



On the Record for Children

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From the AP Editorial Desk

On The Move

The Global Movement for Children was launched earlier this year by UNICEF and five large NGOs – World Vision International, PLAN International, Save the Children, Netaid, and BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee). The aim was to mobilize civil society all over the world and create a groundswell of support for children in the run-up to the Special Session.

The Global Movement seeks to build support by asking individuals to sign on to an appeal which asks them to 'Say Yes' to ten critical actions on behalf of children. Broadly speaking, these ten actions also form the declaratory portion of the so-called Outcome document, which will form the centerpiece for the Special Session.

In one sense, the Global Movement has been remarkably successful. As we report below, thirty-eight million individuals' pledges have been received since April. But in another sense, the Global Movement has yet to discover its real identity. Is it a real 'movement' or an inspired idea from a small number of large NGOs? Is it catching on in the countryside and in communities? Is it capable to creating a mighty wave of support – and even indignation – on behalf of children?

Some of these questions were reviewed by the Movement's founding members at a meeting in London in July, and briefly discussed in an article in a recent issue of *On the Record for Children*. No doubt the discussion will intensify as the Special Session draws closer. UNICEF and its five NGO partners will meet on November 20 – international children's day – to relaunch the Say Yes campaign.

In this issue, we present several articles on the Global Movement that were commissioned by SARA FRIEDMAN before the September 11 terrorist attack on New York.

In the first article, Sara visits the offices of NETAID, one of the founding NGO members of the Global Movement, and meets Amy Bruner, who had the daunting task of sorting through the mountain of written pledges that were reaching UNICEF.

In the second article, a Sudanese journalist reports on how the Global Movement started with a march for peace in Sudan, and how it is creating pressure to resolve a war that has taken a devastating toll on children. In a question-and-answer session with *On the Record*, Julianna Lindsey, from UNICEF's office in the Southern Sudan, explains how Global Movement ballots are even being distributed in the war zone, along with aid rations.

Surprisingly, more votes have been cast for education than for peace in Southern Sudan. But people are still desperately tired of war. One of them is 12 year-old BWANA MACHAR, a 12 year-old former soldier who tells *On the Record* of his relief at being demobilized.

Skeptics of the Convention on the Rights of the Child should note that UNICEF was able to use the Convention in getting both sides to suspend hostilities so as to release child soldiers like Bwana. The Convention is a tool for peace in a world that suddenly looks more dangerous.

News:

Five Million Afghan Women and Children at Risk, According to New NGO Monitoring Group

Over five million Afghan women and children will require emergency relief aid to survive the forthcoming winter, according to the first Watch List on children in armed conflict to be issued by NGOs.

The goal of the Watch List is to improve the protection of children in armed conflict by offering regular monitoring from civil society before, during and after a conflict. This was one of the recommendations to come out of the 1996 Machel study on children in armed conflict. Afghanistan has been chosen as the first case-study.

The report paints an alarming picture of the crisis in Afghanistan, as seen from the perspective of women and children. In addition to being one of the world's poorest countries – with appallingly low rates of immunization and high infant mortality – Afghanistan is also suffering from twenty-five years of warfare. 571 children are reported killed or wounded by landmines last year, although the real figure may be higher.

With more than a million Afghans displaced and on the move, the risk from landmines, hunger and warfare becomes much greater. 'All told, armed conflict has created a massive humanitarian and human rights catastrophe,' warns the report.

Watch List reports will provide information compiled by networks of child advocacy groups. Some of these have been formed to focus on specific themes, such as small arms, landmines, education, and child soldiers. Specific data on children, combined with a strategic analysis of the context, will form the basis for practical recommendations for action by various parties based on existing international laws.

The Watch List hopes to link local community groups involved in child protection with international networks to provide consistent and persistent follow-up on actions taken to protect the rights of children. Youth and youth organizations will also be included in the monitoring and advocacy activities.

- The first Watch List report on Afghanistan is available. For more information contact Julia Freedson.

China, Algeria Oppose Call For Global Study On Child Violence

Algeria and China are among several governments that are holding up a proposal from West Europe and Latin America to call for the UN Secretary-General to conduct a global study on all forms of violence against children.

The proposal is contained in a draft resolution on children that is being circulated at the current session of the UN General Assembly. It picks up on a suggestion from the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee has held two 'thematic' days of discussion on state violence, and violence within the family and home.

Diplomats say that the proposed study would be modeled on the study on children in armed conflict by Graca Machel.

China and Algeria are among several governments that feel the proposal – which is strongly supported by NGOs – is being slipped into what is otherwise a procedural resolution. Apart from this proposal on violence, the draft resolution contains very little of substance and is noticeably thinner than in previous years. This is because so much of the agenda on children is contained in the Outcome document, which is being drafted in advance of the Special Session.

Diplomats say the chances of a successful resolution are no better than fifty-fifty.

NGOs Lukewarm as Sexual Trafficking Protocol Enters Into Force

An important international treaty to prevent international child prostitution entered into force on October 25, when the government of Romania became the tenth government to ratify the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

The new protocol will become legally binding on January 18, 2002, after a period of three months has elapsed since Romania's ratification. (69 governments have now signed.) Many hope this success will speed up ratification of a second optional protocol, which raises the level of recruitment to 18.

Sexual exploitation poses a major threat to children and the trade - in child prostitutes and pornography – is increasingly international in nature. It is thought that over a million children, mainly girls, are lured into prostitution each year. The new protocol lays great stress on criminalizing practices like trafficking.

UNICEF hailed the breakthrough on the sexual exploitation protocol, and expressed the hope that it will be followed by an outpouring of interest for the forthcoming Second World Congress against the sex trade in children, which is due to take place in Yokohama Japan in December.

In spite of this, some human rights NGOs fear that the protocol could be significantly weaker than the existing standards in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

On March 6 last year, 23 prominent international NGOs noted that under the optional protocol, governments will only be obligated to provide protection for victimized children once a legal process is under way (eg. against a trafficker). In contrast, the Convention calls for protection regardless of the context. Unlike the protocol, the Convention also calls for special protection for children who are separated from their families, which is often the case with child prostitutes.

The Convention is also tougher than the protocol in calling on states parties to take 'all appropriate measures' to rehabilitate children who are rescued from prostitution. The new protocol offers weaker wording – 'take all feasible measures.' NGOs are also concerned that in its efforts to criminalize offenders, the new protocol will not specifically exempt child victims of sexual exploitation from prosecution.

The Agenda for Action that was adopted at the 1996 Stockholm conference on the commercial sexual exploitation of children stated that children should not be criminalized as part of efforts to

wipe out the trade.

A larger political concern of some NGOs is that the new Optional Protocol will give the United States an added reason not to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Bush administration has announced its intention to ratify the protocol, together with the second protocol on child soldiers, but remains adamantly opposed to the Convention itself.

Carol Smolensky, from ECPAT-USA, told *On the Record for Children* that ratification of the new protocol by the US would 'certainly not make up for the US opposition to the Convention.' But, she said, it might encourage the Bush administration to take the international protection of children more seriously.

ECPAT-USA is campaigning hard to end the burgeoning international trade in sex tourism, pornography, and the trafficking of child prostitutes between Canada, the US and Mexico. NGOs and representatives from the three governments are due to meet on December 2 in Philadelphia to build international cooperation against the trade, and generally prepare for the Yokohama meeting later in December.

The Yokohama meeting will review progress on implementing the 1996 Stockholm program of action.

Security Council Proposal Would Blacklist Governments That Recruit Child Soldiers

The Security Council is expected to ask the UN Secretary-General to draw up an annual blacklist of governments and rebel movements that are recruiting children into their armed forces.

The proposal is contained in a draft resolution that is expected to be voted on by the Council on November 20 (International Children's Day, which commemorates the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child).

NGOs have long argued that governments and non-state parties (including rebel movements) might be deterred from drafting child soldiers if they were publicly exposed at the highest levels of the UN.

According to diplomats, the draft resolution asks the UN Secretary-General to identify those armies which recruit children 'in violation of the applicable international laws.' It refers specifically to situations which are under review by the Council, but also asks the Secretary-General to make his own additions. NGOs hope that this formula will cast the net broadly and allow Kofi Annan to include groups like the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, who depend heavily on children for their campaign.

Although they welcome the resolution, child advocates also understand its limitations. One problem is that existing law (in the form of the Convention on the Rights of the Child) only prohibits recruitment under the age of 15. A new optional protocol would raise the age of recruitment to 18, but it has only attracted seven ratifications and is not yet even international

law.

A greater problem is that the draft resolution does not commit the Council to taking action. Some NGOs would like to see the blacklist of recruiters backed up by an arms embargo and even sanctions, but this would seem to be swimming against the tide of current political opinion. For example, the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan has been accused of using child soldiers. But there is little chance that the Council would pressure them with sanctions at a time when they could hold the key to toppling the Taliban.

Nonetheless, NGOs feel that the Council resolution could be an important first step in monitoring a growing threat to children. The resolution would also break new ground in asking corporations to break off commercial relations with governments and rebel groups that are parties to armed conflict. This could apply to companies that are working in countries such as Sierra Leone, Angola, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The resolution contains other innovative suggestions. It underscores the link between HIV-AIDS, children, and conflict, by calling for HIV-AIDS prevention to be included in the training for peacekeepers and integrated into post-conflict reconstruction.

The resolution refers specifically to this year's report by the UN Secretary-General on children in armed conflict. The hope was that the Council would hold a special meeting on the issue during the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children (September 21), taking advantage of the presence of several heads of state in New York. After the Session was cancelled, governments decided to hold the debate on November 20 instead.

- Read the Secretary-General's report on children in armed conflict and scroll down to document 852 (September 7, 2001)

Briefly Noted:

Afghan Women More Reliable Peace Partners Than Men

The UN Security Council has been told that Afghan women must be more directly involved in the delivery of relief aid, and that women will be more reliable peace partners than men.

Speaking at an NGO briefing for the Council on October 30, Jamila, a leading member of Afghan's women civil society, said that women's groups do not have political affiliations and could play a more constructive role in rebuilding the country than men. She also criticized relief agencies for channeling aid exclusively through men's organizations, which have consistently opposed the advancement of Afghan women.

The briefing was called for by a Security Council resolution on women, peace and security, and it gave NGOs a unique opportunity to inform the Council about the critical role of women in several current crises, including Afghanistan. NGOs are hoping that they can organize a similar briefing on children in armed conflict, to coincide with the debate on November 20.

Jamila spoke on behalf of the Afghan Women's Network, a group of some 200 women and women's groups currently in exile.

- For more information contact Christelle Matou, coordinator of the NGO working group on women, international peace and security.

Graca Machel to Address General Assembly on Children in War

Graca Machel is expected to brief the General Assembly on November 12 on the revisions to her landmark 1996 study on the impact of armed conflict on children. Some NGOs had been hoping to launch the updated report with a fanfare. But the General Assembly will be debating terrorism on that day, and this was expected to divert attention from any launch. In addition, it has been difficult to find a suitable venue. The updated survey contains new material on HIV/AIDS and conflict, the media and women in conflict.

- The Machel study will shortly be available on the UNICEF website.

Part Two: Special Report - The Global movement for Children

- **Education a winner as 38 million say Yes**
- **Amy's dream**
- **Mobilizing for peace in the Sudan**
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Special Report: The Global Movement for Children in Action

- Sara Friedman assesses the progress in pledging since the Movement was launched in the spring, and looks at the impact of the movement on Sudan's long-running war -

Education a Clear Winner as 38 Million Say Yes to Children

Over 38 million pledges have been made on behalf of children since the Global Movement for Children was launched in April.

The Movement began with a campaign that urged individuals everywhere to 'Say Yes' to children by pledging support for ten principles that protect the rights and well-being of children. Pledges were also asked to vote on the three actions they considered most urgent.

The Say Yes campaign was organized and initiated by UNICEF and five NGO partners, BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), NetAid, Plan International, Save the Children and World Vision International. The results will be publicized at the Special Session for Children in May 2002, as a way of encouraging governments to act on any pledges they make.

Of the ten principles, 'Educate Every Child' was a clear winner with 14.7 percent of the votes

cast globally. 'Fight HIV/AIDS' and 'Stop Harming and Exploiting Children' came second and third, with 12 percent and 11 percent respectively.

The pattern of pledging revealed notable distinctions in region, age and gender. Education came first in four of the eight regions, but third in the region of Northern Africa and the Middle East. In CEE/CIS, Western Europe and Latin America, education was not even included among the top three. Among children under 12, education barely makes the top five. For girls of this age group, it garnered only 5.8 percent.

The pledge to 'Stop Harming and Exploiting Children,' had overwhelming support among women and girls under 12. It was the number one concern in Western Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean, and second in South Asia.

- Voting results and the pledge form can be seen at [Say Yes for Children](#).

Paper Chase

Amy Bruner of NetAid had a recent dream. She heard a loud whirring noise outside her Brooklyn (NY) apartment. Looking out the window she spied an army helicopter hovering overhead with 'UN' written on the bottom in big orange letters.

'Hey lady,' the pilot yelled when he saw her. 'More votes! Where do you want them?' With her arms thrashing and her head shaking, Bruner signaled frantically 'No, No, No! Not Here!'

The dream reflected Bruner's real life since she started to coordinate the collection of more than a million paper ballots which were cast in the 'Say Yes to Children' campaign and delivered to New York before the September 11 terrorist attacks.

The campaign invites people to make a commitment to the Global Movement by signing a ballot. NetAid is one of the five original NGO partners in the Global Movement, and Netaid also serves as website host to the Campaign. So it fell to Netaid to tally and analyze data as it came in – by gender, age, region, etc.

But that offer, according to Amy Bruner, the Campaign's Paper Vote Coordinator, presumed website postings and electronic mail. It did not anticipate the cartons, crates, and mailbags, and string-tied packages arriving from Yemen, Peru, Nigeria and more than 20 other countries.

Rising to the occasion, high-tech NetAid has adopted a very low-tech process. Starting in July, Bruner and a small team could be seen wheeling US Mail Carriers, each weighing between 200 and 400 pounds, one block (or 5000 painful steps) from UNICEF House. This was the distance from the UNICEF mailroom to a no-frills 'suite' of offices that was opened in Ugandan House to serve as temporary 'Paper Count Headquarters.' The officers were loaned to UNICEF for the purpose.

Here pledges could be found pasted on the walls, strung up on a long clothesline and spilling out

of mailbags. They might read 'Recite da za decu' (Yugoslavia) 'Sema ndio Kwa' (Tanzania) or 'Decir que si polos nenos' (Spain).

'We have a computer in every office here, said Bruner 'and we barely use them.'

The system for counting ballots was devised by a professional statistician, and would have done justice to a national election. (Some joked that it might have rescued Florida from international embarrassment.) First, UNICEF offices throughout the world were informed in no uncertain terms that every piece had to be sent by diplomatic pouch and that no single package could weigh more than 35 pounds. This was the weight of precisely 2,500 ballots.

In the offices, the ballots are put into piles. Bruner and her colleagues then pull a sampling of ballots out from each pile in order to create a random sample: this, according to the experts, yields a more accurate count.

How often a ballot is pulled will depend upon the size of the pile. For example, if 2 million ballots are received from one country, every 2,000th ballot might be taken out and added to the sample. If a country sends in 10,000 pledges the counters might take out every seventh ballot. The smaller the pool of pledges, the larger the percentage of ballots that are pulled.

Bruner explains that the counters pick a random figure, instead of taking from the top of the pile, to ensure that the sample is broadly representative. An entire box of ballots might all come from the same school.

Still confused? Don't be. The counting is in safe hands.

Paper counting is worlds apart from the Internet world of NetAid, where there is no distance and everything happens with a flick of the mouse. Bruner has put up with paper cuts, struggling to cram boxes into an elevator that is never quite large enough, opening bags of wet ballots. But, she admits a little sheepishly, nothing is more exciting than digging her hands into a new box, to feel a tangible piece of paper signed by a real person in Korean, Arabic or Swahili. 'It makes you feel how big the world is, and yet how small.'

And nothing surprised her. A week or so after her dream, Amy learned that UNICEF had received a call from the Turkish mission announcing that their government was preparing to send a military plane carrying 1.5 tons of votes to New York. Where should they land?

- Contact Amy Bruner at: 212-906-6096

Mobilizing for Peace in the Sudan

Why would anyone volunteer to march 187 kilometers in the blazing hot Sudan sun? 'Because this march is for peace,' said celebrated Sudanese actor and comedian, Ali Mahdi.

Mahdi was one of the organizers of a two-day march that took place this summer to gather

support for the 'Say Yes to Peace for Children' campaign and the Sudanese Movement for Children (SMC).

The SMC is a coalition of government, Non-Governmental Organizations, (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) established in 2001 to mobilize different segments of society behind child rights and to call for peace on behalf of children.

'Politicians have so far not succeeded in ending one of the world's bloodiest and most protracted civil war that has hurt millions of children. It is time for the person on the street to spur them into action,' says Ali Mahdi. Marching for peace seemed like a good way to get his message across.

Mahdi puts his money where his mouth is. Former head of the NGO, Sudanese Homeless Children's society, representative of the SOS Kinderdorf International (and a strong supporter of UNICEF's activities), he has also spent his personal money on street children in Khartoum and in the south. This is only an attempt to 'stir the water around the pool,' said Mahdi. 'The circle will hopefully widen to include the full implementation of the rights of the child.'

But enthusiasm may be tempered by harsh reality. Sudan has been at war since 1953, and this latest chapter has lasted since 1983. The war is between the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, based in southern Sudan and the Government of Sudan based in the capital, Khartoum. In addition, more than 40 deep-rooted second-tier conflicts and proxy wars are being fought among various ethnic groups over natural resources like water, land and cattle as well as over local political and administrative power.

- Devastating War

It is estimated that the conflict has claimed the lives of up to two million persons and displaced an estimated four million.

The vast majority are women and children. Sudan's 18-year conflict has had a devastating impact on a whole generation of children. Many have only known war.

Infant mortality in the government-controlled urban areas of the south is estimated at 93 per thousand live births and maternal mortality rate at 763 per 100,000 live births. Only about 30 percent of the population have access to safe water sources. Between 14 percent and 18 percent of the children have been immunized.

The two-day march drew its inspiration from a story told to Ali Mahdi by a displaced young boy. He described his forced march of 950 kilometers from Wau town (Bar El Ghazal State) to Khartoum. The march spanned several months during which time he witnessed the death of several family members, endured illness and hunger. Now he lives in a camp for internally displaced persons near Khartoum – still far from his dream of the decent life that kept him going during the difficult journey. Walking symbolizes the plight of such children, according to Alfred Taban, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the English daily, Khartoum Monitor. 'They have been walking or running all their lives to escape attack and abduction or in the search for food, security, medicine and comfort.'

This two-day march to Khartoum, on July 27-28, had a far different purpose – to promote the message of peace. It began in Wad Medani, a central Sudanese town and melting pot for Sudan's more than 100 tribes and languages.

Theater performances, live broadcasts and traditional dances attracted huge crowds of children and adults. Comedians warmed up the crowds with skits and jokes, then explained why they seemed so happy to be marching in the heat. They visited schools with one clear message – that children everywhere deserve to have peace and that their rights must be preserved.

Within an hour the march grew from 1,000 to 20,000 participants. By the time it reached Khartoum two days later, an estimated 35,000 persons had taken part along the route. Thousands cheered from the roadside or honked from trucks. 25,000 pledges were collected from communities along the way.

- National Endeavor

Over 20 young volunteers, including high school graduates and university students, have helped with the data entry and analysis of the pledges coordinated by the National Council for Child Welfare. The analysis indicated that the overriding priority was 'Educate Every Child', followed closely by 'Fight Poverty: Invest in Children' and 'Protect Children' from War'.

The Head of State joined government officials (including Ministers), members of the National Assembly, Walis (i.e. Governors), Commissioners and others to sign the pledge. It called upon all Sudanese to embrace peace, reconcile and support inter-community peace efforts on behalf of the children of Sudan.

On the second day, the Head of State of the Republic of Sudan, President Omer Hassan Ahmed El Beshir, walked for over a kilometer. In his brief remarks he underscored the country's commitment to the wellbeing of children, citing polio eradication as an example. The Minister of Welfare and Social Development spoke along the same lines. Other government officials strongly endorsed the need for peace on behalf of the children of the Sudan. Ali Mahdi, and the team of Actors who participated in the march believe that such initiatives need to be encouraged. Children agree. One Grade-7 pupil, Omar Basha, said that 'our fathers have to make peace'. He appealed to adults to care for children living in bad conditions in war areas. He was referring specifically to a group of 40 barefooted boys at the ceremony who were living on the streets. Most had been displaced by the conflict.

For UNICEF, this march is only the beginning of something bigger. 'It is clear that working through only one entity, whether a Ministry or an institution, we have not achieved much on behalf of children,' said Thomas Ekvall, the UNICEF Representative. 'Working collaboratively and holistically with partners from Government, NGOs, civil society and private sector to address the rights of children, we can be sure of achieving our goals.'

Ali Mahdi has even bigger plans in store. He dreams of marching beyond the towns in the north and south right into the war zones and between the two warring factions. 'I dream of engaging

them to put down their guns for a while, listen to us and eventually embrace peace on behalf of the children of Sudan.'

It can be done, said Mahdi. 'When we first planned this march, people laughed at us. But we did it and will do it in the south. Nothing is too much to undertake on behalf of our children.'

- The Sudanese Movement for Children is a network of diverse partners that includes the National Council for Child Welfare, Save the Children (Sweden and UK), the Journalists for Children Organization, the Sudan Scouts Association, Plan International and UNICEF.

Ballots Instead of Bullets in Southern Sudan

Women and children have suffered terribly from the long-running war in the Southern Sudan. Not only are they especially vulnerable in a conflict that has created famines and huge numbers of internally displaced, they also suffer from a chronic lack of development and little hope of personal attainment. It is a place of considerable hardship, with none of the communication tools that much of the world takes for granted.

But even here many people had a chance to participate in the Say Yes for Children Campaign. Working with its NGO partners, UNICEF has made a big effort to distribute ballots along with aid. The result has been encouraging and surprising. By the time world leaders sit down for the special session it is expected that more than two hundred thousand votes from southern Sudan will have been logged and sent en bloc to New York.

How did it happen? **Julianna Lindsey**, UNICEF's Planning Officer for Southern Sudan, answered some questions from On the Record.

Q: How were you able to carry out the Say Yes campaign in southern Sudan?

A: International NGOs, UN agencies and Sudanese aid groups worked very hard. Paper ballots were printed reflecting the exact wording found on the Internet. We wanted the people in southern Sudan to have, for the first time in their lives, exactly the same chance as the businesswoman in London, or the Internet capable child in Singapore. The balloting was done as part of normal aid activities such as medical work and human rights workshops. The ballots were then given to pilots of the aircrafts that crisscross Sudan as part of the long running relief operation.

Q: What was the response?

A: Very good indeed. Especially keeping in mind that there are many parts of southern Sudan that we cannot reach because of insecurity.

Q: Are there authorities there that you could work through?

A: Yes, there are a number of rebel movements in southern Sudan. The biggest is the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Both the SPLM and the humanitarian wing, the Southern Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA), made it clear they supported the aims of the Say Yes campaign. So did so did the humanitarian wings of other movements. But primarily the aim was to bring the vote to as many people as we could and give ordinary people the right to say yes or no.

To be honest, we were a bit afraid of 'assessment fatigue', of people saying 'Oh yeah, another vote!' Assessments take place all over southern Sudan, but it's impossible to respond to every expressed need and people are sick of being asked for information when there is no clear benefit. Our intention is to print some posters to let people in southern Sudan know how the voting went.

Q: Did peace win the most votes?

A: No. It was second. Beaten by education! But that's not surprising. People crave education for their children. They also obviously want peace and know that the war is a danger to their children's lives.

We carried out voting amongst the 3,551 former child soldiers as they did not have the chance to go to school. These boys and many other children, including girls, have a tremendous thirst for education. They believe it is a way out for them of a truly awful situation. When children go to school, they tell us, parents listen to them with respect. Adults ask advice of a child who is educated.

Q: What is the state of education in southern Sudan?

A: Very, very bad. Over 17 years of conflict have stripped the region of most of its physical infrastructure and resources. Only an estimated 30 percent of children are enrolled in school, 10 percent of girls and in some IDP communities as little as 5 percent. There are few books, pens or chalkboards. They have to write on the ground. Only 7 percent of teachers are trained and it is considered normal for teachers who have finished Grade 5 to be teaching Grade 3. Teachers are often paid nothing and have to work in the fields to find food.

Q: What can be done about this under the circumstances?

A: In this setting of continuing conflict, it is sometimes difficult for humanitarian agencies to think beyond saving lives. But they can create space and opportunity for communities to develop.

Some international agencies like UNICEF and Save the Children UK are training teachers, and programs such as the return of the former child soldiers have a big education component, which will bring benefits for all children in the home areas. But communities need the resilience to be able to support their schools. And ultimately of course, they need peace in order to address the huge problems of Sudan.

Q: What is the role of NGOs in the Say Yes Campaign?

A: It has been key. UNICEF did a lot of internal advocacy work initially amongst the various agencies and undertook the collation and computer work. But Sudanese partner NGOs participated in promoting the campaign.

For example the New Sudan Council of Churches is trying to encourage peace among the different ethnic groups and carried the Say Yes message during their activities. The International Medical Corps attached votes to its delivery of the drug, Mectizan, which treats river blindness, a disease that is common in the region. The UNHCR was very co-operative and facilitated the collection of amongst Sudanese refugees at a large camp called Kakuma in northern Kenya.

Q: What is next?

A: We are very determined that the people who took part get feedback in order to see and discuss the results. Frequently, the Say Yes vote started wide-ranging discussions on various aspects of human rights. This is quite empowering for people who feel that they are often given little say in what happens. So, for UNICEF at least, the results and the process will be built into future activities that encourage community involvement and capacity building.

War is Not For Children

- **Bwana Machar** is a 17-year old Sudanese boy who has known only war since he was born. Bwana is from Kangkuoy village near Leer town of southern Sudan. He grew up sleeping in the bushes and often went without food. Bwana entered school in 1993. Three years later, at age 14, was recruited into the military. Here he tells On the Record for Children of his relief at being demobilized:

The headman of the village was forcing boys to join the army and I was no exception. I was conscripted against my wish; but what could you do against the chief. There were so many boys, some as young as nine years old.

Sometimes we went for days without food. Whenever lucky, we survived on wild animals that we killed and cooked. Mostly we slept in the bushes far away from the main camp and the river to avoid the enemy getting us at night.

Fighting against the government soldiers was tough for us children. At times, we defeated the enemy and at other times they would defeat us. Many people died and I lost three of my best friends. Gatkuoth Stephen 15, Gatluak Diew 10 and Marko Chidong 12, are friends I loved but they died in field. I remember them each day!

One day when we fighting in the Rubnyagai area, Gatkuoth was shot and hit hard. I was captured as I tried to save my friend. He died before my own eyes. It was so sad. I was taken to the enemy's camp where I remained for seven days. I was beaten day and night and only survived because the commandant was away.

God is great. He opened a way for me to escape and sneak to the bush. I ran for four days

without food when a man picked me and took me to his house and fed me. I then got back to our camp where I was given permission to return home to be with my parents. I found my parents crying thinking that I had died. They rejoiced to see me alive.

Within the same week, letters were circulated by UNICEF to the commanders to release the children because of this convention for children rights. Then all children were demobilized on 2nd February. In May the war intensified and our soldiers were forced to retreat. We ran away towards Nyal where demobilized boys were living. Nyal is quite far and we walked for three days non-stop.

Now I am very happy after being demobilized. I hate war. War is not for children. Children should grow without war and learn in school. I am now in class and will struggle to complete school. UNICEF and other agencies are doing a great job for children. Other countries should join in to help bring peace in southern Sudan.

I hope to complete my schooling and become a leader in my country and serve my people the best way I can. I look forward to becoming an engineer one day.