

# Enquiry: Notions of Terrorism

The stories below are true examples of violence. The names of the actors/countries involved have been omitted. Each story has a number of possible newspaper headlines. How is terrorism defined in relation to each headline?

## **TERRORIST SOLDIERS - TERRORIST CHILDREN - TERRORIST AID GIVER**

The army of country A receives AID from rich country B to buy weapons. Soldiers of country B surround a refugee camp of poor country C and insult the people who live there. They challenge the boys of the refugee camp (some as young as 11) to come closer to the fence. The boys get angry and go near the fence to throw stones at the soldiers. The soldiers shoot and kill some of them.

## **TERRORIST CORPORATION - TERRORIST COUNTRY B - TERRORIST FARMERS**

Corporation C from rich country A is testing some genetically modified crops in poor country B. The costs of production are rising for small farmers in the region. Many commit suicide because of debt. If their crops get contaminated by genetically modified seeds, they may lose their livelihoods. They decide to get together and threaten to destroy the company's crops and the company's offices.

## **TERRORIST RICH PEOPLE - TERRORIST POLICE - TERRORIST MAN - TERRORIST CHILDREN - TERRORIST POPULATION**

In country A there is a huge gap between the rich and the poor. Rich people generally humiliate and exploit the poor. They say it is poor people's fault they are poor. Sandro, a 5 year old boy from a very poor family sees his mum being murdered. He becomes a street boy. At 12, he watches the police shoot 8 of his friends when they were sleeping outside a church. He spends most of his teens in an institution where he is treated very badly. At 22 he decides to hijack a bus and uses the opportunity to call the attention of the media to his desperation. He threatens to kill the passengers. He is killed by the police. Many people in country A think street children should be killed so they do not become robbers or murderers.

## **TERRORIST FACTORY - TERRORIST EMPLOYEES - TERRORIST POLICY OF COUNTRY B**

There is a leak of a poisonous gas in a chemical factory that belongs to a corporation of rich country A. The factory is located in poor country B, as it is cheaper to run from there. The leaking happened because the factory was trying to cut expenses to have more profit. 6,000 people died that night in nearby towns and many more afterwards because of the contamination. The land and the water in the area are still contaminated. The company gave the families very little money in compensation.

## **TERRORIST COUNTRY B - TERRORIST GUERRILLAS**

A dictator is overthrown by a group in poor country A. Rich country B is not happy with the changes. So, country B funds and trains a guerrilla army to attack country A from its borders. The guerrillas generally try to avoid fighting the army of country A. Instead they attack clinics, schools, cooperative farms. Sometimes they mine the roads. Many, many civilians are killed and maimed by the guerrillas armed and supported by rich country B.

## **TERRORIST BOMBERS - TERRORIST COUNTRY C - TERRORIST COUNTRY A**

Simultaneously, two embassies of rich country A are bombed. 224 people are killed and over 1,000 injured. In retaliation, country A launched missiles at the capital city of country C, destroying a pharmaceutical factory, injuring ten people, and killing one. Country A claims that this factory was manufacturing chemicals that could be used to make poisonous gases - although it offers no substantial proof of this claim. Country C claims the factory produced medicines for malaria and tuberculosis and that more than 500,000 children will die without this medicine. Country A blocks the UN from launching an investigation.

## Informed Thinking

What informed your current perspective on this topic? What shapes the mainstream perspectives available to the public? Where can you find out about different perspectives? How do you make your decisions about what you think about it?

## Reflective Questions

Take three minutes in silence to reflect about the following:

1. How do you define terrorism? How was your assumption constructed? To what extent are you open to be challenged?
2. Have you, or have any members of your family, or any people you know well, ever experienced state or police repression firsthand? What were your reactions, and what actions, if any, did you/they take? What kind of injustices would you, your family or your community have to suffer to make you feel that violence was your only recourse?
3. At the bottom line, what do you think is worth fighting for – struggling for, resisting for, living (and dying) for?
4. What dangers and sources of violence are evident where you live, and are they in any way connected to global processes?
5. What do you perceive to be the biggest threat to global security? To national security? And to your own personal security?

## Group Dialogue Questions

Read through the list of questions below. Are there any other burning questions you would like to add to this list? Select two 'priority' questions for discussion in your group.

1. How do you define terrorism?
2. Can we classify the destruction of property (with no injuries) as terrorism?
3. Can governments commit acts of terrorism, or is the term reserved only for people who operate outside of governments?
4. Is violence always and absolutely morally wrong? Does it depend on the perspective of the group of people who decide to use it? Does it depend on the situation one is struggling within, or on whether one is facing violence, or on how equal or unequal the situation is, between the two sides in struggle? Is violence justified in self-defence?

5. Under what conditions should a movement consider remaining pacifist or using militant, 'violent' means? In what conditions would you support violent action against people (military or not)?
6. Do you agree with the following statement: "There can be no peace without justice"? In other words, for there to be justice, we must first fight for and achieve justice and equality?
7. Are there double standards in relation to how the law, the media and governments treat the issue of terrorism?
8. When is violence, by one state on another, legitimate? Who decides and how?

## Responsible Choices

How does this topic relate to your context of work? To what extent does asking these questions affect your decisions?

An act of violence against civilians happened in your country last week (choose a real incident). The media and the government portray the act as a terrorist act. Some of the students in the school have the same religion, nationality or social class of the perpetrators of the act of violence. Most students are still shocked and confused – no one in the school has addressed the issue openly. You want to plan a session in which students can address the issue. What content and approach would you use?

## Debriefing

Think about your learning process today. What have you learned about yourself? What have you learned about others? What have you learned about knowledge and about learning? Do you feel you and other participants could express themselves in an open and safe space? What could be done to improve the learning process of the group and the relationships within the space?