

THE WASHINGTON NETWORK ON  
 WNCAC  
CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

*Child Soldiers: Expanding the Dialogue*  
Meeting Notes, August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005

The August meeting of the Washington Network on Children and Armed Conflict continued the discussion that was launched during a one-day workshop on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The workshop, which was convened by Search for Common Ground, USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund, and Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, aimed to bring together a number of human rights, humanitarian, peace and security, and military organizations who have concern about the use of children as soldiers but who often come from divergent points of analysis and do not work together effectively. The June 7<sup>th</sup> meeting was the first phase of a much larger initiative to promote dialogue, both globally and in specific conflict situations, among a wide range of parties. The hope is that this process will lead to some new, creative, and effective approaches to preventing child recruitment that can be used on the ground.

With the initiative now underway, the August WNCAC meeting sought to engage the broader WNCAC membership with the goal of informing the community about the project and seeking input as we move forward. What are WNCAC members currently doing to address the child soldiers problem? Which actors should be involved in the dialogue? What are the underlying interests of those actors?

The next stage of this initiative will be a larger gathering in Ottawa with significant participation from direct stakeholders in the field, with an emphasis on the involvement of people with direct military experience and children. From there, the initiative will carry out a set of further simulations to develop creative approaches to the prevention of the use of children, leading to an intervention that will take place on the ground in a country to be selected.

**Discussion Points:**

*What were the key topics/points of debate during the June 7<sup>th</sup> workshop?*

- Lieutenant-General Dallaire introduced the notion of viewing children as a weapons platform or a military doctrine. Viewed in this context, how might this weapons platform be neutralized?
- How can we address the rampant impunity, which is particularly prevalent among non-state actors?
- Many interventions focus heavily on disarmament and demobilization, while reintegration typically receives fewer resources and a shorter commitment. There is a need to more explicitly promote the link between reintegration and security.

- While there are some prevention initiative underway, there is a need for them to be more fully integrated, involving the array of actors needed to truly prevent the use of children as soldiers. Opportunities to develop new tools would emerge by engaging actors – particularly military – who have not been involved in such work in the past.

*Reaction: What issues are important to consider? How does your organization address the child soldiers issue?*

- It is important to recognize that the reasons for and circumstances in which children participate vary considerably depending upon the situation. While some are abducted, others are recruited or volunteer. Furthermore, some are recruited from within the country in conflict, while other children are recruited from neighboring countries. Given these variations, where is the most effective point to intervene?
- It is important to secure a long-term commitment to reintegration. There was some debate as to whether or not donors understand the importance of this part of the process. Some argued that donors are more concerned with fighting fires than with long-term development. What is the relationship between reintegration and prevention of recruitment?
- Interventions must take into account gender differences. Girls suffer from unique forms of exploitation and abuse, and their specific needs must be addressed.
- The Department of Labor focuses mostly on reintegration of child soldiers, funding programs that provide vocational training, formal schooling, and non-formal training. They emphasize three areas: awareness raising, direct educational services, and policy. They work with governments and local communities to build capacity to advocate on behalf of children.
- OTI conducts “market analysis” to assess conditions before starting programming. Once on the ground, they seek to connect communities to microfinance opportunities and use networking to learn ways in which they can have an immediate impact.
- One way to reduce the stigma felt by former child soldiers is to provide educational programs in mixed schools, where these children can learn and work side-by-side with refugees and internally displaced persons, for instance.
- One way to limit the effectiveness of children is to address the flow of small arms and/or ammunition. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to trace the movement of small arms, which are largely recycled.
- There is a need to address some of the root causes of conflict - corruption, for example, may not be the initial source of conflict, but often fuels it.
- Design of intervention programs will depend to a large extent upon context. Determinations of which actors to engage, how, and when to engage them could vary considerably depending upon the situation. However, it is still productive to consider the issue at a global level, as certain patterns exist, even if every situation has a unique set of circumstances.

*Which actors should be involved in a broad dialogue to reduce the number of child soldiers?*

Ministries of education, defense, justice, sports; Members of the diaspora community; Local government officials; Business community; Peacekeepers; Religious leaders; Ex-combatants; Children, especially youth leaders and organizations; National and international media; Donors; Families and communities (including organizations such as the PTA); Local associations; Civil society  
Traditional leaders; Regional organizations; Women's groups; Potential rebel leaders; Other parties to the conflict; Conflict transformation experts;  
Mental health experts; Economic livelihood experts; Judicial actors; Human rights actors

*What are the underlying interests of some of these actors? What are their approaches? What are their limitations?*

The following are some of the conclusions from the participants of the meeting:

- Human rights organizations often work towards establishing international standards that define at what age it is illegal to conscript children (under 18, as established by the Optional Protocol to the CRC). They favor the use of international law to prosecute offenders.
- International peace and security apparatus are often mandated to promote security or implement the military dimensions to a peace agreement. Many peacekeeping missions now have child protection officers incorporated within each unit
- Armed groups and rebel leaders are often motivated by political and power-based motives. Their use of children is to pursue those military objectives.
- Families and communities often desire peace, security, stability, and livelihood.

*Which geographic areas are the best candidates for a successful intervention?*

- Though there was not enough time to discuss this question, we would appreciate any suggestions you have. Please email Michael Shipler at [mshipler@sfcg.org](mailto:mshipler@sfcg.org).

### **Resources and Program Sharing**

*Potential Topic for next meeting:*

- Monitoring and reporting on children in armed conflict – implications of Security Council Resolution 1612 on the Washington DC community of practice. The meeting will be held in mid September.

*Washington Network for Post-Tsunami Peacebuilding and Reconstruction:*

- This community of practice is for individuals and organizations involved in the efforts to improve conditions in the tsunami affected areas. Their most recent roundtable was held on Wednesday, August 17<sup>th</sup> from 10 AM to 12 PM. Please email Saji Preliis if you are interested in attending the event or becoming involved in the network: [saji@cpbintl.org](mailto:saji@cpbintl.org)
- Have there been any studies or reports on children and youth-related issues following the tsunami? Please email Saji if you are aware of any publications that reflect upon the impact of aid that has been delivered.

*USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI)*

- In September, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) will be finishing a paper that comes out of its three-country community-based capacity-building and reintegration project. Over the past year, OTI has been learning lessons from its reintegration programs in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia. In the project's final paper, OTI will be sharing lessons learned regarding the contribution that community-based capacity-building can make to reintegration efforts and the elements necessary to maximize its effectiveness. This paper will be made available to WNCAC members.

*USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF)*

- The June 2002 report, "Assessment of DCOF-Supported Child Demobilization and Reintegration Activities in Sierra Leone," by John Williamson and Lynne Cripe, can be accessed at [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/humanitarian\\_assistance/the\\_funds/pubs/reports/t.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/the_funds/pubs/reports/t.html)
- A new report on Sierra Leone (which re-visits the key factors identified in 2002 as facilitating reintegration) is available in draft on request from John Williamson at [j.williamson@mindspring.com](mailto:j.williamson@mindspring.com). Eventually it will also be available at the above address.

*Creative Associates*

- Papers on accelerated learning methodologies can currently be accessed at [http://beps.net/highlights/beps\\_publications2.htm](http://beps.net/highlights/beps_publications2.htm).
- Additional publications on child labor, child soldiers, and issues related to conflict can be found at [http://beps.net/beps\\_pubs.htm](http://beps.net/beps_pubs.htm).

*The Coalition to Prevent the Use of Child Soldiers*

- A useful bibliography can be found at <http://www.child-soldiers.org/resources/>.