

ICRC

SPECIAL BROCHURE

CHILDREN AND WAR



INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

Protecting children, often the most vulnerable in wartime, is a priority for the International Committee of the Red Cross. The texts and photographs on the following pages describe the main thrust of the institution's humanitarian action against the disease, injustice and ignorance to which these children fall victim.



Elizabeth Gilbert/ICRC

Terms of Reference

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) derives its mandate from the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977. The Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement assign it other tasks in situations not covered by the Geneva Conventions.

The ICRC works for the faithful application of the provisions of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts and undertakes the tasks incumbent upon it under this law.

The ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, together with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, form the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The ICRC, which gave rise to the Movement, is an independent humanitarian institution. As a neutral intermediary in the event of armed conflict or unrest it endeavours, on its own initiative or on the basis of the Geneva Conventions, to bring protection and assistance to the victims of international and non-international armed conflict and internal disturbances and tension.

Table of Contents

	Introduction	4
I	Immeasurable suffering	6
II	Staring reality in the face	8
III	The essentials: food and water, clothing and shelter	10
IV	Children's health	12
V	Child soldiers	14
VI	Children in captivity	16
VII	Separated families	18
VIII	Hopeful for news	20
IX	Gaining respect for children's rights	22
	Conclusion	24

Nagorno-Karabakh, 1994. ICRC
Evacuation of a wounded child.
Zed Nelson/PANOS PICTURES.

Agence Rizzoli Editore, Milan



Hiroshima, August 1945. Japanese woman nurses her child after atomic bomb attack.



World War II. Families are deported from the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw.



Roger-Viollet

Introduction

War does not spare children. Mortar bombs fall from the sky, bullets rip through homes, water and provisions are cut off. Children may be the smallest victims of armed conflict, but they are by no means the most insignificant. Trying to protect children in such situations is a formidable task.

Legal efforts to protect children in wartime have been under way since the beginning of this century. In recent decades governments and institutions have produced declarations, conventions and other legal texts which should ensure the primacy of children's rights in even the worst of circumstances. In 1924 the League of Nations adopted the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child. The Geneva Conventions were written in 1949, their Additional Protocols came out in 1977. The most recent text drawn up by the international community, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, was adopted in New York in November 1989.

There is considerable discrepancy, however, between the detailed provisions worked out by experts and the daily life of children caught up in the maelstrom of war. Abuse of children's rights by combatants seems to rise in direct proportion to the number of international laws adopted to ensure children's safety. Warlords murder children with the aim of conquering the future, and the world turns a blind eye. The collapse of social order leaves the way open to lawlessness. Society's slide towards tolerance of such behaviour through sheer negligence violates the principles championed by international law since its inception. In reality, children have never before been so poorly protected.

The problem has reached such disastrous proportions that appeals for funds to help children in wartime elicit little more than polite murmurs. Even organizations whose sole purpose is to assist mothers and their children nowadays barely succeed in financing their operations. Until an antidote is found for the murderous violence of internal, regional and international conflicts, children's survival will depend largely on the capacity of humanitarian institutions to come to their aid at the right time and with the appropriate means.

I. Immeasurable suffering

Figures cannot adequately convey the distress of death and suffering during wartime, but they can situate the problem more objectively. For example, over the last ten years an estimated 1.5 million children were killed in armed conflicts. In the last two months of 1992 about 75% of the children under five died in some areas of Somalia. Child mortality rates among refugee populations fleeing conflict situations are five to twelve times higher than in their home countries.

Thierry Gassanoni/CRC



Immeasurable loss. A small child without its parents has little chance of survival when a social environment is disrupted by war and access to food is limited.

As they grow up children need specific nutrients for their physical and mental development. When they do not get the right food or enough to eat they very quickly become vulnerable. Children are also more susceptible to infection owing to the kind of precarious conditions found in camps for refugees or displaced people.

Thus children, not adults, are the first to suffer the effects of rationing or sanctions. They die of hunger if aid cannot get through because

convoys are held up by mined roads or airspace is closed to non-military activity. They are hurt the most by shortages of supplies in hospitals and the suspension of vaccination campaigns in areas where fighting rages.



Philippe Mecheri/CRC

Childhood lost. Not a second thought about sweeping around a gun. Little girls grow up quickly in a camp for displaced people.

Malnutrition, measles, diarrhoeal diseases and pulmonary infections can cause the death of 50% to 95% of children under five in wartime. These figures could be much lower if simple and inexpensive measures were employed to promote hygiene.

Landmines too represent a greater danger to children, who may be injured while playing. Figures from the Hargeisa hospital in northern Somalia show that nearly three-quarters of mine victims are children between five and fifteen years of age. In former Yugoslavia, at least two children are currently being admitted to hospitals every day with severe mine-blast injuries. Amputations are lifetime scars which will affect the children's ability to get around, work and marry, in short to live a normal life.

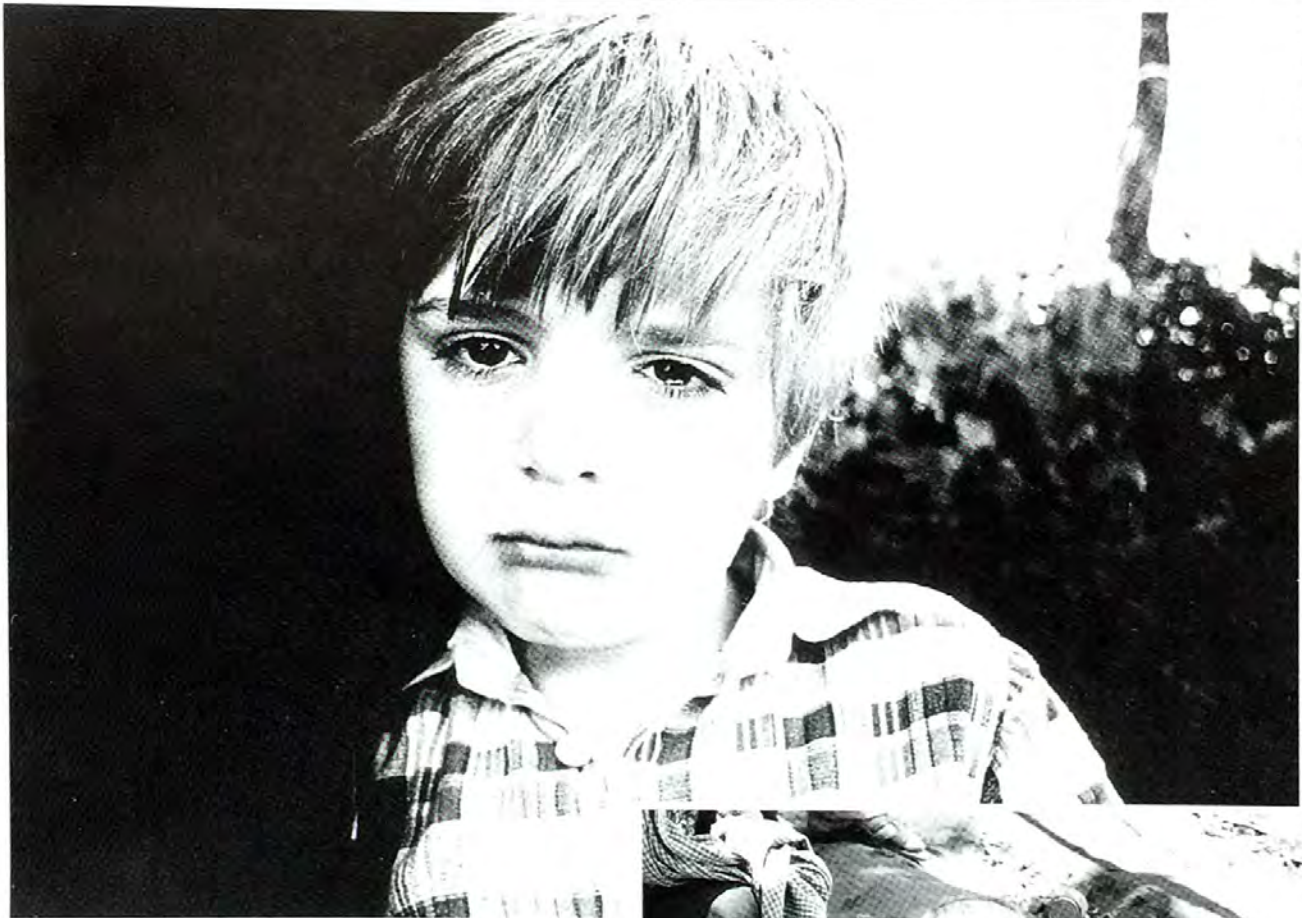
The psychological impact of war is harder to measure but cannot be overlooked. Witnessing atrocities committed against close relatives and scenes of plunder, being forcibly displaced and separated from one's family can cause either immediate or delayed changes in a child's psycho-social behaviour.

Children protected by the Geneva Conventions

Numerous provisions of international humanitarian law provide for special protection for children in time of armed conflict. Indeed, such protection is part and parcel of the protection of civilians. The Fourth Convention, relative to the protection of civilians in time of war, and adopted in 1949, contains articles affording special protection for children. The principle on which these provisions are based is most clearly stated in Protocol I, Article 77:

Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault. The Parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require, whether because of their age or for any other reason.

In all, the Geneva Conventions and the two Additional Protocols contain some 25 articles which specifically concern children. The responsibility for the application of the provisions of humanitarian law providing special protection for children is a collective responsibility. It is the duty of the States party to the Conventions to respect and ensure respect for these standards.



Zaven Khachikyan/CRC

A boy discovers his father has gone missing but does not know whether he has been captured or killed in the latest fighting.



Dominique de Pinna/CRC

A bucket, the closest thing to hand, served as a cradle for this child when fighting broke out near her family's village.

II. Staring reality in the face

Recent support for children's rights

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations on 20 November 1989, covers the whole range of human rights - civil, economic, cultural, social and political rights - and applies them to children. It recognizes that enjoyment of one of these rights is inseparable from enjoyment of the others and opens new horizons by recognizing the right of the child to play an active part in its own development.

Article 38, paragraph 1 of this Convention contains a welcome reminder of the rules of humanitarian law protecting children in armed conflict:

States party undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child.



Ron Haber/NATZ

Europe too has regions torn apart by conflict where orphans or children temporarily separated from their parents are thrown into a completely alien environment. Their parents' sole concern may have been to ensure their safety but the children themselves see this as a terrible breach of trust. Many suffer the added trauma of surviving bomb attacks on their villages. Psychological scars sustained in early childhood do not heal easily.

Paul Smith/PANOS PICTURES



Certain Latin American countries are plagued by gang warfare and endemic poverty, fostered by a system founded on social exploitation and inequality that has cast thousands of children into the streets. These children live from hand to mouth, are hunted like vermin and despised by everyone.



Larry Towler/MAGNUM

In the Middle East, there are youngsters who have now reached adolescence without experiencing anything but armed violence and the breakdown of communication between their elders. Since they know no better, their view of the future is that of a society based on brutality.



Mike Goldwater/NETWORK

In some parts of Asia, children mutilated for life because of the millions of mines strewn over the countryside are abandoned to their fate and forced to eke out an existence as best they can. Antipersonnel mines often look like brightly coloured toys but when mines are picked up or stepped on they maim or kill indiscriminately. In some places troops send children on ahead, thereby testing the route.



Yann Gambin/UNICEF

There are African countries where young boys, barely emerging from childhood and easily led astray by the temptation of easy plunder, are snatched from their families and enrolled - often under the influence of drugs - in pseudo-military camps, turned into robots and forced to perform base and cruel deeds.

Children's rights to education and their cultural environment

Even in wartime children have the right to continue to receive an education, including religious and moral education, in keeping with the wishes of their parents, or in the absence of parents, of those responsible for their care (Fourth Geneva Convention, Articles 50 and 94).

The child's cultural environment must be preserved (Fourth Geneva Convention, Articles 24 and 50 and Protocol I, Article 78, paragraph 2). By protecting this environment, humanitarian law also protects the moral values, religion, culture and traditions in which the child was brought up.

III. The essentials: food and water, clothing and shelter

Too often in wartime there are not enough resources to go around and other sectors have higher priority or the prevailing insecurity restricts access to public services. In principle, the State bears the primary responsibility for providing its population with the essentials such as food, water, clothing and shelter. National Societies also assist people in times of penury.

When the State is unable to cope with the situation the ICRC will lend support to still functioning local organizations, including National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The ICRC's short-term strategy is to enable local services to deal with the emergency.

When conditions deteriorate to the point where State structures collapse and local services do not function or health services are not accessible to people on both sides of the conflict, the ICRC steps in to safeguard children's health with more extensive assistance such as food supplies, drinking water, adequate sanitation and essential medical care.



A nurse helps a malnourished child drink a special protein formula at an ICRC feeding centre.



Thomas has a new plaid shirt! ICRC Landcruisers and Mexican Red Cross trucks venture into Chiapas with clothing.

Families displaced by the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh are sheltered in tents donated by Red Crescent Societies



Roger Hutchings/NETWORK

Braving bombs and snipers, children accompany their parents or go alone to fetch water for drinking, cooking, bathing and cleaning.

Children and access to essential supplies

The ICRC distributes foodstuffs to families affected by war. It may also supply families with seeds and tools in order to restore their capacity for growing food. These are complementary activities since agricultural assistance can reduce the need for food consignments.

Nutritional rehabilitation programmes are developed for children suffering from malnutrition and, depending on needs, the ICRC sets up centres where children are given food appropriate to their degree of malnutrition.

The link between health and living conditions is particularly obvious where children are concerned. Poor conditions, temperature extremes and water pollution inevitably lead to health problems such as respiratory infections and diarrhoeal diseases. The ICRC installs systems supplying safe drinking water, builds shelters and distributes blankets.

These kinds of programmes can be set up for vulnerable groups with special needs such as children at nutritional rehabilitation centres or the wounded in hospitals. They are implemented in collaboration with Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Children's right to humanitarian aid

The parties to the conflict are obliged to:

- permit the free passage of all consignments of essential foodstuffs and clothing intended for children (Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 23);
- give priority to children in the distribution of relief consignments (Protocol I, Article 70, paragraph 1).

Ian Berry/MAGNUM



It only hurts for a minute. ICRC vaccination campaigns protect children against diseases that can be prevented such as measles, diphtheria, tetanus, tuberculosis and polio.

Children's right to medical care

Children shall be given priority during evacuations from besieged or encircled areas or areas of hostilities (Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 17 and Protocol II, Article 4, paragraph 3(e)); and be sheltered in hospital and safety zones (Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 14). The temporary evacuation of children to neutral countries for medical reasons shall be permitted (Protocol I, Article 78).

IV. Children's health

Many conflicts take place in countries where it is difficult to meet children's essential needs in peacetime; in wartime it is virtually impossible. Children are the hardest hit by the uncertainty and deterioration of basic hygiene and health services. It is a vicious circle: as children's medical needs increase, medical services decrease or disappear, along with preventive measures such as vaccination campaigns.

The ICRC's emergency activities help reduce the imbalance caused by war, and as soon as conditions allow the institution transfers its programmes to organizations that will work towards long-term objectives. The ICRC's normal partners in these situations are the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The ICRC and children's health

ICRC medical teams may undertake vaccination campaigns in emergency situations or negotiate or arrange for protection for local teams responsible for an expanded vaccination programme.

In many war-torn areas medical supplies are sorely lacking. The ICRC provides support for local services caring for sick and injured children, particularly in areas close to combat zones or far from large medical centres. When local institutions are unable to deal with children's health problems, the ICRC may set up dispensaries, whenever possible with Red Cross or Red Crescent branches. Children wounded by acts of war are cared for at ICRC surgical units or in ICRC-supported hospitals - often staffed with the help of medical teams from National Societies.

The ICRC manufactures prostheses and has programmes for the rehabilitation of children who have undergone amputations due to war injuries.



Another one of war's tiny victims. This child is cared for by his mother while in hospital.



ICRC hospital, Kabul. This little girl was injured by an antipersonnel mine while guarding her sheep.

Drawing by a young landmine victim in Afghanistan. "I was caring for my sheep as usual. I stepped into the fold and saw a round thing. When I picked it up it exploded. Here I have illustrated my leg injuries with the drawing of a shoe, even though I know that I will never wear shoes again."





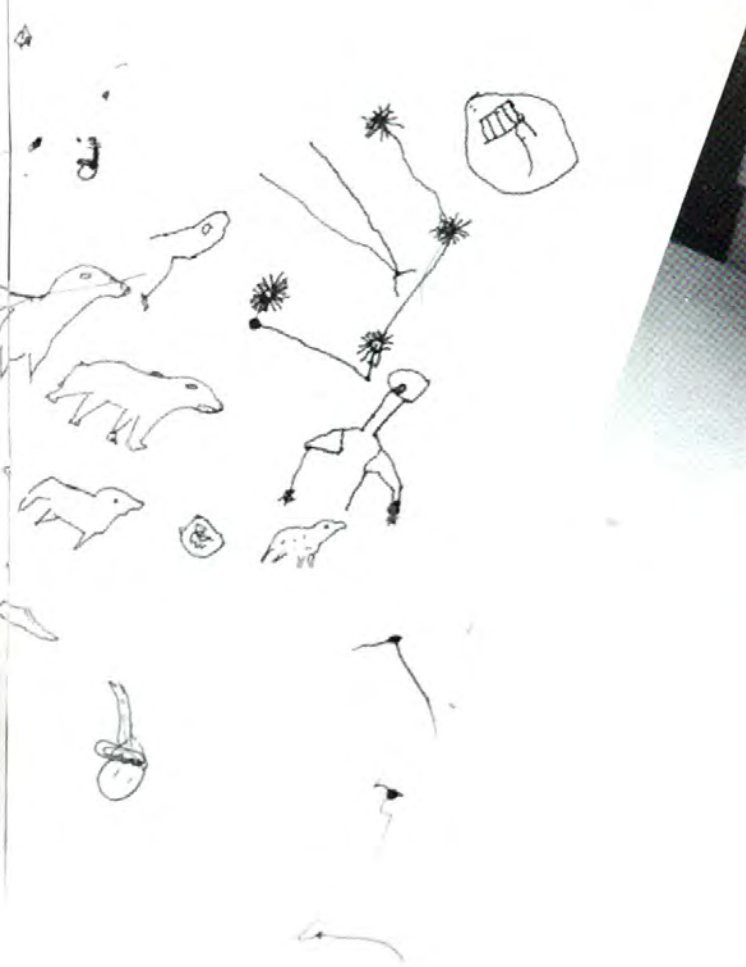
Children's health

Child mine victims

"Injuries by antipersonnel mines are both horrific and expensive. Horrific because they inflict severe injuries. Expensive, because of all war wounds, they place the greatest demands on the resources for war surgery in terms of time, blood for transfusions and nursing care."

"The horror and waste are all the greater since mine victims are hit indiscriminately. Most of the casualties are not combatants but children, in particular those working the fields or pastures. Long after a conflict has ended mines continue their bloody work."

Gavin W. Bowyer
ICRC surgeon, Quetta (Pakistan)



ICRC orthopaedic specialist encourages a young mine victim to take his first steps with an artificial leg.

V. Child soldiers

Children left to their own resources are good candidates for recruitment as soldiers. A gun is often a meal ticket; fighting may look better than sitting at home alone and afraid. The following accounts are from interviews with child soldiers.

Kabanda was nine when he watched soldiers kill his parents: *"The men who kill my mother, they make me angry. Me, I decide to go into the army. Me, I decide to beat them. If I find them I kill them."*

Thirteen-year old **Stephan** says: *"I know these people they killed. This one, when I would come home from school and be hungry, he would give me food. Now I will remember. Those men who killed my friend, they should be killed."*

Ram Dee is fifteen. He declares to anyone who will listen: *"I am a rebel. I fought off the trouble. I took in the bubble. I said double trouble. I'm a man who's not stable."*

Children barred from combat

The Parties to the conflict shall take all feasible measures in order that children who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities and, in particular, they shall refrain from recruiting them into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, the Parties to the conflict shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest (Protocol I, Article 77, paragraph 2).

The rule is even stricter in non-international conflict situations:

Children who have not attained the age of fifteen years shall neither be recruited in the armed forces or groups nor allowed to take part in hostilities (Protocol II, Article 4, paragraph 3 (c)).



When children take part in armed conflict it is not only their own lives that are at risk, but also the lives of their potential targets.



Humanitarian law prohibits the participation of children in hostilities.



Zed MISCOPANOS PICTURES

More children and youth bear arms in internal conflict and violent strife than ever before. Characterized by guerilla-style warfare conducted largely by part-time participants, such conflicts inevitably result in excessive civilian deaths and injuries, extensive damage to health and education systems, and substantial movements of refugees and displaced persons. When conflict drags on for years and even decades, the root causes themselves, such as poverty or repression, are exacerbated, galvanising civilian populations for recruitment into armed groups...

When children's realities are defined by war's causes and by-products - displacement, separation, loss of parents, lack of food and shelter - should we not be ready for the choice that some will make?

No systematic study appears to have been conducted into the relationship between the way children cope with exposure to violence and future choices. Some evidence suggests a connection between exposure to chronic fear (in childhood) and susceptibility to later recruitment into terrorist or armed groups.

Excerpts from ***Child Soldiers*** by Ilene Cohn and Guy S. Goodwin-Gill.
A study for the Henry Dunant Institute, Geneva.
Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994.

gered. Because of their often immature and impassioned



Martin Adler/PANOS PICTURES

The war games children learn from the local heroes can quickly turn into sordid reality. These Eritrean children made a tank graveyard their playground.

VI. Children in captivity

Children in captivity

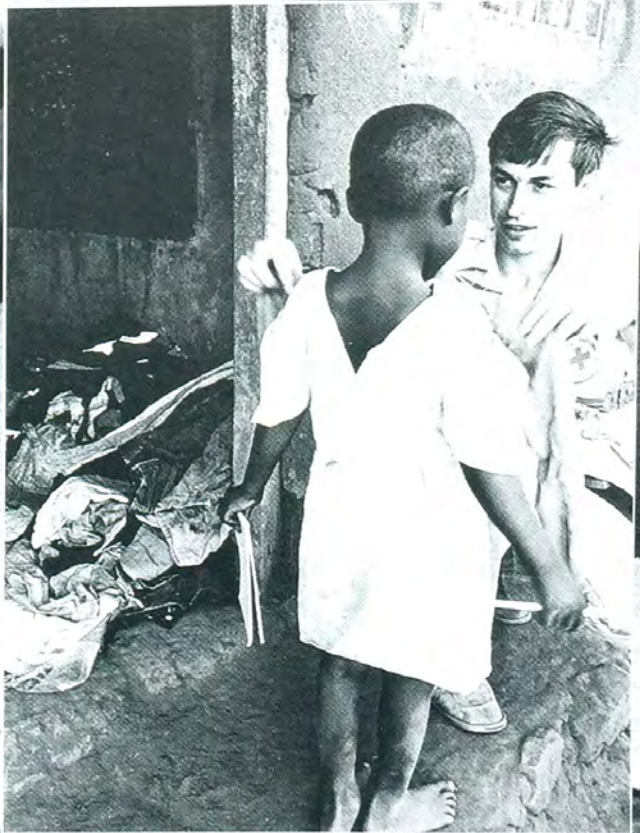
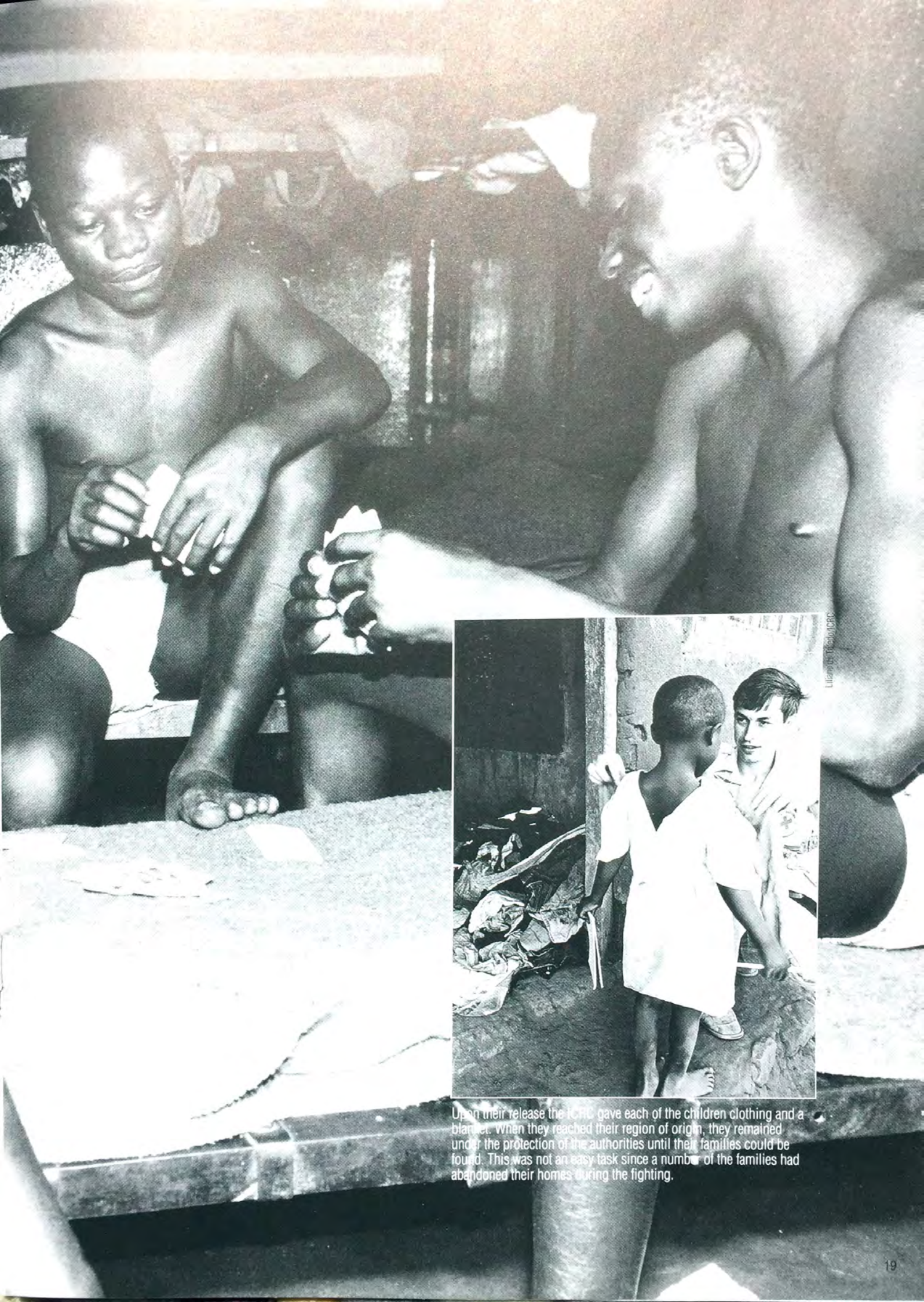
Like these young Ugandans, thousands of children are imprisoned each year for common law offences, because they were caught up in violent upheavals in their country, or because they were voluntarily or involuntarily enrolled as combatants. Such restrictions on children's freedom can create situations which are difficult for them to bear and can have lasting effects on their future development. It is therefore essential that the law takes their particular needs into account.

Children arrested, detained or interned shall be held in quarters separate from the quarters of adults, except where they are lodged with their families (Protocol I, Article 77, paragraph 4).

Interned children shall be given additional food, in proportion to their physiological needs (Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 89).

Uganda, 1988. Some 270 children between six and ten years of age were found by ICRC delegates in four prisons. They had been arrested in 1987 and 1988 during the conflict that was ravaging the country. Regular allowances were paid to them over several months, to meet their basic needs in contact with them and their families. The children's families did not know that they had been arrested and could they travel to look for them, the journey would have been much too dangerous.

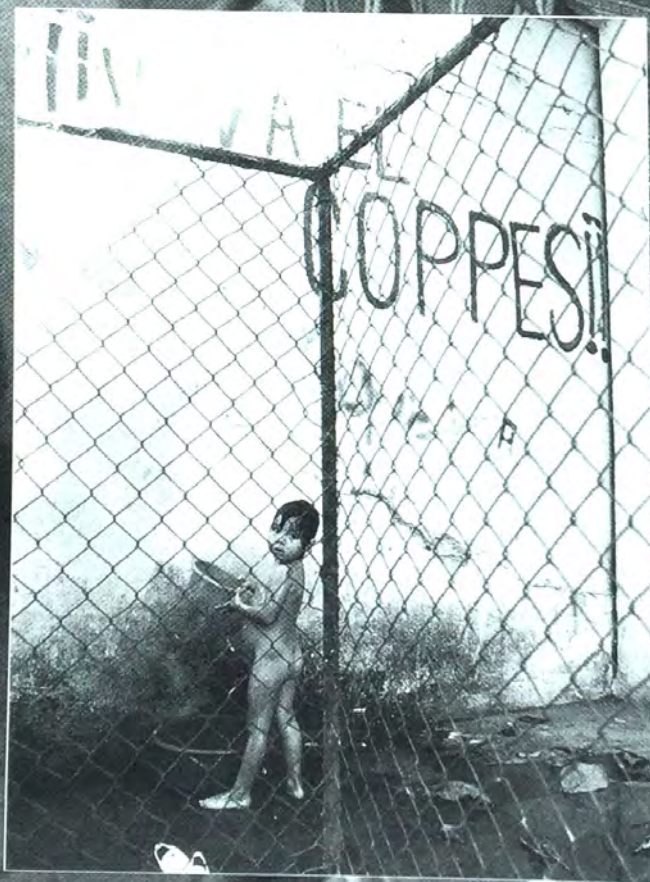
The first thing the delegates did was to make sure the children were adequately fed and that they were in good health. Later on, the ICRC negotiated their release. The children were free on condition that they could develop their own lives. They must go to school and receive a recommendation from the ICRC to those who



Upon their release the ICRC gave each of the children clothing and a blanket. When they reached their region of origin, they remained under the protection of the authorities until their families could be found. This was not an easy task since a number of the families had abandoned their homes during the fighting.

Children in captivity

ICRC delegates visit and bring assistance to detained families in Nagorno-Karabakh. Imprisoned children visited by the ICRC are either detainees themselves, small children living with their detainee mothers or infants born in prison.



This child is being detained with her mother in a Latin American jail. She may remain in detention until her mother has served her sentence or be released to live with relatives. On a case-by-case basis, the ICRC recommends the detaining authorities set the child at liberty for humanitarian reasons - provided its family is able to receive the child.



ICRC visits to imprisoned children

ICRC delegates make every effort to ensure that the child's psychological and emotional balance, normal development and, as far as possible, education are guaranteed. The ICRC requests the following from the detaining authorities:

- the period of interrogation should take place without delay;
- imprisoned children should always be housed separate from adult detainees, except where they are lodged with their families;
- if the child is not housed with his or her family, the child should be transferred to an appropriate institution for minors;
- the child should have direct, regular contact with his or her family;
- food, hygiene and medical care should be provided in the same general condition as for the general population;
- the child should spend a large part of his or her time with family members whenever possible;
- the child should be able to continue his or her education.



Like children everywhere, those in detention have lots of imagination when it comes to making toys. The ICRC Landcruiser was a popular model for these children.

VII. Separated families

Family unity is also very important for children's health. The International Red Cross tries to keep family members together and to reunite families separated by conflict. Children who have lost their parents through death or displacement are sometimes sheltered by a kind neighbour or placed in institutions, others live in the streets. These children are at risk of falling into the hands of unscrupulous people who use them as cheap labour, often abusively, and even teach them to handle arms in order to turn them into soldiers.

Protection of unaccompanied children entails identifying them, placing them in temporary custody of an adult or an institution where they will be cared for, searching for their parents, restoring contact with relatives and maintaining it until they can be reunited with at least one of their parents.

All possible avenues are explored in searching for a child's parents: Red Crescent or Red Cross workers make inquiries at the village of origin, radio appeals can be launched, posters made, authorities likely to have useful information can be approached, and so forth. If the father and mother cannot be traced or, more tragically, are found to have died, attempts will be made to locate other close relatives - brothers or sisters, grandparents, uncles, aunts - who can take care of the child. Only as a last resort, when all other possibilities have been exhausted, a child may be declared legally abandoned and put up for adoption.

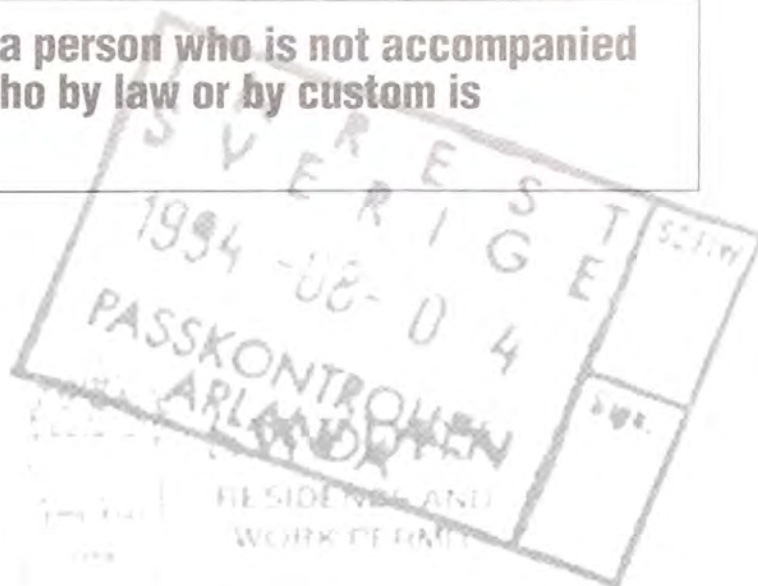


Impresiones digitales (totalizadoras)
Emporjants (compriments)
Huellas digitales (totalizadora)

ICRC temporary travel documents are issued to people without identity papers as a result of a conflict. Entry, transit and exit visas can be stamped into the document indicating that the authorities' permission to travel has been obtained.



An unaccompanied child is a person who is not accompanied by a parent or other adult who by law or by custom is responsible for him or her.



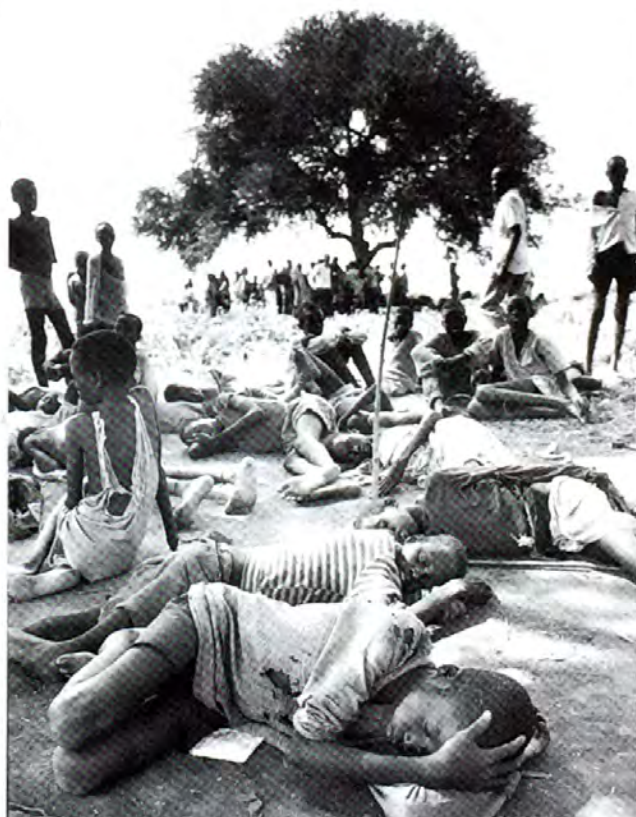
SVERIGE
RESIDENS- OCH
ARBETSTILLSTÄND

RESIDENS- OCH
ARBETSTILLSTÄND

U

1-2-3

940713-140919



Martin Adler/PANOS PICTURES

Having fled internecine fighting in their home villages these unaccompanied children fend for themselves best as they can. The ICRC, usually in cooperation with National Societies and organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Save the Children Fund and the International Organization for Migration, does all it can to reunite families separated by conflict.

Children separated from their families

One of the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law is to preserve the unity of the family. A number of clauses provide mechanisms which are designed to promote the reunification of families separated after the outbreak of a conflict. The parties to the conflict are obliged, as far as possible, to keep members of the same family together in the event of internment (Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 82).

With the same objective in mind, strict conditions are imposed on evacuations: ...The consent of the parents, the legal guardians or persons who by law or custom are primarily responsible for their care is required for temporary evacuation (Protocol I, Article 78).

Humanitarian law also contains detailed rules designed to keep track of children temporarily separated from their families: children under twelve should be identified by the wearing of identity discs (Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 24); the Occupying Power shall facilitate the identification of children and the registration of their parentage (Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 50).



Displaced people try to find their relatives through tracing programmes. When it is possible to bring families back together the ICRC tries to ensure that the reunion takes place in a non-conflict area.



A tearful reunion. Months, even years, may go by before families can be reunited. In the meantime children grow up and may not even remember what a parent or brother or sister looks like when they meet again.



Out of sight, not out of mind. Searching for family members is a trying experience. A child is not immune to her mother's anxiety.

VIII. Hopeful for news

Where mail services have broken down, family members separated by conflict can send news through the Red Cross message service. Message forms are available at all ICRC or National Society offices.

- In connection with the Iran-Iraq conflict which began in 1980, more than 13 million messages were exchanged between prisoners of war and their families.
- In the context of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, more than 4 million messages were exchanged throughout the world by refugees, displaced people and prisoners in 1993 alone. Over 100 National Societies helped ensure the distribution of these messages.

Families have the right to know the fate of their relatives. (Protocol I, Article 32)



The news in Red Cross messages is not always happy. Sometimes though, it is better to know than to be left wondering what happened to loved ones. Red Cross and Red Cross Societies play a big part in collecting and distributing these family messages.

DRA G DENISE, PUNO TE
VOLIM

Dear Denise, I love you a lot.

12 Date
Datum
28 Datum

12.4.1994

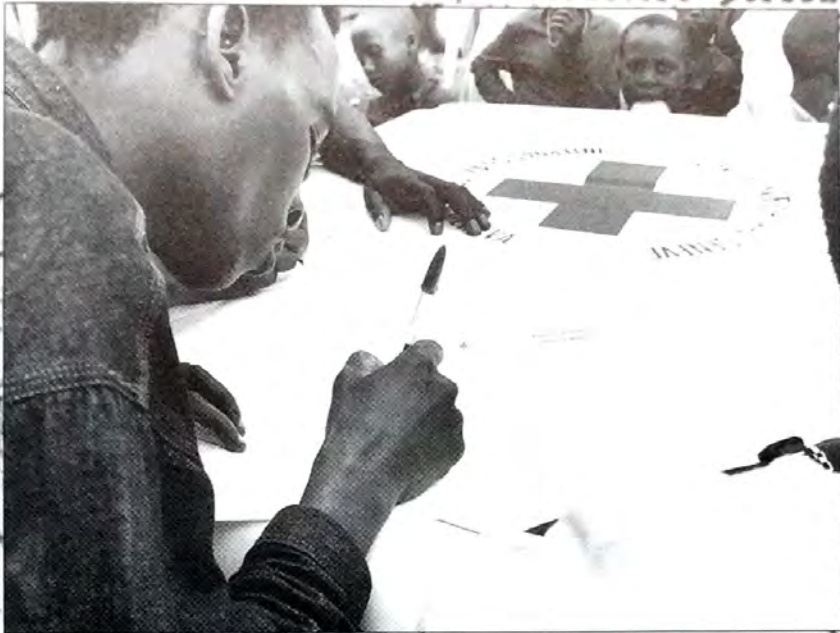
Signature
Potpis
Potpis

A. M. ...

MESSAGE / PORUKA / PORUKA

(Nouvelles de caractère personnel et/ ou familial)

(lične prirode)
(odlične prirode)



Someone else will have to read the message this father is writing to his small daughter. Family ties are maintained during wartime by the regular exchange of news.



SRCE

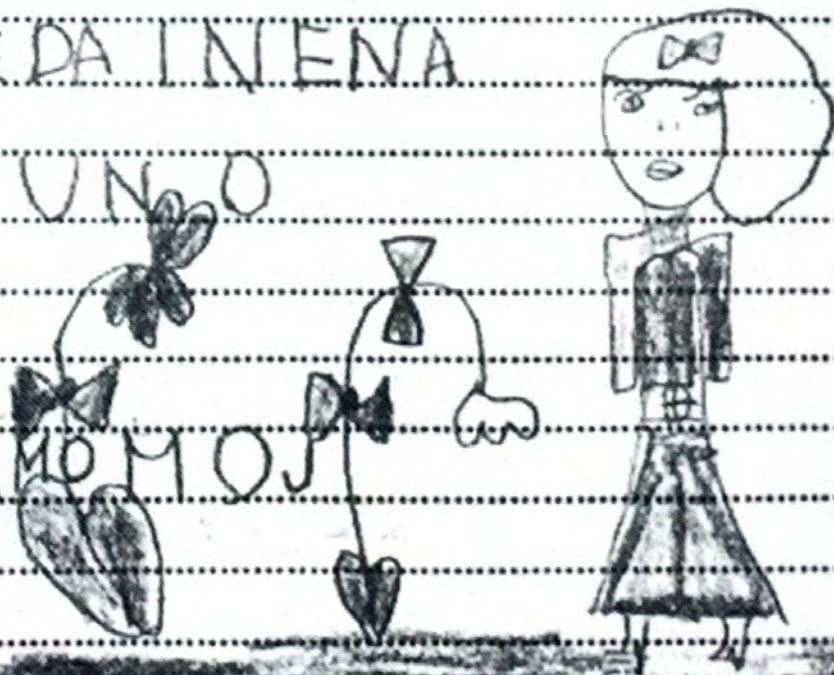
DRAGI DEDA I NENA

JAVAS PUNDO

VOLIM

JELI TATA MOJ

TATA



My dearest grandad and granny, Happy New Year! I love you both so much. Please let me know if my daddy is with you.

6.

Date

Datum.

Datum

10.01.194

Signature

Potpis

Potpis

[Handwritten signature]

DEDA

Le destinataire est mon / ma

Primalac je moj/moja (naznačiti rodbinsku vezu)

Prijatelj je moj/moja (naznačiti srodstvo)

IX. Gaining respect for children's rights

Laws protect only insofar as they are respected and enforced. International humanitarian law contains far-reaching provisions for protecting children in wartime. But what happens when the parties to a conflict do not take seriously their obligation to treat children humanely and to protect them against the effects of hostilities?

There is no "humanitarian police" to enforce these laws; the ultimate responsibility lies with the international community. The States party to the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols* have made a special pledge to respect these laws and ensure that they are respected. When these States adopt preventative measures and spread knowledge of the law of war widely they are helping to ensure that children are truly respected. Promoting humanitarian treaties is also part of the collective task.

ICRC delegates work to promote international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols, by encouraging the authorities and offering them technical assistance. Knowledge of the rules of war is spread through discussions, seminars and courses on international humanitarian law with a variety of audiences including government representatives, members of the armed forces, military police, lawyers and university students.

** As at 30 September 1994, 185 States were party to the Geneva Conventions, 135 to Protocol I and 125 to Protocol II.*



▲ Children represent the future. Refugee children in conflict areas need to be protected in order to grow up healthy and strong. What they learn about protection and the law of war they can pass on to their children.

◀ A booklet for children about the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement which illustrates the rights of civilians in wartime.



The Red Cross made an impression on this Latin American boy who traces an ambulance in the dust on an ICRC Landcruiser.

Philippe Mennecy/ICRC

Conclusion



Victims should never be seen as “good” or “bad”. Any non-combatant who suffers as a result of war must be helped. This means civilians, but also combatants who have been wounded or taken prisoner and are therefore no longer able to fight.

However, one sector of the population above all must be helped: the children. Humanitarian agencies may be impartial, but their duty is first and foremost to these most vulnerable of victims. Children must be given a chance to survive and to play their part in society. They hold the future of the human race in their hands.

Those who see the daily reality of war - ICRC delegates, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers, those working for other humanitarian agencies - are sure of one thing: something must be done to reverse the trend of today's merciless power struggles in which children are no longer the chance victims but are actually singled out as targets. This is the very least that we adults can do for our children.



INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE
OF THE RED CROSS / GENEVA

19, avenue de la Paix - CH-1202 Geneva - Switzerland
Telephone: (022) 734 60 01 - Telex: 414226 - Telefax: (022) 733 20 57