

**Statement by Kul C. Gautam  
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**at the 55<sup>th</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference on  
“Rebuilding Societies Emerging from Conflict: A Shared Responsibility”**

**Panel discussion on: “Restoring Social Services: Identifying Priorities”  
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- I am delighted to have this opportunity to chair this morning’s panel discussion on the very important subject of “restoring social services and identifying priorities” as part of rebuilding societies emerging from conflict.
- We have a very distinguished panel whom I will introduce shortly.

As an introduction to the discussion, I would like to briefly set the context and touch on some important issues, based on my experience with UNICEF.

The biggest challenge facing those of us working to help rebuild societies in a post-conflict situation is that while the world’s attention and concern is rivetted at the height of armed conflicts, once the violence subsides, international media coverage, political concern and financial support often diminish. That is precisely when the work to rebuild and restore basic services is most essential. Failure to act decisively in the immediate post-conflict situation often has tragic consequences for the most vulnerable groups, in particular children, women and elderly.

- During conflict, access to essential services is often disrupted and civilian populations, in particular women and children, are disproportionately affected. There are no redeeming features to the reality of people living in a war zone. Many people lose access to basic social care and other essentials for survival. It is life without enough food, without adequate nutrition or safe water and adequate sanitation. It is life without education and teachers and schools. Human rights violations are often widespread and impunity is often the norm.
- Civilians are not only unintended victims, but they are often specifically targeted in an unprecedented manner in today’s conflicts. Women and children in particular run the risk of being killed, forcibly displaced, and sexually exploited.
- In a transition period from war to peace, the international community has the challenge to support civilian populations as they strive to rebuild their lives and put the horrors of war behind them. The importance of the re-establishment of basic social services and infrastructure, the provision of health care and basic education, special care and services for women and girls, restoration of the rule of law and addressing the impact of small arms and landmines on civilians cannot be overstated. These are important both for their own sake and to consolidate peace efforts.
- This has been underlined by the Security Council, which has expressed, on a number of occasions, its grave concern at the harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on civilians. In several resolutions, the Security Council has urged all parties to armed conflict to

protect civilians and to take their rights into account during peace negotiations, in peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations.

- Rebuilding societies emerging from conflict is, as the title of this conference indicates, a “shared responsibility”. It needs to be “shared” in many ways. There are two principles of peacebuilding that I particularly want to emphasise.
  - Many actors play an important role in peace-building initiatives. It is important that peacebuilding initiatives unite national and international actors around a strategy for durable peace, which is grounded in local ownership and supported by the international community. There needs to be a joint strategy for peace reflecting the shared responsibility of the international and local community.
  - Vulnerable populations, such as internally displaced persons, refugees, children and women are not only the victims of armed conflict, but they can also be a reservoir of strength and resilience. Their energy can be a great asset to their communities in the rebuilding of a more peaceful future. In that sense, the responsibility to rebuild should be shared with the affected people themselves.
- The capacity of the international community as supporter of peace building programmes has continued to grow as more effective strategies are developed, based on past experience. We have learnt that specific commitments to a number of priority areas are important. I would like to highlight three priority areas for the international community: the first is health care, the second is education, and the third is disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants.
- The first priority area I would like to highlight is health care. The chaos and insecurity of war threatens or destroys access to food, shelter, social support and health care. Children are likely to succumb to diarrhoea, respiratory infections, measles, cholera, malaria and other diseases. In fact, 7 of the 10 countries with the highest rates of under-five mortality in the world today are either in conflict or in a post-conflict situation<sup>1</sup>, and more than half of the 10 countries posing the greatest challenge to the global polio eradication campaign are war-affected<sup>2</sup>.
- It is worth reminding ourselves that the world will not be able to achieve many of the Millennium Development Goals such as drastically reducing the under-5 mortality rate or the goal of eradicating polio, if we fail to restore basic services in the world’s major post-conflict hotspots
- The provision of health care in crisis situations, should include surveillance, immunization and the control and treatment of preventable diseases for children and mothers, emphasising immediate threats such as measles, malaria, cholera and respiratory infections. It must also include the reduction of malnutrition and provision of safe water. The impact of all actors can be maximised if a common public health framework is developed.
- *Let me give you an example. In Rwanda, UNICEF and its partners initiated youth-friendly health services. Health workers and health educators from the community were trained to provide information, counselling, recreation and skills training for young people. In collaboration with the National Youth Council, young people conducted a media campaign of*

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<sup>1</sup> Graça Machel, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, “The last mile to end polio”, UNICEF, New York, September 2001, p. 13.

*monthly radio broadcasts and a television debate on HIV/AIDS, promoting health lifestyles. This had tremendous positive impact on people's health.*

- Education is the second priority area I would like to mention. Historically, education was not regarded as a priority intervention in emergencies. People thought that priority should go to saving lives, and education could come later. But we have realized that lack of education can be very damaging to children in later life. Children suffering from deprivation and boredom are susceptible to acquiring anti-social behaviour, to get into drugs, to be lured into joining the militias, to be vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Existence of child-friendly spaces and education must therefore be a crucial component of emergency response, both during and after conflicts.
- Education can give the support and guidance children need to be pro-actively engaged within their communities. Besides the 3 Rs, UNICEF supports education of displaced children on landmines, HIV/AIDS prevention, gender sensitivity, child rights and life skills. Schools can also be used as entry points for psychosocial counselling. They can be used to promote peacebuilding and to teach conflict resolution.
- Special emphasis should be given to support girls' education by promoting the establishment of learning environments which are gender sensitive, non-violent and encourage respect for each other's rights, dignity and equality.
- *An example in this context is the support to the Afghan Interim Administration on the back-to-school campaign in Afghanistan. I am sure we will hear more about it from Ms. Sima Samar later in the panel discussion. When the programme started in March 2002, the goal was to reach 1.78 million children return to school. Initial results show that up to three times that number may have enrolled, exceeding all expectations. This campaign has been possible with the invaluable collaboration of many NGOs on the ground. By attending classes and re-establishing a normal routine, war-affected children are given reason to believe in themselves, their families and their community. Education has been a key factor for bringing stability and security for Afghanistan's children and is a crucial component in restoring peace and hope for a better future.*
- The third area I would like to highlight relates to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programmes of former combatants.
- Since the mid-eighties, UNICEF and many other child protection agencies have been involved in the demobilization of child soldiers, playing an important role in advocating for and securing the release of children from armed forces and militia groups in Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan. In a joint effort by many actors, we have supported programmes for the provision of care, technical guidance and financial support for the successful implementation of national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, especially of children in their communities.
- *In February 2001, 3,551 child soldiers were demobilized from the SPLM/A forces in Southern Sudan. By the end of August 2001, all but 70 of the children had been reunified with their families. Follow-up programmes are now in place in the communities of origin of the children to help sustain their reintegration. In the difficult situation prevailing in Southern Sudan, preventing the children from being re-recruited or volunteering for militia groups remains a major challenge. The example of South Sudan illustrates the critical need for a*

*sustained commitment of resources and staff to provide for children's longer-term needs, including education, psychosocial support and vocational training. This is exactly why partnership is so important in all DDR programmes.*

- Let me conclude by saying that, in all of our efforts, we must ensure that any post-conflict transition strategy should form a bridge between relief and recovery. It should aim at simultaneously directing assistance to those most affected by the war and paving the way for the transition to sustainable development.