



Children waiting to leave an IDP camp in southern Sudan. (Photo: Sean Sutton, Panos)

## INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN

Displacement frequently causes the breakdown of family and community structures and the disintegration of traditional social norms, leaving children particularly vulnerable. Too often the rights of displaced children are violated, resulting in abuse, discrimination, malnutrition, poverty or even death. During 2006, displaced children were recruited by government forces and armed groups, were victims of sexual exploitation, and/or were not able to go to school. In most cases, national governments did not provide much-needed assistance and protection. Violations against displaced children largely continued unimpeded in 2006, despite the establishment in several countries of a monitoring system on violations against children in armed conflict, as well as advocacy efforts by the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, member states and NGOs.

### Major violations

Displaced children – particularly those who have been separated from parents and family – are often

targets of abduction and recruitment by rebel groups, paramilitary or government forces. Recruitment of displaced and other children by national armed forces and/or militias continued throughout the year in Burundi, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, the DRC, Iraq, Burma, Nepal, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda.<sup>60</sup> In addition to military duties, displaced and other children are often sexually exploited or enslaved.

Displaced children were also denied education and health care. Destruction or occupation of schools or hospitals in the course of attacks on civilian populations occurred in the CAR, Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, Israel, Lebanon, Nepal, the Palestinian Territories, Sri Lanka and Sudan. Also, in southern Afghanistan, more than 100,000 children were reportedly denied access to education because of insecurity caused by the Taliban and other armed groups.<sup>61</sup> In Iraq, children were kidnapped and teachers subject to violence, both of which seriously affected the delivery of education.

Humanitarian aid workers were often prevented from gaining access to displaced children due to insecurity in several countries, such as the DRC and Iraq. Meanwhile, the governments of Burma, Sudan and Zimbabwe severely restricted humanitarian access to displaced children. In Nepal, humanitarian access remained difficult in 2006 due to insecurity but also due to restrictions imposed by the Communist Party

of Nepal-Maoist. In Sri Lanka's north and east, both the government and the LTTE have denied access to humanitarian organisations assisting displaced children. In Lebanon, displaced children were denied humanitarian assistance because of an Israeli military blockade of Lebanon's borders and seaports, and the bombing of roads and the main airport.

Sexual violence continues to be a serious and significant part of the violence suffered by displaced children (see Gender-Based Violence chapter).

## National responsibility

States bear the primary responsibility for the protection of displaced children, as laid out in both humanitarian law governing conflict situations and in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocol on children in armed conflict. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement also specifically recognise that "children and unaccompanied minors ... shall be entitled to protection and assistance by their condition and to treatment which takes into account their special needs."<sup>62</sup>

In some countries experiencing internal displacement, including Colombia, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Uganda and the DRC, the UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict has obtained commitments from parties to the conflicts not to use landmines, attack schools or hospitals, or recruit or use children as child soldiers, and to release abducted children. But, so far, these commitments have not translated into tangible improvements for the children.<sup>63</sup>

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has the potential to act as an important deterrent to abuses against displaced children. In March 2006, the ICC, with the cooperation of DRC authorities, indicted Thomas Lubanga, leader of a militia that had caused large-scale displacement in northeastern DRC, for the commission of war crimes, the conscription and enlistment of children under the age of 15, and the use of children for active participation in hostilities.

## The international agenda

In order to bring an end to grave violations against displaced and other children in situations of armed conflict, the UN Security Council passed a resolution in 2005<sup>64</sup> outlining a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism to be implemented by the UN, in collaboration with government and civil society organisations. The



Displaced children are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, abductions and other violations of their rights. (Photo: Christophe Beau, IDMC)

following violations are monitored by this mechanism: killing or maiming of children; recruitment or use of children as soldiers; attacks against schools or hospitals; denial of humanitarian access for children; abduction of children; and rape and other grave sexual abuse of children. A working group comprised of the 15 Security Council members reviews and guides the monitoring process. In 2006, based on the above-mentioned resolution, the UN Secretary-General reported to the Security Council on violations in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, Somalia, Sudan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. All these countries experience significant internal displacement, and information on displaced children has improved as a result of the monitoring.

International initiatives to assist displaced children and to protect their rights also included medical, psychosocial and legal assistance to survivors of sexual violence, advocacy for the release of children associated with armed forces and groups, demobilisation, family tracing and reintegration activities, and mine awareness-raising, as well as the rehabilitation of schools that have been attacked, the provision of school materials, and the building of "safe-play" areas in towns and villages affected by mines and unexploded bombs. Many of these activities were realised in collaboration with local partners. A valuable resource for those working to better protect displaced children is "Right to Education during Displacement: A resource for organizations working with refugees and internally displaced persons", developed by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children in 2006.