

**Canadian Pugwash Conference: “Canada’s Contribution to Global Security”**  
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While new wars bear a frightening multitude of distinct characteristics, there is perhaps none more grotesque than the recruitment and use of children in 21<sup>st</sup> Century political violence. Indeed, not only do youths suffer disproportionate victimization at the hands of the unscrupulous belligerents – they are also subject to unprecedented levels of forced or coerced recruitment. If in the past, children were made to fight in spite of their youth, they are now being targeted for recruitment and use specifically because of their youth.

While it is undoubtedly illegal and should be deemed immoral, the choice to incorporate children into fighting forces and groups is not altogether irrational. On account of their agility, impressionability, and underdeveloped sense of morality, children bestow numerous perceived strategic and tactical advantages to those adults who are willing to use them to achieve their selfish ends. In particular, when deployed against a professional armed force, children present a vexing moral dilemma – one that may result in fatal hesitation and subsequent long-term consequences such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

In light of this quandary, if state armies and professional forces are not afforded the adequate doctrinal guidance and clear preparatory training on how to deal with facing child soldiers, they may well become increasingly hesitant to participate in operations that involve children, thereby effectively ceding the strategic advantage to those who use children for political and violent purposes. Without a clear understanding of how to reduce these perceived tactical and strategic advantages of using children, we will not effectively reduce the demand for the use of children for such negative purposes.

As a critical response to this dilemma, it is important to make the prevention of the use of children as soldiers a central dynamic to security sector reform approaches. In April 2014, the Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative (Dallaire Initiative) proposed a new UN SC Resolution 2143 and on 28 April 2014, the Dallaire Initiative proposed new language to the UN Security Council Resolution 2151 on Security Sector Reform.

UN SC Resolution 2143 is aimed at improving the training and preparation of UN peacekeeping troops to effectively respond, recognize and report to violations and abuses committed against children. UN SC Resolution 2151 adopted language states that nations rebuilding after conflict must take appropriate measures to protect children and ensure security sector actors are well equipped to do so. If states fail in this task, the situation could precipitate into renewed conflict and give rise to the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Global approaches surrounding efforts to end the use of child soldiers are often directed towards generic child protection strategy and less focused on security sector interactions with children in armed conflict. By framing the issue as a specific priority concern for security sector actors, it empowers military, police and prison personnel to develop better policies and strategies to not only limit or prevent child soldier use and recruitment but to improve overall peace and security efforts.

The existence of a legal normative framework and extensive international programming has failed to disrupt the persistent recruitment and use of child soldiers. A need to create widespread standardized training and doctrinal frameworks for the security sector is required and as such the Dallaire Initiative has developed a set of Core Competencies for the Security Sector on the Prevention of the Use of Child Soldiers. The Core Competencies address the following:

1. Security sector actors must demonstrate a clear understanding of the definition of a child soldier. This includes being able to properly define and explain: national and international legislation on the issue, the roles and responsibilities carried out by child soldiers, how child soldiers are recruited, how child soldiers are used strategically and tactically, and the unique roles played by girl soldiers as well as the gender-specific challenges that they face.
2. Security sector actors must begin to see child soldiers as a security concern that demands unique security attention. This includes training the security sector to see the child first and the child soldier second. Key aspects of this core competency include understanding and successfully explaining: why child soldiers should be on the security agenda, the types of interactions that can occur with child soldiers, the moral dilemmas faced by confronting child soldiers, and how to improve those interactions to avoid fatalities on all sides.
3. Security sector actors must understand the importance of effective collaboration and reporting with other concerned organisations. Security sector actors should be able to effectively monitor and report on human rights abuses that are committed against children, understand their role in overall child protection activities, and understand the importance of strategic collaboration and information sharing with concerned organisations to impact the holistic approach to child protection.

The Dallaire Initiative approach incorporates the above three core competencies into doctrinal frameworks and training systems approaches that are contextualized for national level implementation. This requires an analysis of the national context, including the gathering of research on the current structures of the national military, the training systems that are in place, the doctrinal frameworks that may or may not exist, the collaboration with allies or training partners on the ground and the overall socio-political drivers that can contribute to motivations for collaboration on matters of peace and security – understanding that the prevention of the use of child soldiers is a key to this attainment. A priority is placed upon national level doctrinal training and systems change as a mechanism to improve the overall international approach because they are commanded and controlled at a national level.

This approach also allows the Dallaire Initiative to effectively monitor the impact of the training and doctrinal frameworks that are being employed. Long-term approaches to monitoring that involve both qualitative and quantitative methods are developed and enhanced regularly to learn from best practices. Behavioural and attitudinal changes are measured through an understanding of knowledge retention, to a change in thinking of the trainees, to behavioural change that can be measured through second-level transmission of information to others; the prevention of child recruitment into armed conflict; the informal diffusions of knowledge with colleagues and communities; or purposeful de-escalation of conflict when faced with children in the non-lethal to the most lethal contexts.

It is important to see this shift in attitudes, behaviours and action as a long-term process. The Dallaire Initiative insists that meaningful engagement in a country requires at least 5 years of consistent commitment and mentoring. In addition, the Dallaire Initiative employs processes of continual impact assessment that combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches that are shared and incorporated into lessons learned.

### **TRAINING – Prevention of the Use of Child Soldier Training for the Security Sector**

The international community can no longer view the tragedy of child soldiers as simply an exercise in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), rather the time has come to actually prevent their recruitment and remove the perceived advantage to their use as weapons of war. There is therefore a need to elevate this issue as a specific concern for military and law enforcement members of the security sector, and to bring these previously under-appreciated child protection assets to bear in the fight against the use of child soldiers.

By framing the issue of children in armed conflict as a specific priority concern for security sector actors, the Dallaire Initiative empowers military, police and prison personnel to develop better policies and strategies to not only limit or prevent child soldier recruitment, but also to improve security sector interactions with children during actual armed conflict, with the ultimate aim of avoiding casualties on all sides. Training must focus on tangible tools that can be immediately implemented in the field, and is supported by persistent evaluation and monitoring to ensure the correctness of our methodology as well as the use of these enhanced tools by the security sector. Working with security sector actors to recognize that preparation for interactions with children in armed conflict is as important as preparation for any other aspect of a mission.