



Terre des hommes

Letters from Kathmandu

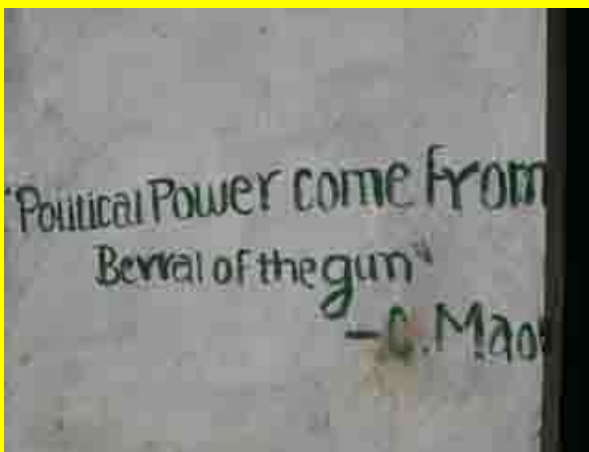
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Children as Victims of the Armed Conflict in Nepal

With this newsletter we inform about the growing humanitarian crisis in Nepal and the response of the Foundation of *Terre des hommes*.

The leading human rights organization in Nepal, the *Informal Sector Service Centre* (INSEC) disclosed that between 13th February 1996 and 30th April 2005, Maoist and government forces in Nepal have killed 12,086 people. Among them 323 children, 224 of them younger than 15 years old.

The impact on the average Nepalese is devastating. Large parts of the population have been caught between Maoists and security forces. Outflows of hundreds of thousands of adolescents and young adult migrants fleeing the conflict have left many rural areas devoid of breadwinners, leaving only women, children, old and sick people behind. The effects and impact of displacement are long-term and far-reaching. Nepal is already one of the poorest countries in the world, and the armed conflict has already contributed to a further worsening of the poor standard of living of so many children in Nepal.



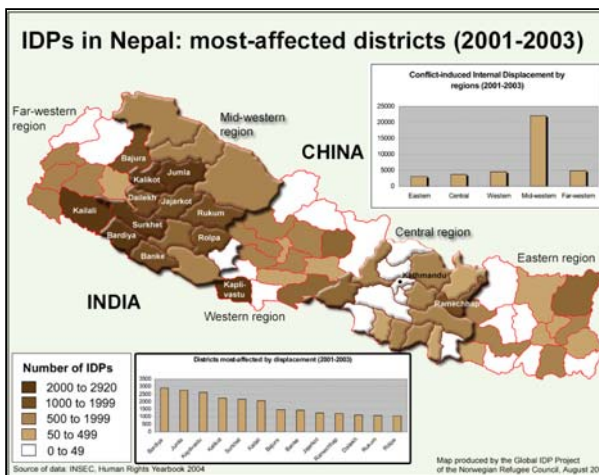
A Maoist graffiti on a wall in Mugu, a mountain district in western Nepal – Photo by Andrew Mitchell



A girl child with her younger brother in Mugu
Photo by Andrew Mitchell

The growing humanitarian crisis

Trying to escape violence and lawlessness people have fled – and continue to flee - to the urban centers and across the border to India, resulting in extensive population displacement. In their report of February 9th 2005, the *International Crisis Group* noted with concern the depopulation of rural areas across the country. Already in 2002-2003, INSEC recorded 31,635 cases of displaced people within Nepal. The NGO *Community Study and Welfare Centre* (CSWC) estimates however that over the last nine years between 350,000 and 400,000 Nepalese have been displaced from their villages, whereas the Global IDP Project, run by the Norwegian Refugee Council, reports in September 2004, that among 200,000 displaced people 100,000 are found in Kathmandu alone.



The children of Nepal are particularly vulnerable. Since the end of the cease-fire agreement in 2003, violations against Nepali children have been steadily increasing by both parties to the conflict. The armed conflict has weakened fragile gains in literacy, child mortality, nutrition and other areas, as the general standard of living and quality of life for all Nepali children continues to deteriorate. Many children in Nepal are growing up in an environment shaped by the violent conflict. They are confronted by guns, bombs, bandhs (strikes), killings, the sight of dead bodies, have witnessed others being tortured or killed, their parents being threatened and developed a fear of war with all its psychological and social consequences. They worry about losing their homes, their families and their education.



Displaced children in a camp near to Nepalganj, Midwestern Nepal – close to the Indian border

Due to the on-going conflict children all over the country lose their rights and opportunities to go to school and to grow up in a safe and decent environment. Many of the very poor children are forced to leave their

homes, to escape being recruited by the Maoists or to migrate for work.



The conflict has left many rural areas devoid of breadwinners, leaving women, children, old and sick people behind. Photo by Andrew Mitchell

Among them were many who have been encouraged to go to school for the first time, while wealthier families have been able to transfer their children to private schools in the safe urban areas. According to a UN study the country has one of the highest school dropout rates in the world. Among the consequences of the conflict has been internal displacement of families, a general sense of insecurity and a generation of children growing up in a culture of terror.



Near to Nepalganj the first refugee camps of IDPs are already setup with 476 displaced children



On 4th of May 2005 Tdh counted 216 families with 578 men and 519 women including 476 children in Rahjena Camp near to Nepalganj.

There are also reports coming in which show that in recent years children have begun to migrate by themselves inside the country. They have experienced tremendous loss both in terms of physical wealth and emotional attachments to their people and localities – experiencing a sense of despair, disorder and insecurity.

Such children are as a result separated from their families and peers, therefore particularly vulnerable and exposed to abuses of many kinds. A recent study also showed that among 1,741 households surveyed, 288 of them were children-headed households. The bitter consequence here is that once their coping



mechanism fails, these children will be pushed out of these communities, they try to settle in. They are in urgent need of protection and support.



799 displaced children were found in nearby communities and villages. Most stay with their relatives or friends in rented houses, in cow sheds or other poor facilities.

Aid to displaced children victims of the armed conflict in Nepalganj area.

A new project of *Terre des hommes*: With financial support of the Swiss Solidarity (Chaîne du Bonheur) *Terre des hommes* begun with project preparations beginning of May.

Terre des hommes assessed the situation of conflict-affected children in Nepalganj in February this year after receiving many reports from different local NGOs and human rights activists.

The government of Nepal is primarily responsible for the welfare of the internally displaced people IDP, but unable to offer assistance. Many of these refugees are without birth registration or other identity papers due to their rapid displacement from mountain villages and communities.

The displaced or conflict-affected children face many challenges and risks: discrimination, breakdown of their families, separation from families, psychosocial impact, violence, abuse and exploitation, and other violations of their rights. Adolescents have special needs because they are especially vulnerable to forced recruitment, abduction, trafficking or exploitation.



For girls the problems of displacement are compounded. They are at special risk of abuse, exploitation and sexual violence. Stress and tensions of the poorly planned camp increase the likelihood of domestic violence. Poverty, limited opportunities for employment and recreation may force girls into prostitution or leave them exposed to abuse, even by those who are there to protect them.

This project is the first one of this kind in Nepal. Its innovative approach is to include not only displaced children, which would be a matter of discrimination, but to include all children who are affected by the armed conflict, impoverished and struggling for their survival. *Terre des hommes* with its local partner organization will provide immediate assistance to these children and their families in the field of education, psychosocial support (mainly in the field of recreation & play) and nutrition for small children. There will be an organized effort to identify and document these displaced children, and to enlist the support of government ministries to provide for their basic needs.



Families continue to be impacted in all aspects of their lives and don't know where to go

The humanitarian project

1000 children as victims of the armed conflict in Nepal will be provided with schooling and followed up in the field of health/nutrition. They have access to recreational and counselling activities. The project will enable children to attend non-formal school in the camp. This provision also includes promotion of care & recreation for children.

Psychosocial support will be provided through organized counseling, play and recreation activities for vulnerable and displaced children and their community peers.

Protection will be ensured by close monitoring of IDP children, data collection, establishing of name lists etc but also establishing child-friendly spaces in camps. It mainly includes protection from further human rights violations.

The nutritional status of small children will be assessed and needy children will be included in mother and child health (MCH) care.



Photo by Andrew Mitchell

Assistance will be given in getting birth certificates and school leaving certificates for those children, who were displaced

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