

U.N. SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Issue:

The U.N. Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict is seeking Canadian support for his mandate and Canadian views on his role. Although Canada is not providing financial support for his office at this time, we want to assist his efforts through the creation of a Canadian Eminent Persons Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Background:

Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed H.E. Mr. Olara Otunnu to the position of Undersecretary and U.N. Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict as a concrete follow-up to the Graça Machel Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children (Tabled December 1996).

In the first six months of his three year mandate, SRSG Otunnu's priority has been to establish his office. In so doing, he has visited northern capitals to solicit support for a Trust Fund, from which operational and personnel funds will be drawn. This visit to Ottawa is part of that process. Another priority of the SRSG is to visit war affected countries. Mr. Otunnu recently returned from his official visit to Liberia and Sierre Leone.

Canadian Position:

The role of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG) could be twofold: (i) to act as an advocate on behalf of children in situations of armed conflict with governments, non-state actors and global public; and (ii), the SRSG should negotiate with fighting factions to mediate on behalf of children to ensure respect the rights of children and to create political space for UN agencies to carry out their humanitarian work with children.

As an UnderSecretary to the Secretary-General, Mr. Otunnu could leave a lasting mark on the U.N. system by creating mechanisms which would almost automatically ensure attention, by the UN's political organs, to child protection in situations of conflict. Furthermore, Mr. Otunnu could introduce the issue of children and armed conflict to the Security Council.

Canada could assist the SRSG by identifying eminent Canadians to advocate on behalf of children trapped in the midst of armed conflict.