

tion, demilitarization and reconstruction. Following consideration of the reports by the Independent Expert, the 1996 General Assembly, in resolution 51/77, requested the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative on the protection of children affected by armed conflicts. The Special Representative (SRep) in 1997 was Mr. Olara A. Otunnu.

The SRep's interim report (E/CN.4/1998/119) was submitted to the 1998 Commission on Human Rights and sets the context for consideration of issues related to children and armed conflict. The report contains commentary on, *inter alia*: taking norms and values seriously; promoting prevention, protection and rehabilitation; building partnerships; focussing on selected themes; and, the steps taken to lay the groundwork for future work within the mandate.

The report describes the reality in which children are caught, noting, *inter alia*: today's conflicts are primarily internal, often fought by multiple, semi-autonomous armed groups within existing state boundaries; the international rules of warfare are routinely ignored in these situations of "total war"; such protracted conflicts can expose successive generations of children to horrendous violence; conventional weapons and ordnance used in these conflicts are increasingly accessible and destructive; such conflicts are often characterized by the demonization of the "enemy community" and the orchestration of vicious hate campaigns; in the intense and intimate setting of today's internecine warfare, the village has become the battlefield and civilian populations the primary target; and many societies exposed to protracted conflicts have seen their community values radically undermined if not shattered altogether, giving rise to an "ethical vacuum" in which international standards are ignored with impunity and where local value systems have lost their influence.

The report addresses a number of aspects of prevention, noting that such prevention entails the strengthening of the "normative foundation of societies and mobilizing public opinion in order to create a social and political climate that is capable of impeding abuse against children."

The report notes that from the many issues highlighted in the Machel Report priority attention should be given, in the near term, to: participation of children in armed conflict, sexual abuse and gender-based violence, mine awareness and rehabilitation of child victims, integrating standards into UN operations, and the impact of sanctions on children.

The report concludes by noting that the preliminary steps taken to establish the groundwork for the mandate included: (a) outreach and advocacy through consultations with governments and others; (b) initial projects, including input into the draft statute for the International Criminal Court, discussions on the issue of standards, procedures and training relating to the conduct of UN peacekeeping personnel, development of pilot projects in post-conflict situations to develop "best practices" and a more systematic application of "lessons

learned", and preliminary work to strengthen the knowledge base through, for example, the establishment of an electronic database and Website; and, (c) establishment of a secretariat for the SRep and mobilization of voluntary contributions to support the work.

The SRep's report to the 1998 General Assembly (A/53/482) includes commentary on, *inter alia*: promoting prevention, protection and rehabilitation; participation of children in armed conflict; taking norms and values seriously; rape and sexual abuse in the context of armed conflict; mine awareness and rehabilitation of child victims; displaced children; the impact of small arms on children; the impact of sanctions on children; incorporating standards into UN operations; field missions and initiatives with regard to Afghanistan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Kosovo); political advocacy; and, partnerships for children.

The report covers many of the same themes and subjects as the report to the 1998 Commission. On additional issues, the report notes, *inter alia*: children constitute well over 50 per cent of the 24 million people who are either refugees or internally displaced persons; there is a strong link between the accessibility of small arms and the victimization of children; the proliferation of these weapons has made it possible for very young children to be perpetrators of violence; there are some 50 countries in which children are currently affected by armed conflict; and, civil society organizations and key actors from the private sector are important partners in the broad movement to protect children's rights and welfare in the context of armed conflict.

The priority areas for immediate future action are identified and include: missions to areas affected by armed conflict to advocate for commitments by conflicting parties to stop the involvement and targeting of children, to assure humanitarian access and to advocate humanitarian cease fires; development of a stronger and more comprehensive advocacy communications strategy involving, in particular, networks of non-governmental organizations and the various media; the organization of regional symposia to raise awareness of the situation of children affected by armed conflict and to mobilize partnerships for children; efforts to bring together countries in subregional groupings in which children face common threats — such as cross-border small arms trade, the use of landmines, child abductions or child recruitment into armed groups — in order to seek commitments from states and non-state parties to take concrete collective measures to protect children better in their neighbourhoods; the monitoring of post-conflict situations where concerted international assistance in support of children's needs could prove particularly effective in the peace-building process ("best practices" and "lessons learned"); and promotion of research on thematic issues, for example, sexual abuse and violence — particularly against girls and young women, and the role of local value systems.