



Graça Machel was born Graça Simbine on the 17th of October, 1945, in Incadine, Gaza Province, Mozambique. She is the widow of the late Mozambican president, Samora Machel.

In July of 1998, she married Nelson Mandela, becoming his third (and last) wife.

Machel is the only person, in the world, to have married presidents of two different countries. She is an international advocate for women's and children's rights.

In this photo - from The Presidency of South Africa's official web site - we see Graça Machel with Mandela (in Qunu, Eastern Cape during the summer of 2008), celebrating his 90th birthday and their 10th wedding anniversary.

We can learn more about Graça Machel by reading her own words.

The following are [her comments](#) regarding the investigation/report which she undertook on behalf of the United Nations. It addresses the *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*:

I am privileged to have been given the opportunity to report on a topic that I believe is of fundamental importance to humanity.

In the past decade, 2 million children have been killed in armed conflict. Three times as many have been seriously injured or permanently disabled. Millions of others have been forced to witness or even take part in horrifying acts of violence.

It is impossible to give accurate statistics on this carnage. The conservative estimates available hide the numbers of children whose murders are concealed and remain unrecorded, who are erased from the memory of humankind when whole families and communities are wiped out. Yet it is clear that increasingly, children are targets, not incidental casualties, of armed conflict.

I come from a culture where traditionally, children are seen as both our present and our future, so I have always believed it is our responsibility as adults to give children futures worth having. In the two years spent on this report, I have been shocked and angered to see how shamefully we have failed in this responsibility.

In some countries, conflicts have raged for so long that children have grown into adults without ever knowing peace. I have spoken to a child who was raped by soldiers when she was just nine years old. I have witnessed the anguish of a mother who saw her children blown to pieces by land-mines in their fields, just when she believed they had made it home safely after the war. I have listened to children forced to watch while their families were brutally slaughtered. I have heard the bitter remorse of 15-year-old ex-soldiers mourning their lost childhood and innocence, and I have been chilled listening to children who have been so manipulated by adults and so corrupted by their experiences of conflict that they could not recognize the evil of which they had been a part.

These are the stories behind the figures given in this report — figures of such magnitude that they often hide the impact of these horrors on each child, each family, each community.

This report has given me the opportunity to learn about more than just the brutality of armed conflict, however.

In Lebanon, I visited the site of an 'education for peace' project set up by children, with support from UNICEF. Where only months before there had been division, bitterness and hatred between

communities, I found a group of teenagers interacting positively, exchanging experiences. These teenagers have managed to build bridges of communication where so many adults had failed. Hundreds of youth volunteers, many of them former militia members, have been mobilized as militants for peace. Those children understand that preventing the conflicts of tomorrow means changing the mind-set of youth today.

I have learned that despite being targets in contemporary armed conflicts, despite the brutality shown towards them and the failure of adults to nurture and protect them, children are both our reason to eliminate the worst aspects of armed conflict and our best hope of succeeding in that charge. In a disparate world, children are a unifying force capable of bringing us all together in support of a common ethic.

This was demonstrated repeatedly in the interactive, consultative process of research and mobilization that led to this report, involving all elements of civil society, and in particular, women and children, communities, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UN agencies, governments and regional organizations.

In particular, six regional consultations were held: in Asia and the Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and West and Central Africa. Field visits were made to several areas affected by armed conflicts: Angola, Cambodia, Colombia, Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Rwanda (and refugee camps in Tanzania and Zaire), Sierra Leone and former Yugoslavia.

There I met with officials and with children and their families to ensure that the final report reflects the immediate concerns of the people most directly affected. More than 20 thematic research papers and workshops were specially commissioned as background materials.

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Above all else, this process has strengthened my conviction that we must do anything and everything to protect children, to give them priority and a better future. This report is a call to action and a call to embrace a new morality that puts children where they belong — at the heart of all agendas.

Protecting children from the impact of armed conflict is everyone's responsibility — governments, international organizations and every element of civil society. Therefore my challenge to each of you reading this report is that you ask yourself what you can do to make a difference. And then take that action, no matter how large or how small.

For our children have a right to peace.

While Mandela was still alive, Machel often represented him at public affairs.

Click on the image for a much better view.

Credits:

Photo online, courtesy The Presidency of South Africa's [official web site](#).

Quoted passages from comments accompanying the United Nations report on "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children."

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