

breakdown of social norms and of the rule of law within states in conflict, and the existence of a climate of impunity within which parties to conflict attack children and other civilians without compunction. In such environments, it is rare to find effective spokespersons for children. There exist few or no incentives or threats which might encourage conflicting parties to assure protection for children, rather than to target them. All too frequently, it appears that the international community is unable or unwilling to enforce (or to demand that actors in civil conflicts apply) international humanitarian and human rights standards to protect children and other civilians. There is frequently international reluctance to intervene in the internal affairs of states, or to commit political, economic or military resources to intervention, especially if the conflict is not perceived to be taking place in a region of vital strategic importance. As a result, children are victimized with impunity.

The suffering of children during armed conflict is often invisible to international decision-makers. As a direct consequence, the particular requirements of children are rarely taken into account in international efforts to resolve political crises or to bring armed conflicts to a negotiated end. **It is in the political arena that Canada's advocacy on behalf of children, together with like-minded countries and within a human security framework, can have a significant and innovative impact.**

An agenda for action: children in human security

What can Canada do - as a member of the U.N. Security Council and elsewhere - to ensure that the rights of children in armed conflict are systematically considered in global deliberations on peace and security?

Canada can help to ensure that Security Council addresses the situation of children whenever it deliberates on armed conflict. The Council can consider appropriate responses to the targeting of children, can condemn their abuse and exploitation and can identify ways of pressuring parties to conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and human rights instruments for the protection of children in armed conflict. With the formation of the international Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the recruitment and use of children as combatants is becoming an increasingly important issue on the international agenda. The Security Council can ensure that the demobilization of child soldiers is a clearly identified priority within any framework for demobilization of combatants. In most internal conflicts today, child fighters constitute a significant proportion of armed forces, regular or irregular. Child soldiers have a range of special needs: for protection at the time of demobilization; for interim care and counselling; for appropriate education or vocational training to earn a living; and for the difficult, long-term process of post-conflict social reintegration. Failure to address these issues can contribute to the marginalization of such youth and their consequent resort to crime and violence.

The Security Council can ensure that peace accords take into account the particular requirements of children. To date, few if any peace accords even mention children. One analyst of the Guatemalan Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights noted that "children's