

Facing a New Reality

The end of the Cold War was hailed by some as the harbinger of global peace. But intra-state conflicts have continued to proliferate. Of the 87 armed conflicts around the world recorded in 1997, 84 of them were intra-state conflicts, nearly all in developing countries. These conflicts are often characterized by long-term cycles of violence in the absence of the capacity to sustain a peaceful society. And while they generally occur within states, rather than between them, they tend to spill over into surrounding regions. In an increasingly globalized world, these crises affect us all.

Growing international recognition of the human and financial costs of these conflicts has led the international community to re-examine the whole concept of security and to develop new and creative ways to address them. We must look at all of the tools at our disposal to respond to this evolution in the perception of international security, an evolution which has led to the emergence of two key concepts: human security and, as one means to achieve it, peacebuilding.

Human security recognizes that democratic development, human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, good governance and sustainable development are as important to global peace as arms control and disarmament. The promotion of human security in countries torn by internal conflict poses special and complex challenges.

Peacebuilding is the effort to strengthen the prospects for internal peace and decrease the likelihood of violent conflicts. The overarching goal of peacebuilding is to enhance the indigenous capacity of a society to manage conflict without violence. While peacebuilding is an evolving concept, it consists basically of a set of measures that creates a sustainable environment for human security. These

measures provide the minimal conditions under which a country can implement social, political and economic development.

Peacebuilding may involve conflict prevention, conflict resolution, as well as various types of post-conflict reconstruction. Conflict prevention could involve community level initiatives aimed at defusing sources of tension, or special envoy missions to avoid a breakdown in communication between parties regarding a potential dispute. Conflict resolution could involve support for informal peace dialogues between representatives of divided communities, or official third party mediation to help broker a peace settlement. Post-conflict reconstruction activities include: support for the reintegration of refugees/displaced persons; post-trauma counselling; peace education; demobilization and reintegration of former combatants; and building institutions that help broker disputes without violence.



CIDA Photo: Roger LeMoynes. Child in Bosnia.