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CHILD SOLDIERS:

Changing the Reality on the Ground

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Bienvenu tout le monde.

- It is my great pleasure to be in Winnipeg with all of you for this important conference. I appreciate this opportunity to be with you on this 1st full day of discussion on the important subject of Child Soldiers. I believe very strongly there is an obligation on Canada to culture others in the international common to achieve more progress in this area.
- It has been six years since the 2000 International Conference on War-Affected Children was held here in Winnipeg and much has been

accomplished on the broader efforts to respond to the needs of war-affected children and on the specific challenges of halting the recruitment and use of child soldiers. “This search for Common ground gatherings” is crucial.

- Sadly, the reality on the ground for too many children caught in armed conflict remains grim. Our challenge remains the full and effective implementation of these international commitments to ensure real changes in the lives of children at risk.

- I would like to begin by thanking the organizers for the opportunity to speak this evening. Senator Dallaire's interest in this issue has been long-standing his commitment and the personal experience and knowledge he brings are unparalleled.
- We should all feel more empowered with the greater knowledge and mutual support that comes from gatherings such as these but also a greater depth of responsibility. There is no room for complacency on such subjects.

- I would also like to thank Ambassador Moose for the essential role he played in bringing this workshop together.
- Important Progress has been made in recent years: DFAIT's Human Security Programs is proud to sponsor the 1st phase of these common ground initiatives bringing together important actions and actors to identify gaps in programs and opportunities for more collaborative approach and focus.

- The protection of children in conflict and ending ongoing violations against children are key components of the human security agenda and of our international assistance programs.
- Since Graça Machel's 1996 seminal report significant studies have been carried out.
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict has entered into force; the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court defined the conscription, enlistment, or use in hostilities of children under

the age of fifteen years as a war crime; 180 countries endorsed a global action plan entitled A World Fit for Children at the UN Special Session on Children and the Security Council has adopted seven thematic resolutions devoted to children and armed conflict. Resolution 1612 is both ground breaking and heart breaking when one considers the number of places where this resolution is still violated.

- Complementary progress has been made on the wider protection of civilians in armed conflict agenda, where leaders have confirmed their commitment to the legal and physical protection of civilians. Peacekeeping mandates now include specific provisions to protect civilians from attack, and the capacity of agencies in the field to respond to protection concerns is being improved. Clearly what remains the most obvious and effective contribution to the cause is - - whether in Uganda where there are signs of hope or Sri Lanka - - ending hostilities and a return to dialogues and negotiations.

- *S'agissant des violations contre les enfants, la dernière résolution sur cette question adoptée au Conseil de sécurité, la résolution 1612, prévoit un mécanisme global de surveillance et de communication des renseignements. La résolution porte également sur la création d'un groupe de travail sur les enfants et les conflits armés, chargé de veiller à la mise en œuvre du document en question.*
- *Par le passé, l'absence de renseignements précis et vérifiables sur les atrocités perpétrées contre les enfants servait trop souvent d'excuse à l'inaction. C'est pourquoi le Canada préside*

le Groupe des amis qui se penche sur la question des enfants et des conflits armés, à New York, et qu'il a été l'hôte d'un atelier d'une journée, dans cette même ville, en juillet, sur la mise en œuvre de la résolution 1612.

- *De même, l'Agence canadienne de développement international apporte un concours financier important au mécanisme, notamment sous forme d'un soutien aux efforts de coordination déployés par l'UNICEF.*

- *Parallèlement, mon ministère finance la mise au point d'un mécanisme complémentaire qui servira à surveiller plus largement la protection des civils dans les conflits armés.*
- UNICEF as is so often the case is showing tremendous leadership on this issue.
- The goal of monitoring and reporting activities is not only to track trends and identify areas where action is needed, but to stop violations of the rights of children, to get timely action in cases where violations have been committed, and to end impunity for these violations.

- Naming and sharing is an important tool in disclosing, forming and following up with offending states.
- Take for example the situation in Northern Uganda. I need not remind anyone in this room of the dire situation in that region – of the children abducted, the civilians killed and maimed, the squalid internally displaced persons camps or the “night commuters” – the estimated 4,000 kids who have to seek temporary refuge in churches and hospitals overnight to avoid abduction.

- The ceasefire agreement reached on August 26th between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda marks a first substantive result of the peace talks in Abuja and a welcome development to end the conflict.
- Over the past several months, Canada has sought to substantially increase pressure on all parties to the conflict. We have increased pressure in New York, including a call on the Security Council to formally address this long-standing conflict. I brought the issue to the table at the G8 Foreign Ministers' meeting prior to the Summit and a reference was included in the Chairman's

Statement of June 29.

- We are establishing a diplomatic presence in Kampala in order to more effectively coordinate our diplomatic efforts.
- The situation in Sri Lanka is another example of children bearing the brunt in conflict and of the destabilizing consequences of not protecting children's rights. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been recruiting children as soldiers for over 20 years, of which 40% are young girls. Canada's new government moved quickly to list the LTTE as a terrorist

organization to help choke off funds they had been extorting from Canadians to fund their activities. There is much blame on both side of this conflict with (as is so often the case) children sadly caught cruelly in the cross fire.

- The current escalation of violence in Sri Lanka, which is spiralling dangerously into open warfare and heavy fighting, is having a devastating impact on the security of civilians and on the humanitarian response. Recent attacks against aid workers seriously impede humanitarian assistance to civilians in need. The forced recruitment of children into fighting

forces creates a culture of violence perpetuating the conflict. Canada is committed to actively addressing this situation.

- I spoke this morning to my counterpart in Sudan to raise again Canada's concern along with members of the international community for the fragile state of the peace agreement there. The issue of child soldiers is particularly disturbing in the Darfur region.
- One particularly challenging dimension of the child soldier problem that reappears time and time again is the recruitment and use of girls in

fighting forces. Programs to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate soldiers post-conflict have often overlooked girls as active agents in armed conflict.

- It is a shock to the sensitivities of most of us to hear this let alone comprehend how the problem continues today.
- The principal challenge today is to bridge the gap between words and deeds.

- A robust legal regime is in place, a series of Security Council resolutions has established a framework for implementation, and a broad array of international and non-governmental organizations are working ever more closely to provide protection for children caught up in armed conflicts. Yet the nature of the abuses faced by children in dozens of conflict zones remains unthinkable. Concerted action is required by actors at all levels to prevent and respond to violations of the rights of children. An investment early in conflicts will pay huge dividends in future abuses.

- This gap between words and deeds is not limited to the case of child soldiers. The UN Security Council has progressively raised the bar with statements on issues such as the role of women in the promotion of peace and security, on the protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict, and on the responsibility to protect populations facing crimes against humanity and genocide. Recent events in the Middle East saw hundreds of thousands of people displaced- obviously a large number of them children and it can happen virtually overnight. The size and scope of these conflicts and the speed of these erupted is stagger at times.

- *Il ne suffit pas de faire connaître nos préoccupations.*
- *Les pays, y compris les membres du Conseil de sécurité, doivent faire en sorte que les populations à risque bénéficient en tout temps de la meilleure protection possible. Ils doivent aussi veiller à ce que les responsables aient à rendre compte de leurs actes, y compris à ce que la promotion des droits, la surveillance et le renforcement des capacités deviennent les maîtres mots de notre action. Cela veut dire que le multilatéralisme doit se traduire par des résultats concrets.*

- *Toutefois, il n'est jamais facile de faire appliquer le droit, ni de concrétiser nos engagements par des gestes. C'est pourquoi nous devons être disposés à mener une action rigoureuse, et progressive. Et cela, même si les progrès semblent parfois terriblement lents à venir, notamment aux yeux de ceux qui peinent durement aux premières lignes et voient, par eux-mêmes, les conséquences dévastatrices des violations pour la vie des jeunes.*

- But we should also reflect, from time to time, on progress in international forums and policy statements on March 20, 2006 the Congolese militia leader Thomas Lubanga appeared before the International Criminal Court in The Hague. He had been indicted for, among other things, “enlisting and conscripting children under the age of fifteen and using them to participate actively in hostilities.”
- Only ten years before, the violation for which he was charged was considered an abstract part of international law, and the court that indicted him did not even exist.

- Canada was an important initiator and supporter of the international criminal court
- Canada welcomes this important first step, and hopes that this case will serve as a strong signal to perpetrators of these crimes that they cannot hide from justice.
- Obviously there are many related issues of small arms, and greater participation of youth, but I am confident that there are people around the globe who are extremely motivated in coming together and committing to this cause.

- Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I look forward to hearing about the outcome of this very valuable workshop and to further engagement on the issue of child soldiers.