

organizations, including the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Council of Europe, the European Union (EU), the League of Arab States, Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This circle of partners should include important multilateral political-cultural associations based on shared historical affinities, such as la Francophonie and the Commonwealth.

(iii) Civil society organizations

An important premise of the work of the Special Representative is the need to widen the ownership of this agenda beyond official actors. Civil society organizations, including humanitarian and relief organizations and the human rights community, women's organizations, religious leaders, civic and youth associations, as well as 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. Non-governmental organizations are particularly important in this regard because of their commitment, expertise and activities on the ground. The Special Representative will encourage civil society organizations to work to build greater awareness and to mobilise for action on this issue. He will also encourage organizations with relief, humanitarian and development capacities on the ground to develop more focussed and coordinated programmes to protect the rights and respond to the needs of children during and in the aftermath of conflict.

(iv) The media

The media have come to play a central role in informing and influencing public opinion at all levels. The media will have an important role to play in building public awareness about the abuse and brutalisation of children in the context of armed conflict. The Special Representative will therefore make particular efforts to inform and engage the media on this issue, so that they can play a more effective role in mobilising both public and official opinion.

VI. FOCUSING ON SELECTED THEMES

The Machel Report highlighted a wide range of important issues affecting the rights and welfare of children in the context of armed conflict. Given the breadth of this agenda and practical constraints, there is need to select some areas for concentration of efforts. The following are some of the issues to which the Special Representative will give priority attention at this stage:

(i) Participation of children in armed conflict

Children simply have no part in warfare. The Special Representative will seize every available occasion and forum to underscore this fundamental principle.

An alarming trend in recent years is the increasing participation, direct and indirect, of children in armed conflict. It is estimated that up to a quarter of a million children under the age of eighteen are serving as combatants in government armed forces or armed opposition groups in ongoing conflicts.