

# Will the World's Children be Better off in 2007?

by Janet Jagan – Dec. 30, 2006

This planet on which we all live was in pretty bad shape during 2006. Wars (Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Ethiopia, etc), pestilence (HIV/AIDS and malaria) poverty (everywhere, even in the very rich countries), homelessness (as a result, mainly of wars and poverty) crime (increasing in every country) and all kinds of violence have all reaped heavy tolls on humanity.

Hit the hardest, as always, are the world's children who suffer and die in increasingly large numbers because of all the ills of society. When it comes to war, the toll on children is devastating. In all the countries where wars exist, it is the children who are hit the hardest.

The numbers killed grow daily in the bombings in Iraq and Afghanistan and the suffering, especially in Darfur in Sudan is unbelievable, as children starve and die because of displacement, no food and shelter and the violence against their mothers.

Now before military courts in the USA are US Marines charged with the murder of 24 unarmed Iraqi citizens who died in Haditha, Iraq. Several were children who were allegedly gunned down by US soldiers. One young girl was raped and then murdered.

But this is only one of many such occurrences arising out of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan where one hears constantly of deaths by gunfire at weddings, for example, mistakenly thought to be ambushes or by false information. Always children die!

In Lebanon, Israeli soldiers flooded the country with cluster bombs that covered vast areas of the countryside, where children play and where these bombs explode and kill or maim thousands of children.

The BBC recently showed a feature its correspondents filmed in Vietnam, showing large numbers of children who were born horribly deformed – as a result of the poison Agent Orange which was used during the US invasion of that country. Thousands of acres of land were sprayed with this poison which remains in the soil and still has the power to destroy and deform babies. It's always the children who pay!

Violence against children is widespread. Children are raped, frequently by soldiers, by relatives, even by their fathers. Children are beaten, some to death, by angry fathers, mothers, teachers and others.

In Guyana we debate whether teachers should be allowed to beat school children! We seem to be in the dark ages, when slaves were whipped and children beaten to serious injuries for minor offences.

Children go hungry in a world where food is plentiful and much of it thrown away. A recent news report said: "Hunger in American households has risen by 43% in the last five years and it requires urgent attention." The report stated that the US Department of Agriculture released information that 38.2 million

Americans live in households that suffer directly from hunger and food insecurity, including nearly 14 million children.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, some 220 million or 44% of the population of the area do not have enough money to cover their needs.

And what do these statistics tell us? It's the children who always suffer the greatest.

Further statistics help us understand the "Why" for such pervasive poverty. In the USA, for example, the richest 1 percent of the US population hold 40% of the nation's wealth. In the UK it is there, but lower. 1% of Britons hold 18% of the nation's wealth.

Although each year malnutrition in developing countries contributes to the death of more than 5 million preschool children, enough food is available to provide every human being on earth with more than the 2,350 calories needed daily for a healthy and active life. (From Crop Circles by Marc J. Chin reviewed in "Natural History," October 2003).

We should go back to a slogan popular some years ago – "Save our Children." Irresponsible, foolish and harmful wars must end. Voters in every country have to speak out – as they did recently in the USA against the war – and demand a better use of each nation's resources, so that children can live, enjoy life and make their contributions to the welfare of all

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