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African Peacekeepers and Child Soldiers: Building Capacity Through Training and the Development of Minimum Standards [PTP.2012.02C]

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□□ : The Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative,
Geneva School of Diplomacy and International Relations

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It is estimated that some 300,000 children - boys and girls under the age of 18 - are today involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide (UNICEF). Children are viewed as cheap and expandable labor and easy to manipulate and control by

warlords. They are used as combatants, messengers, porters and cooks and for forced sexual services. Some are abducted or forcibly recruited, while others are driven to join by poverty, abuse and discrimination, or to seek revenge for violence enacted against them or their families.

Children are more likely to become child soldiers if they are separated from their families, displaced from their homes, living in combat zones or have limited access to education. Children may join armed groups as the only way to guarantee daily food survival. In some situations, the involvement of children in conflicts as soldiers may even be accepted or encouraged by the local society. Children may 'voluntarily' take part in warfare, not realizing the dangers and abuses they will be subjected to. Most likely these children are responding to economic, cultural, social and political pressures.

Military and police personnel involved in peace operations in conflict zones are often placed on the front lines dealing with child soldiers, with little, if any, training or preparation on what to expect or how to deal with children being abusively used as soldiers. Yet, the military and police are usually the first point of contact with child soldiers and have an important role to play in preventing their recruitment and use.

Determining the scope of child soldier problem is difficult due to its illegal nature and the challenge posed by armed conflict in accessing the civilian population. Despite the existence of a normative legal framework and programming to address the impacts of the problem, recruitment and use of child soldiers persists. Security forces, and in particular peacekeepers, have an important role to play in preventing and addressing this issue. Many, including the UN, recognize the need for specific military training: however, no country or regional organization has yet developed coherent policies, formal doctrine, substantive practical guidance or tactics on how security forces should deal with child soldiers.



The objective of the Round Table is to discuss the applicability of minimum standards for training on the issue of child soldiers as proposed by the Child Soldiers Initiative (CSI). Inspired by the Sphere Project and the INEE minimum standards for Education in Emergencies, CSI minimum standards aim to provide an overall framework to guide the design and development of training on child

soldiers. The roundtable will draw together experts on the design and development of training on child soldiers. The roundtable will draw together experts on the issue of child soldiers and will provide a unique opportunity to share views among actors involved in the field.



The Round Table will feature Senator Romeo Dallaire, Director of the Child Soldiers Initiative and will be moderated by Ms. Sally Fegan-Wyles, Acting Head of the United Nations Institute of Training and Research.