

MAIN MESSAGES:

- * WHEN WE SPEAK OF CHILD SOLDIERS, WE ARE NOT JUST SPEAKING OF CHILD FIGHTERS WITH WEAPONS, BUT ALSO OF THE MANY GIRLS AND BOYS WHO SERVE IN ARMIES AND REBEL GROUPS AS COOKS, PORTERS, MESSENGERS, SPIES, LABOURERS AND AS SEXUAL SLAVES.
- * THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT IS WORKING WITH INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS TO IDENTIFY CONCRETE WAYS FOR CANADA TO HELP PREVENT CHILD SOLDIERING, AND TO ASSIST THE PLIGHT OF CHILDREN WHO ARE BRUTALLY ABDUCTED INTO ARMED FORCES, OR BECOME SOLDIERS BECAUSE THEY ARE POOR, OR MARGINALIZED OR HAVE NO OTHER VIABLE ALTERNATIVES. OUR APPROACH IS THREE-FOLD:
 - * FIRST, THROUGH ADVOCACY. WE SUPPORTING YOUR ROLE AS AN ADVOCATE TO RAISE AWARENESS FOR THE ISSUE OF CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT-- BOTH WITH GOVERNMENTS WHO USE CHILD SOLDIERS, AND WITH REBEL GROUPS WHO SPECIFICALLY TARGET CHILDREN. WITHIN THIS REGARD, ADVOCACY IS ESSENTIAL FOR HIGHLIGHTING THE SPECIAL NEEDS AND VULNERABILITIES OF GIRLS SOLDIERS.
 - * SECOND, THROUGH DEVELOPMENT. THROUGH CIDA, CANADA HAS BEEN SUPPORTING CHILDREN IN AREAS OF CONFLICT SINCE 1993 BY REBUILDING SCHOOLS, AND BY ASSISTING CHILDREN WITH BASIC HUMAN NEEDS SUCH AS ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER, FOOD, HEALTH CARE AND SHELTER. BEYOND THIS FIRST RANK OF NEEDS, CANADA HAS ASSISTED THE REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN AND CHILD SOLDIERS ALIKE, THROUGH EDUCATION PROJECTS, REUNIFICATION PROGRAMMES, SPORTS AND SKILLS TRAINING THROUGH LOCAL CANADA FUNDS AND NGOS, AND WE ARE COMMITTED TO CONTINUING THIS IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTAL TRACK.
 - * AND THIRD, THROUGH PREVENTION. LAST WEEK, MY DEPARTMENT HOSTED A ROUNDTABLE ON CHILD SOLDIERS WITH LEADING NGO EXPERTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD. THEY ASKED CANADA TO JOIN IN A GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY COALITION TO PREVENT THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS AND RAISE THE AGE OF RECRUITMENT INTO ARMED FORCES.