

From conflict and crisis to renewal: generations of change

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Around the world, in countries and regions that have emerged from conflict, survivors restarting their lives are also facing fundamental changes in the societies around them. People who have staggered out of the shadows of brutal wars, endured the destruction of homes and families and languished in camps for the displaced or fled as refugees are also learning to deal with new realities: new power relationships within families, changes in gender roles, upended village economies and traditional cultures in flux.

For survivors, peace is a welcome end to conflict, but it also presents new challenges. There to help are many budding non-governmental grass-roots organizations, some which are led by younger generations of local people who are close to their communities and are at home with contemporary communications and multimedia skills that link them globally to others far away. To back them up are an array of United Nations agencies and donors.

The release of *The State of World Population 2010*, published by UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, coincides with the 10th anniversary of resolution 1325, the Security Council's groundbreaking move against the abuse of women in conflict and the marginalization of them in peacebuilding. For a decade, the Security Council followed up with a series of related resolutions, while at the same time, on the ground in diverse countries, women—and men—began transforming the goals of the resolutions into reality. Real-life experience was their guide in deciding what needed to be done.

As the years have passed, new ideas have come into focus. The violence and sexual abuses associated with conflict and cataclysmic disasters were not limited

to female victims. Men suffered too and began to be heard as they started telling their own stories of abuse, humiliation and degradation. For women, living through conflict or life as internally displaced people, lives were changing. Many women became the economic lifelines for their families, finding ways to earn enough money for food and other necessities when times were tough. When they returned home, they felt a new sense of confidence and sought to keep their financial independence. Some became activists for women's rights.

Changes in gender roles have not always been accepted easily. While they contributed in some families to new kinds of partnerships, in others, they fuelled an increase in domestic violence, which remains a major problem in countries as different as Timor-Leste and Liberia.

The 2010 edition of *The State of World Population* is based for the first time on reports from the field in a sample of countries that have experienced conflict or disasters and are on the road to recovery, however rocky the path and uncertain the destination. The nations are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liberia, Uganda and Timor-Leste. In addition, there were visits to the Occupied

Palestinian Territory; to Jordan, to which Iraqis have fled to escape violence and the extreme dislocation of war; and to Haiti, a country already in trouble before the devastating earthquake struck on 12 January.

The trauma people suffer because of war does not end with peace, and extreme stress touches everyone in a society that has been disrupted: the very young, adolescents, middle-aged men and women who have lost homes and jobs and have families to support and the elderly, who often cannot manage on their own when the comfort of family life is taken from them. Senior



citizens—especially women, who are often the least likely to be literate or able to work and whose health falters at a relatively early age—often are victims of land seizures by relatives or neighbours. Many are fearful of leaving camps for the internally displaced. They spend their final years in limbo, alone and in poverty.

Adolescents are another sector at high risk. Many had been conscripted into fighting with brutal militias and have to be coaxed back into civilian life. Girls and young women abducted into sex slavery come home broken in spirit, and often with babies they did not want, only to find themselves shunned by family members. Neither the boys nor the girls of war, their education interrupted, have hope of finding work in societies where a “youth bulge” in the population and slow economic growth combine to produce high unemployment even among those whose lives have not been affected.

The physical wounds of war—severed limbs, mutilated faces, bodies weakened by HIV and AIDS and other debilitating diseases—last a lifetime. Healing spirits and restoring mental balance progress slowly, if at all. Everywhere there has been conflict, healers of all kinds, from traditional herbal doctors and performers of cleansing rituals to psychiatrists and psychosocial counsellors, ask outsiders who have come to help: Please do not leave too soon, but if you must, continue to support us wherever you are.

However different countries may be in economic or human development, both survivors and those working to help them talk about the fundamental importance of

a caring community, whether it is an extended family, a clan, a village or one of many local organizations springing up to provide something of a “home.” Where these social supports exist, resuming life is made much easier.

This report includes the stories of women and men who benefited from strong friends, family and community. One example: a Palestinian woman left paralysed by an airstrike that flattened her home. Lost in despair, she was saved by a local feminist who supported her through university, by fellow students who helped her navigate the campus and by professors willing to move their classes to more accessible floors in old buildings.

Tragic stories were also heard in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where women who had survived horrific sexual abuse of all kinds came home to rejection and often accusations that they had dishonoured their families. Fifteen years after the end of the Bosnian war, many shattered women remain so traumatized and fearful of having their stories known that they can no longer function in society. The most promising years of their lives have been lost; many of those victims will never recover.

This report shows what the world has done and seen in a decade. But most of this report is based on human stories. There are searing human predicaments. But there are also many new, promising efforts by concerned people from local to national levels to understand post-conflict trauma within their own cultures and search for ways, small scale or more ambitious, to alleviate the suffering around them.

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