

Internally displaced civilians flee the fighting in northwestern Liberia, while members of the West African Peacekeeping Force (ECOMOG) make their way to the front lines. (1995)

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# Protection of Civilians



## **Legal and Physical Protection**

While children are among the most vulnerable, there is clearly a need to enhance the legal and physical protection of all civilians affected by armed conflict. In contemporary armed conflicts, civilians, including humanitarian personnel, find themselves deliberately targeted by combatants on all sides, in violation of international law and often with impunity. Concerted action to enhance the protection of all civilians affected by armed conflict is urgently required.

As a result of an initiative during Canada's February 1999 presidency of the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary-General tabled a ground-breaking report entitled *The Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* in September 1999. Two Security Council resolutions on the subject followed, both initiated by Canada. Through its work on the Council and elsewhere, Canada is committed to advancing international implementation of the report's recommendations. Promoting adherence by states to international human rights and humanitarian law is central to this effort. So, too, is ensuring attention to the protection of civilians, including humanitarian workers, in international approaches to everything from the design of mandates for peace support operations and sanctions regimes to the control of small arms proliferation and the accountability of war criminals and non-state actors. The protection of civilians represents a comprehensive and critical challenge for the international community as a whole.

## **Internally Displaced Persons**

Among the most vulnerable victims of conflict worldwide are the 20 to 22 million people who are internally displaced. Most are women and children. Often lacking the protection and resources accorded to refugee populations, people displaced within their own borders require special attention from the global community.

Canada supports efforts to address this complex challenge. In particular, Canada has actively supported the work of the Representative of the Secretary-General (RSG) for Internally

## **W**ar-Affected Children

Among the most urgent objectives for human security is the protection of war-affected children. In the past decade, almost two million children have been killed in armed conflict, more than four million disabled and more than one million orphaned. Over 10 million children have been psychologically scarred by the trauma of abduction, detention, sexual assault and the brutal murder of family members.

Their plight is a central concern for Canada. For this reason, Canada was the first to sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict when it was opened for signature in June 2000. Canada will continue to promote the Protocol's wide ratification and implementation, in order to put a stop to the compulsory recruitment and deployment of child soldiers. Building on the accomplishments of a West African regional conference, co-organized by Canada and Ghana in April 2000, Canada will also host an International Conference on War-Affected Children in September 2000 in Winnipeg. This ministerial-level meeting will set out a global action plan for consideration by world leaders at the 2001 UN Special Session on Children. In collaboration with others, Canada will continue to promote the international commitment, political will and capacity required to ensure the effective protection of children.