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# Evacuation of Children from Conflict Areas



Considerations and guidelines

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# Preface

This paper derives from a joint UNHCR/UNICEF mission to the former Yugoslavia in August/September 1992. The situation, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, has continued to deteriorate since then. In view of the persistent queries concerning the evacuation of children from the former Yugoslavia, UNHCR and UNICEF, supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies, saw the need to highlight the applicable principles and to spell out some practical guidelines to be respected if evacuation of children is considered. The statements and guidelines are presented as annexes to Everett Ressler's essay.

This report was basically initiated in response to the situation in the former Yugoslavia. Many of the examples contained in it, however, are drawn from earlier conflicts where evacuation of children was considered necessary. By presenting a review of previous evacuation experiences and a synthesis of some of the lessons which may be drawn from them, this essay attempts to provide information that may be helpful to those who must decide and act. Other situations may arise where the lessons learned may again serve as an inspiration and where the annexed guidelines might be applicable

The agencies involved have one key consideration; that all parties considering evacuation of children must be guided by a concern for «the best interests of the child», the first principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our hope is that this booklet might provide guidance for the benefit of children who are victims of conflict.

Geneva, December 1992  
UNHCR UNICEF

## Evacuation of Children

**E**ven as mothers in the conflict area of the former Yugoslavia, in great anguish, tell of the killing of husbands and sons, of being driven from homes or of living trapped in bombarded apartments for weeks and months, of being so destitute as having to share shoes, of having no winter clothes, of having limited water, no electricity, no vegetables or meat, still then, it is evident that they are struggling to protect and care for their children. Even in the midst of the tears, mothers or fathers are likely to be holding their children close, consoling them, attending to their needs. Despite shelling, bombing, fear, shortages, misery, cold, hunger and deprivation, parents are vigilantly striving to provide love, security, understanding, guidance, consolation, food and clothing to their children. Experience in the former Yugoslavia, as elsewhere in the world, confirms that even in the most difficult circumstances, parents do not easily abandon or transfer responsibilities for the care of their children, a reflection of one of the most sterling qualities of human nature.

Parental care is not always sustained. Parents and children may be involuntarily separated, if parents are killed or put in concentration camps, for example. Sometimes children are left completely on their own, as may happen when children are separated from their extended families or simply abandoned. However, because the extended family system remains vibrant and the social commitment to children strong, few children in the former Yugoslavia are currently known to be living alone.

Sometimes, life in war situations becomes so difficult that parents consider it necessary to separate from their children. Sending the children off may be the only way to save their lives. More often children are sent away in an attempt to relieve their physical or

emotional suffering. What parent would not be anguished as, day by day, their young children get thinner, pale, and are forced to experience the hardships of war conditions?

When parents do voluntarily separate from their children, they are most likely to send them to the care of trusted relatives or friends. Some parents, however, have sent their children on organized evacuation schemes. Over the last 150 years, numerous evacuation programs for children have been implemented throughout the world. These evacuations have taken many forms - rescue efforts, summer holidays, temporary rest and recuperation periods, temporary asylum, long-term care. Indeed, in virtually every conflict situation, individuals and agencies attempting to aid children debate the possible need for the evacuation of children from war zones just as it is being considered for children in war zones in the former Yugoslavia.

In the face of continued shelling, displacement, sustained hardships, and the threat of winter without adequate food, clothing or shelter (which carries with it the potential loss of large numbers of lives, particularly children's lives), thousands of parents in Sarajevo and throughout other conflict areas would likely evacuate to safer areas with their children if they had the option. Lacking opportunity for themselves, some parents are urgently attempting to send their children out of the war areas without family accompaniment. Some children have been evacuated by local and foreign agencies, including the children evacuated in one widely reported effort in which several died when their bus was fired upon during exodus. Already, procedures and a system for the evacuation of children requiring life-saving medical treatment are in operation in Sarajevo; a limited number of children have been evacuated with the help of local authorities, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNPROFOR and receiving countries. Discussions continue on the criteria for permitting evacuation of children through this program.

The evacuation of children poses serious concerns for all and the decisions to be made are judgments. Authorities in the various conflict areas are faced with the issue of whether or not they should organize or permit evacuation, and if they do so, who should be permitted to leave under what conditions. International and non-governmental organizations must decide whether or not they should mount or support evacuation efforts. Host countries face the decision of whether or not to accept evacuated persons. Parents must decide whether or not to attempt to evacuate as a family unit (if possible) or to send children alone (if possible). Children's wishes are also at issue.

By presenting a review of previous evacuation experiences and

a synthesis of a few of the lessons that might be drawn from them, this essay attempts only to provide information that may be helpful to those who must decide and act.

## Evacuation experiences

The first example, the emigration of children from Great Britain, is an exception but deserves mention. From 1870 to 1930, when the practice was finally halted, more than 100,000 children were sent from Great Britain to Canada alone (they were also sent to other Commonwealth countries) by more than 40 British child placement agencies. Maria Rye and Anne Macpherson, directors of child rescue organizations in London, are credited with beginning this child emigration scheme, which placed destitute children from the urban centers of Great Britain to farms in various Commonwealth countries. The idea was reputedly their adaptation of a post-American civil war program for needy children in which the children were sent across the United States on «orphan trains». At station stops across the Midwest, the children were reviewed and selected by farm families interested in providing foster care or boarding a child who could help with the farm work.

Organizers of British child rescue schemes assumed that children in need would benefit from farm life and work, farm families were reportedly interested in taking in children as a cheap source of much-needed labor. The story and analysis of this child rescue effort is documented in two books: *Children of the Empire* (1) and *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (2). While it is not an example of evacuation of children from war, this history is relevant because of the lessons learned about the disparity that may exist between the good intentions of those attempting to help children and the loneliness and abuse the children sometimes experience. Many of the debates and difficulties of that experience, including the necessity of understanding children's and parents' needs, of carefully matching children and host families, of providing services to protect children in placement, remain cardinal issues to be considered in any evacuation of children.

More than 5 million children were reportedly homeless during the 1920 period of the Russian revolution and famines. There are numerous examples from this tragic period of efforts to assist children. Early in 1918, for example, various agencies organized evacuations of

children from the near-famine conditions that gripped Petrograd and Moscow. At least 4,000 children were entrusted by their parents to young teachers and nurses for excursions across the Ural Mountains to summer camps in western Siberian resort towns where food was more plentiful. All expected that the children would live for a few months in a sea of plenty, send back food and return safely at the end of the summer.

But the war situation changed suddenly and unexpectedly. The front line moved past the area in which the children were residing, making their return home impossible. Any available goods were quickly consumed and the children faced a harsh Siberian winter without warm clothes or any source of support. Local officials attempted to help but there were severe shortages and many children were forced to beg and steal for survival thereby gaining the label «wild children of the Urals »

Some 1,000 of these children were assembled by a Red Cross organization which, despite many difficulties, helped them cross Siberia to Vladivostok during the winter in box cars then slowly around the world by sea to Finland from where on January 26, 1921, two years after they left home, the last of the group walked across the border to be reunited with their families back in Petrograd. This experience is documented in the *The Wild Children of the Urals* (3).

The Spanish civil war provides important lessons about the evacuation of children in war. In brief, after persistent efforts to remain in their homes, people in the Basque provinces of northern Spain were forced by shelling, aerial bombardments, brutality, destitution, severe hardships and hunger to abandon their homes. Through spontaneous flight and organized civilian evacuation schemes, hundreds of thousands of women, children, elderly people and people with disabilities poured out of Spain to take refuge in France and other European countries.

Among those who left the war area were more than 20,000 children sent by their parents on various evacuation schemes. The majority went to France. While the Spanish Republican government planned and facilitated civilian evacuations from besieged areas, the idea of evacuating children separate from their parents seems to have been an idea propagated by parties outside Spain who were seeking ways to help children.

In France, supporters of the evacuation idea established the Committee to aid the Children of Spain. They assertively sought and screened potential host families and readied facilities for children's colonies. In other countries, too, organizations were formed to receive Spanish children.

Various procedures were drawn up with Spanish Republican social welfare authorities and evacuation organizers to safeguard evacuated children. For example, proof of parental consent was required, as was proof of each child's age and four photographs. Four copies of each file were made, one to accompany the child wherever he or she was placed. Each child was given a medical examination, proof of vaccination and an identity card.

Even with all the hardships, the idea of evacuating children was not readily accepted by Spanish families. Organizers were obliged to use a variety of publicity techniques to convince parents to send their children. An assurance that helped persuade parents was that Basque teachers and priests would accompany the children. Even so, few wealthy families reportedly sent their children on these evacuations. The promises of food and good care in the face of harsh family circumstances and great uncertainty influenced parents to send their children, as reflected in an interview with a mother years later

“ Because of my circumstances, I sent you three away, but I wouldn't ever do so again. We lived on the third floor, your father was crippled, his legs gone since a truck accident, and I had to carry him down to the shelter in the old train tunnel on my shoulders. We all spent days and nights there, with the dirty stones overhead dripping on us. Food was scarce and hard to come by for all of us, and it was getting worse ”

*(Legarreta 45).*

Generally, children who were evacuated were first moved to reception centers from where they were either placed in children's colonies or homes. The well-appointed facilities of the first reception centers did not match the grim conditions of many later ones. As a general observation, children often arrived with siblings and friends and made strong friendships. Subsequent dispersal of the children broke these relationships, a considerable loss to the children, as reported by them later.

The separation of sibling groups proved much more traumatic. Despite children's strong desire to remain together, parents' expectations that the family group would be kept together and parents' admonition to older children to care of younger siblings, siblings were usually separated.

“ Few families in any host country except Belgium took more than one child of a family, though efforts were made to keep brothers and sisters in the same vicinity. Children sent to Catholic institutions were usually separated by sex, and almost invariably housed in different institutions. ”  
(Legarreta, 54).

The form and quality of care assured the children by the various sponsoring organizations varied widely. Some programs, such as the French program that placed children in working class families and cared for others in children's colonies, carefully selected foster homes, provided a variety of supportive services, issued clothing and school materials, arranged for the children's attendance in local schools, ensured that medical costs were covered by local authorities, facilitated monthly visits by Spanish nurses and organized teams of volunteers to regularly visit the adoptive homes to report on the well-being and progress of the children. As adults, children placed under this French program were uniformly positive about their experience.

Similar positive experiences were also reported by children who had been sent to the Soviet Union. The Soviet government assumed full responsibility for the care of the children, placed and cared for them in institutional settings and arranged for the children's education by their accompanying Spanish teachers, separate from Russian children. Children were to be kept in correspondence with their parents and were to be repatriated when the parents wished. Most importantly, children were cared for by committed, long-term staff members whom the children described as loving and nurturing. The children also benefited from being warmly received by the public, being able to preserve and exhibit their cultural traditions and receiving excellent education and training opportunities.

However, at the end of the Spanish civil war, when the Spanish Republican government was defeated, the plight of the children in the Soviet Union changed, for there was then little chance of their returning home. Also, as part of Stalin's purges, many of the Spanish teachers were killed or imprisoned. Then in 1941, with the Nazi invasion of Russia, the Spanish children once again became refugees and suffered all the hardships of Soviet citizenry during World War II.

Not all groups of evacuated Basque children had positive experiences in the care they received during their evacuation. The care provided in England proved unsatisfactory in many ways, caused in



great part by what Legarreta terms as a «mental gulf» between the organizers and the children. The difficulties were reflected and exacerbated by reception and screening procedures perceived by the children to be undesirable and dehumanizing, by hastily and poorly organized reception camps in which the children were forced to reside for an extended period, and by the subsequent lack of nurturing care for many of the children, particularly those placed in harsh institutional arrangements.

Some children placed in homes also fared poorly, particularly if placed in childless or unhappy homes. As reported in later years by one child who had been placed in Belgium

“ The couple was rich, childless. She suffered from nerves. She insisted I call her «Mother.» I couldn't: My mother lived in Guernica. I was always sad and lonely. I tried to run away, but at seven it was hopeless. I remember the whole boiled potatoes, everything with mustard, such fatty bacon. I forgot how to speak Basque in the Flemish school. To this day, I am afraid of strangers who speak other languages ”  
(Lagarreta, 149)

The experience of the children evacuated to Mexico is particularly important, for organizers assumed that language and overt cultural similarities would be distinct advantages. The issue of the quality of care proved, however, to be more important. Despite the fact that the Mexican organizers intended to provide a model program of excellent care, innumerable problems arose. The consequence was that the children were poorly cared for, badly treated, and faced public hostility.

In all countries that accepted or considered accepting evacuated children (except the Soviet Union), the costs related to the care of evacuated Basque children became a contentious, publicly debated issue. In England, for example, the Home Office agreed to accept Basque children only if it could be arranged at no cost to the treasury; private funds were to be gathered for the children's education and care. From a private agency perspective, it was easy to raise money for the cause of evacuated children when the children first arrived but as months dragged into years fund raising became increasingly difficult. Many programs had substantial financial limitations which reflected on the services provided to the children.

Repatriation also became a heated debate in every country to which the children were evacuated. Issues to be considered included the wishes of the parents, many of whom encouraged their children to remain in their foster care situation, the wishes of the children, who often had become a part of the family and community that took them in; a value judgment by sponsoring agencies regarding the suitability of returning children to continuing harsh conditions; and political issues such as whether or not the host country recognized the new Spanish government. An important factor that prevented later repatriations arose from the Spanish government and its Civil Guard's mistrust of evacuees as suspicious or traitors.

When the evacuations were planned and initiated, it was generally assumed that children would be gone for no more than a few months. Children and their families expected the sojourn to be little more than a pleasant summer holiday. Experience proved quite the opposite. While some of the children returned to their parents during and immediately after the war, many were unable or unwilling to return and did not see their families again for many years, some as long as 20 years. The book *The Guernica Generation Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War* (4) from which much of this example was drawn is an important reference.

In the period immediately following the Spanish civil war and at the beginning of World War II, a consensus seemed to exist among agencies concerned about the care of children in war situations that evacuation of children was an essential response in war. A working paper suggesting practical measures to be taken for the protection of children in time of war, for example, was circulated in Geneva in 1938 among agency members of the Save the Children International Union. A basic contention of the paper was that in situations in which whole populations were displaced, children should be evacuated with their parents but in other cases, such as for children in «urban areas exposed to aerial attack,» children should be either protected where they lived or evacuated in groups. The evacuation of children was held to be a responsibility of child welfare organizations.

The extent to which the above-mentioned guidelines influenced later actions is unknown but many evacuations of children were organized during World War II. The people of Yugoslavia, for example, suffered horribly during the war, more than 3.7 million Yugoslavians were killed, wounded or tortured, including some 300,000 children. While the major effort to assist children came from actions within Yugoslavia - providing aid, accommodating needy children in homes, rescuing children from concentration and prison camps, establishing children's homes - several evacuations were organized late in

the war to send civilians, children in particular, out of Yugoslavia. Groups of women and children in the south were evacuated to camps in Italy and Egypt. Groups in the north were evacuated to Vojvodina through Hungary. To accommodate children who had been evacuated, the first children's colony in Yugoslavia was established in the city of Split soon after the war ended.<sup>(5)</sup> Other evacuations may also have taken place.

Perhaps no country suffered more in the war than Poland, where 2.25 million children are recorded as having been killed or taken between 1939 and 1945. During the war, local efforts were made to organize a summer camp program for some 75,000 children as a means of providing extra food and some respite from the war but the program was obstructed by the German military authorities <sup>(6)</sup>

In an effort to encourage the immigration of German Jewish youth to the Jewish agricultural collectives in Palestine and to rescue them from the cruelty of the National socialist regime, a youth immigration or evacuation program was organized in 1933, soon after Hitler's accession to power and his announcement of Jewish racial policies. Between 1933 and 1939 more than 5,700 youth, most between the ages of 15 and 17, moved to collectives and special training programs established in Palestine by the Youth Aliyah program. The children lived in communal settings and on arrival entered a two-year training program in which half-days were spent on practical work and the remainder on formal education.

The British evacuation of civilians is a noteworthy example. The British civil defense planned the evacuation of some 3 million persons from urban centers to homes in the countryside at the very beginning of Britain's war with Germany, expecting massive sudden destruction of the cities. It was assumed that when advised to do so, children under 5 years of age would be voluntarily evacuated with their mothers, and children between 5 and 14 would be evacuated with their teachers. In practice, when announced, less than half the expected number of persons actually evacuated and many returned to their homes soon after their evacuation, particularly mothers with children. Not surprisingly, it was learned that wives did not wish to be separated from their husbands and parents did not wish to be separated from their children. Still, almost 750,000 unaccompanied children were evacuated and one year later some 315,000 children remained in their billeted situations <sup>(7)</sup>

Various studies were conducted on the social and psychological impacts of the evacuation on the lives of children. Some of the conclusions serve as beacons in child welfare to this day. Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham's careful analysis of the impact of separation

of infants from their mothers is particularly important. In an essay on reactions to evacuation they wrote:

“ The war acquires comparatively little significance for children so long as it only threatens their lives, disturbs their material comfort or cuts their food rations. It becomes enormously significant the moment it breaks up family life and uproots the first emotional attachments of the child within the family group. London children, therefore, were much less upset by bombing than by evacuation to the country as a protection against it. ”  
(8)

Without diminishing Freud and Burlingham's observation, Maas, 20 years later, carried out a controlled study to examine the long-term effects of separation and residential care on persons who had been placed in the residential nurseries as infants. Considering various attributes of the lives of the now young adults, Maas, recognizing the contributions of the «plasticity of the human personality and perhaps the importance played by the nursery parent substitutes,» he concluded that «at least from the age of 2, early childhood separation and pre-school residential care are not themselves sufficient antecedents to a seriously troubled or troublesome young adulthood.» (9) He also suggested that the effects of separation cannot be considered apart from the family life from which the children were separated and, in the case of the group under study, to which they were returned

Various studies during the 1940s examined the impact of the British evacuation on older children. Katherine Wolf surveyed that literature in an effort to sort out the often contradictory conclusions. Wolf drew a distinction between short-term adjustment and maladjustment of children away from home and deeper neurosis formation caused by evacuation. She concluded that the percentage of neurosis formation was believed to be relatively low, that enuresis (lack of bladder control) was the dominant symptom of the syndrome «evacuation neurosis'» and that the way a child dealt with the experience of evacuation seemed to depend on whether the child's prior relationship to his parents was stable or one of conflict. Wolf postulates that to cope with evacuation children that had stable relationships with their parents mentally suspended these relationships. She postulated that this suspension of familial relationships facilitates adaptation to evacua-

tion, explains the low incidence of neurosis formation and manifests itself in the lack of concentration that was an almost uniform characteristic of evacuated children. For children with conflictive relationships with parents, evacuation seemed to accentuate the conflict and resulted in the child acting it out. An additional point that deserves mentioning relates to the age of evacuated children as a factor in serious disturbance. Wolf's review of the literature revealed no consensus among researchers as to whether any particular age between the ages 1 and 13 was more prone to what researchers considered «neurosis formation». An uncontradicted conclusion among authors, however, was that adolescents develop an evacuation neurosis more frequently than younger children.

Many European countries less directly affected by World Wars I and II established short-stay evacuation schemes to host children. In Switzerland in 1939, for example, some 20 Swiss societies created a coordinating organization called *Cartel Suisse de Secours aux Enfants Victimes de la Guerre* to provide aid to war-affected children by arranging temporary care for children in Switzerland and by providing material help and medical care to children in other countries. Over a five-year period ending in 1947, more than 100,000 children were provided three-month visits to Switzerland. Children generally were placed in private homes, although 453 Serbian children from Belgrade were cared for in four large colonies, group rather than family care was organized because of the language barrier.

In light of all the evacuation efforts during World War II, it is interesting to note that in 1945, at the end of the war, an international week of study concerning child victims of the war was organized in Switzerland. Psychologists, teachers, social workers, sociologists and government officials were called together to examine questions related to children's futures after their war experiences. Experience with the evacuation of children was one of the issues considered. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) concluded that on the basis of its experience, except for very particular medical reasons, children were better off if helped in their own country rather than sent to a foreign country. It was noted that evacuated children often suffered from homesickness or found it difficult to readopt to their home country when repatriated. Also, host families often hesitated to separate from their children, particularly if the children were to be returned to situations of danger.<sup>(10)</sup>

The Greek civil war provides another example of the international movement of children, although for many years contention raged over whether the 23,000 to 28,000 children between the ages of 3 and 14 who went from northern Greece to Yugoslavia, Albania,

Bulgaria and other countries were coercively or forcibly separated from their parents (as many Greek parents asserted) or willingly evacuated from difficult war situations for educational purposes as the Greek guerrilla forces and receiving countries contended. Some 10,000 of the children were reportedly provided care and support in Yugoslavia. Repatriation of the children proved difficult. Although Yugoslavia took a somewhat more active role in permitting the evacuated children it sheltered to be documented by international parties, still it, like the other host countries, defended its refusal to repatriate the children on such grounds as that the children were happy where they were, because of claimed uncertainty of the children's well-being if they were returned and because of political and ideological difficulties that existed then between it and Greece. Five years after their evacuation, after many major international initiatives to facilitate their return, only one-fourth of the children, some by then adults, returned to Greece. About five years after the war ended, Greece would no longer accept the evacuated children when they attempted to return because they were considered suspicious, having been raised and trained in a communist country.

The Nigerian civil war beginning in 1967 provides yet another example of the evacuation of children. The conflict, as may be remembered, was a war of secession and was finally ended but with great loss of life and suffering. Food shortage and famine, a defended war tactic in that conflict, reportedly caused the deaths of some 500,000 children under the age of 10 during 1968 in just one of several famine periods throughout the war. In response to the severe food shortages, relief agencies initiated relief flights that delivered food and medicines to civilians within the encircled battle area.

The evacuation of children reportedly began with persons thrusting babies and small children onto relief airplanes after the planes had discharged their loads. The idea of using empty planes to evacuate starving children quickly gathered momentum and within a short period, several thousand children had been evacuated out of the war zone to Gabon, the neighboring country where the relief flights were based. A large residential care center was established there for the treatment and care of the children.

The evacuation of children was heatedly debated during the war. Some, including government leaders in North America and Europe, advocated the massive evacuation of children to their countries and proposed sending in large planes to facilitate it. Agencies in neighboring countries, such as Cameroon, offered to establish reception centers as an alternative. Finally, authorities in the secessionist State of Biafra, supported by some local specialists and international

## LETTERS

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### Trauma of removing children from war

YOUR ARTICLE on the Bosnian children ('Plucked from war and mother love' 4 October) was for me a *déjà vu*. I was one of a small group of refugees taken from the Iberian peninsula to the United States in 1943. Although my mother, a Polish Jewess, had carried her babe in arms and my elder sister over the Pyrenees into Spain, she was not allowed to accompany us.

In the US my sister and I were separated and when, nearly five years later, the Red Cross finally located all members of our family, I had completely forgotten my past and assimilated into the

present. When I was returned to my impoverished broken parents, it was against my wishes. It was a nightmare we had nothing in common — not even language — except a past which was foreign to me. I spent my adolescence being torn between my two families, crushed by the pull between two cultures and two very distinct sets of values. Although we were physically reunited as a family, we never regained the emotional bonds that had been strong enough to ensure our survival when so many others perished. The traumas of those years have never left me.

About five years ago I tried to

trace the other children who were on the boat with me. Most had ended up unwanted and labelled as delinquent in institutions. Even where relatives survived the war, happy ever after endings were difficult to find.

I don't know the answer to the child casualties of war. But moving traumatised children to another culture can cause more problems than they already have. The psychological scars that this well-meaning action can cause can be as debilitating as any others these children have suffered. Joan Salter  
London N10

**A comment to initiatives to evacuate children from the former Yugoslavia by a woman who was herself evacuated as a child - alone.** (*The Independent on Sunday* 11 October 1992)

child welfare agencies, discouraged the evacuation of children as a solution to meeting children's needs. Evacuation was not entirely prevented, for whenever the food situation became critical, some needy children were permitted to leave, but it was not implemented on a massive scale.

The objections to the massive evacuation of children arose from beliefs that with adequate support local efforts could be initiated to meet children's needs, that children were being moved without adequate documentation and that it was unacceptable to spend vast amounts of money for the evacuation and care of a comparatively few children, money that if redirected could benefit many more children. The risks of moving very ill children were noted. It was also suggested that evacuation might result in the children's psychological estrangement from their families and environment and cause difficulties on reintegration. It was observed that during the most difficult times parents supported evacuation but when the situation improved they mourned the loss of their children.

As an alternative to evacuation, an assertive, coordinated, on-the-spot child welfare program was proposed and supported by many agencies. The first and foremost response called for was a massive relief effort of essential goods, ensuring that the needs of children were given priority. Many special services were also established.

At the end of the war, about 4,500 children had been evacuated out of Biafra to Gabon and some 40,000 unaccompanied children lived in orphanages and special service centers throughout the war zone.

After initial family reunion efforts, some 10,000 to 11,000 unaccompanied children still remained separated from their families, including the children who had been evacuated.

The actions taken at the end of the Nigerian civil war serve as a most important example of the possibility of family reunification. Under the directive of a firm governmental policy, an assertive large-scale social welfare program is initiated. To achieve the objective of tracing, reuniting and providing follow-up services to the more than 10,000 unaccompanied children, some 500 Nigerian and international staff were required over a period of several years. All but 97 of the children were reunited with parents or relatives.

Some five years after the repatriation of the evacuated children, researchers from the University of Nigeria led by D. A. Obkeze, carried out an extensive follow-up study (11). They concluded that «most important is the quality of the staff» in such an effort. They found that some of the staff involved in that experience were «corrupt, partial and inefficient». With regard to the issue of rights, a much debated point, based on the customary African practice of evacuating women and children from conflict situations, they concluded that the rights of children who had been evacuated, then returned to their homes at the end of the war, had not been violated. They held that the rights of children and parents had been violated in cases where the children were not returned to their homes at the end of the war.

The researchers also examined the impact of the separation of children from their families and of the care the children received in the institutions in which they were held before they were returned home. They concluded that, despite the institutional settings, the relationships between the evacuated children and their care givers in reception camps reportedly had been warm, friendly and cordial «suggesting an atmosphere for normal social, psychological development». They found, however, that the care received left its imprint on the children, for the displaced children continued to show considerable differences from their non-displaced siblings and peers. However, they were believed to be generally well-integrated into the family and community, did not exhibit any generalized symptoms of maladjustment and remembered the evacuation experience as positive. Other indicators, such as behaviors and performance at home and school, were found to be positive. They concluded that the evacuation had been beneficial as implemented.

Timing as to the repatriation of the children had been a much debated point. The researchers concluded that delays for better conditions or to accommodate children's wishes to remain in their temporary placement longer may have defeated the objective of returning the



children to their home environment. They recommended that in any future evacuation every effort must be made to obtain parental consent or «at least keep parents or near relatives well-informed of the whereabouts of the children.»

The above are but a few of many examples. The evacuation of Finnish children to Sweden, the evacuation of Cuban children to the United States, the Vietnamese airlift of children to the United States and other countries and attempts to evacuate Khmer children from Thailand might also have been included in this summary. Others also exist. More information about many of these case studies is provided in the book *Unaccompanied Children: Care and Protection in Wars, Natural Disasters and Refugee Movements*.<sup>(12)</sup>

## Conclusions and Commentary

It is instructive that in past conflict situations, each unique in its own right, the issues and problems encountered with regard to the care and protection of children have been similar throughout. Many of the issues are generic - whether or not to evacuate children, how to provide for children in families or after separation from their primary caregivers, what protective measures are necessary, uncertainty about psychological and social consequences and the difficulties of facilitating family reunion and repatriation - and have been faced in the past and are relevant to humanitarian considerations today. Their repeated re-emergence confirms them to be «unsolved» concerns, they are best understood as uncertainties that must be wrestled with in each new situation.

In seeking lessons learned, we are reminded that the past does not tell us the solution or «right» things to do in the present situation, perhaps reviewing the past is important for what we may learn about what has gone «wrong» or has had consequences quite different than involved parties anticipated.

Listed below are three concluding statements, which attempt to summarize lessons to be learned from the past applied to the situation of the former Yugoslavia.

# 1.

## Protect and assist

An important and substantial criticism levied against many past evacuation schemes is that organizers did not adequately address the underlying problems which caused families to evacuate or send their children away. Considerable efforts have often been made to identify needy children and substantiate the dire circumstances of their families. Then, however, rather than providing aid that the family may have required to provide for their children, agencies involved in evacuations merely supported the removal of the children

The need for families to flee or for children to be evacuated, always it may be said, represents gross failure. First, it reflects a failure to assure minimum human rights. Second, it reflects failure to provide essential humanitarian aid. These failures cannot be excuses, simply by the existence of difficult war circumstances, for experience repeatedly confirms that in the midst of war, humanitarian assistance to ensure basic needs (the absence of which often necessitates flight or evacuation) can be provided where there is concerted commitment and an effective response to that end. The humanitarian act of removing children, if that is necessary, does not absolve the failure to provide the assistance required by the family. In some situations, withholding or ineffectively providing aid only to then offer the chance to desperate parents to send their children away might be considered a form of philanthropic abduction. Certainly providing family assistance in war situation is more difficult than removing children from the scene. Also, it is very likely that the costs of evacuation and subsequent care of children may exceed the costs of providing assistance that enables families to continue caring for their children.

In considering a humanitarian response to the needs of children in war situations, the first question is not, simplistically, whether children should or should not be evacuated. Two more fundamental determinations deserve priority consideration and every support.

- a) What are the needs of families in the war situation that may cause parents to feel they must send children away?
- b) What assistance is required to enable families to protect and meet basic needs of their children?

Perhaps consideration should be given to requiring in the documentation of each child for which evacuation is sought, a brief assessment of whether any specific assistance might feasibly be provided to the family which might eliminate the need for the separation. Perhaps

organizations, even communities, interested in the evacuation of children, should be encouraged to redirect their focus of humanitarian assistance toward family assistance.

Extra-ordinary efforts are currently being taken by local families and local organization, by national, international and bilateral organizations to meet humanitarian needs in the former Yugoslavia. The persons involved are working in extremely difficult circumstances against innumerable wartime obstacles, including threats to their own lives. Recognition of the shortfall that exists in the assistance required by families to enable them to protect and provide for their children is not a criticism of current efforts but a reminder that, quite obviously, current efforts are insufficient. If the needs of families are to be met, substantially greater support is required to strengthen and expand current programs. In addition, more efforts by committed, competent humanitarian agencies and persons are required and should be encouraged and directed to offer assistance, ensuring that the aid is directed to priority family needs.

## 2. Preserve family unity in evacuation

Clearly, history confirms that sometimes in war situations flight may be necessary. When flight is necessary parents usually flee with their children as a desperate effort to protect them. Women and children in fractured family units constitute the majority of the 18.5 million refugees and 20 million internally displaced persons that exist around the world today. Moving from harm's way, if possible, is, indisputably, a sensible, primal reaction to danger.

Civilians in war situations in current times, it seems, are increasingly at risk. The tools of our age enable combatants to inflict greater harm, more easily subjugate or control civilian populations and at the same time diminish the possibility of their flight to safety. Additionally, in many situations, neighboring communities or countries seem less willing to provide sanctuary. The need to mobilize effective measures to protect civilian war victims, provide emergency assistance that meets basic needs, including possibly their evacuation to safer areas, is an increasingly critical policy and program concern.

Family forms vary considerably between cultures but the concept that families have both a right and a responsibility to provide for

their children and that children have a right to care within their families is a deeply rooted, guiding principle in child welfare and national and international law. Experience confirms that children can successfully be raised by other than their families, as mentioned later in the paper, but this reality does not supercede the importance of the need to protect family unity, particularly in adversity. The principle of family unity is a fundamental element of the joint UNHCR/UNICEF policy concerning the evacuation of children from war-affected areas of countries of the former Yugoslavia which, rightly, advocates that if there are children who need to be evacuated, every effort must be made to evacuate them with family members.

Evacuation of the family units may be necessary and deserves every support if families are unable to provide at least the minimal care and protection of children by their families within their homes. Throughout the conflict areas of the former Yugoslavia tens of thousands of families have fled or have been displaced to date and this displacements continues.

Particularly in enclave and encircled areas, special, extra-ordinary humanitarian intervention may be required to assist in the evacuation of threatened civilian family units. One argument against the evacuation of civilians from such situations is that it may contribute to the «ethnic cleansing» intentions of combatant parties. This possibility must be balanced against the possibility that by not assisting defenseless women and children to flee slaughter in their entrapment is to unintentionally be a party to their deaths and suffering. From a humanitarian perspective the right to flight needs always to be protected in war situations. Assistance is sometimes required to facilitate the opportunity to flee, may be required for those in flight and is almost always required for those who have been displaced.

If evacuation is deemed necessary or desirable, the central question that should drive policy and actions is. What actions are required to evacuate family units?

### 3. Evacuation only of children

Despite best intentions, experience confirms that conflict situations do exist in which children are not protected, essential food and basic needs for survival are not available and families may be unable to

find sanctuary from the dangers that beset them. In numerous past conflicts this has resulted in the deaths and/or immeasurable suffering of large numbers of children and their parents, as Yugoslavia and Poland have experienced in the past, for example. The reality of these deaths and the suffering of the survivors forcefully raises the issue of whether the evacuation of children apart from their parents, if such was the only feasible option, should be considered and if so under what conditions. Where there is high risk of loss of life for specific children, and evacuation of children apart from their families is determined to be the only feasible intervention, certainly, evacuation is defensible.

Part of the difficulty in determining when children should be evacuated from a war zone arises from difficulty in determining children's risks in a shifting and uncertain situation. A guess about the future is always required. Conditions of risk and hardship sometimes change quickly. Will the conflict continue? Will an extra-ordinary relief effort be mounted that would reduce the risks of loss of life and suffering?

A second complication in determining whether children should be evacuated arises from the usual scale of the problem. All children in war zones face risks and hardships, some more serious than others. Which of the millions of children living in very difficult circumstances in the war-affected countries of the former Yugoslavia are most at risk, and which should be evacuated if evacuation was feasible and deemed desirable? Clearly evacuation of all children is not a feasible solution.

Concerns arising from the scale of children's needs and/or the difficulties that exist in assessing risks do not, in and of themselves, invalidate the possible need to evacuate some children. Such concerns merely reinforce the need for a careful, compassionate understanding of the risks which families face and the need for a reasonable and equitable criteria for evacuation if such was deemed necessary. However, experience confirms that the evacuation of children is not a panacea. There is every reason for caution, careful planning and the implementation of all usual legal and social welfare protections for children to be evacuated. Following are some of the causes for caution.

Calls for evacuation are always portrayed as purely humanitarian. Experience substantiates that, sometimes, the evacuation of children has been motivated by self-serving personal, political, military, organizational, financial or ideological purposes, rescuers seeking popularity, politicians seeking support, organizations seeking visibility or funds, combatants pursuing military objectives, parents seeking children to adopt or use. Evacuation efforts deserved careful scrutiny to determine whether the best interests of children will be served.

The warm reception and loving care of evacuated children is

always assumed when evacuation programs are advocated and planned. But, as illustrated in the cited examples, evacuated children have not always received positive nurturing care. Sometimes the care givers have been inappropriate, the individual needs of children not met or, in the worst cases, children have been abused. Child welfare issues have often been inadequately considered prior to the movement of children because organizers have assumed that care arrangements would be made after evacuation, as may happen when children are moved simply as medical cases or as holiday children rather than as children for whom long term care arrangements might be necessary. Often the organizations who have been involved in evacuations have had no previous child welfare or child placement experience. Complications with regard to organizational arrangements have also arisen when individuals or agencies have assumed initial responsibility for evacuated children on the assumption that they were only responsible for providing a short holiday only to find themselves holding responsibility for arranging and financially supporting adequate long term care for which they were neither competent nor financially able to do well.

It is because of the common difficulties which arise in efforts to provide alternative care arrangements for children not with their families that extensive child placement services exist in most countries in peaceful times. Care that meets the needs of evacuated children must be able to address the types of usual concerns in the care and placement of children plus additional concerns arising from the special circumstances of evacuated children.

The need for special protective measures for evacuated children arise because their basic rights as individuals and children are sometimes violated. The absence of protection has caused the loss of the names and identities of children through inadequate documentation and record keeping. Repeatedly in emergency situations, possibly well-intended, but misdirected individuals simply carry away children, without authority, without parental permission or documentation.

Rescuers often without any experience in child welfare act on the assumption that evacuated children are available for adoption or that the usual placement considerations to protect child or parental rights are unnecessary or not applicable. In some conflict situations, under the guise of child rescue efforts, pernicious organizations have formed to abduct and sell children. Experience substantiates that children evacuated from emergency situations require the same protections required for children not in the care of their parents in non-conflict situations, plus additional protections that arise from the conflict circumstances.

Most evacuations are organized on the assumptions that the children will only be removed for a short period, a few months, before the children are returned to the families. Examples exist of evacuations in which children were returned home after a brief time away, even during a continuing war. But experience confirms that the intended short evacuation, more commonly, becomes an extended separation. Rather than abating quickly as assumed, conflict situations many times deteriorate still further and drag into protracted affairs. Children thinking they were to be apart from their families for a brief holiday find themselves unable to return home; then after a protracted separation may not wish to return home. Parents expecting to see their children soon are forced to accept almost permanent separation; after an extended separation, if the child is happily settled, the family may not advise the child to return home. Many other unexpected difficulties typically arise to prevent the children's return - resistance of fostering organizations to the return of the children to war areas, death or continuing difficult circumstances of the children's families making reunion undesirable or impossible, political complications between the host and home country, and so forth.

The impact of evacuation on the psychological and social well-being of children is a critical concern, a full discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper. Recognizing that great gaps exist in our understanding about this issue and that it is very difficult to generalize about children who differ as individuals, are of varying ages and developmental stages, and come from quite different backgrounds and experiences, still the *prima facie* evidence is that evacuation and alternative care in and of itself is not usually harmful. Whether or not the experience is harmful, although well-being and harm is multifactorial, seems fundamentally to relate to the quality of care provided to the children after their evacuation; that is, the extent to which the care provided each child meets the specific needs of that individual.

Some children will not do well away from their families. As noted in an analysis of the British evacuation, «We must recognize that there are some children who are quite unsuitable to leave their parents, there are others who are quite unsuitable to be put in someone else's home; there are foster-parents who should not have the care of children and there are parents whose children should not be taken from them.» (13)

We can be certain that evacuated children will be quite homesick at times and that some are likely to exhibit bed-wetting, periods of unhappiness, worry and other normal stress indicators. The evacuation, particularly if for an extended period, will leave its imprint on each child's life; for some it will have been a boon, for others a

tribulation As was reflected by children evacuated during the Spanish civil war, many said that in similar circumstances they would send their children away and hope they were treated as they had been, a minority indicated that they would die with their children rather than send them away to experience what they had suffered. (14)

## 4. Conclusion

From an intervention perspective it is worth repeating that the priority consideration with regards to children's needs must be actions which enable families to meet the needs of children in their care. The second priority, if evacuation is deemed necessary, that children be evacuated as part of a family unit, children being kept with their primary care givers.

If, however, parties involved come to the opinion that evacuation of children is necessary, the guidelines spelled out in the UNHCR/ UNICEF joint statement no 2 (see pages 29 to 32 ) should be respected so as to ensure the best interests and protection of children who are evacuated

Finally, with regard to the evacuation of children from war areas of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, each involved party - children and their parents, first and foremost, national authorities, international and non-governmental organizations, and host countries- must consider the options, the risks and the potential benefits, to act on what is believed to be in the best interests of children and their families in this situation No course of actions will be ideal, for the ideal situation of families being able to provide for their children in an environment of peace and tolerance has been temporarily destroyed.

Very likely, some form of all the mentioned courses of actions are necessary concurrently One conclusion is indisputable; in the humanitarian interests of the survival of women and children in this situation, concerted but thoughtful action is immediately and urgently required Innumerable problems can be expected in every attempt to assist. The extraordinary efforts taken in such situations to meet humanitarian needs reconfirm the positive attributes of human nature and provides a ray of hope on a foreboding landscape



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UNHCR/UNICEF  
JOINT STATEMENT ON

## The Evacuation of Children from former Yugoslavia

**1.** There continues to be well-meant efforts by Governments and non-governmental organisations to evacuate children from conflict areas, particularly Sarajevo. When any action affecting children is being contemplated, all parties must be guided by concern for «the best interests of the child», the first principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which states

«In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration » (*Article 3 para 1*)

It is on this basis that UNHCR and UNICEF present the following key considerations which must be taken into account when evacuation of children is being contemplated

### 2. Numbers Involved

There are more than 600,000 children under six years of age in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 281,000 of whom are in besieged cities, including 80,000 in Sarajevo. Given these numbers, it is clear that all children cannot be evacuated. Any evacuation which selects some children over others should not be done in such a way as to exacerbate ethnic tensions and conflict, and should be based on clear criteria

### 3. Evacuation from Sarajevo by Airlift

The primary mission of the airlift is to bring desperately needed food and relief into Sarajevo for the besieged population. Furthermore, sufficient security between the city and the airport and in the airport does not exist for the use of the airlift for evacuation. In light of this security situation and in an effort to maintain the fragile airlift operation, UNPROFOR and UNHCR have delineated a policy that only those persons whose medical situation is life-threatening and who cannot be treated with the facilities available in Sarajevo should be considered for

evacuation by the airlift. Procedural guidelines for evacuation by airlift of such medical referral cases, including children, have been developed in consultation with WHO, UNICEF and ICRC and been distributed.

#### 4. Evacuation in General

Several factors indicate that evacuation is not the most appropriate solution. In fact, evaluations of past evacuations have shown that evacuation often is more harmful than helpful to the children involved. These are some of the reasons:

The trauma of being separated from the family is often greater than the trauma of remaining with the family in an area affected by hostilities and conflict.

Initiatives for evacuation often come from evacuation organizers rather than from parents whose emotional stress in the duress of the situation may result in decisions which might not have been taken otherwise.

Evacuations of children are often conceived as mainly logistical operations and may not necessarily be carried out by groups that have a proven record in child welfare, including assessing the best interest of the child, and in placement experience.

There is great risk, particularly where large numbers are involved and there is a lack of resources, that the situation of the child will not be adequately documented and monitored. Children may become «lost» without the possibility of eventual return to their families. The length of separation is usually much longer than expected and may lead to estrangement of families and a loss of ethnic and cultural identity.

Where displacement and ethnic relocation are goals of the hostilities, parties might be pressured to evacuate children for this purpose.

Unexpected political complications may prejudice the outcome of evacuations. Whether the children are invited into a country, and when and if they return may become political issues, particularly where proper groundwork has not been done.

### Guiding Considerations

#### 5. Family unity

No child should be moved without his/her primary caretaker. Respect for family unity is a guiding principle, clearly stated in the Convention on

the Rights of the Child. Every effort must be made so that the family unit remains intact and the child is not separated from the family.

## **6. Unaccompanied children**

Every effort should be made to trace the parents or other close relatives of unaccompanied minors before evacuation is considered. Unaccompanied minors are children who are separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who has responsibility to do so.

## **7. Adoption**

Adoption should be carried out in accordance with Article 21 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adoption should not be considered if (a) there is hope of successful tracing or evidence that the parents are still alive, (b) it is against the expressed wishes of the child or the parent, or (c) unless a reasonable time (at least two years) has passed to allow for tracing information to be gathered. Staying with relatives in extended family units is a better solution than uprooting the child completely.

## **8. Orphans**

The issue of children occupying orphanages before the outbreak of hostilities and who can be clearly documented as orphans deserves special attention. Thorough assessment of the status of these children is very important and very difficult. Recent incidents have shown that alleged orphans turned out to have parents. Many unaccompanied children have living parents or close relatives with whom they may one day be reunited. If the status of an alleged orphan cannot be clearly documented, there is a risk of creating further problems of family reunification and tracing across country borders after hostilities have ended.

## **9. To be clarified before any evacuation of a child:**

- a Conditions of release and custody placement (identity of the child, documentation, family history, issuance and preservation of records),
- b Conditions of admission and care in receiving country, including all financial and legal responsibilities;
- c Measures to ensure/preserve relationships and communication with original family/original caretaker,
- d Provisions for family reunion in the context of a durable solution

## **10. Conclusion**

Unless the above factors are carefully considered and implemented, UNHCR and UNICEF can not endorse evacuations and/or request or advise governments or NGOs to evacuate children. UNHCR and UNICEF, with other humanitarian agencies on the ground, will continue to do everything possible to improve medical and social conditions locally, so that the safety and integrity of the child is preserved within his or her family and community.

UNHCR/UNICEF 13 August 1992

UNHCR/UNICEF JOINT STATEMENT n° 2

## Further Considerations Regarding the Evacuation of Children from former Yugoslavia

Supported by ICRC and  
the Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

In view of the persistent queries concerning the evacuation of children from the former Yugoslavia, UNHCR and UNICEF, supported by ICRC and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, see the need to highlight the applicable principles and to spell out some practical guidelines to be respected if evacuation of children is considered

### **PROTECT AND ASSIST IN PLACE**

1. Given the many serious problems associated with evacuations, as summarized in the Joint Statement of 13 August 1992, UNHCR and UNICEF continue to urge that priority be given to providing protection and assistance to enable families to meet the needs of their children in former Yugoslavia. As part of their humanitarian mandates, UNHCR, UNICEF and other organizations concerned with children continue to pursue every means to provide adequate protection and assistance to families in need. These efforts involve identifying the needs clearly and addressing them effectively so that people are able to choose to remain and keep their family units together. Greater support is required to strengthen and expand current programs in this regard. Organizations especially concerned with the welfare of children should contact UNHCR or UNICEF to see how they can *join our efforts in former Yugoslavia*.

### **PRESERVE FAMILY UNITY IN EVACUATIONS**

2. If it has been carefully determined that assistance and protection cannot be provided in place and evacuation is deemed necessary, the guiding principle must be the best interests of the child, e.g. that the evacuation would not lead to more harm than good for the child concerned. Experience has shown that

the most effective way to reduce the likelihood of harm is to keep children with their parents or primary care-givers. Thus, any consideration of evacuation should be driven by action that enables evacuation of family units

### **EVACUATE ONLY UNDER PROPER CONDITIONS**

3. It is recognized that there may be exceptional situations where there is a need to evacuate children without their parents or families. Such evacuations raise a number of fundamental issues related to child-care standards, including an assessment of the best interests of the child in terms of destination, reception and care arrangements, maintaining contact with the family, early reunification, etc. UNHCR and UNICEF firmly believe that all the factors set out in the Joint Statement of 13 August 1992 and those elaborated below should guide all action during any evacuation. If these principles cannot be respected, the evacuation should be reconsidered.

### **ORGANIZING/IMPLEMENTING EVACUATIONS**

4. The following principles should be respected and the best interests of the child should prevail throughout
  - (a) The choice of which children are to be evacuated should be reasonable, fair, and based on clearly assessed needs of the individuals concerned, as opposed to the needs of remaining children
  - (b) The professional standards and capacity of evacuating agencies/individuals must be confirmed before entrusting the children to them
  - (c) The decision of parents to send their children away must be based on full information and must be free and without coercion. Families of prospective evacuees should be provided information about the evacuating agency to whom they are entrusting their children, the intended child care-arrangements and the risks and possible consequences of evacuation
  - (d) Every effort must be made to abide by the parents' wishes. The wishes of parents regarding the children's care, culture and religious training must be followed
  - (e) Children should be afforded the opportunity to have their opinion heard and considered
  - (f) Parents or guardians (by law or custom) must give written consent prior to evacuation
  - (g) For each child, personal and family particulars, with photos,

must be recorded in a personal profile and history file. This file should also include full particulars of the agency to which the child is entrusted and copies of the written consent of the parents. One copy of this file should be given to parents. One copy should travel with the child. One copy should be retained by national authorities. One copy should remain with the agency to whom the child is entrusted, and one copy should be placed with a neutral monitoring agency (such as the Central Tracing Agency of the ICRC).

(i) Children should be moved to safe areas as close as possible to their homes and families. The location of evacuation should be determined by the best interests of the child, not only by the availability or subjective interests of donor organizations or families.

(j) Suitable evacuation, reception and care arrangements must be demonstrably available prior to the movement of children. Every possible measure should have been taken to assess travel conditions and ensure safety and appropriate care en route. If entry into another country is involved, the necessary approval, including visas, should be obtained before children are separated from their parents.

(k) Guardianship of the children (who will act in loco parentis) must be established prior to the movement of the children.

(l) Caring adults known to the children should accompany those evacuated without their families.

## **RECEPTION AND CARE**

5. (a) The reception of the children should be well-planned, positive and humane so as to safeguard the well-being of each child.
- (b) Evacuated children should be provided all the social services and legal protections available to children in the host country who are not in the care of their parents.
- (c) The care and placement of children should be supervised by national or local child welfare services to ensure that they receive care that meets at least the minimum standards provided for national children.
- (d) Siblings should be kept together.
- (e) The most appropriate form of placement must be determined for each child. Age, personality, needs and preference of the child must be considered. For most children, family care will likely be most desirable. For some children, group care may be more appropriate. Clearly the most important criterion is that children are provided care that is age-appropriate, loving and



nurturing, by continuous, rather than frequently changing, caregivers

(f) Every effort must be made to preserve the culture, language and religion of the children, with full respect for the expressed preferences of the children's families. Special efforts should be made to provide families of similar ethnic, language and religious backgrounds

(g) Communications between the child and his or her family must be maintained, and special efforts should be taken to facilitate such communication

#### **FAMILY REUNIFICATION**

6. (a) Evacuations, reception and care should be planned with a view to the earliest possible reunification between parents and children. It must be clearly explained to guardians or foster parents that, although the duration of the evacuation may be long, the objective is to return the child to his or her parents as soon as the situation permits

(b) Documentation for children should include sufficient travel documentation to enable easy return to countries of origin, as appropriate

Geneva, Switzerland 16 December 1992

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