

# CHILDREN & ARMED CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA



Displaced Tamil girl at Mannar Reception Centre, 1995  
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**A discussion document prepared for  
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## ABBREVIATIONS

CAAC	Children Affected by Armed Conflict
CRC	(UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child
DfID	Department for International Development (UK government)
EPDP	Eelam People's Democratic Party
EPRLF	Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MSF	Medicins Sans Frontieres
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
ROSA	Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF)
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RSC	Refugee Studies Centre (Oxford University)
SC UK	Save the Children, United Kingdom
SLA	Sri Lankan Army
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
TRO	Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation
UNGASS	UN General Assembly Special Session (on children)

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Background to the project**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides a global charter for the protection of children's survival, development and well being. Armed conflict creates conditions under which many of the rights laid out in the CRC are undermined. As the 1996 Graca Machel/UNICEF report on Children Affected by Armed Conflict pointed out, war increases the threats to children and clearly contravenes the mandate for their protection laid out in the CRC.

The international community has therefore a special duty of care and protection with regard to children exposed to armed conflict, civil strife and displacement. This duty requires agencies involved in preventative and emergency efforts to understand how children are affected by such adversities and to develop measures that mitigate the impact on children. Acknowledging the urgent need to improve child-focused emergency responses in the context of conflict, the UK government's Department for International Development (DfID) has provided financial support to UNICEF globally, through the Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC) Project to raise the capacity of child-focused interventions in armed conflict.

As part of this initiative the Regional UNICEF Office in South Asia (ROSA) has undertaken the Children Affected by Armed Conflict Part One Project. The premises of the project are:

- ◆ Child protection during emergencies involves more than simple service delivery. The project seeks to develop a conceptual and practical framework to move forward policy, practice and advocacy on CAAC. This entails the development of new methods of information gathering and analysis, new approaches to programming and policy development and new ways of thinking about and working with children and their families during conflict.
- ◆ Working with and supporting children, their families, communities and other local stakeholders implies the need for in-depth understanding of the particular context, dynamics and impacts of armed conflict in South Asia.

- ◆ Building the capacity of UNICEF and partner organisations to respond more effectively to war-affected children requires the development of new training approaches that enhance not only individual learning, but also institutional memory. Current training practices that rely on ‘training events’ and the production of manuals are not the most effective way of meeting these objectives. The Project will therefore develop interactive and distance learning methods and produce learning modules and materials that will be made available on the UNICEF website.
  
- ◆ Children’s rights can be protected by promoting leadership and accountability for violations, and by ensuring that internationally agreed standards of child protection become accepted throughout the region and are sustained during conflict. This entails lobbying, advocacy and information dissemination on general human/children’s rights instruments, with a focus on principles and issues that are of particular relevance to war-affected children.

### **Establishing the Knowledge Base**

To initiate the project UNICEF ROSA commissioned consultants at the Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford, to map out: 1) the existing knowledge on children affected by armed conflict in the South Asia region 2) the existing institutional capacity for intervention on CAAC. Between January and April 2001 two consultants travelled to India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan collecting existing secondary information on CAAC and meeting informed experts, particularly those involved in child-focused intervention in areas of conflict. The UNICEF country offices provided logistical support in Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In Pakistan and Afghanistan the project was facilitated by the UNICEF Pakistan Country Office and Afghanistan Country Office in partnership with Save the Children Fund (US) Pakistan and Afghanistan Field Office. A complementary study on children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Cox’s Bazaar of Bangladesh was funded by the British Council Bangladesh.

The findings of the research will constitute two regional discussion papers to be presented at a workshop in Kathmandu 9-13<sup>th</sup> July 2001. Country specific discussion documents have also been compiled. These use existing material and

insights from interviews with informed experts to promote conceptual and practical frameworks to move forward policy, practice and advocacy on children affected by armed conflict.

### **The Sri Lanka Country Document**

This discussion document looks at children in Sri Lanka and their relationship to the conflict between government and LTTE forces in four principle areas:

- ◆ **Economy**
- ◆ **Physical impacts**
- ◆ **Socio-cultural & educational life**
- ◆ **Psycho-emotional issues**

In all four of these areas the effects of the conflict upon children are considered not only at the individual level but also at an intermediate, communal level and at the wider, level of the nation as a whole. This approach enables us to see, firstly, that although children living in the north and east of the country are most commonly and most directly affected, nearly two decades of armed conflict has had profound implications for all of the nation's young. Secondly, by integrating the local, child-focussed analysis within a discussion of broader, macro issues it is possible to consider the ways in which the experiences of children within their families and communities may contribute to the perpetuation or diffusion of conflict at local and national level.

#### *Children as victims and as participants*

Speaking at a recent European Union seminar on children and armed conflict in anticipation of the UNGASS in September 2001, Patricia Durrant offered the following statement:

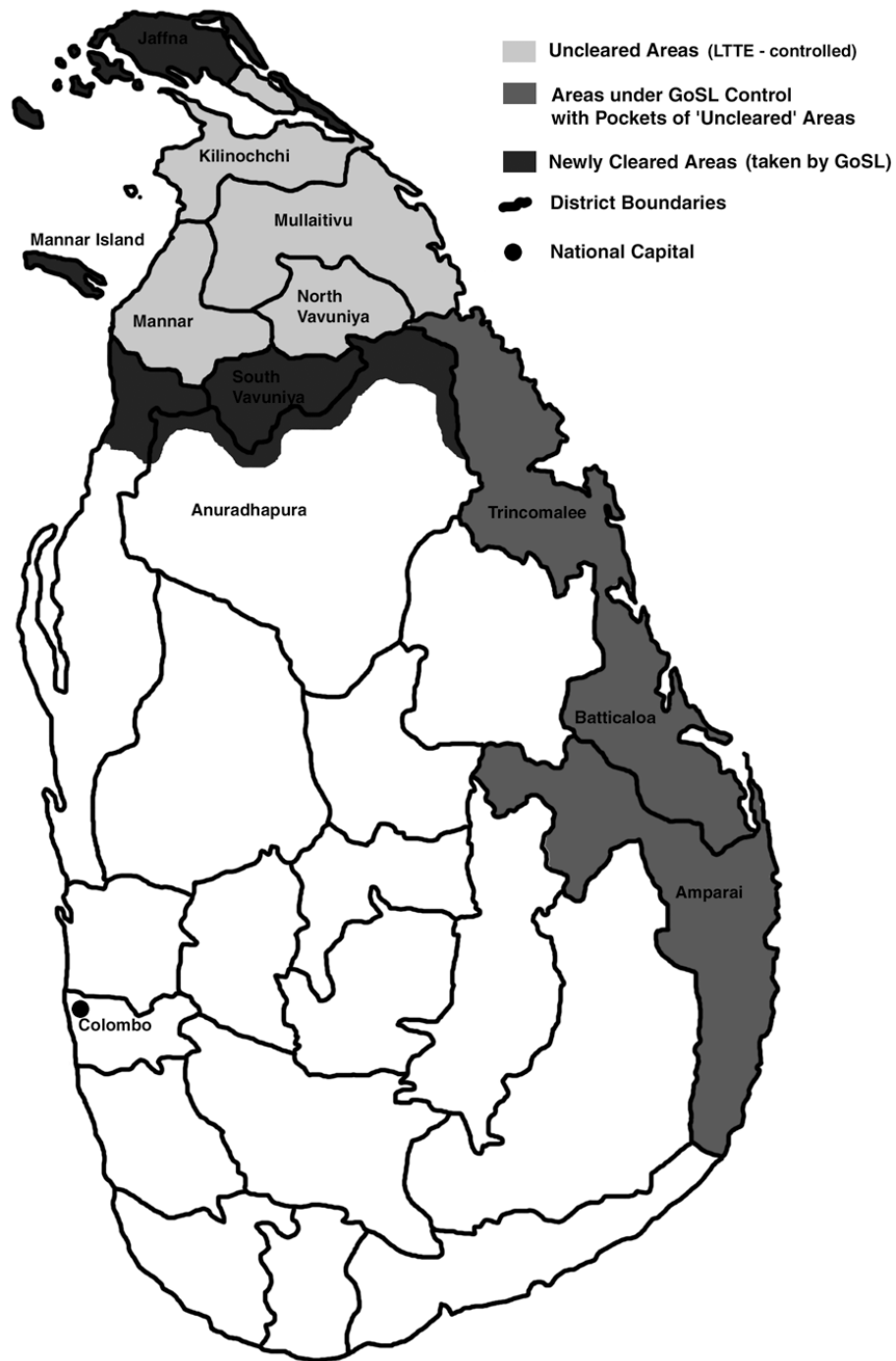
“In addressing the vulnerabilities of children in situations of conflict, the Special Session should also recognise the capacity of children and the young to participate actively in conflict resolution initiatives and in programmes promoting their access to health, nutrition, education and reintegration following displacement.”<sup>1</sup>



Mindful of Ms Durrant's observations, this discussion document does not assume that Sri Lankan children are merely the victims of conflict. Although the ways in which their lives are constrained, exploited and damaged are central to the discussion, consideration is also given to the opportunities that the conflict situation may present for the young. This approach assumes that children are participants in their own right whose role within their communities may include actions which are political, military, economic, social and cultural.

Given that this document is based principally on secondary sources, however, it cannot hope to convey more than glimpses of children's contributions amidst the hardships and challenges of conflict. To fully appreciate the point, sustained, dialogic research with young people is vital. The willingness to conduct such research, in turn, requires appreciation of the fact that children have something valuable to say, something that cannot be adequately or sufficiently expressed by adult relatives. It is partly with a view to encouraging initiatives for participatory, child-focussed research that this document has been written.

# Sri Lanka



**Map showing areas of north and east Sri Lanka most affected by conflict between GoSL and the LTTE.**

## SECTION 1

### **DEVELOPMENT & DIMENSIONS OF THE CONFLICT**

Before moving to consider the impact of the conflict on children and young people directly, this discussion document will first offer an overview of the historical development and characteristics of the conflict itself. Due to constraints of space, it is not possible to do full justice to the complexity of the issues involved. The intention, rather, is to provide a context for later discussion by outlining the following points:

- ◆ **REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF ARMED CONFLICT**
- ◆ **THE POSITIONS OF THE MAIN PROTAGONISTS**
- ◆ **HISTORY AND NATURE OF THE CONFLICT**

#### **REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF ARMED CONFLICT**

- 1. The development of communalist politics**
- 2. Social and economic inequality – education and language – ‘Sinhalization’**
- 3. Failures of the political system**

#### **1. The development of communalist politics**

When the British departed from Ceylon in 1948 they left behind a society that had become notably communal in outlook and in the conduct of government. During the first year of the colonial administration, in 1833, they introduced a legislative council, the local members of which were chosen on the basis of community: “Kandyan Sinhalese”, “Ceylon Tamil” and so on. For nearly a century, government of the country had a strong communal dimension, encouraging a general sense that each community had its own discrete set of interests.

In 1931 communal representation was replaced by representation on the basis of territory and, at the same time, universal adult franchise was instituted. Given that the Sinhalese were in the majority in most parts of the country, this raised immediate fears amongst minority groups and led to boycotts by Tamil politicians. These tensions surrounding the access of different communities to political power grew steadily during the 1940s. By 1947, just prior to independence, they found expression in the call of Tamil leaders for self-determination within a federal state in order to ensure that Tamil interests remain protected.<sup>2</sup>

The first elections of the newly independent state of Sri Lanka brought to power a government principally composed of elite Sinhalese. At this time the Sinhalese ('Low Country' and 'Kandyan') constituted 69.4% of the population and the Tamils ('Up Country' and 'Ceylon') were only 22.7%.<sup>3</sup> Amongst the first acts of the government of D.S. Sananayake was the disenfranchisement of the 900,000 Up Country Tamils who had been brought to the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by the British for work on the tea plantations. The government also adopted the *sinha* flag as its national flag. This gives pride of place to a lion, representing the Sinhalese Buddhists. The Tamil and Muslim minorities are represented, respectively, by yellow and green stripes to one side.

Such acts gave impetus to the formation of the Federal Party (FP) composed of radical Tamil politicians who, at their first national convention in 1951, declared that "Tamils are a nation distinct from that of the Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood."<sup>4</sup> Already the seeds were sown for the escalation of communalism within Sri Lanka politics.

## **2. Social and Economic Inequality**

### *Education and Language*

At the social level, communalism was fuelled by a number of factors, some of the most important of which relate to the education system. Under the British a number of missionary schools were opened on the island, located particularly in Colombo and Jaffna. The Tamils in Jaffna were extremely responsive to the new educational opportunities which became available during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>5</sup>. The schooling offered was conducted in English and generally of a higher standard than that in the indigenous system which employed either Sinhala or Tamil and covered only the primary cycle. Those young people who graduated from the missionary schools enjoyed comparative ease of access to positions in the colonial administration and were best able to take advantage of opportunities for trade. Although only a small percentage of the total Tamil population benefitted in this way, their numbers were disproportionate in relation to Sinhalese citizens, giving rise to resentment and fears about loss of influence amongst the latter.

The majority of Sinhalese, who lived in rural areas where the schooling available had not enabled them to gain mastery of English, also resented the rule of an

English-speaking, urban, Sinhalese elite. This resentment contributed greatly to the electoral victory of the People's United Front in 1956 which promised to declare Sinhala as the national language. This the party quickly delivered in the form of the Official Language Act (commonly known as the 'Sinhala Only Act'), passed in the same year."<sup>6</sup>

Since that time measures have been introduced intended to offer reassurance to native Tamil speakers. Nevertheless, the status of Tamil remains inferior to that of Sinhala even to the extent that government forms are sometimes still published in Sinhala alone.<sup>7</sup>

ACCOUNT 1: **Mr Mancivasgar, former Supreme Court Judge**

"I went to the office of the Government Agent in Colombo in July 1973. In order to find my way to the officer I wanted to meet, I saw a board in Sinhala only. I enquired in English from the clerk who was seated behind the counter as to what it said. His reply in Sinhala was "Don't you know how to read Sinhala?" I replied in English that I could not understand what he said. He said in Sinhala: "Go and learn Sinhala and come back." A bystander told me what the board conveyed."<sup>8</sup>

During the 1950s and 1960s government provision for secondary education expanded greatly. For the most part, this was conducted in the mother-tongue of the students: either Sinhala or Tamil. Although this appears a policy respectful of difference, since the majority of students only learn their mother tongue (plus some English) the effect has been to heighten "the ethnic and cultural isolation of different groups of Sri Lankans."<sup>9</sup> It also ensures that the majority of native Tamil speakers do not gain mastery of Sinhalese, which has serious implications in terms of social and economic mobility.

*'Sinhalization'*

The so-called 'Sinhalization' of Sri Lankan society, has been a process embracing many areas of daily life, notably the following:

- i. The **privileging of the Sinhala language**, as discussed above.
- ii. The **assertion of Buddhism**, in its particular local form, as foremost amongst the religions practised on the island.<sup>10</sup>
- iii. In the 1970s measures were introduced aimed at **the control of university entrance** which had the effect of enhancing the access of Sinhalese applicants

at the expense of Tamils, particularly those from Jaffna. Hitherto, the Tamils, as a group, had done comparatively well in the entrance examinations and were represented to a disproportionate extent in the island's institutions of higher education.<sup>11</sup> Writing of the system introduced in 1972, de Silva made the following observation:

“The political impact of the district quota system has been little short of disastrous. It has convinced many Sri Lankan Tamils that it was futile to expect equality of treatment with the Sinhalese majority. It has immensely strengthened separatist forces... and contributed to the acceptance of a policy campaigning for a separate state.”<sup>12</sup>

- iv. A particular source of resentment for many Tamils, was the **colonization** policy of the government from the late 1940s to the end of the 1960s. From their perspective, the **re-settlement of Sinhalese farmers** from the south in areas of land in the ‘dry zone’ of the north and east, was intended to ensure the hegemony of the Sinhalese majority over the whole of the island.<sup>13</sup>
- v. In addition, there was a strong sense amongst this population that **only Sinhalese areas benefitted from large-scale development projects** while the north and east were subject to neglect.

All of these issues played upon Tamil fears that they were being progressively marginalized and rendered second-class citizens within the Sri Lankan state. Such fears inevitably provided a strong impetus for Tamil nationalism. No longer prepared to fight for equitable treatment within a Sinhalese-dominated state, by the mid 1970s Tamil political leaders were openly advocating separatism. In this way they dispensed with the federalist approach which had been at the heart of the Tamil political agenda in the 1950s and 1960s.

### **3. Failures of the political system**

From its inception as an independent, sovereign nation in 1948, Sri Lanka has been governed according to a system of constitutional democracy, with the president as elected head of state. However, given the strong sense of communal identity, particularly amongst the Sri Lankan Tamils and the rural Sinhalese, it was always

going to be a hard task to ensure that the interests and aspirations of minorities were not sacrificed to the will of the electoral majority within a democratic framework.

As it transpired, the protection of minority interests has been a very minor concern of most of the elected governments in Sri Lanka. Indeed, in the case of the disenfranchisement of 900,000 Up Country Tamils in 1948, the political system has been positively injurious to the one of the most disadvantaged communities in the country. Discriminatory actions of government, such as this, have been introduced by politicians who themselves were from elite, cosmopolitan backgrounds (albeit Sinhalese). In their quest for electoral victory, however, they have marginalized minority sections of the electorate and promised actions intended to appeal to the parochial and nationalistic sentiments of rural and lower-caste Sinhalese who constitute the largest sector of the country's citizens.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the consequently communalist agenda of most governing parties, some measures have been proposed that were intended to provide safeguards for the minority communities. However, these have been relatively meagre and, in some cases, not properly implemented.<sup>15</sup> In the meantime, the democratic system has been eroded by corruption and thuggery, as well as through the introduction of 'emergency' measures which have been used to the detriment of minorities in the country. These include, for example, the 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) which allows for the suspension of constitutional standards in the arrest and detention of suspected 'terrorists'. According to Amnesty International, this act, which is still in force, has enabled the authorities to commit systematic violations of human rights.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the national security forces have often failed to offer protection to Tamils during incidents of inter-communal violence. The best known example of this failure occurred during the anti-Tamil mob violence in Colombo in 1983 when hundreds of civilians were killed, thousands of homes destroyed and around 200,000 people were displaced. In the estimation of many Tamil and foreign commentators, the security forces not only left Tamil civilians without protection but, in some cases, actively assisted in attacks.<sup>17</sup> Ultimate blame, however, was placed upon President J.R. Jayawardene who was informed of events but delayed the imposition of a curfew. According to Nissan, "Not one member of the government made appeals for calm or condemned the violence. Instead, they blamed the Tamil militants, whose killing of 13 soldiers in the north had 'triggered' reprisal attacks against Tamils living in the

south.”<sup>18</sup> It is hard to quantify the mistrust and sense of alienation that such an event created amongst Tamils.

## **THE POSITION OF THE MAIN PROTAGONISTS: THE GOVERNMENT AND THE LTTE**

### **The Government of Sri Lanka**

There have been notable differences between administrations since independence in terms of approaches made towards the Sri Lankan Tamils and other minorities. Overall, however, policy has been shaped significantly by Sinhalese nationalism which itself is informed by these two main factors:

#### *i. Buddhist revivalism*

The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed a popular revival of Buddhism, largely as a response to the proselytising efforts of Christian missionaries. Central to this revival was the belief that Sri Lanka and the Sinhalese people had a unique religious mission arising from their historical relationship to the Buddha. As one Sinhalese writer claimed in the 1950s:

“For more than two millennia the Sinhalese have been inspired by the ideal that they were a nation brought into being for the definite purpose of carrying the torch lit by the Buddha.”<sup>19</sup>

During this time the history of Sinhalese Sri Lanka entered into popular culture: a history that emphasised sharp differences and physical separation between the Sinhalese and Tamils. The fact that one of the Sinhalese kings had actually been a Tamil, the similarities between the two peoples and the centuries of co-existence on the same island were overlooked in favour of a focus on episodes of conflict.<sup>20</sup>

A further feature of this Buddhist revivalism has been the active role taken by many monks (*bikkus*) in the nation’s politics, reminding the government that it is “...legally and morally bound to protect and maintain Buddhism and Buddhist institutions.”<sup>21</sup> Over the years, the Sinhala Buddhist establishment has proven itself a powerful political force, able to stir large elements of the electorate with claims that the faith is threatened. It is the clergy, perhaps more strongly and consistently than any other section of the society, who express the view that Sri Lanka must remain a unitary Buddhist state with a single language, Sinhala.<sup>22</sup> The notions of federalism or of a separate Tamil state are total anathema. According to Liyanage, some factions within the clergy even go so far as to demand that “all minority ethnicities should



respect the dominance of Sinhala Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka and assimilate into it.<sup>23</sup>

ii. *'The Tamil threat'*

In discussions of Sri Lanka's unique religious and cultural mission, the Tamils have generally been cast as the major threat. As explained above, popular history has often been constructed in a manner which emphasises the periods of conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils. Furthermore, the fact that more than 50 million Tamils reside just the other side of the narrow Palk Strait in Tamil Nadu engenders deep fears that the country will be taken over in the building of a Tamil nation which also embraces, the Maldives and the southern Indian state. The direct support offered to the LTTE from elements within Tamil Nadu has inevitably fuelled such concerns.

It is important, therefore, to acknowledge that, whilst the Sinhalese are a clear majority within Sri Lanka itself, many see themselves as a threatened minority within the wider region. For such people the offer of federal status or independence to the north of the country would be tantamount to providing a territorial base from which the Tamils might annihilate the Sinhalese state and people.

**The LTTE**

Unlike the Sri Lankan government, which is formed through an election process - albeit one that is increasingly discredited - the LTTE has no formal mandate from the population it claims to represent. As a consequence, it is hard to know the extent to which the views and actions of this organisation enjoy the endorsement of all sections of Tamil society.

In any event, the sense of marginalization and discrimination by the Sinhalese-dominated state is undoubtedly widespread. Whether or not all Tamils necessarily seek a separate political entity, the desire for fair treatment by the Sri Lankan judiciary, government and security forces; some measure of autonomy in running local affairs; and equitable access to educational and work opportunities are aspirations shared by the vast majority.

For the LTTE and its supporters, the enduring aim has been the creation of a separate state - Tamil Eelam - in the north and east of the island. However, there have been recent indications that the organisation might be prepared to negotiate a peace

treaty on the basis of receiving some form of devolution for these areas. Meanwhile, the military struggle against the Sri Lankan armed forces continues.

### **Other parties to conflict in Sri Lanka**

Due to limitations of space, this discussion document focuses principally on the current conflict between the government and the LTTE only. On the Tamil side consideration might also be given to the numerous organisations which have come, in recent years, to ally themselves with the government. Intra-Tamil conflict, often of the most brutal kind, has developed between the LTTE and organisations such as the EPDP, EPRLF, TELO, and PLOTE.

While the LTTE has been dealing with this challenge to its own power within the Tamil heartlands of the north and east, the government has confronted full-scale insurgency in the predominantly Sinhalese south. This occurred in 1971 and, even more violently, in the late 1980s. In 1987-9 the JVP (Janatha Vimukti Peramuna – ‘People’s Liberation Front’) mobilised disaffected Sinhalese youth around economic issues and fears of Indian imperialism following the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. An estimated 60,000 citizens of the south were killed or disappeared and almost the entire JVP leadership was eliminated. Since that time, the JVP has rebuilt itself to become a powerful force within Sri Lankan politics. There are also growing fears that the same poverty, alienation and resentment which fuelled the previous uprisings have not been effectively addressed. Thus the seeds of further conflict remain.

Mention must also be made of the Muslim population who constitute around 7.1% of the population (1981 census figures). Prior to the start of the GoSL-LTTE conflict a large proportion of this community lived in the north and east. However, in 1990 the LTTE forced 120,000 Muslims in areas under its control to leave. Since that time, many thousands have remained in temporary accommodation, principally around Puttalam in the west. There are reports of growing tension between these IDPs and the resident Muslim population of the area.

Within Sri Lankan politics the Muslims are an important force. In particular, their concerns about the east of the country, where they constitute roughly one-third of the population (Batticaloa and Amparai Districts), must be taken into account in any future settlement. In the meantime, Muslim communities in the east have been involved in inter-communal violence, notably with neighbouring Tamils.

## HISTORY AND NATURE OF THE CONFLICT

### The general level of conflict

The conflict between the LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka has lasted for almost twenty years and cost an estimated 60-100,000 lives<sup>24</sup>. It would be inaccurate, however, to describe the situation as one of all out war for the whole of this period. There have, indeed, been major offensives and battles, such as occurred in December 1995 when the government forces took Jaffna from the LTTE and in April 2000 when the LTTE captured Elephant Pass. Nevertheless, for the most part, this conflict has been characterised by ongoing, low-level violence involving separate incidents of guerrilla-type activity, small-scale land and sea battles, aerial bombardment by the Sri Lankan Air Force, and shelling by both sides.

The main incidents have occurred principally within three time periods:

TABLE 1: **Main events of government (GoSL) -LTTE military confrontation**<sup>25</sup>

<b>'Eelam War I' (1983-88)</b>	
Rapid escalation of violent inter-communal attacks	1983
LTTE massacres of TELO and EPRLF members	1986
Arrival of Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)	1987
<i>IPKF leave Sri Lanka</i>	1989-90
<b>'Eelam War II' (1990-94)</b>	
GoSL forces launch attack in east & on Jaffna	1990
Tamil groups (other than EPRLF) ally with GoSL	1990
LTTE order all Muslims to leave the north, 120,000 flee	1990
GoSL imposes embargo on north	1991
LTTE assassinations of several senior politicians	1991-94
<b>'Eelam War III' (1995- )</b>	
GoSL launches "War for Peace", forces capture Jaffna	1995
LTTE kill over 1,200 GoSL soldiers in Mullaitivu Camp	1996
LTTE bomb Central Bank, Colombo: over 150 civilians dead	1996
GoSL forces launch major offensive in north	1997
LTTE step up bombing campaign in south:	
Temple of the Tooth, Kandy partially destroyed	1998
GoSL offensive in north called off	1998
Series of GoSL attacks on LTTE positions	1999
LTTE capture Elephant Pass and almost reach Jaffna Town	2000

The major conflagrations have primarily caused the death of military personnel. Nevertheless, the conflict overall has involved a high level of direct civilian casualties.<sup>26</sup> This is due to several factors:

- indiscriminate bombings in civilian areas
- local-level intercommunal violence, notably in eastern districts and Colombo
- deliberate military attacks on village communities
- widespread use of landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs)

Aside from the scale of casualties a major feature of the conflict has been the incidence and level of displacement. In many parts of the north and east people have been forced to move several times, sometimes returning to damaged or destroyed homes, rebuilding their lives before again being displaced. The mass and multiple displacement that characterises the conflict in Sri Lanka has created particular challenges for children and their families, as will be discussed in this document. According to estimates there are around 800,000 people currently displaced within the country.<sup>27</sup>

### **Funding and sources of weaponry**

#### *The Government*

According to recent estimates, during the year 2000 government defence spending amounted to 65.4 billion Rupees (c\$726 million), which represents 5.3% of GDP.<sup>28</sup> The funds raised by the government are used to pay for the security forces which number around 120,000 soldiers, 17,000 naval personnel and an 18,500-member airforce. In addition, there is a 60,000 strong police force, a Special Task Force, 15,000 homeguards and an unknown number of paramilitaries belonging to various Tamil groups loyal to the government and armed by them.<sup>29</sup>

Military expenditure in the year 2000 rose sharply on previous years after parliament approved a 50% increase in the defence budget.<sup>30</sup> According to a report in the Economist, \$350 million of this budget was used by the President to buy new weaponry which included multi-barrel rocket launchers and MiG fighter-bombers.<sup>31</sup> It is clear, then, that the domestic budget is a major funding source for the military campaign against the LTTE. In addition, there have been occasional donations of

equipment from friendly governments such as a contribution of 10,000 rockets by the Czech government in 2000.<sup>32</sup>

With regard to the purchase of arms, the Sri Lankan government has traditionally acquired most of its hardware from China. However, in recent years it has diversified its sources to include the US, the UK, Russia, Israel and Ukraine, and there are reports that the government has been in discussion with Pakistan, Iran and Singapore.<sup>33</sup> The US and Israeli governments have reportedly provided military training.

### *The LTTE*

In comparison to information about the government, it is very hard to gain a clear picture about the finances and military capability. Reports generally concur that funding for the Tigers currently comes from two main sources: expatriate Tamils, principally in North America, Australia and the UK<sup>34</sup>; and the profits from a large network of businesses, which include 'legitimate' endeavours together with drug-trafficking and smuggling. The extent of funds available from these two sources is disputed. One recent analyst has suggested that LTTE military expenditure averages around \$75 million per annum – a fraction of the government's own spending.<sup>35</sup>

The LTTE's weaponry, which is not as sophisticated as that of the government forces, comes from a variety of sources. Some of it is captured from defeated Sri Lankan army units or raided from their armouries<sup>36</sup> while an amount of small arms comes from Tamils living in Singapore, Malaysia and Tamil Nadu. According to Gunaratna, until 1987 the government of India was a major supplier of weapons to all of the Tamil groups.

Aside from these sources, during the Cold War period the LTTE procured explosives, heavy weapons and ground to air missiles from Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Since 1989 former Soviet, Eastern European and Balkan states have become major sellers.<sup>37</sup> As a general observation, it is clear that the LTTE have moved from guerrilla-type operations using small arms and improvised explosives to become a force employing heavier and more sophisticated weapons - such as long-range artillery - in semi-conventional military activities. Estimates of personnel vary between 14-18,000 cadres.<sup>38</sup>

SECTION 2  
**THE ECONOMY**

This section explores the following issues:

- ◆ **THE COSTS OF CONFLICT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL**
- ◆ **THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF CONFLICT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**
- ◆ **IMPACT UPON CHILDREN: COMMODITIZATION**

**THE COSTS OF CONFLICT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL**

The economic costs to the people of Sri Lanka may be considered under two distinct headings: firstly, the direct costs incurred in pursuit of conflict and in addressing its consequences and, secondly, the revenue foregone.

**i. Direct costs**

In the mid-1990s, government military expenditure per head of the population became the highest of all South Asian countries.<sup>39</sup> Since 1989 this expenditure has risen from \$9.34 per capita to well over \$30.<sup>40</sup> As a percentage of Gross Domestic Product, military spending has risen from 0.5% of GDP in 1982 to 3.11% in 1992 and 5.3% in 2000.<sup>41</sup> However, estimation of the direct costs of conflict should also include expenditure on public order and safety, which has grown massively. Only a small part of this growth can be attributed to demographic increase. The rest is accounted for by strengthening of the police force, prevention of terrorism activities, security provision for political figures, and for measures to address organised criminal activities which have burgeoned in the conflict situation.<sup>42</sup> The following table illustrates the enormous costs involved.

**TABLE 2: Government Defence and Public Order Spending, 1982-2000<sup>43</sup>**

	<b>Defence</b>	<b>Public Order &amp; Safety</b>
1982	480 million SLR/ \$5.33 million	415 million SLR/ \$4.6 million
1992	13.23 billion SLR/ \$147 million	4.47 billion SLR / \$49.75 million
2000	65.4 billion SLR/ \$726 million	12 billion SLR/ \$133 million

In addition, it is necessary to consider the outlay on rehabilitation and reconstruction of physical capital damaged or destroyed by fighting. For the period 1983-1998 the total cost of damages was estimated at 137.1 billion Rupees (c.\$1.53 billion). Events since 1998, including the LTTE offensive on Elephant Pass and the Jaffna Peninsula in 2000, have surely added greatly to the damages and consequent costs.

The spending of the LTTE is harder to calculate due to the unavailability of raw data. A recent report by the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka & the MARGA Institute suggested that up to 1998 the Tigers had spent around 42.6 billion Rupees (c.\$473 million) on the military. This represents roughly 10% of the GDP of the north and east.<sup>44</sup> No figures are available for LTTE expenditure on public order or on rehabilitation and reconstruction.

## ii. Revenue Foregone

Inevitably a good deal of informed guesswork has gone into the calculation of revenue lost as a direct result of the conflict. Here it has been necessary to make projections about likely growth in tourism and foreign investment at the national level and agricultural output in the conflict-affected areas. The following table illustrates projected figures for the period 1983-1998.

TABLE 3: **Estimates of lost revenue, 1983-1998**<sup>45</sup>

	Lost earnings from tourism	Lost foreign direct investment	Lost rice paddy production in north & east
1983	\$31.9 million	\$32.6 million	499,000 tons
1990	\$146.6 million	\$96.2 million	307,000 tons
1998	\$398.4 million	\$107.1 million	261,000 tons

These figures are, of course, only the tip of the iceberg. Even if precise statistics on deaths, casualties and emigration were available it would still be impossible to estimate the true economic cost of the foregone contribution of lost human resources to the nation's economic life. To such a calculation we would also have to add productivity lost due to the multiple displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom were ordinarily engaged in agricultural pursuits or as fishermen.<sup>46</sup>

## **THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF CONFLICT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

As a World Bank report from June 2000 points out:

“The extent of social and economic deprivation in the North-Eastern province is not precisely known as the security situation has precluded the inclusion of the province in island-wide household surveys carried out since the mid-1980s...Despite the lack of data, available information and small scale surveys show that healthcare, education and local economic conditions are worse in the areas torn by the civil conflict than in the rest of the island.”<sup>47</sup>

The main effects to be discussed are as follows:

- **Impoverishment of basic services**
- **Loss of income**
- **Migration for work**
- **Inflated prices of basic goods**

### **Impoverishment of basic services**

Most of the economic effects of the conflict felt at the local level are the direct consequence of military action and the associated physical damage, unrest and tension. Although basic services are affected by these factors, they have also been seriously and systematically damaged by the spending choices of the government. If we exclude government expenditure on regular, peace-time defence and public order, in 1998 2.8% of GDP (= \$316 million) was spent directly on the conflict. This compares with 1.5% of GDP spent on health and 2.6% on education. Had this money been made available instead for basic services, children throughout the country could have benefitted, for example, from reduced class-sizes in classrooms which are often chronically overcrowded and from properly-resourced hospitals and other medical facilities.

As it is, schools in the north and east suffer from a severe lack of investment and staff<sup>48</sup>, with the result that many children, particularly those who have been displaced within government-controlled areas, find themselves excluded from school under various pretexts designed to keep numbers down. Hospital services are likewise in a poor state with crumbling facilities, insufficient trained staff and outdated or inadequate equipment: the input of INGOs and local NGOs has become crucial in



many places for the maintenance of basic health provision, including routine surgery.<sup>49</sup> “Additional services” made necessary by the conflict, such as prosthesis for landmine victims, have generally fallen to the NGO sector to provide.<sup>50</sup>

As will be shown in later sections, the impoverishment of basic services has had a clear impact upon literacy levels and upon key indicators of maternal and child health.

### Loss of income

*CRC: Article 27, paragraph 1*

States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

The most direct way in which citizens of the north and east have felt the economic effects of the war is in the loss or drastic reduction of normal income. When considering this issue, it is necessary to bear in mind that an estimated 85% of the population in the conflict-affected areas ordinarily derive their livelihood from agriculture or fishing.<sup>51</sup> The loss of income is due to a number of factors:

- i. The **death, disappearance and imprisonment of breadwinners** are obvious causes of income loss for families in the north and east. The extent of such loss may be considered in relation to the following statistics:

TABLE 4: **Percentage of families in north and east from which main breadwinner has been lost (1998)**<sup>52</sup>

District	Percentage of families
Amparai	27%
Batticaloa	41%
Jaffna	25%
Killinochchi	30%
Mullaitivu	55%
Trincomalee	17%
Vavuniya	5%
<b>Average</b>	<b>33%</b>

- ii. **Mass displacement** in the north and east has had devastating effects upon people's ability to pursue a normal economic life. Where return is possible, property may be damaged and land lost. Even short term displacement can seriously disrupt the agricultural cycle. For those who have been accommodated in welfare centres, the opportunities to earn some form of income are generally negligible, deprived, as they are, of access to land and often subject to restrictions on movement.
- iii. In many districts there are **severe restrictions imposed by the military** on work activities. This is the case, for example, amongst fishermen in the Jaffna Peninsula whose normal practices have been seriously curtailed by army orders regarding the timing of their trips and the locations in which they may fish.
- iv. Normal farming endeavours have been affected in some districts by the **planting of landmines on agricultural land**, notably in the Vanni and Jaffna Peninsula. Within current plans by the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE for demining, the clearance of agricultural land has been a low priority.
- v. Although hard to quantify, there are common reports that the **psychological effects** of the conflict, particularly of multiple displacement, have taken their toll upon the motivation of regular breadwinners to continue normal income generating activities.
- vi. Even if the population are available to work, the conflict has led to the **widespread destruction of industrial plants, the closure of ports and of other former sources of employment.**
- vii. The effective **embargo** imposed by the government on the LTTE-controlled Vanni, as well as **restrictions on the import of many items** to other conflict-affected areas have created serious obstacles for the development of industrial and agricultural enterprises.
- viii. The general level of family poverty caused by the above factors has led, in turn, to the **demise of local markets.** With many families relying on government rations, the demand for local produce has fallen with damaging effects for local farmers and fishermen. At the

same time, military restrictions hinder the transport of produce to markets outside many of the conflict-affected districts.

### **Migration**

Loss of income from traditional activities and the consequent impoverishment of many families has created pressures to find alternative sources of employment. In particular, it has led to the out-migration of workers in the north and east, principally to the Middle East region. Although this movement involves many men - who generally find work as labourers or in service industries – it is predominantly girls and women who leave their homes to live for a year or more in the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Their remittances from work as domestic servants is sent back for the support of the family.<sup>53</sup> The abuse which many endure from their employers is a well-known matter which, so far, has not merited the international attention it undoubtedly deserves.<sup>54</sup> It might be misleading to label such migration for domestic work as ‘trafficking’ but neither should it be seen as a comfortable option amongst a range of possibilities. In a society where women and girls do not traditionally venture far from their homes, this movement to the Middle East is clearly the product of immense hardship. Furthermore, it is facilitated by a well-organised network of middle-men who profit greatly from what often amounts to severe economic exploitation.

Although reliable data on the number of women involved in this work is not available, reports commonly suggest that a great many are mothers who have lost their husbands due to the conflict. Finding no other viable source of income sufficient for the support of the entire family, widows are thus obliged to leave their children to the care of others in order to travel overseas. Their work may ease the economic plight of the family. However, their absence often leaves children without a proper source of care and nurturance.

### **High price of basic items**

The transportation of goods into (and within) some of the conflict-affected districts of the country is often extremely difficult. This is due to five main factors:

- i. Government-imposed restrictions and quotas on basic items.
- ii. Practical problems and high costs of transport to inaccessible areas such as Jaffna and the Vanni.
- iii. The closure of border points due to fighting.
- iv. The physical risks to drivers and property.
- v. The poor state of roads in much of the north and east.

All of these problems create obstacles to the supply of food, medicine, fuel, books and other basic items, serving to push up prices. For example, a recent study conducted by CARE on food security in the LTTE-controlled Vanni found that the price of staples such as wheat flour was an average 10-12 Rupees per kilo higher in this location than in Colombo. During a period of intense military activity in 1999 this price differential became even greater. Similar differences were found for eggs, cooking oil, sugar and chicken. Only beef, fish and milk, all of which are locally-produced, were notably cheaper in the Vanni.<sup>55</sup> Kerosene prices, on the other hand, are widely reported to be around 800% higher in the Vanni, even after deduction of the transport costs involved. This clearly demonstrates the effect of government controls. As a consequence of the much higher price, ordinary citizens coming into this area struggle to carry with them large jerry cans full of fuel across the Forward Defence Line.

#### **IMPACT UPON CHILDREN: COMMODITIZATION**

This is a subject about which it is necessary to be cautious in making assumptions. Currently there are few reliable data on the scale of children's involvement in the labour market as a consequence of the conflict and its economic effects. In any event, we must bear in mind that child work / labour was a feature of Sri Lankan society prior to the start of the conflict and still exists today in areas of the country other than the north and east.<sup>56</sup> For these two reasons it is difficult to quantify with any precision the extent to which the conflict has created change.

Having said this, anecdotal evidence strongly and consistently suggests that, as a general trend, children in the north and east have become an increasingly important economic resource for their families due to the economic pressures created by conflict. Provisional findings from one study undertaken in

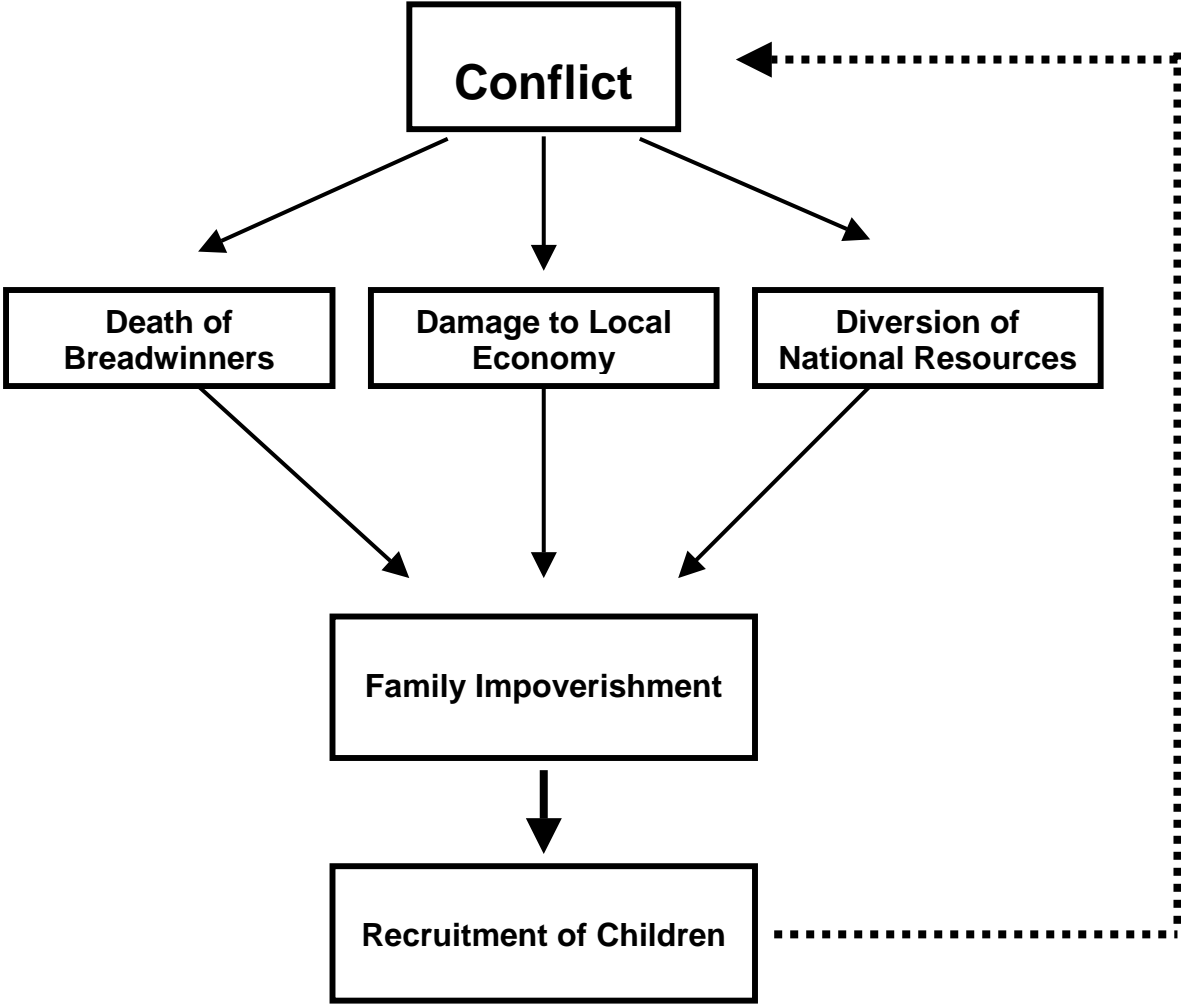
the eastern districts in 2000-1, indicate that children are engaged in considerable numbers in a wide range of occupations which include agricultural, domestic, construction and service industry work.<sup>57</sup> The rice mills in Polunnaruwa and Ampara Districts have been identified as common sources of employment for children from age 13 who engage in gruelling work full-time, in school holidays or seasonally in order to supplement the household income.<sup>58</sup>

In other areas, such as Vavuniya, where there are large numbers of displaced people living in welfare centres with few economic opportunities, local community workers report that children are involved in casual work which includes searching waste facilities for saleable items.

In addition, there are concerns in some organisations that children are being systematically trafficked away from areas of great deprivation, such as the Vavuniya welfare centres, for domestic and sex work. No data is available to indicate the scale of this phenomenon but it is clearly an issue that merits further, sensitive enquiry.

The involvement of children with the LTTE and other Tamil militia groups also has economic implications and might be seen as a form of commoditization of the young. Even though children may not receive a proper wage for their assistance to these groups, they will certainly be given some kind of reward, at least in the form of food, thereby reducing their burden on the household budget. Furthermore, their role and their death in the line of duty will bring economic benefits to their families in the shape of assured access to (increased) rations.

If we consider that the involvement with military groups might, at least in part, be a response to the economic deprivation created by the conflict in Sri Lanka we can appreciate one way in which children become implicated in the cycle of conflict. This is represented pictorially on the next page.



SECTION 3  
**PHYSICAL IMPACTS OF CONFLICT**



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This section explores the following issues:

- ◆ **HEALTH PROVISION IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS**
- ◆ **CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND NUTRITION**
- ◆ **CONFLICT-RELATED VIOLENCE**
- ◆ **ABUSE BY MILITARY FORCES**
- ◆ **ABUSE & NEGLECT WITHIN THE FAMILY**
- ◆ **ORPHANS**

## **HEALTH PROVISION IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS**

Current efforts to assess the affect of the conflict upon children's health are hampered for the following main reasons:

- i. weaknesses of national system for data collection on illness, injury & death<sup>59</sup>
- ii. common tendency not to disaggregate data by age, sex, and location
- iii. difficulties of communication, especially in the LTTE-controlled Vanni
- iv. lack of reliable population figures (by district)
- v. political sensitivities surrounding disclosure of figures for conflict-related casualties

For these reasons detailed national statistics are either not available or of questionable validity. However, in some cases, the material published by the government is helpful in echoing the impressions offered by health officials and workers who speak from first hand experience of health provision in the north and east.

Given the massive diversion of national resources to the defence budget, services across the country have inevitably suffered to an extent that cannot be clearly quantified. Current social indicators provided by UNICEF may be misleading in this regard, suggesting, as they do, that Sri Lanka is way ahead of other South Asian countries. These figures, such as an infant morality rate of 17 per 1,000 live births, are impressive in themselves but cannot tell us of the potential for further improvements that has been lost due to the pursuance of conflict.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the figures are national averages which conceal the variations between districts.

Visits to health facilities in the conflict-affected districts revealed a common picture of shortages of staff, medicines and equipment. The situation appeared particularly acute in the LTTE-controlled Vanni where government and army controls have created huge problems in obtaining regular and sufficient supplies of basic medicines and equipment.<sup>61</sup> This is in addition to the challenges created by limited power supplies and the high cost of cement for building purposes.

Senior staff at one of the main hospitals in the Vanni provided a picture of current circumstances in the delivery of health services to the local population. They claimed that the hospital is often left without vaccines for months on end and that when these do arrive there are no proper refrigeration facilities to keep them. As a



consequence, staff must rely on a local ice-cream salesman for cold storage, at least during the monsoon season when demand for ice-cream is low. In terms of sanitation, the high cost of cement, due to government restrictions on import, have made it impossible to build proper latrines. At present, the pits are lined with lime which lasts for only three months.

In addition, there are currently only three ambulances serving the entire population of the Vanni consisting of up to 380,000 people. Recently one international organisation provided a new ambulance to ease the situation. However, the government insisted that this be exchanged for an old ambulance. Thus the total number remained the same.

Overall, health workers reported a high incidence of death due to maladies such as malaria, tuberculosis, anaemia and snakebite for which preventative measures and routine treatments are often unavailable. Pregnancy and childbirth are also particularly hazardous due to a severe shortage of trained midwives. These observations are supported by government statistics for the rate of maternal and infant mortality in Kilinochchi District (in the Vanni), compared to the national average.

**TABLE 5: Maternal & infant mortality rates – Kilinochchi & the national average**

	<b>Maternal Mortality Rate (1996) per 10,000 live births</b>	<b>Infant Mortality Rate (1997) per 1,000 live births</b>
<b>Kilinochchi</b>	14.3	25.2
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	2.3	15.4

Source: Department of Health Services, 1999

Many of the problems reported in the Vanni were also noted by health officials in other districts of the north and east. Jaffna, in particular, suffers from difficulties of supply and of staffing. Although there is a well-established teaching hospital, the numbers of trainees are very low: according to government figures published in 1999, there were about half the number of trainee doctors and nurses here as compared to other such facilities in Sri Lanka.<sup>62</sup> Here the problems have been heavily compounded by the frequency of mass displacement and the high level of out-migration, especially amongst the professional classes.

The following table compares government statistics for Jaffna and Anuradhapura Districts from 1999 relating to hospital beds and staffing. Anuradhapura has been chosen because it is believed to have roughly the same

population numbers as Jaffna.<sup>63</sup> The intention here is to give an impression of basic provision in Jaffna in relation to another area of the country far less affected by conflict.

**TABLE 6: Comparison of hospital bed & staff numbers– Jaffna & Anuradhapura Districts**

	<b>Hospital Beds</b>	<b>Midwives (hospital &amp; public health)</b>	<b>Curative Care Specialists*</b>	<b>Nurses</b>	<b>Medical Officers</b>
<b>Jaffna</b>	2,011	105	14	325	147
<b>Anuradhapura</b>	2,624	422	27	502	216

\* This includes, for example, surgeons, paediatricians, physiotherapists & psychiatrists

Source: Department of Health Services, 1999

The apparently low numbers of beds and staff in Jaffna in comparison to Anuradhapura is particularly worrying given the inevitable extra need arising from the direct effects of conflict: displacement, military attacks on civilians, heavy presence of landmines, and so on. These limited facilities, which are reportedly inadequate during relatively peaceful periods, would be woefully insufficient at times of great violence and upheaval in the peninsula, such as the government offensive in 1995 and that of the LTTE in 2000.

## **CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND NUTRITION**

*CRC: Article 24 (selected paragraphs)*

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.
2. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures”
  - a. To diminish infant and child mortality
  - c. To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary healthcare, through, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution.
  - d. To ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers.

Evidently malnutrition is a major health issue for children in the north and east of the country. Recent studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that many children are suffering from the long-term effects of poor nutrition. This, in fact, begins before birth with the malnourishment and enfeeblement of many pregnant mothers – a

problem noted by health professionals throughout the north and east.<sup>64</sup> According to government statistics for 1998, 58% of under five deaths in these areas were due to short gestation periods and low birth weight.<sup>65</sup>

The particular reasons for malnutrition in the conflict-affected areas are believed to be as follows:

- i. loss of family income and consequent poverty
- ii. problems with transportation & delivery of government rations
- iii. insufficiency of rations
- iv. suspension of ration delivery due to the escalation of fighting
- v. interference with distribution of rations by LTTE & Tamil militias for political ends
- v. government / army restrictions on INGO nutrition interventions<sup>66</sup>
- vi. inaccessibility of normal sources of food: agriculture and fishing
- vii. need for widowed mothers to work, leading to early cessation of breastfeeding
- viii. mother's poor nutritional status affecting lactation
- ix. displacement discouraging long-term thinking about food sources
- x. army restrictions on the quantities of food stored by households<sup>67</sup>

Although no systematic, nationwide data collection has been conducted since the mid 1970s, local studies provide some insight into the effects of such problems on the nutritional status of children. For example, a study done in Jaffna by Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) in 2000 suggested a sharp increase in the incidence of malnutrition amongst under five year olds in comparison to the pre-conflict period. In 1975/6 only 3.7% of under fives were found to be suffering from acute malnutrition (wasting), against a national average of 6.6%. MSF's own study showed that, by 1999, the figure for Jaffna had risen to 18.9% while the most recent figures cited by UNICEF suggest a figure of 14% as a national average.<sup>68</sup>

Of particular concern to the MSF researchers was the extremely high incidence of wasting amongst children in the age range 6-17 months, which they estimated to be as much as 30.7%. The authors anticipate that such high levels of acute malnutrition amongst the youngest children may well lead to problems of cognitive development and, potentially, to mortality.<sup>69</sup>

Problems of malnutrition not only involve pregnant mothers and infants but affect the young at all stages of their physical and intellectual development. Several children in a recent study conducted in Batticaloa District stated that they often receive only one meal a day, a fact that discourages or prevents them from attending school and affects their powers of concentration. Some also suggested that they get depressed by the sight of other children enjoying food unavailable to them.<sup>70</sup>

**ACCOUNT 2: A father from Kilinochchi**

Mr S. is a 42 year old father of four children aged 6 to 17 from Kilinochchi. in the Vanni. Until February 2001 he and his family were living in temporary accommodation in Akkarayan, having been displaced from their home by heavy fighting. At the start of the year the main school in Kilinochchi and some health facilities were reopened and former inhabitants began to return. This was in spite of warnings from international organisations that the area was unsafe due to the presence of vast numbers of landmines.

Mr S. was amongst those who chose to move his family back to the site of their destroyed home. When explaining his reasons for this he said simply “in Akkarayan we had only the rations to live on and they weren’t enough. At least in Kilinochchi we have our land and we can produce some food for ourselves. I know about the landmines and I am worried for my children but if we stay in Akkarayan we will slowly starve to death.”<sup>71</sup>

In the Vanni the difficulties of assessing the scale of recruitment to the LTTE are compounded by the small stature of many children as a direct consequence of long-term undernourishment. Here the young routinely appear diminutive for their age. Thus, many of the apparent ‘child soldiers’ spotted by concerned observers may well prove to be at least 17 years old – the age at which the LTTE claims to start recruiting.

Inevitably many of the ailments suffered by children are a consequence of malnutrition, or aggravated by it. However, there are a number of health issues separate from this, which stem directly from the conditions created by conflict. As already mentioned, treatable problems, such as malaria, diarrhoea and respiratory illness are seemingly more likely to become fatal. This is due not only to the lack of medicines but also to the difficulties of reaching medical facilities. The journey from remote villages to the nearest hospital may be hampered by the lack of public transport and the poor state of roads. In addition, the Sri Lankan Army often imposes strict regulations on the movement of civilians, especially during the night. In rural areas of the east and in Jaffna District people in need of urgent medical attention after

dark must carry a hurricane lamp on their journey to hospital (torches are forbidden), and even then free passage is not assured. Stories abound of fatalities during the night resulting from conditions such as snakebite which require emergency treatment.

### **CONFLICT-RELATED VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

Regrettably there are no statistics available which indicate the total numbers of children who have died or sustained serious injury due to conflict-related violence. However, we can discern the principle ways in which death and injury occur, which are as follows:

#### *i. In combat*

The LTTE's practice of using children as combatants has led to the death and injury of many in the course of military operations. For example, on 24th December 2000, 14 teenage girls were amongst those killed in a battle between the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE at Kaithady near Jaffna Town, according to government sources. The precise ages of the girls were not known. An event such as this suggests that the young, including women, are active on the front line and highly susceptible to death and injury.

#### *ii. Bystander / collateral damage*

There is a clear tendency of the Sri Lankan Army to position its checkpoints and military installations in the eastern districts and in Jaffna close to educational and health facilities.<sup>72</sup> For example, according to statistics for Jaffna, as of March 2001 31 schools were located close to checkpoints and two schools were occupied by army forces.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, an army camp has been sited next to the main hospital in Jaffna.

The close proximity of the military to facilities used by children greatly increases the risks of injury and death to the young. Checkpoints are common targets for enemy attacks and there are accounts of children being hit by crossfire in gun battles. Claims have been made that, by placing military camps next to schools and hospitals, children and other civilians are being used as human shields and deliberately exposed to harm.

### *iii. Communal massacres*

Both sides in the conflict have been responsible for the massacre of civilians. Whole villages have been slain by military and paramilitary forces as well as by armed civilian groups caught up in a cycle of inter-communal revenge killings. Amnesty International provides the example of the 1990 disappearance and presumed massacre of over 160 residents of a cluster of hamlets near Batticaloa. This was conducted by Sri Lankan Army personnel and the victims included 68 children.<sup>74</sup>

Amongst the tactics employed by the LTTE, the indiscriminate killing of Sinhalese and Muslim villagers in border areas has figured often. For example, in May 1995 six children were amongst 42 civilians killed at Kallarawa, a village in Trincomalee District, during an LTTE attack.<sup>75</sup>

### *iv. Landmines*

The presence of landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and unexploded ordnances (UXOs) is a problem throughout the north and east, especially in the Vanni and in Jaffna Peninsula. In both these locations it is claimed that the incidence of injury and fatality has decreased greatly as a result of awareness campaigns, targeted particularly, but not exclusively, at children.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, there are still new incidents involving such explosives every month. In Jaffna, where the system of recording landmine and UXO incidents is most advanced, around five casualties per month have been recorded for the period March 2000-February 2001.

However, looking over the figures for the period 1985-2000 there is a wide variation which enables the discernment of trends. One notable feature of the history of casualties in Jaffna has been the sudden and sharp increase in casualties in the period following the major offensives of December 1995 (SLA) and April 2000 (LTTE). Presumably, at these times a large number of new mines were laid and a great deal of UXOs accumulated on open land. It would seem that the injuries were sustained by people returning to their homes following the cessation of heavy fighting, possibly unaware of the new dangers.

In some countries landmines have killed and injured children disproportionately. In Cambodia and Afghanistan, for example, this has happened largely due to children's particular responsibilities for domestic chores such as firewood and water collection which expose them to danger. The evidence from Sri

Lanka, however, does not indicate a disproportionate number of casualties amongst the young. The following table, based on statistics compiled in Jaffna, shows the rate of casualty by age and gender:

**TABLE 7: Landmine & UXO casualties in Jaffna by age & gender**

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
<b>0-4</b>	1	0
<b>5-12</b>	20	7
<b>13-17</b>	19	6
<b>18-35</b>	69	15
<b>36-59</b>	72	20
<b>60+</b>	12	3

Source: IMSMA, 2001

The marked disparity in casualty rates between males and females across all age groups suggests great differences in the kinds of activities and patterns of movement within daily life. The gap becomes particularly wide towards the end of adolescence when the constraints upon women's movement are likely to increase greatly.

In Jaffna and the Vanni, despite the clear marking of areas that are heavily mined and the wide dissemination of mine awareness materials, children continue to suffer injury and death.<sup>77</sup> Often young people are hurt or killed by playing with UXOs and live ammunition, which appear as shiny, interesting objects, especially to younger children. Furthermore, the pattern of planting mines and IEDs by the LTTE in an unpredictable manner, sometimes close to everyday facilities such as wells, creates particular dangers for civilians, including children. The risks from injury under such circumstances are obviously exacerbated by frequent displacement which forces large numbers of people to move to unfamiliar locations.

Currently both the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE are involved in demining major areas of contamination such as Chavakchcheri near Jaffna Town and Kilinochchi in the Vanni. However, they face a mammoth task to render these areas entirely safe. In the meantime, there are reports that further mines are being laid elsewhere and continued shelling assures a constant supply of new UXOs.

### *v. Bombs and shells*

The use of bombs and shells by both sides in the conflict has often targeted civilians. There have been well-known incidents involving LTTE-planted bombs in locations such as the Central Bank in Colombo, in which 150 civilians were killed and over 1500 injured, and the Temple of the Tooth, Kandy, in which two children were amongst the 13 pilgrims who died. However, these are only the best known such actions: during the period 1982-1998 there were around 50 separate incidents involving LTTE bombs and shells which caused the death of approximately 900 civilians.<sup>78</sup>

The Sri Lankan forces have also been responsible for large numbers of civilian casualties, due less to the use of planted devices than to aerial bombing. For example, in September 1999 more than 20 civilians, including two children, were killed by an air force attack on a market in Puthukkudiyiruppu in the Vanni. The number of incidents involving shells and bombs used by government forces during the period 1982-1998 was around 17 and the total number of civilian deaths roughly 400.<sup>79</sup>

## **ABUSE BY MILITARY FORCES**

### **Sexual abuse & harassment**

#### *CRC: Article 34(c)*

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

There are several instances of rape which have been widely reported, such as that of Jaffna schoolgirl Krishanthi Kumaraswamyin 1996 by SLA soldiers who subsequently killed her and other members of her family. In January 1998 the Supreme Court awarded compensation to a 15 year old girl who had been tortured and sexually abused by soldiers at an army camp in Batticaloa District in 1997.<sup>80</sup> However, due to the shame associated with sexual abuse and the consequent silence of many victims, the true scale of this phenomenon is impossible to gauge. Many community figures in the north and east express the certain conviction that rape and the sexual harassment of girls and, to a lesser extent boys, by military personnel is commonplace. In response to several reports of rape by security forces, Amnesty



International appealed to the President of Sri Lanka in April 2001, urging that she take action to prevent this and to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to cases of violent rape, many young women are believed to endure minor sexual harassment from security personnel on a fairly regular basis. This is often of a verbal nature and particularly hard to avoid given the close proximity of military installations to school and health facilities. In Vavuniya such abuse was widely reported by residents of the town's welfare centres who are obliged to pass through numerous military checkpoints everyday. Data from a child rights monitoring exercise conducted in Jaffna found that, in the year 1998-9, there were 45 cases of physical, sexual or verbal abuse of girls by soldiers.<sup>82</sup> It has been suggested, however, that the increased recruitment of women to the army and police force may have reduced the scale of this problem, particularly when women officers are positioned at checkpoints.

### **Arrest and torture**

#### **ACCOUNT 3: An 11 year old Tamil boy.**

“Two soldiers....threw me in a tub which had no water in it. I got up and ran to my mother at the gate. I held my mum and asked her not to allow them to take me. They snatched me away again. I was put against the wall and one of the soldiers kicked me with his knee in my stomach. I screamed. They took me behind their compound. There was a coconut tree. They tied my legs with rope and pulled me upside down. While hanging, I was beaten with netted [twisted] wire about six times. Then they let me down and tied my hands. I was beaten with sticks from the tulip tree.”<sup>83</sup>

Although the arrest and torture of children is not believed to be commonplace, as the above account illustrates, when it does happen it can involve extreme brutality. Amnesty International has reported several incidents of the arrest and torture of children, not only by government forces but also by Tamil groups fighting together with the SLA. The best known of these is PLOTE, which is alleged by Amnesty to run “at least three illegal places of detention where torture is routinely practised” in Vavuniya.<sup>84</sup> In Jaffna, during the first half of 1997, four children were amongst 37 people who were arrested separately and who subsequently “disappeared”.<sup>85</sup>

There would appear to be a particular likelihood for the younger siblings or offspring of known or suspected LTTE supporters to be targeted for such treatment by

the Sri Lankan forces.<sup>86</sup> This is in clear contravention of the following article of the CRC:

*CRC: Article 2, paragraph 2,*

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.

### **Forced Recruitment**

*CRC: Optional Protocol, Article 4, paragraph 1 [date??]*

Armed groups, distinct from the armed forces of a State, should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years

The most common abuse of children committed by the LTTE is their forced recruitment to serve in a support role or as combatants. It is generally believed that this has declined over recent years and that the majority of child members of the LTTE have joined up 'voluntarily', albeit with strong ideological encouragement. However, it has been alleged that at times of particular need, such as the 2000 offensive in the Jaffna Peninsula, children were forcibly recruited in considerable numbers.<sup>87</sup>

According to one local human rights organisation, recruitment activities around the time of this offensive focussed more on girls than boys. This is their account of the treatment of 20 girls who may have been recruited 'voluntarily' but who were subsequently held against their will:

#### **Account 4: The recruitment of 20 girls by the LTTE**

[They] were recruited recently from a school and were taken to a girls' camp. They were ordered to surrender their school uniforms and were given exercise slacks. The school uniforms were burnt in their presence. After a day, five of the girls aged 14 to 15 told the camp authorities that they wanted to go home. These girls were then isolated, taken to a room, stripped, mercilessly assaulted and pushed onto the ground. They were then trampled upon. This punitive violence was administered by senior girls.

The girls were then locked up. Three of them escaped when they had the chance. The remaining two were too frightened to escape. The escapees made it home after walking more than 24 hours in the jungle. The father of one of the girls feared that the LTTE would come looking for this daughter...He continues to keep her at home.<sup>88</sup>

As members of the LTTE, the young are subject to the same rigorous training and harsh living conditions as other cadres. They are also, reputedly, put under obligation to commit suicide by consuming cyanide, rather than risk capture.<sup>89</sup>

On the government side, Amnesty International confirms the verbal reports of local human rights workers that Tamil groups allied to the Sri Lankan authorities, such as PLOTE and EPDP are also engaged in forced recruitment.<sup>90</sup> This is believed to happen, for example, with children from the welfare centres of Vavuniya. Given that these organisations are armed by the government and act, effectively, as proxy militias, it is necessary to question the extent of the Sri Lankan authorities' avowed intention to recruit only men and women aged 18 years and over.

Further doubts about the government's sincerity may be raised in relation to the establishment of 'home guard' units in areas bordering the main conflict-affected districts. These forces are composed of local people, reportedly aged from 16 to 45, who are conscripted to undergo military training, then armed and used in a defensive role.<sup>91</sup>

To date there has been little public discussion of these less obvious forms of child recruitment which reportedly involve the government in some capacity. In the meantime, the LTTE's recruitment practices remain a major issue by which the Sri Lankan authorities and media seek to discredit the Tigers both domestically and internationally.

#### **ABUSE & NEGLECT WITHIN THE FAMILY**

It is hard to estimate the extent to which the conflict has increased the prevalence of domestic abuse and neglect since no baseline, pre-conflict data exist against which to measure change. Furthermore, it may be that the attention given to the conditions of family life as a consequence of the conflict has encouraged the discussion of behaviour that was previously commonplace but rarely mentioned publicly.

With these caveats in mind, it should be noted that children, health care professionals and social workers in the north and east frequently report neglect and abuse.<sup>92</sup> The following are often given as causes:

- i. The absence of mothers who have left the country in search of work
- ii. Mental problems caused by living in a situation of long-term conflict & multiple displacement
- iii. Alcoholism
- iv. Death of one or both parents leading to neglect from alternative care givers.

## **ORPHANS**

Given the lack of government census and other systematic demographic research since the early 1980s, it is impossible to know the numbers of children who have lost parents. In any event, most of the studies about the conflict in Sri Lanka employ the term 'orphan' to apply to children who have lost one or both parents – a usage not familiar to those for whom the term is restricted only to young people who are parent-less.

A study undertaken in Jaffna in 1998 for UNICEF and SC UK does, however, give some indication of the possible scale of this problem. Helpfully it also disaggregates the figures into categories of children who lost one parent as distinct from the parent-less. From a sample of 1250 children aged between 5-19, it transpired that a total of 10.2% were without one or both parents. Of these, 7.1% had lost their fathers, 1.3% their mothers and 1.8% were parent-less.<sup>93</sup> Regrettably this study does not give an indication of the cause of death, making it hard to estimate the full effect of the conflict.

The heavy loss of fathers is not, of course, restricted only to the north and east but also to the south where the Sri Lankan armed forces enlist their personnel. It would appear that little research has been conducted on the families of government military personnel who have died in the line of duty.

Traditionally the care of orphaned children in Sri Lanka is provided by the extended family rather than a dedicated institution.<sup>94</sup> However, there has been a notable increase in the number of orphanages in recent years. Within the Vanni alone there are currently eight homes under the aegis of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO). As of March, 2001 around 1,100 children were accommodated in these facilities. It should be noted, however, that many children do not enter orphanages due to the death of parents: other common reasons include poverty and the consequent inability of families to feed all members; parental abandonment or

migration in search of work; family separation due to the conflict; birth out of wedlock.

Visits to institutions in the Vanni and Batticaloa suggested that children were often better fed and enjoyed a greater chance of access to schooling than many of their peers living within families. However, some NGO personnel expressed concern that the existence of these facilities encourages parents to abdicate responsibility for their offspring. Furthermore, rumours abound that some orphanages in the Vanni may be used by the LTTE for the grooming of children for their own ranks.<sup>95</sup>

Similarly, the involvement of Christian organisations in the running of institutions in the north and east generates fears of religious indoctrination and conversion. In Colombo there are reports of homes created by Sinhala nationalists to accommodate children from Sinhalese villages in the east who have been orphaned or made destitute by LTTE massacres. The children who take up residence in these institutions are apparently liable to indoctrination and utilisation for propaganda purposes.

At a general level, there are growing concerns about the level of care offered by many children's homes. Seemingly the rules governing the establishment and running of such facilities are highly inadequate, leaving the way open for unethical businesspeople to make profits from the desperate circumstances of vulnerable children. The last investigation into the state of residential institutions was in 1990 and numerous facilities have opened since then.

Those children who remain with a lone surviving parent or are taken in by relatives may be subject to particular hardships. In the case of children who have lost their fathers there is not only economic hardship caused by the loss of the breadwinner but also the social stigma that attaches to widows in many Tamil communities.<sup>96</sup> Children who lose their mothers, on the other hand, may experience neglect from fathers who are not customarily expected to take a direct caring role. In addition, many widowed fathers choose to remarry which reportedly leads to a common sense of marginalization amongst children of the deceased woman.

It would appear that the lives of girls and boys are affected in different ways by the death of parents. For girls, the loss of either parent commonly increases the burden of domestic responsibilities upon them, especially if there are younger siblings requiring care while the remaining parent is out at work. Boys, in particular, may

pursue some form of paid employment upon the death of a father. However, it is not clear that the death of a mother necessarily affects their daily life as greatly as that of girls.

**ACCOUNT 5: A widow and her 7 year old son**

Lingeswaran is a child caught up in the midst of the conflict. His father was killed in crossfire in a Jaffna village. His twin suffered from diarrhoea and died due to the lack of medical attention. Another sibling was killed when a coconut fell on the child's head as the family was trying to take cover during an air raid.

Their house was burnt down and the family lost all their worldly possessions. After staying at a refugee camp for a while, his mother took the children back to the village, where they have been resettled.

Lingeswaran's mother is in her early thirties. As a widow, her status in the society is affected and she faces religious and cultural restrictions. She earns a living out of selling hoppers. It is hard work: she is up by four in the morning and her day ends at ten in the night.

She has three other children aged twelve, nine and two. She does not have enough time for her children, especially Lingeswaran who creates trouble simply to get her attention. He steals or destroys things and at times, even runs away from home. He cries profusely and sometimes hits his mother. At seven, Lingeswaran still wets his bed. The mother says that all three school-going boys display hyperactive behaviour.<sup>97</sup>

## SECTION 4

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL LIFE**

The issues to be explored in this section are as follows:

- ◆ **EDUCATION: ACCESS & EXPERIENCE**
- ◆ **LEISURE/PLAY**
- ◆ **RELIGIOUS & CULTURAL LIFE**

#### **EDUCATION: ACCESS & EXPERIENCE**

Analyses of the emergence of the current conflict in Sri Lanka commonly point to educational issues as central to inter-communal tensions. As several authors claim, serious concerns amongst many Sinhalese about the greater educational achievement of the Tamil population led to government-imposed quota systems for tertiary institutions. For Tamils, such restrictions have been amongst the clearest manifestations of Sinhalese discrimination.<sup>98</sup> It should be noted, in this regard, that many of the leaders of the militant separatist were from the generation of Jaffna Tamils whose educational prospects were adversely affected by policies introduced in the 1970s.<sup>99</sup>

Given this background, it is inevitable that education, including matters of access and of curriculum, should continue to be highly sensitive, holding the potential to fuel further resentment and mistrust, thereby extending the conflict.

Inevitably, the conflict itself has impacted directly on children's experiences of schooling and their access to educational facilities. At the most obvious level, military activities themselves prevent the normal functioning of schools and thereby interrupt children's education. A study conducted in Batticaloa District in 1995 found that 91% of children in the sample of year six students had experienced disruption of their education due to the conflict. The average length of time that they were unable to pursue their studies was between one and five months.<sup>100</sup> However, even at times of relative quiet there remain many obstacles to children's attendance at school.

## Access

### *CRC: Article 28 (selected paragraphs)*

States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- a. Make primary education compulsory and available free to all.
- c. Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means.
- e. Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

Recognising that school enrolment and attendance rates in the north and east have fallen dramatically over the years of conflict<sup>101</sup>, a number of local studies have been conducted to identify the possible reasons. Some of these are district-specific but most are noted by researchers across all locations and are evidently conflict-related.

### *i. Provision*

The most obvious cause of non-enrolment is the shortage of facilities within a reasonable distance of a child's dwelling. Lack of government funding for education, the destruction of buildings in fighting, and the appropriation by the armed forces of existing facilities have left large areas of the north and east with insufficient schools, spread too far apart. Particularly in remote villages of the east and in the Vanni, the lack of public transport compels children to walk for several hours each day in order to study. During the monsoon season students arrive at school soaked to the skin and must spend the day in wet clothes - hardly ideal conditions for serious work.

### *ii. Family economy*

Education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels is provided free of charge by the government. Nevertheless, in practice there are numerous costs of educating a child which must be born by his or her family. Given the distances involved for many villagers in reaching the nearest school there may be transportation expenses. Outlay is also required for the purchase of obligatory school uniforms, writing materials and other equipment. Lack of adequate nutrition also prevents children from attending school.

In some families children may be required to engage in some form of employment in order to support the household. This seems particularly likely in female-headed households, of which there are evidently many throughout the north



and east.<sup>102</sup> Girls in such households are commonly required to take over many of the mother's domestic responsibilities while she is at work, thereby preventing school attendance.

### iii. *Security*

Concerns about safety while travelling to and from school and during class are expressed by parents and children in many districts. The risks from sudden, localised fighting are an obvious source of worry. In so-called uncleared and partly cleared areas, such as exist particularly in the east of the country, there are fears that children will be harassed by government forces who interrogate them for their knowledge of LTTE movements.<sup>103</sup> Once at school there are often dangers due to the common practice of siting army installations close to educational facilities, a point mentioned earlier.

In Vavuniya Town and in Jaffna, both of which have a heavy presence of Sri Lankan soldiers, children must pass through several checkpoints to reach school. For displaced children in the welfare centres of Vavuniya this is especially disconcerting given the frequent reports of harassment. Furthermore, from the age of ten, young people in both locations are required to carry ID cards, the absence or loss of which can create serious problems for the child and his or her parents. The ID cards held by welfare centre residents in Vavuniya, including the young, must be renewed every month.

Interestingly, where such concerns about harassment by the military are uppermost, it is reportedly girls more than boys who still venture to school. Although there are often fears of sexual harassment, it would appear that girls are considered to be less at risk of being stopped and of being subject to physical harm.

For parents in the Vanni and in some parts of the eastern districts there are also concerns that their children will be recruited by the LTTE, either at school or whilst travelling. In one well-known incident, parents in the Vanni burned down the local school in order to prevent it being used for the recruitment of their children.<sup>104</sup>

In spite of these concerns about security, parents and children are often prepared to take great risks for the sake of schooling. For example, many of the families currently returning to their destroyed homes in the heavily mined town of Kilinochchi are eager to do so because of the re-opening of the main school.

*iv. Displacement*

The mass and multiple displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in the north and east has inevitably taken a huge toll on children's education. Not only are there problems of accommodating so many students in new locations, but continuity in studies may be lost. According to a report by SC UK "Displacement causes many children to lose as much as two years of schooling. If they do return, they may be unable to follow classes and withdraw, embarrassed that younger children are ahead of them."<sup>105</sup>

For those children displaced to areas where there are already government schools, there may be problems gaining access. Headteachers of under-resourced and overcrowded institutions are believed to use a number of different excuses to prevent new students from enrolling. This was widely reported in Vavuniya, in particular.



Displaced children at a school in Madhu. Due to the lack of furniture students must sit on the floor and use chairs as desks.  
© Howard Davies / Exile Images

#### *v. Bureaucracy*

It is often due to bureaucratic procedures that displaced children, in particular, are denied access to educational facilities. The most common cause is lack of birth certification. The birth of some children may never have been registered due to the circumstances of conflict at the time. However, for displaced families it is more often the case that such documentation has been lost or destroyed. A number of organisations, notably SC UK, have focussed efforts on this issue, both in practical and advocacy terms. Government directives about the non-admittance of children without certification have been changed recently. Nevertheless, in some schools this is still used by some headteachers as an excuse to deny access. In any event, children without such documents are commonly refused the opportunity to take examinations and to participate in inter-school sports events.<sup>106</sup>

#### **Experience**

In addition to all of the above challenges that children must face in gaining access to school, it is necessary to acknowledge that a minority simply prefer not to attend. This decision may be based upon their experiences of punishment and abuse by teachers. Although such behaviour is believed to be fairly widespread, there is a lack of research to show if the incidence of such behaviour is greater in the north and east than elsewhere in the country. It has been suggested that stress, frustration and low morale as a consequence of living with the effects of conflict may find expression in abusive behaviour, but this matter needs to be explored carefully.

Some children appear to believe that the pursuit of schooling is futile given the lack of opportunity once they graduate: far better to seek an immediate source of income. This was a point made, for example, by Tamil children who engaged in a research exercise in Batticaloa District conducted by Save the Children, Norway in 2000.<sup>107</sup> It would seem that the example of older siblings and neighbours may be important in this respect. Many graduates, having exerted themselves and overcome many obstacles in order to complete their schooling subsequently find themselves without opportunity for work or further study. Whether and to what extent this is perceived as the consequence of being Tamil within Sri Lanka is an important question that does not appear to have been asked of the young in any systematic way.

A further issue that merits careful exploration concerns the school curriculum and, most especially, the teaching of history (within ‘social studies’). An analysis of curricular content is outside the scope of this document. Nevertheless, several commentators have voiced alarm at the divisive nature of some texts and the lack of acknowledgement of the Tamils’ history and their contribution to the country . Nissan, for example, drawing upon the work of Perera, explains that:

“In Sinhala-medium schools the texts used for teaching Buddhism, Sinhala language and social studies were found to contain the most damaging messages for ethnic relations, conveying negative images of Tamils as the historical enemies of the Sinhalese... Tamil-language social studies texts themselves contain primarily a Sinhalese version of Sri Lankan history.”<sup>108</sup>

Educationalists in Jaffna offered the same observation and one commented that current school textbooks offer “a twisted version” of history, which, for example, suggests that prior to the 14<sup>th</sup> century there was no Tamil civilisation in Jaffna – a point strongly refuted, it seems, by Tamils themselves.

A further sense of discrimination concerns the support offered by the government to Tamil schools in contrast to those in Sinhalese areas. For example, teachers in several Tamil villages in the east described the problems that they had encountered in obtaining the annual supplies of school textbooks from the government. According to them, the authorities claimed that it was a problem of transportation from Colombo. They noted, however, that schools in neighbouring Sinhalese villages were receiving their books without the same delays, reinforcing the belief that they are deliberately discriminated against.

In Jaffna similar opinions were voiced with regard to the lateness and insufficient quantity of books being sent for school use. Examples were cited, such as the lack of the appropriate material for ‘O’ Level Maths. According to education officials, this has had a most detrimental effect on exam results which, at ‘A’ Level, have gone down by 20%.

The question, then, is to what extent children also share this sense of discrimination and the underlying belief that the government intends to de-skill and de-educate the Tamil population of Sri Lanka. Available studies offer little indication and yet, this is clearly an important issue as it could be amongst the factors that

influence both school non-attendance and, potentially, the decision to engage in military action.

#### **LEISURE/PLAY**

##### *CRC: Article 31, paragraph 1*

States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and to leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

As discussed, the obstacles to freedom of movement prevent children from gaining access to schooling and health facilities. In addition, such restraints also hinder the ability of the young to enjoy leisure and play activities in the company of their peers. The most obvious and consistent example of this is in Jaffna where the daily curfew, which in March 2001 lasted from 8pm until early morning, severely restricts the ability of children to play outside with neighbourhood friends.<sup>109</sup> According to one group of children, if there were no curfew they and their peers would be able to participate in sports meetings, to meet more freely for study and play, to eat ice-cream, and go to the temple. As it is, the conditions created by curfew lead to feelings of loneliness and boredom: they must study alone and rely on the television, where available, for entertainment.

In areas of the east with mixed populations living in close proximity to each other, children reported that they do not feel able to socialise with peers of different backgrounds. Aside from difficulties of language, a Tamil boy or girl attempting to socialise with a Sinhala child would invite the suspicion of the community that he or she is “pro-government”. In addition, some Tamil children reported that if they spent too much time visiting friends in neighbouring Tamil villages they might be identified by the Sri Lankan security forces as LTTE members.

Boys in one village, which lacked any open space for play, explained that they usually chose to spend their free time in the nearby jungle. This often led to punishment from parents who were fearful of the snakes and other dangerous animals living there. However, in the boys’ estimation such creatures were less of a threat than the Sri Lankan soldiers who harassed them when they played in open areas. The ideal location for play, the beach, had been declared out of bounds by the SLA. The girls, it seemed, did not leave the area of the village at all, except to attend school.

## **RELIGIOUS & CULTURAL LIFE**

### *CRC: Article 30*

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

### *CRC: Article 31, paragraph 2*

States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

In a situation of conflict the right of children to participate in activities which represent part of their own “culture” must be seen as a double-edged sword. On one hand, such participation may provide benefits for the child’s own sense of belonging and for his or her psycho-emotional well-being. Additionally, this is an area of social life in which children can make an important contribution to the benefit of the whole community. On the other hand, it is possible for cultural activities to become opportunities for the dissemination of narrow, nationalistic ideology that is arguably not in the child’s best interests at all and may only serve to deepen inter-communal antagonisms amongst a new generation. The ambiguous character of cultural / religious activities in Sri Lanka is illustrated by the following points:

### **The role of religious figures**

Although the research for this document did not encompass the role of Buddhist clergy in the daily lives of Sinhalese children, given the extreme nationalist views of some, their influence on the young may be worthy of further attention. Such concerns certainly appear justified in relation to a number of the Christian priests working in the north and east, especially in the Vanni. Locally-produced human rights reports and the accounts of key informants suggest that a minority of priests have chosen to adopt a highly partisan view and have become effective mouthpieces for the LTTE.<sup>110</sup> Given their position in the community, specifically in the educational and religious lives of children, the fact that they endorse the violent methods of the Tigers and speak in highly nationalist terms, should give cause for concern.

At the same time, it is also necessary to acknowledge the valuable role played by many priests and other religious figures who work tirelessly in their communities to support children. Many examples exist of protection offered to young people from the worst effects of the conflict by clergy who strive to impart a message of reconciliation and shared humanity at considerable personal risk.

### **Cultural activities as propaganda**

*CRC: Article 29, paragraph 1c.*

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate and for civilizations different from his or her own.

The distinction between 'culture' and 'propaganda' is often vague. The right of children to pursue activities aimed at the development of respect for their own culture is upheld in Article 29 of the CRC. However, in the Sri Lankan context such activities may run counter to the encouragement of respect for other cultures. One example of this are the versions of history contained in Sinhala-medium school textbooks which portray Tamils as threatening and as a constant cause of conflict. Another clear example are the events reportedly conducted by the LTTE with young people which involve the inculcation of nationalist ideology and the development of hatred and fear of Sinhalese people. While both might be labelled as 'cultural activities' they clearly mitigate against intercommunal respect and the resolution of conflict.

### **Language**

Discussions with children and young people living in 'border areas' of mixed population revealed that language was a major obstacle to the development of contacts between Sinhala and Tamil-speakers. One youth initiative in the area of Anuradhapura, recognising this fact, has devoted much of its energies to teaching children 'the other language' as a basic component of building inter-communal activities.

It would seem that in the majority of cases, children do not have the opportunity to master 'the other language' at school – arguably a consequence both of government insensitivity to the needs and aspirations of the Tamil population as well as the intransigence of Tamil leaders and educationalists. The result has been

particularly damaging for Tamil children who commonly lack the language skills necessary to progress fully in Sri Lankan society.

### **The role of children in the socio-cultural life of their communities**

Throughout Sri Lanka it would seem that there is a flourishing tradition of cultural performance. Far from destroying this tradition in the north and east, the conflict may have helped to encourage local initiatives, involving the young especially. Some groups, such as the Centre for Performing Arts, date back to the 1960s while others have been set up only since the start of the conflict, partly in recognition of the importance of such activities for the well-being of children and the wider community.

One good example of such an organisation is the Aesthetic Society in Akkarayan, a town in which a large number of displaced people from Jaffna and Kilinochchi reside. This local organisation, which was established in 1999, has attracted around 600 members aged 6-25 who participate in a range of cultural activities including visual arts, music, dance and theatre. Regular performances are held which attract large crowds from the local area eager to see the youngest members of the community display their skills in performing songs and dances which embody the traditions of Tamil expressive culture. Amongst a displaced population, in particular, the psychological and emotional value of witnessing children demonstrate continuity with the culture of home communities now lost is surely immeasurable.



SECTION 5  
**PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL ISSUES**

This section addresses the following issues:

- ◆ **THE SCALE AND NATURE OF THE PROBLEMS**
- ◆ **EFFECTS UPON CUSTOMARY FAMILY RELATIONS AND COMMUNITY VALUES**
- ◆ **CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES**

**THE SCALE AND NATURE OF THE PROBLEMS**

**Children in the south**

In any discussion of the impact of the conflict it is important to acknowledge that all Sri Lankan children, wherever they live in the country, are, to some extent, affected. This is not only a matter of resources being spent on the military rather than on social provision and welfare. As many observers have argued, on a fundamental level the minds and emotions of all children are influenced by militarization of the society. Children in Colombo and other towns live in an atmosphere charged with tension and suspicion resulting from bombings, assassinations and mob violence. Such events have occurred in everyday settings: in banks, shopping centres, temples, aboard buses and trains, in the streets where people live. Many areas of the capital and other towns in the south now have a heavy presence of army personnel, sandbags, barbed wire, and weaponry. Although life continues 'as normal' this is far from a healthy environment for the young.

For many Tamil children in Colombo, especially those displaced from the north and east by conflict, there are additional reasons to be fearful. Under emergency regulations introduced by the government, they and their families are obliged to register with the police. Should an incident such as a bombing occur, these 'police-registered Tamils' are liable to be rounded up and, it is claimed by many, subjected to abuse by the security forces. The effects of this precarious situation upon such children is a matter that does not appear to have been properly researched. Ken Bush has argued that they are members of "a particularly invisible sub-group".<sup>111</sup>

**Children in the north and east**

In the north and east the physical effects of the conflict and the challenges these create for children are all too obvious to the casual observer. Less apparent are the

wounds inflicted by violence and displacement upon their psychological and emotional state. Inevitably, children are not only affected by the conflict on a direct and individual level but also by the ways in which the conflict impacts upon their families and communities.

A central aim of many projects has been to protect the coherence of the family as the best place for a child to receive care. However, it is clear that many children live with relatives who are themselves overwhelmed by the economic, physical and psycho-emotional strains of conflict. Alcoholism, especially but not exclusively amongst men, is a central problem contributing to impoverishment, neglect and domestic violence. Families in which these and other problems exist may offer little comfort to children and possibly add to the conflict-related stresses upon them. The following quote comes from Professor Daya Somasundram, a mental health expert and resident of Jaffna:

“At an age where a child is not able to understand the full significance of events or conceptualize the permanency of loss or death, it is the parents, elders and teachers, who, by their behaviour, verbal or non-verbal cues, and natures of interaction, give meaning and interpret events for the child. If provided with a nurturing, secure and trusting atmosphere, one can expect the child to cope well.

But in the long term, where the disrupting and devastating events of the war continue, when no safe and secure haven is available for a child to settle down and when the parents are emotionally affected or worse, missing or dead, the child is put under enormous strain.”<sup>112</sup>

An innovative project aimed at assisting children most deeply affected by the conflict was started in Batticaloa in 1996. Between 1996-1999 the Butterfly Garden facilitated the healing of around 500 children through “play, artwork and earthwork”.<sup>113</sup> A report written about the project in 2000 included 20 case studies of children who have participated in activities at the Butterfly Garden. The studies reveal that all of these children have not only suffered the direct consequences of the conflict in terms of displacement, poverty and the death of loved ones but the majority contend with great difficulties in their home lives. The following account is fairly typical:

#### ACCOUNT 6: An 11year old participant at the Butterfly Garden

Shangar's family was displaced from their border village when it was attacked by the Sinhalese community...He now lives with his maternal aunt and a cousin sister. His father died in a terrorist attack in 1990 when he was very small. For the past four years his mother has worked overseas as a housemaid...His 13 year old brother lives in an orphanage in Batticaloa. Aunty was widowed when her husband was taken and killed by the army. Her 15 year old daughter lives at home, but her other two daughters live in the girls' residential home. At least 3 of his uncles were killed, two remaining ones are alcoholic.<sup>114</sup>

The impact of Shangar's painful experiences and his difficult home life is apparently seen in his behaviour. He is described as "a lonely child, uncommunicative and emotionally depressed" whose school performance is "generally poor" and who is seen by teachers "crying and fighting with other children."<sup>115</sup> Similar signs of deep unease are displayed by the other 19 children discussed.

#### **Effects upon customary family relations and community values**

It would seem that the conflict has not only impacted heavily upon particular families but has created challenges to the basic structures of family and community. Several local observers, especially in Jaffna, voice concern about the effects of heavy militarization upon children's perception of family member's roles and relative authority. They note, for example, the humiliation of parents, principally fathers, at army checkpoints which is witnessed by their offspring on an everyday basis. Obligated to descend from their bicycles and walk with their heads bowed, grown men, who otherwise assume a strongly authoritative role in the family, appear weak and powerless before heavily-armed young soldiers.

In some cases, the power of parents and older relatives to offer protection is disproved through children's personal experiences of harassment, arrest and punishment by military forces, which family members are totally unable to prevent. Such occurrences, it is believed, cause children to question the structure of the family unit and the authority of parents and other adult figures, including teachers.<sup>116</sup>

At the same time, there are also severe strains upon the maintenance of community networks due to multiple, mass displacement. Together, these developments may lead into a deeper questioning of the value system of the wider society. Residents of Jaffna commonly express anxiety that the conflict has created

doubt amongst the young about moral codes which, in turn, is leading to an increase in anti-social behaviour and in crimes such as robbery and sexual abuse.

## **CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES**

### **Trauma and PTSD**

Since the mid 1990s increasing attention has been given by international and local organisations to the psycho-emotional state of the young in conflict-affected areas of Sri Lanka and a number of studies have been conducted in different locales. However, there has been a tendency in such work to rely on indicators such as the Child Post-Traumatic Reaction Index (CP-TRI) and the UCLA Grief Questionnaire to assess the extent of trauma afflicting the young. The use of such tools has given rise to much debate amongst researchers and NGO personnel, both internationally and locally, who have expressed concerns for several reasons:

- i. The relationship between events and psycho-emotional response to those events is over-simplified (i.e. violent events cause traumatic reaction). Such an approach tends to leave little space for consideration of coping, resilience and mediating factors.
- ii. Research using these tools over-focuses on individuals and underplays the critical importance of familial and communal dimensions.
- iii. Interpretation of trauma, grief, depression, sadness is highly culture-specific – a fact not necessarily reflected in the employment of CP-TRI and similar tools.<sup>117</sup>
- iv. An approach which relies on these tools tends to medicalize and individualize problems which have root causes in social, economic, political and cultural phenomena: emphasis is placed upon the individual's experience of conflict while underlying structural violence is overlooked.
- v. The methods used may be intrusive and distressing to the subjects, and may create social stigma due to the subsequent application of medical labels.

Unquestionably, the psycho-emotional challenges to people in the north and east of the country are immense and pervasive. In order to assess these, however, it will be necessary to move beyond a medicalized, individualistic approach to one that is more holistic, family- and community-oriented and which takes local cultural conditions firmly into account. With regard to research with children it is vital to learn more

about the social context of their lives and the factors that mediate the ill-effects of conflict-related experiences. In particular, we need to learn more about the reasons why some children appear to cope and possibly come to terms with experiences that seemingly overwhelm the psycho-emotional lives of their peers. Family and community dynamics, residential location, gender, socio-economic standing, religious devotion, may be among some of the influential factors in this regard. It is also important to consider carefully the strategies that individual children adopt to deal with the challenges to their psychological and emotional well-being. There are clearly many issues here that merit primary research at the local level.

### **Children's capacities for violence and peace**

Shangar and his fellow participants at the Butterfly Garden are fortunate in that they receive the healing support of this unique endeavour. However, these are a small fraction of the thousands of children whose psycho-emotional lives have been affected. Numerous commentators and NGO personnel express great concern about the prospects of such children being capable of building and participating in a peaceful society where they do not resort to violent means to resolve problems.

In this regard, the results from a national survey of the attitudes of young people are intriguing.<sup>118</sup> This was conducted in 1999 and involved nearly 3,000 Sri Lankans in the age range 15-29, all of them unmarried. Just over 50% of participants are not, of course, 'children',. However, since they would all have been affected by the conflict, in some way, during their childhood, the current views of these older youth are also instructive. When questioned about the legitimacy of violence as a means for achieving people's aspirations, the responses by ethnic background and province were as follows:

**TABLE 8: Views of 15-29 year olds on the legitimacy of violence, by ethnic background & location<sup>119</sup>**

	<b>Proper</b>	<b>Not Proper</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
<b>Sinhalese</b>	31.5	62.4	2.9	3.1
<b>Tamil</b>	32.4	60.1	1.4	6.1
<b>Muslim</b>	22.0	71.3	1.0	5.7
<b>Western</b>	31.4	61.8	3.4	3.3
<b>Central</b>	21.0	72.9	1.9	4.3
<b>Southern</b>	29.6	64.3	3.1	3.1
<b>Northern</b>	25.6	68.9	1.2	4.3
<b>Eastern</b>	26.4	68.9	-	4.7
<b>North-Western</b>	34.4	60.7	2.0	2.9
<b>North-Central</b>	28.3	63.9	3.9	3.9
<b>UVA</b>	52.2	42.2	2.2	3.3
<b>Sabaragamuwa</b>	35.3	56.3	2.6	5.9

As this table suggests, there is very little difference between Sinhalese and Tamil respondents. Furthermore, in the areas most affected by the conflict, the northern and eastern provinces, the young people who participated in the survey were below the national average in terms of the number who saw violence as legitimate.<sup>120</sup>

This results of this limited survey should not, of course, be taken as a definitive statement on the views or intentions of young people in the north and east. Nevertheless, it does suggest that the link between experience and outlook may not be entirely straightforward. It would appear valuable to explore further the ways in which social and cultural factors mediate perceptions of violence and of appropriate behaviour amongst young people.

A clear relationship of causality between the experience of conflict and dysfunctional behaviour is also rendered questionable by examples of young people engaged in activities of a highly constructive and socially responsible nature. This is demonstrated in the work of a youth group formed in Trincomalee District with the assistance of ZOA Refugee Care, a Dutch organisation. The inhabitants of this Tamil village had been displaced 3 or 4 times, with loss of land each time. As a consequence of this and other effects of the conflict, many of the villagers were suffering from depression and lack of motivation, and alcoholism was becoming a big issue. The youth group, composed of 12-25 year olds, was formed for the specific purpose of

addressing these and other problems. Initially they were involved in the creation of pre-school care, and have moved on to address local brewing activities which are fuelling the heavy drinking of residents. They also encourage the village elders to think about ways of introducing other positive changes. From such concerted involvement, these young people are reportedly benefiting in psycho-emotional terms whilst offering hope and encouragement to older village residents. This might appear to be a role reversal from the general assumption that children are merely the passive recipients of parental and community care and protection.

At the same time, we must also acknowledge that children's experiences and the impact of these on their psycho-emotional state may be a factor in the decision to participate in military activity. For example, during discussions in a border village in the east, a group of mothers revealed that 15 of their children had, as they put it, "gone to the other side". By this they meant that the youngsters had chosen to leave the village by night and enlist with the LTTE. There was no suggestion that this had been forced. Rather, the mothers expressed the view that family problems and frustration at life in the community had added to the pressures of poverty in encouraging the young to take this course of action. The fact that their children had left for this reason had seemingly added to the sense of despair amongst villagers, thereby fuelling a vicious circle in their community. The implications of this extend far beyond this one small village to the conflict as a whole.

## SECTION 6

### CONCLUSION – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

In comparison to most other countries in the region, the situation of children living in areas affected by conflict in Sri Lanka has been fairly well researched. However, given that this conflict has endured for nearly two decades, and has impacted upon the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and their families in so many fundamental ways, there is still a great deal that remains unknown.

Much of the work that has been conducted until now has been both highly localised and issue specific. That is to say, there are a good number of studies which address one topic, such as school non-attendance or malnutrition, in one particular location without either explaining the wider context fully or giving an indication of how the results might be applicable to or differ from other locales. As a consequence it is not easy to see the vital linkages between apparently different phenomena and thereby build up an overall picture. For example, it is important to know how displacement, access to education and child trafficking, as issues, might be connected, or the relationship between family dispersal / breakdown and the recruitment of children. The picture that is received from much of the existing research indicates a series of problems without imparting a strong sense of children's lives as a whole, within which such problems are encountered.

In order to provide a meaningful account of young people's lives it is, of course, necessary to engage with them as genuine participants, to create the space for their own narratives. This, more than anything, is lacking from the majority of the material compiled so far, except in a tokenistic or decorative way. Even in the bleakest of circumstances, children's lives are more than a history of calamities. In a small way, this document has attempted to demonstrate that amidst the conditions of conflict, children are also actors, making decisions and taking action to contribute to their own welfare and that of their families and communities. Sometimes the choices and actions that they take, such as to join militant groups, may be unpalatable. However, understanding can only grow by sustained dialogue that aims to situate these choices and actions within the context of a child's daily life and discern the logic at play.

One further problem of much of the data that exists is the lack of disaggregation by gender, by age and by social class / profession. This kind of



information is surely crucial to ensure that any intended intervention addresses the needs of children more fully and accurately.

With these points in mind, I would suggest that the following issues, amongst many possible others, merit far greater consideration than has been afforded them to date:

**Landmine awareness**

Children's experiences and assessment of awareness activities

How do children identify dangerous areas & how do they negotiate these?

The threat of landmines at times of displacement

Attitudes of and towards disabled children and their integration within family and community

**Education**

The challenges of accessing school (including rural-urban focus)

Children's estimations of the current curriculum

The ideas of children and their parents about the value of education (including focus on age )

The role of teachers in schools in the north - east & their relationship with students.

Government supplies to the schools of different ethnic communities

**Psycho-emotional issues**

Children's understandings of and responses to the effects of long-term conflict upon the communities in which they live (e.g. alcoholism, depression, impoverishment)

Strategies employed by children for dealing with fear, grief, depression & stress

The particular pressures of displacement

### **Leisure/play, religious & cultural activities**

Relations between children of Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala background in the context of ongoing, low-level conflict

The role of children in maintaining and developing Tamil culture in circumstances of displacement

The effects of heavy military presence on children's educational, social and religious lives, including the use of curfew

The identification of 'safe space' for play

### **Health & nutrition**

The effects of government embargo on children's health in the north

Children's understanding of nutritional issues; their means of obtaining food

The link between nutrition and school attendance / performance

Displacement and hygiene

### **Displacement**

The challenges for Tamil children in Colombo and the protection of their rights

The connection between displacement and the trafficking of children

The effects of repeated displacement and return; the understandings of this amongst children and their strategies for re-ordering their lives in new locations

### **Recruitment**

Attitudes of children towards military action

Relationship between recruitment and family & community dynamics

Children's lives in a 'grey zone'

Ways to avoid pressures of recruitment

## APPENDIX – A NOTE ON SOURCES

This document is based on a range of sources: interviews, published literature, internal documents of UNICEF and other organisations, and material published on the Internet. The strengths and weaknesses of the sources utilised in pursuit of this project may be summarised as follows:

### i. Published literature

Due to lead-in times, even the most recently published literature does not include consideration of events in the last two years. This is a big drawback for the discussion of an ongoing and rapidly changing situation of conflict. Furthermore, due to the relative lack of interest in Sri Lanka internationally, academic books tend not to be re-printed and are, therefore, often hard to obtain. The material published by the Minority Rights Group and Conciliation Resources was, however, readily available and invaluable in providing an overview of the conflict.

Overall, the published sources reveal a number of disparities in terms of basic statistics regarding, for example, casualty figures and the economic costs of the war. I suspect that this may partly be accounted for by the unavailability or unreliability of the government's own statistics: a consequence of three main factors:

- difficulty of access to the north and east
- lack of established systems for data collection (notably in hospitals)
- political considerations with regard to the sharing of certain information
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### ii. Internal documents

Most of the reports and documents produced by UNICEF and other organisations provided **either** a generalised account of the situation with little cited evidence to support particular statements **or** very localised accounts of certain phenomena at specific moments. These latter reports provided useful glimpses of important issues but were insufficient for the discernment of the wider situation, both in terms of children's lives as a whole and changing conditions across the north and east.

### iii. Interviews

These provided an invaluable means to identify key issues and cross-check information. Overall, there were notable differences in the accounts offered by interviewees in Colombo and those provided by people in the conflict-affected areas themselves. Clearly political and ethnic background were of salience here, in addition to physical distance from the conflict. Informal discussions with children were not always easy to organise but most helpful. I am especially grateful to the young people who shared their ideas and experiences with me and to those individuals and organisations who facilitated our meetings.

### iv. Internet

A range of useful data is currently available on the Internet. The latest statistics of institutions such as SIPRI (regarding weapon expenditure) and reports of human rights organisations were easily accessed. Although it is possible to obtain much information from journalistic sources in Sri Lanka via the Internet, due to the highly partisan nature of the press (both Sinhala and Tamil) these are of questionable value.

**ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the draft conclusions by the Presidency (Sweden) of EU meeting on CAAC, 1-2 March, 2001 in Norrköping, Sweden. Unpublished document

<sup>2</sup> Nissan E. (1996) *Sri Lanka: a bitter harvest* Minority Rights Group International, London page 10

<sup>3</sup> 1946 census figures, cited in Bastian S. (1986) *Statistical Guide on Ethnic Groups in Sri Lanka* International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo. More recent figures, based upon the 1981 census suggest that the Sinhalese constituted 74% of the population, Tamils (Sri Lankan and Up Country) 18.2% and the Muslims 7.1%. Nissan 1996:9

<sup>4</sup> Cheran R. (1992) 'The Cultural Politics of Tamil Nationalism' in *South Asia Bulletin* vol. XII. No. 1. page 46

<sup>5</sup> Wilson A. & Chandrakanthan A. (1998) 'Tamil Identities and Aspirations' in Armon J. & Philipson L. (eds) *Demanding Sacrifice: War & Negotiation in Sri Lanka* Conciliation Resources, London page 70

<sup>6</sup> Nissan, op. cit. page 11

<sup>7</sup> Nissan E. (1998) 'Historical Context' in Armon & Philipson op. cit. page 13

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Schwarz W. (1988) *The Tamils of Sri Lanka* Minority Rights Group, London page 4

<sup>9</sup> Nissan, 1996: 36

<sup>10</sup> This was made explicit in the constitution introduced in 1972.

<sup>11</sup> At the time of independence the Sri Lankan Tamils constituted roughly 10% of the population but had 31% of the places in universities. Schwartz, 1988:9

<sup>12</sup> de Silva, C.R. (1975) 'Weightage in university admissions' *Modern Ceylon Studies* Vol. 5 page 166, quoted in Nissan, 1996:13; Schwartz notes that "In 1911, 4.9% of Ceylon Tamil males were literate in English, compared with 3.5% of the (Kandyan) Sinhalese males." (1988:7)

<sup>13</sup> In 1972 the Centre for National and Tamil Affairs (CINTA) provided the following figures to the International Commission of Jurists to demonstrate the large demographic changes in the north and east which had been effected by government re-settlement policy:

	<b>Sinhalese population 1953</b>	<b>Sinhalese population 1971</b>	<b>Increase of Sinhalese in Tamil Areas</b>
<b>Jaffna</b>	6,183	20,402	14,219
<b>Batticaloa</b>	31,174	94,150	62,976
<b>Trincomalee</b>	15,296	55,308	40,192
<b>Puttalam</b>	31,587	309,298	277,711

Cited in Schwartz, 1998: 10

<sup>14</sup> Wilson and Chandrakanthan, 1998:72

<sup>15</sup> Examples of this include the 1958 Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act which was not properly implemented and the weak clauses regarding discrimination in the 1972 Constitution. See Nissan, 1996

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Amnesty International, (1999) *Sri Lanka: Torture in Custody* page 6

<sup>17</sup> For a highly personal account by one young Tamil man of these events see Selvadurai S. (1995) *Funny Boy* London:Vintage

<sup>18</sup> 1996:16

<sup>19</sup> Vijayavardhana D. (1953) *The Revolt of the Temple* Colombo: Sinha Publications page 4

<sup>20</sup> Schwartz, 1988:6

<sup>21</sup> Taken from a statement made at the 1951 All Ceylon Buddhist Congress. Cited in Liyanage P. (1998) in Armon & Philipson op. cit. page 66

<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that there are also Buddhist monks, albeit a minority, who have taken an active role in efforts at inter-community dialogue and peace-building, often at great personal risk.

<sup>23</sup> 1998:67

<sup>24</sup> In 2000 a US Department of State report claimed that the conflict had caused the death of approximately 60,000 people. In 1997 the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies estimated that the total deaths from the conflict since 1983 were in the region of 78,000 to 100,000. Both figures cited in *Armed Conflicts Report 2000* (<http://www.ploughshares.ca>)

<sup>25</sup> Information taken from Nissan, 1996; Armon & Phillipson, 1998; ARC, 2000

<sup>26</sup> Deaths as a consequence of the general situation created by the conflict are discussed later.

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- <sup>27</sup> www.idpproject.org
- <sup>28</sup> NPC / MARGA, (2001) *Cost of the War in Sri Lanka* page 14
- <sup>29</sup> US State Department figures. February, 2001
- <sup>30</sup> *Armed Conflicts Report 2000* (<http://www.ploughshares.ca>)
- <sup>31</sup> *The Economist* 7.10.00
- <sup>32</sup> *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 19.7.00
- <sup>33</sup> *The Associated Press* 30.4.00, cited in *Armed Conflicts Report 2000* (<http://www.ploughshares.ca>)
- <sup>34</sup> It should be noted in this regard that roughly one third of the Tamil population of Sri Lanka now resides outside the country. (Gunaratna R. (2000) 'Sources of Arms Supplies to the LTTE: Successes and Failures of the Sri Lankan State' in Bannerjee D. (ed.) *South Asia at Gunpoint* Colombo: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies page 60
- <sup>35</sup> Gunaratna, 2000:60
- <sup>36</sup> According to Gunaratna, "80-90% of the personal weapons held by the LTTE were recovered during raids on Sri Lankan strategic camps." (2000:66)
- <sup>37</sup> *ibid.* pages 66-70
- <sup>38</sup> Armon & Phillipson, 1998:85; Gunaratna, 2000:61;
- <sup>39</sup> SIPRI Yearbook, 1999
- <sup>40</sup> In comparison, Pakistan, the country with the second highest per capita outlay on arms maintained its level of spending almost constant during this period, at around \$28. Both of these countries far outspend other South Asian countries: India (\$9.45); Bangladesh (\$4.50) and Nepal (1.74). All of these figures are for 1997.
- <sup>41</sup> NPC / MARGA, 2001:14
- <sup>42</sup> NPC / MARGA, 2001:15
- <sup>43</sup> NPC / MARGA, 2001
- <sup>44</sup> NPC / MARGA, 2001:16
- <sup>45</sup> NPC / MARGA
- <sup>46</sup> For discussion of these issues see Arunatilake et. al. (2000) *The Economic Cost of the War in Sri Lanka* Colombo:Institute of Policy Studies page 24-27
- <sup>47</sup> World Bank (2000) *Sri Lanka: Recapturing Missed Opportunities* page 30
- <sup>48</sup> According to estimates by senior education officials in Akkarayan, there is currently a shortfall of 1,500 teachers within an area that covers only half of the LTTE-controlled Vanni. Many of the vacancies are currently taken up by volunteers for whom there are not the funds to provide training. Furthermore, a chronic shortage of basic furniture compels many children to sit on the floor during lessons.
- <sup>49</sup> Problems of staffing are not only the result of underfunding by the government. However, this is one important factor since it affects the training of new staff, while low wages certainly make work in the conflict-affected areas an even less attractive prospect. The problem of staffing is so acute that, for example, a senior medical officer in Jaffna reported that it has been necessary to raise the retirement age of medical staff in order to maintain levels. Personal communication.
- <sup>50</sup> In Jaffna and eastern districts the Jaipur Foot Centre, a local NGO, has taken the lead in providing prosthetic legs for landmine victims. The White Pigeon Institute fulfils a similar function in the LTTE-controlled Vanni.
- <sup>51</sup> CARE, (2000) *Household Livelihood Security Assessment Report* unpublished report
- <sup>52</sup> CHA (1998) *Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies Yearbook 1997*. Cited in Bush K. (2000) *Stolen Childhood: The impact of militarized violence on children in Sri Lanka* unpublished report
- <sup>53</sup> A recent newspaper article claimed that in 1996 the remittances sent home by Sri Lankan maids amounted to \$763 million, which was more than that year's foreign earnings from tea. Ha'aretz, 14.6.01
- <sup>54</sup> This author is personally familiar with the circumstances of Sri Lankan maids in Jordan many of whom are routinely exploited and subsequently thrown in prison when their employers wish to terminate their employment.
- <sup>55</sup> CARE, (2001) *Food security for conflict affected areas in Sri Lanka: situation in Wannu* unpublished report
- <sup>56</sup> Recent studies undertaken by INASIA describe children's involvement in a range of occupations including the sex trade, drug-dealing, domestic, factory, agricultural-fishing and service sector work in areas such as Colombo, Kandy and in various village locations. Colombo, 2000
- <sup>57</sup> Save the Children Norway, personal communication.
- <sup>58</sup> Ananda Galappatti, personal communication

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- <sup>59</sup> This is a point acknowledged by the Department of Health Services (1999) *Annual Health Bulletin* page 21)
- <sup>60</sup> Figures for Sri Lanka taken from UNICEF website: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)
- <sup>61</sup> Bush reports that in May 2000 the surgery of one hospital in the Vanni and two departments in another were closed temporarily due to a severe shortage of supplies. (2000:10)
- <sup>62</sup> Department of Health Services, 1999:79
- <sup>63</sup> According to the Department of Health Services both districts have a population of between 750-950,000 people (1999:viii). Since detailed statistics are not available, dependence on such rough calculation is unavoidable.
- <sup>64</sup> One recent study conducted in the welfare centres of Jaffna District found that as many as 50% of pregnant women were anaemic. Dr Sivarajah, University of Jaffna, Personal Communication
- <sup>65</sup> Ministry of Public Administration, Home Affairs and Plantation Industries (1998) *Child and Maternal Mortality in Sri Lanka*
- <sup>66</sup> For example, an initiative by the Norwegian Red Cross in 1990 to bring nutritious biscuits into conflict-affected areas for consumption by children was, according to reports, blocked by the Sri Lankan authorities.
- <sup>67</sup> Villagers in Batticaloa and Ampara Districts reported that the army allows them to store no more than one kilo of rice and one measure of sugar for fear that they will supply the LTTE. Therefore, they must go to the shops daily, a particular problem during periods of fighting. In addition, shopkeepers are subject to controls and checks. Consequently, the maintenance of sufficient stocks of basic foods by households is a particular challenge.
- <sup>68</sup> Taken from UNICEF website [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)
- <sup>69</sup> MSF, (2000) *Rapid Nutrition Survey of Internally Displaced Children Under 5 in Camps, Jaffna, Sri Lanka* unpublished report page 3
- <sup>70</sup> Save the Children Norway, personal communication
- <sup>71</sup> Personal communication
- <sup>72</sup> According to a senior SLA source in Jaffna, the army maintains a close presence to schools in order to insure that LTTE activists cannot gain access to conduct propaganda and recruitment activities. Personal communication with Brigadier Commander Rubasinghe.
- <sup>73</sup> Note from Zonal Director of Education, Jaffna to UNICEF, 22.3.01
- <sup>74</sup> Amnesty International, (1998) *Children in South Asia: securing their rights* page:37
- <sup>75</sup> Amnesty International, 1998:35
- <sup>76</sup> It is estimated that the UNICEF / UNDP awareness campaign conducted in Jaffna has led to a 62% reduction in casualties. Personal communication with UNICEF staff.
- <sup>77</sup> The evidence of casualties from landmines, IEDs and UXOs in the eastern districts is unclear. No system of recording specific incidents, as used in Jaffna and the Vanni, currently exists. According to anecdotal evidence from health workers and local NGO staff such devices have caused the death and injury of civilians, including children. However, the numbers are not known.
- <sup>78</sup> Figures taken from NPC / MARGA, 2001
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid
- <sup>80</sup> Amnesty International, 1999:12
- <sup>81</sup> Amnesty International press release, 04.04.2001
- <sup>82</sup> SC UK (1999) *Data Analysis of Children, Jaffna District 1998-1999* unpublished report
- <sup>83</sup> Taken from Amnesty International, 1998:32
- <sup>84</sup> Amnesty International, 1999:13
- <sup>85</sup> Amnesty International, 1997:Appendix A.
- <sup>86</sup> Sri Lankan army personnel, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed my suspicions about this point.
- <sup>87</sup> Amnesty International claims to know of children as young as 12 who have been recruited against their will by the LTTE (1998:40)
- <sup>88</sup> University Teachers for Human Rights – Jaffna, (2000) *The Sun God's Children and the Big Lie* July, page 4
- <sup>89</sup> Da Silva H. (2000) 'Sri Lanka' in Schwartz-Kenny B. et al. (eds.) *Child Abuse: a global view* London: Greenwood Press pages 228-230
- <sup>90</sup> Amnesty International, 1998:40
- <sup>91</sup> University Teachers for Human Rights - Jaffna, 2000:15
- <sup>92</sup> Save the Children Norway, personal communication; SC UK 1999; discussions with education officers, Jaffna
- <sup>93</sup> UNICEF / SC UK, (1998) *School-aged children in Jaffna District* unpublished report

- <sup>94</sup> UNICEF/MARGA, 1996; Wijeyeskera A. n.d. *The Problem of Unaccompanied Children in Sri Lanka: an overview* UNICEF unpublished report
- <sup>95</sup> UTHR (J), 11.7.2001
- <sup>96</sup> Shanmugam, G. (1999) *Rebuilding Lives: a new beginning – war widows and their children* Save the Children, Norway
- <sup>97</sup> ibid pages 78-9
- <sup>98</sup> See, for example, de Silva, 1975; Nissan, 1996 & 1998; Schwartz, 1988
- <sup>99</sup> Nissan, 1998:15
- <sup>100</sup> Chase R. et al. (1999) 'Mental Initiatives as Peace Initiatives in Sri Lankan schoolchildren affected by armed conflict.' *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* vol. 15
- <sup>101</sup> A study conducted for SC UK / UNICEF in 1998 found that 20.1% of children from a sample of 1250 were not attending school.
- <sup>102</sup> This is evidenced by studies conducted in Batticaloa District (SCF –UK, 1996) and Jaffna District (SCF – UK & UNICEF, 1998).
- <sup>103</sup> At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that in some locations and at some times, military personnel may assist children in getting to school. Tamil villagers in the east reported that local soldiers sometimes give their children a lift on the long road to the nearest school.
- <sup>104</sup> Bush, 2000:14
- <sup>105</sup> SC UK, (2000) *War Brought Us Here* page 120
- <sup>106</sup> Research conducted by SC UK in Trincomalee District in 1997 revealed that around 5% of school children lacked registration documents. The majority of these were Tamils who had been displaced. Personal communication.
- <sup>107</sup> SCN, personal communication
- <sup>108</sup> Nissan, 1998:36; Perera S. (1991) *Teaching and Learning Hatred: The role of education and socialization in Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of California
- <sup>109</sup> Personal communication with around 50 children aged between 5 and 16 in Jaffna Town.
- <sup>110</sup> See, for example, UTHR (J), 11.7.00. My own information on this matter came from interviews conducted on condition of anonymity.
- <sup>111</sup> Bush, op. cit. page 16
- <sup>112</sup> Somasundram D. (1999) *Scarred Minds: the psychological impact of war on the Sri Lankan Tamils* Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Bookshop page 148
- <sup>113</sup> Chase R. (2000) op. cit.
- <sup>114</sup> Ibid pages 60-61
- <sup>115</sup> Ibid
- <sup>116</sup> Somasundram D. (2000) *Psycho-social needs: a report for the framework for relief, reconciliation and rehabilitation* unpublished report
- <sup>117</sup> A 1996 study undertaken with 170 sixth grade children (average age 11 years) in four separate locations in Batticaloa District, found that roughly 20% displayed signs of conflict-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>\*</sup> Using the UCLA Grief Questionnaire to explore the extent of participants' grief and depression, the researchers determined that roughly the same proportion (20%) had recently experienced feelings that life was not worth living and several of these expressed "suicidal ideation". However, the discussion of suicide rates in conflict-affected populations needs to bear in mind that the everyday incidence of suicide varies greatly between countries. Sri Lanka, as a whole, has one of the highest rates in the world: suicide is a far more common response to psycho-emotional turmoil here, whatever the cause, than in most places. Indicators like the UCLA Grief Questionnaire do not necessarily take account of the specificities of cultural context such as this.
- <sup>\*</sup> Chase R. et al. (1999) 'Mental Initiatives as Peace Initiatives in Sri Lankan schoolchildren affected by armed conflict.' *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* vol. 15
- <sup>118</sup> CASS, University of Colombo (2000) *National Youth Survey – overview report*
- <sup>119</sup> Ibid page 17
- <sup>120</sup> Interestingly, youth in those areas which were centres of the JVP-led armed struggles in the 70s and 80s – North-Western Province, UVA and Sabaragamuwa – expressed the greatest acceptance of violent methods.