

World's children paying price for political rifts: TRFN

By Tom Miles

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Syrian refugees wait to call their relatives at a centre of the International Committee of The Red Cross which conducts a programme that enables refugees to get in touch with their relatives either by using mobile phones or by writing letters, at Al Zaatari refugee camp in the Jordanian city of Mafraq, near the border with Syria, September 15, 2014.

Credit: Reuters/Muhammad Hamed

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GENEVA (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Divisions among the veto-wielding powers of the U.N. Security Council are harming the world's children and sowing the seeds of future conflicts, the head of the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) said on Monday.

This year, riven by conflicts, has been the worst in two generations for children around the world, but 2015 looks set to be even worse, said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake.

"This reflects the indisputable fact that the world is more divided politically among and within nations than ever before," Lake told Reuters.

UNICEF estimates 15 million children are caught up in wars in [Syria](#), [Iraq](#), Central African Republic, South Sudan, [Ukraine](#) and the Palestinian territories, and 230 million children globally live in areas affected by armed conflicts.

"If you compare the severity of the plight of the children with the attention of the world to that plight, I don't suppose that gap has ever been bigger."

The big powers have always been divided, but the consequences of their divisions are now greater than ever before, said Lake, who served as U.S. National Security Advisor under President Bill Clinton.

It was in their own security interests to stop conflicts such as Syria's war and prevent humanitarian crises, he said.

"If these conflicts become endemic in the next generation and the generation after that, then what hope is there for the whole region in the Middle East, and ergo, what hope is there for the kind of stability there that the rest of the world needs for so many reasons?"

At the same time aid agencies, stretched by new crises like Ebola, lingering ones like [Syria](#), and forgotten ones like those in [Yemen](#) or [Afghanistan](#), have less and less capacity even to put "bandaids" on the conflicts, Lake said.

The foundations of the future would be built in the hearts and minds of children, not the physical infrastructure of schools, he said.

Lake has stopped asking refugee children about their hopes for the future because it was "too heartbreaking".

"If you can't get these kids into school where they will both learn things and feel safer, then they are going to be very ill-equipped to rebuild their societies someday because they simply won't know enough."

Traumatized children need help to cope with the horrors they have seen, he said.

"Otherwise they are simply going to recreate what they consider to be normal in the next generation and seek revenge rather than reconciliation, and everybody is going to pay the price."

(Reporting by Tom Miles, Editing by Lisa Anderson)

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