

CHAPTER 1: ESTABLISHING A BASIS FOR ACTION

1.1 Civilian Casualties of War in the 20th Century

The statistics of war are seldom uplifting. Never has this been more true than in the 20th century. Ninety per cent of all war deaths since 1700 can be accounted for in this century. Between 1960 and 1980, eighty-one major wars were fought. More wars have been fought in the 1980s than in any other decade in history, and more wars were underway in 1987 than in any previous year on record.¹ The trend, as the century progresses, seems to be toward more frequent and more lethal wars; and for no one is war more lethal today than the innocent-bystander. It has been estimated that in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, civilian non-combatants accounted for approximately 50 percent of all war-related deaths. In the 1980s, so far, they account for eighty-five per cent of those deaths.

These statistics represent an enormous and tragic irony. Much of the revulsion we feel for nuclear weapons grows out of the knowledge that a nuclear exchange inevitably would involve the deaths of millions of innocent children, women and men. This moral dilemma has been a key factor in the nuclear debate since 1945.² Yet, we in the developed world seem oblivious to the fact that in the conventional wars being waged today it is the non-combatants who account for the majority of casualties.³

¹ The statistics on war in this section are taken from Ruth Leger Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures 1987-1988*, Washington D.C.: World Priorities, 1987. Like others, Sivard defines war as "any armed conflict which includes one or more governments, and causes the deaths of 1,000 or more people per year."

² In his study of nuclear strategy, Lawrence Freedman draws attention to this fact, especially as it related to the development in the 1960s of the doctrine of mutual assured destruction. See: Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981, pp. 348-350.

³ It should be understood that, according to Sivard, all of the twenty-two conflicts being waged in 1987 were taking place in the third world. This may help explain -- but does not excuse -- why Canadians and others in the developed countries may feel insulated from casualty rates, civilian or military. See: Sivard, *supra* note 1, p. 28.