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Political Initiatives Protecting the Rights of Children in Armed Conflict

Several new initiatives aimed at protecting the rights of children in situations of armed conflict were announced recently.

They include:

- a contribution of \$400 000 to support the work and ensure continued profile and action of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Olara Otunnu;
- support for a joint Canada-Norway workshop bringing together a small number of governments to consider the common challenges faced in aligning domestic laws with the expected terms of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which would raise the age of recruitment and participation in hostilities;
- support for a joint Canada-Norway project aimed at developing training modules to enhance peacekeepers' awareness, knowledge and expertise in dealing with children in conflict zones; and
- a Canada-Norway initiative to bring together government and NGO agendas on the issue of children in armed conflict, with a view to convening an international conference in the future.

DFAIT's Cultural Initiatives for War-Affected Children: Helping Children Help Themselves

"This picture is of the man who was my husband. It is the face of death." So reads the caption to a painting entitled *My Soldier Husband*, by Acen Paska, a child-soldier bride in Uganda. The picture is part of the *Children of the Wind* exhibit on show at the McCord Museum in Montréal until April 25, and of an art therapy project called "Mapping Our World." The pictures from this children's rights project evolved out of five-day workshops in which kids from all over the world used drawing, painting, writing, photography and video to "map" or describe their lives. They tell us how they see themselves, how war affects their lives, and what their hopes are for the future.

The project was 1 of 14 which received funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's Cultural Initiatives for War-Affected Children Program. The aim of the fund is to raise awareness about children in armed conflict by promoting cultural activities at the international level.

After the War is another project supported by DFAIT. The aim of this documentary film is to explore the lives and perspectives of young people living in Canada after escaping from situations of war. It also seeks to inform the public about the devastating effects that war has on young people.

In 1990, during a troubled period in Ethiopia, a Canadian teacher, Marc La Chance, went to Addis Ababa and changed the lives of children in the city when he noticed that many of them had remarkable physical ability and creative capacity. He began to teach the children the concepts of self-expression, self-confidence and teamwork through creative movement, gymnastics and circus activities. Within a year, Circus Ethiopia was formed.

The Circus consists of 30 young Ethiopians (ages 10 to 25) performing incredible circus acts in a theatrical context. It has enjoyed enormous success touring throughout Ethiopia and Europe. With support from the Cultural Initiatives for War-Affected Children Program, the circus will be able to participate in the Milk International Children's Festival of the Arts in Toronto and the International Children's Festival in Vancouver next May. These appearances will mark its Canadian debut.

DFAIT is encouraging Canada's arts and cultural community to submit new applications for projects. The deadlines are May 14 for projects taking place in the summer or fall of 1999, and October 15 for projects taking place in the winter of 1999-2000.

For more information, call (613) 996-3649 or visit the DFAIT Web site at www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/culture/children/menu-e.htm for descriptions of the selected projects, the program and the project selection process.