

trade. Central and Eastern European countries have been mentioned in reports as supplying weapons to UNITA against international sanctions. Those countries include Bulgaria and the Ukraine. Essentially any country that does not guarantee the end user of its weapons has the potential to be used in the illegal trade.

Marie Smyth, Director of the Community Conflict Impact on Children project at INCORE in Northern Ireland, and a witness who testified at the Hearings suggested that the developed world, particularly the United States, is playing a significant role by reproducing an ideology of arms use to which developing countries can aspire. She suggested that INGOs might play a role in countering this by promoting ideas of ethical trading in arms. Ms. Meek replied that some developed countries are hypocritical in having heavily armed police forces and deploys armies in various parts of the world but still telling other countries how to behave, as in the case of the United States, which is the origin of the Mexican gun control problem. The ethical trade issue is a huge problem and it may be that ethical trading policies are not attainable, and it might be queried if ethics are possible in the arms trade.

Following a query from Kathy Vandergrift regarding successful local level projects to reduce the demand for small arms, Ms. Meek responded by saying that some African countries have adopted creative approaches. She cited clan-based pilot projects in Somalia that have developed single armouries in villages for overnight storage of arms, so that a secure home environment is created, in which women are strong in maintaining the project. She also mentioned cross-border police collaboration in Mali to prevent arms smuggling in the face of danger from big smuggling cartels. Liberia also has civil society education projects to stop people from even touching guns should they come across them. Local level examples such as this need to be made replicable by community-based organisations in other countries.

Paige Wilhite, researcher with Amnesty International Americas Programme, asked about the possibility of the UN being lobbied by the NGO community to become involved in more effective disarmament programmes. Ms. Meek replied that disarmament is a process of political negotiation and is not often implemented despite demobilisation and rehabilitation clauses in agreements.

Implementation of international law

No two armed conflicts are the same. Therefore, only general rules apply to each conflict situation. For the rest, many different inter-national law provisions have to be used.

Nevena Vuckovic Sahovic: Evidence to the Tribunal

The role of national NGOs in protecting children in armed conflicts: Testimony of Nevena Vuckovic Sahovic, Director, Yugoslav Child Rights Centre, Serbia.

Nevena Vuckovic Sahovic introduced herself to the Tribunal as a native of Belgrade who runs the research and education components of the Yugoslav Child Rights Centre in Serbia and has an interest in strengthening civil society. She told the Tribunal that while the eyes of the world were on Kosovo during the conflict in early 1999, little attention was paid to the plight of children in the territory of the Former Yugoslav Republic (FRY). Many were killed, others wounded, left without parents, displaced, hungry, deprived of education and emotionally disturbed. During the conflict, the Yugoslav Child Rights Centre was unable to function normally because its activities might have been viewed as 'unpatriotic'. The work was reduced to co-ordinating with other NGOs in distributing emergency supplies and to providing psycho-social assistance. For three months, the Centre relocated to Budapest, Hungary and ran a project called 'Invisible Refugees' which targeted children among the 50,000 refugees who had fled FRY for fear of bombings, mobilisation or the regime in Belgrade. At least half were children under 18 years of age.

'Invisible Refugees' was planned over a seven-day period and provided alternative pre-school and school activities. The children and the programme staff all benefited. The staff learned how to work with a 'non-obvious situation of invisible refugees, dispersed around a big city, alone and scared, without any idea how to make it through the day'. Ms. Vuckovic Sahovic suggested to the judges that the model used could be replicated in similar situations. The children were not 'dragged into psychological treatment' but worked with on a day-to-day basis, using their 'endless free time and developing their creativity.' As a result of this experience, some conclusions were reached regarding the role NGOs might play in protecting children's rights in times of armed conflict:

- During armed conflict the relationship between government and NGOs based in civil society is not easy, and NGOs may have better relationships with the government of an external power;
- It is a wise strategy for international NGOs to work through local partner NGOs, since their staff know the environment;
- It is essential to communicate with children in their mother tongue;
- Professional staff in local NGOs may have limited skills for use in emergency situations, especially in planning and management. This is particularly true of societies in transition to market economies;
- Any activity must be based on adequate needs assessment, which may be easier and quicker in collaboration with other NGOs and, where possible, governments;