

(ii) Local value systems

In addition to these international instruments, all societies can draw on their own local value systems, including a normative order governing civic relations and the conduct of war. Societies throughout history have recognized the special obligation to protect children from harm. Even in times of conflict, fundamental values and ethical standards were respected. Distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable practices were maintained, with taboos and injunctions proscribing indiscriminate targeting of civilian populations, especially children and women.

Increasingly, however, especially during periods of protracted conflict, we are witnessing a breakdown of traditional norms and social codes of behaviour, with horrendous consequences for the civilian population. In the resulting "ethical vacuum" anything goes. Distinctions between civilians and combatants have broken down. Children, women, the elderly - all have become fair game in the single-minded struggle for power.

In such situations, the Special Representative shall encourage the revival of these critically important local value systems, the values that promote the rights, protection and welfare of children. In particular, the role of institutions and community structures that normally provide a sense of ethical rootedness, such as parents, extended families, elders, teachers, schools and religious institutions, should be supported and strengthened.

IV. PROMOTING PREVENTION, PROTECTION AND REHABILITATION

A serious and systematic effort by all concerned parties - from Governments to the UN system to civil society organizations to private citizens - is needed to address the abomination being committed against children in the context of armed conflict. As an advocate on behalf of these children, the Special Representative will work to spearhead that effort. He will combine normative, political and humanitarian strategies in efforts to promote prevention, protection and rehabilitation for the benefit of children.

First, it is high time to put the old adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" into practice. Prevention entails strengthening the normative foundation of societies and mobilising public opinion in order to create a social and political climate that is capable of impeding abuse against children. Second, the protection of children in zones of active conflict is the most visible and daunting challenge. In addition to their right to life and physical security, children require continued access to relief, health and educational services. Third, and equally important, is the need for healing and reintegration of children in the aftermath of violent conflict. The provision of physical, spiritual, and emotional care to children whose lives have been shattered by conflict must constitute an important component of programmes for post-conflict recovery.

In this context, the Special Representative will develop the following activities: