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No short cut to genuine security: Suffering beyond the spotlight

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People around the world are more insecure today than at any time since the end of the Cold War, Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International said today at the launch of the organization's annual report.

"The war on Iraq dominated the international agenda for the past year, but away from the eyes of the world a myriad of "forgotten" conflicts have taken a heavy toll on human rights and human lives, in places as diverse as Côte d'Ivoire, Colombia, Burundi, Chechnya and Nepal."

"Iraq and Israel and the Occupied Territories are in the news, Ituri in the Democratic Republic of Congo is not, despite the imminent threat of genocide," said Irene Khan. "Drawing attention to "hidden" crises, protecting the rights of the "forgotten victims" is the biggest challenge we face today."

Governments around the world have spent billions in an effort to beef up national security and the "war on terror", but for millions of people the real sources of insecurity were corrupt and inept systems of policing and justice; brutal repression of political dissent; severe discrimination and social inequities; extreme poverty and the spread of preventable diseases.

"A war was fought in Iraq because of the suspected presence of weapons of mass destruction. But nothing was done to stop the well-documented flow of arms that fuel conflicts and cause massive human rights abuse in many parts of the world."

More than eighteen months after the war in Afghanistan ended, millions of Afghans, including returning refugees, face an uncertain and insecure future.

"There is a very real risk that Iraq will go the way of Afghanistan if no genuine effort is made to heed the call of the Iraqi people for law and order and full respect of human rights."

At a time of heightened insecurity governments chose to ignore and undermine the collective system of security which the rule of international law represents. While claiming to bring justice to

victims in Iraq, the United States has actively sought to undermine the International Criminal Court, the mechanism for universal justice.

The "war on terror", far from making the world a safer place, has made it more dangerous by curtailing human rights, undermining the rule of international law and shielding governments from scrutiny. It has deepened divisions among people of different faiths and origins, sowing the seeds for more conflict. The overwhelming impact of all this is genuine fear -- among the affluent as well as the poor.

"It is vital that we resist the manipulation of fear and challenge the narrow focus of the security agenda. The definition of security must be broadened to encompass the security of people, as well as states. That means a commitment to human rights. That means recognising that insecurity and violence are best tackled by effective, accountable states which uphold, not violate human rights," Ms Khan concluded.

Campaigns that ran throughout 2002 resulted in a number of successes. The organization succeeded in the release of individuals like former Russian prisoner of conscience Grigory Pasko, in obtaining justice for Sierra Leoneans with the establishment of a Special Court for that country and for global accountability with the entry into force of the International Criminal Court.

Beyond the spotlight: "Hidden Crises"

Away from the glare of publicity, conflict, insecurity and violence continue to affect millions of people in Africa.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the human rights situation remains bleak, with continuing fighting and attacks on civilians, particularly in the east. In the Great Lakes region too, those perpetuating human rights abuses continue to enjoy impunity.

In Burundi, government forces carried out extrajudicial killings, "disappearances", torture and other serious violations, while armed groups unlawfully killed, maimed, abducted and tortured civilians in pursuit of their political aims. Armed belligerents in Burundi continued to recruit, at times forcefully, child combatants.

Although the human rights crisis in Israel and the Occupied Territories is among the issues most discussed -- it is the least acted upon by the international community.

In Colombia, the security measures enacted by the new government exacerbated the spiralling cycle of political violence . The breakdown of peace talks in February between the government and the main armed opposition group, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), deepened the human rights crisis.

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