

GOODWILL SOCIAL WORK CENTRE, MADURAI,INDIA

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS CENTRE

Promoting the value of Peace as a Child Right

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History tells us that many a bloody war was fought the world over and many tribes suffered resounding defeats. Many nations waged war and the victors prospered and the vanquished suffered human and material losses. Even in the present century, war has become an endemic disease in many nations where children in particular are the victims of human blunders and criminal negligence. Most importantly, war on terrorism is being fought tooth and nail by both developed and developing nations and many a hapless human being becomes victims of horrendous activities spewed by terrorists.

While great advances have been made in protecting the world's children against some of the principal deficiency diseases it is a sad fact that no strides have been made in protecting the children from two dangerous diseases: war and violence. War is emerging as a major cause of child mortality in many countries of the world today. According to UNICEF's report on the State of the world's children (1995) in the last decade, 2 million children have died in wars, 4.5 million physically disabled by wars, more than 5 million forced into refugee camps and more than 12 million children left homeless. Most wars were and have been conducted with armies fighting armies, and soldiers fighting soldiers, between formal governments and rebel outfits and between nations. Since World War II, many large and small wars have been fought and 80-90% of the civilian casualties were children. While many countries are beset with the problems of child labor, female infanticide, child abuse and neglect, there are countries where many children become victims of war. In these wars, the major targets were the civilians. For these children, Wars interrupt the biography of children and their right to childhood is endangered. They are not assured of their right to life, survival and development. In war-torn countries day to day activities are paralyzed. Parents do not know whether they can send their children to school and even if their children are sent to school, they do not know whether their children will return home at the end of the day.

The introduction to the United Nations study of the impact of armed conflict on children, led by Graca Machal, emphasizes that millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are 'not merely bystanders, but deliberate targets'. They are 'slaughtered, raped, and maimed.exploited as soldiers... starved and exposed to extreme brutality'. Because of the length of recent conflicts, many children have lived in the midst of 'unregulated terror and violence' their entire lives, experiencing 'multiple and accumulative assaults'. (1996).

War has been a major preoccupation with man in these century-two world wars and 140 or lesser wars since the second. The world had witnessed world war type situation in

Kosovo in 1999, which became more 'sophisticated' and horrendous. "O war, thou son of hell " William Shakespeare's lamentation today rings even more accurate a warning than four centuries ago".

The great Frenchman Victor Hugo who made a pronouncement with the following words more than one hundred years ago at the Peace Congress in Lausanne, Switzerland, a slogan beneath which every peace loving person who values his/her peaceful life and peace for his/her children would sign 'WE WANT PEACE, PASSIONATELY WANT PEACE. PEACE FOR ALL PEOPLE, FOR ALL NATIONS, FOR ALL RACES'. Late Thomas Jefferson, the outstanding American democrat had had a dream of 'peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations'. Unfortunately, peace as a 'value', a 'virtue' and a 'force' seems to have been forgotten by humankind over the centuries. To quote from the book 'May you live in peace' written by Vladien Kachanov (1986)'if durable peace has not triumphed on our planet yet, it is not the peoples of the world who are at fault, but those who aspire to increase their wealth by seizing and exploiting others lands and by producing instruments of annihilation'? 'To work for peace is the concern of all individuals and of all peoples. And because everyone is endowed with a heart and with reason and has been made in the image of God, he or she is capable of the effort of truth and sincerity which strengthens peace' (Pope John Paul II, 1980)

How can peace work at it within the children? Mahatma Gandhi said, "If we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children"

1. To help children understand and cope with violence in their immediate world and see alternatives to that violence.
2. To grow in an understanding of the "war mentality" in our culture and find ways to circumvent it in our families and
3. To explore ways to build a mentality of global interdependence within families.

Most importantly, children of the world should be inculcated the value of peace. The acquisition of peace as a value, instrumental and terminal, should become an integral part of the socialization that begins at home and extends to school, community and nation. They need to be educated on the importance of peace and peace making. That helps develop in them a spirit of sharing and cooperation. The development of human society is ultimately built on and sustained by the value of peace imbibed by people during their formative years. Unfortunately, peace as a value is fast becoming dearer to the present day children!!

Of course, peace marches, meetings and walks are organized for school children to proclaim every child's right to peace. But they are not enough. Peace education should be imparted to all school children. And that should include development of knowledge, skills and attitudes for the realization of a humane and peaceful world. It should aim at eliminating war and promoting peace and developing world-mindedness among children .In The Hague Appeal for Peace Conference in held in The Hague in 1999, it was

deliberated and discussed the issue of making peace education compulsory in all schools around the world.

Schools should accept this as a social and moral obligation, particularly when the bomb and gun culture is spreading. Interested and capable teachers must be motivated and trained. Every State party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child(1989) on its part, must allocate funds for peace education and establish an academy of peace to administer and monitor the programme. The present school system has no component pertaining to peace education in the curricula. Nor have the State parties felt the need for making it obligatory. Such education should include peace as a 'value', the history of international conflicts and cooperation, the attitude towards the United Nations, the economics of peace, and the role of children, teachers and parents in promoting 'peace'. To quote from 'PEACE MAKERS'-A newsletter of the Hague Appeal for Peace (Vol 3.Issue 1;January 2000)'Every school, no matter what its geographic location, state or religious affiliation, whether for boys or girls or both, teaches reading, writing and arithmetic as basic educational skills. In English they are referred to as the "Three 'R's." Why not a fourth 'R'? -Reconciliation. You might not consider peace, or reconciliation or conflict resolution a skill in the same category as addition, but, we argue, without the skills of negotiation, without the understanding that conflict and violence can be prevented, we won't have a new generation of young people able to lead a world awash in weapons. Making peace is a skill as well as an art." Children of the world must acquire the skills and values that will sustain peace.

There are many different ways of inculcating the value of peace in children, namely

- ◆ Writings and pictures: Children can express their feelings in poems, often more easily than in writings
- ◆ Story telling and writing: Children can write about their experiences of a topic.
- ◆ Pictures and art: Children can use art to express the feelings of peace.
- ◆ Social activities: Peace clubs to be set up faith based schools and in the neighbourhood. Peace games and exercises to sensitize children to the value peace to be organized.
- ◆ Drama and music: Children can express themselves in peace movement and act out their feelings or experiences through dance and mime, role play and drama, songs and music, puppet shows etc. These methods would not only instill a spirit of cooperation in children and motivate them to learn and demonstrate peace as a 'virtue' and a 'force' to reckon with.
- ◆ Providing digital opportunities for children to access various 'peace related websites' to gain more insights into the understanding and application of peace and its importance for their own development in this violent and crime ridden society.

The role of parents is equally important in promoting peace as a child right .In many countries; intrafamilial violence to children becomes a culture of the family. It remains largely a much hidden and neglected problem. Much of the intrafamilial violence to children occurs within the privacy of the family, or the relative privacy of the family. It may appear in many forms namely infanticide and homicide, physical assault, sexual abuse, illicit transfer, traditional practices involving violence and mental violence by

family members. In a developing country like India, female foeticide and infanticide is very much rampant among certain socially backward and oppressed caste groups. It is more painful to notice that the girl child is yet to be accepted as a 'human becoming' who is virtually denied of the right to life. Sad to say, 'infanticide has been practiced as a brutal method of family planning, and in societies where boy children are still valued, economically and socially, above girls, unequal gender population figures indicate that it remains widespread' (Innocenti Digest; UNICEF, 1997). It is a familial obligation to teach children the values and standards of life. Parents have to be peacemakers in their families and act as peace models.

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