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## **Video Games that Promote Positive Social Change**

The large role of video games in the lives of North American youth, and the central role of violence in many of these games raises the obvious concern that violent video games negatively influence the beliefs and behaviours of many youth. A vast amount of empirical evidence exists in support of what many feared (and knew) true for some time: a positive correlation exists between playing violent video games and real-world aggressive behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

Violent video games do not positively contribute to youth development and socialization. Instead, such games normalize violence as a common and acceptable option for dealing with conflict. Additionally, such games desensitize viewers to violence, undermining feelings of concern and empathy for victims and increases aggressive/violent behaviour.

Alarming, the entertainment industry has a new partner in the quest for more realistic, graphic and gory games: the military. Digital artists from the entertainment industry are collaborating with real life war fighters to produce extremely graphic portrayals of combat. Through this partnership, the military is able to develop valuable warfare simulations used to train and recruit soldiers, while the entertainment industry gains financially. At the same time, consumers welcome the opportunity to take on the role of a soldier in an eerily realistic and graphic war, or, as Kuma War (created jointly by the Department of Defence and Kuma Reality Games) allows, re-enact the raid that killed Saddam Hussein's two sons, or the one that led to the capture of the Iraqi leader.

Fortunately, many video game developers are increasingly seeing a need for video games that positively contribute to youth development and to social change. Such games allow players to catch a glimpse of life through the eyes of a Darfurian refugee, a youth living in desperate poverty, a famine struck nation, or an individual caught in Middle East conflict. Players are challenged to distribute food aid, fetch clean drinking water, rebuild a village, help fight the HIV/AIDS virus, secure human rights against an oppressive regime, or negotiate a peaceful settlement to a violent conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> Gentile, D., et al. "The Effects of Violent Video Game Habits on Adolescent Hostility, Aggressive Behaviours, and School Performance", Journal of Adolescence, 27, 2004. See also: Anderson, C. and K. Dill. "Video Games and Aggressive Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviour in the Laboratory and Life", Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 78, 2000; Bushman, B. and Anderson, C. "Violent Video Games and Hostile Expectations: A Test of the General Aggression Model", Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 28, 2002;

The following list of video games educate youth about some of the most pressing social ills around the globe. Such games can serve as effective tools in educating our youth about ways in which they can bring about positive social change.

### **Games Currently Available**

**1. Food Force: <http://www.food-force.com>**

Game description - Players accept missions to distribute food to the famine struck island of Sheylan, which is suffering from drought and civil war. Players join a team of UN experts to carry out 6 missions related to the distribution of food. This game is published by the United Nations World Food Program (WFP)

**2. Darfur is Dying: <http://www.darfurisdying.com/>**

Game description – The player, from the perspective of a displaced Darfurian, must negotiate forces that threaten the survival of his/her refugee camp. Players must rebuild a village while having to make periodic trips to forage for water, while at the same time, avoid capture by Janjaweed militias. This game provides players with a faint glimpse into the lives of the millions of people displaced by the crisis in Sudan.

**3. Unicef World Heroes: <http://www.unicefgames.org>**

Game description - The player volunteers for a variety of Unicef relief missions (education, immunization, emergency, water purification, and nutrition). The environments change on each mission but the game play is the same: the player drives a truck around to catch iconographic representations of relief that a plane airdrops. After a mission is complete, a related bonus question is asked (ie. How many people around the world lack access to safe drinking water?), followed by educational information.

**4. A Force More Powerful - The Game of Nonviolent Strategy:**

<http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org/game/>

Game description – The game is based on successful nonviolent strategies used around the world in resolving conflicts. Faced with ten scenarios, inspired by history, players must struggle to win freedom and secure human rights against dictators, occupiers, colonizers and corrupt regimes. Players can utilize such real-world strategies such as strikes, boycotts and mass protests.

Obtaining the Game – Available for purchase at \$19.95 (US dollars) plus shipping and handling. Orders can be placed online through the website.

Note: Individuals active internationally in campaigns to win human rights and freedoms who wish to obtain copies should direct requests to: [game@nonviolent-conflict.org](mailto:game@nonviolent-conflict.org)

**5. Peter Packet - <http://www.peterpacket.org>**

Game description – Players help Peter carry out various missions related to global poverty (provide safe drinking water in Haiti, help children attend school in India, and help prevent the spread of AIDS in Zimbabwe). Players must deliver important information by maneuvering through computer and internet technology. Mission also includes educational bits related to the internet and computers. Completion of a mission is followed by the opportunity to learn more about global poverty in that region (i.e. facts about drinking water, finding solutions, water problems in Haiti, and “how you can help”).

**7. Balance of Power** (1985, developed by Chris Crawford)

Game description - Players choose to be either the US President or the General Secretary of the Soviet Union, and attempt to avoid nuclear war. Players are presented with a set of incidents and crises in various countries around the globe and must choose how to respond (i.e. no action, diplomatic notes to the other superpower, military maneuvers). A counter-response ranging from backing down to escalation of the conflict follows. In the event of nuclear war, the game is over as the events are characterized as “failure”.

Obtaining the Game – The game is available for sale on eBay ([www.ebay.ca](http://www.ebay.ca)) and Amazon ([www.amazon.ca](http://www.amazon.ca)).

**7. 3<sup>rd</sup> World Farmer:** [http://www.itu.dk/people/hermund/3wf/index\\_content.html](http://www.itu.dk/people/hermund/3wf/index_content.html)

Game description – Players must keep themselves and their 4 family members alive while managing a farm in Africa. Players must make decisions on how to spend their money from an array of various crops, livestock and farm equipment. Crops are constantly threatened by drought and livestock by disease or plundering. The game ends when the last of your family members dies of hunger.

**8. September 12:** <http://www.newsgaming.com/newsgames.htm>

Game description – Throughout this game, players are encouraged to consider various aspects of the “war on terror”. Players hunt down terrorists but soon learn that in doing so, collateral damage is unavoidable. Additionally, players soon learn that the killing of a terrorist results in the emergence of additional terrorist threats, eventually filling the city streets.

**9. Madrid:** <http://www.newsgaming.com/newsgames.htm>

Game description – Players must keep candles from fading, in remembrance of victims of terrorism, by clicking on the flames.

**Games to be released shortly**

**1. Peace Maker:** <http://www.peacemakergame.com>

Game description – Players choose the role of either the Israeli PM or the Palestinian President and attempt to bring stability to the region. Players must react to events ranging from diplomatic negotiations to military attacks, and interact with eight other political leaders and social groups in order to establish a stable resolution to the conflict before his or her term in office ends.

**2. Escape from Woodmere:** <http://escapefromwoomera.com>

Game description - Players find themselves in an Australian detention camp and learn what it is like to be a political refugee seeking asylum.

Note: Described as “almost finished”. The prototype is available for downloading from the website.

**3. Global Conflicts: Palestine:** <http://www.seriousgames.dk/gc.html>

Game description – Players take on the role of a young journalist in Israel and try to shape the region’s future in a peaceful direction. To get your article, players must navigate between Palestinian and Israeli sources and attempt to stay objective and maintain trust on both sides as the conflict escalates. Players are engaged with real

personal stories and see the conflict from different perspectives, and in the process, learn about conflict and why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is so ongoing.

Release Date: Early 2007