

# 8

## UN PEACEKEEPING AND CHILDREN AFFECTED BY CONFLICT

This chapter derives from a United Nations Association in Canada (UNA-Canada) public dialogue, held on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007 in Toronto, to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UN Peacekeeping. The event included a public forum and a closed experts' roundtable. Participants of the closed experts' roundtable and panelists at the linked public dialogue event discussed issues related to Children Affected by War and UN Peacekeeping, in particular the implications of the Paris Principles. Panelists at the public forum composed of young adults who lived through war when they were young children, provided insights from their experience and encouraged the public to become engaged in this issue. Participants at the experts' roundtable looked at ways of improving programs to address children affected by conflict in field operations. The opinions expressed in this chapter and the recommendations derived from UNA-Canada's consultative process are not necessarily the views of UNA-Canada or of organizations represented at the event.

The closed roundtable featured **Jennifer Adams**, Plan Canada; **Svetlana Ageeva**, Red Cross Canada; **Imran Ahmad**, Office of Senator Roméo Dallaire; **Sara Austin**, World Vision Canada; **Linda Dale**, Children/Youth as Peacebuilders; **Myriam Denov**, McGill University; **Kristine Ennis**, Department of National Defence; **Chol Kelei**, Youth Representative, Winnipeg; **Philip Lancaster**, Consultant, Victoria, BC; **Guillaume Landry**, International Bureau for Children's Rights; **Marlen Mondaca**, Save the Children Canada; **Jean-François Morel**, Department of National Defence; Youth Representative, Toronto; **Rachel Schmidt**, MA Candidate, NPSIA, Carleton University; **Emily Schroeder**, UNA-Canada; **Julie Stevens**, UNICEF Canada; **Emmanuelle Tremblay**, Canadian International Development Agency; **Carrie Vandewint**, World Vision Canada; and **Kimmi Weeks**, Youth Representative, Youth Action International. **Kathy Vandergrift**, Forum on Children and Armed Conflict, Canadian Peacebuilding Coordinating Committee, acted as moderator for the event.

### BACKGROUND: CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT AND UN PEACEKEEPING

The plight of children affected by armed conflict is a key concern for contemporary UN peacekeeping missions. The total number of child soldiers<sup>1</sup> in the world is estimated to

<sup>1</sup> 'Child soldier' refers to "any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and for forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms." (Cape Town Principles 1997).

<sup>2</sup> University of Alberta, "Children and War: Impact, Protection and Rehabilitation," Report from Phase II Workshop held at the USC Gould School of Law, University of Southern California, 14-15 January 2006. Available at: <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/childrenandwar/>.

be around 300,000, with more than 120,000 in Africa alone.<sup>2</sup> Girls account for approximately 40% of the global figure.<sup>3</sup> What is most disturbing about these figures is the fact that many of these children have never known anything but war; for them, peace remains a distant and unknown concept. As these children constitute the future of many war-ravaged countries, the importance of addressing their specific needs and ensuring their full (re-) integration within society is ever more pressing.

In some post-conflict contexts, UN peacekeeping is particularly crucial in addressing the issue of children and armed conflict (CAC). Peacekeepers are asked to perform a multitude of tasks, including forestalling conflicts, encouraging peace settlements, carrying out disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) programs, providing security to the population, provide election monitoring and security, training and leading local de-mining teams, protecting humanitarian aid convoys, and performing civil functions. Children in armed conflict add a specific and challenging dimension to the responsibilities of peacekeepers. Despite growing attention, the role of peacekeepers in addressing the specific needs of CAC remains unclear. There is limited literature dealing exclusively with CAC and peacekeeping. While several SC Resolutions on the protection of children in armed conflict refer to UN peacekeeping missions, more needs to be done to define the roles of military and civilian peacekeepers in addressing the multiple challenges posed by child protection. The same can be said for peacebuilding.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF NORMS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT**

In 1996, Graça Machel mobilized global attention on *The Impacts of Armed Conflict on Children*, a ground breaking UN report. Since that time there have been some improvements in mechanisms to protect the rights of children threatened by armed conflict, but millions of children still remain vulnerable. In recognition of the growing problem of child soldiers, a symposium was organized in Cape Town, South Africa in April 1997, by the NGO working group on the Convention of the Rights of the Child and UNICEF.<sup>4</sup> The symposium set out to develop concrete strategies to prevent the recruitment of children in armed forces, and to strengthen the processes of demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. The “Cape Town Principles and Best Practices on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa,” or the Cape Town Principles, have become a leading document informing the development of international norms and legislation, and defining changes in policy at all levels.

---

Other sources report that more than 500,000 children have been recruited and that 300,000 are actively fighting. See IRINnews.org, IRIN Web Special on child soldiers, 2007. Available at: <http://www.irinnews.org/webspecials/childsoldiers/print/intro.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> University of Alberta, “Children and War: Impact, Protection and Rehabilitation.”

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, *Cape Town Principles and Best Practices*, Cape Town, South Africa, 27-30 April 1997. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/Cape\\_Town\\_Principles\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/Cape_Town_Principles(1).pdf). See also the Paris Guidelines.

In 2000, the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict came into effect, establishing a minimum age 18 for forced recruitment into armed forces. Meanwhile, the Security Council adopted several strong resolutions to protect children, specifically naming six egregious violations of the rights of children that it deemed threats to international peace and security. Governments who sign on to the Optional Protocol can still recruit 16 and 17 year olds who volunteer — as long as those young people do not take part in frontline combat; rebel groups MUST adhere to the minimum of 18 if the state has signed on (i.e. there is no assumption that rebel groups will keep young people off the frontlines, should young people volunteer to join). States that are not party to the Optional Protocol are still held to the international legal minimum age of 15 for recruitment.

In 2005, the Security Council passed Resolution 1612<sup>5</sup>, which moved from policy to practice through the establishment of a system for monitoring and reporting on CAC-related issues, the use of action plans to end the use of child soldiers, and the creation of a Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to follow up on specific situations. The six violations articulated in Resolution 1612 (going beyond child soldier issues) are: (i) the killing and maiming of children; (ii) recruiting and using child soldiers; (iii) attacks against schools and hospitals; (iv) rape and other grave sexual violations against children; (v) abduction of children; and (vi) denial of humanitarian aid access to children.

In February 2007, 60 countries endorsed The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups.<sup>6</sup> Beginning in 2005, UNICEF initiated a review of the Cape Town Principles in order to better reflect the knowledge acquired and lessons learned since 1997, and to incorporate new legislative developments. The review process culminated in the development of two documents — “The Paris Commitments to Protect Children from Unlawful Recruitment or Use by Armed Forces or Armed Groups” (the Paris Commitments), and “The Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups” (the Paris Principles). Participants at the March 6<sup>th</sup> roundtable discussed the latter document, as it offers a more detailed guidance and standardized approach for all practitioners on the ground, including peacekeepers. Accordingly, it is important that it be understood how the guidelines apply to peacekeeping, and the approach of peacekeepers, military and civilian, in the field.

A number of priorities have been identified within the Principles as having the greatest potential influence or implication for UN peacekeeping. These are:

---

<sup>5</sup> Other key CAC documents include UN SC resolutions on children in armed conflict 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing Rules, 1985), African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child (1990), the Rome Statute (resolution ICC-ASP/2/Res.3, 2003), the CRC (1989), Optional protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000), 1977 Optional protocols to the Geneva conventions and ILO convention 182 (2000).

1. Preventing the forced recruitment of children below 18 years of age at all times, irrespective of a peace agreement, and establishing mechanisms to ensure age is respected. However, as mentioned above, a minimum legal age of 18 only applies where the Optional Protocol has been ratified; where it has not been ratified, the minimum legal age remains 15. There is no legal commitment to end voluntary recruitment below age 18 as states who have not ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRC are not legally compelled to do so.
2. Seeking the release of children at all times, irrespective of a peace agreement.
3. Promoting efforts to monitor and report on violations of children's rights.
4. Combating impunity by investigating and prosecuting those who are recruiting children or other war crimes against children (or have in the past). Issues of concern are other crimes, such as rape of girls. This is also supported by the citation of the six egregious children's rights violations in 1612.
5. Supporting implementation of targeted measures such as a ban on arms.
6. Longer-term support for effective DDR programs for youth, with an emphasis on the reintegration part.
7. Supporting and promoting the voluntary involvement of children in truth-seeking and reconciliation processes.

Translating these new norms and principles for child protection into practical actions in the context of armed conflict remains a challenge. For example, states that have not signed the Optional Protocol use the age of 15 as their minimum legal age for voluntary recruitment with armed forces/groups, while those that have signed use 18. This has clear implications for peacekeepers, as they must respect local laws. Compliance by states with the above commitments remains a challenge, however there are measures that can be taken for violations of Security Council Resolutions, which is what some parts of civil society have been advocating, including political, economic and punitive sanctions. In addition to sanctions against states, child soldier recruiters can also be individually held accountable under the Rome Statute/ICC.

## CANADIAN ENGAGEMENT AND INITIATIVES

Canada has been a leader in the support and promotion for the protection of the rights of CAC and has actively engaged in diplomacy on CAC issues at the UN. Canada was the first country to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 2000, Canada hosted the International Conference on War-Affected Children in Winnipeg. More recently, Canada hosted a workshop at the UN in July

---

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, *The Paris Principles. Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups*, 2007. Available at: <http://www.unicef.org/media/files/ParisPrinciples310107English.pdf>.

2006, which focused on the implementation in practice of Resolution 1612 to protect the rights of children affected by armed conflict. The following month, the Government of Canada supported a workshop in Winnipeg on Preventing the Use of Child Soldiers. This workshop was organized by The Child Soldier Initiative composed of the University of Winnipeg, UNICEF Canada, Search for Common Ground, USAID, and the Office of Lt. General (Ret) Roméo Dallaire. Canada also supported the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, one of the first monitoring initiatives, and presently chairs Friends of CAC, a group of countries helping to maintain the importance of this issue at the forefront of the political agenda.

The issue of CAC was one of the Government's priorities under DFAIT's human security agenda, and is in direct line with its engagement on the protection of civilians threatened by conflict.<sup>7</sup> Canada's interest on CAC is also part of its focus, through CIDA, on governance and capacity building for government and civil society.<sup>8</sup> Within these purviews, Canada has made implementation of Resolution 1612 its priority.

## **LESSONS LEARNED: LISTENING TO VOICES OF EXPERIENCE**

Linked to the roundtable discussion was a public forum on Children and Armed Conflict held in the evening of March 6th. Increased awareness about the impacts of war, presented by three young adults, turned into a lively engagement. The discussion fostered a deeper understanding of the causes and impacts of the armed conflicts that threaten young people and ways that everyone can contribute to prevent similar experiences for other children.

## **CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT**

Kathy Vandergrift, moderator, introduced the subject by giving an overview of the global movement on CAC. Canada, the first country to sign the Optional Protocol, now focuses on implementation of measures to prevent recruitment and other violations of the rights of children. In particular, implementation of Security Council Resolution 1612 is a priority. Canadian civil society organizations work through the Forum on Children and Armed Conflict to engage the government in dialogue on specific situations and issues. The Forum on CAC also focuses on improving programming in the many places where Canadian agencies work with children in zones of conflict.

## **KIMMI WEEKS**

Kimmi Weeks, from Liberia, has been an advocate for child rights for 12 years. He was exiled from Liberia as a result of his advocacy to stop the conscription of children in

---

<sup>7</sup> Foreign Affairs Canada, "Canada's Human Security Programme," 2006. Available at: <http://www.humansecurity.gc.ca/menu-en.asp>.

<sup>8</sup> CIDA, "Children's Rights and Protection," 2006. Available at: <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/JUD-12115346-RJE>.

the Liberian army. Kimmi reflected on his childhood during the war in Liberia. He remembers the sight of children holding guns, beating and killing adults. Most child soldiers in Liberia were conscripted, given makeshift training, and forced onto the frontlines. Conditions were harsh. Girls were used as sex slaves. After the war Liberia faced the enormous challenge of rebuilding society and reintegrating thousands of children who had experienced war much of their lives.

Kimmi highlighted the importance of providing alternatives for young people, in the context of poverty. Ending the use of child soldiers, for him, is part of the larger goal of ending global poverty. In particular, he noted that young people, who were disarmed when the war ended, were then forgotten. Peace had returned, but not for them. Without real opportunities, the risk is that young people will go back to a life of conflict.

Kimmi spoke about the importance of youth participation. Youth make up over half of the population in many conflict countries. “What can we do with the power of numbers?” In North America, where he now works, the government also responds to public outcry. The challenge, Kimmi says, is getting the masses involved. Youth Action International, the organization Kimmi works with now, engages youth in awareness raising and letter-writing through local chapters and school organizations.

## **CHOL KELEI**

Chol Kelei is originally from Southern Sudan. He currently undertakes advocacy and awareness for children affected by armed conflict in Winnipeg area schools. One of his goals is to return to Sudan and help people rebuild that country. Chol focused on the need to implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between north and south Sudan. Chol shared glimpses into the past suffering of his family that now motivates him to work for peace. He was 8 years old when he left home without his family, one of the lost boys and girls of Sudan. He made his way to Ethiopia, where he was faced with wild animals such as hyenas, lions and tigers. According to him, more than a thousand unaccompanied children died on the way to Ethiopia. Rebels would sometimes recruit them into their armies, or shoot them down. There was no media presence to expose the atrocities, and no help on the way. Eventually he left Ethiopia and made his way to Uganda to make his refugee claim, and then eventually to Kenya in search of better education opportunities..

He believes it is important for the international community to get involved in situations beyond where they may have “interests.” Canada, he argues, should focus more efforts in South Sudan, including the reintegration of children into the communities, to avoid the return to violence as a way of live or criminal activity, such as banditry. “The ballot,” said Chol “can be our bullet to make changes in the world.” He challenged Canadian citizens to pressure their government to get involved in places where children are threatened by war, such as Darfur. Chol spoke about the notion of Responsibility of Protect, a concept that Canada promoted at the United Nations. If countries are unable or unwilling to protect people, then the international community has an obligation to help. “If Canadians are serious about the notion of Responsibility to Protect,” said Chol, “then we need to take action in Darfur.”

## **YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE FROM IRAN**

A youth who grew up in Iran during the Iran-Iraq war is a political refugee now living in Canada. The youth recalled the trauma of being forced to stay in prison with the youth's mother as a 2 year old, when the youth's parents were arrested because of their political views. The youth spent a year and a half in jail. At the age of 5 bombardments forced children to go into shelters in the school, an experience shared by other persons in the audience.

The youth challenged all of us to think about the impacts of the militarization of youth that results when children as young as 10 are trained in weapons and taught to be suicide bombers. In particular, the use of religion to engage youth in war is something that needs to change. Telling children that they will gain access to the gates of paradise by killing non-believers is a misuse of religion that the youth argues needs to be challenged. A focus on youth is essential for peace in places like Iran, where up to 70% of the population is young.

The wide-ranging discussion confirmed a core motivation behind the Children and Armed Conflict movement. If we take seriously the impact of armed conflict on children, it motivates us to work together to prevent the recurrence of the kind of situations described by the youth guests at this forum.

## **PARIS PRINCIPLES: THE “WHAT” DOCUMENT FOR PROGRAMMING**

The background of the three youth's experiences as well as the discussion around existing norms on children and armed conflict served as a useful starting point for the roundtable participants to discuss the Paris Principles, recently endorsed by Canada. The challenge of how to turn this document into applicable action on the ground was explored. Emmanuelle Tremblay, Child Rights Officer, CIDA, discussed her participation in the process along with DFAIT officer for Children and Armed Conflict, Katrina Burgess.

In February, foreign ministers and officials from over 60 countries endorsed The Paris Commitments to Protect Children from Unlawful Recruitment or Use by Armed Forces or Armed Groups. The first two commitments are:

1. To spare no effort to end the unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces or groups in all regions of the world, i.e. through the ratification and implementations of all relevant international instruments and through international cooperation.
2. To make every effort to uphold and apply the Paris Principles, wherever possible in our political, diplomatic, humanitarian, technical assistance, and funding roles and consistent with our international obligations.

The Paris Principles constitute a revision of the earlier Cape Town Principles. Discussion at the roundtable focused on the new principles and their implications for both NGOs and peacekeepers. Of particular interest is the fact that officials from several countries with child soldiers attended the meeting and were actively engaged by others to end the practice.

Canada endorsed the Paris Principles, with a delegation led by the Executive Vice-President of CIDA, Diane Vincent. CIDA is committed to remaining engaged in the field of children and armed conflict. The child protection group in CIDA's Policy Branch works with officers in the geographic division to address CAC issues in specific countries and as well as supporting UNICEF-led monitoring initiatives through CIDA's multilateral branch.

The roundtable first explored questions about the new Paris Principles. These principles, based on growing experience in this field, address some of the gaps in the earlier Cape Town Principles. Girls in armed conflict, for example, receive more attention, and the reintegration process, one of the challenges in the field, is more fully addressed. The importance of longer-term programming for effective assistance was highlighted at the Paris meeting, partly due to a strong message from Ishmael Beah, who has written a book on his experiences as a child soldier in Sierra Leone.

The Paris Principles complement previous CAC policies, such as Security Council Resolution 1612 and the monitoring mechanisms, as well as other CAC protection measures mentioned above. These are principles that address the substance of programming, i.e., the "what" of programming in this field. As Guillaume Landry pointed out from his extensive experience in West Africa on children and armed conflict issues, they are not operational guidelines, leaving the "how" to various actors, and they are vague on the "who" should be responsible for implementation. This policy is not a legal agreement, but it will be used to shape programs by donor agencies who committed to it. CIDA considers it a working document that will be refined and developed as it is applied.

Areas of concern about the substance of the policy included the limited participation of youth in its development, the generality and vagueness of some elements, and the challenge of translating principles into operational reality. In general, however, there was agreement among roundtable participants that this document is an improvement of the Cape Town Principles and does reflect the "state of the art" in this field.

On a conceptual level, there was not group consensus concerning the way child rights are incorporated into the Paris Principles. The notion of absolute and relative rights was brought up by consultant Phil Lancaster. While some participants appreciate the attempt to base all aspects of the Paris Principles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, others thought the references to child rights in general are too broad, and that there needs to be further clarity about who can actually uphold children's rights in the context of armed conflict. It was argued that limiting references to more specific rights, with parallel obligations on specific actors, would be more practical. Particularly for military actors, who are accustomed to military doctrines, more prescriptive and specific directions might have a greater chance of effective implementation. Conversely, other members of the roundtable argued that each conflict is rooted in various causes and is fuelled by a range of socio-economic and political factors – as that is the case, each situation will require that different rights are promoted by different actors, using various organizational capacities. It was noted that, even in the context of anarchy, there are local people who share concerns about child protection and can be supported to take responsibility. The link between rights and responsibilities is an area for further discussion.

## IN PRACTICE: APPLICABILITY OF THE PARIS PRINCIPLES FOR WORK ON THE GROUND

The above guidelines are reflected in various developments that have occurred in the past several years, some of which involve peacekeeping more directly. In cases where the guidelines do not define a role for peacekeeping, we elaborate on what such role could be.

### PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT ZONES

Discussion turned to ways that the Paris Principles could be used to advance the goal of protecting the rights of children in conflict zones.

- **Advocacy:** The fact that 60 countries made commitments to the agreement in Paris is worth prompt follow-up to advocate for actions. In Canada, Kathy Vandergrift noted that the Forum on CAC will engage with our political leaders on the next steps towards the implementation of this Commitment. In conflict countries, the Principles could be the basis of advocacy for attention to specific elements, e.g. inclusion of CAC in peace processes.
- **Policy and Strategy Development:** Carrie Vandewint, who just returned from working in Southern Sudan, suggested that the Paris Principles provide a framework or starting point for countries faced with developing national strategies or action plans, such as a post-conflict situation. This is a significant advance; previously, there were not frameworks that could guide the development of plans and the process took a long time. Delays have negative impacts for children. This could speed up the development of national strategies, within which individual actors operate.
- **Youth Empowerment:** Youth need to know their rights and what commitments their governments have made to them. Kimmi Weeks, for example, recounted how becoming aware of children's rights empowered him to become a youth leader. Youth friendly versions of the Optional Protocol, Security Council Resolution 1612, and the Paris Principles were named by roundtable participants as high priorities. A youth representative reminded the participants that for closed societies, like Iran, diaspora and youth outside the country with connections inside the country can be vehicles to help inform and empower young people, if they are given the tools to do so. The importance of coherence and co-ordination between different awareness-raising initiatives on international norms in local contexts was highlighted.
- **Training:** Trainings and associated materials, based on the principles, would be useful for several different constituencies, such as agency field staff in affected countries, indigenous child protection networks, donor agency program officers, military and humanitarian personnel, and diplomatic and legal advisors in foreign affairs.
- **Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation:** Operational tools and specific methodologies are needed to apply the Principles, to ensure: (i) a level of

similarity/parity between all trainings; (ii) a level of monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the trainings are useful and effective and current, and (iii) a means of collecting best practices. There is a need for more operational tools, to help program designers and frontline staff to translate these principles into specific program activities.

- **Best Practices:** Collecting and disseminating best practices based on the Principles was identified, by Julie Stevens, as a way to bridge the gap between practice and the realities of the policy environment. Collecting best practices also allows us to incorporate the most effective tools into our own toolboxes, thereby providing children who have been affected by conflict with the most comprehensive assistance possible.
- **Awareness:** At the political and diplomatic level, the Paris principles can help raise awareness of the plight of children affected by conflict. More popular awareness raising tools, based on the principles, could help at the community level in conflict countries and to build public support for donor investments in Canada. They could help to address the high level of scepticism about the effectiveness of work in this field.
- **Accountability:** While the Paris Principles are not legally binding, they could be a useful tool in helping strengthen the accountability of States that are parties to the CRC and the Optional Protocol on CAC. For instance, Sara Austin suggested that the Committee on the Rights of the Child could request that States that have endorsed the Principles should report on their progress in implementing the Paris Principles when they prepare their periodic reports on the CRC and OP. Similarly, non-governmental organizations can reference the Paris Principles in their alternative periodic reports, and in their advocacy efforts once the Committee issues their Concluding Observations.

## REINTEGRATION

Demobilization, Disarmament, Reintegration and Rehabilitation programs (DDRR) have put more emphasis on the two D's than on the Rs. Lessons learned have demonstrated that the reintegration and rehabilitation components are the most important for stopping the cycle of abuse of children.

Best practices in reintegration are reflected in the Paris Principles, but there are still major issues related to the implementation; for example, there is a general consensus that cash payments to youth who leaving fighting forces are not usually effective. The challenges of finding alternative livelihoods and dealing with the psycho-social impacts of armed conflict require longer-term approaches with full community participation. At the same time, Phil Lancaster pointed out that community consultation in some programs, e.g. World Bank programs in the DRC and Burundi resulted in unacceptable delays before children received any benefits from the program. Community consultations are crucial in ensuring that the community is actually being benefited by interventions, rather than having 'goods' imposed on them; participation is a key step in implementing a human

rights approach. Timely interventions and responses, that assist children leaving forces, is a priority. Others countered that the problem is not community engagement, but the bureaucratic structures and processes forced on local leaders by the World Bank.

Programming that is based on the resilience of children and builds on skills they acquired while engaged in armed forces, shows potential to be more effective than reinforcing the negative impacts of engagement with forces. At the same time, others pointed out that false expectations regarding the ease of a former child soldier's reintegration to community life can result in ignoring current problems that can re-surface later, when there are no programs to deal with them.

The importance of building the capacity of local child protection networks was repeated throughout the roundtable. Peacekeepers and international agencies should see themselves as technical advisors rather than program deliverers, supporting local skills and building local capacity. Local leaders will be there for the long-term; this is the only effective way to bridge the gap between emergency response and long-term sustainability.

The shortage of resources for long-term reintegration is another challenge. Most donor agencies pull-out of post-conflict programming within a few years, often terminating programs when the youth are still vulnerable to re-recruitment or to other problems, such as being trafficked, criminal activity, etc.

## **MILITARY – CIVILIAN ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS**

Children's needs have traditionally been seen within the scope of humanitarian agencies; protection and security issues, particularly in relation to child soldiers, also put children on the security agenda. With their inclusion on security agendas, come questions about the role of peacekeepers and military actors in child protection during conflict. Is it appropriate, for example, for peacekeepers, to participate in the reporting and follow-up on human rights violations? With the new focus on integrated missions, how can the roles of military and civilian actors complement each other? Is there a concern about blurring the lines between military and civilian roles? The discussion resulted in several points of consensus and areas for further clarification.

The trend toward including specific language about the protection of children in the mandates for peacekeeping missions was affirmed by the roundtable participants as a step in the right direction. When child protection is incorporated in the peacekeeping mandate itself, then resources and attention are directed towards children. This is in addition to the appointment of child protection advisors, which was started a few years ago. A particular challenge for peacekeeping missions is the fact that staff rotate every six months, making continuity a challenge.

There was also agreement that peacekeepers should play an active role in the monitoring and reporting mechanisms established under Resolution 1612. Under 1612(5), UNICEF monitors and documents human rights violations; while peacekeepers are highlighted in section 15 – UN agencies (including UNICEF) are asked to cooperate with peacekeepers and UN country teams when appropriate, on the implementation of 1612. Collating and

analyzing the information gathered was identified as an area for further attention; it may be a role where military expertise in strategic analysis proves valuable. This is often a weak spot in the process, and without it, the data does not lead to effective action.

More importantly, Chol Kelei highlighted that there is a need for clarification of roles and responsibilities in general, and within each specific mission. Participants shared experiences in peacekeeping missions where lack of clarity about roles resulted in unacceptable delays or ineffective response. DDR, for example, is a civilian led process, but the military is an integral part of it. This can lead to conflicting agendas, unless there is early agreement and clear roles.

The Paris Principles section 6.16 identifies UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General-Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC) as the lead monitoring and reporting bodies; in addition, UNICEF is identified as the the lead agency, while the Head of Mission is the coordinating body .

The Paris Principles do not address roles and responsibilities. While some saw that as a weakness, others observed that different agencies have capacity in particular situations, so it is best to leave those decisions to each mission. As a result, however, much depends on the experience and personality of the head of each mission, leading to a wide range of practice in relation to child protection. Early and clear identification of roles and responsibilities was seen as a central key to effective protection for children.

Training of peacekeepers remains an issue. Contributing troops are trained in their home country, and there was general agreement that this is unlikely to change. The result is a wide variety of training within a particular mission. One suggestion was that training on protection of children and other civilians be reinforced in the field, to ensure a common level of understanding among all members of a mission. Child protection competes with many other priorities for training; it should be given special emphasis, with particular attention to the role of peacekeepers in preventing child abuse through reporting and appropriate response when they encounter it and through example in their own practice.

The importance of building local expertise was highlighted. Peacekeepers can play an important role as technical advisors to local child protection authorities, such as local community leaders, local police, etc.

Discussions of the abuse of children by peacekeepers resulted in a strong consensus that there should never be impunity for peacekeepers who engage in child abuse, such as the sexual exploitation of girls. It is not enough to send them back to their home country where they escape being held accountable for their actions. Local communities interpret that as not taking the abuse of their children seriously by the international community. The UN, through DPKO, must develop appropriate mechanisms for punishment that reinforce accountability to the affected persons, within the framework of respect for the ultimate control of troop-contributing countries over their own forces.

Further attention is also needed to address the blurring of the lines by peacekeeping forces between civilian and military activities. An experience was shared from Côte d'Ivoire, where peacekeepers were actively involved in humanitarian activities, such as

building schools one day, and then the next day; however, when violence erupted again, the peacekeepers retreated to barracks and recommenced their patrolling in full arms, thereby sending confusing signals to youth and politicizing the humanitarian work. This can result in increased risk to the aid workers and youth involved, as communities are unsure of their roles, or their adherence to the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Careful distinctions and clarity between civilian and military roles is needed to prevent increased risk for local youth and humanitarian workers, who rely on their neutrality for security.

The question of what are a peacekeeper's role in addressing children and armed conflict was also raised in relation to the mixed role played by Canadian forces in Afghanistan, where attacks on schools have doubled in the last year. A "Do No Harm" assessment is needed to ensure that forces are not increasing the risk for children through hearts and minds activities on local schools sites.

In general, greater focus on child protection by peacekeeping missions was endorsed by roundtable participants. While the Paris Principles outline what is needed, integrated missions need to quickly and clearly assign roles and responsibilities for developing operational plans and consistently implementing them.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As mentioned in the introduction, the role of UN peacekeeping missions in addressing the specific needs of CAC remains unclear. The above demonstrates that more needs to be done to define the exact roles of military and civilian peacekeepers in addressing the multiple challenges associated with CAC. While the Paris Principles are a step in that direction, the role of peacekeepers in addressing the specific needs of CAC still appears limited. More work remains to be done to understand how these guidelines can apply to UN peacekeeping (and peacebuilding) in practice, and how in turn, peacekeepers can play a greater role with respect to the protection of children involved in conflict on the ground.

Many suggestions for addressing children and armed conflict emerged from the March 6<sup>th</sup> event. Not all recommendations below were endorsed by all participants, nor was there consensus on all recommendations. Participants also discussed a number of steps that will be pursued by the Forum on Children and Armed Conflict in its ongoing dialogue with government officials. The below recommendations came out of the discussions held during the roundtable:

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS, THE UNITED NATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

1. Youth-friendly versions of the Optional Protocol, Resolution 1612, and the Paris Principles should be developed, including active participation of youth in the process. This is also needed in local languages where recruitment of child soldiers is a threat to young people.
2. Easy-to-use, condensed versions of the Paris Principles should be developed for field staff and local communities, to help develop a broad base of awareness. The collation and dissemination of good practices based on the principles should also be explored to help bridge the gap between principles and operational realities.
3. The Committee on the Rights of the Child should request that States that have endorsed the Paris Principles should include progress reports on the implementation of the Principles within their periodic reports on the CRC and the Optional Protocol on CAC. Civil Society Organizations should also report on this within their alternative reports.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UN DEPARTMENT OF PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS (DPKO):**

1. Disseminate guidelines and DPKO lessons learned on protection of youth during conflict and rehabilitation of youth after conflict. The community and the youth themselves need to be involved in developing community-based programs that assist both child soldiers and other youth to create new opportunities and social relationships.
2. Reporting and response mechanisms, established under Resolution 1612, should include peacekeepers where appropriate, with particular attention to collating and analyzing data collected for early, preventive responses.
3. Appropriate international mechanisms to hold peacekeepers accountable for abuses of children should be mainstreamed throughout all peacekeeping missions, such as through Codes of Conduct with clear punitive measures.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO UN PEACEKEEPING MISSION ON THE GROUND:**

1. Clarity of roles and responsibilities should be established at the beginning of each peacekeeping mission to ensure that child protection receives due attention. Where there is not a peacekeeping mission, clarity of roles and responsibilities within the UN country team is needed, including strong links with local child protection networks.
2. Children and youth in conflict zones need to be provided with assistance as soon as possible after a peace agreement has been signed. In addition, the Paris Principles advocate for assistance to child soldiers regardless of the signing of a peace accord—DDRR should be ongoing process (i.e. during and after peace agreements). Longer-term programs are needed, including a focus on alternative livelihoods so youth can sustain themselves; some will become leaders in rebuilding their countries.
3. Clear programmes for psycho-social healing through community should be explored for youth in areas of conflict.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNMENTS AT THE UNITED NATIONS:**

1. Training initiatives, based on the Paris Principles, should be developed for different user-groups, including military, donor agency staff, diplomats, and field staff. Consideration should be given to reinforce child protection training done in contributing countries when forces are integrated into one mission, and regularly thereafter because of the six-month rotations. A training strategy for all contributing countries to peacekeeping forces might be facilitated through the Friends of Children and Armed Conflict Group within the UN.
2. Given the importance of an early start on reintegration, a contingency fund should be established at UNICEF for immediate use after a peace process is signed, to prevent the long delays that now occur before youth receive assistance. Contributions to this fund could include voluntary contributions by countries, as well as through UN regular resources, etc.
3. To encourage implementation, states that are party to the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children and Armed Conflict could be asked to include regular reports on how they applied the Paris Principles. This process would also allow youth and NGOs to comment on their government's implementation of the Paris Principles.
4. Canada should take a lead in developing an appropriate international means to hold peacekeepers accountable for abuses of children, including some form of accountability to the affected community. Being sent home is not adequate.

5. Clear programs for psycho-social healing through community should be explored for refugee youth. One element of the Optional Protocol signed by Canada is provision of assistance to children who come to Canada after being abused in armed conflict.
6. Child rights education should be integrated into school curricula in countries where child recruitment is rampant to raise awareness of recruitment dangers and serve as a prevention measure.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOS):**

1. A joint letter from Canadian civil society will be prepared to express support for Canada signing the Paris Principles and encourage the government to implement it through more specific program and budget allocations, within CIDA and/or START at DFAIT.
2. Integrate the Paris Principles into monitoring and reporting on States Parties' progress in implementing the CRC and the Optional Protocol on CAC, including in NGOs alternative reports and in advocacy efforts to follow up the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (INGOS):<sup>9</sup>**

1. Capacity building of local, indigenous child protection networks should be a high priority in each country strategy, along with longer-term funding for reintegration plans. This would transform short-term emergency response initiatives into sustainable social support systems for youth.
2. Foster connections between youth in Canada and youth in these countries to inform youth of their basic rights, foster greater religious tolerance, and destroy some of the myths that entrap youth in a militarized culture.

---

<sup>9</sup> While these recommendations are targeted primarily at INGOs, they can also apply to civil society and NGOs in Canada and around the world.