

generation, violence begets violence, as the abused grow up to become abusers. Children who are thus violated carry the scars of fear and hatred in their hearts and minds. Forced to learn to kill instead of pursuing education, the children of conflict lack the knowledge and skills needed to build their futures and the futures of their communities. For society, the lives destroyed and the opportunities lost could have a devastating effect on its long-term stability and development.

### III. TAKING NORMS AND VALUES SERIOUSLY

As noted above, the abomination against children that we are currently witnessing in so many theatres of conflict around the world are due in large measure to a normative crisis at both the international and local levels. The traditional limits on the conduct of warfare - international instruments as well as local injunctions and taboos - are being cast aside. Clearly, the development and codification of these local and global norms is only the first step. To be meaningful, they must be respected and applied. The immense effort involved in the creation of international instruments and standards comes to naught if adoption is not followed by application. Similarly, the rich well of history and traditions from which local values spring means little if those norms are discarded when most needed. In his work, the Special Representative will stress the need to turn principle into practice, reminding all parties concerned, including non-state actors, that international and local standards of conduct should be resurrected and respected.

#### (i) International instruments

Over the past fifty years, the nations of the world have developed and ratified an impressive series of international human rights and humanitarian instruments. Several of these address the rights, protection and welfare of children. The most pertinent are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the Geneva Conventions (1949), along with their Additional Protocols. The latter contain some 25 articles specifically pertaining to children. Protocol 1 stipulates that children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of assault during conflict. Article 3, common to all four Conventions, is the cornerstone of the protection of civilians in internal conflicts and is binding on all parties to a conflict, regardless of their relationship to the state. Its fundamental guarantees are supplemented by Protocol II. Article 4.3 of Protocol II is devoted exclusively to children, enjoining that they "be provided with the care and aid they require". The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most universally ratified international instrument, calls for the protection of children's right to life, education, health, and other fundamental needs. These provisions apply equally in times of armed conflict as in times of peace.

However, the value of these provisions is limited to the extent to which they are applied. Words on paper cannot save children in peril. The role of the Special Representative will be to ensure that the international community does not forget that its obligation encompasses not only the invocation of norms but, more important, the exertion of pressure to implement those norms and prevent the abuse and brutalisation of children.