

### Dallaire Institute Practicum: Final Report

The *Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security* is a global peace initiative founded on the mission of preventing the recruitment and use of children in armed violence and transforming cycles of violence. Their vision, as stated on their website is to advance a “world where children are at the heart of peace and security” through advocacy, policy work, training and active research that prioritizes a “dual lens” which recognizes on the needs of children as well as the impacts felt by the security sector operating in conflict zones where children are affected and used. Dallaire’s mission and staff are international, operating out of and advocating in several countries in Africa and Latin America. Their main office however, is conveniently located on Dalhousie campus, right on Le Marchant street. The Dallaire Institute was originally named the *Romeo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative* upon its foundation in 2007 by General Romeo Dallaire, the former Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda during the Rwandan genocide. During his time in Rwanda, General Dallaire witnessed atrocities, many of them taken out on and committed by children who were used by armed groups. Gen. Dallaire’s traumatic experience informed his life-long commitment to advocating against the recruitment and use of children across the world.

To advance their mission, Dallaire focuses on four main areas of action: capacity building, community engagement, research and policy guidance and advocacy. As stated on the Dallaire website, each year, more than 100,000 military and police personnel are deployed on peace support operations where children are recruited and used by both government armed forces and armed groups. As the 2022-2026 strategic plan notes, peacekeepers and military are often not systematically trained for their encounters with

children. With scenario-based, prevention-oriented training, Dallaire's capacity building programmes prepares military, police, and civilian personnel to prevent and stop the use of children in armed violence if they were to come across it in the field. This work is done in tandem with the communities affected by violence, helping create context specific solutions that maintain a focus on the gendered and youth-targeted aspects of armed conflict. The voice of local and youth-driven/led peacebuilding groups is strong in this work. The Dallaire institute has centralized a youth driven approach in line with their goal of keeping youth perspectives at the heart of their work with the leveraging of a Youth Advisory Council. The Dallaire Institute also has a robust foundation in research, championing the first ever predictive model used to monitor early warning signs on the use of child soldiers. The Early Warning to Early Action (EW2EA) system (originally called Knowledge for Prevention, K4P) is actively monitoring conflicts in 70 countries. When the early warning system predicts the likelihood of mass atrocity to increase in these countries, Dallaire's advocacy team works with stakeholders and community leaders to develop policy and prevention efforts. One of the major projects that the Dallaire Institute is famed for is the creation of the "Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers," in collaboration with Foreign Affairs Canada. These principles provide guidelines to best protect children and ensure their voices are heard in peace processes during and post conflict. They have been endorsed and adopted by over 100 countries.

I split my time in the Dallaire office to four hours on Tuesdays (12:00-4:00) and three hours on Thursday afternoons (12:00-3:00), where I was easily able to get to after my morning classes. Though I had the option of working online, I found it more exciting to work alongside my colleagues, all of whom were very welcoming, organised and extremely dedicated to their jobs. It was helpful for me to be working in person as I could bounce ideas off those more familiar with the specifics and current affairs relevant to the various projects I

undertook. The office is usually quite full, though many of the team meetings are online to accommodate those travelling and those who work from the international offices. Everyone, especially the advocacy team, travels often to oversee policy, connect stakeholders and attend panels in countries suffering from armed conflict. For about two weeks in February, I was one of few in office as most of my colleagues attended their annual symposium in Kigali, Rwanda with the Dallaire African Centre of Excellence. My work was relatively independent and for most projects and deadlines were not made from above, giving a certain degree of breathing room.

My time at Dallaire involved work on several different short research projects and briefing documents, mostly under the supervision of Madeline Zutt, Policy and Advocacy Officer and Dr. Julie Hyde, Director of Research and Knowledge Mobilization. At the beginning of the practicum, Dr. Shelly Whitman, the Executive Director since 2010, offered me the choice between two main projects for the semester: compiling research on moral injury or helping update and advance profiles on seven sub-saharan African countries where the Dallaire Institute is working to implement the Vancouver principles and peace processes.

For my semester-long project, I chose to work on the country profiles for Nigeria, Cameroon and Ghana, based on my previous work experience writing and updating briefing notes and my general interest in global politics. These profiles summarized the general current affairs of the country, the intricacies of the conflict(s) and the various armed groups associated, along with the past steps taken towards peace (including the signing of MOUs and international agreements on peace) with special attention paid towards the impacts felt by children. The research included searching through UN databases (particularly the Secretary-General Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict which details the specific number of grave violations taken out against children and who they were committed by), news articles, scholarly sources and military databases. For particularly complex conflicts, I sought

assistance and guidance from Dr. Hyde, Madeline and Dr. Whitman, who provided me with past reports, relevant academic papers and advice. Since the nature of armed conflict changes rapidly, these country reports would have to be updated frequently. Oftentimes I would be asked to quickly draft a briefing note on a specific conflict so the rest of the team could move into last minute planning meetings and travel plans with the right knowledge on the subject. The reports went directly to Madeline and the advocacy team to brief them before they drafted policy plans specific to that country. With the right context and knowledge on the complex natures of their armed conflicts, the advocacy team were able to meet with stakeholders and hold productive meetings to advance the implementation of the Vancouver principles.

In my second last week, I was asked by Dr. Whitman to prepare a short report on the conflict in South Sudan, which escalated overnight during my writing of the report when President Salva Kiir Mayardit arrested VP and opposition Riek Machar, leaving the country at the brink of another civil war. This short project turned into a longer one, where I was called on to attend a brainstorming session with Dr. Whitman and Madeline to discuss Dallaire's role in producing tools or approaches specific to the context of the reinvigorated conflict in South Sudan. I was surprised at how much I was able to contribute to the discussion from my research, highlighting the importance of engaging faith leaders (specifically the Catholic Bishops of South Sudan, who seem to have some sway over the president) and the specific ways other peace groups have successfully engaged South Sudanese youth. We concluded the meeting with concrete action plans on how Dallaire will leverage existence connections with peace mediators in the region and how we will reach new connections like faith leaders, as I brought up, to best advance the mission and protect children in the face of a civil war. This was by far the most interesting and collaborative

experience of my time at Dallaire as it allowed me to see and participate in where my research was actually going.

Another major research project I worked on was helping create a strategy for Dallaire's Youth Advisory Council (YAC). The YAC is staffed by a number of very accomplished individuals, mostly from Africa, who raise awareness on the prevention of the recruitment of children in armed violence in their own communities and networks and collaborate with the Dallaire Institute on creating inclusive, culturally sensitive, and gender-responsive initiatives. YACs are beginning to become commonplace in global peace institutes as the voices of youth are now understood to be critical to peacebuilding operations, something Dallaire has helped champion in their research. However, the frameworks and strategies designed to help youth and children engage productively and effectively are limited and vary significantly. My task was to compile the various strategies developed by established YACs of international NGOs like US Institute of Peace and War Child International as well as national/regional YACs like that of African Union and Canada. In my time researching these strategies and frameworks I was asked to join the Dallaire YAC to contribute a voice more familiar with the organisation and Canada's peacebuilding role for the other members.

In early March, Julie, Director of Knowledge Mobilization asked me to help out with a poster presentation for the Dalhousie 2025 SDG Expo. With resources provided by Julie, I created a 36' x 48' poster detailing the work of the EW2EA system and its greater impacts around the world. My presentation highlighted a case study on Cabe Delgado, Mozambique where the EW2EA system predicted a high probability of recruitment and use of children in early 2020. Through this initial early warning research, the Dallaire research team confirmed that there was evidence of recruitment and use by the militant group AhluSunnah wal Jama'a (ASWJ). The advocacy team was quickly dispatched to build a tripartite agreement between

the Dallaire Institute, UNICEF and the Ministry of Defence in Mozambique, allowing Dallaire training efforts on preventing use and recruitment to be implemented. At the SDG Forum, I spoke about my role at Dallaire alongside Julie, answering questions about the organization and this specific project as asked by the judges who came around to various posters.

I would highly recommend the Dallaire Institute as a placement option for any student in political science or the law, justice and society program who is interested in gaining experience working in the international NGO and advocacy world. If a practicum candidate were hoping to pursue a career or further education in global politics and international affairs, international law, humanitarian aid, war/military studies or research, Dallaire might be a good choice for them. The research and knowledge pillar of Dallaire is strong, with academic publications on youth, peace and conflict and the peacebuilding nexus released often (see the Dallaire journal *Allons-y: Journal of Children, Peace and Security* and Dr. Whitman and Madeline's recent book chapter "Why Canada Needs to Promote a Children, Peace, and Security Agenda"). In terms of networking and future engagement with the institute, the director, Shelly Whitman seems to be eager to keep former interns involved after the initial internship has ended. It was made apparent very early on how well connected the Dallaire Institute is with the Canadian military and state forces from around the world, which could be troubling for some hoping to do work outside of these structures, or advocacy that was more local/grassroots based.

Words: 1900