

## Clipping #1 – DiSec Topic A



UN First Committee update – November 2004  
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At its meeting in October the UN First Committee on Disarmament and International Security again focussed on halting the proliferation and misuse of small arms. While many states pointed to progress made against the illicit trade in small arms at the regional, national and international levels, others continued to express their grave concern at the devastation still being wreaked by guns trafficking.

Several states emphasised the negative impact of small arms proliferation on the consolidation of peace in post-conflict situations and on sustainable development. States also reiterated their full support for the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms (PoA), and many expressed their support for the continuation of consultations at the UN on controls of arms brokers. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) called on states to mandate an Expert Group to develop proposals for an international system of controls on arms brokers. Several states also expressed their concern regarding the access of non-governmental actors to small arms and light weapons.

States also held informal consultations on the currently negotiated instrument on tracing illicit small arms, including issues regarding the instrument's scope and definitions, recordkeeping, cooperation in tracing, implementation, and final provisions. Many states continue to argue for a legally binding instrument, and there is support for the inclusion of small arms-related ammunition in the instrument. However, other states, including the USA, oppose both the adoption of a legally binding instrument and the inclusion of ammunition. There is also no consensus yet on the possible role of Interpol in assisting states in tracing illicit small arms.

Specific decisions taken at the First Committee include the dates for the future meetings on the UN PoA. The UN conference to review progress made in the implementation of the PoA will be held in New York for a period of two weeks between 26 June and 7 July 2006. A preparatory committee for the conference will meet in New York from 9 to 20 January 2006. The second Biannual Meeting of States to review the implementation of the PoA will be held in New York from 11 to 15 July 2005.

Falling short of the recommendation made by the ICRC, the First Committee only requested the UN Secretary-General to continue to hold broad-based consultations on further steps to enhance international co-operation in combating illicit brokering in small arms. The committee further encouraged states to ensure a positive outcome for the negotiations on a tracing instrument for small arms, and to voluntarily submit to the UN national reports on the implementation of the UN PoA.

In addition, members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sponsored a resolution on assistance to states for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms, and collecting them. The resolution calls on the international community to support the implementation of the Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms in West Africa, and to provide technical and financial support to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to take action to combat the illicit trade in small arms.

A further resolution sponsored by 80 states encourages international assistance to states to collect and destroy small arms in post-conflict situations. Also, a resolution sponsored by 58 states on the prevention of the illicit transfer and unauthorised access to, and use of, man-portable air defence systems. The resolution encourages states to: enact or improve national controls over access to, and transfer of, man-portable air defence systems to prevent the illicit transfer and unauthorised access to, and use of, such weapons; to ban the transfer of such weapons to non-State end-users; and to ensure that such weapons are exported only to governments or agents authorised by a government.

### **Security Council to consider Annan's action plan on ending child soldier recruitment**

*UN News Centre, 23 February 2005* – Acknowledging the need for a monitoring and reporting mechanism to track the recruitment of child soldiers and other children's rights violations, the United Nations Security Council today said it has started considering the proposal for such an instrument from Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

In a statement read by Foreign Minister Rogatien Biaou of Benin, which holds the Council presidency for February, at the end of a day-long debate the 15-member body said it was working on a new resolution to "take forward the implementation of its previous resolutions."

It reiterated "its intention to complete expeditiously the process of the establishment of the mechanism" and said it would ensure compliance and end impunity.

The new resolution would be aimed at "ending the recruitment or use of child soldiers in violation of applicable international law and other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict situations, and promoting their reintegration and rehabilitation."

It did not make clear whether it would impose sanctions or "targeted measures" against those who recruited children, a key request made earlier in the day by Olara Otunnu, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC).

He made his remarks during a special Council session convened to review the problems facing child victims of wars and his third report on the situation.

The situation of vulnerable children has improved in just a few years, mainly under Security Council leadership, Mr. Otunnu said, but too many of them were still being brutalized by parties to conflicts, with UN field representatives complaining of lack of security, access, cooperation and, especially, an organized and functioning mechanism for monitoring and reporting at the country level.

"The Council has on previous occasions expressed its intention to take concrete and targeted measures against these (offending) parties. It is most important that the Council make good on its promise on this occasion. On that depends the credibility of this exercise," he said.

"The targeted measures should include the imposition of travel restrictions on leaders and their exclusion from any governance structures and amnesty provisions, the imposition of arms embargoes, a ban on military assistance and restriction on the flow of financial resources to the parties concerned."

He suggested that the Council establish a committee to review any sanctions imposed to protect children exposed to conflict, demand that the parties named prepare time-bound action plans to end their violations and put the recommended monitoring and reporting mechanism into operation expeditiously.

Listing an offending party, whether a Government or a rebel, was to ensure accountability of a "specific, identifiable and identified entity," not a broad or non-specific category of offenders, Mr. Otunnu said.

The LTTE of Sri Lanka, named in this year's report, notified him in a letter he received just yesterday of "their readiness to enter into dialogue, using the framework of the monitoring and reporting mechanism," he said.

He called on the LTTE leadership to embark immediately on tangible actions, leading to a time-bound action plan to end, once and for all, the practices of recruitment, abductions and use of children as soldiers.

Mr. Otunnu concluded his remarks by reciting from a Bob Marley song, "Hear the children cryin'!"

Meanwhile, the Deputy Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Rima Salah, told the Council the agency "already has in place sophisticated monitoring and reporting tools for a variety of sectors, including health education, water and sanitation and, in some countries, on conflict-related child rights abuses, such as abductions and recruitment of child soldiers."

To improve this expertise and apply it globally, UNICEF would need cooperation from Governments, assurance of security for staff and whistle-blowers, and appropriate guidance, methodology and data collection tools, as well as funding for training staff and other workers in the field, Mr. Salah said.

More than 30 speakers addressed the Council, including its 15 members.

## **UNICEF, CONADER and partners disarm 2,914 children in DRC**

*UNICEF, 4 April 2005* - UNICEF today confirmed that 2,914 children associated with armed groups have passed through the seven Disarmament and Community Reintegration (DCR) sites in Ituri District since September 2004, in addition to the 399 children (337 boys; 62 girls), received by child protection agencies in Ituri District prior to the 1 September 2004 start of the DCR process. The Congolese government body, CONADER (Commission Nationale de la Demobilization et Reinsertion), coordinates the disarmament process.

Of the 2,914 children who have been received in Ituri during the DCR process, 2,353 are boys, and 561 are girls. "While the number of children who have left the armed forces and various armed groups has increased in Ituri, we are deeply concerned about the low numbers of girls who have been released," says Trish Hiddleston, UNICEF DRC Child Protection Officer.

UNICEF calls upon all armed groups and forces to immediately release all children, girls and boys – irrespective of their role in the group - so they can begin to resume their normal lives with their families and go to school. UNICEF and partners will continue to receive children associated with armed groups and also calls for a halt to any further recruitment of children, a violation of both Congolese and international law.

Although progress has been made in the number of children received so far, UNICEF estimates that in Ituri District alone, at least the same number of children are still believed to be in the hands of armed groups and an even greater proportion remain with armed groups throughout the rest of the country.

Girls and boys are not only used for combat, but also for carrying arms, cooking, cleaning and other tasks. Often, girls and boys are also not only victims of daily psychological, verbal and physical violence, but also sexual violence which exposes them to HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. It is especially hard for children - both girls and boys - to resume their normal lives due to the psychological and physical harm and stigma caused by such violations.

Adult combatants must surrender at least one 1 weapon to enter the disarmament process. Although many children do arrive at the DCR sites armed, it is not a condition for children to present a weapon to be received into child protection partners' programs. Inside each DCR site is a separate children's space, supported by UNICEF in collaboration with child protection partners, where children are registered and referred within a maximum of 48 hours to a transit care facility. Family tracing is carried out if the child cannot be immediately reunified with his or her family. UNICEF and child protection partners ensure their temporary care and protection until they are reunited with their families.

Each child is also provided with a basic kit which includes a shirt, pants, shoes, sleeping mat, blanket, soap, high protein biscuits, etc. The provision of civilian clothing is an important part of the reintegration process as many children arrive at the DCR sites wearing military uniforms. To help care for the children, UNICEF also helps provide health supplies, water and sanitation facilities at the sites.

For most children, returning to a normal family and community environment, far removed from the traumatic lives they have led within the armed groups, is the most effective initial support that can be given. Once a child rejoins his or her family, child protection organizations follow through with important efforts in the longer term to ensure the child's successful and lasting reintegration into the community.

As in other areas of Congo, hundreds of thousands of children in Ituri District - virtually every child –are war-affected. They have suffered massive human rights violations, including recruitment by force into armed groups, sexual, physical and psychological violence, displacement from their homes and villages, separation from their families and have little access to basic health and education services, with many hospitals and schools in Ituri looted and destroyed.

UNICEF staff members are told by almost every child –those who have been recruited and those at risk of recruitment - that they want to go to school. "The desire of children who have left the armed groups to learn and to have a normal life - to be a child again - is very moving," said Hiddleston. "Congolese place a high value on

education and schools not only allow children to learn within a normal, protective environment, but education can also contribute to the prevention of future conflict, recruitment or re-recruitment, as well as facilitating reintegration and promoting reconciliation.”

While projects to support education for children who have been recruited or are at risk of recruitment are being increased, there is also a need to provide alternatives for the older children such as skills training or income generating activities. “Ensuring the successful and lasting reintegration for girls and boys who have been associated with armed groups is great challenge, particularly in a country like Congo where the standard of living is so low and so many families are so vulnerable,” says Hiddleston. “Reintegration is especially difficult – and important – in a context like Ituri, where security cannot always be guaranteed and where humanitarian access is so limited.”

One of the worst humanitarian crises in the world, the 7-year conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) has killed more than 3 million people since 1998. The government estimates that approximately one tenth of the estimated total number of combatants in the DRC are children associated with armed groups or forces: approximately 33,000 children throughout DRC.

UNICEF works in close collaboration with the Congolese government coordinating body, CONADER, and with partners including: Caritas, COOPI, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children-UK, AMAPAD, APEK, ADECOR, ADR, UNDP, WFP, and MONUC. UNICEF and partners provide financial and technical assistance to support emergency transit care, family tracing and reunification, psycho-social care, education, recreation and skills training, as well as to the government in the prevention of recruitment and the reintegration of children who have been associated with armed groups and forces.

### **West Africa: Roving Warriors Recruited for New Conflicts**

Preventing New Atrocities Requires Ending the Cycle That Drives Regional Mercenaries

*Human Rights Watch, April 13 2005* — Thousands of young men and boys, many of whom have committed atrocities while fighting in West Africa’s brutal civil wars, face re-recruitment into the region’s emerging conflicts, Human Rights Watch said in a new report released today. International efforts to disarm these fighters must provide them with alternatives to war.

Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea, two countries marked by growing political instability, are the current theaters into which these young fighters are being drawn, according to Human Rights Watch.

The lives of these “regional warriors” are documented in a 66-page report, “Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa’s Regional Warriors.” Based on interviews with some 60 former fighters who have crossed borders to fight in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea, the report explores the forces driving the phenomenon of cross-border mercenary activity in West Africa.

Since the 1980’s, impunity and impoverishment have fueled a pattern of extreme violence in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire. Time and again, these fighters—most of whom began their military “careers” as children after being forcefully abducted to fight with an armed group—are drawn into the region’s conflicts. Many of these fighters have gone on to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity against civilians. Corrupt and repressive government policies, as well as arms dealers flooding the region with weapons, have given rise to further internal conflict.

“Breaking the cycle of atrocities in West Africa depends on disarming these fighters, demobilizing them, and providing them with alternatives to war,” said Peter Takirambudde, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Half-measures ensure that the international community will face new calls for intervention in the region’s conflicts, long after it’s too late to prevent new atrocities.”

In the past year, well over two-thirds of the Liberian ex-combatants interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that they had been asked to join fighting “missions” in Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire. Among those recruited to fight in neighboring Guinea, about half had been approached by commanders claiming to represent a fledgling Guinean insurgency, and the other half by those claiming to be supporters of Guinean President Lansana Conté.

Just last month, a Human Rights Watch mission to Liberia found that hundreds of recently demobilized Liberians, including children, have been re-recruited to fight in Côte d'Ivoire since October. According to those interviewed in southeastern Liberia, they have gone to fight alongside militias associated with the Ivorian government.

These young fighters are victims as well as perpetrators of serious human rights violations, Human Rights Watch said. The report details how after initial recruitment into a warring faction they were submerged into a world of brutality, physical hardship, forced labor and drug abuse. And it shows how they emerged as fighters willing to rape, abduct, mutilate and kill civilians.

All of the combatants interviewed fought with groups that have, to varying degrees, committed serious human rights crimes against civilians, often on a widespread and systematic scale. The fighters interviewed by Human Rights Watch had fought with such groups as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Although these armed groups were responsible for killing, raping or maiming tens of thousands of civilians, the perpetrators have largely enjoyed impunity for the atrocities committed.

When the youth interviewed were re-recruited into subsequent wars, all were unemployed or living a precarious economic existence, and were motivated by the promise of both financial compensation and the opportunity to loot.

"We thought things would be ok, but they went bad again. There was no food," said one Liberian combatant, who had fought in wars across West Africa. "I had to feed my parents. The commanders said we could pay ourselves, which meant looting."

Most interviewed received at least part of the financial compensation offered by the recruiters, and all participated in and benefited from the looting and pillage of civilian property—itself a war crime. Most described using the money to pay rent, school and medical fees for their extended family, and to engage in petty trading.

"The fact that war has become the only economic route for thousands of youth points to serious failings by their countries' governments," said Takirambudde.

International efforts to disarm and reintegrate former fighters into their home communities have so far had limited success, Human Rights Watch said. The report identifies problems in the U.N.-led disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The report details corruption by commanders and disarmament program officials who diverted benefits earmarked for their subordinates to themselves instead.

The young fighters interviewed for the report noted how these programs lack adequate grievance procedures to address corruption. They described how the shortcomings of the demobilization programs have greatly contributed to their decision to take up arms in subsequent conflicts.

The report also notes how a severe funding shortage in the Liberian disarmament program has left some 40,000 combatants at risk of missing out on job training and education, making them more vulnerable for re-recruitment to fight in future armed conflicts.

### **120,000 Girls Believed To Be Child Soldiers**

*Voice of America (USA), 25 April 2005* – A new report says of the estimated 300,000 child soldiers around the world, about 40 percent of them are girls. Save the Children says the girls are often front line fighters or used as porters or cooks. And many are sexually abused.

Charly Cox works for Save the Children and has met many former girl soldiers in West Africa. From London, she spoke with English to Africa reporter Joe De Capua about the problems they face.

She says, "I was in Sierra Leone and Liberia, which are thankfully post-conflict now. But I did meet girls who had been involved with the armed forces there. Girls who had been abducted at gunpoint from their villages in the

early hours of the morning and who were forced to be so-called wives of the commanders, who abducted them. Their stories were widespread and not unusual. And I think I was really shocked by the age at which that could happen to girls. I met girls who had been abducted at the age of eight and had been forced to be wives for several years.”

While the girls she met did not take part in actual combat, some of them were forced to carry heavy munitions. She calls them “the backbone” of the army, being forced to cook and clean.

As for being ‘wives,’ Ms. Cox says, “We would probably use terms like sexual possession or sexual slave. But essentially girls were being abducted and forced to become the sexual partners of one or multiple men.”

The Save the Children report says improvements need to be made in DDR, which stands for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration. It says often the post-conflict programs do not address the needs of girls and concentrate more on the number of weapons turned in.

Save the Children has programs that reintegrate the former child soldiers with children in their villages to help them remember what its like to be a child. It says this also helps them to be accepted by their families, who often view them as unclean. The aid organization is calling on the international community to do more to help the girls.

### **Use of Child Soldiers Sparks Global Debate**

*The Children and Armed Conflict Unit, 6 May 2005* – (Uganda) Grace Aciro was 13 when rebels from the Lord's Resistance Army roaming the countryside abducted her from her village near here in 1995. After several years as a foot soldier, she was chosen by a commander named Opiro to become one of his 10 "wives."

She bore three children with him. The first was handed over to the commander's family; the second died of meningitis. When she fled the rebel militia last September, she took along her last child, 18-month-old James Origema. Now 23, she looks after James and two other children whose mother, another of Opiro's "wives," was killed.

"I am not sure I will be able to live a normal life and that someone will take care of me," Grace said, creasing her forehead over dark, sad eyes.

Grace is among the estimated 6,500 girl soldiers in the Lord's Resistance Army, about one-third of the militia's ranks. They are part of a "hidden army" of more than 120,000 girls around the world, according to a report, "Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict," issued last week by the London-based Save the Children U.K.

The use of child soldiers, once rare, has exploded in the past two decades as a result of the proliferation and increasing ferocity of civil conflicts in places such as Afghanistan, East Timor and Liberia, coupled with the growing availability of lightweight, easy-to-operate weapons. Journalists and human-rights groups have documented armies of youngsters abducted, drugged and trained in killing and torture.

All told, there are currently some 300,000 child-soldiers under age 16 in the world today, according to the United Nations.

The recent study in England found that girls seized at ages as young as 8 are forced to work as combatants, porters, cleaners and cooks for armed groups in countries from Colombia to Sri Lanka. They all serve additionally as sex slaves.

When it comes to the problem of child soldiers, Uganda is one of the worst places, most experts agree. During the last 15 years more than 12,000 children have been abducted into the Lord's Resistance Army, constituting at one point as much as 90% of the militia, according to a 1999 Amnesty International report.

"Northern Uganda is probably the worst humanitarian and human rights catastrophe in the world," said former Ugandan foreign minister Olara Otunnu, who currently serves as U.N. undersecretary general for children in armed conflict.

The growing attention to the problem has led to some action by world bodies, and the number of child soldiers around the world is believed to have dropped significantly in the past two years from an estimated high of 350,000.

The progress is fragile, however. Aciro, the former child "wife," said she would consider going back to the Lord's Resistance Army if her former commander would take her, since she lacks other prospects. "Maybe I will go back with Opiro if he shows me and my family that he wants me," Grace said.

"If he does not come back, I will keep the three children and start a business to sustain them," she added with little apparent conviction.

Encouraged by the initial progress, human rights activists are now focusing efforts on a U.N. Security Council initiative spearheaded by Otunnu, a Harvard-trained lawyer who has held the U.N. post since 1997.

"We need to see tangible results on the ground," Otunnu told the Forward. "We need to transform deeds into words."

The Security Council has adopted five resolutions in the past five years on child soldiers. Otunnu hopes to turn a corner this year by enacting a mechanism with teeth, including mandatory sanctions for nations, groups and even individuals guilty of abusing children in war. His draft is currently being negotiated by member countries, and the council is expected to vote on it later this month.

In addition to child soldiers, the new council measure addresses other abuses of children in war, including rape, killing, maiming, abduction and deliberate attacks on schools and hospitals. Some 2 million children were killed and 6 million injured in armed conflicts in the last decade.

The new mechanism would include an enlarged "naming and shaming" list of offenders — including governments, armed groups and individuals. Such a list has existed since 2003, but until now it encompassed only conflicts already on the agenda of the Security Council. Moreover, it dealt exclusively with the use of child soldiers.

This year's list names armed groups in conflicts across the globe, whether or not the Security Council has begun debating the conflict. Among the 54 groups on the new list are the notorious Janjaweed militia in western Sudan, the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka and no fewer than 10 parties in war-torn Congo.

Otunnu's proposal entails a detailed monitoring and reporting mechanism and calls on the Security Council to take concrete steps against perpetrators. The actions begin with ultimatums and eventually include sanctions such as arms embargoes, financial restrictions and personal travel bans for militia leaders.

"The new resolution will lend new legitimacy to our effort," Otunnu said. "On the ground, it will be a very important tool for us to put the heat on violators." He said it was important that the issue be seen by member nations as "peace and security issue," and not merely "a soft issue to be dealt with on the side."

The fate of the plan is uncertain, however. The list and the reporting mechanism will likely be adopted, but the council remains divided on how and when to apply sanctions. Some countries believe sanctions should be imposed once a perpetrator is identified; others see the threat of sanctions as leverage in negotiating for compliance.

Diplomats said the council might compromise on a plan to issue ultimatums with firm deadlines leading to mandatory sanctions.

A larger disagreement concerns the scope of the new regime. While most countries favor applying it to all conflict situations, some want it limited to conflicts already on the council's agenda. Washington is said to prefer the second approach, limiting the regime to known Security Council targets, because of its traditional reluctance to grant too large a mandate to the U.N.

In addition, some observers say, Washington is hesitant because its close ally Colombia is among the nations listed as offenders.

Otunnu said he was hopeful an agreement would be reached for across-the-board implementation. The first action is expected on Congo and Darfur, since both situations are already on the council's agenda.

Otunnu said that child soldiers were mostly seen in long-lasting local conflicts, in which adults are no longer willing to fight and youngsters are forced to take their place. The abuses are worst, he said, in conflicts in which "the objective is not so much fighting the enemy army as defeating the enemy community."

The conflict in Uganda evolved during the late 1980s out of a civil war between the central government, under President Yoweri Museveni, and a rebel militia founded by a Christian mystic named Alice Lakwena. Under her nephew, Joseph Kony, her Lord's Resistance Army has evolved into what is widely regarded as one of the world's worst human-rights offenders.

"Abduction, killing, maiming, rape — the sheer magnitude and the duration of the conflict is mind-boggling," said Otunnu, who was raised near Gulu.

Otunnu acknowledged that his efforts to mobilize governments have been hampered by disclosures that U.N. peacekeepers were themselves involved in child abuse in Congo and Liberia.

His effectiveness reportedly has also been hampered by Israeli-Arab diplomatic sniping. His stinging denunciations of suicide bombings have incurred the wrath of Arab countries, without reducing Israeli suspicion toward him as a U.N. official. Israelis are particularly irked at his calls for better protection of children in the Palestinian territories.

Otunnu said he has never visited Israel or the territories

### **UN envoy for war-affected children gets peace award**

*UN News Centre, 12 May 2005* – Olara Otunnu, the United Nations envoy dealing with war-affected children, has been awarded the 2005 Sydney Peace Prize for his lifetime commitment to human rights and efforts to protect youngsters in time of conflict.

Professor Stuart Rees, Director of the Sydney Peace Foundation, said the jury had been impressed by Mr. Otunnu's passionate commitment, advocacy and initiatives to protect the most innocent and most vulnerable members of a community – children.

As Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Otunnu has travelled the world negotiating to end the use of child soldiers and other violations.

His recent report acknowledges that there is continued targeting and brutalization of children in situations of armed conflict, including their killing, maiming, use as child soldiers, rape and abduction, and refers to a "human-made catastrophe of tsunami proportions."

"Those who destroy the children are destroying the future of our societies. We must stop this process of self destruction," he said.

Previous recipients of the Sydney Peace Prize have included Professor Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank for the Poor; Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu of South Africa; President Xanana Gusmão of

Timor-Leste; former Governor-General of Australia Sir William Deane; former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson; the Palestinian academic and human rights campaigner, Hanan Ashrawi and, last year, the Indian writer Arundhati Roy.

Mr. Otunnu will deliver the City of Sydney Peace Prize Lecture in the Seymour Centre on 3 November and will receive the Peace Prize in a gala ceremony the next day.

### **Children in Côte d'Ivoire learn about peace from UNICEF-sponsored curriculum**

*UN News Centre, 13 May 2005* – Children in post-conflict southern Côte d'Ivoire are learning to substitute concepts of peace and forgiveness for hate and intolerance in a curriculum co-sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

“Through the Peace and Tolerance curriculum, we have been able to reach thousands of children who otherwise only know messages of hate and distrust. This curriculum allows us to counteract those messages in every lesson in the classroom,” UNICEF's Youssouf Omar said in the main city, Abidjan. “This way we're hoping that reconciliation and peace are not just slogans on their classroom walls.”

UNICEF and its partners introduced the curriculum late last year to teach the children in a country bitterly divided by war that protection, peace and tolerance are not just words.

“What is the most important thing for a child?” teacher Florence Abo Kossia asks her class. A lively little boy volunteers the first answer: “The right to have fun.”

A failed coup attempt in 2002 against President Laurent Gbagbo led to a civil war that has left the country divided into the south, ruled by the Government, and the north, controlled by rebels.

“Because of this war in Côte d'Ivoire, we thought that if people were taking up arms, it's because they had no sense of peace. We, as teachers, are in charge of the children and we must promote this culture of peace so they can grow up and flourish,” Ms. Abo Kossia said.

“They are still little. But they are the citizens of tomorrow and maybe even the [future] president of the republic is in my class right now. If the president doesn't know about peace, how can he run his country?”