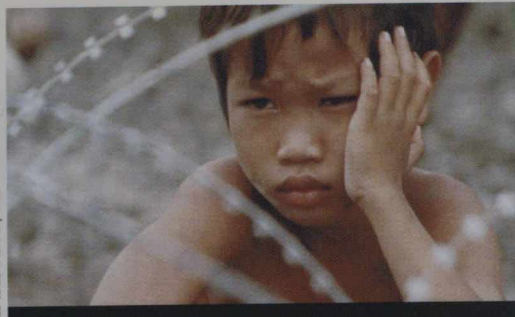




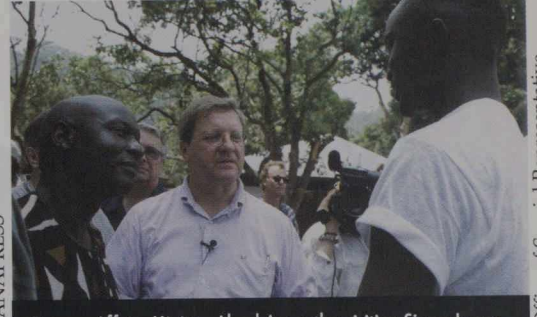
Refugee camp in Angola

photo: CANAPRESS/AP



Cambodian refugee

photo: CANAPRESS



Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy visiting Sierra Leone with Mr. Otunnu in April 2000

photo: Office of Special Representative

for International Peace, as well as the Advisory Committee of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Himself the guardian of six children, Olara Otunnu was the perfect choice for an advocate to give a strong and credible voice to war-affected children. His mandate, he says, is simple: "To promote the protection, rights and welfare of children at every phase of conflict. . . . I undertake political and humanitarian diplomacy, and propose concrete initiatives to protect children in the midst of war. By the time my mandate expires, I hope to have succeeded in creating broad-based awareness of the fate of children affected by armed conflict, and that global outrage at these continuing abominations will in turn have led to a worldwide movement of repudiation."

### Commitments that bring hope

Mr. Otunnu's field missions have certainly produced results. In Colombia, for instance, the government adopted a policy forbidding enlistment of youths below the age of 18 in the armed forces, while the insurgent Revolutionary Armed

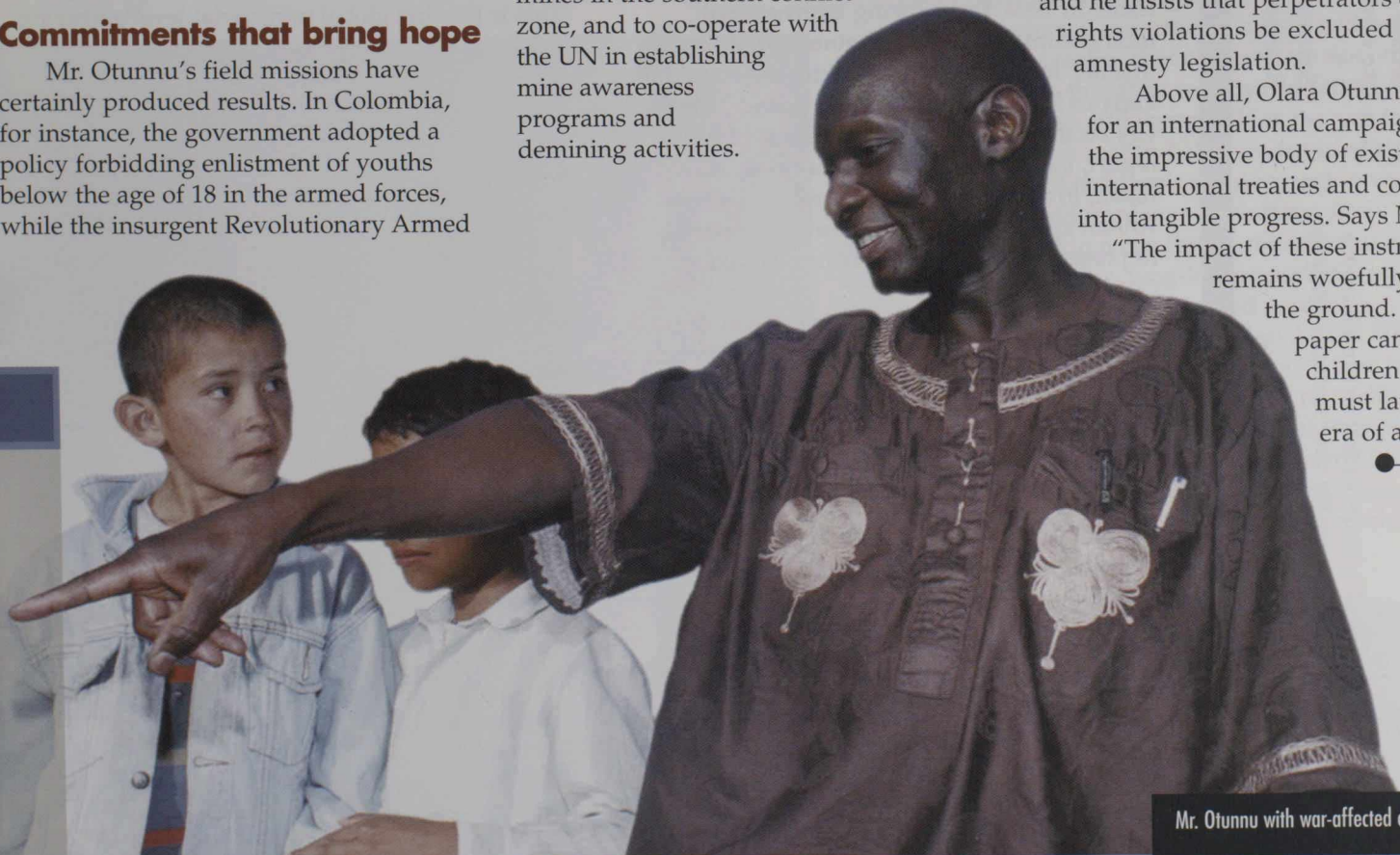
Forces of Colombia agreed to end recruitment of children below age 15. In Rwanda and Burundi, both governments undertook to raise to 18 the minimum recruitment age for the armed forces, and to pay special attention to children's needs in the post-conflict period, especially education and health requirements.

In Sri Lanka, government authorities and rebel leaders agreed not to use children below age 18 in combat, and not to recruit children under age 17. Both sides also gave commitments to allow the provision and distribution of humanitarian supplies in conflict-affected areas, and to permit the free movement of displaced populations. In Sudan, the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement both undertook not to use anti-personnel mines in the southern conflict zone, and to co-operate with the UN in establishing mine awareness programs and demining activities.

### From words to action

Despite these breakthroughs, much remains to be done. Now that his mandate has been extended for another three years, Mr. Otunnu has several priorities. One is a worldwide Week of Tranquillity: "All warring factions in all ongoing conflicts would adhere to a simultaneous week-long cease-fire each year for the sake of children." Another priority is the Voice of Children initiative, promoting radio programming that focusses on the needs and interests of war-affected children. The Special Representative has also proposed "children-to-children networks" connecting youth from both conflict areas and countries at peace; he is calling for better and more systematic monitoring of the peace and humanitarian commitments given by parties to conflicts; and he insists that perpetrators of child rights violations be excluded from amnesty legislation.

Above all, Olara Otunnu is calling for an international campaign to translate the impressive body of existing international treaties and conventions into tangible progress. Says Mr. Otunnu, "The impact of these instruments remains woefully thin on the ground. Words on paper cannot save children in peril: we must launch an era of application."



Mr. Otunnu with war-affected children in Colombia

photo: Office of the Special Representative

For more information about Olara Otunnu and his work on behalf of war-affected children, visit the Web site of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict: [www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict](http://www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict)