



Halifax, Nova Scotia May 29th

## **The International Day of UN Peacekeepers: Protect Children to Protect Peace**

Today, on the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative (Dallaire Initiative) honours all peacekeepers around the world who have sacrificed their lives to help bring peace to conflict-affected countries.

UN peacekeepers continue to play a crucial role in helping these countries and their people find peace and stability. The International Day of UN Peacekeepers is therefore observed annually on May 29th, and this year's theme "Protecting Civilians, Protecting Peace" also marks the upcoming 20th anniversary of the first ever Security Council mandated peacekeeping mission designed explicitly to protect civilians in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in 1999.

Sierra Leone today is a peaceful country on Africa's West Coast, but the anniversary reminds us of the challenges to protect peace. During its decade-long civil war, 10,000 child soldiers were recruited and used as soldiers by all parties to the conflict. Today, however, the country is one of the first African countries to endorse the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. It has also undergone significant security sector reforms and is now contributing troops to the UN and African Union peacekeeping missions in various conflict zones.

"We are extremely proud of how Sierra Leone has emerged as strong advocate for the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers across the globe," says Dallaire Initiative Executive Director, Dr. Shelly Whitman.

The Dallaire Initiative has been working with the security sector in Sierra Leone since 2012. This week, our team of expert trainers are in the country to continue the collaborative development of an integrated training program. Together with our partners, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, the Sierra Leone Police, and the Sierra Leone Correctional Services, we are supporting the world's first integrated security sector curriculum focused on the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

The Dallaire Initiative believes that if we are to collectively "protect civilians as a means to protect the peace", we must empower security sector actors with the appropriate training, tools, and resources to protect children. This also requires us to understand that the realities of conflict demand new approaches and practical strategies to better protect both children and soldiers from physical and psychological harm. We believe that by taking a Children's Rights Upfront approach – which means placing children at the top of the international peace and security agenda – it will,

in turn, contribute to improving overall peace and security globally and ultimately, the mandate of UN peacekeepers to better protect civilians.

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### **About the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative**

Founded by retired lieutenant-general Roméo Dallaire, the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative (Dallaire Initiative) believes that in order to progressively end the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, the world must focus on effective prevention. It is the Dallaire Initiative's unique approach to affecting beliefs, attitudes and behavior change through our pedagogical approaches that leverage our relationship to work with the security sector through a prevention-oriented lens, that defines our organizational imperative and creates lasting impacts well beyond the immediate interventions.

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