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Children in armed conflict
An important priority for Canada's foreign policy agenda

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The rights of children are a

agenda (1). This essay briefly reviews the foreign policy focus and suggests that particular attention should be given to children exposed to armed conflict, not least as one of the key elements of the human security agenda. As Canada prepares to take up its two-year term (2005-2006) as a member of the United Nations Security Council, some suggestions are made on how Canada might encourage that body to give increased attention to the effects of armed conflict on children in its deliberations on international security.

What is "human security"

For many years, Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel laureate in economics, has argued that economic analysis and public policy should examine human diversity, good governance, the freedom to achieve and the "capability (of ordinary people) to function" in society. He has called for a "broad view of development efforts, going far beyond the focus on improving national output and the distribution of incomes", to one which stresses basic human needs and quality of life issues, such as life expectancy, access to education, health care and other social services (2).

He has argued that famine is not merely a humanitarian tragedy, a consequence of the vagaries of nature, but the consequence of bad political decisions and economic policies: "past mistakes of policy have been responsible for the death of many millions and the suffering of hundreds of millions" (3). World hunger has "legal, constitutional, political implications and social relevance" as well as economic roots and Sen insists that the connections between these interrelated factors have to be "explored and systematically integrated" (4). It is such a concern with placing human life and human dignity on the political and economic agenda that is at the heart of the concept of "human security".

Canada, together with a number of like-minded countries, is arguing that the safety and well-being of people must be at the centre of discussions of international security. Foreign policy and international relations must be assessed in terms of their impact on individuals and on communities. This means that "human rights are increasingly seen as

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