



# ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP on the GREAT LAKES REGION of AFRICA

tel: +44 (0)20 7219 1165 fax: +44 (0)20 7219 0922 cartersf@parliament.uk  
Room 514, Portcullis House, House of Commons, SW1A 2LW



## ***Children in Conflict Meeting***

### *Contributors:*

Eric Joyce (Chair)  
Corinna Csaky (Save the Children)  
Sarah Mathewson (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers)  
Boniface Mush'ayuma (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers)  
Nivi Narang (War Child)  
Tim Grover (War Child)  
Katy Barnett (UNICEF)  
Davy Young (Invisible Children)

Eric Joyce MP introduced the meeting and invited the speakers to introduce themselves.

### **Boniface Mush'ayuma:**

Boniface said he welcomed the commitment to seeking international justice by the UK Government; he also welcomed peace building and community reconciliation efforts. At the heart of his work was research on why the problems regarding child soldiers have occurred. He stated the project's key priorities as being:

- Stopping the recruitment of children
- Army and media integration, that was currently not well managed
- Cooperation between armed groups and the government
- Justice and security reform
- Root causes of child soldiering and the issue of impunity

However, the main priority is the **reintegration of child combatants**.

### **Corinna Csaky:**

Children in the Great Lakes are experiencing a protection crisis. At any one time thousands of boys and girls are being raped, sexually abused and exploited, separated from their families, forced onto the streets, recruited into armed groups, abused or neglected at home or killed and maimed in conflict. Of all these abuses it is important to note that sexual violence is the biggest concern to children today. The perpetrators are both parties to conflict and civilians and many of them drift between these two statuses.

Corinna gave an example of 13 year old Asha from Ituri district in North-East DRC. She was separated from her family during conflict and now lives on the streets where she has been raped twice by local militias. She is out of school, has no birth certificate and is not registered for health services. Poverty has forced her into prostitution. Her greatest wish is to have her family together again.

Corinna noted that the harm children experience is not only an extreme violation of their rights but it is also a critical barrier to conflict resolution, stabilisation and development. With little or no education, deep physical and psychological injuries and no family or community support networks these children have few employment prospects and little chance of contributing to development processes.

Save the Children, along with many other organisations, is working with governments, communities, children and other actors to prevent harm against children and respond to it when where it occurs.

1. Firstly, child protection must be addressed as a comprehensive sector in its own right. Tackling single child protection issues – such as child soldiers, sexual violence or street children – is less effective. This is because children experience multiple forms of harm at once, and because the causes, consequences and solutions to all forms of harm – whether it is neglect, abuse, violence or exploitation – are very similar.

Corinna urged DFID to acknowledge child protection as a sector with its own resourced budget line and work stream. Such a move would help make the work of the UK Government more effective and encourage a step change amongst its partners.

2. Secondly, Save the Children UK underline that tackling impunity is key. To do this requires social as well as practical change. Child survivors of violence must be helped to report abuse, receive support to recover and reintegrate back into society, and have access to justice. Meanwhile, perpetrators must be served due punishment, and social attitudes must condemn their actions. The UN Security Council's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism is an excellent example of how impunity can be addressed. It has helped to transform attitudes on the ground towards child soldiering and led to significant demobilisation.

Save the Children UK would like to see the FCO reinforce its support for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, in particular by championing greater emphasis on tackling impunity around sexual violence and other grave violations. They also call upon DFID to support conflict-affected countries to build the services and structures needed to tackle impunity and support children to report and recover from grave rights violations.

3. Thirdly, they emphasise that long-term approaches are essential for tackling child protection problems.

**Nivi Narang:**

War Child are advocating a long term and joined up approach to the issue of child soldiering and reintegration, there are serious long term funding issues - grants rarely last more than 12

months. War Child propose that in post-conflict areas there should be ten year funding in place. In these complex areas it is never one single issue in isolation causing a problem and therefore systems needs to be built up as well.

War Child have called on DFID to include this in their White Paper, for FCO to develop a new child in conflict strategy, and on the MOD to review its tactics and the impact this has on children.

War Child has also called on civil society to play a much more significant role in bringing about these changes.

**Eric Joyce:**

With regards to punishment and impunity, Eric raised his concerns that the ICC is perceived as an organisation that only prosecutes black Africans. He questioned whether the ICC is the best tool for ensuring that justice is seen to be fair.

**Kate (UNICEF):**

Kate agreed with the analysis of the current piecemeal approach to child protection. She described it as a sub-cluster within the UN and said that more needed to be done to raise the profile of the child protection sector within UK departments.

**Nivi:**

The MOD needs to support DFID more, and needs to be a much more powerful department. In deciding tactics, the MOD should take a comprehensive approach and consider child protection as a priority.

**Representative of MoD:**

The MoD representative agreed with Nivi and maintained that DFID has the upper hand by being on the ground and having access to more funding. He said there was currently a government led review of the Comprehensive Approach.

Tim (from Warchild) suggested the frameworks from Iraq and Afghanistan, where the comprehensive approach was piloted, indicate that so far CA has been very much MOD lead.

**Patrick Merienne (DFID):**

There is close collaboration in Africa between the three UK government departments. There are funds for cross-departmental initiatives and this strengthens close departmental work.

**Warchild:**

SSR requires a multi-level approach. The Congolese army are among the greatest perpetrators of abuse therefore there can't be a single military solution.

**Corinna:**

The issue of perpetrators needs to be viewed in a broader context. Because of socially accepted norms interventions can only achieve so much. Social condemnation is what is needed and this requires the support of teachers, judges, doctors etc.

**Kate:**

Un Security Council Resolution 1612 is a reporting mechanism for violations of human rights. We need to be clear about condemning sexual violence.

**Sarah Mathewson:**

In order to achieve sustainable peace, justice must be done: in a culture of impunity, tensions and hostilities will soon resurface. High-profile trials like that of Thomas Lubanga have profound effects in the region. Reforming the national justice sector and the security sector and ensuring access to justice for the population are essential in restoring minimal accountability in the DRC.

Eric suggested this is still a political question – how are you going to get a reformed security sector when the EU and other donors will not deploy a single battalion.

**Corinna:**

NGOs are in a position to pilot solutions for SSR; you do not necessarily need UK troops. You need to train the police, judges and technical experts – this will achieve much more than a military presence.

Eric added that troops would need to be involved in the training process, as they have been in Iraq.

**Corinna:**

What is important is having someone to report abuse to – a judge to approach. It is possible to have these systems and structures even in fragile circumstances.

**Patrick :**

The UN and EU are helping to build these much required structures (e.g. justice, military, police), but clear leadership and vision from the DRC government is required. DFID has supported Security Sector Reform in DRC, including the reform of the army through the Integrated Brigades.

**Eric Joyce:**

Listen to Paul Collier, put money into “the bottom billion”. Resources need to be ploughed into the region, the Chinese are currently investing massive amounts of money and this will give

them a lot of influence in the future.

**Russel Brown MP:**

It seems nationwide reintegration projects are impossible – the DRC is an unmanageable geographical space that ca not be handled as a single entity.

**Ben Dempsey (Save the Children):**

People need employment opportunities otherwise they will stay in the army.

**Eric Joyce:**

DRC needs a proper political space with functioning institutions. There has been no political development in Rwanda for the last 5 years because there is no proper political space.

**Corinna:**

Valid child protection solutions are required in the entire Great Lakes region.

**Nivi:**

Invited the group to look at War Child's solutions and offer feedback.

**Eric Joyce:**

In conclusion long term funding is vital, small amounts of money achieve little.