

## 2.5. Advocacy and Action for the Protection and Prevention of War-Affected Children

### 2.5.1. *The role of the international community as defined by international standards*

**Peace building and human security issues:** *Testimony of Katherine Foster, AGP, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Government of Canada*

Katherine Foster told the Tribunal that the purpose of her testimony was to situate the response of the Government of Canada to the topic of war-affected children within the context of the national human security agenda. This strategy has been multifaceted. The first response has been political advocacy in supporting the Office of the Special Representative, particularly in the role of raising awareness among both state and non-state actors employing children as combatants. In addition, during Canada's period on the UN Security Council, the issue of war-affected children was a key element in Canadian initiative, with particular respect to promoting protection of civilians during conflicts. The Council has now adopted two resolutions on these topics. Canada also strongly supports the inclusion of child protection specialists in UN peacekeeping operations as well as strengthening technical and professional capacity on child rights among peacekeepers.

Ms. Foster pointed out that those charged with peacekeeping functions are increasingly confronted with child soldiers and other war-affected children in the course of their work. Canada is exploring ways of addressing this new reality. Some options that could be contemplated are including training in child rights and how to work with war-affected children in pre-deployment military training as well as collaboration between military personnel and NGOs. Ms. Foster informed the Tribunal that Canada and Norway are developing a training module that might be used to enhance the awareness, knowledge and expertise of peacekeepers who face the challenge of dealing with children in conflict zones.

Canadian strategy also includes working to improve international legal instruments as well as to ensure compliance with existing humanitarian norms and standards protecting children. To that end, Canada had been supporting the work of developing the Optional Protocol to raise the age of recruitment to armed forces, for example by providing resources to the International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. Canada is also working with other committed governments to bring the rights and needs of children in armed conflict to the fore in a variety of regional and sub-regional organisations, such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organisation of American

**A strong partnership between governments and civil society can make an enormous difference.**

**Katherine Foster: Testimony to the Tribunal**

### The Role of the Military

Pre-deployment military training might include courses on child rights and on how to deal with war-affected children during peace support operations. Military personnel might work with NGOs to assist affected children.

**Katherine Foster: Testimony to the Tribunal**

States and the Economic Community of West African States. Canada is also committed to development and peacebuilding projects funded by the Canadian International Development Agency to rebuild schools and meet basic human needs, as well as working with NGOs and local communities to reintegrate child victims and child soldiers through education, disarmament, reunification, sports and skills training.

Ms. Foster referred to the lesson learned in the campaign against the use of anti-personnel mines of the importance of recognising the contribution of civil society. Within Canada, a joint Committee on War-Affected Children has brought together NGOs and the Government of Canada to share experiences and resources and 'chart a common strategy for the future'. She reported that this Committee is proving effective in forging partnerships with various sectors of Canadian society, including further recognition of the importance of child and youth participation in improving their own security and life situations. In addition, Canada has taken up the challenge of the Machel Report to host a conference bringing together stakeholders from all major regions of the world at a Conference in September 2000.<sup>24</sup>

### **?** *Questions to Katherine Foster*

In response to questions from the Tribunal, Ms. Foster defined 'human security agenda' as a term relating to a broad range of issues related to concern about and attention to civilians in situations of armed conflict. She also referred to the Government's recognition that rehabilitation projects and programmes should be evaluated to establish what works and what does not work, and also to the need to avoid duplication of efforts.

Ms. Foster replied to Marie Smyth's question about the potential for the Canadian Government to have influence on these issues within Commonwealth circles, by stating that the approach tends to be region by region rather than global. She also responded to a question from Kathy Vandergrift about the contradiction that may occur when advocacy oriented NGOs lobby a government with which they are otherwise in partnership. Children and their rights, she stated, should always be regarded as more important than any difficulties in this interface.

In reply to a query from Samuel Doe, Director of the West African Network of Peacebuilders and a witness who also testified at the Hearings, regarding what Canada is doing to prevent conflict, Ms. Foster said that the Government tries to establish early-warning indicators in all programmes, seeking ways to break the cycle of violence through working in peace processes. She pointed to the

24. *International Conference on War-Affected Children*, September 10-15, 2000, Winnipeg, Canada.