

## U.N. RELEASES LIST OF TOP TEN STORIES THAT NEED MORE MEDIA ATTENTION

May 3, 2004

*The ongoing occupation of Iraq and the violence there has been the focus of much of the media's attention, forcing many important news stories to "slip off the radar screen," according to the United Nations, which announced a list of the top ten stories that merit more attention.*

In an effort to draw attention to these less-covered stories, the United Nations' Department of Public Information released the list, dubbed "Ten Stories the World Should Know More About."

### **The list**

The stories outlined on the list include humanitarian emergencies -- such as the crisis of children orphaned by AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa and the condition of child soldiers in Uganda -- and post-conflict situations like Tajikistan's road to peace following a deadly civil war.

The United Nations admits that while these stories have been reported, they need more thorough, balanced and regular coverage.

They are, according to Shashi Tharoor, undersecretary-general for Communications and Public Information, "a snapshot of the most compelling stories that, at this point in time, we believe are in need of more attention."

The list was prepared in consultation with various U.N. offices and agencies, but the DPI took full responsibility for the final selection. Officials were careful to point out the list does not represent the main issues before the United Nations and the order of the stories was not meant to reflect its importance. The first story is merely "the first among equals," according to Tharoor.

Other highlighted stories include:

- The tenuous peace in the Central African Republic, one of the world's poorest countries
- The growing strain on U.N. resources needed to maintain peace throughout the world
- The vital role that women play in achieving peace and rebuilding societies, for example in Rwanda
- A potential treaty to promote the rights of people with disabilities
- The role of the International Court of Justice in solving border disputes such as the one between Cameroon and Nigeria
- How overfishing is depleting marine biodiversity
- Why some indigenous peoples in the Amazon face extinction as their land disappears

## **Child Soldiers in Uganda**

Uganda, a country in central Africa, has been plagued by violence for more than 18 years as members of the Lord's Resistance Army have clashed with the government. The LRA operate mostly in northern and eastern parts of the country and have forced more than 1.6 million Ugandans to flee, half of them children.

In addition to the effect the fighting has had on refugees, almost 90 percent of the LRA is made up of children under the age of 18. Many of the fighters, who can be as young as 8, are abducted from their villages and forced to attack their fellow abductees or even family members. If they refuse, they are killed.

Officials estimate that over 30,000 children have been forced to be soldiers, porters or rebel "wives" since the 1980s. In the past 18 months alone, more than 10,000 children have been abducted.

## **Post-civil war in Tajikistan**

Civil war broke out in the central Asian country of Tajikistan when it became independent in 1991 after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Fighting between regional militias throughout the country killed more than 50,000 and left 1.2 million people refugees in their own nation.

Since 1997 Tajikistan has worked hard to maintain the peace brokered by a U.N. agreement. In many ways, the United Nations says Tajikistan has been a model for post-conflict reconciliation. The country has worked to promote the rule of law and strengthen democratic institutions.

But Tajikistan continues to struggle with the effects of the war including high unemployment -- especially of former fighters, the spread of small arms, drug trafficking and the resurgence of extremist organizations.

## **AIDS orphans in sub-Saharan Africa**

The devastation of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa is most clearly represented in the 11 million AIDS orphans -- children orphaned because both of their parents have died of AIDS. Eight of every ten children who are orphaned as a result of AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa.

As a result entire communities fall deeper into poverty as already over-extended families must care for the well being of these orphaned children, according to U.N. officials. Orphans who cannot be helped by these communities are often forced to live on the streets where they are even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

"Millions of children live traumatized, unstable lives, robbed not just of their parents, but of their childhoods and futures," said Stephen Lewis, the U.N. Secretary-General's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa.

*By Annie Schleicher, NewsHour Extra*

© 2004 MacNeil/Lehrer Productions