

A Voice for Children: Olara Otunnu

In September 1997, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan named Olara A. Otunnu to a three-year term as his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. In announcing the appointment, Mr. Annan underscored the urgent need for a public advocate and moral voice speaking on behalf of war-affected children.

Mr. Otunnu has taken the task very seriously. In his field missions, he has secured important commitments from warring parties, including undertakings

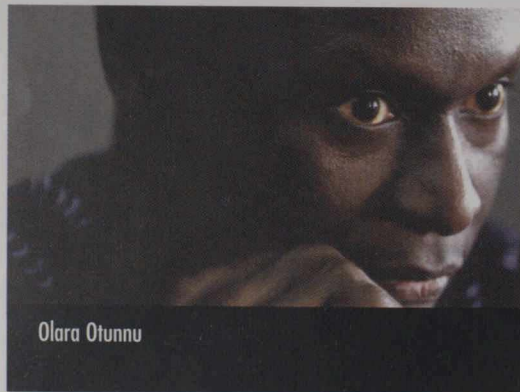
not to recruit children as combatants and not to target schools, hospitals and other public buildings. He has also been a highly effective catalyst for action by governments, UN agencies (which were already working on behalf of war-affected children) and humanitarian NGOs; and he has tirelessly promoted the rights of war-affected children.

Born in northern Uganda in 1950, Olara Otunnu is particularly well qualified for his current position. A lawyer, he studied at Makerere University in Kampala, and at Oxford University and Harvard Law

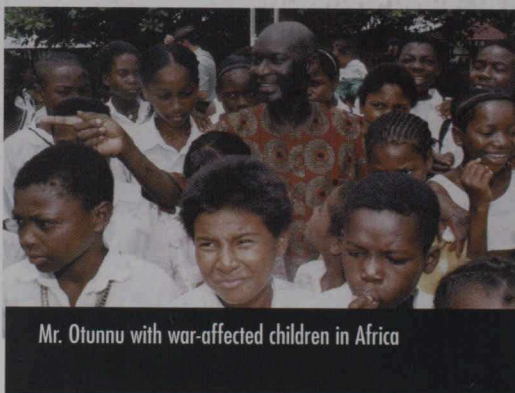
School. As a student leader in the 1970s, he played a prominent part in the opposition to the regime of Idi Amin. From 1980 to 1985 he served as Uganda's Permanent Representative to the United Nations; there he took a very active role, including as President of the Security Council. In 1985-86 he was Uganda's Minister of Foreign Affairs; and in following years he participated in many international organizations, studies and commissions focussing on world peace. He is a member of the Carnegie Endowment

Children simply have no part in warfare.

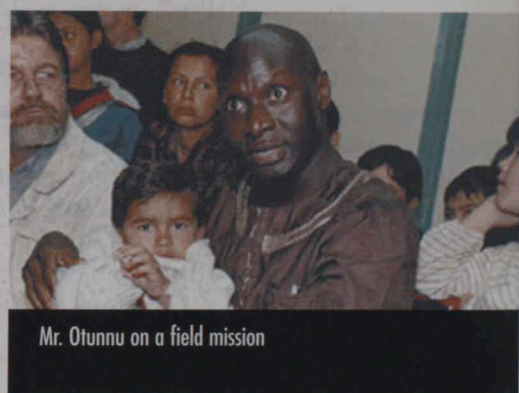
—Olara Otunnu, ADDRESS TO THE UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, MARCH 12, 1998



Olara Otunnu



Mr. Otunnu with war-affected children in Africa



Mr. Otunnu on a field mission

photos: Office of Special Representative

Recent key actions by the international community

- UN peace operations now include child protection activities and Child Protection Advisers.
- In East and West Africa and in Kosovo, "neighbourhood initiatives" have been developed to promote dialogue between governments, insurgency groups, civil society organizations and humanitarian agencies. The aim is to adopt concrete measures for protecting children from cross-border threats.
- In August 1999, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution specifying important measures for protecting and ensuring children's welfare in the midst of armed conflict and its aftermath.
- In the Security Council this past July, Secretary-General Annan tabled a report with 55 recommendations outlining what the international community could and should do to improve the situation of war-affected children—especially young girls and adolescents, who tend to be forgotten in conflict situations.
- Perhaps most important, last May the UN General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. This new international instrument prohibits the conscription of children under age 18 and their participation in combat. Canada was the first country to sign the Protocol on June 6.