

human security

Protection of civilians

Strengthening international norms and building capacity to reduce the human costs of armed conflict

Protection for war-affected populations

■ In contemporary armed conflicts, new forms of aggression increasingly victimize civilian populations. Combatants often deliberately set out to injure, kill or displace civilians. Despite numerous provisions under international law, attacks against civilians, including humanitarian workers, are often carried out with impunity.

■ Since the mid-1990s, Canada has worked to improve the legal and physical protection of war-affected populations. The 1997 Ottawa Convention banning anti-personnel landmines, for example, was a landmark victory for the protection of civilians. Further campaigns on issues such as the International Criminal Court and the proliferation of small arms have demonstrated that effective international action is possible. Civilian protection was a major theme of Canada's Security Council tenure in 1999-2000, resulting in the clear acknowledgement that protection issues fall directly within the Council's mandate. A new international agreement banning child soldiers was reached in 1999 and major conferences held in Winnipeg in 2000 and New York in 2002 developed a detailed international action plan on war-affected children. Progress has also been made to increase protection for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Guiding Principles on IDPs are rapidly becoming the accepted framework within which affected countries and international agencies operate. Canadian support to the UN Secretary-General's Representative on Internally Displaced Persons, and monitoring efforts such as the Global IDP Project have increased international awareness of the challenges facing the internally displaced, and facilitated more effective responses in the field.

An internally displaced child at Vavuniya, Sri Lanka. (1999)

■ In recent years, international norms surrounding the protection of civilians have been strengthened and clarified. The current challenge is securing worldwide acceptance of these norms and putting them into practice. UN responses remain inconsistent. The imperatives of state sovereignty continue to inhibit protection efforts and Security Council resolutions are still seldom matched with effective action. Canada will continue to press for enhanced legal and physical protection of war-affected children and internally displaced persons, as well as improved security in refugee camps, humanitarian access, targeted sanctions, and the safety of humanitarian workers.

ECOWAS Child Protection Unit

Canada's Human Security Program has worked in partnership with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to establish a Child Protection Unit within the ECOWAS Secretariat. The Unit monitors the situation of children affected by armed conflict, and their rehabilitation and reintegration in post-conflict peacebuilding. It also deals with emergency assistance, and humanitarian and human rights issues, including early warning capacity for the protection of war-affected children.

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