

A Collaboration of National Community Organisations

5 St Vincent Place, Albert Park, VIC 3206 • tel: (03) 9645 7977 • email: enquiries@tya.org.au • www.australiancollaboration.com.au

Peace, armed conflict and violence

Violent conflict, including war, genocide and terrorism, undermines human security and incapacitates human development causing death, disability, displacement, psychological stress and trauma, disease, hunger, cultural property destruction, repression, poverty, loss of infrastructure, environmental degradation, as well as educational and health deprivation. Breaking the cycle of armed conflict and other forms of violence is a critical challenge for all nations, regardless of geographical location.

A 2005 United Nations report, titled *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, observed that “nearly three times as many people were killed in conflict in the twentieth century as in the previous four centuries combined”. The report identified six interconnected clusters of threats:

- war between states;
- violence within states (including civil war, human rights violations and genocide);
- poverty, disease and environmental degradation;
- nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons;
- terrorism;
- transnational, organised crime.

Armed conflict

Since 1990, armed conflict has claimed the lives of more than 3 million people worldwide. Civilians account for approximately 90 per cent of all casualties. Most of these fatalities have occurred in developing countries. In 2005, nine out of ten countries ranked at the bottom of the Human Development Index had experienced violent conflict at some point since 1990. The economic impact of armed conflict for a low-income country can be devastating and in many conflict-prone countries, military spending far exceeds spending on health and education.

Although during the last decade of the twentieth century the number of violent conflicts decreased from 51 in 1991

to 29 in 2003, wars now last longer, with a heavy human toll. Approximately 800,000 people were killed in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. Almost 4 million people have lost their lives due to fighting, malnutrition and disease in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), described by the United Nations as “the deadliest conflict since the Second World War”. In 2005, the International Crisis Group estimated that 1,000 people were dying every day from war-related causes in the DRC. The western Sudanese region of Darfur has experienced a major humanitarian catastrophe (which has been termed a ‘genocide’) due to conflict since 2003. It is estimated that over 400,000 people have been killed due to disease and violence since the conflict began. Deadly conflicts are not, however, restricted to the African continent. Since the U.S. led military occupation in Iraq, an estimated 60,000-100,000 civilians have been killed.

More than two million children have died as a result of armed conflict since 1990, and more than 6 million have been either disabled or seriously injured. Under circumstances of violent conflict, children are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and abduction. Rape is also a common tactic of war with a devastating impact on women and their communities. Armed conflict increases vulnerability to infectious disease. HIV/AIDS is, for example, spread through sexual violence, population displacement, relationship breakdown, sexual coercion and the collapse of health systems. Approximately 22.5 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa now have HIV/AIDS, many of whom are in conflict or conflict-prone countries. Other health issues include malnutrition, diarrhoea, measles, respiratory infections, malaria and tuberculosis.

In the world today, approximately 30 million people are displaced due to conflict or human rights violations. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated, in early 2007, that about 12 per cent of the total Iraqi population have fled their homes due to violence. There are approximately 2 million Iraqis dis-

T H E A U S T R A L I A N C O L L A B O R A T I O N

placed internally and 2 million in neighbouring states, such as Syria and Jordan, according to Forced Migration Online (FMO), and in Lebanon it has been estimated that almost one million people were displaced during the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in mid-2006.

Small arms are the cause of 60-90 per cent of direct conflict deaths, anti-personnel mines kill 25,000 people a year, and cluster bombs claim the lives of thousands of people a year. It could take 10 years to clear an estimated 100,000 unexploded cluster bombs from the rubble of Southern Lebanon. Cluster bombs pose a special threat to civilians because they affect large areas and almost always leave behind unexploded bomblets. In Vietnam, some 300 people are killed each year as a result of bomblets remaining from US cluster bombing during the Vietnam War. On 30 May 2008, an historic international treaty to ban the use of cluster bombs was signed by over one hundred countries, including Australia. The United States, Russia, China and Israel were among the countries which did not sign the treaty.

Terrorism

Terrorism is the deliberate use of violence by individual, group or state actors to achieve political ends through fear and intimidation. Tactics such as suicide bombing, kidnapping, hijacking, assassination and car bombing are typically used. Due to the emergence and growth of 'home-grown' terror movements and terrorist attacks worldwide, terrorism is now considered a 'global phenomenon'. According to former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "All States in every region – large or small, strong or weak – are vulnerable to terrorism and its consequences." Some notable examples of terrorist events in the past decade include: the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington; the Beslan school siege in Russia in 2002; the Bali bombing in 2002; the attacks in Madrid in 2004; the London bombings in 2005; and the Mumbai train bombings on 11 July 2006.

Since 1998, according to the United Nations *Human Development Report* (2005), terrorism has resulted in almost 20,000 fatalities globally, although statistics vary according to the definition adopted. In 2005, almost one-third of all terror incidents occurred in Iraq, resulting in more than half of all the terror related deaths worldwide. Currently, there is no single universally accepted definition of 'terrorism' and rarely do those who engage in 'terrorism'

define themselves as 'terrorists', often preferring to use other terms such as freedom fighter, revolutionary, vigilante and jihadi.

Australia has signed a number of bilateral memoranda of understanding (MOUs) on counterterrorism. In May 2006, Australia announced a \$92.6 million four year regional counter-terrorism package which included new measures that build on successful regional cooperation in law enforcement, border and transport security, intelligence and legal affairs. Since 2002, the Australian Government has introduced anti-terror legislation to give greater detection, detainment and prosecutorial powers to law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Aspects of this legislation have been strongly criticised by law bodies across Australia because of their threats to longstanding civil liberties.

Nuclear proliferation and biological and chemical weapons

Nuclear proliferation is the spread of nuclear weapons production, knowledge and technology from one nation to another. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty came into force in 1970 to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. The Treaty obligates the five internationally recognised 'nuclear weapon States' – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States - not to transfer nuclear weapons technology and knowledge to any 'non-nuclear-weapon State' and to pursue a disarmament plan. Non-nuclear states undertake not to acquire or produce nuclear weapons and to pursue nuclear power production peacefully. India and Pakistan (non-members of the Treaty) have declared possession of nuclear weapons. It is believed that Israel, another non-member, has also pursued its own nuclear weapon development. In 2005, it was estimated that 29,000 nuclear weapons were held by at least seven countries, with 96 per cent estimated to be held by the United States and Russia. The continued spread of nuclear technology (to new countries like North Korea, for example), and the failure of the nuclear weapon states to disarm, do not bode well for the future.

Chemical weapons and biological weapons containing viruses, bacteria or toxins are two other forms of weapons of mass destruction. The production and stockpiling of these weapons are prohibited under international conventions. Radiological weapons, such as dirty bombs

(conventional explosives which disperse radioactive material) can also contaminate land, food and water supplies.

Australia plays an active role in non-nuclear proliferation and has made important contributions to global efforts towards nuclear disarmament. Australia meets its international obligations through the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office. Despite some commendable efforts, the Medical Association for Prevention of War has described Australia's recent performance as a Treaty member as a "mixed bag" which is coloured by "our alliance with the world's superpower and compounded by a desire to maximise uranium sales". In April 2006, for example, Australia and China signed the Australia-China Nuclear Material Transfer Agreement and Nuclear Cooperation Agreement to cover the transfer of uranium and nuclear-related material, including equipment and technology for 'peaceful and non-military purposes'. Australia has similar agreements with the US, UK, France and Russia. The concern with such exports is the risk of nuclear proliferation.

Peace-building

Peace-building has the capacity to bring optimism and stability to conflict-prone and post-conflict nations. The United Nations has identified three core objectives of peace-building. The first is to ensure physical security for civilians, which can be achieved through peacekeeping forces and the maintenance of law and order. The second is to provide adequate short-term and long-term economic support in order to improve living standards, health and education. A third objective is 'peace-making', which refers to the development of long-term diplomatic 'solutions' that contribute to sustainable peace, typically achieved through negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration.

Australia plays an important role in peace-building in its region (e.g. peacekeeping and peacemaking in East Timor, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands). The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has been involved in peacekeeping since 1947.

All nations should vigorously pursue global security and universal human rights protection not merely out of economic and security self-interest but also out of moral responsibility. The insecurity linked to armed conflict, global terrorism and nuclear proliferation demands that underlying causes such as global poverty and inequality

are urgently addressed. As the latest United Nations Human Development Report (2005) has observed, "violent conflict creates problems that travel without passports and do not respect national borders, even when those borders are elaborately defended".

Useful sources

- International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch*,
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1200-&l=1>
Crisis Watch is a 12-page monthly bulletin that provides monthly summaries of the current and potential conflicts in the world.
- The Medical Association for Prevention of War Australia (MAPW). <http://www.mapw.org.au>
MAPW is the Australian affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW). The site provides access to a wide range of resources on the impacts of war and on work to promote peace and disarmament.
- United Nations Human Development Report (2005), "Violent conflict: Bringing the real threat into focus",
http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/HDR05_chapter_5.pdf
This chapter of the Human Development Report (2005) examines the relationship between human development and violent conflict.
- United Nations, (2004). *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*,
<http://www.un.org/secureworld/>
This report, prepared by the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, sets out a broad framework for collective security.
- U.S. Congress, *Trends in Terrorism 2006*,
<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/69479.pdf>
Provides a summary of the U.S. State Department's annual report on global terrorism.

Author

Dr Nicola Henry, lecturer La Trobe University. June 2008.