Aqsa Intifada tends to focus on the violence of the protests, and ignore the reasons behind the uprising and why large scores of young people are risking their lives to confront a well-armed military force. This article will attempt to offer a snapshot into the daily lives and struggles of Palestinians in order to provide some insight into the Palestinian uprising.

Background

The 1948 war between Israel and neighbouring countries resulted in 800,000 Palestinians leaving their homes¹. Many of these refugees set up temporary homes in camps throughout Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. Another wave of refugees was created as a result of the 1967 war. The international community responded to the crisis by passing UN General Assembly Resolution 194, and they created the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). UNRWA's operative definition of Palestinian refugees are persons (and the descendants of such persons) who resided in Palestine two years prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1948, who lost their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the war. This definition of refugees does not include many Palestinians who, for whatever reasons, are not registered with the Agency or do not live in UNRWA's jurisdiction. Currently, UNRWA supplies 3.7 million registered refugees with health, education and social services in 59 camps located in the above-mentioned nations². The effectiveness of this Agency in providing essential services is being compromised by deep budget cuts.

The refugee issue is one of the "final status" issues of the current peace process. Before the creation of UNRWA, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 194, which provides for repatriation for those refugees wishing to return to their homes or compensation for lost or damaged property for those choosing not to return. The large gap in the positions of the Arabs and Israelis has resulted in deadlock in the negotiations. However, it is clear that there can be no stable peace in the region without a fair solution to the plight of the Palestinian refugees.

Children and Violence

Israeli policies that oppress and repress all Palestinians are contrary to international laws such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *Fourth Geneva Convention*, *Convention on Civil and Po-*

*litical Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Covenant of Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and the Conventions on Statelessness*³. These policies include the use of live ammunition against civilians including children; shelling of homes and infrastructure; collective punishment measures such as military closures and curfews on Palestinian communities; house demolitions and attacks against civilians with the purpose of inflicting panic and fear throughout the population. Furthermore, countless UN resolutions are being ignored including 181, which provides a special international regime over all of Jerusalem; 194, which calls for repatriation and restitution of Palestinian refugees; 242 and 338 which calls for the Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian territories taken in 1967⁴. The disregard for these and other resolutions generates Palestinian sentiments that their rights are inconsequential and justice is not being served.

Physical Injuries and Mental Trauma

Daily life for Palestinians, regardless of their refugee status, is full of hardships, which has a pronounced impact on their physical and mental well being. However, with the Intifada of the late 1980s and the current Al-Aqsa Intifada, the daily struggles of those living on and off refugee camps become even more desperate. Routine activities, such as going to school or work, are frequently impaired due to Israeli roadblocks or internal closures. In many cases such ventures carry a high risk of serious injury or death as Israeli military forces fire indiscriminately at protesters. In addition, Palestinians also experience terror in their homes as Israeli forces utilise collective punishment on communities. To date approximately 400 Palestinians have been killed in violent confrontations with Israeli forces. Among them a third are children under the age of eighteen. In addition, over 10,000 have suffered injuries mostly to the upper body and head⁵.

Every family has experienced various traumatic events stemming from the wars and displacements of 1948 and 1967, and the intifada. Children living through these times witnessed the imprisonment and torture of parents and siblings (over 100,000 people were detained during the last intifada) or were themselves the victims of such abuse. In the last intifada, over half of all children observed their parent or sibling being beaten, and 40% received a beating; approximately 19% of children suffered wide-ranging injuries; and a third of the casualties were children⁶.

Besides leaving physical scars, violence has a crippling effect on the mental health of Palestinians. Mental health studies in the region report that 12% of adults are suffering from a severe state of anxiety and 8% were clinically depressed⁷. Children, especially those that were beaten, witnessed beatings, lost family or had their home demolished, exhibited symptoms of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, hysterical conversions, stuttering, bed-wetting, insomnia, aggression, diminished concentration and regressive clinging behaviour⁸. Life event studies demonstrate a correlation between high numbers of negative life events and high morbidity at a rate greater than 20% of the population - which children make up half⁹.

Children in Poor Living Conditions

Although violence is a considerable source of physical and mental distress for both children and their parents, it is not the only contributing factor. Harsh living conditions in the Occupied Territories create an atmosphere of instability and hostility, thereby restricting healthy child development. Within the Palestinian enclaves, refugee camps and villages coexist to form a community. Living conditions in the 59 camps (27 are located in the Occupied Territories with a total refugee population of 1.37 million people), and to lesser degree surrounding villages are characterized by poverty, overcrowding, political repression, land confiscations, curfews and high unemployment¹⁰. The average Palestinian family size is approximately 4.5, with many families exceeding this number¹¹. Over half the population is 14 years old

or younger¹². Their homes do not exceed nine square metres and are generally poorly constructed, suffer from a lack of ventilation, are prone to leaking and do not provide much privacy¹³. Within the community, the infrastructure in many areas is below international standards of hygiene and environmental health, and jeopardise the health of the local population.¹⁴

Household Wealth

The Israeli-imposed closures and curfews during the Intifada and the Gulf War is a serious detriment to household incomes in the Occupied Territories. For many households, fathers get up at 3:00 a.m. to provide unskilled labour in Israel or are forced to travel abroad to earn an income. Subsequently, mothers are left to tend to all the needs of her immediate and extended family¹⁵. Two out of three households report a decline in income due to employment restrictions within Israel, and chronic unemployment at 40-65% within the territories¹⁶. Not surprisingly, as many as 38% of Palestinian families (in Gaza) are living in poverty¹⁷. Parents are highly stressed and suffer from various degrees of depression. They do not have much time to interact with their children.

Recreation

Ultimately, overcrowding and poverty do not create an environment conducive for healthy child development. Overcrowding in camps and villages has left few safe and clean places for children to play and grow. Usually, they take to the streets or play near garbage collection sites since they generally offer the only open spaces in camps where children can start up a game of soccer, or socialise outside home¹⁸.

Education

When children are not busy doing chores or working they attend UNRWA schools. Nonetheless, schools are not immune from the overcrowded living conditions in the area. The average class consists of 50 students¹⁹. In order to deal with the high enrolment, most schools run on a double shift basis. Teachers cannot provide students with personal attention, and are usually strict disciplinarians to maintain order in the classroom. Schools lack adequate playgrounds, libraries, computer facilities and study rooms²⁰. As a result, students are feel discouraged and tense because they find it difficult to study.

Most students attend school until grade nine. They have a literacy rate of approximately 70-80%, and overall, most enjoy schooling²¹. However, many do not continue on to secondary school because UNRWA does not provide secondary school education. Consequently, most families cannot afford to finance their child's education and/or the child must travel far distances to attend school²². In addition, poverty induces adolescents to leave school early to get married, work, or stay home to help the family²³. It should be noted that higher education does not result in a substantial increase in income for Palestinians. If the society was divided according to economic standing, 24% of household heads with post-secondary education comprise the poorest economic third of society and 39% are in the top economic third of society²⁴. This indicates there is a lack of opportunity to translate educational achievements into income-generation.

Cumulative Effects of Living Conditions

Living in these conditions under occupation consequentially results in anxiety, stress, depression and frustration among all segments of the population. Children and adolescents feel they have no active or productive role in society; they suffer from a void in their lives; and believe they have no prospects for the future. Growing up they have seen the struggles of their parents and older siblings, and are regularly confronted by settlers and soldiers in the area. To compound their despair, many are disappointed that the peace process has not lived up to their expectations. Accordingly, it is not surprising that vast numbers of Palestinian youth brave armed soldiers with only rocks and slingshots to protest against the decades of oppression, frustration over their living conditions and the humiliation and violence they and their families have endured. It gives them a sense of purpose and power to be

able to do something that will express their anger against injustice, and rebel against the authority that has kept them down throughout their lives.

All children need to feel a sense of security and belonging and to grow in a nurturing environment to develop into healthy, well-adjusted adults. The oppression and destitution of the Occupied Territories traps Palestinians into a never-ending cycle where poverty prevents children from furthering their individual goals, and oppression builds into the Palestinian psyche resentment, anger, rebellion and deep pain. Children remain trapped in their existence, living a difficult life like their parents. Eventually, they too have children who will live out the same frightening experiences and suffer their parents grief. Systematic violence also has long-term effects on individuals and society. Thousands of young Palestinians, imprisoned and tortured in Israeli jails for years, were employed by the Palestinian Authority upon their release. Not familiar with any other concepts of justice, they are prone to repeating the actions of their abusers. These cycles of poverty, oppression and violence will take years to break if peace ever comes to the region. Not until then will the Palestinian community begin to prosper economically and socially.

Based on the daily lives of Palestinians, and the details of the Middle East peace negotiations, it does not appear that the situation will improve for the better for the world's largest refugee population. If we hope to ever witness stability in the region, we can no longer ignore the plight of the Palestinians. As Canadians, we have an integral role to play in this situation. Canada chairs the Refugee Working Group, who aims to improve the current living conditions of refugees; extend access to family reunifications; and supporting the process to achieve a solution to the refugee issue. As citizens, we should inform ourselves of the situation of the Palestinians, and take seriously the reports being produced by various national and international governments and NGOs. We should then contact our Members of Parliament and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to express our concerns and desire for a just solution to the Palestinian situation. Justice is the only way to break the downward cycle and forge a long lasting peace in the area. If a viable peace agreement is ever attained, it will be the first generation of children, both Arab and Israeli, growing up in a mutually just society that will bring lasting peace to the region.

Dania Majid is a law student at Osgoode Hall Law School, York University, Toronto Canada. She is involved with CCVT as a student placement under the guidance of Ezat Mossallanejad, CCVT Policy Analyst. This article is dedicated to Ghaleb Majid.

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Photograph courtesy of John Donoghue

Story of the Azizi Family

For many people, war is something to watch on the news or in a movie. For our family, war changed our lives. War does not happen overnight. Events build up until finally conflict breaks out. This is the story of our family's experience in Kosovo.

In 1989, there was trouble for the Albanian people in Kosovo. We were not permitted to study our language. In our family, we continued to study Albanian, but we went to a secret schoolhouse. There was great danger, especially for the teacher. If the army found out about our school, the teacher would be imprisoned for life or killed.

In the early 1990's, Albanian people in Kosovo began losing their jobs. The army said we were not allowed to work anymore. Our father lost his job. His company had employed both Albanians and Serbs, but now all Albanians were fired. Albanian people started leaving Kosovo. Some of them moved because they were scared. They didn't know from one day to the next whether they would live or die. Young Albanians were in danger because the army wanted them to be soldiers. We were afraid for our brother, because if they would know about him, they would take him. Every day, the soldiers destroyed more and more of our villages. Many women and children, old and young alike were massacred. We didn't want to be used to destroy our own people.

One night, our mom was cooking dinner, our sister was on the balcony, and it was 8:15 p.m. Our sister saw a car stop on our street near our house. Soldiers were in the car. My sister ran into the house and told our father and brother to leave the house quickly. She didn't want them to be caught by the army. But it was already too late. At that moment, a bomb exploded near our house, power went out, everything was dark. The police opened fire on our house and other houses in our village with automatic machine guns. One sister crouched on the balcony, keeping watch on the street. The rest of us lay face down on the floor in the house.

The machine-gun fire continued for 3 ours. When it finally stopped we gathered the family together and fled to a friend's house some distance away. At 5 a.m., the machine-gun fire began again. At 7 a.m. when the machine-gun fire stopped the second time, our parents decided to check on our house. They saw broken windows, bullet holes straight through the walls and doors and shattered light fixtures.

We couldn't go back. We fled to another house that was more protected. We

stayed for a week. While we were there, we heard that the army had returned to our house and stolen everything of value, including our computer, the TV, the fridge and our 2 cars. We had to continue to move, we couldn't stay at one house for too many days. It wasn't safe.

Finally, after several weeks, our father said we have to try to go to Macedonia. We decided to go by train, but when we got to the train station, we realized that this would be impossible. The train was already packed. Those in the train were pulling others in through the window. Others, who were outside, were pushing through the doors trying to get in.

We decided to go by bus. The bus ride to Macedonia was only about one hour, but it was the longest hour of our lives. We saw many dead bodies on the streets. Cars were burning, blood was everywhere, the smell was bad. We were crying. We were sad, remembering how beautiful our life had been here before the war started and how terrible everything had now become.

In Macedonia, we lived in a tent, 17 of us, immediate and extended family together. We ate canned fish and bread, we were given 4 loaves of bread each day for 17 of us. We had 1 blanket per person; it was cold at night. We had brought nothing from home, only the clothes on our backs. Our sister in Switzerland eventually sent us some warm clothes. Our mom got sick in the camp. We stayed in the camp for 5 weeks.

One day, we saw our family name on the camp bulletin board. It said "Azizi Canada". The next day, we boarded a plane for Halifax, Nova Scotia. We were happy to leave the camp, but we were sad because we were going even farther away from our country and our home.

We stayed at the army barracks in Halifax for 2 months. Our mother went to the hospital. The doctors were good to her; we visited her every day. We studied English in the barracks for 2 weeks.

Then one day, an immigration official told our father, "Your family will move to Winnipeg." Winnipeg is good, is beautiful, we have a good sponsor, we like to study English.

Transcript of a letter read at the Winnipeg Roundtable on War Affected Children, coordinated by the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture and the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

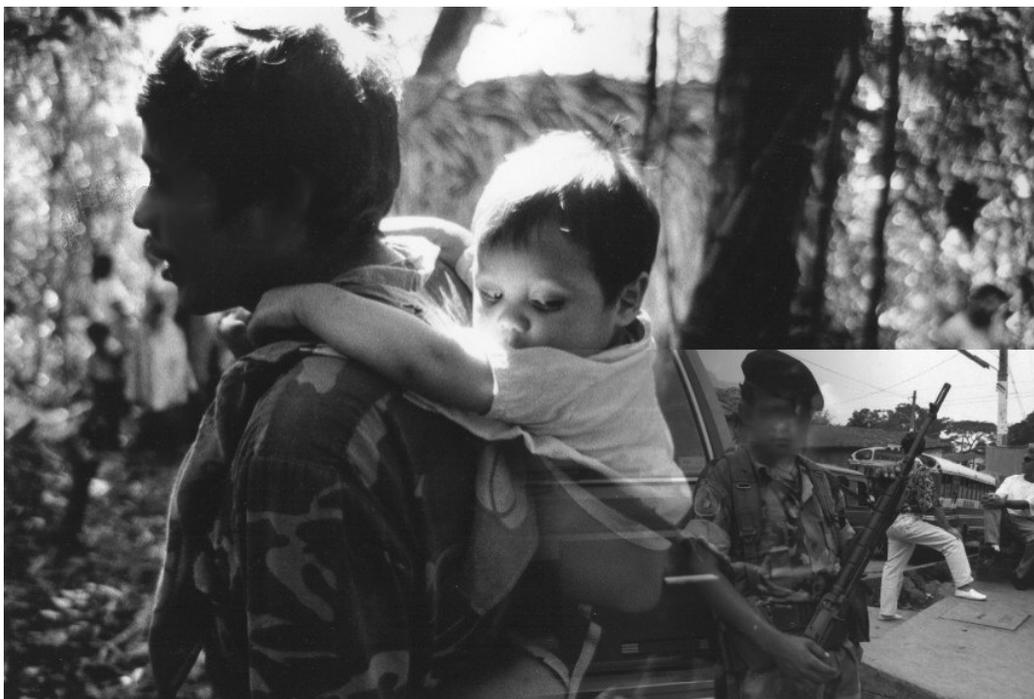
Uprooted Children: A Glimpse into a Global Disaster

By Ezat Mossallanejad and Sarah Burns

I. Introduction

On November 20, 1989, after ten years of negotiations, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the first **Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC)**, creating a comprehensive treaty for the protection of children. We can rejoice at having a document, which could be referred to as the Magna Carta of Children. We must at the same time feel sad that, 12 years after the adoption of the CRC, there has been little improvement in the global condition of children. Children in general, and uprooted children in particular, are suffering from abject poverty, inadequate education, lack of shelter, slavery, AIDS, prostitution, detention, torture, organized violence and systematic abuses.

According to United Nations estimates, 40 million children die every day as a result of war and deprivation. More than 100 million children are estimated to be abandoned in the streets of the world's big cities. There are 300,000 child soldiers, 250 million child laborers, and millions of refugees, internally displaced and stateless children. In more than 75% of the countries of the world, childhood is combined with utmost suffering. These children never enjoy the pleasure of childhood. In more than 50 countries of the world, the crime of torture is being perpetrated against children.



Photographs courtesy of John Donoghue

We hope that this article will serve as a first step in discovering an unnoticed tragedy that we must all face, for the sake of our future.

II. Refugee Children: A Global Picture

The 1999 World Refugee Survey reports 13.5 million refugees scattered around the globe. Women and children constitute over 80 percent of the world refugee population. Out of the above proportion, 55 to 60 percent are children. In the other words, there are around 8 million refugee children desperately in need of help and resettlement.

Apart from refugees, there are about 30 million people displaced in their homelands due to their governments' tyrannical policies, tribal conflicts, civil wars, generalized violence, famine, ecological disasters, etc. Unlike refugees, internally displaced people have no international body to monitor their situation and protect them. More than 80 percent of these people are also women and children. To this we must add 4 to 5 million people who are living in a refugee-like situation or are left with no effective citizenship (stateless persons).

Despite the global dimensions of the problem, the burden of refugee protection and resettlement remains with the countries of the South. According to UNHCR figures, only 15 percent of the world's refugee population is resettled in Western countries. Some unofficial estimates speak of only 4 percent. And finally, out of all refugees resettled in the West, only 25 percent are women and children.

III. A Glance at Some Hot Spots

While the tragedy of refugee children is global, it is useful, to take a closer look at some particularly troubled regions of the world.

1. The Middle East

The Middle East is one of the most refugee-producing areas of the world. Palestinians have been living an awkward refugee life for almost three generations. Thousands of Palestinian families have been separated and live apart against their wishes. Hundreds of families apply for family reunification each year but the Israeli Authority rejects most of these applications. (The Palestine National Authority, 2000)

The poor condition of children in Israeli occupied territory can be judged from facts and figures. Since the beginning of the Intifada, a civilian uprising of 1.5 million people against the Israeli occupation (December 9, 1987), more than 500 children under the age of 16 have lost their lives as a direct result. And a further 2,000 children have died as a result of systematic violence. A recent study of Palestinian school children found that 77% of children between 5-10 years of age had experienced violent acts. As a result, 66% of these children showed signs of insecurity and fear and a large portion of these were experiencing learning problems in school. (The Palestine National Authority, 2000)

In Iraq, during the Gulf War (January 17 to February 27, 1991), hundreds of children died as a result of bombing. Ten years after the termination of the war, western sanctions continue to severely affect children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers. More than 900,000 Iraqi children are malnourished and child mortality in Iraq is up 38 percent.

The peace accord proved to be a real inferno for the Kurds. Saddam Hussein's massacre of the Kurds forced 2.5 million Iraqi Kurds to flee their homelands for Iran and Turkey. At the Turkish border 400 to 1,000 refugees were dying each day - most of them children. Today, despite the repatriation of Kurdish refugees and the existence of a kind of *modus vivendi* between Kurdish leaders and the Iraqi government, the tragedy of refugee children continues. Kurds are suffering from double sanctions: the

international sanctions Saddam Hussein's own harsh economic blockade against Kurdish people as a means of inducing subservience. The result has been hardship and death for children; with the international media being quite apathetic towards these silent victims.

Afghanistan is currently experiencing a terrible refugee problem. Some 7 million Afghan refugees, most of them children, are living in scores of camps in Pakistan and in other parts of Iran. In the course of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iranian government wasted no time in recruiting Afghan children to fight either against Iraq or against the Iranian Kurds. Today, however, these children are suffering as a result of the Iranian government's policy of forced repatriation of Afghan refugees.

The change of government in Afghanistan has aggravated the condition of displaced children. The total number of internally displaced Afghans in 1998 was no less than 540,000 and as high as 1 million. There are about 360,000 displaced in Kabul alone (U.S. Committee for Refugees, World Refugee Survey, 1999). There are thousands of starving children begging in the ruined cities of Afghanistan. Some of them collect wood and scrap paper in an attempt to support their younger siblings. The kidnapping and murder of relief workers have frequently resulted in grave tensions between the Taleban and international aid agencies. The Taleban have also misused the aid provided by channeling it to military personnel and their families. As a result of this policy, displaced children have suffered from acute malnutrition. Under the official policy of the Taleban, girls are not allowed education, resulting in ongoing tensions between the Taleban and women's rights activists who have tried to address girls' education by teaching them at home. In June 1998, for example, the Taleban closed 200 home-based schools for girls in Kabul (Ibid., P. 123).

2. Asia

Some 70,000 refugees from Sri Lanka - most of them children - are living in 131 camps in the southern Indian province of Tamil Nadu. Others live outside the camps (an estimated 110,000 altogether). The lack of local resources combined with occasional police harassment has made life extremely difficult for refugees - especially children. It is interesting to note that India has a poor record for the protection of its own children, let alone refugee children: 4 million children in India die annually below the age of four. The government has strictly enforced the policy of confining Tamil refugees in their camps. It has gone to the extent of denying UNHCR access to some refugee camps. The result is lack of international aid as well as education for Sri Lankan refugee children (U.S.C.R., World Refugee Survey 1999, P. 128).

Inside Sri Lanka itself, there are 900,000 displaced people in 350 camps scattered throughout the Jaffna district. Displaced children have been systematically imprisoned and killed by the army. In January 1992, for example, the bodies of 72 boys, aged 12 to 18, were found on Mandaitivo Island. Displaced children have suffered at the hands of Sri Lankan army *and* LTTE. The latter has moved to the extreme of recruiting small children for military purposes (Human Rights Watch World Report 2000, P. 211).

Nepal is another hot spot. Around 85,000 Bhutanese refugees, half of them children, have been living in Nepal without any status and in abject poverty and suffering from discrimination for more than a decade. They had been denied Bhutanese citizenship as a result of their Nepalese origin. While they have no access to Bhutan, the kingdom of Nepal is not even willing to speak about the local integration of these stateless Bhutanese. There is no program for protection of the vulnerable Bhutanese children. The whole world has forgotten about them. The situation is little better in Thailand where half a million refugees, mostly women and children, from four different countries - Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam - live and where refugee children are suffer from malnutrition, lack of sanitation and overcrowding.

3. Africa

More than 3 million refugees are desperately struggling for survival in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan. The 18 year-old civil war in Sudan has displaced 4 million people— half of them children. Children are sold into slavery or recruited by belligerent armies. Out of an estimated 300,000 child soldiers in the world, 120,000 are in Africa, fighting in 16 wars. (Armed Conflict Report 2000 and Amnesty International Report 2000) There are between 6,000 to 12,000 abducted children – 60% girls - in the Southern Sudan and Northern Uganda. Girls are forced to do hard physical labor for rebel armies or act as “wives” or sex slaves for the warlords. To this one should add ongoing famines, endemic food shortages and chronic malnutrition, which have mercilessly taken lives from the region’s uprooted children.

Uprooted children are suffering in the countries of central Africa, especially the Great Lake area. The 1994 Rwandan genocide resulted in the massacre of over 800,000 civilians including children. According to estimates, between 250,000 to 500,000 women - including girls as young as 5 - experienced systematic torture, gender-related crimes and rapes. When the rebel Tutsi-controlled army of Rwandan Patriotic Front took control in July 1994, an estimated 2 million Hutus fled to neighboring countries. Thousands of children lost their lives during these operations. Six and a half years after the genocide, the protection of separated children and children born out of rape is not yet resolved in Rwanda. (Refugee Update, No. 41). The condition of separated children is no better in Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo.

The war in Sierra Leone has uprooted hundreds of thousands of children. Out of 300,000 Sierra Leonian refugees in Guinea, 65% of them are children. The plight of separated children, specifically girls, is beyond imagination. Most of them are neglected, sexually or physically assaulted, denied food and education and forced to work as bonded laborers or child soldiers (from the age of 7). Girls as young as 12 are left with no choice but to work as child prostitutes in a desperate attempt to support themselves and their families in refugee camps. Refugee children in camps close to borders are subjected to cross border armed raids that have resulted in their abductions, mutilations and murder, (Human Rights Watch world Report 2000, P. 425). What is particularly disturbing is the total failure of the international community in protecting these vulnerable children.

4. Europe

In Europe, the former Yugoslavia is still a picture of fratricidal activity. A full-scale civil war produced 150,000 refugees and a million internally displaced people - 75 percent of them women and children. While the condition of former Yugoslavian refugee children is relatively better than their counterparts elsewhere, they still live under the horrendous trauma of their terrible experiences. Below is an excerpt from testimony given by an 11-year-old refugee boy: "*...I miss my home.... It is very hard to bear. It is the war.... Those left are alive now. The others are all killed. They hanged the educated people to make the others see. They stabbed people and put them in mass graves. My grandfather was killed....*" And the following is taken from the statement of an adolescent girl from Bosnia: "*The war takes everything away – everything- you don't have any more of that happy face. There are no more jokes that are funny. If someone says a joke, you just sit down there. It is not funny anymore – you understand it in a different way. The war takes simply everything that you have. You don't have yourself again. You're a totally different person like you're born again with different personality, some different world that is now so ugly. And you see all those bad sides; there is no more good side to anything. There is no point; there is simply no point of living anymore. I don't trust now anybody. When somebody simply kills somebody that you love the most...you don't believe anybody.*" (Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, Coming to Terms with Torture and Organized Violence, P. 53).

5. Mexico

Apart from the Guatemalan refugees who are still living in Mexico, there are thousands of uprooted people in Mexico who use this country as a route to asylum in United States or Canada. Among them, children are the most vulnerable and most unprotected. Some of them are separated children who travel alone or with their friends or siblings. They have frequently been cheated or abused by smugglers (coyotes).

6. Colombia

Armed conflicts, generalized political violence and gross human rights violations have left more than 1.4 civilians displaced in Colombia – 55% of them are children. Displacement is a deliberate strategy of the paramilitary to cleanse the civilian population from the areas of suspected guerrilla influence. Displaced populations – especially defenseless children - who return home and declare themselves "peace communities" are systematically attacked by both sides of the conflict (Amnesty International Report 2000, P. 77). Tens of thousands of children have also been abducted for use as soldiers

7. The United States

Each year, an unprecedented number of Central American children risk their lives to illegally cross the Mexican border at Brownsville-Harlingen into Southern Texas. These separated children, mostly 13 to 17 year-old boys, are escaping both government and opposition forces that drafts teenagers for military services. Unhappy with these children, the U.S. Naturalization and Immigration officials put them in temporary houses until they turn eighteen. At this time they move them to detention centres, and from there more than 95 percent face deportation. They are returned to their native places to face a very dangerous future. The U.S. media and public opinion have totally neglected these uprooted children who never enjoy a shade of the happiness of the childhood. Treatment as such ridicules the words beneath the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe freedom...."

IV. Main Areas of Suffering

Bereaved and traumatized, with most family members dead, there is little joy ahead for refugee children. Most of them are incapable of imagining a life other than the one they live in violent and oppressive camps. Refugee children are far from being able to satisfy their basic needs and the most fundamental standards required for the sound and healthy development of a child are simply not there. Most live in war zones and concentration camps. There is a saying that "all war is war against children." War and violence have even penetrated the games refugee children play. At worst, they play with explosives disguised as toys and at best with barbed wire. The violence and inhumanity refugee children and their families have gone through are frequently reproduced in their games, with serious implications for their overall development.

Another tragedy is the recruitment of children by government and opposition forces to fight in wars. The phenomenon of child soldiers is an ever-increasing problem. There are currently 36 countries where children under 18 are participating in armed conflicts. Reports have documented child soldiers as young as five years of age. The common perception is that only male youth are recruited, but, in fact, both male and female children have been forced to participate in armed conflicts. (Child Soldiers: Youth Who Participate in Armed Conflict, 1999)

A positive development in this issue is that 68 countries have recently signed a new international treaty (an Optional Protocol to CRC) prohibiting the participation of children in armed conflict. A number of countries that have signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), however, have not committed to upholding the protocol that prohibits them from recruiting any child as a soldier if he/she is less than 18 years of age. Canada is one such country that continues to recruit children

"voluntarily" into military service. (Press Release, The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, September 2000)

Additionally, thousands of separated children - children with no parents, relatives or friends - are abandoned in refugee camps all over the world. When a parent dies in a camp, the child will be left with no love, care, or protection. Even the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is reluctant to extend its mandatory protection to separated children ("unaccompanied minors") by considering their resettlement in Western countries. Refugee children who are left parentless and without families increasingly find themselves neglected, denied food and education, exploited for their labor and are commonly victims of physical or sexual abuse. Such is the case in Guinea where refugee camp workers have found that the plight of separated girl children is particularly severe. (Human Rights Watch – World Report, 2000) Refugee children in camps live a helpless and vulnerable life. Most of them have never been registered. They suffer from the crisis of identity, which could leave its harmful mark throughout their lives. They are subject to all sorts of abuses - rape, child prostitution, addiction, drug trafficking, robbery, etc. - by organized gangs of criminals. If they do survive, the hardship of life will make them feel, think, and act like an adult at a very young age. It is not therefore surprising to hear the following words from a little boy in an overcrowded refugee camp in Thailand: "Sometimes I want to cry. But I don't want other children to see it. So I cry when it rains."

V. Canada and Refugee Children

Canada is a nation that professes to respect human rights. The Canadian government has ratified the Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 protocol as well as the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Canada has generously incorporated all these international instruments into its domestic legislation. It is commendable that Canada has played a leadership role in addressing the plight of war-affected children at the global level. A recent example of this was the global Conference on War Affected Children in Winnipeg in September 2000.

Despite this, there is still a long way to go in protecting refugee children inside Canada. There is a guideline at the Immigration and Refugee Board for the hearing of separated children ("unaccompanied minors"). The guideline is a useful tool, but it is not binding on decision makers and does not include other children who are traumatized as a result of war and torture. There is a need for the expansion of this document and its incorporation into Canadian legislation.

It is positive that the government of Canada accepts up to 7,000 people under its government assisted refugee sponsorship program even though the Canadian government has not been proactive in identifying children at risk in refugee camps and war-affected areas. There are also hardly any special programs by the government for the resettlement of refugee and separated children in Canada.

In rare cases when separated children are accepted into Canada, they are put in foster or group homes. There are no follow-up programs; they are left to themselves. There is no specific legislation - federal or provincial - concerning their protection. Adoption, guardianship or tutorship is determined by general provincial laws, which more often than not fit the needs of the Canadian children rather than those of uprooted ones. The process, which is different from province to province, is usually complicated and expensive.

The government of Canada has failed to introduce an accelerated process of family reunification for children separated from their refugee parent in Canada. According to Immigration Act, in order for family reunification to take place, Convention refugees must be landed immigrants – a complex process that may take many years. The result is destruction of families and tremendous suffering for children. This situation could be improved by granting visas to the families of Convention refugees and processing their landing in Canada.

Deportation of refugee children whose parents' claims are rejected is considered to be in "the best interest of the child" by Canadian Immigration authorities. There is hardly any Humanitarian and Compassionate relief towards rejected refugee claimants with Canadian-born children. There are uprooted children, some born in Canada, languishing in Immigration detention centres awaiting their removals. During the recent "massive" Chinese migration to Canada, Immigration authorities went to the extent of detaining Chinese children as "a means of their protection".

In Canada, like many other Western countries, refugee children face discrimination, exclusion, mockery, and harassment, common to minorities, in Canadian schools, playgrounds, and neighborhoods. They are singled out due to their skin color, appearance, name, accent, ethnic background, and parents' culture. In some Canadian provinces, including Ontario, children of rejected (and sometimes non-rejected) refugee claimant are denied access to elementary schools. This practice has been continuing despite the Canadian official allegiance to the principle of children's universal right to education.

VI. Concluding Remarks

We have so far illustrated a gloomy picture of the plight of uprooted children both nationally and globally. It is unfortunate that the world has so far been shortsighted in not giving priority to its children. According to the United Nations Children Fund, only \$2.5 billion is required to solve children's health problems. This is not even a quarter percent of the world's military budget, and yet it is not provided. This unjustifiable negligence will lead to the irreparable destruction of the future of humanity on earth.

There will be no solution for the plight of disadvantaged children - uprooted or others - until and unless the world overcomes its present fatal apathy. An individual may get disappointed vis-à-vis a monstrous global system that is merciless, not accountable to anyone and sets its own rules. One could be left with the feeling that "after all, nothing tangible is possible." It is true that, as human rights workers, we are surrounded by scores of evils and enemies here and there. The worst of them, in my opinion, is cynicism. Let us not forget that we have sincere friends as well. The policy of the government has also both negative and positive sides and it could be changed, in the course of time, as a result of pressures from a cross-section of the population.

Finally, I would like to mention that change usually comes from the grassroots level. Therefore, public education plays a vital role in the introduction of progressive policies. Let us cherish hope and educate the Canadian public and the government about the preciousness and uniqueness of the lives of uprooted children. Let us reiterate to ourselves and others that uprooted children are not faceless figures, they could be our daughters, sons, nieces and nephews and we must all respond to their cries. Let us acknowledge that we have the capacity of making a vital difference. The least we can do is to help individual uprooted children, to cooperate with people and organizations working with them and to spread love as well as good faith and ideas.

Ezat Mossallanejad is the Policy Analyst for the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture. Sarah Burns is in the Master's program, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto and is currently completing her student placement at CCVT.

Children's Voices: An Interview*

By Magda Hatteb

The voices of innocent children who witness the terror of war sadly sound the bitter truths about their own experiences: it's in their hearts, in their tears.

Recently, I interviewed three young refugee clients from the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) who are war survivors from Kosovo: Chevy, Tima and Fahri. Just listening to the stories of these young victims informs us of the extent to which the world is being stripped of its humanity.

Chevy is a nine-year-old girl. She said, "I am a war survivor." She stopped for a while before continuing, "I'm very sad about what happened in my country. I saw many bad things and I still remember it. Late one night, we were forced by armed soldiers and police to leave our home. They killed our only cow. They closed our schools, stores, streets and destroyed many homes. They shot a lot of people together. We were scared to look back. We left everything behind trying to find a safe place. But there was no safe place. Many of the people could not make it. Some were killed, some disappeared, some were buried or thrown alive into a well. We went to a refugee camp where there were many people who didn't know what would happen to them. But life in the camp was not easy; no food or clean water; for several days, only bread to eat.

I'm not frightened anymore. With the help of counselors at CCVT, me and my family are feeling much better. We are lucky to be in Canada. I'm suspicious, but I can't forget the past."

Tima is another nine-year-old. She said, "Myself, I saw our neighbours and friends get tortured to death by the paramilitaries and police. This was filmed by the television crews to show the murder. They took my dad and tortured him for no reason but just because he is from Kosovo. I got scared because I know that they raped many girls my age and made them strip naked before burying them alive. I remember that on our way to the camp we had a lot of problems with the police stopping everyone and asking for papers. Those who did not have papers were killed. I'm safe now and so is all of my family. That hell is behind me now, but I still have nightmares remembering what happened in my country. These memories will remain with me for the rest of my life.

Tima then asked Chevy if she could tell the story that had made her cry.

Chevy related the following: "My family's friend lost her husband during this time. She does not know how he disappeared. She was left alone with her baby. Then they came after her. They took the baby and in front of her they cut his legs and hands and put the rest of his body alive in the oven and told her to eat it."

Fahri is twelve years old. He told me: "The war started in my city, Pristina in Kosovo in 1998. All people were forced by armed police to leave their homes. We spent many days and nights hiding under the trees, hungry and scared. It was dark everywhere and death everywhere. They took many boys

* *Editor's note:* These interviews were conducted in English with the help of the children's counsellor. Some grammatical constructions and vocabulary were corrected in the interests of readability, although every effort was made to retain the authenticity of the content.

First Light

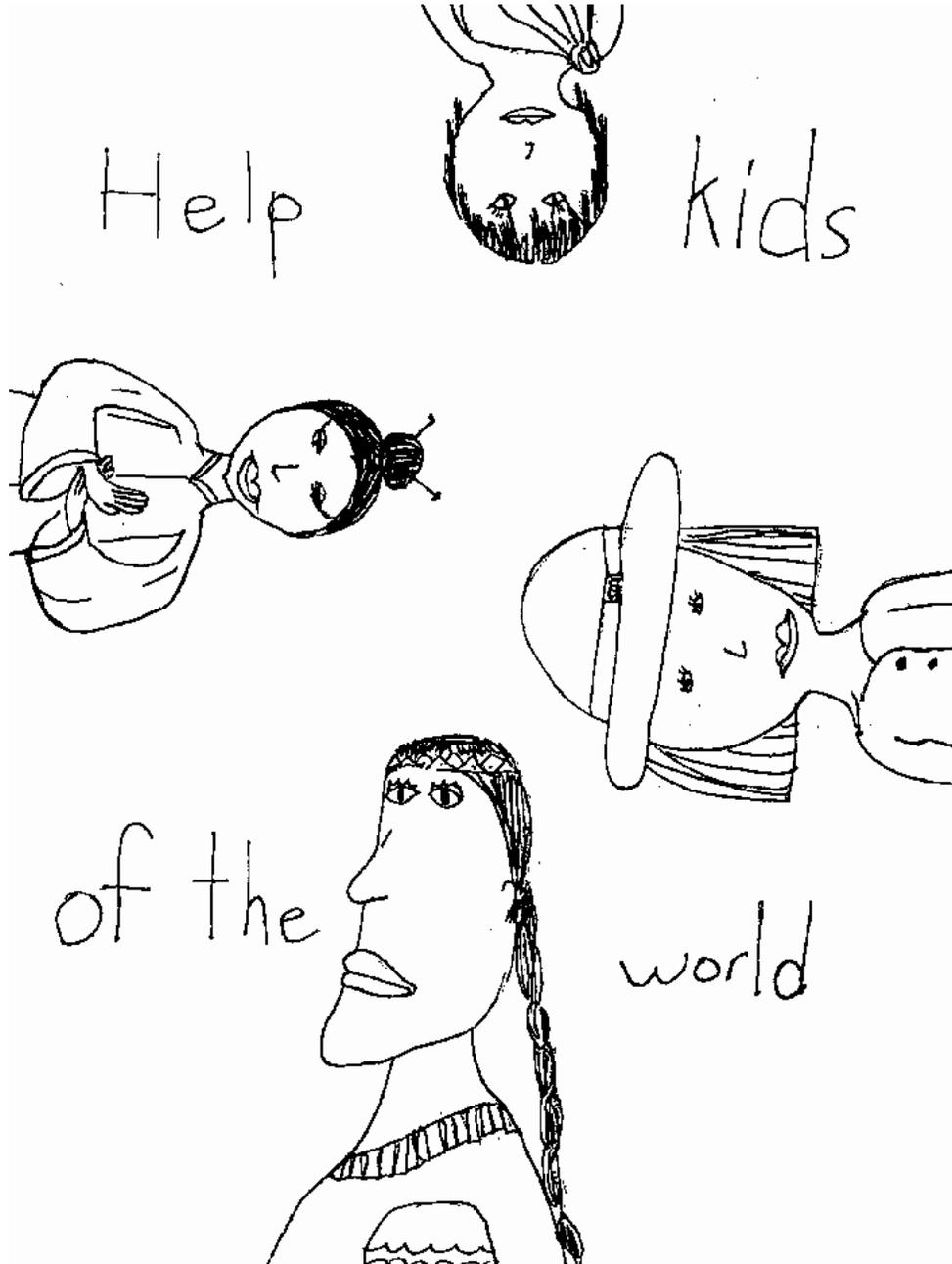
and tied them up, some were killed, some were hurt. They destroyed homes, raped women and girls; they took the men and killed them. One day, they came to my school and took my teacher and shot him in the head. They killed my aunt and some other members of my family. There is nothing left for us to return to. We ran away into other cities. With every day that passes by, we say today is better than tomorrow.

I saw a lot of people, not army people, being beaten and killed. I saw dead bodies mixed with live people being carried by trucks to huge graves to be buried. To trick the UN, they covered it with dead dogs and cats. I saw women and girls being raped and then they made them dance after beating and raping them. Bodies were around us in the streets and managed to go with a group of refugees. Many people were pulled out of the group and killed. We reached the refugee camp and for two months we ate only bread. We had nothing, only the clothes we wore. I'm happy to be here in Canada. Here, I try to forget the past but I can't forget my friends who are still there suffering. I want to help them but there is not much that I can do. I'm lucky to be alive today and grateful for the help that I am getting through the counselling in CCVT. I love Canada."

Magda Hatteb is a CCVT Board member, journalist and reporter.



Children enjoying the craft table at CCVT's Annual Holiday Party



This drawing was done by Julia, an eight year-old girl. As told by one of the lawyers in CCVT's Legal Network: "It was unsolicited. She was listening while the adults were all talking about children's rights and then she went away and came back to give me this drawing."



In Memoriam: Amina Malko

It is with deep sadness that we announce the untimely death of Amina Malko. Amina died peacefully, surrounded by family, on Friday March 2, 2001 at Toronto Hospital, Western Division in Toronto.

Amina had been CCVT's Office Manager for over 5 years before moving to the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI). During her time with us, Amina was an extremely hard working, tireless and committed staff member. Her particular interest was in improving the lives of refugee women, and she did indeed have a positive impact through her dedication and perseverance. She was an energetic and vocal advocate at the Canadian Council for Refugees, Toronto Refugee Affairs Council (TRAC) and OCASI.

Amina had a wonderful sense of humour, a vitality and sense of caring that made her such a valuable part of CCVT. We will miss her deeply.

CCVT Programs and Services

1. **Settlement**
 - **Services:** housing, language, skills training, employment, social assistance, applications for family reunification, sponsorships
2. **Mental Health**
 - **Mutual Support Groups**
 - **Crisis Intervention:** suicide attempts, breakdowns, family problems, etc.
 - **Art Therapy**
 - **Individual and Group Therapy**
 - **Coordinated professional services:** doctors, lawyers, social service workers provide treatment, documentation and legal support
3. **Children's Programs:** Art and Play Therapy
4. **Volunteer Program**
 - A **Befriending Program** that assists survivors in rebuilding their connections to others as well as to the greater community.
 - An **ESL Tutoring Program** to help students learn and practice their English.
5. **Escorting and interpreting** for survivors at different appointments (medical, legal, social).
5. **Public Education**
 - responds to numerous requests for information, assistance and consultations on torture and the effects of torture as well as regularly producing resource materials
6. **Refugees in Limbo**
 - Providing services to refugees in limbo at different levels, including counselling, training, workshops, networking with sister organizations, etc.
7. **Language Instruction and Training**
 - specially designed to address the needs and realities of the survivor of torture (concentration, memory, depression, triggers)
 - Computer training
8. **International Projects:** CCVT is associated with a coalition of Centres which support victims of violence, repression and torture, in exile or in their own countries

**Any comments or thoughts about *First Light*?
We warmly welcome letters to the editor!**

Just mail your comments to:
CCVT
194 Jarvis St. 2nd Floor,
Toronto, Ontario, M5B 2B7
Canada

Or email them to: The Editorial Committee c/o mmillard@ccvt.org

and we'll do our best to publish them in the next issue. We reserve the right to shorten any letters due to space requirements.



Yes!

I want to help CCVT respond to the needs of survivors of violent oppression who have sought refuge here in Canada.



\$20 \$40 \$50 \$150 \$250

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