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Key Facts | The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative

What is the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative?

The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative (the Dallaire Initiative) is a global partnership based at Dalhousie University. Our mission is to progressively eradicate the use and recruitment of child soldiers through a security sector approach.

When was the Dallaire Initiative created and why did it come into existence?

The organization was founded by LGen Roméo Dallaire (ret'd) in 2007. General Dallaire first experienced the issue of child soldiers as the Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. During this time, General Dallaire realized that he and his troops were ill prepared to face them.

The Dallaire Initiative wants to bring the perspective of the security sector to the issue of child soldiery, while equipping them with the training and tools to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers worldwide. Through this we hope to build a more holistic, prevention oriented approach to the issue of child soldiers that compliments current efforts while providing innovative solutions.

What does the Dallaire Initiative do?

The Dallaire Initiative conducts work on three fronts to support its mission:

- We offer tactical, prevention-oriented training to security sector actors, to promote broader security sector reform.
- We conduct world-class interdisciplinary research to build—and share—knowledge, which in turn leads to new solutions.
- We engage in high-level advocacy activities to create and promote the political will to end the use of children as soldiers.

PRESS KIT

Key Facts | The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative

How do you frame the issue of child soldiers?

We frame the issue of child soldiers as a specific security concern and base our work on the experiences of military, police, children and communities who have been affected by conflict. We translate these experiences into our research, training and advocacy to give depth and reality to our work. We focus on changing attitudes and behaviours—specifically within the security sector—that will create momentum to achieve our ultimate vision—a world where children are no longer used as weapons of war.

What makes our approach to the issue different?

The contemporary use of children as weapons of war continues to challenge the international community. Often left picking up the pieces after the child has served as a soldier, we have failed to protect the child, and ultimately prevent their recruitment and use as a child soldier in the first place. Tackled from a humanitarian approach, the security sector actor is not included in the international response or solution to the issue.

No individual country or regional organization had yet developed coherent policies, or military and police doctrine for dealing with child soldiers during peace operations. Our unique approach working with military, police and peacekeeping forces—often the first point of contact for child soldiers—is breaking new ground, and is a critical part of interrupting the cycle of recruitment of children by armed groups.

Through taking a security sector approach, we compliment international efforts, including child protection, international law, and demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programs. Through engaging with the security sector actors, who are often the first point of contact for child soldiers in the field, we can create a comprehensive international response that enables us to take a preventive approach to the issue of children used as weapons of war.

In order to solve this problem it must be seen as a security concern and security sector actors must be included as part of the solution. Through this prevention-oriented approach, we aim to create the necessary tools and training, supported by research, to better protect children from recruitment, and in so doing, help end this crime against humanity, community-by-community, country-by-country, once and for all.

PRESS KIT

Key Facts | The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative

Our approach aims to change attitudes and behaviours that are monitored through our innovative impact assessment approaches. Long-term systemic changes are key to the success of the Initiative's efforts and the global fight to end the use of children as soldiers.

What are some examples of the Dallaire Initiative's training activities?

Our preventative training changes attitudes, behaviours and policies of security sector actors, allowing them to counter-act the issue of child soldiers effectively. The Dallaire Initiative's training produces better, more specialized soldiers, police, and peacekeepers. This represents a strategic investment that over the long term produces more cost-effective solutions.

The Dallaire Initiative's training is built within a security sector paradigm. With a focus on Standard Operating Procedures and Rules of Engagement, coupled with our context specific, scenario-based modules, we effectively build the capacity of our trainees.

Some examples of this training work include:

Uganda – We are developing a national level training program working with the Ugandan People Defense Forces.

Sierra Leone – Embedded within the national security structure of Sierra Leone, our training is building the capacity of security sector personnel to understand and implement strategies for preventing the use and recruitment of child soldiers at home and abroad.

AMISOM – In January 2015, Captain Musa Gbow became the first ever child protection advisor in an African Union peacekeeping mission. Based in Somalia, Captain Gbow is sharing lessons learned through the Dallaire Initiative's training with AU peacekeeping forces as he continues to monitor and evaluate the interactions of security sector forces with children.

PRESS KIT

Key Facts | The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative

What are some examples of the Dallaire Initiative's advocacy activities?

We have a number of advocacy efforts that we continue to move forward with organizations around the globe. Some recent advocacy efforts of note include:

NATO – We are working with NATO to develop new Standard Operating Procedures on children and armed conflict and influencing new training.

Responsibility to Protect – We participated within the world summit in Slovenia on the Responsibility to Protect, where we presented to the international community the concept of child soldiers as an early warning indicator for mass atrocity.

African Union – We are currently working with the AU to create new standards and capacity for child protection within AU peacekeeping missions.

International Criminal Court – We are assisting with the development of the Chief Prosecutor's policy on children and armed conflict.

What are some examples of the Dallaire Initiative's research activities?

The Dallaire Initiative's research project regularly represents the first attempts to give context and in-depth analysis on issues related to child soldiers and those effecting children and armed conflict. Our research supports our training and is used as a larger catalyst to inform international discourse and our programs.

Some of our current work includes:

- Innovation in the Prevention of the Use of Child Soldiers – Women in the Security Sector;
- Child Soldiers as an Early Warning Indicator of Mass Atrocities and Genocide;
- Impact Assessment of Preventative Training on the Issue of Child Soldiers.

PRESS KIT

Key Facts | The Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative

What is the role of LGen Roméo Dallaire with the Dallaire Initiative?

Retired lieutenant-general Roméo Dallaire is the founder of the Dallaire Initiative. General Dallaire brings his extensive experience as a career soldier, humanitarian and former peacekeeper to help guide and inform our security sector first approach.

General Dallaire also plays an important role in elevating the work of the Initiative and participating in our advocacy at the United Nations and other key organizations around the globe.

Why are you located at Dalhousie University?

Dalhousie University is the institutional home for the Dallaire Initiative; it situates the project within a uniquely rich, interactive and collaborative environment. As part of Dalhousie University, the Dallaire Initiative is able to draw upon the expertise of a variety of academic disciplines, as well as to inspire students, faculty, staff and alumni to make significant contributions to the world.

The Dallaire Initiative is a founding member of the newly established Dalhousie Institute for Children and Youth in Challenging Contexts. The Dallaire Initiative has benefitted from this institutional home on a number of fronts, but most notably the inclusion of the Initiative in two major Dalhousie led research projects – the Dalhousie Marine Piracy Project and the Network Centres of Excellence Knowledge Mobilisation Grant for Children in Challenging Contexts.