

# A Preface by Graça Machel

It has been ten years since the UN asked me to produce a report on the impact of armed conflict on children – and much has been achieved in that time. The very existence of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and the Global Report, outlining the use of child soldiers worldwide, these are clear steps forward. We can point to a range of other actions that are testament in themselves to progress: the strengthening of humanitarian responses to the plight of children in war; the innovation, commitment and perseverance shown by civil society organisations across the globe in their work to improve the lives of children; the strengthening of international law to better protect children and women affected by armed conflict; the growing number of governments and armed groups that have pledged to abide by those laws; and some governments that have prioritised commitments to improving care and protection for children in the midst of armed conflict and once the fighting has stopped.

When my report was published in 1996 there was a strong, but little acknowledged perception that children were at best marginal to the ‘real’ security issues of the ‘real’ world. Now the UN Security Council regularly discusses children and armed conflict and the long-term protection of children is seen as a cornerstone of peace and security. It was with great pride and greater humility that in 2002 I watched a small group of children from diverse regions of the world eloquently, knowledgeably and passionately address the Security Council

on their experience in armed conflict and their visions of a world in which all children would be protected from the ravages of war.

So as I think about this Global Report there is a sense of progress – but in the end, it is not enough. In Addis Ababa young teenagers asked me when the world would do something about the abduction, rape and exploitation they have suffered for decades in Northern Uganda; in New York a Palestinian girl asked me when the international community would uphold its resolutions and act to end the conflict and violence suffered by generations of children in that region; in the Caucasus and other parts of the world the haunted eyes of child survivors ask all of us how we can live in a world where children can be brutalised and murdered as part of adult conflicts.

I have no answers for these children. No reasonable or convincing explanation for why we have collectively failed to protect them from the atrocities of war. No justification for generations of broken promises. Such questions show that progress made thus far is too little and too slow.

The horrors lived by child soldiers are overwhelming: abducted, subjected to sexual slavery, beaten, deprived, forced to kill and often murdered. We have known this for many years. We have it in our grasp to stop this nightmare – so why have we not made this happen? The problem is not that we lack the power to do this – the problem is our failure to use that power effectively, consistently and urgently.

It is heartening that the Security Council has condemned the use of child

soldiers and outlined measures to end the practice. But this is not enough. Governments and armed groups must be held accountable for their actions, yet assisted to take concrete steps to get children out of conflict and back to their families and communities. This must include efforts by ‘the silent partners’ – those organisations, corporations and governments in Europe, North America and other parts of the world that provide military training and resources that assist warring parties in conflict zones. They must ask themselves how they can fulfil their personal, their human and their State obligations to the care and protection of children while they continue to sell weapons and provide assistance to those shown to abuse children in their armed conflicts.

I hope that every reader of this Global Report will pledge her or himself to turn the knowledge gained from these pages into

practical commitments and concrete efforts to better protect children in situations of armed conflict and stop the use of children as soldiers.

Finally: a message to all activists – in families, in governments, in civil society groups – who work with such commitment and courage. To all of you, including members of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers throughout the world: your determination to bring an end to the use of child soldiers, your perseverance and your unstinting efforts in the face of grave dangers are shining examples of what true humanity and commitment mean. You keep alive the flame of hope and the belief that by working together we can create a world where children can grow up with love, in dignity and in peace.

In solidarity,

**Graça Machel**  
**Maputo, September 2004**