Since the two World Wars of the 20th century, the nature of war has changed. Many wars since the 1980s have been the result of deceptive or oppressive governments, and leaders who have intensified conflict and divisions among ethnic groups. Here are some of the main characteristics of war today:

- Most wars are caused by internal problems within countries, rather than the international situation. Often, these conflicts take place in the poorest or least developed countries of the world. Some organizations say that this is because of "the failures of national governments and societies to meet the basic human security needs of their citizens."

- Many violent conflicts are the result of ethnic, cultural, or religious conflicts. Societies are often governed by fear, intolerance, and ignorance of cultural differences.

- Acts of violence are increasingly affecting civilians, including children, as both victims and participants. This is not only the result of expanded war zones because of advanced technological warfare; it is also an effect of the widespread availability of weapons such as land mines and small arms, and increased acts of terrorism and non-military violence. Extreme poverty and lack of hope for the future lead people into groups that support acts of violence. In some countries, propaganda and intimidation are used to recruit even young children into war.

- The mass media bombard viewers with repeated images of war, violence, and destruction. Often, this can lead to feelings of detachment or unreality. It can also lead to feelings of helplessness and the belief that the world is saturated with war and violence.

> The proliferation of small arms, and munitions and explosives has also aggravated the violence associated with terrorism and organized crime. Even in societies not beset by civil war, the easy availability of small arms has in many cases contributed to violence and political instability. These, in turn, have damaged development prospects and imperiled human security in every way.
> ~Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General

International organizations have noted that there is a definite connection between wars and the level of human development (quality of life):

> *"Of the world's 40 wars in 1999, virtually all were internal civil wars and more than 80 percent were in countries on the bottom half of the United Nations Human Development Index. Those countries on the bottom half of that index are three times as likely to go through a war as are countries on the top half. In other words, underdevelopment breeds conflict. And when readily available weapons are added to the mix, armed conflict reliably follows."*

This becomes a vicious circle, because war has a terrible effect on quality of life. Besides taking lives, it destroys the environment and stresses agriculture and food production. It breaks down family and social organization. It causes instability and economic crisis. It increases health care needs. Many NGOs conclude that it is essential that governments of the world cooperate to improve peace building and global human security, by working to eliminate poverty and poor quality of life in the least developed nations of the world. This, they say, will "bring new life and promise to the dual challenges of human development and war prevention."

Source: Project Ploughshares Armed Conflicts Reports:
<www.ploughshares.ca/CONTENT/ACR/ACR00/ACR00.html>