

We have finally seen the light

Statement by LGen Roméo Dallaire and Dr. Shelly Whitman on Omar Khadr

Today, the Canadian government has finally given Omar Khadr the apology he has long deserved.

It has been a long 15 years.

Starting in 2002, in the fields of Afghanistan, where a young Omar Khadr was forced to move and take up arms as a child soldier under the guidance of his father, a long and winding saga has unfolded. After being torn asunder in a firefight with American forces that claimed the life of Sgt. Christopher Speer, a Delta Force strategic forces soldier and special forces medic, allegedly by a grenade thrown by Khadr, he was detained in Guantanamo Bay for ten years.

Canada, at the time of Khadr's incarceration, failed to act in accordance with international standards to protect children who are unscrupulously used as weapons of war. This failure had a negative impact on Canada's image as a protector of children's rights and brought into question our commitment to human rights.

An apology and compensation is just the first step in a long healing process that has only begun for this young man. An apology does not absolve Canada for its many years of inaction, but does give it an opportunity to finally lead once again on issues of children. When Khadr was finally released on bail on May 7th of 2015 he stated, "there is nothing I can do about the past, but there is something I can do about the future".

Canada can and should find resonance and continued action in these words.

We applaud the action of the Canadian government in issuing this apology as a critical step to demonstrate a children's rights upfront approach. It is time for us to break the cycle of violence that so many children are vulnerable to around the world.

Sincerely,

LGen Roméo Dallaire (Ret'd), Founder of the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative and Dr. Shelly Whitman, Executive Director of the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative