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## Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces Capacity to Address Child Soldiers

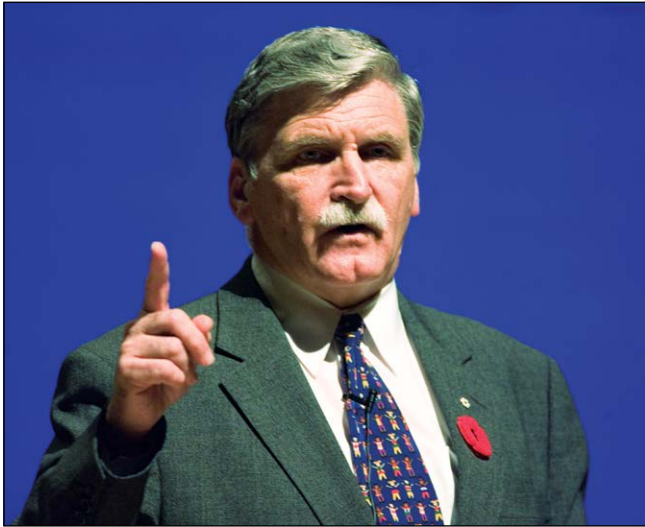
by Alan Okros

**O**n 25 June 2019 at Canadian Forces College, Minister of National Defence Harjit Sajjan announced the establishment of the Dallaire Centre of Excellence for Peace and Security. Minister Sajjan stated that the Centre of Excellence’s initial focus will be to support the Canadian Armed Forces’ implementation of the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, stating that “...this practical resource will have real world impacts and help to protect children.” In attendance, Lieutenant-General (ret’d) Roméo Dallaire stated: “I have dedicated my life to ensuring soldiers are prepared and children are protected in situations of armed conflict, because both are central to achieving peace. The establishment of the Dallaire Centre of Excellence for Peace and Security will have an impact on soldiers, on children, and on global peace and security.” This article provides the context for this initiative with a short summary of the Vancouver Principles; presentation of the concept of operations for the new Centre of Excellence; and, a description of the contributions being made by the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldier Initiative (RDCSI).

### Context

**T**he sad reality is that many conflicts around the world involve children serving in armed groups as child soldiers. Broadly defined, child soldiers “refers to 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>1</sup>

Underpinned by evolving International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law,<sup>2</sup> the United Nations Security Council has passed thirteen resolutions to address issues related to children and armed conflict,<sup>3</sup> as well as having encouraged Member States to endorse a number of related principles and declarations. In November 2017, Canada hosted the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Conference leading to the articulation of the set of political commitments focused upon child protection in peacekeeping, the Vancouver Principles, as they were referred to by Minister Sajjan. These seventeen principles acknowledge the



Senator and Lieutenant-General (ret'd) Roméo Dallaire.

unique challenges posed by child soldiers; prioritize the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers in UN peacekeeping operations; and are intended to help ensure that all peacekeepers—military, police, and civilian—are prepared and directed to take appropriate action. Importantly, the Vancouver Principles extend upon previous agreements.

“In particular, the Paris Commitments and associated Paris Principles (2007), which built upon the Cape Town Principles (1997), lay out detailed guidelines for protecting children from recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups, and for providing assistance to those already involved with armed forces and armed groups. The Safe Schools Declaration (2015) calls on states to protect schools and universities from military use during armed conflict. The Kigali Principles (2015) establishes a set of commitments on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations. Additionally, the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals recognize the dignity of children and their right to live free from violence and fear as a distinct priority in the international development agenda.”<sup>4</sup>

Following the launch of the Vancouver Principles, individuals from Global Affairs, National Defence, and Canada’s delegation to the UN, working with representatives from endorsing States and civil society organizations, developed implementation guidance. Published concurrently with the MND’s June announcement, this guidance is intended to assist endorsing States in translating the Vancouver Principles into national-level guidance, plans, and capabilities. The objective is to ensure that police and military members contributing to UN missions are provided the direction, resources, and the preparation required to prevent the recruitment and use of



Child soldiers in the Sudan People's Liberation Army.

CFB Kingston Base Photo



Canadian Defence Academy, Kingston, Ontario.

child soldiers; to be able to respond effectively when encountering child soldiers in the context of UN peacekeeping operations; and to enable effective personal support post-deployment.

### Dallaire Centre of Excellence for Peace and Security

Based upon MND direction and allocated resources, the Dallaire Centre of Excellence for Peace and Security is being established within the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA) to achieve initial operating capability (IOC) in 2020, and full operating capability (FOC) in 2021. The DCOE-PS will serve as a strategic Defence asset to advance related Government of Canada objectives through the *enhancement of*, and *contribution to*, Defence capabilities. With a focus in the first instance upon implementation of the Vancouver Principles within the CAF, the Centre conducts research and analyses of relevant policies, issues, perspectives, lessons learned, and best practices to enhance CAF operational and individual effectiveness by contributing to concepts, doctrine, professional military education, training, and related personnel readiness enablers.

Recognizing the complexity of the issues involved and the importance of collaborative approaches, core activities and engagements are conducted internally within DND and the CAF; horizontally, across associated Federal Government Departments and Agencies; and, externally, with international organizations, Vancouver Principles endorsing nations, academic researchers, civil society organizations, and other expert stakeholders. A range of funding mechanisms are applied to: harness extant external expertise; commission new research; engage in collaborative exchanges; and enable the development of the next generation of scholars and National Security practitioners. Through the use of flexible employment vehicles, including post-doctorate fellowships, short-term secondments, and interchange opportunities, the

Centre is designed to be innovative, creative, and adaptive with the capacity to quickly pivot to emerging issues, policy developments or key updates to international frameworks, such as those expressed through United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Children and Armed Conflict, or the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

As stated by Rear-Admiral Luc Cassivi, Commander Canadian Defence Academy (CDA), when DCOE-PS was announced, "... the Centre of Excellence will draw on a diversity of expertise and perspectives from across academia and civil society to effectively fulfill its mandate. Its flexible nature will also position the Canadian Defence Academy to consider other emerging human security topics, such as sexual exploitation and abuse, conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, and human shields."

At FOC, the Centre will have an establishment of seventeen military and civilian personnel organized in three functional areas, and located in three cities. The Executive Director, along with staff responsible for key engagements are located in Ottawa, those responsible for concepts are at CDA Headquarters in Kingston, and those engaged in research are co-located at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto. The Deputy Director Engagements will monitor CAF/DND strategic objectives; conduct outreach and engagements; contribute to interdepartmental liaison; establish grant programs; design and deliver symposia, short courses, and seminars on COE-related topics, as well as serving as the Centre's Chief of Staff. The Deputy Director Concepts will support CAF OPIs responsible for Joint and Service concepts, doctrine, training, and lessons learned by identifying lessons learned and best practices, developing concepts, and conducting doctrinal gap analyses against CAF operational requirements in order to contribute to updates or to the development of doctrine. The Deputy Director Research will conduct research and analysis of current, emerging, and potential security policy areas; academic

and professional literatures; perspectives of the national security practitioner community; and civil society discourse to identify implications for CAF operational requirements and professional development.

As reflected in Rear-Admiral Cassivi's reference to the DCOE-PS 'flexible nature,' the majority of individuals will be employed on a rotational basis for two-or-three-year employment lengths, and are thus beyond typical posting cycles for Regular Force members. The civilian personnel employment strategies will include drawing upon policy experts from across National Defence or Global Affairs; employing researchers from internal academic faculty or Defence Research and Development Canada; attracting visiting faculty as Visiting Fellows and recent graduates with specific expertise for post-doctorate employment; and enabling shorter-term engagements where CAF personnel, members of the Public Service, or current graduate students could be embedded within DCOE-PS to draw upon the resident expertise and resources.

### Roméo Dallaire Child Soldier Initiative

In his June 2019 announcement, Minister Sajjan identified that National Defence will draw upon the expertise of the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative (RDCSI) through a five-year contribution agreement to enable research and to identify lessons learned and best practices regarding the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers. RDCSI is

housed at Dalhousie University, Halifax, and is dedicated to the eradication of the use of child soldiers. The overarching philosophy is as follows:

The use of child soldiers is one of the farthest-reaching and most disturbing trends in contemporary conflict. Through viewing child soldiers as a security sector concern, we work to counteract the strategic and tactical advantages of child soldiers. By interrupting the reasons for their use, we can end the recruitment and use of child soldiers once and for all.<sup>5</sup>

A key contribution being made under the current agreement is to provide the CAF with valuable perspectives with respect to best practices in preparing troops to address child soldiers, as well as lessons learned from those who have completed training and encountered child soldiers when deployed. With over 5,000 military members from several African Union (AU) nations having completed courses, as well as training delivered with support from Wounded Warriors to CAF and RCMP veterans through the Veteran Trainers to Eradicate the Use of Child Soldiers (VTECS),<sup>6</sup> RDCSI is a leading organization world-wide in designing, delivering, and evaluating relevant training. In his exchanges with DCOE-PS staff, General Dallaire has emphasized two critical points: that training must go beyond classroom delivery of factual information to the development of practical skills through realistic scenarios and exercises; and, the need to validate the effectiveness of learning, including gathering perspectives from deployed



A child soldier of the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) stands guard and holds a rifle in his hands in Bunia, Democratic Republic of Congo, 19 June 2003.



Jack Picone/Alamy Stock Photo/AX3JXF

A child soldier returns from the frontline in Luanda, Angola.

troops with respect to how they adapted techniques when dealing with encounters with child soldiers, or those who employ them. As one of the first significant activities conducted under the contribution agreement, the DCOE-PS acting-Deputy Director Concepts attended an informative evaluation meeting conducted by RDCSI in Kigali, Rwanda, with representatives from several AU nations on their insights and lessons learned following completion of RDCSI designed training and deployments.

While RDCSI remains an independent not-for-profit organization, the arrangements made with the CAF and DND enable DCOE-PS to assist the CAF to move forward quickly in assessing concepts, doctrine, and training related to child soldiers. Concurrently, the DCOE-PS research team is conducting analyses of complementary issues, since the issues of child soldiers are recognized to be a sub-set of the challenges of children affected by armed conflict and those populations encountering situations of vulnerability, usually referred to as vulnerable populations. It is also recognized that these topics are informed by the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, as well as considerations of Human Security.

Although significant work remains to be done to ensure that CAF members are effectively prepared, enabled, and supported to deal with child soldiers, DCOE-PS is working to support CAF OPIs and to provide all members of Defence with relevant references.

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**NOTES**

- 1 United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, "The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups" February, 2007, p 7; accessible at: <https://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/ParisPrinciples310107English.pdf> <https://www.unicef.org/french/protection/files/ParisPrinciplesFrench310107.pdf>
- 2 These include, but are not limited to, the Geneva Conventions (1949) and Additional Protocols I and II to the UN Geneva Conventions (1977), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (1999), and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000) as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (1990) and the Covenant on the Rights of the Child in Islam (2005).
- 3 UN Security Council resolutions regarding the protection of children affected by armed conflict include UNSCR 1261, 1314, 1379, 1460, 1539, 1612, 1882, 1998, 2068, 2143, 2151, 2225, 2427.
- 4 Implementation guidance for the Vancouver Principles accessible at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/vancouver-principles.html>, p. 6.
- 5 <https://www.childsoldiers.org/>
- 6 <https://www.childsoldiers.org/vtecs/>