

Seeking to expand into new areas of peacekeeping, such as the deployment of police and experts, Canada is improving its capacity to rapidly deploy high-calibre expertise and is exploring ways to improve specialized training. Canada has shown leadership in such areas as refugee camp security, the roles of armed and unarmed police, and rapid deployment. As a long-standing proponent of UN rapid reaction capacity, Canada supports efforts to create the Rapidly Deployable Mission Headquarters, participates in the Stand-by High Readiness Brigade, and has identified contributions to the UN Stand-by Arrangements System. Canada is active in efforts by the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to improve their responsiveness, focusing on the review of UN hiring practices and the evolving OSCE REACT (Rapid Expert Assistance and Co-operation Teams) initiative.

War-affected children

The plight of war-affected children is one of the most devastating tragedies of the times: millions of children are caught up and scarred by the brutality of war and conflict. This includes children who have lost their limbs, their parents, their homes, their schools and the ability to play. It also includes an estimated 300,000 who have served fighting factions as soldiers, sexual slaves, or water carriers. The human security cause challenges the world to examine the issue of war-affected children from the perspective of those children.

Efforts have been made within the UN to strengthen international norms and standards. At the Security Council, Resolution 1261 of August 1999 and the earlier resolutions 1265 and 1296 propelled the UN to incorporate the rights and well-being of war-affected children into its work. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict raised the profile of children's rights in conflict-affected areas with political leaders, NGOs, and domestic constituencies throughout the world.

Advocating a comprehensive approach to the plight of war-affected children, in April 2000 Canada and Ghana organized the Conference on War-Affected Children in West Africa. In Winnipeg in September 2000, Canada will hold the International Conference on War-Affected Children. Canada played a strong role in negotiating the Optional Protocol on Children in Armed Conflicts and, in June and July 2000, was the first country to sign and to ratify it. Canada is working to make this a mainstream issue within the UN system, the Organization of American States (OAS), the OSCE, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and the Economic Community of West African States.

Through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Canada supports projects to help war-affected children in a number of areas. Through both Canada's peacebuilding and human security initiatives and local Canada Fund programs, the Canadian government is working with non-governmental organizations and local populations to reintegrate all children affected by armed