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DALLAIRE INSTITUTE CHILDREN PEACE SECURITY | DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY



HIGH LEVEL EXECUTIVE BRIEF ON CHILDREN AND THEIR CENTRALITY TO PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA



EVENT SUMMARY

On 25 May 2026 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security (the “Dallaire Institute”), in partnership with the Permanent Mission of Canada to the African Union, convened a High-Level Executive Brief on Children and Their Centrality to Peace and Security in Africa. The dialogue brought together representatives of the African Union, diplomatic missions, UN agencies, regional organizations, and international partners to advocate for a stronger prevention of the recruitment and use of children in armed violence and conflict. It also sought to raise awareness of child-centred approaches to peace and security, align continental priorities with actionable prevention frameworks, and strengthen partnerships to advance the Children, Peace and Security agenda across Africa.

***“No society can build sustainable peace while its children are targeted, exploited, or silenced. Children’s safety, rights, and voices are central to the future of this continent and to the global pursuit of peace.”*– H.E Ben Marc Diendéré**

KEY RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS



01 Elevated Political Awareness and Commitment

Participants demonstrated increased awareness of the Children, Peace and Security (CPS) agenda and acknowledged the strategic importance of integrating child protection into peace and security frameworks aligned with AU Agenda 2063 and Silencing the Guns.

“Protecting children is essential to sustaining peace, and prevention must remain at the centre of our peace and security efforts.” — H.E. Ambassador Jainaba Jagne, African Union Special Envoy for Children and Armed Conflict.

02 Strengthened Strategic Engagement with the African Union and Member States

The event facilitated direct engagement with AU leadership and Member States, identifying policy and operational entry points for advancing the implementation of the Vancouver Principles across priority contexts.

“The Vancouver Principles provide a practical and operational framework to strengthen preparedness and prevent the recruitment and use of children. — H.E. Ambassador Jainaba Jagne, African Union Special Envoy for Children and Armed Conflict

KEY RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS



03 Mobilization of Partnerships and Interest for Future Collaboration

Multiple stakeholders expressed interest in technical collaboration, partnership development, and future programming, reinforcing the Dallaire Institute's role as a strategic partner in advancing child protection within peace and security frameworks.

04 Enhanced Alignment with Continental Priorities

Discussions contributed to aligning CPS programming with existing continental commitments, including the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and regional prevention initiatives.

05 Increased Visibility of Prevention-Based Approaches

The Executive Brief highlighted innovative approaches, including early warning to early action, security sector engagement, and community-based prevention models, strengthening recognition of prevention as a core pillar of stability.

STRATEGIC IMPACT

The High-level Executive Brief reinforced a shared understanding among high-level stakeholders that preventing the recruitment and use of children is not only a humanitarian imperative but also a strategic investment in long-term peace, stability, and development.
By convening decision makers in Addis Ababa—the diplomatic hub of Africa—the event strengthened institutional linkages, created momentum for the operationalization of CPS priorities, and laid the groundwork for scaling prevention programming across multiple African contexts. As highlighted by Dr Shelly Whitman, Executive Director at the Dallaire Institute, Children's participation in peace processes must move beyond symbolic representation toward safe, meaningful, and child-friendly engagement.

The dialogue also reinforced a shared recognition among partners of the need to sustain political visibility and leadership on this issue. As highlighted by H.E. Dr. Annelies Verstichel, Belgium Ambassador to Ethiopia and Djibouti and Permanent Representative to the AU, IGAD, and UNECA, there is a critical need for champions who can keep the protection of children firmly on the policy agenda while advancing innovative approaches to awareness and engagement. This call for sustained leadership and action was also echoed by the Embassy of Norway, which emphasized the importance of transitioning from normative frameworks to concrete implementation at both continental and Member State levels. Notably, the Embassy of Norway expressed its commitment to supporting a process that convenes key stakeholders and establishes mechanisms to foster stronger ownership, coordination, and accountability across national and regional systems. Collectively, these perspectives underscore a growing consensus among partners that meaningful progress will depend on translating commitments into action through strengthened collaboration, leadership, and sustained investment in prevention.

"***The question before us is no longer whether we should act for children, but how we move from shared concern to sustained collective action."***
Maj Gen (Rtd) Ferdinand Safari

EVENT OBJECTIVES

- SHOWCASE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS FROM PREVENTION INITIATIVES ACROSS AFRICA
- FOSTER DIALOGUE WITH AU LEADERSHIP AND MEMBER STATES ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICY AND OPERATIONAL ENGAGEMENT
- EXPLORE AVENUES FOR COLLABORATION AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG STAKEHOLDERS
- STRENGTHEN THE DALLAIRE INSTITUTE'S CONTRIBUTION TO CONTINENTAL EFFORTS ON CHILD PROTECTION, PEACE, AND SECURITY



WHY THIS DIALOGUE MATTERED?

Across Africa, children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict, violence, displacement, and insecurity. While significant progress has been made in strengthening child protection frameworks, prevention efforts often remain disconnected from broader peace and security responses. As a result, children are too frequently viewed as beneficiaries of protection rather than as a central consideration in conflict prevention and sustainable peacebuilding.

This dialogue was convened to help bridge that gap by advancing a more child-centred approach to peace and security. It provided a platform for policymakers, practitioners, and partners to examine how prevention, political leadership, and collective action can better protect children from recruitment and use in armed violence while strengthening long-term peace and stability across the continent.

Additionally, this engagement mattered because it translated Canada's AU-level strategy into concrete national-level action, strengthened partnerships with a key African state, and demonstrated measurable progress on prevention-focused strategies—all of which are critical to advancing Canada's credibility, influence, and impact within the African Union system.

"Children's safety must remain at the centre of Africa's peace and security agenda. Protecting children today is essential to building a more secure and resilient continent tomorrow"
H.E. Ms. Ntsiuoa Sekete
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Lesotho to Ethiopia & Permanent Representative to the AU

KEY MESSAGES



- Preventing the recruitment and use of children is essential to effective peace and security efforts
- Children should be recognized as stakeholders and agents of change, not only as victims of conflict
- Prevention must be prioritized through early warning, early action, and long-term resilience-building
- The Vancouver Principles provide a practical framework for security sector engagement in child protection
- Security sector actors play a critical role in identifying, preventing, and responding to the recruitment and use of children
- Effective prevention requires collaboration between governments, security institutions, communities, and civil society
- Children's protection and participation should be integrated into peace and security policies and processes
- The Children, Peace and Security agenda complements existing continental and global frameworks by advancing both protection and participation
- The Children, Peace and Security agenda complements existing continental and global frameworks by advancing both protection and participation
- Investing in prevention contributes to more sustainable peace, stronger institutions, and safer communities

KEY MESSAGES

- Meaningful progress requires decisive leadership, political will, and coordinated continental action to translate commitments into tangible outcomes for children across Africa

- Sustainable peace requires a shift from reactive responses to preventive, collaborative, and resilience-focused approaches that address the root causes of conflict and armed violence

- Children affected by conflict and armed violence must be recognized as important stakeholders whose perspectives and experiences should inform peacebuilding, policymaking, and prevention efforts

- African-led approaches, strengthened partnerships, and sustained cooperation among Member States, regional institutions, and international partners are essential to advancing the Children, Peace and Security agenda across the continent



- The implementation of the Vancouver Principles strengthens efforts to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and reinforces child protection within peace operations
- African Union leadership drives the integration of child protection into continental peace and security frameworks, early warning systems, and conflict prevention mechanisms
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H.E Amb. Ben Marc Diendéré
Canada's Special Envoy for Africa



H.E. Ambassador Jainaba Jagne
AUC Special Envoy for CAAC

- Preventing the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict requires sustained investment, political commitment, and strong partnerships that place children at the centre of peace and security efforts
- The implementation of the Vancouver Principles strengthens the preparedness of defence and security actors and provides a practical framework for advancing prevention, protection, and accountability
- Children and youth must be meaningfully included in peace processes, with child protection systematically integrated into ceasefire agreements, mediation efforts, peace accords, and DDR processes

- According to Save the Children (2024), one out of three children live in conflict settings
- Effective early warning systems are essential to preventing the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, as they enable timely action before risks escalate into harm
- Child protection strategies must continuously evolve to respond to emerging threats and ensure that children and communities remain at the centre of prevention efforts



Ms. Isabel Magaya
UNICEF Office to the African Union & ECA



- Child protection is a peace and security, governance, and development imperative, and must be recognized as a strategic priority across all levels of decision-making
- Prevention is the most effective and sustainable approach to protecting children, with local communities, children, and young people serving as essential partners in building resilience and lasting peace.
- Meaningful progress requires decisive leadership, political will, and coordinated continental action to translate commitments into tangible outcomes for children across Africa

Mr. Patrick Kumi
Member of Dallaire Institute Youth Advisory Council

REFLECTIONS

During the discussion and reflections on the Children, Peace and Security agenda, participants emphasized that prevention must be placed at the center of continental action—not as a complementary approach, but as a strategic necessity. This centrality underscores the urgent need to systematically integrate child protection considerations into peace support operations and to strengthen the African Union's continental Early Warning Systems to better anticipate and mitigate risks to children.

H.E. Amb. Mulamula, Special Envoy for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda to the AU, highlighted the interconnected vulnerabilities faced by women and children, reinforcing the importance of protection measures that are both inclusive and responsive. At the same time, participants stressed a critical shift in perspective: children must no longer be viewed solely as victims, but as agents of resilience, peacebuilding, and innovation.



H.E Amb Liberata Mulamula
AU Special Envoy for Women, Peace, and Security

REFLECTIONS

The discussion moved decisively beyond reflection toward action and commitment. A key intervention from the Embassy of Norway to the AU called for bridging the persistent gap between normative frameworks and practical implementation, emphasizing the need to develop clear pathways and solutions at both continental and national levels. In response, the Embassy committed to facilitate further dialogue and processes aimed at advancing actionable implementation. The Embassy of the Kingdom of Lesotho also reaffirmed its commitment to actively contribute to efforts that ensure the protection of children, reinforcing a shared responsibility among Member States.



H.E. Amb. Ntsiuoa Sekete
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Lesotho to Ethiopia & Permanent Representative to the AU

REFLECTIONS

H.E. Annelies Verstichel, Ambassador of Belgium to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the AU, underscored the importance of moving beyond dialogue to championing the Children, Peace and Security agenda through advocacy, capacity-building, and collective action. The engagement also resulted in a positive commitment from the Embassy of Belgium to support similar advocacy initiatives aimed at advancing child protection and strengthening collective action across the continent.

Collectively, these contributions signal a shift from dialogue to delivery; anchored in concrete commitments to embed prevention, operationalize frameworks, and strengthen coordinated action across the African Union system.



H.E. Amb. Annelies Verstichel Ambassador of Belgium to Ethiopia & Permanent Representative to the AU

RECOMMENDATION AND WAY FORWARD

Place Prevention at the Core of AU Peace and Security Efforts	• **Integrate prevention as a central pillar within AU peace and security frameworks (APSA, Agenda 2063, Silencing the Guns),** • **Ensure dedicated political commitment and resource allocation for prevention-focused programming.**
Place Prevention at the Core of AU Peace and Security Efforts	• **Embed child protection mandates and risk assessments into AU peace support operations,** • **Train security actors to identify and prevent the recruitment and use of children using normative frameworks such as the Vancouver Principles.**
Strengthen AU Continental Early Warning Systems	• **Enhance early warning to early action mechanisms to detect risks affecting children,** • **Integrate child-specific indicators into AU monitoring and response systems.**
Move from Policy Frameworks to Implementation	• **Develop practical implementation pathways at continental and Member State levels,** • **Convene multi-stakeholder processes (as supported by the Embassy of Norway) to drive coordination, ownership, and accountability.**

RECOMMENDATION AND WAY FORWARD

Recognize Children as Agents of Peace and Resilience	• **Design programs that meaningfully include children and youth in peacebuilding and prevention efforts,** • **Shift policy narratives to reflect children as contributors to stability and innovation, not only beneficiaries.**
Strengthen Inclusive and Gender-Responsive Approaches	• **Align CPS efforts with Women, Peace and Security (WPS) priorities,** • **Ensure programming addresses the interconnected vulnerabilities of women and children.**
Reinforce Member State Commitment and Collective Responsibility	• **Encourage AU Member States (e.g., Lesotho's commitment) to take active leadership roles in child protection,** • **Promote shared accountability through coordinated continental and national actions.**
Strengthen Partnerships and Coordination	• **Expand collaboration between the AU, Member States, international partners, and civil society,** • **Establish or support mechanisms for ongoing coordination, dialogue, and joint implementation.**

ANNEXES

- Dallaire Institute’s 2025-2030 Strategic Plan
- AdvocacyBrief_RegionalApproach
- CONFERENCE REPORT_Advancing Children's Roles in Peace Processes and the Vancouver Principles
- Policy Brief-Advancing Children's Roles in Peace Processes
- Vancouver Principles poster
- Presentation - High Executive Briefing





THANK YOU

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