

# WORLD GOODWILL

## NEWSLETTER

A quarterly bulletin combining comment and information on world affairs with details of the work and programme of World Goodwill

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### THE REFUGEE

*There is no greater sorrow on earth than the loss of one's native land*

Euripides, 431 B.C.

"A new phenomenon beyond the world's experience or imagination." That is how one writer describes the refugee crisis of recent years. From countries as far afield as Tibet, Somalia and Liberia, Bosnia and Croatia, Afghanistan and Iraq, Colombia and Haiti, Cambodia and Vietnam millions of traumatised, displaced and vulnerable human beings have been forced to flee their homes by war, repression, ethnic violence and hunger.

They face an unknown future. Some end up in vast refugee camps, others scratch out a meagre living on their own while a small minority are helped to start a new life in a new country. Often, in fleeing, they have lost members of their family and do not know if their loved ones are alive or dead. In 1982 Joyce Pearce, co-founder of the Ockenden Venture, a British voluntary agency which helps refugees, spoke of the almost total sense of loss experienced by someone who has been forced to seek refuge in a foreign land. "When a refugee flees his country he has nothing. He has no documents, he cannot go back and he does not know where he is going. He is often totally lost, he cannot communicate, he has lost every link with the past. Precious and familiar things are left behind. Qualifications are often useless; there are all the problems of requalification to get the professional status that is truly his. For the less educated refugees the adjustments are even more difficult. They are totally bewildered without the roots of their culture, as they have lost every evidence of the way of life that has been familiar to them in the past. At the end of the line are the very old and the children, the very young."

The scale of the tragedy facing refugee populations represents an enormous challenge for the forces of goodwill in humanity. Governments channel aid through the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Countless small and large agencies supplement the work of UNHCR so that, taken altogether, much is being done to assist refugees and to help solve the problems that caused them to flee their homes in the first place. Clearly, however, a great deal more is called for. Wealthy countries, in the midst of economic recession, are cutting back, not just on their financial support for refugees, but also on their willingness to fulfil the spirit of international law by offering a safe haven for refugees.

The refugee crisis can be traced back to a deep-seated sense of separativeness in the human psyche. Despite the seriousness of the problem, there are real grounds for optimism in the long term, for ours is a time charged with hope precisely because separativeness is losing its hold. We are recognising the manifest interdependence of people and of countries, and this recognition is awakening a new sense of inclusiveness. From this perspective of human interdependence, we are forced to face up to the terrible dangers to society that arise from prejudice, fear and hatred of migrant communities and of religious or ethnic minorities.

If there is to be adequate response to the refugee crisis there is no alternative other than to continue to strengthen attitudes and values which foster a generous, intelligent, open-hearted

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response to all "strangers", whether in our own community or in some distant part of the world. We need to recognise the importance of the countless individual acts of kindness and understanding which take place every day, and are repeated endlessly in a healthy society. These "small" acts replenish the reservoir of goodwill from which we draw in collective acts of wise compassion. In an atmosphere of goodwill it becomes possible to take the

sort of political, diplomatic and financial initiatives that can address the cause of the problem. In this issue of the Newsletter we feature a brief overview of the problem; an interview with Mrs. Sadako Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees; an article on homeless children living on the streets; and a poem on the energy of love, the energy which can dissolve the sense of separateness that underlies the conflicts of our time.

*Establish right human relationships by developing a spirit of goodwill • Alice A Bailey*

## REFLECTIONS ON THE CRISIS

The tragedy of the refugee forced to escape from violent conflict, famine and persecution has been part of the history of most societies throughout the ages. In the years after the second world war popular outrage against the horrors of the holocaust and concern for the plight of ten million displaced Europeans led governments to adopt the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. At the same time they established the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The aim was to ensure that refugees had the protection and support they needed.

It is true that, together with the 1967 Protocol to the Convention, these initiatives did raise the official standards of compassion, and today over 112 states are signatories. Although the Convention was strictly concerned with post-war refugees in Europe it has, by wide agreement, been applied over the years to the needs of refugees from all parts of the world. By laying down certain fundamental rights of a refugee, the Convention defines exactly who has these rights — in other words it defines who is a refugee. Refugees must be able to show that they will be persecuted if they are forced to return to their homeland. When this can be established, and many signatory states in the developed world are making it increasingly difficult to do so, the country of asylum is obliged to accord refugees their fundamental rights. Assistance is also normally available to help start a new life.

More than forty years on, the refugee crisis has put new demands on the now commonly accepted standards of protection and care. Mass migrations of the eighties and nineties have, in the main, consisted of thousands of people fleeing conflicts and persecution. Often this has involved a dangerous journey across a border to a neighbouring country. It is not uncommon for refugees to pay their life's savings for a guide to accompany them, or for a bus ticket, or passage on a very risky sea voyage. Sometimes migrations do not involve crossing a frontier, but rather movement to another region within their own national boundaries. Most come from and flee to countries experiencing serious economic hardships. "Home" is wherever some measure of safety, minimal shelter and food can be found. For many this means a makeshift refugee camp. No-one can predict how temporary these camps will be, or when the residents will be able to return to their towns or villages. For example, a large number of the Palestinians displaced after the creation of Israel and then uprooted for a second time both by occupation of the

West Bank and by conflicts between Israel and its Arab neighbours, are young people who have known no home apart from the camps.

Life in a refugee camp is very difficult, especially when one considers the trauma that the occupants have experienced even before they reached the camp. Sadruddin Aga Khan and Hassan bin Talal write of "long listless days and dark nights, sustained by a mixture of fear and hope — and a deep nostalgic feeling for 'home'". The camps are often in isolated regions. In many of them health facilities, sanitation and food reserves are totally inadequate.

### Women and Children

For women and children the difficulties can be especially severe. "Women and children make up the largest proportion of refugees, and the exploitation of these vulnerable groups is repeated time and again in all parts of the world. In addition to facing the same problems confronted by all refugees, women suffer the added disadvantage of being subjected to sexual abuse and harassment. Torn from home and family, often forced into the unfamiliar role of family head, they have to feed, clothe and protect themselves and their children. Some women find that to get even basic things like food, water and firewood, they are forced to bribe guards with sex."<sup>1</sup> In 1991, as a "matter of urgency", UNHCR's Executive Committee adopted certain guidelines for the protection of refugee women.

"Where women suffer, so do the children. It is not uncommon for UNHCR to get reports of child victims of physical abuse, torture, abduction and arbitrary detention. In addition to being victims of violence, children are often conscripted into armies and forced to take part in the violence .... If such children are to come to terms with the horrors of their experiences, they need special care. UNHCR is setting up programmes to train community workers to identify trauma among refugee children and to provide appropriate counselling services."<sup>2</sup>

The recent escalation in the refugee crisis comes at a time when western governments, in the midst of recession, have been unwilling to commit the level of resources needed to cope with the migration of millions of people. Within the limits of the funds available the UNHCR, governments and a network of agencies representing people of goodwill from all parts of the world are doing their best to ensure that the basic needs for food, shelter, health care and sanitation in the camps are met. Some of the voluntary

agencies involved in this work are well-known: Oxfam, Médecins Sans Frontières, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Not so well-known are the countless groups established by refugees themselves, and by people of host countries in the developing world. World Goodwill called a leading refugee agency in the UK and asked for details on one such local initiative, only to be told that there were so many it was impossible to single out just one example.

We can see, in all that is being done to help refugees, that there is a positive side to this sad crisis. And perhaps most remarkable of all has been the generosity and compassion shown by some of the world's poorest countries to the homeless who have arrived in their midst. Malawi, a tiny country which is the fourth poorest nation in the world, is a typical example. The people of Malawi have a difficult enough time making ends meet with the scant resources available. Yet they have taken in a million Mozambican refugees, who now make up ten percent of Malawi's population. The country's civil service has had to be expanded to cope with this sudden increase. Many small communities in the country now contain more Mozambicans than Malawians — placing an enormous strain on the competition for jobs, land and food.

When the home country from which the refugees have fled becomes sufficiently safe, the prospect of their return poses serious problems. How can a country ravaged by war, often on the point of economic collapse, cope with an influx of thousands of citizens whose homes have been destroyed and who have few resources to start up a new life? Yet even here there is a positive side. Refugees, trained in exile, can return to their communities and, with assistance, become agents of change and initiators in community development. Trained in techniques of primary health care, efficient farming, land co-operatives and appropriate technology, the returnees can bring the dynamism and fresh energy needed if a tired, war-weary village is to get back on its feet.

Finally, it should always be remembered that the cross-fertilisation of cultures which takes place when groups and individuals migrate from one region to another is a source of human enrichment and progress. Many influential world servers of our time are, or have been, refugees. So it is not unreasonable to suppose that amongst the communities of those who are displaced today a number of the inspired leaders of the future may be found.

1 *Refugees*, N° 87 - Oct. 1991, UNHCR.

2 *Ibid.*

## UNHCR: "THE WORLD'S CONSCIENCE ON REFUGEE RIGHTS"

### An Interview with Mrs. Sadako Ogata - the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

At the time of her election to the Office of High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Sadako Ogata was Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Studies at Sophia University in Japan. During an extensive international career she has been Japan's Delegate to the General Assembly (six sessions between 1968 and 1979), Minister at the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations (1976 - 1979), Ambassador for Indo-Chinese Refugee Relief (1979), Japan's Representative to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (1982 - 1985), a member of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues (1983 - 1987) and, most recently, Independent Expert on the United Nations Commission on the Human Rights Situation in Myanmar, (1990).



We are very grateful to Mrs. Ogata for finding the time for this interview with World Goodwill in the midst of her busy schedule.

**World Goodwill:** *There seems to be an increasing number of refugees day by day. What in your view are the main causes of this tragic problem?*

**Sadako Ogata:** That is indeed true. Today, some 78 million people around the world have left one land and moved to another. Most of them chose to move — either for personal or career reasons or because they could no longer bear to see their children hungry and growing up without any chance of a future without poverty. But more than 18 million of these people were forced into flight to save their lives and liberty. These people we call refugees. We must not forget, however, that another 20 million people have been displaced inside their own countries by the same factors that create refugees. With the population of our globe now numbering 5.2 billion,

this means that *one in every 137* people has been forced into flight.

People are forced to flee for a complex combination of reasons. The root causes of refugee flight are persecution, human rights abuses, social and ethnic tension and armed conflict. The root causes also include poverty and under-development nourished by corruption and brutality.

In some countries, the end of the Cold War has resulted in a breakdown in centralised authority allowing ancient ethnic, tribal and nationalist strife to bubble to the surface. In several countries, the old order has been replaced, not by a new order, but by anarchy. Old feuds are being revived, old scores settled, and the cycles of violence and intolerance are being fuelled. Words like "inhumanity", "cruelty" and "atrocities" have acquired new shades of meaning. Unspeakable things are done by human beings to other human beings in the name of nationalism, ethnic purity and religion. This is worrying.

There are only about 190 nations in the world but there are more than 3,000 ethnic "peoples".

**World Goodwill:** *What do you think are the most important steps that should be taken to help resolve the refugee crisis?*

**Sadako Ogata:** The refugee crisis should be tackled at three levels:

- the *political* level, through multilateral actions to resolve conflicts and promote, support and defend representative forms of government and respect for human rights;
- the *humanitarian* level, through more effective and co-ordinated assistance and protection focusing not only on the country of asylum but also on the country of origin;
- the *economic* level where the links between displacement and lack of development and the continuum from emergency assistance to development must be recognised and acted upon.

Prevention is the first step to solving the refugee crisis. Preventive strategies could and should be pursued *before* people begin to flee. These include human rights monitoring by the international community, providing advisory services, establishing national or regional structures for protecting minority rights, promoting mediation as a means of conflict resolution, and encouraging tolerance for diversity and respect for human rights generally. To this end, UNHCR is continuing to develop its ties with inter-governmental and non-governmental human rights bodies.

The success of preventive strategies will in part depend on the effectiveness of early warning mechanisms. UNHCR has already greatly enhanced its early warning and emergency response mechanisms and is actively co-operating with UN system-wide efforts to develop a UN early warning mechanism incorporating appropriate follow-up procedures.

Emergency response to refugee situations must be coupled with energetic political initiatives to promote solutions which can allow the safe and voluntary return of refugees. Repatriation is a difficult undertaking, often of greater political and operational complexity than emergency response. The potential for solution can easily become the seed for disaster in the face of premature return of refugees to insecure and unsatisfactory conditions. Planning and preparation are important, but the key lies in innovation and flexibility.

The concept of quick-impact development projects designed to bridge the gap between relief and longer-term development is one example. UNHCR has made significant progress in this area in the past year, together with UNDP and other agencies, within the framework of the International Conference on Central American Refugees. The lessons learned in that part of the world are now being applied in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Angola, and, recently, Somalia.

Much remains to be done, however, to give greater priority to incorporate returnees and their communities into national reconstruction and development efforts. The extent to which the international community is able to meet the development challenge will affect UNHCR's

ability to maintain the impetus in repatriation and to provide genuine and lasting solutions to refugee crises.

While the pursuit of solutions through voluntary repatriation is a fundamental part of my strategy, we must not overlook the continued need for resettlement of refugees whose lives or fundamental well-being would otherwise be in jeopardy. With the proliferation of refugee situations around the world, the need for resettlement places has grown, though in absolute terms the numbers are still very limited. We rely on the continued generosity and commitment of the international community to accept those who are in urgent need of resettlement.

**World Goodwill:** *Public opinion is a potent force. Could you comment on the importance of work to change popular attitudes towards refugees?*

**Sadako Ogata:** Public opinion is indeed a very potent force. In fact, at UNHCR we believe that information is a vital form of protection. One of the first things I did when I took office was to strengthen our Public Information Section and seek greater transparency in our relationship with the media and our NGO partners. At a time when disturbing trends of racism and xenophobia are becoming evident in some parts of the world, it is crucial that UNHCR engage not only governments and organisations, but public opinion as well. To this end, the Public Information Section has launched intensive public awareness campaigns in the United States and key European countries. In just one year, this policy has enabled UNHCR to build greater support for the humanitarian values and traditions for which this Office was created.

**World Goodwill:** *From your perspective as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, what could you say are the most encouraging aspects of the response to the refugee crisis?*

**Sadako Ogata:** It is very encouraging to see that donor countries are responding generously to our appeals for refugee emergencies. We hope that in the future, the donor community will continue to be as generous.

**World Goodwill:** *What concerns you most about this crisis?*

**Sadako Ogata:** What is most worrying is that, far from receding with the end of the Cold War, refugee emergencies are, on the contrary, multiplying. And they tend to happen in situations of armed conflict and civil war, making our work all the more complex and dangerous. With the emergencies in former Yugoslavia, in Bangladesh and in the Horn of Africa, our material and human resources have already been stretched to the limit. In several parts of the globe the warning signals of new emergencies are already flashing. Will our limited resources be able to cope?

**World Goodwill:** *Could you please comment on the relationship between UNHCR and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)?*

**Sadako Ogata:** Throughout the world UNHCR works extensively and in close co-operation with NGOs.

Without NGOs most of the work of UNHCR would not be possible. We just couldn't cope with the job of caring for and protecting the uprooted of the world. NGOs' freedom, presence on the ground, and speed of movement in the earliest phases of an emergency have been repeatedly recognised. An outstanding example was the Persian Gulf crisis, where massive mobilisation of NGO staff and resources complemented that of the coalition military and preceded official United Nations intervention by several vital weeks.

Advocacy NGOs are the spokespeople of the uprooted; they help us in our role as the world's conscience on refugee rights. The operational NGOs make it possible for us to shelter, feed, give medical care, educate and find durable solutions for refugees around the world. NGOs

are our right hands and through them we have been able to reach the millions who might otherwise be inaccessible. I hope our collaboration with NGOs will become even closer in the coming years. The NGOs are our strongest critics and our strongest supporters. We need both.

#### **IF YOU WANT TO BECOME INVOLVED**

*You can find addresses of groups in your community that are helping refugees from:*

- your national office of UNHCR
- your local Red Cross or Red Crescent Society
- UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Public Information Section, BP 2500, Geneva 2, Switzerland
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 17 Chemin des Crêts, Petit-Saconnex, Geneva 19, Switzerland

The fear foreigners inspire in us calls into question our own role in society. When I look at a foreigner it's easy to see that like him, I am a foreigner in someone else's eyes. To that person, I am someone who arouses fear. On a human scale, this could mean that we are all foreigners. There is a part of us that does not belong to us, something indecipherable and impenetrable. So if foreigners frighten me, it's because they resemble me in some way. They frighten me because, ultimately, I am afraid of myself. And what if those people were me? The truth is that they are. Or rather, it behooves me to act as if they were.

It is not because I have a home, a job and a family that I am less foreign than the foreigner. It takes very little for someone to be uprooted, for the satisfied, happy man to lose his place in the sun. I can testify to this because I belong to a generation which has seen just how unstable everything is and how vulnerable people are. When destiny winked its eye, in the space of a day, the rich lost their treasures, men of status lost their friends and thinkers lost their bearings.

**Elie Wiesel**

Today's world requires us to accept the oneness of humanity. In the past, isolated communities could afford to think of one another as fundamentally separate. Some could even exist in total isolation. But nowadays, whatever happens in one region of the world will eventually affect, through a chain reaction, peoples and places far away. Therefore, it is essential to treat each major problem, right from its inception, as a global concern. It is no longer possible to emphasize, without destructive repercussions, the national, racial, or ideological barriers which differentiate us. Within the context of our new interdependence, self-interest clearly lies in considering the interest of others.

I view this fact as a source of hope. The necessity for co-operation can only strengthen mankind. It will help us to recognize that the secure foundation upon which to build a new world order is not merely one of more comprehensive political and economic alliances, but that of each individual's belief in a genuine practice of love and compassion. For the future of mankind, for a better, happier, more stable and civilized world, we must all develop a sincere, warm-hearted feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood.

**H.H. The Dalai Lama**

## **UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES**

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees is unique among the UN system. It is the Office of the High Commissioner and her staff who represent the exiled people of the world. For those of us who hold a passport and can travel freely, our national ambassador or High Commissioner is our official representative wherever we are on foreign soil. If we are in trouble, or simply need some form of legitimate protection and assistance, we can call on the aid of our government. Refugees have often had their passport taken from them. They cannot call on their government for assistance. In their circumstances it

is the office of the UNHCR which assumes responsibility, under international law, for their protection and assistance and for finding 'permanent solutions' for them.

Protection means using the "independence, authority and prestige" of the High Commissioner to ensure that a refugee's basic human rights are respected by the countries in which they are living. It gives the High Commissioner the right to intervene in the internal affairs of a sovereign state to ensure that refugees or displaced people are not forced to return to a country of origin where they are

liable to be persecuted. In recent times, when the UNHCR has been charged with the task of protecting the millions involved in mass migration, there has been an additional challenge of trying to ensure that those who are on the move or in refugee camps are safe from attack by armies and bandits.

UNHCR seeks three long-term solutions for refugees:

- to work diplomatically and through other means to make it possible for people to return voluntarily to their homelands
- to enable people to leave the large refugee camps and be integrated into their country of asylum
- to be resettled in a third country.

The aim is to make sure that refugees can settle down into a normal life again as soon as possible. The sheer scale of the recent movements of displaced people has, however, created great problems in the efforts to promote these lasting solutions. After the successful Paris Peace Accord on Cambodia, for example, some of the 350,000 Cambodians who had spent over twelve years in camps on the Thai-Cambodian border began to return. But these returnees themselves posed huge problems. First, the difficult political situation in Cambodia has meant that security in the country cannot be guaranteed. And second, the returning families need considerable help if they are to start their lives afresh.

There's never been such a demand on the High Commissioner's mandate to provide assistance to displaced people and returnees as there is today. UNHCR administers a vast array of programmes from the provision of emergency food, shelter and medical care in temporary camps, through to the funding of programmes which help people either to return voluntarily to their country of origin, or to start up a new life in their country of exile. In the main the UNCHR funds and co-ordinates these programmes which are actually carried out on the ground by national or local authorities, UN agencies, or NGOs.

Funding is a matter of critical concern at this time when there is such need for the High Commissioner's services. Almost all funds come as voluntary contributions from governments, international agencies, and voluntary organisations. Donations increased during the eighties, but this gives a false picture. For, as the magazine *The New Internationalist*<sup>1</sup> reports, inflation and the increase in the number of displaced people in need of assistance has meant that there has been a decline in real terms in UNHCR expenditure. In 1985 the amount spent for every displaced person was \$46; by 1989 this had fallen to \$38.

The UNHCR is today at the forefront of efforts to protect and assist the millions of refugees and displaced people. It is increasingly concerning itself with the root causes of the crises that lead, ultimately, to such tragic movements of people as we are today witnessing in former Yugoslavia. In the words of the present High Commissioner, Sadako Ogata, "our ultimate goal must be to act in such a way that people are not forced to flee or, alternatively, that solutions can be found and that people cease to be refugees".

In striving towards this goal, the UNHCR is pioneering humanitarian and development aspects of the new era. Arthur E. Dewey, former Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, has written of the imperative for the office to take an initiative in constructing a comprehensive framework of "structure, mandate and procedure" for a new humanitarian order: "The acronym 'UNICEF' automatically evokes the image of children in the world's consciousness. The acronym 'UNHCR' must be seen to evoke human rights; root causes; early warning; preparedness; and preemption through political liberalization and development."

1 *The New Internationalist*, Sept. 1991

## UNCLENCH THE FIST AROUND THE HEART

Adam Curle

Adam Curle is a pioneer in the field of peace studies and conflict resolution. He has worked as a mediator in crisis situations in many parts of the world, dealing first-hand with the horrors that force people to flee their homes and become refugees. He is Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University. He has written many books and has experience in peace-making in Africa, Asia and currently Eastern Europe. His most recent book is *Tools for Transformation: A Personal Study*. Stroud, Hawthorn Press, 1990.

Adam was a guest speaker in a panel discussion on the theme, *The Energy of Love*, at the annual World Goodwill Seminar held in London, last October. He spoke of his current work with a small group in the town of Osijek in former Yugoslavia and described the desperate situation there, the hatred and violence of the ethnic conflict. In this atmosphere "all sorts of abuses of human rights are being committed" and there are countless refugees as a result. This "bloody tide of violence" in former Yugoslavia has displaced over two million people and forced over

half a million to become refugees. Yet it was through his involvement with the group in Osijek that Adam found the most inspiring example of the energy of love. Here "in the midst of this intense human misery there has developed a small group of people who have retained the sanity, the objective altruism and the compassion which is necessary if we are to help each other". The group he is working with is made up "of a collection of some twenty ordinary human beings from different walks of life who are empowered by love". The leading spirit is a woman

doctor in her early forties. At enormous personal risks they are helping the refugees, the injured and the children. They are clearing mines and even training the police in methods of non-violent confrontation. All over the world there are people like this group in Osijek whose hearts have responded to extreme human crisis and who are helping those in need with courage and compassion.

One evening, a few days before the seminar, Adam had been reflecting on the talk he was to give and especially

*I have been asked to talk about the energy of love for fifteen minutes. But that's what I am, and you and the whole world. Without that energy we simply would not be. That's what we are. We are the product of, the essence of, and we perpetuate love which is the finest form of energy. Compared with love, nuclear energy is nothing, null and inert. So what can I say about it in fifteen minutes?*

*I'll start by being practical. Although love is and everything that is not love is not but is illusory, we have to cope with that illusion. It is the source of suffering and what we call evil. The illusion that we are not love or lovable is a fist around the heart. It constricts the awareness that you and I are one like waves in the ocean, each seeming separate yet merely ripples in the same eternal sea.*

*This error fetters us within the tight little identity, the limited sub-self that has no consciousness of the indivisible Self which includes us all, within which we are joined without loss of individuality, a wonderful miracle of oneness in diversity.*

*Lost in this illusion we struggle to realise what is not real, lash out desperately like ghosts*

the inspiration of the expression of love he had seen in the group in Osijek. He went to sleep and woke in the middle of the night when he "put together" a piece of writing — "not quite poetry yet not quite ordinary prose". In the morning he set to work to recapture these thoughts. He shared this "poem" with us in his contribution to the seminar. We include it for it captures the essence of the crisis of the refugee: that we human beings have to accept our interdependence and learn to love one another.

*shadow boxing in a hall of mirrors, bringing pain to ourselves and others. The energy is there, but we fail to use it, having forgotten that it exists — not outside us but within us, that the energy of love is what we are. Instead we become powered by false forces — greed, fear, hatred, envy, vanity, and guilt which tarnish and weaken, concealing our reality.*

*How to unclench the fist around the heart, to remove the blinkers that restrict our vision, to open understanding wide enough to be aware that the other is ourself, and ever wider to include the planet and the endless galaxies; to recognise that we partake in all this splendour, and its glory and the immeasurable energy which formed it, which it is, and which nothing can diminish, least of all our piddling follies?*

*How then? Simply love. Take off the brakes, open the windows, unbolt the door, turn off the burglar alarm; love cannot be stolen, it has the power to disarm the strongest thief. This was well known to Jesus and to Gandhi, to the Buddha and Mother Teresa and to countless others — including you and me. We simply need to recognise this truth.*

## STREET CHILDREN

Half of the world's 17 million refugees are children and 'home' for millions of these children is the refugee camp. As refugees they have witnessed tragedy in their families and communities. And as children they are amongst the first to suffer from lack of food, water, shelter and other basic necessities.

Yet even so, the refugee child is often less disadvantaged than the displaced child who is forced onto the street and virtually disowned by society. Street children are not refugees in the official meaning of the word, but they share most of their problems and they certainly share their extraordinary needs.

Surely one of the most tragic legacies of late 20th century life is the fact that countless millions of children worldwide spend a large percentage of their daily lives upon the streets of our major urban centres. While a majority of the world's street children work the streets by

day and return home at night, an alarming 25% live on the streets day and night. These are the abandoned, truly desperate children of the world.

It may be true that this problem stems largely from the global economic crisis which has had such a devastating impact upon traditional family and community structures, but it goes far deeper than that. It includes a real crisis of values within the human heart. From the wealthy cities of North America, to the African continent, to the former Soviet Union and to the Far East, the street children of the world cross all racial and economic barriers. Many of them are forced onto the streets through economic hardship, but a growing number leave home voluntarily having decided that the deprivations and hardships of the streets are preferable to the violence, addiction and sexual abuse often found within their own homes. One young boy in Africa asserted: "There is only one place where I felt any

solidarity and that was the street." An abandoned youth in New York city said: "Today it's hard out there, real hard. There are just so many children being abandoned, abused, involved with drugs.... I mean, you've got children having children without wanting them." In the former Soviet Union *perestroika* has brought much new found freedom, but it has also resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of street children — in St. Petersburg alone there are now thousands of homeless children.

To support themselves, street children eke out a living in brick-making, construction, handicrafts and food services, leaving little or no time for education. Many are also involved in life-threatening activities such as glue sniffing, alcohol and other forms of drug abuse. Many are being drawn into prostitution at ever younger ages because the widespread fear of AIDS has led to increased demand for young prostitutes. As a consequence, street children are increasingly at risk of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. The high incidence of AIDS among the adult population in central Africa has led UNICEF to project that by the year 2000 some 3-5 million children will be orphaned and it is highly likely that many of them will end up on the streets. *Amnesty International* has documented reports that street children are being murdered in Brazil by private security forces, vigilante death squads and even by the police in an effort to "clean up the streets".

Nevertheless, there is hope, in spite of this desperate global situation, for many individuals and groups throughout the world are actively engaged in seeking to meet the needs of these children. In most countries where there is freedom of the press the media has served to heighten public awareness of the problem. On a global level the ideals embodied in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* bring children's rights within the embrace of international law, thus providing a possible blue-print for real change. The Convention charts new territory: it not only codifies existing laws relating to children but also represents a breakthrough in such key areas as adoption, health care, education, as well as calling for protection against sexual exploitation, neglect and drug abuse. There remains the hard work of seeing that the ideals of the Convention are put into practice worldwide, but the Convention makes truly significant progress in the struggle for children's rights.

At the grassroots level, too, there are many groups seeking to improve conditions for children on the streets and within the community as a whole by providing apprentice programmes, help in establishing business co-operatives, academic scholarship programmes, and improved health-care and housing. *Childhope*, an NGO and international advocacy organisation for street children, works actively to promote awareness and greater understanding through its educational materials and grass roots involvement.

The resiliency and drive of the world's street children are evident in the *National Street Childrens' Movement of Brazil*, founded in 1986. It is organised by and for street children. The first conference was held in the capital's central park. "To get there 432 children had travelled for days by bus, train and on foot from every part of Brazil."<sup>1</sup> One of the few adults invited to the meeting, the late Peter Taçon of *Childhope*, was "very impressed". "The children spoke calmly, easily, mostly in an organised way, chairing the conference themselves."<sup>2</sup> When the conference delegates visited Congress Hall to put their questions to politicians one girl, Carmen, seeing the opulent setting, asked: "How could someone build and live in such surroundings when children are starving to death outside?"<sup>3</sup>

At a conference on street children held last September in Rio de Janeiro, James Grant, Director of UNICEF, closed the session with a moving address which, for the first time, committed UNICEF to help meet the needs of street children, particularly girls.

While governments are preoccupied with what may seem to them more pressing concerns, millions of these children will die before the end of this decade. Can we, as a world community, begin to extend to the street children of the world the same simple caring that we extend to our own children? Indeed these children deserve so much more because they have been denied that most basic privilege — the bond of love, and the guidance of a caring adult. The resources of the world community are adequate to begin to meet this challenge — if there is the will to do so.

1,2,3, Anuradha Vittachi, *Stolen Children*. Cambridge & Oxford, Polity Press/Basil Blackwell, 1989.

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