Human Development Report Calls on International Community to Break Vicious Cycle of Poverty and Violent Conflict

Post-conflict intervention is a development as well as peacekeeping challenge, authors say

United Nations, 7 September 2005—The *2005 UNDP Human Development Report* documents the terrible human cost of violent conflicts in poor countries, as well as the ways in which poverty provides a breeding ground for further violence. The authors of the Report argue that to achieve global development goals, the international community must break this vicious cycle by responding to conflicts as a long-term reconstruction challenge as well as an immediate peacekeeping imperative.

The authors strongly endorse the proposal in the Secretary-General's report *In Larger Freedom* for a new, well-funded Peacebuilding Commission under UN auspices.

"There are no blueprints for preventing or resolving violent conflict," the authors acknowledge. "However, without much more—and more effective—international cooperation to tackle the threats posed by violent conflict, the international community cannot hope to protect basic human rights, advance collective security and achieve the MDGs."
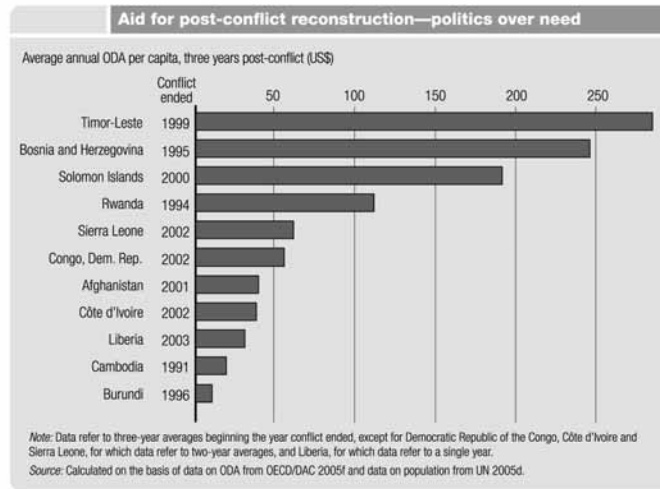
Since 1990, developing countries have accounted for more than half of all armed conflicts, with nearly 40 percent taking place in Africa alone. According to the Report, more people in these conflicts die from disease and malnutrition than from bombs, bullets and bayonets. For instance, in the Darfur region of the Sudan, the Report found that child mortality rates are three to six times higher than in the rest of the country.

The poorer the country, the more likely it is to suffer from violent conflict. The Report shows that countries with an annual per capita income of US$250 are twice as likely to descend into civil war as those with an annual per capita income of $600. But "attempting to establish whether these countries are poor because they are in conflict or in conflict because they are poor is a futile and largely meaningless exercise," the authors of the Report write. "What is clear is that poverty is part of the cycle that creates and perpetuates violent conflict—and that violent conflict feeds back to reinforce poverty."

The Report's Human Development Index, which ranks countries according to health, education and income levels, offers evidence of the connection between poverty and violent conflict. "Indeed," say the authors, "violent conflict is one of the surest and fastest routes to the bottom of the HDI table—and one of the strongest indicators for a protracted stay there." Of the 32 countries at the bottom of the HDI rankings, 22 have experienced conflict since 1990.

This vicious cycle poses a threat to everyone, not just the residents of these countries, according to the Report: "When weak states tip over into violent conflict, they provide a natural habitat for terrorist groups that pose a security risk to people in rich countries while perpetuating violence in poor ones."

The Report lays out several key policy improvements that can have an immediate effect on reducing the threat of conflict and its detrimental impact on poverty and human development:

Aid for post-conflict reconstruction—politics over need

Average annual ODA per capita, three years post-conflict (US$)

Note: Data refer to three-year averages beginning the year conflict ended, except for Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, for which data refer to two-year averages, and Liberia, for which data refer to a single year.
Source: Calculated on the basis of data on ODA from OECD/DAC 2005f and data on population from UN 2005d.

- **Aid for conflict-prone countries**. "Starving conflict prone or post-conflict states of aid is unjustified. It is bad for human security in the countries concerned—and it is bad for global security." In recent years, aid for post-conflict countries has ranged from $245 per capita in Bosnia and Herzegovina to just $40 in Afghanistan. Along with an overall increase in aid, donors should be more transparent about their conditions for allocating those resources and about their reasons when they reduce aid to conflict prone countries.

- **Integrated approach to collective security**. A recent report from the UN Secretary-General called for the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission to provide a strategic framework for an integrated approach to collective security. As part of that approach, a global fund should be created to finance on a long-term and predictable basis immediate post-conflict assistance and the transition to long-term reconstruction.

- **Building regional capacity.** An immediate and urgent priority is the development—through financial, technical and logistical support—of a fully functioning African Union stand-by force.

- **Cutting the flow of small arms.** The 2006 Small Arms Review Conference provides an opportunity to agree on a comprehensive and mandatory arms trade treaty to regulate markets and curtail supplies to areas of violent conflict.

- **Greater transparency in managing natural resources.** As parties to the natural resource markets that help finance conflict and, in some cases, undermine accountability of governments, transnational companies involved in mineral exporting should increase the transparency of their operations in poor countries. The international legal framework proposed by British government-sponsored Commission on Africa to ensure that corrupt practices by transnational companies overseas are prosecuted at home—as already practiced under US law—should be developed as a priority.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT: Every year since 1990, the UNDP has commissioned the *Human Development Report* by an independent team of experts to explore major issues of global concern. A worldwide advisory network of leaders in academia, government and civil society contribute data, ideas, and best practices to support the analysis and proposals published in the Report. The concept of Human Development looks beyond per capita income, human resource development, and basic needs as a measure of human progress and also assesses such factors as human freedom, dignity and human agency, that is, the role of people in development. The *Human Development Report 2005* argues that development is ultimately "a process of enlarging people's choices," not just raising national incomes.
   The *Human Development Report 2005* is published in English by Oxford University Press.

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