

# ALLONS-Y

Journal of Children, Peace and Security

VOLUME 4 | MARCH 2020



THE ROMÉO  
DALLAIRE



**CHILD  
SOLDIERS**  
INITIATIVE



**DALHOUSIE  
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# Allons-y

## Journal of Children, Peace and Security

Volume 4 | March 2020

### ISSN

2371-4387 (Print)

2371-4395 (Online)

**Editors** Catherine Baillie Abidi and Dustin Johnson

**Contributors** Catherine Baillie Abidi, Jo Becker, Victoria Bryce, Laura Cleave, Roméo Dallaire, Valentina Falco, Dustin Johnson, Marion Laurence, Allyssa Walsh, Alec Wargo, Bill Watkins, and Shelly Whitman

**Design and Production** Megan Churney  
**Front Cover and Interior Art** Jessica Wiebe  
**Back Cover Photo** UN Photo/Stuart Price

**Publisher** The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative  
Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

The Editors would like to thank the Dallaire Centre of Excellence for Peace and Security for their funding in support of this issue, and the peer reviewers for their critical contributions to this issue of *Allons-y*.

The views, opinions, and analyses expressed in this volume are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, Dalhousie University, or the authors' respective employers.

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For more information, please contact  
[dustin@childsoldiers.org](mailto:dustin@childsoldiers.org) or [catherine@childsoldiers.org](mailto:catherine@childsoldiers.org)

## ABOUT THE COVER ART

“Having been deployed to Afghanistan as a soldier and having seen the reality of children living in war first-hand, the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative resonates with me on many levels. I believe in education and the power of collaboration. I admire the Dallaire Initiative’s approach to collaboration with concerned governments, security sector actors, academics, humanitarians and civilian communities to elevate children’s rights, well-being, and security in war and conflict zones - especially the direct work with soldiers, police, prison personnel, and private security operators which is critical to the interruption of children’s recruitment on the ground.”

Interdisciplinary artist Jessica Lynn Wiebe is a former artillery soldier in the Canadian military whose body of work centers on reflections of militarism, military life, memory and commemoration. Her interdisciplinary approach investigates the mechanisms of war, including the complex politics around gender, economy, architecture of war, and the human condition. By engaging and challenging deeply-held beliefs and emotions about the military and war, her work generates dialogue among members of the public, government, and those who serve. Jessica was born and raised in Brandon, Manitoba, and currently practices in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Wiebe participated in the Canadian Forces Artist Program (CFAP) 2018–2019 through the Canadian War Museum (CWM) in Ottawa. Currently, Jessica is the artist in residence at the Centre for Art Tapes (CFAT) in Halifax, NS.

*This publication was made possible by funding from the Government of Canada*



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# UN ONU

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The launch of the Vancouver Principles at the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in Vancouver, Canada on 15 November 2017. Photo: The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers

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Photo by Josh Boyter

# ABOUT THE DALLAIRE INITIATIVE

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative (Dallaire Initiative) was founded in 2007 with the mission of ending the recruitment and use of children as weapons of war. Today, we are the leading organization globally to address this grave problem. The demand for our unique approach and expertise has grown exponentially, especially since 2017 when we co-created, with the Canadian Government, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. Now endorsed by over 95 countries, the Vancouver Principles are the primary mechanism through which we advocate for our coined “Children’s Rights Upfront” (CRU) approach. The CRU approach seeks to elevate children’s well-being as essential to achieving international peace and security, by making children a priority for all actors, and by ensuring children’s rights are included in peace processes. Considering almost half of the world’s population is under the age of 24 years, and that most countries where recruitment and use of children is occurring have predominately young populations, it is essential that we prioritize the rights of children.

In a conflict-affected area, a child’s environment is often shaped by the work of the security sector actors. We continue to develop and promote ways to improve security sector interactions, by developing standards and clear guidelines around recruitment prevention and child protection to prioritize the safety of children. Our approach focusses on four activities, which mutually support each other to enhance recruitment prevention and child protection:

1. Developing a global network of champions
2. Applying research to practice
3. Influencing policy and doctrine
4. Training and building capacity



*LGen Roméo Dallaire, Rwanda, 1994. Used under permission from the National Speakers Bureau.*



# ABOUT ALLONS-Y: JOURNAL OF CHILDREN, PEACE AND SECURITY

In January 1994, General Dallaire, then the Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), sent a fax to UN headquarters in New York warning of the impending genocide. He signed the fax with the line “peux ce que veux. Allons-y” – “Where there’s a will, there’s a way. Let’s go.” At the time, there was not a will among the international community, with lethal results for nearly a million Rwandans.

Since then, General Dallaire has worked tirelessly to ensure that there is both a will and a way to prevent mass atrocities in the future. However, action must be informed by understanding for it to be effective, and this has led to General Dallaire’s focus on preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers. The creation and adoption of the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in 2017, is helping to focus and drive action by the international community to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers through ensuring that security sector actors are trained and prepared to prevent recruitment. Doing so requires learning from experiences and sharing knowledge on all aspects of training, education, research, and prevention in this area.

Published since 2016, the Dallaire Initiative annual publication Allons-y, is entering a new phase with a focus on supporting the implementation of the Vancouver Principles. In this and future issues, commentaries, peer-reviewed research and policy articles will focus on all aspects of the implementation of the Vancouver Principles. The articles provide guidance, policy recommendations, and new knowledge to support the international community’s work to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

# PREFACE

*LGen (ret'd) Roméo Dallaire*

The ways in which child soldiers are used in modern conflicts has become ever more sophisticated and prominent, with shifting capabilities and a focus on generational warfare, compared to when I faced them during my command of the UNAMIR mission in Rwanda twenty-six years ago. To confront this challenges, we need to keep our focus on the fact that the recruitment and use of children as weapons of war is the worst thing that we can do to children. We need to focus on the significance of bringing an end to the era of the expectation that children should participate in conflict. If we want to stop the use of warfare, we need to start developing a worldview where adults do not think that children should be involved in war. There needs to be no wavering in our view that use of child soldiers is the worst aspect of modern war. Children are a weapons system that have no place on the battlefield or in the world's security apparatus. How is it possible that we are prepared to let children be used as weapons when we are horrified by the use of biological and nuclear weapons?

The Vancouver Principles are a critical part of meeting this challenge, and as we enter a new decade they are the culmination of the work of the international community that began in 1996 with Graça Machel's report on the impact of armed conflict on children. The VPs build on all the work that we have been doing at the Dallaire Initiative, and the work of the international community expressed in the Optional Protocol, the Paris Principles, Security Council Resolutions, and the initiatives to protect children and civilians. The VPs provide a higher level of strategic guidance that link all of these efforts to rally states to take action, and the immense amount of work that went into creating the Implementation Guidance is absolutely critical to this endeavour. It is one thing to set up the Principles, but another to turn them into practice guidance on how they can be carried out. We now need to shift our focus onto turning the guidelines into training guidelines and the development of new capabilities for our forces. With this in mind, the articles in this issue of Allons-y provide an important complement to the Principles and the Implementation Guidance, and will be of great use to policymakers, academics, and security sector actors working on this issue.

In our work over the past several years, we have seen how hungry the security sector have been for something tangible to base their training on and upgrade and professionalize their forces on to confront the challenge posed by child soldiers. They see problem in peacekeeping of using force against children, and want to reduce casualties on their side and become more effective. With the Vancouver Principles we have taken the work of the Dallaire Initiative global, and we need to ensure that we use this tool effectively. To do so, we need to develop a central secretariat to help states take the Principles and the guidance and operationalize them into capabilities for their forces, and work with the UN to make sure that states have the required knowledge to do so. We also need to start thinking regionally to have more effective, coordinated, and rapid implementation of the Principles. The Dallaire Initiative has started this with our regional office for East Africa in Rwanda. Further work is needed to develop regional capabilities in Latin America, in the Middle East, and in South and East Asia. From our headquarters in Canada we can then assist with capacity building and strategy. With this direction, over the next decade we need to have this operational capability within every troop and police contributing country, and have every contingent going to UN missions qualified in this capability. This global engagement will aid in the reform and modernization of peacekeeping in order to end the use of children as weapons of war.

In an era where human rights came to the fore in the 1970s through the 2000s, with our abilities to document, communicate about, and punish international crimes, it has not resonated enough with people that using children for adult work is wrong, and the use of child soldiers is the worst form of it. You cannot just look at a child as someone in need of food and education, but as a future adult. If we nurture children in war, then we normalize war for the future. It is illogical to want to prevent and end war without addressing the role that child soldiers can play in perpetuating conflict. In a practical sense, we have not been able to connect this in people's heads, only in the law. To eliminate a major instrument of war, we have to make the use of child soldiers unthinkable.

# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

*“The Vancouver Principles pushes the international community boldly forward on issues related to peacekeeping and protecting children used as weapons of war and ensure peacekeepers are prepared.”*

*LGen Roméo Dallaire*

The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers has rapidly been endorsed by states around the world, demonstrating the global desire for peacekeeping to address the use of children as soldiers. Co-created by the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative and the Canadian Government, the Vancouver Principles are a set of political commitments endorsed by states and are focused on “the need to prioritize and operationalize the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers in areas of operations of peacekeeping, noting the critical role of such prevention to the achievement of peace and security, and taking into account the differential impact of conflict on girls and boys.”<sup>1</sup> The seventeen Principles range from the prevention-oriented planning, to the inclusion of child protection focal points in command structures, to the commitment to share best practices among states.

For this volume of Allons-y, we asked contributors to focus on the implementation of the Vancouver Principles, with each article focussing on practical aspects of one of the principles and the current status of research in the area of focus. The contributors are researchers and practitioners in the field of Children, Peace and Security and offer their perspectives on current literature as well as field-based experiences in relation to the goals of the Vancouver Principles. The preface, commentary and six papers in this volume illustrate the complexities of contemporary armed conflict, the increasing and evolving impacts on children, and the importance of prevention.

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<sup>1</sup> Global Affairs Canada, “The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers,” Global Affairs Canada, February 21, 2017, 2, [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/human\\_rights-droits\\_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engageons.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engageons.aspx?lang=eng).

The volume opens with Commentary by Valentina Falco and Alec Wargo who provide an overview of the UN protection framework for children affected by armed conflict and the accompanying monitoring mechanisms. Shelly Whitman and Catherine Baillie Abidi lay the foundation of the concept of prevention and the increasing need to take preventative actions to break cycles of armed conflict. Victoria Bryce and Dustin Johnson build on this foundation and further explore how prevention can be operationalized within security sector structures to dually enhance the protection of children and improve operational effectiveness. In relation to improving protection, Dustin Johnson and Allyssa Walsh explore the role of gender in recruitment prevention, emphasizing the gendered dimensions of recruitment and use of children, and the need to better understand how the gender of peacekeepers affects child protection. Laura Cleave and William Watkins offer insights into early warning systems and the opportunities to embed child-specific indicators as a measure to prevent or disrupt recruitment processes. Marion Laurence explores the function of monitoring and reporting grave violations of children's rights in light of the move towards better and more coordinated use of data in UN peacekeeping. And finally, Jo Becker examines the alarming trend of the detention, rather than the release and rehabilitation, of children associated with armed groups.

Given the unprecedented and increasing number of children living in conflict-affected areas, it is vital that the international community prioritizes children's rights and rallies toward building peaceful communities. The creation of the Vancouver Principles in 2017 has added vital momentum to this agenda, and with this and future issues of *Allons-y* we aim to contribute to this momentum with research, experiences, and practical guidance that will be critical to improving the protection of children during armed conflict and ending their recruitment and use as soldiers.

*Catherine Baillie Abidi, PhD and Dustin Johnson  
The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative*



# VANCOUVER PRINCIPLE 6 AND THE UN MONITORING AND REPORTING MECHANISM:

## The MRM as a ‘whole-of-mission’ responsibility in UN peacekeeping operations

*The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.*

Valentina Falco

Alec Wargo

UN Department of Peace Operations

Office of the Special Representative  
of the Secretary-General on Children  
and Armed Conflict

### INTRODUCTION

The monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict<sup>1</sup> is at the core of the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) normative and institutional architecture as outlined in twelve United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions since 1999. The child protection mandate in United Nations peacekeeping operations is the key pillar underpinning this architecture.

While the role of civilian Child Protection Advisers (CPAs) in identifying and reporting on these violations through the Security Council-mandated Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict (MRM) is by now well established and largely

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<sup>1</sup> *The six grave violations are: (1) killing or maiming of children; (2) recruiting or using child soldiers; (3) attacks against schools or hospitals; (4) rape or other grave sexual violence against children; (5) abduction of children; and, (6) denial of humanitarian access for children. See UN General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General 59/695, Children and Armed Conflict, A/59/695-S/2005/72, 9 February 2005, para. 66.*

codified, the contribution of uniformed peacekeepers to this critical function has been generally overlooked. However, in recent years, a series of UN and non-UN legal and policy instruments have placed increasing emphasis on the role of the UN Military and Police in the MRM.

The present contribution examines the growing formalization, most recently through the Vancouver Principles<sup>2</sup>, of peacekeepers' obligation to collect and channel information on the six grave violations. It further looks at the operationalization of the peacekeeping' monitoring tasks at the tactical level through Force Commander's Directives, as well as at the practical implications of Vancouver Principle 6 as it reaffirms the responsibility of troop- and police-contributing countries in supporting their contingents in fulfilling those tasks. Finally, it concludes by putting forward a series of recommendations to further strengthen the integrated framework for monitoring and reporting in peacekeeping operations, including through training, regional partnerships and increased political and financial support to implement the child protection mandate in peacekeeping across uniformed and civilian components.

## THE UNITED NATIONS MONITORING AND REPORTING MECHANISM ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT (MRM): AN OVERVIEW

In the earliest days of its deliberations on CAAC, the UN Security Council called for the establishment of a “systematic and comprehensive monitoring and reporting mechanism” which would provide “timely, objective, accurate and reliable information” on the recruitment and use of children and on other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of the new mechanism was to ensure not only accountability for violations but also to engender positive action on the ground to take immediate remedial measures, including programmatic response for affected children.

An action plan for the establishment of a monitoring, reporting and compliance mechanism was subsequently presented by the Secretary-General to the Security Council,<sup>4</sup> and endorsed by the latter in its resolution 1612 (2005).<sup>5</sup>

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2 Global Affairs Canada, “The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers,” *Global Affairs Canada*, February 21, 2017, [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/human\\_rights-droits\\_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engageons.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engageons.aspx?lang=eng).

3 UN Security Council, Resolution 1539 (2004), S/RES/1539 (2004), 22 April 2004, para. 2.

4 UN General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, A/59/695-S/2005/72, 9 February 2005, Section III.

5 UN Security Council, Resolution 1612 (2005), S/RES/1612, 26 July 2005, para. 2.

Ever since, and through a series of UNSC resolutions that have further operationalized and refined the mechanism,<sup>6</sup> the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on children and armed conflict (MRM) has become an “essential tool” to monitor the six grave violations, and one that is “at the heart” of the CAAC mandate due to its capacity to foster change among parties to the conflict.<sup>7</sup>

The MRM supports UN-wide engagement on strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including through dialogue with parties to conflict to promote compliance with international norms and standards, and the development of action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children. The MRM also – crucially – informs annual and country reports on CAAC to the Security Council and its Working Group on CAAC, while also supporting programmatic response by relevant UN entities and national and international efforts to foster accountability.<sup>8</sup>

## MONITORING AND REPORTING ON GRAVE VIOLATIONS IN UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS: A “WHOLE-OF-MISSION” RESPONSIBILITY

Since its Resolution 1539 (2004), the Security Council has consistently reaffirmed that, at country level, the UN peacekeeping missions – in coordination with UN country teams – bear the “primary responsibility” to follow up on all Security Council resolutions concerning children and armed conflict.<sup>9</sup> This includes resolutions establishing and refining the MRM.

In this framework, the 2017 Policy on Child Protection in United Nations Peace Operations<sup>10</sup> codified the “crucial role” played by civilian CPAs in implementing the child protection mandate of UN peace operations in mission settings, including by “[m]onitoring grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict” in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and by “[f]ulfilling reporting obligations” under the MRM. The “crucial role of child protection advisers in mainstreaming child protection

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6 For a comprehensive overview of the genesis and progressive development of the UN Security Council-mandated Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict see Ann-Charlotte Nilsson, *Children and Youth in Armed Conflict*, vol. 2, *The Raoul Wallenberg Institute Human Rights Library*, volume 43 (Leiden ; Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2013), 886–906.

7 *Statement by the Special-Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba to the Third Committee of the General Assembly*, 8 October 2019, available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2019/10/statement-by-ms-virginia-gamba-to-the-third-committee-of-the-general-assembly/>.

8 UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, “2017.11 Child Protection in UN Peace Operations (Policy), PK/G/2017.11” (New York: United Nations, June 1, 2017), para. 16, <http://dag.un.org/handle/11176/400655>. (on file with the Authors)

9 See Nilsson, *Children and Youth in Armed Conflict*, 2:886–906.

10 UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, “DPKO-DFS-DPA Policy on Child Protection,” para. 16.

and leading *monitoring*, prevention and *reporting* efforts in missions [emphasis added]” was further recognized by the Security Council in its Resolution 2427 (2018).<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the Policy also emphasizes the “whole-of-mission” nature of the child protection mandate in peacekeeping, which cuts across civilian and uniformed components under the “overall responsibility”<sup>12</sup> of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG).<sup>13</sup> This includes, *inter alia*, the SRSG’s responsibility to “promote a mission-wide approach”<sup>14</sup> to monitoring and reporting on grave violations, which also applies to the mission’s military and police components.

In the challenging operational and security settings where peacekeeping operations are deployed, UN military and police personnel are often the mission’s only “eyes and ears”<sup>15</sup> in remote and hard-to-reach areas, or in volatile hotspots that may not be accessible to civilian components (including the – chronically under-resourced and understaffed – missions’ Child Protection teams<sup>16</sup>) due to security concerns. As key frontline actors, the UN Military and Police are uniquely placed to contribute to the monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children, providing early alerts on suspected violations to the mission’s Child Protection staff or other trained MRM monitors.

The Policy – which is mandatory for all *uniformed* and civilian personnel in UN peace operations<sup>17</sup> – formally endorses this pivotal role, e.g. by emphasizing the need for UN military personnel to be able to report on child protection concerns in the mission area<sup>18</sup>

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11 UN Security Council, Resolution 2427 (2018), S/RES/2427 (2018), para. 33.

12 UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, “DPKO-DFS-DPA Policy on Child Protection,” para. 15.

13 As the highest UN authority in-country in peacekeeping contexts. In *Special Political Missions and non-mission settings, such a responsibility rests with the Head of Mission and the Resident Coordinator respectively*.

14 UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, “DPKO-DFS-DPA Policy on Child Protection,” para. 15.

15 Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), 34, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2019/igvp-20190614.pdf>.

16 *Child protection staff in the five peacekeeping operations with child protection-specific mandates currently makes up less than 1 per cent of substantive civilian peacekeeping staff (DPO figures on file with the Authors)*.

17 UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, “DPKO-DFS-DPA Policy on Child Protection,” sec. 1 There are currently five peacekeeping operations with a child protection mandate, i.e. the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), the African Union - United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

18 UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, para. 20.2.

and for UN police (UNPOL) components to monitor child protection concerns through community-oriented policing.<sup>19</sup>

In particular, the Policy sets out the key principles governing the performance of MRM functions by the missions' military component, under the direct responsibility of the respective Force Commanders.<sup>20</sup> These include the Force Commanders' obligation to 'ensure that all military personnel under their command receive in-mission induction briefings and ongoing training on child protection enabling them to recognize' and report on grave violations against children<sup>21</sup>, as well as their duty to appoint child protection focal points (CPFP) "tasked with, among other responsibilities, channelling alerts of violations against children to CPAs and child protection staff based on agreed information sharing protocols."<sup>22</sup>

These principles were operationalized at the mission level through the Force Commander's Directives on Child Protection, and subsequently reaffirmed at the normative level in Vancouver Principle 6.

#### THE FORCE COMMANDER'S DIRECTIVES ON CHILD PROTECTION: OPERATIONALIZING PEACEKEEPERS' RESPONSIBILITY TO MONITOR AND REPORT

In order for UN peacekeepers to be able to fulfil their monitoring and reporting duties under the MRM, as laid down in the UN Policy on Child Protection in UN Peace Operations, it is essential that such duties be adequately translated at the tactical and operational level.

To that aim, the first Force Commander's Directive on the Protection of Children was issued in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO).<sup>23</sup> Similar instruments<sup>24</sup> were subsequently rolled out in the United

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19 UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, para. 21.

20 UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, para. 20.1.

21 UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, para. 20.2.

22 UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, para. 20.3.

23 *Force Commander's Directive – Protection of Children by MONUSCO Force, 551/MONUSCO/ FHQ/G5/So2POC&GENDER, 12 July 2017 (on file with the Authors). The Directive was updated in November 2019 (561/MONUSCO/FC, 29 November 2019).*

24 *While the content of the three existing Force Commander's Directives overlaps to a significant extent, each Directive is tailored to the specific mission and context in which it is due to be implemented. A template is provided in the DPO-DPPA Manual for Child Protection Staff in UN Peace Operations (2019), Annex 5a (Sample Force Commander's child protection directive), at 108-112.*



Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)<sup>25</sup> and in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).<sup>26</sup>

The legal basis for the Directives is found in para. 20.1 of the Policy, which mandates Force Commanders in the military components of the UN peace operations to “issue mission specific directives and standard operating procedures on military actions in relation to children in the course of military operations.” Such directives should specifically cover “*the provision of alerts on violations and abuses against children* [emphasis added].”<sup>27</sup>

In that they stem directly from the highest-ranking military authority within the mission, articulating in detail the child protection tasks and responsibilities of UN military peacekeepers, the Directives epitomize the cross-cutting nature of the child protection mandate in UN peacekeeping operations as “everybody’s responsibility.”<sup>28</sup>

The Directives place special emphasis on reporting and information sharing, based on the tenet that “the Force regularly witnesses or receives information on violations”, being often a “first responder to either record or intervene in case of violations.”<sup>29</sup> In particular, the Directives include specific provisions on “alerting/reporting”<sup>30</sup> as well as an annexed reporting flow chart governing the reporting of “[a]ll actual or suspected violations against children.”<sup>31</sup>

The Directives also establish the individual responsibility of every member of the Force “for monitoring and reporting . . . violations against children, through their respective chain of command”<sup>32</sup> In line with this responsibility, each force member must alert his/her Military CFPF “immediately”<sup>33</sup> after learning of or responding to a violation against a child. MONUSCO Force Commander’s Directive expressly extends this responsibility to the Force’s Military Observers (who “must report” any incidents of grave violations they may have witnessed, as well as credible reports or second-hand information),<sup>34</sup> Operations (Force G-3)

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25 *MINUSCA Force Commander Child Protection Directive, 18 December 2018 (on file with the Authors).*

26 *Directive on the Protection of Children by UNMISS Military Forces, FC Directive CP/01/2019, 11 February 2019 (on file with the Authors).*

27 *UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, “DPKO-DFS-DPA Policy on Child Protection,” para. 20.1.*

28 *See e.g. MINUSCA Force Commander’s Directive, para. 10.*

29 *MINUSCA Force Commander’s Directive, para. 10.*

30 *MINUSCA Force Commander’s Directive, para. 10 (c);*

31 *UNMISS Force Commander’s Directive, para. 18.*

32 *UNMISS Force Commander’s Directive, para. 17.*

33 *2019 MONUSCO Force Commander’s Directive, paras. 4 and 6(c).*

34 *2019 MONUSCO Force Commander’s Directive, para. 8(k).*

(which must ensure that any grave violations against children occurring in the execution of military operations are “reported immediately”<sup>35</sup>) and Intelligence (G-2) (who should include information on perpetrators of any of the grave violations in the daily intelligence and Unmanned Aircraft Systems reports, and ensure that the mission’s Child Protection Section receive the relevant reports in a timely manner).<sup>36</sup>

The role of the Military CPFs – as established by the Policy<sup>37</sup> – at Headquarters, sector and unit level is critical to ensure that violations are identified, and the relevant information promptly shared<sup>38</sup> with the missions’ CPAs and their teams, who remain in charge of the collection, analysis and verification of MRM information at mission level.

Training and regular evaluation are two critical components of the Directives’ implementation, including provisions on monitoring and reporting. The UNMISS Force Commander’s Directive specifically provides for the inclusion of the six grave violations and the reporting structure outlined in the Directive in the child protection training delivered by unit and sector CPFs to their units on a continuing basis.<sup>39</sup> The Directive also mandates the mission’s Military Gender and Protection Advisor, along with unit and sector Child Protection Focal Points, to evaluate its effectiveness quarterly, including “the adequacy of reporting”<sup>40</sup>.

## VANCOUVER PRINCIPLE 6: REAFFIRMING THE TCCS/PCC’S RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE MRM

Vancouver Principle 6 (hereinafter VP6) builds on the comprehensive normative framework set in the global and mission-specific tools outlined above, focusing on practical ways in which troop (TCCs) and police-contributing countries (PCCs) can further strengthen monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in the context of peacekeeping operations.

Through VP6, endorsing Member States pledge:

*[t]o take steps to ensure our peacekeepers report incidents of Grave Violations against children in situations of armed conflict, including the recruitment and use of children, to United Nations Child Protection Advisers or through the appropriate*

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35 2019 MONUSCO Force Commander’s Directive, para. 8(c)

36 2019 MONUSCO Force Commander’s Directive, para. 8(s).

37 UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, “DPKO-DFS-DPA Policy on Child Protection,” para. 20.2.

38 See e.g. UNMISS Force Commander’s Directive, para. 20.

39 See e.g. UNMISS Force Commander’s Directive, para. 24.

40 See e.g. UNMISS Force Commander’s Directive, para. 20.

*channels established in peacekeeping operations, and to include such monitoring and accountability measures within our national mission mandate and peacekeeping training,<sup>41</sup>*

The principle aptly reaffirms and crystallizes some of the main tenets underpinning both the 2017 UN Child Protection Policy and the Force Commander's Directives, including the peacekeepers' duty to report on incidents of grave violations; the critical synergy with<sup>42</sup>, and role played by, the mission CPAs as the ultimate mission-wide focal points for MRM information; and the need for uniformed peacekeeping personnel to familiarize themselves with the reporting channels and structures at mission level (and thus with the relevant provisions of, and annexes to, the Force Commander's Directives).

However, the significance of the principle also lies in how it construes the monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children in UN field missions as a joint undertaking among the UN and TCCs/PCCs, leveraging the latter's national mandates and reaffirming their primary responsibility to provide their own troops and formed police units with adequate training prior to deploying them to peacekeeping settings.

By providing Member States with an opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to this critical child protection function in peacekeeping, the Vancouver Principles are fully in line with the spirit and letter of the recent "Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations"<sup>43</sup> in the framework of the UN Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative,<sup>44</sup> paving the way for possible synergies between the two sets of principles.

The *Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles*<sup>45</sup> further articulates the concrete steps Member States can take to ensure that their uniformed personnel conduct "effective, systematic, and timely monitoring and reporting."<sup>46</sup> As already emphasized in UN Security

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41 *Global Affairs Canada*, "The Vancouver Principles."

42 Cf. *UN Security Council*, Resolution 2185 (2014), S/RES/2185 (2014), 20 November 2014, preambular para. 28.

43 *Department of Peace Operations*, "Action for Peacekeeping: Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations" (New York: United Nations, August 16, 2018), <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a4p-declaration-en.pdf>.

44 *Through the A4P initiative, launched in August 2018, the UN Secretary-General called on Member States, the Security Council, host countries, troop- and police- contributing countries, regional partners and financial contributors to renew their collective engagement with UN peacekeeping and mutually commit to reach for excellence. See <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p>.*

45 *Government of Canada*, *Implementation Guidance*.

46 *Government of Canada*, 35.

Council Resolution 2143(2014)<sup>47</sup>, the provision of “formal institutional guidance”<sup>48</sup> – through national policies, doctrine, and directives – is critical to build understanding of the six grave violations and of each component’s specific roles and responsibilities within the MRM among national peacekeepers.<sup>49</sup> Existing Force Commander’s Directives developed in MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNMISS provide useful templates to be drawn upon by TCCs.

Paramount among those steps is also the integration of the MRM into national pre-deployment training curricula for both military and police personnel. By reaffirming the TCCs/PCCs’ responsibility, VP 6 echoes a number of UN Security Council resolutions which have consistently called for Member States to “include child protection in military training”<sup>50</sup> including monitoring and reporting. For instance UN Security Council Resolution 2143 (2014) recommended that UN peacekeeping TCCs/PCCs “undertake targeted and operational trainings for the preparation of UN mission personnel including troop and police contingents ... so as to give all mission personnel the ability to effectively *recognize, report* and respond to violations and abuses committed against children [...]”. [emphasis added]<sup>51</sup> In the same vein, UN Security Council Resolution 2185 (2014) on policing in peacekeeping reiterated “the importance of providing UN Police Components with specialized pre-deployment and in-mission training” on, *inter alia*, monitoring and reporting on violations and abuses committed against children.<sup>52</sup>

In this framework, it is essential that national pre-deployment training on child protection – including the relevant modules on the MRM and related responsibilities – is fully consistent with the existing UN specialized training materials on child protection,<sup>53</sup> in order to ensure harmonization of practices and standards, and the interoperability of national uniformed contingents in the implementation of the child protection mandate in peacekeeping operations.<sup>54</sup>

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47 UN Security Council, Resolution 2143 (2014), S/RES/2143 (2014), 7 March 2014, para. 20 (recommending that ‘Member States include child protection in ... standard operating procedures, as well as in military guidance as appropriate’).

48 Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance, 35.

49 Government of Canada, 39–41.

50 UNSC Res. 2143 (2014), para. 20. See also Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance, 28–32.

51 UNSC Res. 2143 (2014), para. 20.

52 UNSC Res. 2185(2014), preambular para. 28.

53 See *Specialized Training Materials on Child Protection for Peacekeepers (2015)*, available at: <http://research.un.org/c.php?g=636989&p=4462873>; *Specialized Training Materials on Child Protection for UN Police (2018)*, available at: <http://research.un.org/en/peacekeeping-community/training/STMUNMU/childprotectionunpol>.

54 Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance, 35.

## CONCLUSIONS

In coordination with civilian CPAs, uniformed components in peacekeeping operations make a vital – and often understated – contribution to monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict. They have incomparably more “eyes and ears” on the ground than the lean - and often severely understaffed – civilian Child Protection Sections in UN field missions, and they are able to access remote and hard-to-reach areas that may be precluded to UN child protection officers due to security constraints.

Although there have been several different models exercised over the years, current best practices point to four key elements of successful monitoring and reporting on grave violations by peacekeepers:

1. Security Council prioritization of child protection in explicit mission mandates;
2. Provision of pre-deployment training and in-mission context-specific briefs on the role of peacekeepers in monitoring and reporting, which makes the UN Military and Police personnel better prepared and more receptive to engaging in effective monitoring and reporting;
3. The presence of civilian child protection specialists who can provide necessary real-time expertise and link peacekeeper’s alerts on violations to verification and response mechanisms within and outside the mission.
4. The issuance of clear child protection directives by the mission’s uniformed leadership, and the establishment of a system of military and police CPFs, to ensure that the CAAC agenda and related monitoring and reporting tasks are known and prioritized at both at the Headquarter and unit levels.

When adequately trained and mandated to carry out MRM-related tasks in accordance with the relevant UN guidance, UN military contingents and formed police units play a key role in gathering data on grave violations against children and sharing the relevant alerts with both their leadership and the mission CPA. When reported through the appropriate civilian and military channels, the information they collect ultimately feeds into the MRM, and thus informs annual and country specific reports on children and armed conflict to the Security Council, but also early warning, analysis and decision-making at mission level, and national and international accountability processes that may be critical to ending and preventing grave violations against children.<sup>55</sup>

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55 *Government of Canada, 35.*



Vancouver Principle 6 serves as an important reminder of the TCCs/PCCs' joint responsibility to build their contingents' capacity to identify and report on these violations when they are deployed as peacekeepers.

To the extent that the relevant national guidelines and training modules draw upon existing UN standards, directives and training materials (in line with the Vancouver Principles Implementation Guidance),<sup>56</sup> VP 6 also lays the foundation for a global integrated training and guidance framework on monitoring and reporting on the six grave violations, and one in which the UN and national level continuously cross-fertilize. In this framework, it is essential that good practices and lessons learned in pre-deployment and in-mission training on – and in the implementation of – monitoring and reporting functions by UN peacekeepers are systematically collected, analysed and socialized – informing further policies, guidance and tools (e.g. Police Commissioner's Directives on Child Protection) as appropriate. The Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training of the UN Department of Peace Operations is the entity mandated – and uniquely placed – to do so (in coordination with relevant UN and regional partners), and should be provided with adequate resources to support the development, roll out, dissemination, translation, operationalization and evaluation of new guidelines and training materials on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in peacekeeping operations.

In order to further strengthen and expand this normative architecture, increasingly closer synergies with regional organizations (such as the African Union, the European Union and NATO) and peace support initiatives (e.g. the G5-Sahel) should also be developed, building on the UN Policy on Child Protection<sup>57</sup> as well as on UN Security Council Resolution 2427 (2018)<sup>58</sup>. Such synergies are key<sup>59</sup> in order to broaden and standardize child protection pre-deployment training opportunities and ensure that monitoring and reporting on grave violations is effectively mainstreamed into regional training initiatives.

Finally, mandates for child protection should be made explicit in mission and budget planning processes. Missions without adequate civilian child protection capacity or single-hatted CFPFs to support military and police components have historically under-performed in both monitoring and response to grave child rights violations.

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56 *Government of Canada*, 36.

57 *(The Policy also serves as a resource for regional peacekeeping forces when operating under a United Nations Security Council mandate, including but not limited to the African Union [AU], the European Union [EU], and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], with a view to encouraging consistency in the application of international norms and standards on child protection in peace support operations mandated by the Security Council.)*. UN DPKO - DPA - DFS, "DPKO-DFS-DPA Policy on Child Protection," para. 6.

58 See UNSC Res. 2427(2018), para. 11.

59 *In line with UNSC Res. 2427(2018), para. 11.*

The negotiations within the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly and around the Secretary-General's Report to the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, the implementation of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative and the meetings of the Group of Friends of CAAC (both in New York and at the field level) all provide important political space for Member States to “champion” and adequately resource the child protection mandate in peacekeeping (and the related monitoring and reporting functions), and to prioritize child protection in mission planning processes as well as mandate renewals.

*Alec Wargo is a Political Affairs Officer, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict. Valentina Falco is a Child Protection Officer-Team Leader, UN Department of Peace Operations Division of Policy Evaluation and Training. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.*

# PREVENTING RECRUITMENT TO IMPROVE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Shelly Whitman and Catherine Baillie Abidi

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers  
Initiative

## ABSTRACT

In order to progressively end the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, the world must focus on effective *prevention*. The impacts of violence on children affected by armed conflict, and particularly those recruited and used as soldiers, are substantial. Thus, in order to break endemic cycles of violence and achieve peace and security globally, we need to prioritize the prevention of recruitment and the protection of children. This article features examples of effective prevention-oriented strategies, including tangible and practical methods that can be implemented towards the ultimate goal of preventing the recruitment and use of children as soldiers.

Keywords: prevention, child soldiers, violence, children and armed conflict, Vancouver Principles

## INTRODUCTION

Over 420 million children live in areas affected by armed conflict, a fifty percent increase since the 1990s, and many of these children are urgently in need of protection.<sup>1</sup> The physical, psychological and social impacts of conflict on children are substantial, particularly for those recruited and used as soldiers, and these impacts are heightened by the changing nature of war.<sup>2</sup> If in the past children were involved in conflict despite their age, they are now being recruited because of their age as a strategic and tactical innovation in contemporary armed conflict.<sup>3</sup> Today, according to the UN Secretary General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict (2019)<sup>4</sup>, there are seven national armies and 56 armed groups operating in 14 countries that recruit and use children as soldiers - both boys and girls - and the recruitment and use of children is sustaining violence over generations.<sup>5</sup> Although many have recognised that children have no place in armed groups, the use of child soldiers persists, especially among non-state armed groups. Thus, in order to break endemic cycles of violence and achieve peace and security globally, the prevention of recruitment and the protection of children needs to be prioritized.

Until recently, efforts to address the recruitment and use of children as soldiers has been reactive — focusing on reintegration and rehabilitation. While this is critical work, responding to both the fatal and non-fatal consequences of violence is a costly exercise, with impacts ranging from health crises, to shattered economies, to the erosion of communities.<sup>6,7</sup> Breaking the cycle of armed conflict requires more concerted efforts to address the issue preventatively: while it is commonly understood that prevention is better than a cure, preventing violence requires sustained efforts, long-term investment and vision, and a recognition that measuring

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- 1 *Save The Children International. (2019). The war on children: Protecting children in the 21st century. London, UK: Save the Children International.*
  - 2 *United Nations Secretary General. (2019). Report on children and armed conflict. NY: United Nations General Assembly.*
  - 3 *Conradi, Carl and Whitman, Shelly. "Child Soldiers and Security Sector Reform: A Sierra Leonean Case Study." 2014, June 25. Security Sector Reform Resource Centre. <http://www.ssrresourcecentre.org/2014/06/25/child-soldiers-and-security-sector-reform-a-sierra-leoneon-case-study/>; Tynes, R. (2018). Tools of War, Tools of State. NY: Suny Press.*
  - 4 *United Nations Secretary General. (2019). Report on children and armed conflict. NY: United Nations General Assembly.*
  - 5 *Machel, G. (1996). The impact of armed conflict on children. NY: United Nations General Assembly; Shelly Whitman, 'The Responsibility to Protect and Child Soldiers', in Andy Knight and Fraser Egerton (eds.), The Routledge Handbook on the Responsibility to Protect (London: Routledge, 2012).*
  - 6 *World Health Organization. (2014). Global status report on violence prevention 2014. Geneva: World Health Organization.*
  - 7 *World Health Organization. (2016). Global plan of action to prevent violence. Geneva: World Health Organization.*

prevention is challenging.<sup>8</sup> In the long run, prevention is an important investment as it helps to create the conditions for lasting peace.

In order to progressively end the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, the world must focus on effective *prevention*. A transformational shift is needed to move from good intentions to preventative action.<sup>9</sup> While prevention is receiving growing attention globally in relation to peace and conflict, such as the emphasis on prevention within the Responsibility to Protect,<sup>10</sup> the recognition of the links between the recruitment and use of children as soldiers and sustained cycles of violence is under-theorized, under-resourced and under-actioned.<sup>11</sup> The goal of this article is to highlight the significance of children within the peace and security agenda and to demonstrate how a security sector approach to preventing the use of children as soldiers is essential to disrupt cycles of violence. This article features examples of effective strategies focused on the ultimate goal of preventing the use of children as weapons of war, such as the practical methods highlighted in the Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

## PRIORITIZING PREVENTION

The visible and invisible impacts of violence against children are extensive, and yet, the World Health Organization argues that violence is a “preventable problem.”<sup>12</sup> Preventing violence in the context of children and armed conflict, and particularly in relation to children recruited and used as soldiers, requires explicit attention during times of peace and conflict.<sup>13</sup> Understanding the risk factors and conditions that lead to armed conflict and the recruitment of children as soldiers, combined with measures to mitigate these risks, can reduce the likelihood of armed conflict and subsequently, violations against children. Despite alarming

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8 World Health Organization. (2014). *Global status report on violence prevention 2014*. Geneva: World Health Organization; Baillie Abidi, C. (2018). *Pedagogies for building cultures of peace: Challenging constructions of an enemy*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill/Sense Publishing.

9 World Health Organization. (2014). *Global status report on violence prevention 2014*. Geneva: World Health Organization; ICISS, The Responsibility to Protect, December 2001, <http://responsibility-toprotect.org/ICISS%20Report.pdf>, accessed 10 January 2017; United Nations Report of the Secretary-General: Prevention of armed conflict. A/55/985-S/2001/574 (7 June 2001).

10 ICISS, The Responsibility to Protect, December 2001, <http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/ICISS%20Report.pdf>, accessed 10 January 2017.

11 Dustin Johnson, Shelly Whitman, and Hannah Sparwasser Soroka, “Prevent to Protect: Early Warning, Child Soldiers, and the Case of Syria,” *Global Responsibility to Protect* 10, no. 1–2 (March 22, 2018): 239–59, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1875984X-01001012>.

12 World Health Organization. (2014). *Global status report on violence prevention 2014*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

13 International Committee of the Red Cross. 2020. *Influencing behavior to prevent human suffering*. Geneva: ICRC; World Health Organization. (2014). *Global status report on violence prevention 2014*. Geneva: World Health Organization.



trends in relation to the rise of terrorism, the growing impacts of climate change, and the significant decline in global peacefulness over the past decade, the vast majority of global resources are used to intervene and respond *after* the onset of armed conflict.<sup>14</sup>

The United Nations Security Council argues that “a comprehensive conflict prevention strategy should include, inter alia, early warning, preventive deployment, mediation, peacekeeping, non-proliferation, accountability measures as well as post-conflict peacebuilding, and recognizes that these components are interdependent, complementary, and non-sequential”.<sup>15</sup> The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2427 (2018) further argues for a conflict prevention strategy that “addresses the root causes of armed conflict in a comprehensive manner in order to enhance the protection of children on a long-term basis”.<sup>16</sup> While many community-based, state-driven, and internationally-supported programs have preventative effects, explicit and coordinated programming on conflict prevention, and particularly recruitment prevention, is lacking.<sup>17</sup>

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005) identified the recruitment and use of children as soldiers as one of six grave violations against children in armed conflict.<sup>18</sup> The recruitment of children as soldiers has long-term impacts on communities due to multiple intersecting factors such as the disruption of schooling, the consequences of trauma on development, and the normalization of violence.<sup>19</sup> The significance of these impacts, and the consequences of recruitment over time, require collaborative and prevention-oriented solutions. Of the six grave violations, the recruitment and use of children can act as a *linchpin* in conflict prevention efforts: this violation substantially increases a child’s risk to be exposed to other grave violations, such as killing and maiming and sexual violence, and at the same time, the prevention of recruitment can significantly reduce overall violations against children that contribute to sustainable peace and development.<sup>20</sup>

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14 Institute for Economics & Peace. (2019). *Global Peace Index 2019*. Sydney: IEP.

15 United Nations Security Council Statement by the President of the Security Council. S/PRST/2018/1 (18 January 2018).

16 United Nations Security Council Resolution 2427. S/RES/2427 (9 July 2018).

17 United Nations Security Council Statement by the President of the Security Council. S/PRST/2018/1 (18 January 2018); Shelly Whitman, ‘The Responsibility to Protect and Child Soldiers’, in Andy Knight and Fraser Egerton (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook on the Responsibility to Protect* (London: Routledge, 2012); ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect, December 2001*, <http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/ICISS%20Report.pdf>, accessed 10 January 2017.

18 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1612. S/RES/1612 (26 July 2005).

19 Save The Children International. (2018). *The war on children*. London, UK: Save the Children International.

20 *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a global commitment to end violence against children and acknowledges that eradicating violence is a key component of sustainable development*. See: [https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/UNICEF\\_VAC\\_ToC\\_2\\_pager\\_](https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/UNICEF_VAC_ToC_2_pager_)

In order to employ effective prevention strategies, we must understand the wider spectrum of the definition of a child soldier – from the support functions to the frontline roles, to the gendered dynamics, and the contextual realities on the ground. This broader definition includes girls used as human bombs or for sexual purposes, the various support functions and grey areas of association, children born within an armed group, the detention of children, and the indoctrination processes that fuel and set the stage for the involvement of children in armed conflict.<sup>21</sup> Understanding the nuance around defining *who* is a child soldier is essential to preventing this grave violation against children. Furthermore, understanding the *vulnerability* of children to being used by armed groups, criminal networks, gangs, in trafficking and child labour is critical to effectively preventing the recruitment of children.<sup>22</sup> Equally important is to understand the *rationale and motivations* that drive armed groups, forces and gangs to use children. How do we mitigate these motivations so as to counter violations against children effectively? This requires an understanding of the arguments and research from all possible angles and perspectives: from the child soldier, to the recruiter, to the community. It also requires an understanding of prevention practices during peace time and during conflict.<sup>23</sup>

What does this mean for early warning and conflict prevention more broadly? Children can be a rallying point for peace: by highlighting violations against children, improving the protection of children through concerted and deliberate actions, and increasing the political will to see children as critical to achieving peace and security, we can set the stage for sustainable peace.

## PATHWAYS TO PREVENTION

The nature of conflict, including the dynamics of how civilians are perceived and treated, has changed dramatically over the past 25 years. Civilians have become increasingly targeted in armed conflict, and a key part of this purposeful targeting has been the clear violation of children's rights, and employment of war tactics that include using children to commit violence as a means to de-stabilize communities.<sup>24</sup> In response to the increased targeting of civilians, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine was created in 2005. At the time, this reflected an evolution in thinking with respect to the protection of human rights and collective

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WEB\_051217.pdf. Accessed 5 March 2020.

- 21 Conradi, Carl, Johnson, Dustin, Mc Neil, Jennifer, Reeves, Darin, Whitman, Shelly and Zayed, Tanya. *Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*, (3rd ed.). Halifax, NS: The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, 2017.
- 22 Conradi, Carl. "Child Trafficking, Child Soldiering: exploring the relationship between two 'worst forms' of child labour." *Third World Quarterly* 34:7 (2013): 1209-1226.
- 23 Op cit, *Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*, (3rd ed.).
- 24 Whitman, Shelly, "The Responsibility to Protect and Child Soldiers," in *The Routledge Handbook on the Responsibility to Protect*. Ed. W. Andy Knight and Frazer Egerton: Routledge, London: 2012, p. 152.

action.<sup>25</sup> The R2P doctrine entails a clear responsibility to prevent violations against civilians, including children. Supporters of R2P would argue that clarifying the means to operationalize prevention is critical to the entire concept.<sup>26</sup> As such, understanding how the prevention of the recruitment and use of children as soldiers influences overall conflict prevention is an essential inclusion.

In 2016, parties to the World Humanitarian Summit called for ending grave violations against children as part of “upholding the norms that safeguard humanity.”<sup>27</sup> Yet, children living in conflict zones are among the least likely to be guaranteed these rights.<sup>28</sup> The drivers of recruitment of children must be addressed systemically in order to prevent it from happening and to ensure that children who have been demobilised do not re-enter armed forces or armed groups. This prevention work must happen at both the macro level (reducing insecurity, conflict resolution, addressing wider issues of inequality, strengthening national protection systems, and so on) and the micro level (strengthening community-based child protection, access to education, intergenerational dialogue, social norm change, parenting skills, psychosocial support, livelihoods, and so forth).

The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (UNSRSG VAC) argues that ending violence against children is both an ethical and economic imperative. This violence has far-reaching costs on individuals and their families by diverting billions of dollars of social spending from economic development, eroding human and social capital, and severely limiting children from reaching their full potential, which results in huge losses to society as a whole.<sup>29</sup> Included among the six steps highlighted to end violence against children by the UNSRSG VAC is the need to increase efforts to make violence against children socially unacceptable. Deep-rooted attitudes and behaviours must change with respect to violence against children. This applies to norms around discipline and the use of violence in communities, schools, and families, as well as a need to build upon positive social norms to overcome entrenched beliefs that condone violence against children.<sup>30</sup>

Imperative in this approach to normative change is understanding how children are exposed

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25 Cohen, Roberta, “From Sovereign Responsibility to R2P,” in *The Routledge Handbook on the Responsibility to Protect*. Ed. W. Andy Knight and Frazer Egerton: Routledge, London: 2012. P.8.

26 Woocher, Lawrence, “The Responsibility to Prevent,” *The Routledge Handbook on the Responsibility to Protect*. Ed. W. Andy Knight and Frazer Egerton: Routledge, London: 2012. P. 27.

27 UN Secretary General (2016). *Annex to the Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit*. Istanbul: United Nations.

28 *World Vision International*, No Choice: It takes a world to end the recruitment of children 2019.

29 UN SRSG on Violence Against Children, “Six steps to take to end violence against children,” [https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/six\\_steps\\_to\\_end\\_vac\\_viewpoint](https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/six_steps_to_end_vac_viewpoint). Accessed 5 March 2020.

30 *Ibid.*

to violence, beliefs related to their use in armed conflict, and how these are part of a larger spectrum of overall attitudes and beliefs in a given society. A security sector actor from Sierra Leone who participated in a Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative (Dallaire Initiative) training course on preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers, stated: “Prior to taking your course I did not see the difference between a child working in a market prior to the war and a child being a soldier for an armed group during the war. To me it was just another form of labour for the child. But after taking your course I realised that by engaging the children in violence, we were ruining the future potential of the children and the future of our nation.”<sup>31</sup> To challenge and change attitudes and beliefs about children and armed conflict, the Dallaire Initiative promotes a Children’s Rights Upfront Approach that seeks to elevate children’s well-being higher up on the international peace and security agenda, both in terms of making it a priority for all actors, and by ensuring children and youth participate in peace processes that impact their future. The recent release of the Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict by the UN SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict, is an important example of prioritizing the protection of children in peace agreements.<sup>32</sup>

Preventing violence against children in the context of armed conflict requires a dual lens that is focused on prioritizing the protection of children’s rights, and understanding the significant operational impacts of the use of children as soldiers. However, these perspectives are largely missing from the international peace and security agenda. The Dallaire Initiative was created in response to this gap, with the intention of bridging sectors to enhance prevention efforts. The Dallaire Initiative focuses on the development and promotion of ways to improve and implement prevention-oriented approaches, by developing standards and clear guidelines to prioritize the safety of children.<sup>33</sup> This approach includes four main activities that mutually support each other in order to enhance child protection and prevent recruitment:

1. Developing a global network of champions
2. Applying research to practice
3. Influencing policy and doctrine
4. Training and building capacity.<sup>34</sup>

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31 *Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, Participant Interviews, Freetown Sierra Leone, January 2014.*

32 *UN SRSG CAAC, “Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict”, file:///Users/shellywhitman/Downloads/FINAL-Practical-guidance-for-mediators-to-protect-children-in-situations-of-armed-conflict-003.pdf*

33 *Whitman, Shelly and Zayed, Tanya. Core Competencies for Security Sector Training on the Prevention of the Use of Child Soldiers. Halifax, NS: The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, 2016.*

34 *The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative. Strategic Plan 2019-2021. Halifax, NS: The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, 2019.*

## PREVENTION IN ACTION: THE VANCOUVER PRINCIPLES

The *Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers*<sup>35</sup> is an example of a collaborative effort to prioritize prevention. The Vancouver Principles, co-created by the Dallaire Initiative and the Canadian Government, are a set of political commitments, now endorsed by over 95 countries, that emphasize proactive and preventative strategies on how to prevent the recruitment and use of children as soldiers. The accompanying *Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles*<sup>36</sup> calls for a change in peacekeeping in the methods of operating, of gathering and interpreting intelligence, as well as employing new tactics and strategies – such as scenarios that are practiced and reviewed, lessons learned collected and adapted, and research that is applied to practice. The creation of military doctrine focused on the prevention of the recruitment and use of children, the integration of new training approaches into the curriculum of military staff colleges, and efforts to build champions of change are part of the Vancouver Principles strategy to elevate the protection of children globally and to promote peace.

In the context of the Vancouver Principles, prevention means moving beyond what has been traditionally viewed as *child protection* training. This does not mean that efforts to bring awareness to child protection have not been, and will not continue to be, important – they set the stage for the initial conversation – but awareness-raising on rights and responsibilities is only the beginning. Preventing violence requires concerted effort to move toward transformational action, where change occurs beyond individuals to permeate institutions, structures and norms.<sup>37</sup>

According to the Implementation Guidance of the Vancouver Principles,

*Preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers is a defining aspect of the Vancouver Principles. Effective preparation of peacekeeping personnel and peacekeeping operations – through all of the elements articulated in the Vancouver Principles – provides for comprehensive prevention. If Member States effectively educate, train, direct, support, and equip their personnel to address the challenges posed by child soldiers, then the strategic and tactical advantage offered by the use of child soldiers can be reduced, and the cycle of child recruitment can be broken.*<sup>38</sup>

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35 Government of Canada. (2019). *Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

36 Government of Canada. (2017). *Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

37 Baillie Abidi, C. (2018). *Pedagogies for building cultures of peace: Challenging constructions of an enemy*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill/Sense Publishing.

38 Government of Canada. (2019). *The implementation guidance of the Vancouver Principles*, 2019. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/>

It is important to highlight that the first point of outside contact for many children in armed conflict contexts, including child soldiers, will often be military and police personnel.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, it is imperative to empower security sector personnel to be able to interrupt the cycle of recruitment and use of children. In order to do so, security sector actors must be prepared for the possibility of confronting child soldiers *before* they ever face them in active hostilities – otherwise they are forced to juggle ethical considerations against the basic need to protect themselves.<sup>40</sup> These considerations take time, thought and preparation, which is a luxury most will not have in the context of armed conflict, leaving them unprepared and likely to under- or overreact.

Effective prevention requires equipping security sector personnel:

- for encounters and potential interventions with children in armed conflict;
- to identify and counteract recruitment tactics;
- to recognize and respond to high-risk recruitment areas;
- to support escape by children from armed groups and forces;
- to protect those who have escaped;
- and to understand the gender dynamics of the recruitment and use of children as soldiers.

The Vancouver Principles recognize the interconnected dynamics and respective areas of expertise among those who are involved in peacekeeping missions. It is essential that those best suited to the various functions to protect children are prepared and understand their unique roles and responsibilities: like cogs in a machine, they each need to conduct their functions effectively or the machine breaks down. Strategic complementarity in this context is the exchange of information, sharing of resources and coordination or co-implementation of programmes in order to establish collaboration and achieve an agreed-upon strategic objective; in this case, the prevention of the recruitment and use of children as soldiers. Such an approach creates opportunities for those who would not typically collaborate or communicate in mission areas – such as non-governmental actors, security sector actors, civilian actors, and government actors – to do so, while at the same time building momentum and dialogue towards peace and security.

Implementing effective prevention strategies requires effective planning and preparation. It also requires countries to step up and be leaders in regions that require stability. Critically, it

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[corporate/reports-publications/vancouver-principles/introduction/prevention.html](https://www.un.org/peacekeeping/corporate/reports-publications/vancouver-principles/introduction/prevention.html)

39 Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors, (3rd ed.)

40 Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors, (3rd ed.)



means understanding and recognizing the early warning signs of conflict and the role children can play in sustaining or fueling conflict.<sup>41</sup> The case of Syria, one of the most tragic examples in contemporary conflict where children have been recruited and used as soldiers, is an example of how attention to this particular dynamic of the conflict went unheeded in any coordinated or effective manner.<sup>42</sup>

There are seventeen principles defined in the Vancouver Principles, which collectively elevate the issue of children's rights within peace operations and offer the security sector practical guidance on how to prevent the recruitment and use of children as soldiers. The following section highlights three prevention-oriented strategies, used in three different contexts, to demonstrate practical approaches to applying the Vancouver Principles in order to prevent recruitment and protect children.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE VANCOUVER PRINCIPLES

### *Canadian Armed Forces Doctrine*

In March 2017, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) adopted a Joint Doctrine Note on Child Soldiers with the aim to “provide the interim guidance required to address and mitigate the broad challenges posed by the presence of child soldiers in areas where the CAF undertake missions.”<sup>43</sup> Canada began to transform itself from a nation that had an *ad hoc* policy on engagement with child soldiers to the first NATO member with a doctrinal document on the issue. A key catalyst to this development were the debates on Canadian contributions to peacekeeping in Mali and the potential engagement between CAF members and child soldiers. The Dallaire Initiative's handbook, *Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*, was a critical reference in the drafting of the new doctrine and the Dallaire Initiative played a key role in demonstrating that the adoption of the doctrine could not only enhance the protection of children during armed conflict, but also contribute to the operational success of Canadian Armed Forces missions.

As a result of this joint effort, a number of subsequent and important policy changes took place: it led to Canada endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, the inclusion of the need for child soldiers training in the 2017 Canadian Department of National Defence Policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged*,<sup>44</sup> and in late 2017, the creation of the Vancouver Principles. Today, the CAF

41 Johnson, Dustin, Whitman, Shelly and Sparwasser Soroka. “Prevent to Protect: Early Warning, Child Soldiers, and the Case of Syria.” *Global Responsibility to Protect*. Ed Bellamy, Alex, Davies, Sara, and Glanville, Luke. Brill Nijhoff: Boston. 10:1-2 (2018).

42 Johnson, Whitman, and Sparwasser Soroka, “Prevent to Protect.”

43 Government of Canada. (2017). *Canadian Forces Joint Doctrine Note: 2017-01 Child Soldiers*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

44 Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy. *National Defence*, 2017, p.84. <http://dgpaaapp>.

are working to understand their current training gaps and how to adapt curriculum and training approaches to implement the Vancouver Principles domestically. The development of doctrine focused on the prevention of the recruitment and use of children was essential to providing the framework for security sector actors to “strategically, tactically, technically and psychologically”<sup>45</sup> prepare for interactions with child soldiers and to prevent child recruitment in the first place.

In July 2019, the Dallaire Centre for Peace and Security was established by the Canadian Government and funded by the Department of National Defence; a watershed moment in establishing the permanence of this collaboration. The newly created Centre has a formal partnership with the Dallaire Initiative to promote the implementation of the Vancouver Principles globally over the next 5 years.

### *Integrated Approaches in Sierra Leone*

Sierra Leone experienced a brutal civil war in which the world failed to act effectively to prevent many horrific attacks on civilians, and where the recruitment and use of children was pervasive. As children involved in the conflict grew into adults, security sector reform became critical to the future of the country and to achieving sustained peace.<sup>46</sup>

In 2012, the Dallaire Initiative began work with the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), the Sierra Leone Police Service (SLPS), and the Sierra Leone Correctional Service (SLCS) to develop, pilot and test a holistic approach to preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Initially it required understanding the motivations of the security forces to collaborate, their desire to participate in peacekeeping missions as a credible troop contributing country, and the economic incentives it provided at a time when the UN was exiting Sierra Leone. Cooperation was solidified through the development of Memoranda of Understandings (MoUs) with military, police and correctional sectors. The holistic approach to prioritizing recruitment prevention and child protection involved developing and conducting training with the security sector, including a focus on capacity building through the implementation of integrated curriculum and a Train the Trainer model.<sup>47</sup> The integration of Dallaire Initiative curriculum within training academies, and the leadership demonstrated by Sierra Leone in relation to preventing the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, offers important insights into the implementation of the Vancouver Principles.

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*forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf*

45 Government of Canada. (2017). *Canadian Forces Joint Doctrine Note: 2017-01 Child Soldiers*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

46 “Child Soldiers and Security Sector Reform: A Sierra Leonean Case Study.”

47 Boyter, Josh, Conradi, Carl, Holland, Sam, Whitman, Shelly and Zayed, Tanya. The Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative: Sierra Leone Project. Halifax, NS: *The Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative*, 2014.

Today, Sierra Leone has created policies and practices that aim to ensure children are never again recruited and used as soldiers. The lived experiences of Sierra Leoneans and the research and pedagogical approach of the Dallaire Initiative have combined to create a set of tools and approaches that are now being shared in many different contexts, including in South Sudan and Somalia.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, several Sierra Leonean Master Trainers have become advocates in nations that currently recruit and use children as soldiers. It is a powerful experience to hear people speaking with conviction about the harmful impacts recruitment and use has for generations to come – having themselves endured conflict and the use of children as soldiers – to nations that are currently in need of ending such abuses.

### *Rwanda – Centre of Excellence*

Rwanda currently contributes the third-largest number of troops and police to UN missions,<sup>49</sup> and is geopolitically significant in the Eastern and Central Regions of Africa. Bordered by several nations that have either experienced or are currently experiencing the impacts of the recruitment and use of child soldiers, it has successfully emerged from the horrific genocide of 1994 and has great potential to lead on the African continent on prevention efforts for both genocide and the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

In Rwanda, the Dallaire Initiative is implementing a strategy that includes establishing a Regional Centre of Excellence, which will be a hub for training and research on preventing the recruitment and use of children. This will be led by the Rwanda Defence Force's (RDF) own example to adopt prevention-oriented doctrine, integrate training throughout their rank structures, ensure every peacekeeping battalion is adequately trained on the prevention of recruitment and child protection, and include an evaluation by the Dallaire Initiative in their annual lesson learned exercises. These actions demonstrate how the Vancouver Principles can be implemented holistically and systematically. As the first African nation to endorse the Vancouver Principles, Rwanda continues to lead with a Children's Rights Upfront approach.

The Rwandan Centre of Excellence, along with the Dallaire Centre of Excellence on Peace and Security, will enable the global community to coordinate on research, policy and practice to elevate children as a priority within peace operations and peace processes.

## CONCLUSION

Effective prevention requires states to take responsibility for the rights of children and to create conditions that prevent the recruitment and use of children as soldiers. For every country that

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48 Gbow, Musa, Johnson, Dustin, Reeves, Darin and Whitman, Shelly. Child Protection Capacity Building in Somalia. Halifax, NS: The Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, 2013.

49 As of January 2020, data from <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

fails to effectively train their forces, they leave the window wide open for those who wish to exploit children. States who are joining the global effort to prevent this grave violation have an opportunity to lead on the global implementation of the Vancouver Principles, as an important strategy towards recruitment prevention and child protection.

Our failure to reduce the involvement of children in armed conflict today will only create more leaders that have been educated in violence for tomorrow. As such, effective prevention must be a priority for the global peace and security agenda. We must see conflict through the lens of the children who are impacted and used to perpetrate violence, as this is critical to breaking endemic cycles of violence and generational warfare.

*Dr. Shelly Whitman is the Executive Director of the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, based at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada. Dr. Catherine Baillie Abidi is the Director of Research & Learning at the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative.*

# SECURITY SECTOR TRAINING ON PREVENTION OF RECRUITMENT

Victoria Bryce and Dustin Johnson

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers  
Initiative

## ABSTRACT

Ensuring that peacekeepers receive suitable and effective training to prepare for deployments has become an important focus for the UN and member states over the past three decades. This is particularly relevant for non-traditional military skills needed in modern multidimensional missions, including child protection. This article discusses the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative's (Dallaire Initiative) training and education programming for security sector actors, highlighting its effectiveness in preparing peacekeepers for addressing the presence of child soldiers, the importance of integrating the issue of child soldiers into national curricula, and the necessity of evaluating and learning from training.

Keywords: training, peacekeeping, child soldiers

## INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the importance of peacekeeper training on the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers, especially those deploying on UN missions, and the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative's experiences in conducting training. The article begins with a review of the current literature on training for peacekeeping. It highlights the UN training architecture that splits responsibility between the UN Secretariat and member states that provide soldiers and police, and the focus of peacekeeping training literature on issues that are relevant to child protection such as civil-military relations and negotiation. However, there is currently a lack of research specifically on child protection training. Following this discussion of the literature, the paper draws on monitoring and evaluation data collected by the Dallaire Initiative in its programming in Sierra Leone, Uganda, and South Sudan to demonstrate how the organization's work helps to support Vancouver Principle 5: Training. The article finishes with a discussion of policy implications and concluding remarks.

## METHODOLOGY

For the literature review, searches for “peacekeeping training” and “peacekeeper training” were conducted through the University of Gothenburg library search system, and “training” was searched for in the journals *International Peacekeeping* and *Journal of International Peacekeeping*. From these searches, relevant articles and book chapters were identified, and others were identified from those chapters' and articles' reference lists.

The second part of the paper explores the themes found in interviews with Dallaire Initiative graduates, which focussed on understanding the impact of training programming. The coding for the interviews followed Kirkpatrick's<sup>1</sup> measurement categories for analyzing learning effectiveness. Revised and clarified by James and Wendy Kirkpatrick, it was theorized that evaluating the effectiveness of training programs takes place on four different levels: reaction, learning, behaviour and results.<sup>2</sup> In the context of the Dallaire Initiative training, course evaluations measure the immediate reactions of the participants, as they fill out evaluation forms directly following the completion of a training. Learning and behaviour changes are assessed later through follow-up surveys and in-person interviews, and are explored in the Findings section of this paper.

In the past two years, the Dallaire Initiative has had the opportunity to conduct interviews in Uganda, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan with training graduates. The overall aim of the

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1 Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels, 3rd ed (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2006) [1993].

2 Mind Tools, “Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model: Analyzing Learning Effectiveness,” Mind Tools, n.d., <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/kirkpatrick.htm>.

interviews were to assess the long-term progression of Dallaire Initiative programming towards progressively ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers. As part of the evaluation process, the interview questions were designed to assess the influence of the trainings with a particular focus on knowledge, attitude and skills development. Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed in NVivo software for common themes and findings. These interviews reflected a small purposive sample and were designed to consider the impact of Dallaire Initiative programming.

The Dallaire Initiative interviewed 54 individuals (including 26 Trained Trainers), from 6 countries, in three different interview locations between April 2018 and June 2019. The table below outlines the demographics of the interviews further.

TYPE OF TRAINING	TOTAL NUMBER	INTERVIEW LOCATION	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
Trained Trainers	15	Sierra Leone	Sierra Leone
	2	South Sudan	Sierra Leone
	8	Uganda	Uganda
	1	South Sudan	Rwanda
Basic course participants	23	Sierra Leone	Sierra Leone
	2	South Sudan	Gambia
	1	South Sudan	Burkina Faso
Pre-Deployment Training graduate	2	South Sudan	Rwanda
OVERALL TOTAL	54		

The process for analysis was twofold: firstly, the interviews conducted in Uganda, Sierra Leone and South Sudan were transcribed and all identifying information was removed, giving each interview participant a coded number. The transcriptions were then uploaded to NVivo and each transcription was reviewed in detail, using the highlighting coding system to process, label and organize the data in order to identify common themes that emerged and the relationships between those themes. Labels were assigned to quotes, phrases and words which represented important and recurring themes. Those themes were then reviewed and the analysis demonstrated that common themes were evident across locations. Results from all locations were then compared, combined and reviewed to condense into the top three common findings, presented in the evaluation results section.

## TRAINING IN THE UN PEACEKEEPING SYSTEM

Since the end of the Cold War and with the evolution of modern multidimensional peacekeeping missions, there has been an increasing acknowledgement of the importance of training for peacekeeping personnel. The UN's Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations first called for specific training for peacekeepers in 1989, and training guidelines were developed by 1991. The need for training was reinforced by the Brahimi Report published in 2000. The current focus on training was consolidated with the comprehensive training strategy released in 2008.<sup>3</sup> Material specific to child protection has been integrated into the two core training packages provided by the UN, the Core Pre-Deployment Training Materials (CPTMs) and the Specialised Training Materials (STMs), and has been recommended by the Security Council through Resolution 2143 (2014).<sup>4</sup>

Training peacekeepers is a responsibility shared by member states and the UN Secretariat.<sup>5</sup> Training is primarily provided to peacekeepers through integration into national curricula, at peacekeeping training centres, pre-deployment trainings for specific missions, induction training upon arrival in mission, and ongoing training in missions.<sup>6</sup> In addition to direct training of their own peacekeepers, several member states provide training to assist other states to prepare for missions through mobile training teams, hosting courses for peacekeepers, and supporting training centres abroad.<sup>7</sup> For instance, Brazil has developed mobile training teams that have supported training taking place elsewhere in Latin America, as well as in Angola and Mozambique.<sup>8</sup> The United States funds a significant amount of training activities through its Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), including one run by the Italian Carabinieri for training of police, the Centre of Excellence for Police Stability Units (CoESPU). Similar

3 Alberto Cutillo, "Deploying the Best: Enhancing Training for United Nations Peacekeepers," *Providing for Peacekeeping* (New York: International Peace Institute, August 2013), 2–3.

4 Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), 28–29, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2019/igvp-20190614.pdf>.

5 Cutillo, "Deploying the Best," 6–7.

6 Cutillo, "Deploying the Best"; ADF Staff, "Training for Peace: Institutions Look for New Methods to Produce Better Peacekeepers," Africa Defense Forum, 2019.

7 Andrew Carpenter and Chris Sharwood-Smith, "Developments in United Nations Police Peacekeeping Training," in *Police Organization and Training*, ed. M.R. Haberfeld, Curtis A. Clarke, and Dale L. Sheehan (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2012), 179–90, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-0745-4\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-0745-4_12); Cutillo, "Deploying the Best"; Danilo Marcondes, Maira Siman, and Ricardo Oliveira, "South-South Cooperation and Training for Peacekeeping Participation," *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 3–4 (April 28, 2017): 197–223, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18754112-02103002>; Richard Gowan and Paul D. Williams, "Innovation in Training and Capacity-Building for United Nations Peace Operations," *Background Paper for Preparatory Meeting on Training and Capacity Building for UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial*, Tokyo, 2017, 2017, <https://www.globaldashboard.org/wp-content/uploads/Tokyo-PKO-Prep-Meeting-Background-Paper.pdf>.

8 Marcondes, Siman, and Oliveira, "South-South Cooperation."



to the Dallaire Initiative, it uses a train the trainer method, and both instructors and training participants are drawn from around the world.<sup>9</sup>

The literature on peacekeeping training has paid little attention to child protection. However, there is close alignment between several of the common topics of study and the approaches to child protection that the Dallaire Initiative uses in its training, particularly in negotiation skills, intercultural competence, and civil-military relations. Up until the 1990s, the common assumption was that traditional combat skills were all that was necessary to carry out peacekeeping.<sup>10</sup> However, as early as the original UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC) in the 1960s, Norwegian soldiers serving in the mission identified the need for better training on policing skills and intercultural competencies.<sup>11</sup>

From a theoretical perspective, several authors have argued that since the basis of a peacekeeping mission (consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force) differs fundamentally from that of the military, training is needed both to alter a peacekeeper's view of their role and provide them with skills not normally associated with the military.<sup>12</sup> Several studies of peacekeepers have provided evidence of this issue,<sup>13</sup> though these perceptions of the role and what is required can be altered by time spent in the mission.<sup>14</sup> As well, the complexity and challenges faced by modern, multidimensional missions require specific, improved training on the skills and attitudes discussed above, and this training needs to be provided in a sustainable manner, preferably at all stages of a peacekeeper's training and education, not just during pre-deployment.<sup>15</sup>

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9 Cutillo, "Deploying the Best."

10 A. Walter Dorn and Joshua Libben, "Preparing for Peace: Myths and Realities of Canadian Peacekeeping Training," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 73, no. 2 (June 2018): 257–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702018788552>.

11 Johan Galtung and Helge Hveem, "Participants in Peacekeeping Forces," in *Peace, War and Defense: Essays in Peace Research*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Christian Ejlertsen, 1976), 264–81.

12 A.B. Fetherston, "Putting the Peace Back into Peacekeeping: Theory Must Inform Practice," *International Peacekeeping* 1, no. 1 (1994): 3–29; Robert A. Rubinstein, *Peacekeeping under Fire: Culture and Intervention* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008); Dorn and Libben, "Preparing for Peace."

13 Franz Kernic, "The Soldier and the Task: Austria's Experience of Preparing Peacekeepers," *International Peacekeeping* 6, no. 3 (September 1999): 113–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533319908413788>; Claus Kold, "New Operations - New Attitudes? Are Soldiers' Attitudes Influenced by the Objectives of Peace Operations?," *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 17, no. 1–2 (2013): 46–73, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18754112-1702002>; Sara Singleton and Anne Holohan, "The Case for 'Trust Awareness' as a Key Soft-Skill for Peacekeepers," *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 3–4 (April 28, 2017): 224–45, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18754112-02103003>.

14 Charles C. Moskos, *Peace Soldiers: The Sociology of a United Nations Military Force* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

15 Gowan and Williams, "Innovation in Training"; Dorn and Libben, "Preparing for Peace."

Child protection, and the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers in particular, are important aspects of current conflicts which UN missions address. The use of child soldiers has occurred in most post-Cold War conflicts,<sup>16</sup> and the UN has verified the use of child soldiers in all countries where its four largest missions are deployed. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in particular has seen sustained use of child soldiers, and the commission of other grave violations against children, by many armed groups and government forces.<sup>17</sup> As well, armed groups that use child soldiers continue to learn from one another and adapt their practices, as was seen with the so-called Islamic State learning from and building on previous use of children as soldiers by the Hitler Youth, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, and other organizations.<sup>18</sup>

For peacekeeping missions, the Dallaire Initiative emphasizes the importance of integration into national military and police training and education structures, gathering information and reporting on the recruitment and use of child soldiers, deescalating encounters with child soldiers to prevent harm, and collaborating with all mission components and partners in government, humanitarian agencies, and civil society to provide more holistic protection of children.<sup>19</sup> These aspects of the Dallaire Initiative's approach have clear alignment with current emphases in what is needed for peacekeeping training, particularly in integration into national curricula and civil-military cooperation, and in the importance of training via a mix of classroom and scenario-based training.<sup>20</sup> As the discussion in the following section demonstrates, the specific approach of the Dallaire Initiative is important in equipping peacekeepers with skills they need to better protect children during armed conflict that are not incorporated into standard peacekeeping training.

## DALLAIRE INITIATIVE METHODOLOGY

The Dallaire Initiative offers several core courses within its security sector training, with the two central programs being the *Basic Training for the Prevention of the Recruitment*

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16 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>.

17 United Nations Security Council and General Assembly, "Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General (A/73/907–S/2019/509)" (New York: United Nations, June 20, 2019).

18 Norman Benotman and Nikita Malik, "The Children of Islamic State" (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2016); Robert Tynes, *Tools of War, Tools of State: When Children Become Soldiers* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019).

19 Darin Reeves et al., *Child Soldiers: A Handbook for Security Sector Actors*, 3rd ed. (Halifax, NS: The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, 2017); The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, "The Dallaire Initiative Strategic Plan 2019-2022" (Halifax, NS: The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, 2019).

20 Dorn and Libben, "Preparing for Peace"; Government of Canada, Implementation Guidance.

*and Use of Child Soldiers* (five days) and the *Training of Trainers (ToT) for the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers* (ten days). The Dallaire Initiative also offers a Pre deployment training package, which includes a 5-day Basic course for officers, and 3-day condensed training for enlisted soldiers. This one-week package is meant to be integrated within a country's pre deployment training course. The Dallaire Initiative's training , "seeks to provide security forces with options on how to prevent and address the recruitment and use of child soldiers by recognizing the multiple roles that children fulfil in armed groups and armed forces."<sup>21</sup> All Dallaire Initiative training courses are built off specific examples from previous training courses and participant's experiences in the field. Course evaluations are conducted at the end of each training course, when feedback is reviewed and fed into a lessons learned cycle for curriculum and training updates. Dallaire Initiative training courses include a multitude of facilitation styles, including practical scenarios - where participants role play scenarios in which they may encounter child soldiers. Scenario-based exercises are used to better demonstrate the wide variety of possible interactions between security forces and child soldiers and reinforce the course content with experiential learning.

The essential objective for all courses is for participants to gain full comprehension of the Dallaire Initiative's three Core Competencies for Security Sector Actors. The first focuses on understanding who a child soldier is, the relevant legal frameworks, how child soldiers are recruited and used, and the gendered dimensions of child soldiering. The second Core Competency is focused on understanding child soldiering as a specific security concern, what kind of interactions security sector actors might have with child soldiers, and how to improve these interactions. The third focuses on cooperation with other relevant actors, such as civilian child protection agencies, and effective information gathering and sharing on children's rights violations.<sup>22</sup> The third Core Competency overlaps considerably with civil-military cooperation focused on child protection.

The ToT builds upon the Basic course and is designed to train qualified Dallaire Initiative trainers. The full training cycle allows the Dallaire Initiative to ensure that qualified participants are selected to act as Trained Trainers to continue to build capacity within the state and region, and to ensure sustainability within the country for educating security sector actors on issues concerning children in armed conflict.

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21 Shelly Whitman and Tanya Zayed, "Core Competencies for Security Sector Training on the Prevention of the Use of Child Soldiers." (*Halifax, NS: The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, 2015*), 6.

22 Whitman and Zayed, 7-8.

## FINDINGS

Stemming from this comprehensive evaluation, with 54 interview participants from 6 countries, three main overall findings emerged:

- Training graduates have an overall increase in understanding about the issue of child soldiers and their role in the protection of children;
- Training graduates applied their knowledge and skills while on peace support missions;
- Training graduates shared and applied their knowledge and skills within institutions to influence and improve policies and training.

### *Increased Understanding*

Several participants emphasized that learning the definition of a child soldier was paramount to understanding the issue, and each participant reflected a sense of greater self-awareness and responsibility once they understood who a child soldier is and how they can prevent children from being recruited, the first of the three core competencies of Dallaire Initiative training. Particularly, by combining the comprehensive definition of a child soldier in the Paris Principles<sup>23</sup> with their previous military experience, the fundamentals of their role came into focus. This illustrates how many security sector actors are currently not receiving the training they require on the topic of child soldiers in order to act appropriately and effectively in their jobs. Training delivered by the Dallaire Initiative aims to fill this gap and the recognition of this training requirement was a primary reason for the creation of the Vancouver Principles.

In South Sudan, Dallaire Initiative training graduates from the Gambia and Burkina Faso reported that learning about the circumstances that child soldiers, especially girls, face in conflict zones was new to them. These trainees were police officers who primarily work on training with the South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS) and viewed both basic information on child soldiering and understanding how traumatic experiences in a child's past can affect their behaviour, as useful to themselves and officers from the SSNPS. Additionally, they spoke of how learning the reasons behind how and why children are recruited into armed groups was enlightening and widened their understanding, which in turn gave them new perceptions on how to teach the subject of prevention. These examples illustrate the need for specific training on issues related to the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and particularly from a gendered perspective, which is highlighted in the implementation guidance for Vancouver Principle 5: Training.<sup>24</sup>

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23 UNICEF, "The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups" (New York: United Nations, February 2007), [https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/ParisPrinciples\\_EN.pdf](https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/ParisPrinciples_EN.pdf).

24 Global Affairs Canada, "The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers," Global Affairs Canada, February 21, 2017, 3, <https://www.>

Rwandan officers who participated in Dallaire Initiative pre-deployment training prior to their arrival in mission in South Sudan, stated that even though they were aware of the issue previously, they did not understand all the connections between the relevant polices and laws for children and their protection. They emphasized that having this knowledge and the full contextual picture of the issue of child soldiers assisted them in their mission in South Sudan, by having the knowledge, skills and confidence to act when necessary but also to teach others what they have learned.

Having the confidence to act appropriately in situations with child soldiers when in mission was also raised by interview participants in Sierra Leone. Several interview participants discussed the importance of understanding all aspects of the issue as well as practicing scenarios prior to going on a deployment. One participant stated: “...with the interactions, it puts to practice what you have learned and makes you comfortable when you are out in the field and when you have been confronted, you know what to do” (Sierra Leone ToT graduate P09, 2019). As noted in the literature review, training of this form for peacekeepers is particularly effective, and should be a standard part of peacekeeping training.<sup>25</sup>

Lastly, one of the key Dallaire Initiative learning objectives is “strategic complimentary”, which focusses on civil-military cooperation and opportunities for collaboration on the issue of the recruitment and use of child soldiers. The Dallaire Initiative Core Competency #3 states: “security sector actors must understand the importance of effective reporting and collaboration with other concerned organizations.”<sup>26</sup> Knowing roles and responsibilities, and whom to engage when an issue arises, was something that resonated with interview participants from all countries, in all levels of training. As one participant from Sierra Leone stated, “strategic complementarity is key for me and for the institutions to make sure we don’t work in [silos]. We could use that for collaboration to solve this issue in the shortest amount of time” (Sierra Leone ToT graduate P08, 2019). Such approaches are as important in child protection as they are in other areas of peacekeeping.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Application of Knowledge and Skills While on Peace Support Missions*

While not all Dallaire Initiative graduates have been deployed on missions (a common situation among many training institutions, whose graduates are not always selected for deployment after training, or are deployed too long after training takes place),<sup>28</sup> those who

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[international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/human\\_rights-droits\\_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engageons.aspx?lang=eng](http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engageons.aspx?lang=eng).

25 Gowan and Williams, “Innovation in Training”; Dorn and Libben, “Preparing for Peace.”

26 Whitman and Zayed, “Core Competencies,” 8.

27 e.g., Singleton and Holohan, “The Case for ‘Trust Awareness’”; Dorn and Libben, “Preparing for Peace.”

28 Gowan and Williams, “Innovation in Training.”

were deployed, shared important information on how they have applied skills from Dallaire Initiative training. Interview participants discussed applying new skills in relation to: how they reported on recruitment and use; how they patrolled differently due to the recognition of areas and times where children are more vulnerable to recruitment; and how they engaged with other actors to improve protections for children.

One interview participant from the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF), who had previously been deployed to Somalia with AMISOM in 2015 prior to receiving training from the Dallaire Initiative, and then deployed in 2017 after having received Dallaire Initiative training, discussed how the training was of great assistance to them in their mission. While on duty at the AMISOM base in Somalia, this individual noticed a young girl who was loitering around the military base waiting for soldiers to let her inside. At the time, soldiers would allow some women and girls inside the base to sell food. However, this time, the Dallaire Initiative graduate had a suspicion about the girl and her movements, due to their training, and decided to not allow her onto the base. Instead, they reported the situation to their superior, who further investigated the matter. In doing so, they discovered that the child was actually a boy dressed as a girl in an attempt to access the military base in order to gain information to pass along to his commander. As such, the child was acting as a spy and messenger for a non-state armed group, making him a child soldier by the Paris Principles definition. The actions of the graduate resulted in the engagement of a child protection agency and the removal of the child from the armed group. The graduate explained that if they did not have Dallaire Initiative training, they would never have recognized that the actions of the child fell within the definition of a child soldier and, as such, would not have reported it.

All individuals interviewed in Sierra Leone who had been deployed on a mission after receiving Dallaire Initiative training confirmed the usefulness in theatre, with one stating, "It helped me feel more prepared to take on my mission." (Sierra Leone ToT graduate P01, 2019). Another participant reinforced the usefulness of the training when they were deployed to UNAMID in Darfur, discussing how the Dallaire Initiative's training made them see children approaching the peacekeepers for food or money in a different light, and allowed them to respond appropriately and contact child protection agencies when needed. The Rwandan graduates interviewed in South Sudan expressed similar sentiments, emphasizing that they had a better grasp of the security situation and were now prepared for dealing with children, including child soldiers, that they might encounter.

#### *Sharing and Applying Knowledge and Skills Within Institutions to Influence and Improve Policies and Training.*

Several interview participants reflected on the facilitation skills they gained from the Dallaire Initiative ToT, which was particularly useful when teaching their colleagues, speaking in

public with civilians, and presenting lectures to fellow officers on issues related to protecting children. In particular, the UPDF trained trainers spoke of how they have the capacity to deliver training and communicate with their colleagues, superiors and staff within the UPDF on the importance of the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers. For example, one participant stated: “The ToT makes you empowered to share your knowledge with others...Now you become somebody who is living the talk and walking the talk” (Uganda ToT graduate P09, 2018).

Similarly, Rwandan graduates described several initiatives to share and apply their skills within their institutions. The Rwandan officers deployed to South Sudan referenced a two-hour briefing they created and facilitated for an Indian battalion deployed in the same region. Members of the Indian battalion revealed that this briefing was the first information on child soldiers in South Sudan they had received. Additionally, UNPOL officers in Juba who received Dallaire Initiative training shared the knowledge gained with their colleagues in the mission and with local police. They discussed that when they are training local police who have direct contact with civilians in communities, they are incorporating Dallaire Initiative learning objectives, such as preventing abduction and how to teach children about protecting themselves, into their key teaching points.

Many interview participants responded how they intend to inject modules or information from the Dallaire Initiative into training programs and doctrine within their respective institutions now that they have become trained trainers. “We will look at the program, then we will look at how to inject it into regular classes. Having professionals and the necessary materials we will be able to do this” (Sierra Leone ToT graduate P08, 2019). Those who were participating in their first Dallaire Initiative training in the Basic course in Sierra Leone in 2019, were equally excited to share and implement their knowledge and skills. “When I go back to my unit, I will educate them. I will explain how to take care of them and protect children from war and conflict” (Sierra Leone Basic participant, 2019).

A Ugandan interview participant who works on doctrine in the UPDF, spoke about how the training increased their skills to do background research and in writing reports to include more relevant information specific to child soldiers. In particular, it helped them to write more informed field directives to UPDF CIMIC (Civil Military Cooperation) officers, while giving them the confidence to call meetings to address the issue of child soldiering in Uganda and the wider region. Building capacity of graduates to not only train, but also to conduct more in-depth research and writing is an additional component of Dallaire Initiative training that may not be its primary purpose, but an interesting outcome to explore further in the future.

Participants shared how the application of knowledge and skills extends beyond local and regional influence. For example, a Sierra Leonean trained trainer explained that when they were invited to help teach a child protection course in Sweden, they integrated Dallaire Initiative training on the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers into the curriculum package they delivered. It was well received by the Swedish officers and “was appraised as even some of the people from the west cannot come out distinctly to tell you what are some of the entry points of children into conflict, and what are some negative impacts children get into when they are in conflict.” (Sierra Leone ToT P01, 2019). This same individual also contributed to the development of the African Union pre-deployment training manual by giving a lecture on preventing child soldiers when the topic of child protection was discussed.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The previous discussion of the importance of training for peacekeepers, particularly on non-traditional military skills, and of how the training on child soldiers as a security sector concern is being put to use in a range of peacekeeping contexts by training graduates, demonstrates the relevance of this approach for the implementation of the Vancouver Principles, and for peacekeeping more generally. The following section highlights two primary policy implications.

First, while child protection focused members of peacekeeping missions, such as Child Protection Focal Points (CPFP) and Child Protection Advisors, are essential to mission success, it is also important for all members of a mission to have training on preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Peacekeepers out on patrols, guarding convoys, at the entrance of bases, and liaising with civil society all encounter children on a daily basis, and even if they are not routinely encountering armed children, it is important that they are able to recognize situations where children may be vulnerable to recruitment, identify children who are being used as informants or messengers, or recognize the importance of information passed on by civilians. Many of the graduates discussed above were not deployed in child-protection-specific roles, yet the skills and knowledge they learned through the training still served them well on mission. To be able to identify these situations and report accurately to the CPFP and chain of command, training focused on child soldiers as a security sector concern is key.

The literature on peacekeeping training and the Dallaire Initiative’s training model also highlight the importance of having this training integrated into pre-deployment training, peacekeeping training centres’ curricula, and national security sector education to ensure peacekeepers internalize lessons on child soldiers like they do with other fundamental aspects of security sector practice. While this process for the Dallaire Initiative’s training is still ongoing and its full impact is not yet reflected in the evaluation data presented above,



ongoing work in this area will investigate how such an approach can best strengthen child protection in peacekeeping. Financial and political support for the integration of such training will be critical to mainstreaming it across peacekeeping training as called for by the Vancouver Principles.

Second, the Dallaire Initiative's monitoring and evaluation of its training, and the lessons learned from and improvements to its training resulting from this, demonstrate the importance of such activities for peacekeeping training. As Cutillo<sup>29</sup> and Gowan and Williams<sup>30</sup> note, there has previously been insufficient assessment of the effectiveness of peacekeeping training. Consequently, peacekeeping contributor states, the UN, and training institutions should prioritize the ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of their training, and ensure that evaluations feed back into improving training design and curriculum to ensure best practices in the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

## CONCLUSION

In the modern security environment of multidimensional peacekeeping missions being expected to deliver on a wide range of outcomes such as child protection and preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers, training for peacekeepers on non-traditional military skills is critical. Well-designed and delivered training on preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers is important for all peacekeepers before they deploy to a mission, and should preferably be integrated into standard military and police education and training. As well, improved assessment of such training's effectiveness, and enhancements to training based on evaluation, will be critical to ensure that peacekeepers are prepared for their mission. The Dallaire Initiative's work to make training and education on the recruitment and use of child soldiers a normal part of peacekeeping and security sector training provides an example of how civil society, the United Nations, and member states can work together to support the implementation of the Vancouver Principles and the preparation of peacekeepers for their vital work.

*Victoria Bryce is a Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist at the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative in Halifax, Canada. Dustin Johnson is a Senior Research Officer at the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, and a doctoral student in peace and development research at the School of Global Studies at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden.*

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29 "Deploying the Best."

30 "Innovation in Training."

## ANNEX

### *Interview Questions for Dallaire Initiative Training Participants*

1. What tools or information from the Dallaire Initiative training stick out in your memory?
2. How has the Dallaire Initiative training contributed to your knowledge and skills about child soldiers?
3. Have you had the opportunity to share the information that you learned from the Dallaire Initiative with others?
  - If yes, with who? How did it go?
  - What was significant/important to you about those events/stories/examples?
4. Have you conducted any training? (ToT only)
  - If yes, what went well? What didn't go as well?
  - How did you adapt the training to fit your needs?
  - What was significant/important to you about those events/stories/examples?
5. How have you used your training on this mission?
  - A. How have you use the knowledge and skills from the Dallaire Initiative training while on mission?
  - B. What portion of the DI training was most relevant to your mission?
  - C. Has this changed how you have or would have conducted your mission?
  - D. What was significant/important to you about those events/stories/examples?
6. How would you apply what you have learned from the Dallaire Initiative training and your experience in mission when you return home?
7. Are there other ways the training been useful for your work or life?
  - If yes, can you tell me about it?
8. Is there anything you would add to the Dallaire Initiative training to make it better?
9. Would you recommend the Dallaire Initiative training to others?

# GENDER, PEACEKEEPING, AND CHILD SOLDIERS:

## Training and Research in Implementation of the Vancouver Principles

Dustin Johnson and Allyssa Walsh

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers  
Initiative

### ABSTRACT

Since the passage of UN Security Council resolution 1325, there has been a growing focus on the involvement of women in peacekeeping operations. Ambitious UN targets, the Vancouver Principles, and the Canadian government's Elsie Initiative all aim to support the increased inclusion of uniformed women in peacekeeping missions. This article discusses three areas in which the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative (Dallaire Initiative) is working to support Vancouver Principle (VP) 11 through the training of women security sector actors, training on gendered dimensions of the recruitment and use of child soldiers and SGBV against child soldiers, and through research on how gender matters in peacekeeping operations. Based on these experiences and an engagement with the academic literature, it makes a number of policy recommendations in support of VP 11.

Keywords: gender, peacekeeping, training, child soldiers, SGBV

## INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the work of the Dallaire Initiative in areas of research and training that focus on how gender matters in both child protection in peacekeeping missions and the recruitment and use of child soldiers as an example of the type of work needed to support Vancouver Principle 11. Of primary interest are the Dallaire Initiative's efforts to increase the participation of women in its courses, training content for peacekeepers on how the recruitment and use of child soldiers is gendered, and research that the Dallaire Initiative is undertaking on gender and child protection in peacekeeping. These issues are discussed in regards to the current state of knowledge on gender, peacekeeping, and child soldiers, drawing on a review of selected literature. The paper concludes with some recommendations for policy makers at the state and UN level concerned with peacekeeping training, the inclusion of women in the security sector, and research support in these areas based on the discussed literature and work of the Dallaire Initiative.

## GENDERED ISSUES IN CHILD RECRUITMENT AND PROTECTION

Drawing on a selection of the academic literature on the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and on peacekeeping, this section examines some of the key aspects of how both child recruitment and protection are gendered. In particular, the gender of children plays an important role in how and why children are recruited and used by armed groups and forces, and therefore it is critical to understand when attempting to prevent recruitment. Research on gender and peacekeeping has revealed the central role that gender plays in the conduct and impacts of peacekeeping missions, but has so far paid little attention to its role in child protection.

### *Gender and Recruitment*

Approaches to understanding child soldiery have long been gender-blind. The use of girls in conflict and the ways girls are impacted by conflict have been considered to be a private matter rather than one of public or political importance.<sup>1</sup> Because of inherent male-centric understandings of conflict, girls and their unique experiences are often neglected or silenced in research, policy, and practice. It is critical to understand that it is not circumstantial that girls are recruited by groups and armed forces. Girls are often considered to be essential actors within many armed groups due to the duality of their roles. They serve in all the same roles as boys, but also in ones specific to their gender. For example, when boy soldiers

<sup>1</sup> Dyan Mazurana and Khristopher Carlson, "The Girl Child and Armed Conflict: Recognizing and Addressing Grave Violations of Girls' Human Rights," in Expert Group Meeting on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child (*Expert Group Meeting on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child, Florence: Division for the Advancement of Women, 2006*), <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/elim-disc-viol-girlchild/ExpertPapers/EP.12%20Mazurana.pdf>.

return following frontline fighting or other tasks they are often given time to rest; however, girl soldiers who return from fulfilling similar duties are often met with other tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and responding to the demands of their “husbands”<sup>2</sup> This causes girls living in conflict situations to be intentionally sought out and recruited in order to achieve a “tactical advantage” and places girls in heightened situations of vulnerability.<sup>3</sup>

Another reason the recruitment of girls might be conducted for strategic purposes is for giving birth to children. This was common in the Lord’s Resistance Army, as girl children were intentionally impregnated and their children were viewed as the next generation of fighters for the armed group.<sup>4</sup> This was also an impetus for the recruitment of women and girls into ISIS.<sup>5</sup> It is thus viewed that girl children contribute to the longevity and sustainability of the armed groups’ efforts. The presence of girl soldiers also is sometimes perceived as a way to boost the morale of adult male soldiers in armed groups.<sup>6</sup> These perceived tactical and strategic advantages have caused certain armed groups to ensure girls are kept within their ranks, which can be further aided by gender-blind approaches to demobilization which focus only on boys. This was noted in 2001 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone released 1,213 child soldiers, and despite the fact that 30% of their total forces consisted of girl child soldiers, only 15 of the children released were girls.<sup>7</sup>

Sexual violence is widespread in many major conflicts around the world, and can be used intentionally as a weapon by armed forces and groups.<sup>8</sup> Conflict makes children more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, particularly for those within the ranks of armed forces and groups. Rape is often used as a “tool” by armed groups to reinforce disproportionate power dynamics and fear into children.<sup>9</sup> No matter what role(s) the child

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- 2 M. Gustavsson, J. Oruut, and B. Rubenson, “Girl Soldiers with Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda Fighting for Survival: Experiences of Young Women Abducted by LRA,” *Children’s Geographies* 15, no. 6 (November 2, 2017): 690–702, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2017.1300233>.
  - 3 Mazurana and Carlson, “The Girl Child and Armed Conflict”; Myriam Denov and Alexandra Ricard-Guay, “Girl Soldiers: Towards a Gendered Understanding of Wartime Recruitment, Participation, and Demobilisation,” *Gender & Development* 21, no. 3 (2013): 473–88.
  - 4 Dyan Mazurana and Susan McKay, “Child Soldiers: What about the GIRLS?,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 57, no. 5 (September 2001): 30–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2001.11460490>.
  - 5 Norman Benotman and Nikita Malik, “The Children of Islamic State” (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2016).
  - 6 Jeannie Annan et al., “Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender in Northern Uganda,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 6 (December 2011): 877–908, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002711408013>.
  - 7 Mazurana and McKay, “Child Soldiers.”
  - 8 Mazurana and Carlson, “The Girl Child and Armed Conflict”; Denov and Ricard-Guay, “Girl Soldiers.”
  - 9 Abigail Leibig, “Girl Child Soldiers in Northern Uganda: Do Current Legal Frameworks Offer Sufficient Protection?,” *Northwestern University Journal of International Human Rights* 3, no. 1 (2005), <https://>

is given in the armed force or group, whether armed or not, the likelihood of rape remains high.<sup>10</sup> Rape has a significant impact on the physical and mental health of children and increases chances of pregnancy in girls and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>11</sup>

Mental and physical consequences from SGBV in childhood are long-term and can affect survivors for the remainder of their lives. It should be noted that both boys and girls are subjected to SGBV in the ranks of armed forces and groups. While girls face greater risk of sexual violence, increasing attention is being paid to SGBV that boys face in armed conflict.<sup>12</sup>

The power imbalance between child and adult soldiers, particularly between girls and men, poses a great risk for sexual exploitation and abuse. Sexual exploitation and abuse can be defined as one “profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.”<sup>13</sup> It is important to note the plethora of ways that conflict increases the sexual and gender-based vulnerabilities of children, as peacekeepers and humanitarian workers are also known to participate in the exploitation and abuse of children, even while they are captives of an armed group.<sup>14</sup> This form of exploitation by peacekeepers and humanitarians shows the need for an increased understanding of gendered vulnerabilities in conflict, as well as a need for improved reporting mechanisms and safeguards for children. Education and training are important for addressing this; however there is urgent need for greater accountability for peacekeepers and other personnel who exploit and abuse children, and changes to military culture that are important drivers of abuse. Particularly, the form of militarized masculinity that is often dominant within the armed forces remains during peacekeeping deployments, and has been directly linked to abuses against women and children.<sup>15</sup>

### *Gender and Peacekeeping*

The Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles notes that there are significant literatures on gender and peacekeeping, and on child soldiers, but little crossover between

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[scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/njihr/vol3/iss1/6/](https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/njihr/vol3/iss1/6/).

10 Mazurana and McKay, “Child Soldiers.”

11 Mazurana and McKay.

12 Mazurana and Carlson, “The Girl Child and Armed Conflict”; All Survivors Project, “Gender and Age Specific Responses Needed to Address Sexual Violence against Children in Armed Conflict” (Liechtenstein: All Survivors Project, 2019).

13 Mazurana and Carlson, “The Girl Child and Armed Conflict.”

14 Mazurana and Carlson.

15 Sandra Whitworth, *Men, Militarism, and UN Peacekeeping: A Gendered Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007); Olivera Simic, “Does the Presence of Women Really Matter? Towards Combating Male Sexual Violence in Peacekeeping Operations,” *International Peacekeeping* 17, no. 2 (April 2010): 188–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533311003625084>.

them.<sup>16</sup> Little seems to have changed in this areas since our colleagues wrote the same in 2016.<sup>17</sup> The area of research on child protection and the gender of peacekeepers that has received the most attention is on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by peacekeepers, though research has not all been focused specifically on SEA against children.<sup>18</sup>

This presents an important gap in the available empirical evidence to support women in peacekeeping, which needs to be addressed through theoretically-informed research.<sup>19</sup> The UN has set ambitious targets to increase the proportion of women in uniformed components of peacekeeping missions.<sup>20</sup> However, current knowledge about the effect of approaching gender parity in peacekeeping missions is largely based on anecdotal evidence,<sup>21</sup> with some exceptions,<sup>22</sup> and essentialized conceptions of gender that see women as naturally more peaceful, cooperative, approachable, and so on.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of the effect of increased participation of women in peacekeeping, it is important to advocate for from a rights-based perspective, as women should have the equal right, both *de facto* and *de jure*, to serve in the security sector and on peacekeeping missions.<sup>24</sup>

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16 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>.

17 Roméo Dallaire, Shelly Whitman, and Sam Holland, "Innovation in the Prevention of the Use of Child Soldiers: Women in the Security Sector," *Prism* 6, no. 1 (2016): 165–77.

18 Simic, "Does the Presence of Women Really Matter?"; Julia Bleckner, "From Rhetoric to Reality: A Pragmatic Analysis of the Integration of Women into UN Peacekeeping Operations.," *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 17, no. 3–4 (2013): 337–60; Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, "Explaining Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peacekeeping Missions: The Role of Female Peacekeepers and Gender Equality in Contributing Countries," *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no. 1 (January 2016): 100–115, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343315615506>.

19 Louise Olsson and Theodora-Ismene Gizelis, "Advancing Gender and Peacekeeping Research.," *International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 4 (August 8, 2014): 520–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2014.946742>.

20 Department of Peace Operations, "Summary: Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028" (New York: United Nations, 2019), <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/uniformed-gender-parity-strategy-2018-2028-summary.pdf>.

21 Marta Ghittoni, Léa Lehouck, and Callum Watson, "Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study" (Geneva: DCAF, 2018), [https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Elsie\\_GenderReport\\_2018\\_Final.pdf](https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Elsie_GenderReport_2018_Final.pdf).

22 e.g., Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States*, *Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations* (Oxford ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

23 Sandra Biskupski-Mujanovic, "Smart Peacekeeping: Deploying Canadian Women for a Better Peace?," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 74, no. 3 (September 2019): 405–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702019874791>.

24 Ghittoni, Lehouck, and Watson, "Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study."

Given the currently low proportion of women in peacekeeping missions, in the security sector more generally, and the resistance from some to deploying more women in all roles, it is important to understand how gender matters in the conduct of peacekeeping in order to deploy women where they can be most effective and to strategically argue for their increased participation. Alongside greater empirical knowledge on the issue, there needs to be greater political will to deploy more women to missions, and to deploy them where needed, not just to the safest locations.<sup>25</sup>

Research that the Dallaire Initiative has previously conducted indicates that gender does have an impact on child protection activities carried out by peacekeepers. Female peacekeepers interviewed in the DRC by the Dallaire Initiative, were more aware of how their gender affected their role, were approached more by women and children, and were more likely to see girl child soldiers as more than just “wives” of male combatants. Similar observations were reported by female military chaplains from the UK, Australia, and Canada.<sup>26</sup> However, this evidence remains anecdotal, and like other studies on gender on peacekeeping it is not easy to separate out whether the peacekeeper’s gender itself was responsible, or that women who were trained on gender awareness and engaging civilians were more likely to be deployed into such roles.<sup>27</sup> Because of the common, gendered conception that women are more approachable than men for women and children, this may cause male peacekeepers to avoid interactions with women and children, leaving it to their female colleagues.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, the evidence suggests that gender does matter in child protection, as it does in other areas of peacekeeping implementation, but further research is needed to tease out the specifics in systematic ways. Both research and implementation in this area should be carried out with a view towards advancing women’s rights and improving the outcome of peacekeeping missions.

## SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION: THE DALLAIRE INITIATIVE’S APPROACH

The Dallaire Initiative views addressing the gendered dimensions of the recruitment and use of child soldiers as a key aspect of prevention, and as noted in the previous section

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25 Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, “Female Peacekeepers and Gender Balancing: Token Gestures or Informed Policymaking?,” *International Relations* 39, no. 4 (2013): 461–88.

26 Dallaire, Whitman, and Holland, “Innovation in the Prevention of the Use of Child Soldiers: Women in the Security Sector.”

27 Ghittoni, Lehouck, and Watson, “Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study.”

28 Sara Singleton and Anne Holohan, “The Case for ‘Trust Awareness’ as a Key Soft-Skill for Peacekeepers,” *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 3–4 (April 28, 2017): 224–45, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18754112-02103003>.



has carried out some research in this area before. The organization is currently focused on improving the consideration of gender in the organization's work through several paths. It is ensuring that its most experienced instructors, both women and men, are well-versed in teaching about gender, peacekeeping, and the prevention of recruitment. A much-improved training module focused on SGBV is currently under development, and a review of existing training materials to improve how they address gender is being conducted. Consideration of gender and SGBV in armed conflict is a central component of current training work in Nigeria and South Sudan. Finally, the Dallaire Initiative has several ongoing research projects focused on gender, peacekeeping, and child recruitment, one of which is discussed below.

The Dallaire Initiative is currently contributing to the implementation of VP 11 in three main areas of the implementation guidance: through actively promoting the participation of women in our training programs, through content on gendered dimensions of the recruitment and use of child soldiers and on SGBV and children in our training curriculum, and through research on gender and child protection in peacekeeping missions.

#### *Women's Participation in Dallaire Initiative Courses*

The Dallaire Initiative aims to increase the participation of women throughout its security sector training. While this is challenging due to the low number of women in most security sector organizations, and especially in pre-deployment trainings that the Dallaire Initiative takes part in as the participants are already chosen by the troop contributor country, in other basic and training-of-trainers courses the Dallaire Initiative actively works towards achieving a gender balance in its courses. As well, the organization has previously run courses for women in the security sector in Sierra Leone in 2014 and Uganda in 2015,<sup>29</sup> and there are plans for more women-only courses over the coming years.

The current low number of women in the security sector globally, and in UN missions specifically, makes reaching gender parity in the Dallaire Initiative's courses challenging. While global data on women in the security sector is difficult to compile, as of November 2019 the proportion of women in the uniformed component of the UN's large missions ranged from 2% to 10%.<sup>30</sup> Many of the Dallaire Initiative's training participants are from predeployment trainings, where the cohort of participants is already set by the unit being deployed and many units have few to no women. Despite these challenges, 11.9% of the Dallaire Initiative's training participants since the first Dallaire Initiative course in 2009 have

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29 Dallaire, Whitman, and Holland, "Innovation in the Prevention of the Use of Child Soldiers: Women in the Security Sector."

30 Department of Peace Operations, "Gender Imbalance per Mission - Nov 19" (New York: United Nations, 2019), [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/gender\\_statistics\\_november\\_2019.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/gender_statistics_november_2019.pdf).

been women. Among basic and training-of-trainers courses where the organization has more influence over who is chosen to participate, the proportion of women rises to 15.9%. This illustrates that determined work to increase the proportion of women being trained for peacekeeping work can succeed through outside pressure. However, further work is required to achieve gender parity in Dallaire Initiative training.

### *Training on Gender, SGBV, and Recruitment and Use*

The Dallaire Initiative is working to address gendered vulnerabilities through its security sector training. The training highlights first and foremost that girls are used in conflict in a variety of ways, not only for sexual purposes or other roles linked to gender stereotypes such as being a cook or domestic worker, but also as fighters, porters, etc. An increased understanding of the ways children are recruited and used helps security sector actors to identify at-risk children and work to prevent their recruitment in the first place. This is where it is critical to challenge male-centric perceptions of conflict and to understand the intentionality of recruiting girls as well as boys. Dallaire Initiative training also includes a module on sexual and gender-based violence that educates on the increased vulnerabilities of both boy and girl children after recruitment takes place. It is critical to understand how sexual and gender-based violence impacts the mental and physical health of children during their time within armed groups and once they are demobilized. From a security sector approach, it is critical to emphasize how the recruitment and use of children poses a challenge for the security sector specifically due to the tactical and strategic reasons for their use.

### *Research on Gender and Child Protection in Peacekeeping*

To help address the gap in knowledge on gender and peacekeeping that was previously discussed, the Dallaire Initiative received a four-year Insight Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) to research how the gender of peacekeepers affects the conduct of child protection, especially with respect to preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Research will be carried out with current and former peacekeepers, civil society actors, and people who were children during previous peacekeeping missions, with a focus on Sierra Leone, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Jordan. The outcomes of the research will be disseminated over the next three years in journal articles, policy briefings, blog posts, and other media, and through workshops and conferences with interested policy makers, security sector actors, civil society, and academics.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Based on the discussion in the literature review section, there are three main areas relevant for policy that should be addressed in support of VP 11 specifically, and for the

implementation of the Vancouver Principles in general. First, the current lack of rigorous empirical research on how women's participation in peacekeeping affects child protection activities in the mission should be addressed to improve the conduct of child protection. Second, the urgent need to prevent sexual and gender-based violence against children during armed conflict calls for ensuring that peacekeepers are adequately prepared to prevent SGBV during conflict and protect survivors. Finally, the continuing low participation of women in the uniformed components of most peacekeeping missions is an issue both of women's rights and of addressing the challenges facing peacekeeping missions. Below, some recommendations are made based on the previously discussed literature and the Dallaire Initiative's experience in these areas. They are primarily aimed at the UN and troop and police contributing countries.

This first area can be addressed through ongoing support of research by academics, civil society, and within the security sector on how gender matters in the conduct of peacekeeping. In addition to financial support for research projects, states that provide uniformed peacekeepers and the UN could consider facilitating access by researchers to peacekeepers for interviews, collecting gender-disaggregated data on where and in what roles peacekeepers serve, and including consideration of gendered experiences of peacekeepers in their monitoring, evaluation, and lessons learned processes.

The second area will require a mix of actions and policies, including better training for peacekeepers on how to understand, prevent, and respond to conflict related sexual violence against children, especially that perpetrated against child soldiers. In particular, it is critical that peacekeeping missions have sufficient personnel who are trained in how to properly interact with and care for child survivors of sexual violence, that these personnel are deployed to mission locations where they are most needed, and that missions have good relationships with civil society and international organization actors that provide trauma-sensitive demobilization, care, and reintegration for child soldiers who have survived sexual and gender-based violence. Changes to both accountability mechanisms in peacekeeping missions and the militarized culture that enables sexual exploitation and abuse are also urgently required and need sufficient political will, resources, and policy to address.

The third area has received more attention, with the UN establishing ambitious targets for increasing the participation of women in peacekeeping missions, and efforts such as the Elsie Initiative helping to address challenges in training and inclusion that will help deploy more uniformed women. These efforts need to be better premised on the normative basis for equal participation of women in peacekeeping, evidence-based on needed research discussed in the first gap, and addressing the exclusionary, masculine culture of most security sector

organizations that impedes the participation of women.<sup>31</sup>

## CONCLUSION

With the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security happening this October, it is an important time to take stock of the progress over the past two decades on addressing the gendered aspects of armed conflict and the inclusion of women in peacekeeping. While there has been considerable progress in research, policy, advocacy, and inclusion, much remains to be done, and this work is as urgent as ever. In the face of ongoing armed conflict, the climate crisis, great power competition, and renewed attacks on women's rights, urgent action will be needed if Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions are to be achieved in the next decade by 2030. Vancouver Principle 11 provides an important political commitment when it comes to women in peacekeeping and addressing the gendered dimensions of the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and the Dallaire Initiative's work on training, preventing sexual violence against children during armed conflict, and conducting research in this area provide important contributions to this agenda.

## NOTES

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. We want to thank the two anonymous peer reviewers and our colleagues at the Dallaire Initiative for their valuable suggestions to improve the article.

*Dustin Johnson is a Senior Research Officer at the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, and a doctoral student in peace and development research in the School of Global Studies at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. Allyssa Walsh is a Research Assistant at the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative.*

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31 Elisabeth Braw, "Norway's Radical Military Experiment," *Foreign Affairs*, January 19, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/norway/2017-01-19/norways-radical-military-experiment>; Ghittoni, Lehouck, and Watson, "Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study."

# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

Given that child soldier use continues to be a defining factor of most modern conflicts,<sup>4</sup> and recognizing the vast number of children currently living in conflict situations,<sup>5</sup> 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

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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.<sup>6</sup>*

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

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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](https://childrenandarmed-conflict.un.org/publications/ParisPrinciples_EN.pdf).

populations.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> As the recruitment and use of child soldiers is seen in most armed conflicts,<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> The ultimate goal of early warning is to prevent an issue from occurring through facilitating preventative action by accountable actors.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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

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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.<sup>13</sup> 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,<sup>14</sup> 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,<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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."

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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](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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> It is well documented that child soldiering remains a pervasive problem in most modern conflict<sup>19</sup> and that the phenomenon of the recruitment of children into armed conflict is not isolated to one part of the globe.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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.”<sup>22</sup> Despite increased attention to child soldiering in recent years, prevention of recruitment and use is still not a

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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.<sup>23</sup> 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".<sup>24</sup> 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".<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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

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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](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,<sup>27</sup> proliferation of light arms,<sup>28</sup> limited or non-existent child protection processes in refugee camps,<sup>29</sup> youth bulges<sup>30</sup> and a state's history of violations of international humanitarian law, international human rights and the UN's six grave violations against children.<sup>31</sup> 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)<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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)

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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](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”.<sup>35</sup> 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.

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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”.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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

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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](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)<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

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.<sup>41</sup> 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

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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.*



# DATA-DRIVEN PEACEKEEPING AND THE VANCOUVER PRINCIPLES:

## Towards Improved Monitoring and Reporting for Grave Violations Against Children

Marion Laurence

Centre for International Policy Studies,  
University of Ottawa

### ABSTRACT

This article examines the UN's move toward 'data-driven' peacekeeping and its implications for the Vancouver Principles, especially implementation of states' monitoring and reporting commitments as outlined in Principle 6. I argue that data-driven peacekeeping presents both opportunities and challenges when it comes to monitoring and reporting. On the one hand, it can improve the quantity and quality of the information available about the recruitment and use of child soldiers. It can thereby foster improvements in responsiveness, performance, and accountability, both within peace operations and among other stakeholders. Yet data-driven peacekeeping also comes with challenges. These include data literacy and 'buy-in' among personnel on the ground, concerns about privacy and confidentiality, and political sensitivities around monitoring and reporting. Together these issues highlight the degree to which the Vancouver Principles are interconnected and mutually reinforcing – each affects implementation of the others, and none can be fully operationalized in isolation.

## INTRODUCTION

This article examines a new trend in UN peacekeeping: the UN's move toward systematic data analysis in peace operations. The push to make peacekeeping more 'data-driven' responds to a variety of longstanding problems. Peacekeepers often struggle to achieve core objectives – like protecting vulnerable populations, including children – because they must manage risks and make decisions without access to reliable information.<sup>1</sup> At the strategic level, the UN also struggles to aggregate data effectively.<sup>2</sup> This makes it difficult for UN officials, member states, and partner organizations to systematically monitor and assess the performance of UN missions. The UN is committed to solving these problems by improving its capacity to gather high quality data, manage it effectively, and make sound decisions based on that information.<sup>3</sup>

What implications does this shift have for implementation of the Vancouver Principles? I focus on states' monitoring and reporting commitments as described in Principle 6, and I argue that the UN's move toward systematic data analysis presents both opportunities and challenges.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, it can improve the quantity and quality of information available about the recruitment and use of child soldiers. In doing so, it can foster improvements in responsiveness, training, accountability, and overall performance, both within peace operations and more broadly. Yet data-driven peacekeeping also comes with challenges. These include data literacy and 'buy-in' among personnel on the ground, concerns about privacy and confidentiality, and political sensitivities around monitoring and reporting. Together these issues highlight the degree to which the Vancouver Principles are interconnected and mutually reinforcing – each affects implementation of the others, and none can be fully operationalized in isolation. Peacekeepers themselves play an important dual role as both gatherers and consumers of information.

The article proceeds as follows. First, I discuss existing monitoring and reporting practices in UN peace operations as they relate to the recruitment and use of child soldiers. This includes

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- 1 Lauren Spink, "Data-Driven Protection: Linking Threat Analysis to Planning in Un Peacekeeping Operations," (Washington: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2018), 8-9.
  - 2 Cedric de Coning and Emery Brusset, "Towards a Comprehensive Results-Based Reporting and Performance Assessment Framework for Un Peacekeeping Operations," (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2018), 18.
  - 3 Phillip Shetler-Jones, "Intelligence in Integrated Un Peacekeeping Missions: The Joint Mission Analysis Centre," *International Peacekeeping* 15, no. 4 (2008): 517; United Nations, "Action for Peacekeeping: Declaration of Shared Commitments on Un Peacekeeping Operations," <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a4p-declaration-en.pdf>; United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 2436 S/Res/2436 (2018)," [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2436\(2018\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2436(2018)).
  - 4 Government of Canada, "Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers," Government of Canada, [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/human\\_rights-droits\\_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-english.pdf](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-english.pdf).

a short overview of peacekeepers' role vis-à-vis the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations Against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict (MRM).<sup>5</sup> In the following sections, I identify points of overlap between data-driven peacekeeping and implementation of the Vancouver Principles, reviewing the opportunities and challenges that systematic data analysis creates for implementation of Principle 6 (Monitoring and Reporting). I conclude with a brief discussion of policy implications. The article presents evidence gathered through a review of primary sources, especially UN and government documents, and a variety of secondary sources, including scholarly articles and grey literature. I use qualitative methods – primarily documentary analysis – to identify relevant information about UN monitoring and reporting practices. This includes information about their relationship to the Vancouver Principles, and to issues relating to child soldiers more generally.

## MONITORING, REPORTING, AND DATA-DRIVEN PEACEKEEPING

When the UN Security Council created the MRM, it explicitly stressed the responsibility of United Nations peacekeeping missions to “ensure a coordinated response to CAAC [children and armed conflict] concerns and to monitor and report to the Secretary-General.”<sup>6</sup> The MRM allows for the systematic collection of accurate, timely, objective, and reliable information about grave violations committed against children in conflict settings.<sup>7</sup> As intended, UN peacekeepers currently make a variety of contributions to the UN-led MRM. In many conflict settings, they facilitate monitoring and reporting by third parties by providing a “reassuring presence.” In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) note that it is easier to monitor and report on human rights violations in areas where blue helmets are present.<sup>8</sup> Peacekeepers also make direct contributions to the MRM. Contemporary peace operations usually include designated child protection advisors (CPAs), and sometimes Child Protection sections. These personnel are charged with gathering and verifying much of the information submitted to MRM Taskforces. Other actors within a mission, like Military Observers, Human Rights units, and Joint Mission Analysis Centers (JMACs) may also gather important information about the Six Grave Violations against

5 *The MRM monitors six grave violations against children in conflict settings: killing and maiming of children; recruiting or using child soldiers; attacks on schools or hospitals; rape or other grave sexual violence; abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access for children. Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations Against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, “Mrm Basics,”* [http://www.mrmtools.org/mrm/mrmtk\\_1115.htm](http://www.mrmtools.org/mrm/mrmtk_1115.htm).

6 *United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 1612 S/Res/1612 (2005),”* [https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/SecurityCouncilResolution1612\\_en.pdf](https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/SecurityCouncilResolution1612_en.pdf).

7 *Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations Against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, “Mrm Basics”.*

8 *Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, “Gettting It Done and Doing It Right: Monitoring & Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict,”* (New York: Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, January 2008), 15.

children.<sup>9</sup> This information is collated through the MRM and used to develop on-the-ground responses, provide services to children, and engage with parties to a conflict in a way that promotes accountability and compliance with international norms, laws, and standards.<sup>10</sup>

These are important contributions. They confirm that UN peacekeepers are actively involved in current efforts to monitor and report on the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Problems remain, however. Many of these problems are symptomatic of monitoring and reporting practices in peacekeeping more broadly. For instance, most contemporary peace operations are multidimensional; they are responsible for a wide range of tasks that require cooperation among different mission components as well as coordination with UN country teams and external partners.<sup>11</sup> The complexity of these missions – and the sheer number of actors involved – mean that effective analysis, coordination, and planning are an ongoing challenge.<sup>12</sup> In its 2014 report, the Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation in UN Peacekeeping found that peace operations frequently suffer from “data sclerosis,” which impedes information-driven decision making. According to the Panel, the way that data is collected and managed must change so that it can be “easily searched, queried against, measured, tracked over time, and visualized for better reporting, analysis, and decision-making support.”<sup>13</sup> In 2015 the High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations reached similar conclusions, calling for an overhaul of the UN’s existing information and analysis structures for peace operations. It specifically observed that monitoring and reporting of human rights issues is “dispersed and fragmented;” the Panel argued that missions should be streamlining monitoring and reporting requirements in order to “ensure coherence and avoid duplication of effort.”<sup>14</sup> In short, the complex, multifaceted nature of UN peace operations makes it difficult for peacekeepers to manage and synthesize data effectively. This includes data about the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

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9 *Ibid.*, 19. See note 5 above for a list of the six Grave Violations.

10 Government of Canada, “Vancouver Principles Implementation Guidance - Chapter 6 - Monitoring and Reporting,” <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/vancouver-principles/introduction/monitoring-reporting.html>.

11 United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, “United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines,” (New York: United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2008), 23-24, 69-70.

12 Spink, “Data-Driven Protection: Linking Threat Analysis to Planning in Un Peacekeeping Operations,” 11.

13 Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation in UN Peacekeeping, “Performance Peacekeeping,” (New York: United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, 2014), 8.

14 High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, “Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People,” (New York: United Nations, 2015), 70.

These types of problems have a negative impact on monitoring and reporting for the Six Grave Violations against children. MRM country Taskforces are UN-led, but they must coordinate with a wide variety of NGOs, local communities, and other stakeholders.<sup>15</sup> This sometimes leads to complaints that country Taskforces are “shrouded in secrecy” – that they do not maintain good working relationships with all of their civil society partners.<sup>16</sup> Operating in conflict settings also means that MRM Taskforces tend to operate in places that are “data poor,” meaning that data sources are limited and there is too little data available.<sup>17</sup> Some critics argue that MRM data is incomplete and inaccurate because of access restrictions and an excessive reliance on information supplied by UN actors.<sup>18</sup> In some cases, though, data is “anecdotal and fragmented” because of data collection methods; many of the forms and databases that Taskforces use are “not designed to collect information that can then be used for statistical trend analysis, thus limiting the potential uses of this information.”<sup>19</sup> In short, existing MRM practices yield useful information about the recruitment and use of child soldiers, but significant gaps remain.

Given these issues, it is not surprising that member states included a commitment to improved monitoring and reporting in the Vancouver Principles.<sup>20</sup> When peacekeepers conduct effective monitoring and reporting, they “provide valuable data that can be used to inform mission-level decision-making on actions to prevent the further recruitment and use of child soldiers, support investigations, inform sanctions, and hold perpetrators to account.”<sup>21</sup> They already play an important role in monitoring and reporting grave violations against children in conflict settings, but much more can be done to improve the accuracy, consistency, and impact of that work.<sup>22</sup> The monitoring and reporting aspects of the Vancouver Principles

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- 15 *Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations Against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict*, “Mrm Basics”.
- 16 *Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict*, “Getting It Done and Doing It Right: Monitoring & Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict,” 11; Katy Barnett and Anna Jefferys, “Full of Promise: How the Un’s Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism Can Better Protect Children,” (London: Humanitarian Practice Network, September 2008), 14.
- 17 *NYU Center on International Cooperation Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UN Peacebuilding Support Office*, “Data for Peace and Security: Report of the Practitioners Workshop on Harvesting Best Practices and Building a Community of Practice,” (New York: NYU Center on International Cooperation 2019), 13.
- 18 Barnett and Jefferys, “Full of Promise: How the Un’s Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism Can Better Protect Children,” 14-16.
- 19 *Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict*, “Getting It Done and Doing It Right: Monitoring & Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict,” 9.
- 20 *Government of Canada*, “Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers”.
- 21 “Vancouver Principles Implementation Guidance - Chapter 6 - Monitoring and Reporting”.
- 22 *Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict*, “Getting It Done and Doing It Right: Monitoring & Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict,” 20.

come alongside a broader UN effort to make peacekeeping more ‘data-driven’ – to improve peacekeepers’ capacity to gather, analyze, and make decisions based on high quality data.<sup>23</sup> I use the term data-driven peacekeeping to describe a range of tools and practices intended to improve the quality and quantity of data available to peacekeepers, and to those who fund, staff, and authorize UN missions. It also refers to changes in decision making based on that data.<sup>24</sup> In the next two sections, I ask: what implications does the move toward data-driven peacekeeping have for the monitoring and reporting commitments outlined in Vancouver Principle 6? I focus on potential synergies first, then I discuss challenges and limitations.

## POTENTIAL SYNERGIES

The move toward data-driven peacekeeping is multifaceted, but there are two areas where it can make a particularly significant contribution to implementation of Vancouver Principle 6. First, the rise of systematic data analysis is closely linked with attempts to leverage new information and communication technology (ICT) in UN peace operations. One of the best examples of this is the Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE) database. SAGE is a web-based database system that allows mission personnel to log incidents, events, and activities.<sup>25</sup> SAGE could provide peacekeepers with valuable new tools for collating data about the recruitment and use of child soldiers – information about their numbers and location, their approximate age, the relative distribution of girls and boys, and details about which armed groups are recruiting children and how. These are just a few examples. Information like this can change daily, and peacekeepers are uniquely positioned to monitor and report on these rapid changes. They also stand to benefit from this data insofar as it improves situational awareness. The other data-driven initiative that can advance implementation of the Vancouver Principles is the Comprehensive Performance Assessment System (CPAS). The goal of CPAS is to evaluate whole-of-mission performance and strengthen accountability through data collection and analysis.<sup>26</sup> Again, CPAS could become a valuable tool for synthesizing data about child soldiers, data that can then be used to improve decision making at the strategic level. Together, SAGE and CPAS can enhance monitoring and reporting on the Six Grave Violations against children by giving peacekeepers and other stakeholders access to information that

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23 United Nations Security Council, “Resolution 2436 S/Res/2436 (2018)”.

24 This definition draws on Duursma and Karlsrud (2019), but it has been expanded to include actors and decisions made beyond the field level. Allard Duursma and John Karlsrud, “Predictive Peacekeeping: Strengthening Predictive Analysis in Un Peace Operations,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 8, no. 1 (2019): 2.

25 *Ibid.*, 3.

26 United Nations, “Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations at the Un Security Council Thematic Debate on Peacekeeping Reform and Performance, 8349th Meeting,” <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/under-secretary-general-peacekeeping-operations-un-security-council-thematic-debate-peacekeeping>.

is more accurate, timely, and comprehensive. Much of this information can also be used to improve planning, early warning, prevention, training, and the development of best practices, all of which are listed as priorities by endorsers of the Vancouver Principles.<sup>27</sup>

SAGE was first launched in 2014, but its rollout and training for field personnel are ongoing. Peacekeepers – including military, police, and civilian personnel – can use SAGE to record outbreaks of violence, but also events like troop movements, hijackings, abductions, and protests. Incidents can be categorized by type, geographical location, number and ethnicity of victims, affiliation of perpetrators, and so on.<sup>28</sup> Different parts of a mission (eg. human rights units or child protection sections) can also insert comments that are only visible to their section. While SAGE is primarily described as a tool to improve situational awareness for peacekeepers, it is also valuable from a monitoring and reporting point of view. It helps to overcome many of the data management problems that afflict UN peace operations by standardizing data collection procedures, providing a centralized tool for organizing information, and making it easier to identify trends across time and space.<sup>29</sup>

Configuring SAGE so that more peacekeepers – including those responsible for daily patrols and other routine duties – can easily share data about child soldiers would be an important step toward implementation of Vancouver Principle 6. Peacekeepers are a mission’s “eyes and ears on the ground,” and they sometimes operate in areas that NGOs and other actors cannot access for security reasons.<sup>30</sup> This is significant given that the Secretary-General’s Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict routinely warns that access restrictions prevent the verification of information, making it impossible to report on “the full scale of violations committed.”<sup>31</sup> This means that blue helmets are often “best positioned to provide an early alert to trained MRM actors of suspected violations.”<sup>32</sup> SAGE could assist them in this role by, for example, helping them systematically record the location of checkpoints staffed by children, along with any changes in their number, location, affiliation, or activities. Having this data in a centralized, easy-to-access database would be an important step forward. If SAGE helps

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27 Government of Canada, “Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers”.

28 See Duursma and Karlsrud (2018, 2019) for a more detailed description of SAGE. Duursma and Karlsrud, “Predictive Peacekeeping: Strengthening Predictive Analysis in Un Peace Operations,” 3-4; “Predictive Peacekeeping: Opportunities and Challenges,” (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2018).

29 “Predictive Peacekeeping: Strengthening Predictive Analysis in Un Peace Operations,” 4.

30 Government of Canada, “Vancouver Principles Implementation Guidance - Chapter 6 - Monitoring and Reporting”.

31 United Nations, “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General a/73/907 - S/2019/509,” (New York: United Nations, 2019), 1.

32 Government of Canada, “Vancouver Principles Implementation Guidance - Chapter 6 - Monitoring and Reporting”.

peacekeepers gather better data and synthesize it in new ways, it will supplement existing information and make a significant contribution to monitoring and reporting. It could also make important contributions to early warning, protection, and prevention – goals outlined in Vancouver Principles 3, 7 and 8 – by helping peacekeepers predict where and when they are likely to encounter child soldiers, or allowing them to pinpoint times and locations where recruitment is taking place.

Attempts to monitor the effectiveness of peace operations – including their work on child protection – have long been constrained by the UN’s failure to systematically organize, analyze, and share information within the organization.<sup>33</sup> The current system involves several independent processes, which serve “different constituencies and a range of purposes.”<sup>34</sup> This fragmentation undermines the coherence of monitoring and reporting. It also inhibits evidence-based decision making because it prevents states, peacekeepers, and UN officials from systematically tracking a mission’s progress toward mandate implementation.<sup>35</sup> To address these problems, the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) has introduced CPAS. To date, it has been launched in eight missions and the goal is to have all missions using CPAS by July 2020.<sup>36</sup> The system is not designed for monitoring and reporting at the operational level, but it is intended to help DPO assess the overall effectiveness of peacekeeping.<sup>37</sup> Specifically, CPAS will use “robust monitoring and analysis” to support “strategic adjustments to planning and decision making.”<sup>38</sup> Implementation of CPAS will involve developing key performance indicators and means of verification, setting up a headquarters-level dashboard to compare substantive performance within and across missions, and creating a database that links to existing data sources and tools to fill information gaps.<sup>39</sup> Detailed public information about how CPAS will function remains scarce, so potential synergies with the Vancouver Principles remain more speculative than for SAGE. Nevertheless, it seems very likely that – as the rollout

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33 Cedric de Coning, “Are Un Peace Operations Effective?,” *The Global Observatory, International Peace Institute*, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/11/are-un-peace-operations-effective/>.

34 de Coning and Brusset, “Towards a Comprehensive Results-Based Reporting and Performance Assessment Framework for Un Peacekeeping Operations,” 6.

35 Aditi Gorur, “The Need for Monitoring and Evaluation in Advancing Protection of Civilians,” *The Global Observatory, International Peace Institute*, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/10/the-need-for-monitoring-evaluation-in-advancing-protection-of-civilians/>.

36 United Nations, “Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations at the Un Security Council Thematic Debate on Peacekeeping Reform and Performance, 8349th Meeting”; United Nations Evaluation Group, “Vacancy Announcement - Information Technology Consultant (Comprehensive Performance Assessment System - Department of Peace Operations),” <http://www.unevaluation.org/vacancies/detail/775>.

37 Gorur, “The Need for Monitoring and Evaluation in Advancing Protection of Civilians”.

38 United Nations Evaluation Group, “Vacancy Announcement - Information Technology Consultant (Comprehensive Performance Assessment System - Department of Peace Operations)”.

39 *Ibid.*



of CPAS continues – it will foster the growth of new, mission-level processes for collecting, analyzing, and sharing data. It should also improve states’ and DPO’s capacity to track long-term trends in UN peace operations.

CPAS has the potential to advance implementation of the Vancouver Principles – especially Principle 6 – by promoting better data collection practices and by integrating performance-related data. This would make it easier to track progress over time on issues like child protection.<sup>40</sup> For example, headquarters-level comparisons across missions could help identify patterns showing which types of child protection programming are most effective, or which approach to DDR is most likely to prevent the re-recruitment of child soldiers.<sup>41</sup> CPAS data could also be leveraged to identify best practices and update training curricula, goals outlined in Vancouver Principles 5 and 16.<sup>42</sup> It is important to note, however, that these contributions will depend on whether CPAS data includes information about child protection in general, and about the recruitment of use of child soldiers, specifically.

## CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The UN’s move toward data-driven peacekeeping also comes with challenges that have a direct bearing on implementation of the Vancouver Principles. These include data literacy and ‘buy-in’ among personnel on the ground, concerns about privacy and confidentiality, and political sensitivities around monitoring and reporting. These obstacles can all be overcome. Still, doing so will require a concerted effort on the part of member states, UN officials, and other concerned stakeholders. Member states, in particular, will have to rise above self-interest and deficiencies of political will to realize synergies between data-driven peacekeeping and the Vancouver Principles.

In order to be useful for monitoring and reporting, data needs to be gathered according to procedures that are rigorous and consistently applied. It also needs to be stored in ways that are conducive to systematic analysis if it is going to help achieve related goals like early warning, prevention, and better planning at the strategic and operational levels (Vancouver Principles 3, 8, and 2).<sup>43</sup> To date, this has not always been the case for information about the recruitment and use of child soldiers, with some observers claiming that data is biased or inaccurate as a

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40 Gorur, “The Need for Monitoring and Evaluation in Advancing Protection of Civilians”; Security Council Report, “May 2019 Monthly Forecast,” Security Council Report, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2019-05/peacekeeping-2.php>.

41 United Nations Evaluation Group, “Vacancy Announcement - Information Technology Consultant (Comprehensive Performance Assessment System - Department of Peace Operations)”.

42 Government of Canada, “Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers”.

43 *Ibid.*

result.<sup>44</sup> This may occur because of technological problems or access restrictions, but limited “data literacy” among field personnel also fuels concerns about “dirty” data.<sup>45</sup> Insufficient data literacy is widespread because the UN’s force generation and recruitment practices do not guarantee that peace operations are staffed by personnel with the necessary skills, nor does existing training provide sufficient guidance.<sup>46</sup> If blue helmets are going to collect reliable information about the recruitment and use of child soldiers, they need clear guidance telling them when and how to do so. This means helping them become proficient with databases like SAGE, but also helping them acquire the skills needed to identify key omissions or sources of data bias.<sup>47</sup> Providing this type of training – and working to streamline monitoring and reporting processes – could also increase ‘buy in’ among field personnel by alleviating concerns that data entry will become an additional burden on top of existing reporting requirements.<sup>48</sup>

Gathering and storing sensitive information – like data about the activities of non-state armed groups – always comes with risks around privacy and confidentiality. Improvements in monitoring and reporting will come at considerable human cost if UN missions do not collect, store, and use that data responsibly. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), for example, armed groups have launched retaliatory attacks on individuals and communities who are thought to be sharing information with peacekeepers.<sup>49</sup> These concerns are magnified when dealing with information about children, and they loom even larger for data about child soldiers, a population that is especially vulnerable to stigma, reprisals, and other types of physical, social, and psychological harm.<sup>50</sup> The existing MRM process takes these risks

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44 Barnett and Jefferys, “Full of Promise: How the Un’s Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism Can Better Protect Children,” 14-16; Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, “Getting It Done and Doing It Right: Monitoring & Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict,” 9, 23-24.

45 NYU Center on International Cooperation Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UN Peacebuilding Support Office, “Data for Peace and Security: Report of the Practitioners Workshop on Harvesting Best Practices and Building a Community of Practice,” 8.

46 Spink, “Data-Driven Protection: Linking Threat Analysis to Planning in Un Peacekeeping Operations,” 24.

47 NYU Center on International Cooperation Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UN Peacebuilding Support Office, “Data for Peace and Security: Report of the Practitioners Workshop on Harvesting Best Practices and Building a Community of Practice,” 13.

48 Spink, “Data-Driven Protection: Linking Threat Analysis to Planning in Un Peacekeeping Operations,” 31.

49 Charles T. Hunt, “All Necessary Means to What Ends? The Unintended Consequences of the ‘Robust Turn’ in Un Peace Operations,” *International Peacekeeping* 24, no. 1 (2017): 115-16; John Karlsrud, “Peacekeeping 4.0: Harnessing the Potential of Big Data, Social Media, and Cyber Technologies,” in *Cyberspace and International Relations: Theory, Prospects and Challenges*, ed. Jan-Frederik Kremer and Benedikt Müller (Berlin: Springer, 2014), 150.

50 Theresa S. Betancourt et al., “Past Horrors, Present Struggles: The Role of Stigma in the Association between War Experiences and Psychosocial Adjustments among Former Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone,” *Social Science & Medicine* 70, no. 1 (2010): 17; Human Rights Watch, “Coercion and Intimidations of Child Soldiers to Participate in Violence,” Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org>.

into account; all MRM activities are supposed to uphold the best interest of the child as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with “due consideration” for the security and confidentiality of witnesses, children who have suffered grave violations, and other informants.<sup>51</sup> Still, privacy dilemmas can take unexpected forms when dealing with new technology or changes in reporting requirements. For example, SAGE and CPAS data could significantly improve monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children, but the UN has already been the target of cyber-attacks. Strong rules are needed to determine who will have access to sensitive information about child soldiers, how it will be stored, and what security measures will be used to ensure the integrity of that data.<sup>52</sup> Responsible planning and careful training are essential to ensure that peacekeepers’ monitoring and reporting – or the activities that follow from it – do not place local informants and other stakeholders at risk.

Finally, peacekeepers and UN officials must contend with political sensitivities around monitoring and reporting. Some proponents of statistical data analysis believe it can depoliticize contentious issues by supplying decision makers with objective evidence.<sup>53</sup> Still, monitoring grave violations is a normatively charged issue, and parties to a conflict may resist the UN’s attempts to gather reliable information about their treatment of children. Host states sometimes invoke concerns about state sovereignty and non-interference to prevent peacekeepers from using all the data gathering tools at their disposal. The government of South Sudan, for example, has resisted the deployment of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for surveillance purposes, arguing that they could be used to ‘spy’ on local security forces.<sup>54</sup> This type of resistance creates significant obstacles from a monitoring and reporting point of view, especially given that Government Security Forces in South Sudan have a history of recruiting and using child soldiers.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, respecting the wishes of host states and focusing more on grave violations by non-state actors would undermine the MRM’s commitment to impartiality and objectivity. The MRM is committed to gathering, “without

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*org/news/2008/04/16/coercion-and-intimidation-child-soldiers-participate-violence; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, “Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers,” United Nations, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Reintegration-brochure-layout.pdf>.*

51 *Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations Against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, “Mrm Basics”.*

52 *Duursma and Karlsrud, “Predictive Peacekeeping: Opportunities and Challenges,”* 3.

53 *NYU Center on International Cooperation Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UN Peacebuilding Support Office, “Data for Peace and Security: Report of the Practitioners Workshop on Harvesting Best Practices and Building a Community of Practice,”* 8.

54 *Tito Justin, “South Sudan: Un Doesn’t Need Drones, Attack Helicopters,” VOA News <https://www.voanews.com/africa/south-sudan-un-doesnt-need-drones-attack-helicopters>.*

55 *United Nations, “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General a/73/907 - S/2019/509,”* 23-24.

prejudice, information on violations committed by all parties to a conflict.”<sup>56</sup> These are not the only political sensitivities that need to be managed. Using systematic data analysis to monitor grave violations against children may also expose shortcomings on the part of UN peacekeepers themselves. Evidence of underperformance could become a source of friction with troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs and PCCs), especially if it is used to assign blame for inaction or wrongdoing.<sup>57</sup> Again, this underlines the fact that peacekeepers have a dual role to play. They are charged with gathering information, but also with acting on it. These political challenges can all be addressed, but not without a concerted effort on the part of member states, UN officials, and peacekeepers themselves.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. These findings illustrate the importance of appropriate training for blue helmets. Member states, the UN Secretariat, TCCs and PCCs, and other stakeholders will have to consider the role of data literacy within pre-deployment, induction, and in-mission training for all peacekeepers. This should likely include training in how use SAGE effectively and how to handle sensitive information responsibly.
2. Cooperation will be required between member states, the Secretariat, Heads-of-Mission, and other interested parties to ensure that tools for gathering and analyzing peacekeeping data are configured to support implementation of the Vancouver Principles, including the monitoring and reporting duties outlined in Principle 6. This will include attention to whether Mission Information Requirements (IRs), Mission Intelligence Acquisition Plans, and Commanders Critical Information Requirements (CCIRs) include information about the recruitment and use of child soldiers. It will also involve configuring SAGE to ensure that field personnel can record this information as a matter of course and access it in real-time to inform decision-making.
3. Cooperation will be required between member states, the Secretariat, and other key stakeholders to determine how the Comprehensive Performance Assessment System (CPAS) can best be leveraged to advance implementation of the Vancouver Principles.
4. Alleviating barriers to effective monitoring and reporting, including political concerns about systematic data analysis, will require a concerted effort on the part of member states and other interested parties. These efforts might include dialogue with concerned states and other stakeholders, advocating transparency in UN data collection practices,

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56 *Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations Against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, “Mrm Basics”.*

57 Adam Day, “Can Data Save Un Peacekeeping?,” *World Politics Review*, <https://www.worldpolitics-review.com/articles/27479/can-data-save-u-n-peacekeeping>.

and promoting awareness of the risks associated with data breaches and violations of privacy, especially for children and other vulnerable populations.

## CONCLUSION

Existing data about grave violations against children in conflict settings is often fragmented and incomplete.<sup>58</sup> The UN's efforts to make peacekeeping more 'data-driven' can advance implementation of the Vancouver Principles – especially the monitoring and reporting duties outlined in Principle 6 – by supplying more comprehensive information about the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Initiatives like SAGE and CPAS can help by standardizing data collection procedures, providing centralized tools for organizing information, and making it easier to identify trends across time and space.<sup>59</sup> Challenges remain, however. New data streams will only be reliable if peacekeepers possess the skills and capacity to collect reliable information. Clear rules and training are also needed to address concerns about privacy, confidentiality, and the integrity of data.<sup>60</sup> Finally, proponents of the Vancouver Principles and systematic data analysis will have to manage political sensitivities around monitoring and reporting, including resistance from host governments, non-state armed groups, and potentially from TCCs and PCCs. These findings highlight the fact that peacekeepers play a dual role as both gatherers and consumers of information. They can be instrumental in efforts to improve monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children, and they can then leverage that information to achieve related goals. This dynamic underlines the extent to which the Vancouver Principles – especially goals like early warning, protection, prevention, and training – are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded in part by Global Affairs Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Government of Canada, through the International Policy Ideas Challenge.

*Marion Laurence is a Research Associate at the Centre for International Policy Studies at the University of Ottawa.*

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58 *Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict*, "Getting It Done and Doing It Right: Monitoring & Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict," 9.

59 *Duursma and Karlsrud*, "Predictive Peacekeeping: Strengthening Predictive Analysis in Un Peace Operations," 4.

60 "Predictive Peacekeeping: Opportunities and Challenges," 3.

# THE DETENTION OF CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF ARMED CONFLICT

Jo Becker

Human Rights Watch,  
New York, USA

## ABSTRACT

In recent years, governments have increasingly detained children for suspected association with non-state armed groups, particularly in conflicts involving violent extremist groups. Between 2012 and 2017, the United Nations recorded a five-fold increase in the detention of children in armed conflict.<sup>1</sup> At any given time, thousands of children are imprisoned for suspected association with armed groups, often without charge and in inhuman and degrading conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General (A/68/878–S/2014/339)” (New York: United Nations, May 15, 2014), [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=a/68/878](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=a/68/878); United Nations, “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General (A/73/907–S/2019/509)” (New York: United Nations, June 20, 2019), [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2019/509&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2019/509&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC).

According to the UN, at least 15 countries detained children in the context of armed conflict in 2018, including Afghanistan, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Philippines, Somalia, Sudan, and Syria.<sup>2</sup> Children are most likely to be detained in conflicts involving violent armed extremist groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS), Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and the Taliban.<sup>3</sup>

International law prohibits the use of children in hostilities or any recruitment of children by armed groups.<sup>4</sup> Children, as victims of that crime, are to be provided with rehabilitation and reintegration, and should not be criminalized or imprisoned for their association with armed groups.<sup>5</sup> In many armed conflicts, governments have upheld this obligation to provide children with assistance for their recovery and reintegration. The UN reports that since 2000, at least 130,000 child soldiers have been released or demobilized from armed forces and armed groups and benefited from rehabilitation assistance.<sup>6</sup>

In the drive to counter violent extremist groups, however, many governments have abandoned their obligation to provide rehabilitation and reintegration, and instead have adopted punitive approaches towards children that include detention and unnecessary criminal prosecution and imprisonment. Since 2001, at least 140 countries have adopted or amended counter-terrorism legislation that often fails to distinguish between adults and children, includes overly broad definitions of terrorism, and imposes harsh penalties.<sup>7</sup> Of particular concern, some states have criminalized mere association with terrorist or armed extremist groups, contrary to standards recommending that children should not be prosecuted solely for association with armed groups, including terrorist organizations.<sup>8</sup> As

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2 *United Nations, "Report of the Secretary-General 2019."*

3 *United Nations, "Report of the Secretary-General 2019."*

4 *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, adopted May 25, 2000, entered into force, February 12, 2002. Currently, 170 countries are party to the Optional Protocol*

5 *Ibid.*, art. 7; see also UNICEF, "The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups" (New York: United Nations, February 2007), paras. 3.6 and 8.7, [https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/ParisPrinciples\\_EN.pdf](https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/ParisPrinciples_EN.pdf).

6 OSRSG CAAC, "Lessons Learned and Best Practices," Office of the SRSR for CAAC, n.d., <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/lessons-learned-and-best-practices/>.

7 Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, "Impact of Measures to Address Terrorism and Violent Extremism on Civic Space and the Rights of Civil Society Actors and Human Rights Defenders," Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism (New York: United Nations, March 1, 2019), para. 3, <https://digitalibrary.un.org/record/3802009>.

8 In its 2019 General Comment on administration of justice, the Committee on the Rights of the Child stated that states "should refrain from charging and prosecuting them for expressions of opinion or for mere association with a non-State armed group, including those designated as terrorist groups." CRC/C/JGC/24, September 18, 2019. The Paris Principles also recommend against prosecuting or

a consequence, children are detained and sometimes prosecuted not for violent criminal acts, but for mere association with violent extremist groups, despite the illegality of their recruitment.

This article argues that the increasing detention of children in the context of armed conflict is both contrary to international law and counter-productive for preventing future violence. It identifies specific steps that peacekeepers and other stakeholders can take to reduce the detention of children and ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration.

Although non-state actors also detain children, as hostages, for sexual exploitation, as punishment for refusal to join their forces, for ransom, and other purposes, the focus of this article is on detention by government forces.

## APPREHENSION OF CHILDREN AND ABUSES IN DETENTION

Security forces apprehend children during military operations or on the battlefield, and round them up during mass security sweeps, at checkpoints, or during house raids. Studies have found that many of these children may have little to do with armed groups, but may be detained because they appear to be of fighting age, come from communities perceived to be sympathetic to the opposition, or have family members that have been involved with armed groups.<sup>9</sup>

Once apprehended, children may be detained in military prisons, military barracks or camps, intelligence facilities, juvenile detention centers, or makeshift centers run by military or government-aligned militias.<sup>10</sup> Once detained, children may be subjected to coercive interrogation or torture, often to obtain confessions, and to other abuses and violations of due process. Children are often held without charge, with no access to legal assistance, or opportunities to appear before a judge. Conditions of detention typically fall far short of international standards, and may be overcrowded, lack basic sanitation and health care, and deny children access to their families, education, and recreation.

Multiple research studies have documented serious abuses against children detained in the context of armed conflict. In Iraq, for example, authorities have arrested thousands of children for alleged affiliation with ISIS, used torture to coerce confessions, and convicted

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*punishing children solely for association with armed forces or armed groups (Principle 8.7).*

9 see Siobhan O’Neil and Kato van Broeckhoven, eds., *Cradled By Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 2018), [https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6409/Cradled\\_by\\_Conflict.pdf](https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6409/Cradled_by_Conflict.pdf); Manfred Nowak, “Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty” (New York: United Nations, July 11, 2019), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3813850>.

10 Nowak, “Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty.”



hundreds of children of ISIS association in hasty, unfair trials. Children interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported that security officers tortured them to get confessions, beating them with plastic pipes, electric cables, or rods, subjecting them to electric shocks, or using painful stress positions. Many of the children said they had little or no actual involvement with ISIS, but confessed simply to stop the torture.<sup>11</sup>

In 2018 and 2019, the UN monitored over 600 trial hearings of ISIS suspects in Iraq, including 44 cases with a defendant who was a child at the time of the alleged offense. It found an overreliance on confessions and frequent allegations of torture. Judges did not question confessions obtained through torture, and frequently convicted defendants for mere association with ISIS, without distinguishing between those who participated in violence and those who may have had minimal involvement or joined through coercion. More than half of the child defendants were sentenced to more than 10 years in prison.<sup>12</sup>

Between 2013 and 2019, Nigerian authorities detained more than 3,600 children as Boko Haram suspects, including over 1,600 girls. The detainees included children as young as five, and babies and toddlers detained with their mothers. Children detained at the Giwa military barracks in Maiduguri, the main military detention facility in the Northeast, described squalid, severely overcrowded conditions, overwhelming heat, and frequent hunger and thirst. Some of the children interviewed by Human Rights Watch were detained for months, others for years. None were ever charged with a crime, saw a lawyer, or were brought before a judge.<sup>13</sup>

In Somalia, the authorities' approach to children suspected of involvement with Al-Shabaab has varied widely. Some children have been handed over to NGO-run child rehabilitation and reintegration centers, while others have been prosecuted in military courts on criminal charges of Al-Shabaab membership, murder, or conflict-related offenses. In other cases, authorities have released children in exchange for bribes from their relatives. Interrogators and guards have subjected children to coercive treatment including intimidation, threats,

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11 Human Rights Watch, "'Everyone Must Confess': Abuses against Children Suspected of ISIS Affiliation in Iraq" (New York: Human Rights Watch, March 2019), [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/iraq0319\\_web\\_1.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/iraq0319_web_1.pdf).

12 UN Assistance Mission for Iraq and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Human Rights in the Administration of Justice in Iraq: Trials under the Anti-Terrorism Laws and Implications for Justice, Accountability and Social Cohesion in the Aftermath of ISIL" (Baghdad: United Nations, January 2020), [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI\\_Report\\_HRAAdministrationJustice\\_Iraq\\_28January2020.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_Report_HRAAdministrationJustice_Iraq_28January2020.pdf).

13 Jo Becker and Anietie Ewang, "They Didn't Know If I Was Alive or Dead": Military Detention of Children for Suspected Boko Haram Involvement in Northeast Nigeria (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2019).

and in some cases, beatings and torture, primarily to obtain confessions. Children tried in military courts have received sentences of 10 to 20 years, and in some cases, death.<sup>14</sup>

## CONSEQUENCES OF DETENTION

Not surprisingly, many children subjected to detention end up feeling doubly victimized, first by the armed group that recruits them or attacks their community, and then by their own government. For example, a 15-year old boy in Somalia was forcibly recruited by Al-Shabaab, and then sentenced to ten years in prison by a military court for terrorism. He told investigators, “I feel afraid and let down. Al-Shabaab forced me into this, and then the government gives me this long sentence.”<sup>15</sup> A boy detained in Nigeria said, “I am not happy with Boko Haram because they killed my people. I also do not like the military because they detained me for no reason. There was nothing good about my experience in detention. My years were wasted in suffering.”<sup>16</sup>

Rehabilitation and reintegration assistance can help children reenter school or gain vocational training so that they rejoin civilian life. In contrast, the consequences of detention can be profoundly negative. Detention delays children’s return to school, perpetuates family separation, exacerbates physical and mental health issues, creates long-term stigma, and can foster resentment and alienation that can lead to future violence. In 2019, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted that the punitive approach adopted by some states was resulting in “lasting consequences for the development of the child and having a negative impact on the opportunities for social reintegration, which in turn may have serious consequences for the broader society.”<sup>17</sup> The UN Secretary-General has similarly warned that depriving children of liberty because of their association with armed groups “is contrary to the best interests of the child, but also to the interests of society as a whole,” noting that such detention can lead to the creation of community grievances.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights has stated that detention can “reinforce terrorist narratives about the cruelty or injustice of the State, increase the likelihood of re-association and

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14 Human Rights Watch, “It’s Like We’re Always in a Prison’: Abuses Against Boys Accused of National Security Offenses in Somalia” (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2018), [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/somalia0218\\_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/somalia0218_web.pdf).

15 Human Rights Watch interview with “Hamza,” Mogadishu, Somalia, October 2017.

16 Human Rights Watch interview with “Abdulsalam,” detained for nearly a year at Giwa barracks at age 17 in 2017. Maidiguri, Nigeria, June 2019.

17 Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 24, CRC/C/GC/24, September 18, 2019, para. 99.

18 United Nations, “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General (A/70/836–S/2016/360)” (New York: United Nations, April 20, 2016), para. 16, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N16/111/19/pdf/N1611119.pdf?OpenElement>.

complicate subsequent integration or reintegration efforts.”<sup>19</sup> Rather than reducing threats, detaining children may only increase them.

## PREVENTING DETENTION

The Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (“the Paris Principles”), adopted in 2007 and endorsed by over 110 states, state that children who are associated with armed forces or armed groups should not be prosecuted or punished solely for their membership in those forces or groups, and that if children are accused of crimes, alternatives to judicial procedures should be sought wherever possible, and “every effort” should be made to seek alternatives to placing a child in an institution.<sup>20</sup>

In 2018, the UN Security Council specifically addressed the detention of children in armed conflict, emphasizing that no child should be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The Council called on all parties to cease unlawful or arbitrary detention as well as torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment imposed on children during their detention, and encouraged states to establish “standard operating procedures for the rapid handover of these children to relevant civilian child protection actors.” It urged states to consider nonjudicial measures as alternatives to prosecution and detention, and reiterated the international standard that the deprivation of liberty of children should only be used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.<sup>21</sup>

In 2019, the African Committee of Experts on the Welfare and Rights of the Child recommended that states “end military detention of children and adopt formal handover protocols that provide for the swift transfer of children from military custody to civilian child protection authorities.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the 2019 UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty also recommended standard operating procedures for the “immediate and direct handover” of children from military custody to appropriate child protection agencies.<sup>23</sup>

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19 Human Rights Council, “Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism (A/HRC/40/28)” (New York: United Nations, January 10, 2019), para. 55, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/28>.

20 UNICEF, “The Paris Principles,” paras. 3.11, 7.21, 7.45, 8.7, 8.8, and 8.9.

21 Security Council Resolution 2427 (2018), paras. 19-21.

22 African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, “Outcome Statement for the Day of General Discussion on Children Affected by Armed Conflict” (Cairo: African Union, November 26, 2019), [https://www.acerwc.africa/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Outcome-Statement\\_-ACERWC-Day-of-General-Discussion\\_-final.pdf](https://www.acerwc.africa/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Outcome-Statement_-ACERWC-Day-of-General-Discussion_-final.pdf).

23 Nowak, “Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty,” paras. 133–134.

## HANDOVER PROTOCOLS

In recent years, several states have signed explicit agreements, known as “handover protocols,” to swiftly transfer children from military custody to civilian child protection authorities for rehabilitation and reintegration. Since 2013, Sudan, Niger, Chad, and Mali have each signed such handover protocols. The protocols typically require the transfer of children within a very short period of time, usually 24 to 72 hours, and can minimize any military detention of children. Implementation of the protocols has been uneven in practice, but have facilitated the release of children detained for association with armed groups. For example, after Mali signed a handover protocol in 2013, military authorities transferred more than 70 children detained for suspected involvement with armed groups to a rehabilitation program.<sup>24</sup>

Handover protocols are negotiated on an individual basis, with the assistance of the United Nations, and typically include the following elements:

- A commitment by defense and security forces to immediately, or within 24-72 hours, hand over children apprehended in the context of armed conflict to an appropriate ministry responsible for child welfare, or to UNICEF;
- Designation of a focal point to monitor the transfer of children and ensure effective communication;
- A commitment to provide children special care while in military custody, including separation from adults, food, shelter, and protection from all forms of violence, abuse, and neglect;
- A commitment to protect the children’s identity and privacy;
- A commitment to prohibit any interrogation for military purposes;
- A commitment by UNICEF to facilitate the appropriate care of transferred children, including through the provision of food, shelter, and psychosocial care, in collaboration with its operational partners.

In several other countries, UNICEF has been in dialogue with national governments regarding handover protocols. However, as of early 2020, the majority of countries known to detain children for alleged involvement with armed groups had not signed such an agreement.

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24 United Nations, “Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Mali (S/2018/136)” (New York: United Nations, February 21, 2018), para. 28, <https://undocs.org/S/2018/136>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Recommendations for States*

Governments involved in armed conflict should make public commitments to end the detention of children in armed conflict and work with the United Nations and civilian child protection actors to establish effective rehabilitation and reintegration programs. Governments should sign and implement handover protocols to ensure the swift transfer of children for rehabilitation and avoid detention for more than a very short period.

Donor governments and those providing security assistance can urge conflict countries to take these steps. They can allocate assistance specifically for rehabilitation programs, and condition security assistance on the release of children from detention and the signature and implementation of handover protocols.

The United Nations should actively engage with relevant states to advocate for the release of children, assist in the establishment of rehabilitation and reintegration programs, and engage in negotiations for the signature, effective implementation, and monitoring of handover protocols.

### *Recommendations for Peacekeeping*

Under the Vancouver Principles, troop-contributing countries commit to ensure that any children apprehended during peacekeeping operations are treated in accordance with international standards. The child's best interests are to be a primary consideration, and children are to be handed over expeditiously to child protection actors and civilian authorities, in line with established policies and guidance.<sup>25</sup>

To effectively implement this principle, peacekeepers should be familiar with international standards that prioritize rehabilitation and reintegration for children affected by armed conflict and reserve detention only as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time. Peacekeeping missions should be aware of child protection actors (including relevant UN agencies such as UNICEF, government ministries, and non-governmental organizations) that operate rehabilitation and reintegration programs, and establish effective channels of communication and standard operating procedures to ensure the swift transfer of any children taken into custody during peacekeeping operations to such actors.

Force commanders should also be familiar with any handover protocol signed by the

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<sup>25</sup> Global Affairs Canada, "The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers," Global Affairs Canada, February 21, 2017, sec. 9, [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/human\\_rights-droits\\_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engagements.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engagements.aspx?lang=eng).

national government, and help facilitate its implementation, as appropriate. In states that have not signed a handover protocol, mission leadership should encourage relevant decision makers to do so and to release any children in detention for alleged association with armed groups.

## CONCLUSIONS

Detention is almost never in the best interests of a child. Under international law, it should be used only in the most exceptional cases. Yet in the context of armed conflict, children are increasingly detained. Some may have joined armed groups because they felt they had no choice, while others come under suspicion because of alleged activity by their family members, or simply because armed groups are active in their community. In any case, the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups, including violent extremist groups, is always illegal. Detention and prosecution should focus on the adults responsible, not the children.

The increase in children detained in the context of armed conflict represents a worrying departure from the principle that children involved in armed conflict are entitled to rehabilitation and reintegration. Endorsers of the Vancouver Principles, and all countries contributing troops to international peacekeeping missions, can set a good example by avoiding the detention of children, advocating for the release of all detained children, and ensuring effective procedures to transfer children to child protection authorities for the assistance they need to rebuild their lives.

*Jo Becker is the children's rights advocacy director for Human Rights Watch and led the research group on children deprived of liberty in the context of armed conflict and national security for the 2019 UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty.*

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The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative  
Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
Canada B3H 4R2

Email: [info@childsoldiers.org](mailto:info@childsoldiers.org)  
Telephone: 1 902 494 6637  
[www.childsoldiers.org](http://www.childsoldiers.org)

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