

Vulnerability is a permanent burden.

### Abubacar Sultan: Testimony to the Tribunal

their babies because of the fear that their crying might reveal the camp location. Children were involved as combatants on both sides, more than half being under the age of 15 years when recruited.

When the war ended, the first tendency was to heal traumatised children. Through a successful family tracing programme 20,000 children were reunited with their families, although this would have been a relatively small proportion, if UNICEF estimates of 300,000 unaccompanied children are correct. The family tracing programme built on previous experiences of the ICRC and of Save the Children UK in Cambodia. It took place over a period of two years and supplemented the informal community-based system for family reunification.

On the basis of this experience, Dr. Sultan commented on the role of international NGOs in post-conflict situations. He stated that the response is often based on good will, but that NGO staff do not spend time to understand the cultural context and make appropriate assessments of children's needs. He stressed that counselling programmes based on Western models have negative effects: 'The government is still trying to solve the problems caused by trauma counselling that established a stigmatised category of "mad kids"'. He also criticised these NGOs for working in geographical areas that were easy to reach, where donors could visit and photograph activities. Therefore, resources did not reach other areas.

A further post-conflict problem highlighted by Dr. Sultan was the absence of children from the peace process. Government and rebel forces both tended to hide child soldiers. After the cease-fire, he stated, the peace

process was conducted in ways the UN regarded as appropriate, with the result that children were forgotten in the development and rebuilding process. In addition to the conflict, communities had been further affected by natural disasters such as flood, those worst affected by war were also worst affected by natural disaster.

#### ? Questions to Abubacar Sultan

Answering questions from the Tribunal, Dr. Sultan stated that the war has not caused an increase in the street children phenomenon in Mozambique, but rather that this problem has been exacerbated by the inappropriate actions of NGOs. Other witnesses agreed on the basis of their own experiences with Dr Sultan's comments about the tendency of international NGOs to place projects in easy-to-reach areas and to lurch from one issue to another according to the current donor concerns and fashions in child welfare. Many witnesses stressed that a more appropriate alternative is to train local NGOs.

## 2.6. Closing Presentation by the President of the Tribunal

The President began his closing remarks by thanking everyone concerned in organising and realising the Hearings. He emphasised in particular the contribution of young people, stressing that the Tribunal recognised the importance of listening to young people and acknowledging their expertise.

Finally, the President stated that, despite the distressing nature of some of the testimony, the message of the Hearings was optimism and a 'passionate belief in the perfectibility of people'. He stated that the Tribunal had already come to a clear consensus that the full body of international humanitarian and human rights law should be brought to bear on the issue of children in armed conflict, and expressed the hope that the recommendations of the Tribunal would be a genuine contribution to the process of moving from ratification to full implementation.