

inseparable from questions of international peace and security, international trade and development assistance" (5). Canada's human security agenda is articulated, for example, in its international leadership in the movements to ban the production, sale and use of antipersonnel landmines, to limit international trafficking in small arms and light weapons, to create the International Criminal Court, to address exploitative child labour and violence against children. It is also recognized that such an agenda can best be addressed through a broad, multidisciplinary "alliance of national and international authorities, civil society and non-governmental organizations" (6).

### **Giving priority to children**

Within a human security framework, why does prioritization of children make sense? A number of reasons suggest themselves. Firstly, children are the most vulnerable group in society. The extent to which priority is given to the rights and well-being of children, whether in domestic or foreign policy, is an excellent measure of society's commitment to human rights and human development in general.

Secondly, the experience of children during their critical growth and learning years at the hands of adult society affects them for life. The values and attitudes that they absorb, the extent to which they are - or are not - encouraged to think critically or solve problems cooperatively, for example, will mould their own approach to political participation, social development, equity and justice. Investment in the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of young children is an investment in the future citizens and leaders of society. Ensuring due attention to early childhood care and development is one of the most effective ways of positively influencing a wide range of social issues. Conversely, failure to invest in the child has adverse consequences, not merely for the development of the individual child, but for society at large.

Thirdly, some 1.3 billion people, a quarter of the world's population, live in absolute poverty, many of them in zones of conflict or of chronic turbulence. Globally, one in every three people is a child under 15 years of age, while in some parts of the developing world - for example in sub-Saharan Africa - it is closer to one in two. Prioritization of the rights and well-being of children will contribute directly to the achievement of long-term poverty-reduction goals and to "sustainable development".

### **Why give attention to children in armed conflict?**

Children, especially children of poor, marginalized populations, constitute the most vulnerable group in the midst of armed conflict. Least able to protect themselves, they are devastated by the destruction of the social networks which normally assure their care and well-being - the cohesive family, the community, schools and social services - and by the breakdown of the rule of law and of normative frameworks which might assure them some measure of security and protection.