

CHILD SOLDIERS AND EARLY WARNING

Laura Cleave and William Watkins

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative

ABSTRACT

Early warning of the recruitment and use of child soldiers remains an elusive concept. This is surprising given the number and intensity of conflicts today where child soldiers are used. Yet, there is currently no formal early warning system in this sphere that focuses on recruitment and use. Without formally looking at indicators that precede recruitment, the international community runs the risk of missing important opportunities for data collection and analysis which could help to improve child protection and inform conflict mitigation. This paper will employ a qualitative review of the policy and research domains to examine the current landscape of early warning as it applies to child soldiers. It will consider why it is important to expand the scope of early warning to incorporate recruitment and use, so that children can be prioritized on the international security agenda and, to further understand why some children are more vulnerable to recruitment than others. Ultimately, this paper argues that the development of an early warning system for child soldiers would be important to better inform recruitment prevention from its earliest stages.

Keywords: Early Warning, Child Soldiers, Conflict, Recruitment Prevention, Child Protection

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, it has become well-documented that child soldiers remain a defining element of most modern conflicts.¹ Supported by the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative (Dallaire Initiative), the Government of Canada looked to resolve this issue at an international level through the creation of the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in 2017. The Vancouver Principles are a set of global political commitments focused on child protection during peacekeeping, which pinpoints early warning as one of the key pillars to preventing the recruitment of children. In this context, early warning is described as a system used to monitor, identify, report and address initial signs of the recruitment and use of child soldiers, so that preventative action can be taken to better protect children.² Despite the Vancouver Principles' growing list of United Nations (UN) Member State endorsements, early warning of recruitment and use remains an understudied area, in both the research and policy arenas. To date, much of the focus of the international community has been on reacting to situations where children have been recruited and used as soldiers, largely through disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration processes. As such, less attention has been paid to preventing instances of recruitment in the first place.³

Given that child soldier use continues to be a defining factor of most modern conflicts,⁴ and recognizing the vast number of children currently living in conflict situations,⁵ this paper makes a case for developing an early warning system for child soldier recruitment and use. The first section of the paper will frame the discussion and define key terms, explore why early warning is important for prevention, and address some of the known challenges associated with early warning, namely early response and political will. Next, the paper will contextualize the research domain. It will argue that early warning of recruitment and use would be beneficial to prioritize a more child-centric focus within the international peace

1 Roos Haer and Tobias Böhmelt, "Child Soldiers as Time Bombs? Adolescents' Participation in Rebel Groups and the Recurrence of Armed Conflict," *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 2 (June 2016): 408–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115581910>.

2 Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2019/igvp-20190614.pdf>.

3 Roméo Dallaire and Shelly Whitman, "Preventing the Use of Child Soldiers, Preventing Genocide," *UN Chronicle* LII, no. 1–2 (2015), <https://unchronicle.un.org/article/preventing-use-child-soldiers-preventing-genocide>; Darin Reeves et al., *Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*, 3rd ed. (Halifax, NS: The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, 2017).

4 Vera Achvarina and Simon F. Reich, "No Place to Hide Refugees, Displaced Persons, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006): 127–64, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2006.31.1.127>; Haer and Böhmelt, "Child Soldiers as Time Bombs?"

5 Gudrun Østby, Siri Aas Rustad, and Andreas Forø Tollefsen, "Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990–2017" (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo, October 2018).

and security agenda and to develop a comparative base upon which to understand why some children are more vulnerable to recruitment than others. The final section will consider policy implications in terms of how early warning of recruitment could be used to alert on conflict escalation. The paper will conclude with recommendations for future research. Ultimately, expanding the scope of early warning to better incorporate a child soldier-specific system will help to prioritize recruitment prevention and global child protection.

FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

As previously mentioned, the intent of this paper is to provide a qualitative review of current literature in the areas of early warning and the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Due to time and space limitations, it will not introduce a model for the development of a child soldier-specific early warning system. Instead, it is hoped that by contextualizing the current early warning landscape, and by offering recommendations for expanding its scope, that further research will be undertaken to develop an early warning system of child soldier recruitment and use.

The terms child and child soldier are used frequently throughout this paper. Both child and children refer to individuals under the age of 18, as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Furthermore, this paper uses the definition of a child soldier as presented in the Paris Principles:

any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.⁶

The next section provides an overview of the purpose and importance of early warning systems for prevention and situates the recruitment and use of child soldiers within this broader discussion.

UNDERSTANDING EARLY WARNING

Over the past few decades, a number of early warning systems in the humanitarian field have emerged to inform the development of appropriate measures to protect vulnerable

6 UNICEF, "The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups" (New York: United Nations, February 2007), para. 2.1, https://childrenandarmed-conflict.un.org/publications/ParisPrinciples_EN.pdf.

populations.⁷ Based on the mandate of the organization operating the system, their focus varies from conflict escalation to political violence, natural disaster, famine, refugee flows, etc. However, all rely on the systematic gathering, monitoring and analysis of data to identify trends in the evolution of the situation being monitored. Although the focus of each system may be different, the various categories that make up these systems often intersect. For example, how changes to the climate can potentially act as an undermining factor to human security, which in turn can increase the risk of violent conflict.⁸ As the recruitment and use of child soldiers is seen in most armed conflicts,⁹ it is a cross cutting issue that intersects with many of the current early warning systems. However, of the existing systems – many of which focus on armed conflict – there is presently no system that concentrates specifically on child soldier recruitment. Further, most systems do not explicitly consider indicators of recruitment and use. Given the importance of early warning to prevention, as further outlined below, the development of a system in this arena has the potential to help identify recruitment patterns that could, in turn, be used to better inform child protection and recruitment prevention.

Why is Early Warning Important?

Early warning is a process used to monitor and analyze changes in social, political and economic dynamics to identify whether a particular situation is worsening or whether a humanitarian crisis is on the verge of occurrence.¹⁰ The ultimate goal of early warning is to prevent an issue from occurring through facilitating preventative action by accountable actors.¹¹ This is accomplished through providing decision makers with a clear picture of the nature and potential impacts of an issue and the progression toward a situation that will require action.¹² To do so, early warning systems employ the concept of indicators, which are observable activities that demonstrate changes within a particular issue area. Indicators are a key part of early warning as they help to measure change in a given situation, so that warnings

7 Phuong Pham and Patrick Vinck, "Technology Fusion and Their Implications for Conflict Early Warning Systems, Public Health, and Human Rights," *Health and Human Rights* 14, no. 2 (2012): 106–17.

8 Jon Barnett and W. Neil Adger, "Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict," *Political Geography* 26, no. 6 (August 2007): 639–55, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2007.03.003>.

9 Achvarina and Reich, "No Place to Hide"; Haer and Böhmelt, "Child Soldiers as Time Bombs?"

10 Jennifer Leaning, "Early Warning for Mass Atrocities: Tracking Escalation Parameters at the Population Level," in *Reconstructing Atrocity Prevention*, ed. Sheri P. Rosenberg, Tibi Galis, and Alex Zucker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 352–78.

11 Anna Matveeva, "Early Warning and Early Response: Conceptual and Empirical Dilemmas," *Issue Paper* (Den Haag: Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, 2006), <https://gppac.net/files/2018-12/Early%20Warning%20and%20Early%20Response.pdf>.

12 Catherine Defontaine, "Setting up Early Warning and Response Systems to Prevent Violent Conflicts and Save Lives," *World Bank, Development for Peace (blog)*, February 15, 2019, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/setting-early-warning-and-response-systems-prevent-violent-conflicts-and-save-lives>.

can be identified, key audiences can be alerted, and preventative action can be taken. For example, in the context of this paper, an armed group that begins to engage with students at or around a school could be an indicator that they are looking to target children for recruitment purposes. Through this initial warning, interventions aimed at preventing recruitment in schools could be tailored, such as through community-based programming. Thus, early warning represents an important tool to monitor the vulnerability of children to recruitment as a means to inform and facilitate prevention and protection efforts on the ground.

Challenges to Early Warning

Early warning systems and their effectiveness, however, are not without critique. Perhaps the most prominent challenge within this field is that alerts of impending crises do not automatically compel action.¹³ As learned from prior humanitarian situations, even the most successful warning systems are not always able to influence early response. This has often been linked to a lack of political will within the international community and at the state level,¹⁴ but it may also be a lack of understanding or agreement on the crisis situation. Therefore, from the earliest stages of development, early warning should be clearly associated with response-based mechanisms,¹⁵ thereby making it easier for decision makers to understand why preventative action is necessary. To ensure the effectiveness of early warning systems, key actors, stakeholders, and decision makers should be engaged during system development to ensure a common understanding of their mandate and responsibilities.¹⁶ Despite the early warning-early response dichotomy, early warning remains an important tool as it presents, at a minimum, a first step in identifying potential threats to populations at risk, as well as a platform for response-based advocacy and knowledge development in terms of prevention strategies.

Ultimately, given that child soldiers are present in almost every modern conflict, preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers has tangible benefits for conflict resolution. As Achvarina and Reich (2006, p. 130) note "...the increasing use of child soldiers poses a long-term threat to the health and security of societies far beyond the borders of the war-torn, fragile states in which these civil and ethnic conflicts take place. If their rehabilitation is difficult but necessary for the future stability of societies, then prevention is arguably even more vital and less costly."

13 Brigitte Rohwerder, "Conflict Early Warning and Early Response," Helpdesk Research Report (Falmer, UK: GSDRC, 2015), https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/1195_-Conflict-early-warning-and-early-response.pdf.

14 Barbara Harff, "How to Use Risk Assessment and Early Warning in the Prevention of Genocide and Other Mass Atrocities," *Global Responsibility to Protect 1*, no. 4 (October 1, 2009): 506–31, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187598509X12505800144873>.

15 Defontaine, "Setting up Early Warning."

16 Matveeva, "Early Warning and Early Response."

To that end, the next section contextualizes previous literature to further identify why an early warning system in this field is important for recruitment prevention and child protection.

EARLY WARNING AND CHILD SOLDIERS

Raising Child Soldiering on the International Peace and Security Agenda

Raising the issue of child soldiering on the international peace and security agenda has never been more important given the number of children who currently live in insecure and fragile environments. In 2017, the Peace Research Institute Oslo estimated there to be 1.8 billion children living in conflict-affected countries, amounting to 81% of all children globally.¹⁷ Even more concerning, in this same year, 420 million children were estimated to be living within less than 50 km from where fighting was occurring.¹⁸ It is well documented that child soldiering remains a pervasive problem in most modern conflict¹⁹ and that the phenomenon of the recruitment of children into armed conflict is not isolated to one part of the globe.²⁰ Referencing Human Rights Watch, Tynes (2019) notes that in 2006 child soldiers were identified in 30 countries, including in places as geographically distinct as Afghanistan, Colombia, Mexico, the Russian Federation, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands and Sudan. Despite the prevalence of widespread myths in popular media that paint the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict as African-centric, Tynes (2019) shows that this is not the case. Of the 83-armed conflicts that took place between 1987 to 2007 which are known to have involved child soldiers, 26 occurred in Africa, 26 in Asia, 11 in Europe, 11 in the Middle East, and 9 in North and South America.²¹ As child soldier recruitment can be linked to all areas of the globe, this makes the call for a formal early warning system all the more imperative given its universal value.

In this context, the Vancouver Principles set out the importance of identifying early warning signs of recruitment and use of child soldiers so that preventative action can be taken. An important element of this is the availability of “timely and accurate information on violations against children including the recruitment and use of child soldiers.”²² Despite increased attention to child soldiering in recent years, prevention of recruitment and use is still not a

17 Østby, Rustad, and Tollefsen, “Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990–2017.”

18 Østby, Rustad, and Tollefsen.

19 Achvarina and Reich, “No Place to Hide”; Haer and Böhmelt, “Child Soldiers as Time Bombs?”

20 Bernd Beber and Christopher Blattman, “The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion,” *International Organization* 67, no. 1 (2013): 65–104; Robert Tynes, *Tools of War, Tools of State: When Children Become Soldiers* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019).

21 Tynes, *Tools of War, Tools of State*.

22 Dustin Johnson, Shelly Whitman, and Hannah Sparwasser Soroka, “Prevent to Protect: Early Warning, Child Soldiers, and the Case of Syria,” in *Children and the Responsibility to Protect*, ed. Bina D’Costa and Luke Glanville (Leiden: Brill | Nijhoff, 2019), 250.

central component of the international peace and security agenda, particularly among nations in the Global North.²³ At the international level, one of the prominent systems tracking child soldier recruitment and use is the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) of the six grave violations against children. The purpose of the MRM is to provide the information or data necessary for "well informed, concerted and effective advocacy and responses to protect and care for children".²⁴ To this end, the MRM plays a central role in informing the Security Council on grave violations against children in armed conflict and on the parties who perpetrate such violations. Although the MRM is an important tool for tracking violations against children and cases of recruitment into armed forces and groups, it is "not triggered until sufficiently grave violations have already occurred, as reported by UN staff and others on the ground".²⁵ This means that the use of child soldiers has already occurred, and thus prevention opportunities have been missed from the earliest stages. This is where an early warning system focused on the recruitment of children as soldiers would be beneficial in identifying indicators of recruitment, which could be used as a call on the international peace and security agenda to inform prevention activities. This, in turn, could help to better protect both children and societies from the long-term effects associated with recruitment and use. As Dallaire and Whitman (2015) note, "Until this issue is elevated within the security agenda, the international community will continue to squander excellent opportunities to prevent the recruitment of children as soldiers". Thus, an early warning system for child soldier recruitment would help to raise the importance of this issue on the international peace and security agenda and, in doing so, support a shift in focus from reaction to prevention.

Understanding Child Vulnerability in Conflict and Indicators of Recruitment

For early warning to strengthen the decision-making capacities of UN Member States and peacekeeping missions, it requires a better understanding of the factors that underlie the recruitment and use of child soldiers.²⁶ Hence, identifying observable indicators of child soldiering requires, as a starting point, a full understanding of its causes, structure, function and processes. Since the release of Graça Machel's 1996 report to the UN Secretary General, and through subsequent research by an array of actors (largely from civil society and global think-tanks), there is now some discussion on the indicators that precede the recruitment and use of children as soldiers in armed conflict. Various authors have focused on different risk

23 Achvarina and Reich, "No Place to Hide."

24 DPKO, OSRSG CAAC, and UNICEF, "MRM Basics," *MRM Tools*, 2006, http://www.mrmtools.org/mrm/mrmtk_1115.htm.

25 Johnson, Whitman, and Sparwasser Soroka, "Prevent to Protect: Early Warning, Child Soldiers, and the Case of Syria," 250.

26 Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance.

factors, such as high rates of poverty and orphaned children,²⁷ proliferation of light arms,²⁸ limited or non-existent child protection processes in refugee camps,²⁹ youth bulges³⁰ and a state's history of violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights and the UN's six grave violations against children.³¹ It should be noted that this research is important to understanding the vulnerability of children living in armed conflict. Yet, discussion beyond broad social, political and economic conditions remains limited.

In this regard, Haer (2019)³² notes that many studies that have investigated the indicators underpinning child soldier recruitment have focused on a small number of case studies. Yet, ongoing challenges related to data collection and access have largely prevented comparative work that provides a broader understanding of the issue for the purposes of early warning. Furthermore, some of the common indicators which have been correlated to child soldier recruitment do not take into account conflict environments where children are not recruited. For instance, poverty is often upheld as a primary indicator underpinning child soldier recruitment. Yet, this overlooks that there are many children who do not become child soldiers in countries with high poverty rates, even in conflict-affected states.³³ This shows that many of these indicators are not stand-alone and a higher number of indicators in place may indicate a greater likelihood of recruitment and use.³⁴ Thus, having an early warning system focused on recruitment and use would provide an opportunity to track multiple indicators at any given time to provide a comparative perspective and to detect the early possibility of child recruitment.

As the poverty example above shows, there is a need to look at conditions of recruitment and use in armed conflict and conditions where children have not been recruited and used in armed conflict: "child soldier" and "not child soldier". Pedersen and Sommerfelt (2007)

27 P.W. Singer, *"Child Soldiers: The New Faces of War"* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2005), <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/singer20051215.pdf>.

28 Singer.

29 Achvarina and Reich, "No Place to Hide."

30 Krijn Peters, Paul Richards, and Koen Vlassenroot, "What Happens to Youth during and After Wars? A Preliminary Review of Literature on Africa and an Assessment of the Debate," RAWOO Working paper (Den Haag: Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council, October 2003), <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9b4c/08499c463a21464bac0d31049f547e7d81bc.pdf>.

31 Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance.

32 Roos Haer, "Children and Armed Conflict: Looking at the Future and Learning from the Past," *Third World Quarterly*, January 21, 2019, 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1552131>.

33 Quaker United Nations Office, "Child Soldiers: Why Adolescents Volunteer" (Geneva: Quaker United Nations Office, 2003), https://quano.org/sites/default/files/resources/Why%20Adolescents%20Volunteer_Written%20Statement%20to%20UN%20Commission%20on%20Human%20Rights.pdf; Achvarina and Reich, "No Place to Hide."

34 Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance.

provide one of the most comprehensive discussions to date on the risk factors which define the characteristics or contexts that make some children more vulnerable to recruitment and use than others. To do so, they present a model for the different states of children in armed conflict – namely all children, child soldiers, internally displaced children or refugees, and discharged former child soldiers. From there, they develop a list of four main categories of indicators that underscore the different states of children and the conditions that govern or influence state transition: contextual factors, such as current residence, environment, infrastructure, access to services, exposure to dangerous environments, social network; human resources, such as age, gender, education; activities, such as school enrolment, availability of work (type, hours, conditions), criminal activities; and, outcomes, such as income and poverty levels. As they write, “The purpose of a risk analysis is to understand which characteristics govern the transition from one state to another”.³⁵ Although this research was not proposed as an early warning system, their model provides an interesting consideration for what an early warning system should comprise and a starting point for comparative analysis that considers both “child soldier” and “not child soldier” indicators. As Pedersen and Sommerfelt (2007) have aptly noted, from a comparative perspective, it is important to understand the different states that children occupy within armed conflict and the conditions influencing their transitions. Thus, having an early warning system would help to track the risk factors that underlie the vulnerability of children to recruitment and use, and to better understand the transitions from one state to another.

Previous research on early warning and child soldiers remains scarce, particularly compared to the wide body of research which focuses on disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration. Thus, developing an early warning system would help to fill a gap in terms of focusing more directly on the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers, by raising the issue of child soldiering and the importance of prevention on the international peace and security agenda and developing a comparative base upon which to understand what makes some children more vulnerable to recruitment than others. Given the number of children who currently live in conflict-affected countries around the globe, early warning is imperative to ensure that child protection is prioritized. Building on this discussion, the following section will consider some of the policy implications that would result from an early warning system for child soldiering and will conclude with recommendations for future research.

35 Jon Pedersen and Tone Sommerfelt, “Studying Children in Armed Conflict: Data Production, Social Indicators and Analysis,” *Social Indicators Research* 84, no. 3 (October 22, 2007): 263, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-007-9117-3>.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Monitoring Conflict Escalation

In addition to helping to prioritize an agenda of prevention, an early warning system for recruitment would also be beneficial to potentially alert on conflict escalation. The Vancouver Principles highlight that the recruitment and use of child soldiers can be correlated to “other grave violations or war crimes and can serve to signal emerging (or re-emerging) conflict more broadly”.³⁶ Similarly, the UN Security Council noted this link in *Resolution 2427* of 2018, which considered how violations of children’s human rights and international humanitarian law can reflect not only a consequence of conflict, but may also act as early warning of conflict escalation. Situations where children are vulnerable to recruitment and use often indicates a breakdown of domestic institutions and internal security – two indicators that are often employed in larger systems of early warning of conflict and mass atrocity.³⁷ In reflecting on his experience as the Force Commander for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), Lieutenant General Roméo Dallaire pointed to the rapid build-up of forces from 1990 to 1994, which included the recruitment of children. In this time, the Interahamwe, the youth movement of Rwanda’s ruling party of the time, became increasingly more active, as intel on the ground observed that children were being recruited and trained to kill the Tutsi population leading up to the genocide.³⁸ In this case, the recruitment of children into armed groups was an initial indication, among others, of the growing tensions within Rwanda which preceded the outbreak of genocide. Although the link between recruitment and conflict escalation is still an area that requires further attention, having an early warning system for recruitment in place would help to add another layer in monitoring humanitarian situations for conflict escalation.

Future Research

Early warning of child soldiering has been an elusive area of study through the lack of an early warning system directly related to this field and through limited research on indicators that precede recruitment. As Østby, Rustad, Tollefsen (2018, p. 1) argue, “More resources should be invested in collecting and managing systematic data on the various ways in which these children are directly affected by armed conflict, such as through killing and maiming, child soldier recruitment, sexual exploitation, and the denial of humanitarian access.” Thus, this paper recommends that future research consider a framework of indicators that could be used to develop an early warning system for child soldier recruitment. The indicators

36 Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance.

37 Shelly Whitman, “Child Soldiers Are Early Warning of Genocide to Come,” *The Star*, December 7, 2013, sec. Commentary, https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2013/12/07/child_soldiers_are_early_warning_of_genocide_to_come.html.

38 Dallaire and Whitman, “Preventing the Use of Child Soldiers, Preventing Genocide.”

outlined in the previous section represent some of the key research to date on risk factors that make children more vulnerable to recruitment. However, as previously noted, this list is not comprehensive. To build on this understanding, and in line with recommendations put forth by the Vancouver Principles, future research on early warning of child recruitment should engage child protection experts on indicator development. It would also be essential to develop a community-driven perspective on local risk factors of child recruitment. Additionally, as Jo Becker (2004)³⁹ of Human Rights Watch highlights, for prevention mechanisms to be effective, it is imperative for local communities in conflict-affected regions to be able to identify local risk factors to recruitment and use. This would also help to avoid a top-down perspective of early warning.⁴⁰

From a long-term perspective, future research should also consider where an early warning system for child soldier recruitment and use could be housed, operated and maintained (i.e. within the UN as a sub-component of the MRM, international non-governmental organizations, the Government of Canada as the lead on the Vancouver Principles, etc.). Moreover, as mentioned previously, early response remains a significant challenge in the early warning field as warning does not always lead to action.⁴¹ Thus, future research should also consider how to build a system that would better integrate early response. This, in part, could be done through examining who would be the key partners needed to foster effective early action, both in terms of international institutions and local civil society organizations.

Ultimately, there is still much to learn about the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and there are many levels of expertise and understanding that cannot be overlooked. This makes future research on early warning imperative to ensure that recruitment prevention is prioritized on the international security agenda.

CONCLUSION

To date, there is currently no formal early warning system that concentrates specifically on the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and research focusing on the indicators that precede recruitment remains limited. Given the importance of early warning to prevention, and in recognizing the number of children who currently live in conflict-affected countries around the globe, there is a need for further research in this area to feed into the development of an early warning system for recruitment. Having a system in place would help to raise

39 Jo Becker, "Children as Weapons of War" (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004), <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k4/11.htm>.

40 Pham and Vinck, "Technology Fusion and Their Implications for Conflict Early Warning Systems, Public Health, and Human Rights"; Madhawa Palihapitiya, "Early Warning, Early Response: Lessons from Sri Lanka," *Building Peace*, September 2013, 26–29.

41 Matveeva, "Early Warning and Early Response."

child soldiering and the importance of recruitment prevention on the international peace and security agenda. It would also provide an opportunity to explore the indicators and patterns that precede recruitment, as well as provide a greater comparative understanding on why some children are more vulnerable to recruitment than others in conflict (previously described as “child soldier” and “not child soldier”). Further, as presented in the Vancouver Principles, an early warning system for child soldier recruitment could potentially help to inform conflict mitigation, an area which requires further research. The authors understand that the development of a standalone early warning system for recruitment and use would be a significant undertaking. However, as limited research has been completed in this area, initiating a dedicated research agenda on the development of an early warning system is important, particularly through engaging child protection experts and local communities. Ultimately, early warning presents an opportunity to better inform recruitment prevention and child protection, so that children around the globe do not have to go through the trauma of being part of armed conflict.

Laura Cleave is a Research Officer at the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative in Halifax, Canada. William Watkins is the Senior Advisor – Research & Learning at the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative.