

Unicef report reveals 250 million children are victims of war

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The new “Unicef report, 2016—Assisting Refugee Children,” detailing the fate of children in war zones and those forced to flee, was released at the beginning of this month. It describes the horrific consequences, for children and young people around the world, of wars and civil wars lasting years and even decades.

According to estimates made by Unicef, the UN’s children’s agency founded 70 years ago, there have not been so many children suffering the consequences of conflicts, crises and natural catastrophes since the Second World War. The report points out that some 250 million girls and boys, one in nine children, are forced to grow up in conflict zones.

Even more children are threatened by natural disasters such as droughts, floods and epidemics. The extent and impact of these catastrophes is intensified by a lack of infrastructure, health care and effective assistance measures.

Conflict zones refer to countries and regions that have been destroyed by war or civil war, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and others that have been exposed to persistent military clashes. During 2015 alone, 16 million babies were born in conflict regions.

The Unicef report documents several facts about children in these conflict regions:

- * Globally, 75 million children between the ages of three and 18 cannot attend a kindergarten or school, or learn only irregularly, due to ongoing crises or catastrophes.

- * An average of four schools or hospitals become targets of armed attacks every day. In Afghanistan, 164 attacks on schools were registered in 2014, along with 67 in Iraq. In Nigeria, the terrorist group Boko Haram has destroyed more than 1,200 schools since the beginning of its insurgency, and murdered over 600

teachers.

- * During 2015, Unicef registered 1,500 severe violations of the rights of children in Syria, and this was only the tip of the iceberg. In 60 percent of cases, children were killed or injured by bombs in densely populated residential areas. One-third of all victims were killed on the way to school.

- * Many children in war zones have been unable to attend school for years, because their schools have been destroyed, the route to school is too dangerous, or there has been a lack of money for books and pens. In Syria and the surrounding region, only one-half of all refugee children were placed in a school last year.

The terrifying situation in Syria and neighbouring countries, where millions of Syrian families have fled war and civil war, forms one of the main areas of Unicef’s work. A report in March this year explained, “Millions of Syrian girls and boys under five know nothing but war and flight.” During this period, 3.7 million Syrian children were born. The plight of 2 million children was particularly stark, because they only received humanitarian aid infrequently. A further 2.4 million children have fled to other countries in recent years, and 300,000 were born during such journeys.

Unicef’s documentation of the children impacted by war, civil war and flight is truly shocking, amounting to a devastating indictment of both the capitalist system and the imperialist powers responsible for war and its consequences.

In Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen and neighbouring countries, the poverty and hardship facing millions of children and young people are the direct product of US-led wars, supported by various European powers, for a quarter century. Entire societies have been, and continue to be, systematically destroyed.

In Africa, the deterioration in the conditions of life for millions of people—including children and young people—is caused by the competition between imperialist powers for control of the region and the exploitation of its natural resources. Germany is one such power. It is participating in an ever growing list of military interventions, including in Mali and off the coast of Libya.

At its press conference in Berlin, Unicef used the release of its report to launch a large-scale fund-raising campaign and to appeal to the warring parties and governments to protect the rights of children. The organization also demanded that children be able to attend school in crisis regions and, in an appeal directly aimed at the German government, declared, “Protection and education for refugee children must also be guaranteed in Germany.”

Gerd Müller (Christian Social Union-CSU), minister for economic cooperation and development, was the German government’s representative on the podium. He stated, “We cannot allow children and young people to become a lost generation in any crisis region around the world.” The German government supported Unicef in 2015 with €250 million, so that it could establish leisure activities in refugee camps in northern Iraq, such as football games and theatre workshops, and set up emergency schools.

Given the disastrous situation confronting 250 million children and young people throughout the world, the contribution of €250 million is not only contemptuously low, but Müller’s statement is both cynical and hypocritical.

German imperialism and the German army are currently either directly or indirectly involved in a large number of military interventions in the Middle East and North Africa. In February 2014, Berlin and Washington also played a key role in the right-wing coup in Kiev, which forced close to 2 million people to flee, and the German government is now deeply implicated in war preparations against Russia.

Moreover, Germany is playing a leading role in sealing Europe’s borders to deter refugees fleeing the horrific conditions created by these wars from entering. It negotiated the dirty deal with Turkey and pushed for sealing, by military means, the routes over the Aegean and Mediterranean seas.

Last but not least, the inhumane treatment of those

refugees who have made it to Germany plays no small role in deterring others from even trying. Unicef’s demand that “protection and education must also be guaranteed for refugee children in Germany” would be unnecessary if refugees were accommodated humanely in the country, rather than being confined to sports halls, airport hangars and factory buildings for months on end in appalling conditions.

Repeated restrictions to the right to asylum over recent months, along with the declaration of the Balkan countries as “safe countries of origin,” are further aspects of the German government’s callous treatment of refugees. Their result has been the eviction of thousands of children and their families, many of whom have lived in Germany for years, or were even born in the country, from their schools and homes, confined to deportation centres and deported out of the country.

The intolerable and often life-threatening conditions facing hundreds of millions of children underscore the urgency of constructing an international antiwar movement based on the working class and directed against the capitalist system.



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