

Consistent with its commitment to integrate human rights concerns into its foreign policy, Canada is actively supporting the strengthening of international standards and institutions. Canada played an important role in drafting the treaty on the International Criminal Court, within the statutes of which crimes against humanity, including those committed in internal conflict, are clearly specified. The enslavement and trafficking of children, the use of children below fifteen years of age in conflict, as well as a number of particular instances of gender violence, are now specified as crimes against humanity. As of early October 1998, no country has yet ratified the ICC treaty. It is hoped that Canada will soon do so and that it will encourage other countries to do likewise. If the treaty were to come into force during the next twenty-four months, Canada could use its tenure on the Security Council to encourage the Council to rapidly refer possible war crimes or crimes against humanity to the ICC. At the very least, the Council should be dissuaded from requesting temporary suspension of any of the Court's proceedings (unfortunately, this eventuality is provided for in the draft ICC treaty).

In early 1998, Canada provided the first seed grant to the newly-formed international Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. Canada is currently examining how it might comply with the provisions of a proposed Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, namely that no child below the age of eighteen years should be recruited into the military or used in hostilities. As Canada seeks an international leadership role in promoting human security and in the protection of children in armed conflict, it is important that its own statutes are consistent with the highest standards for the protection and well-being of children. Current provisions in the Defence Act which allow for the recruitment of young people below the age of eighteen years do not meet that requirement.

In zones of active armed conflict, Canada has long supported the humanitarian activities of international agencies and non-governmental organizations. But this is not enough. As parties to conflict disregard universal norms for child protection and target children with impunity, greater international commitment is required to intercession for children, to direct mediation and negotiation efforts on behalf of children in conflict zones. Canada has a strong international reputation and record as a conciliator and peacekeeper. It could build upon this reputation by supporting advocacy for children in conflict zones. UNICEF has past experience in successful advocacy of days of peace, corridors or zones of tranquillity for children, to permit health care or humanitarian relief to reach children, but such successes are rare in today's violent internal conflicts. Likewise, the Office of the U.N. Commissioner for Refugees intercedes for the protection of refugees. But it cannot be said that there exists today a specific, consistent and credible advocacy movement for children in armed conflict which has the power to persuade those targeting children to desist, or to sanction them effectively if they do not.

One of the main functions of Olara Otunnu, the recently-appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict, is to be such an international advocate for children, and to intercede with warring factions on behalf of children in zones of conflict. Already, in visits to Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Sri Lanka