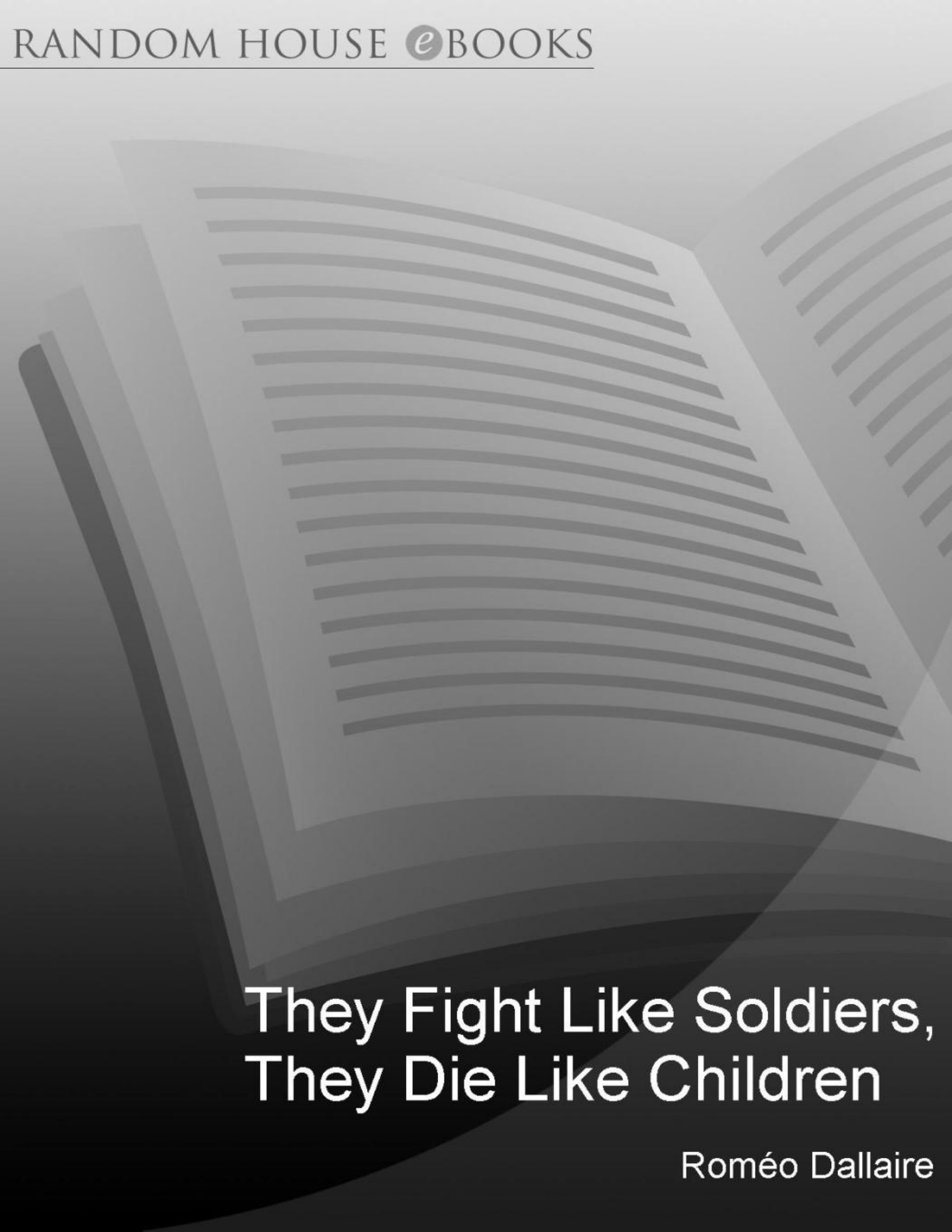
RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS



They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children

Roméo Dallaire

CONTENTS

Cover
About the Book
About the Author
Also by Roméo Dallaire
Title Page
Epigraph
Foreword by Ishmael Beah
Introduction

1. Warrior Boy
2. Little Soldiers, Little Killers
3. Kidom
4. Kidom Lost
5. How a Child Soldier Is Made
6. How a Child Soldier Is Trained and Used
7. How to Unmake a Child Soldier
8. The Moment: Killing a Child Soldier
9. The Child Soldiers Initiative
10. What You Can Do

Appendix: International Action on Child Protection and Child Soldiers
Recommended Reading

Recommended Websites
Acknowledgements
Index
Copyright

About the Book

In conflicts around the world, there is an increasingly popular weapon system that is versatile, simple to sustain, needs negligible technology, and has an incredible capacity for both loyalty and barbarism. What are these cheap, renewable, expendable weapons? Children.

Roméo Dallaire encountered child soldiers for the first time in Rwanda, where he was the three-star general tasked with achieving peace in 1994. ‘I saw them, heard them, faced them down, and ultimately confronted them in the midst of a carnage that swallowed their youth and my professional warrior ethic,’ he writes.

He left Rwanda a broken man, disillusioned, suicidal, a story he told in the award-winning international sensation *Shake Hands with the Devil*. What he saw and heard turned him into a passionate campaigner against the use of children in war around the world.

They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children provides a powerful introduction to the child-soldier phenomenon which also makes concrete solutions for its total eradication. Dallaire speaks up for those without a voice – the children who through ill-fate and the accident of birth find their way into soldiering – in a book that addresses one of the most harrowing, urgent and important issues of our time.

About the Author

LGEN THE HON. ROMÉO DALLAIRE (Ret'd) served thirty-seven years with the Canadian Armed Forces and now sits in the Canadian Senate. His Governor General's Literary Award-winning book, *Shake Hands with the Devil*, exposed the failures of the international community to stop the worst genocide in the twentieth century. It has been turned into an Emmy Award-winning documentary as well as a feature film; it has also been entered into evidence in war crimes tribunals trying the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide. Dallaire has received numerous honours and awards, including Officer of the Order of Canada in 2002, Grand Officer of the National Order of Québec in 2005, the Aegis Award for Genocide Prevention from the Aegis Trust (United Kingdom) and the United Nations Association in Canada's Pearson Peace Medal in 2005. As a champion of human rights, his activities include work on genocide prevention, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the Child Soldiers Initiative, which seeks to develop a conceptual base for the elimination of the use of child soldiers.

www.romeodallaire.com
www.childsoldiersinitiative.com

Also by Roméo Dallaire

Shake Hands With the Devil

They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children

ROMÉO DALLAIRE

arrow books

The child, face and hands caked in red earth, wearing a dirty, ill-fitting bush uniform with a cross dangling from a chain around his neck, furtively aimed a machine gun at me. As bullets started to spew from the barrel, the child's eyes flared in hate. Where is that child today?

FOREWORD
by Ishmael Beah

I AM SIMULTANEOUSLY grateful and deeply troubled to be writing a foreword for this very important work that aims to shed new light on how to end the use of children in war. Grateful that I am alive and was lucky enough to survive the civil war in my country, Sierra Leone, where I fought as a child soldier at the age of thirteen. My survival has allowed me to put a human face to this experience. I am also grateful for the fact that some measures have been taken on the international front to remove children from war, hence the possibility of my writing at this moment in time.

However, I am also deeply troubled because the usage of children in war continues and international and national mechanisms to prevent this appalling phenomenon—and to hold accountable those responsible for such acts—remain weak. Troubled, because what happened to my childhood and continues to destroy lives of children and their childhoods can be prevented and yet nothing concrete has been done to date.

As you read this, there is a child as young as eight, nine, ten and up to seventeen years of age in Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East, who is at the brink of

losing his or her childhood to war, who is starting on the path of believing that violence is an acceptable part of life. I have yet to meet a parent who would like such a life for their child. So why should the world turn a blind eye on such a paramount problem, one that will undoubtedly destroy the moral and ethical foundations of a majority of the next generation? I do not have any explanation for this blindness to the countless lives of children that have been lost, that have been amputated, the countless children who have become traumatized and lost entire families. What I do know is that there is interest in the issue and that over the years much has been learned about children who are caught up in war. As a result, a greater awareness has come about and support to create international standards to deal with this issue has grown exponentially. But this growth in awareness and the push for international legal and non-legal standards, though admirable, has yielded far too little or no impact on the ground in places of conflict and in the lives of the children who are at risk of entering conflict.

Vigorous work to bring international attention to the issue of children in conflict began in 1996, punctuated by Graça Machel's report *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*. Since then, international instruments such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions 1612 and 1882 (enacted to report and monitor the use of child soldiers and to hold recruiters accountable) have come into existence. In addition, there are various declarations and principles at regional and sub-regional levels to support and further expand on the existing international instruments. Unfortunately, in my view there are no workable mechanisms with direct influence in the field in place to implement these instruments. As the enforcement mechanisms continue to be ineffective, the possibility of

more children finding themselves in the theatre of war increases.

As someone who knows first-hand the impact of war on children, I am constantly in search of new ideas of how to end this scourge. I strongly believe that the Child Soldiers Initiative (CSI), developed and led by Lieutenant-General the Hon. Roméo A. Dallaire (Ret'd) in association with the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University, is an innovative project that goes at the root of the problem. It gathers all sectors and stakeholders involved in dealing with children in armed conflict to not only put an end to their use and recruitment but to eradicate the very concept of "child soldier" and to generate a strong global political will that is presently lacking.

It is my hope that through the pages of this remarkable book, you will discover groundbreaking thoughts on building partnerships and networks to enhance the global movement to end child soldiering; you will gain new and holistic insights on what constitutes a child soldier; you will learn more about girl soldiers, who have not been fully considered in the discussion of this issue; you will discover methods on how to influence national policies and the training of security forces; and you will find practical steps that will foster better coordination between security forces and humanitarian efforts.

I challenge you to read this important and timely work and discover that we as human beings, as nations, as the international community, have the capacity to end the use of children in war. We must not waste another minute as the task is clearly outlined in these pages.

Ishmael Beah,
author of *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*

INTRODUCTION

The blue sky glittered like a new-honed knife … The purity of the sky upset me. Give me a good black storm in which the enemy is plainly visible. I can measure its extent and prepare myself for its attack.
—ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY, *WIND, SAND AND STARS*

IMAGINE YOURSELF ON a hillside in the chaotic throes of war, with a sea of innocents behind you whom you are tasked by duty, honour, mandate and ethics to protect. Your weapon is drawn, and you are prepared for the attack. Over the hilltop, right in front of you, comes a troop of marauding rebel soldiers with rifles and machetes. You raise your own weapon and peer through the magnifying gunsight at the leader.

Shock hits as you realize this soldier is not a man nor a professional—not your equal in age, strength, training, understanding. This soldier is a child, in the tattered remnants of a military uniform, with dozens more children behind him.

As you stare at him, you picture yourself in a flash, aged ten, playing war games in the woods. For a split second, you are transported to the world of childhood, with its

make-believe, its wonder, its potential. And in that split second, you must decide your own fate, the fate of the villagers under your protection, and of these children in front of you. Do you treat this person aiming his weapon at you as a soldier or a child? If you do nothing, dozens will be slaughtered and you put your own life at risk. If you fire to frighten or disarm, you begin a doomed and bloody shootout. Fire back to kill, as you would at an adult, and you will save a village, but at what cost?

I was a soldier. A peacekeeper. A general. Years have now passed since I stood among the corpses of a human destruction that rivalled anything Dante could have imagined. The smells, the sights, the terrible sounds of the dying in Rwanda have been damped down in my psyche to a dull roar through constant therapy and an unrelenting regimen of medication.

But no similar intervention has liberated me from the ethical dilemma that spat in my face far too often during that catastrophic period of inhumanity in Rwanda, one hundred days in 1994 that saw 800,000 human beings slaughtered in a genocide no one in the international community could muster the will to stop.

Was that rebel coming over the hill a soldier or a child? Was that rebel acting of his or her own free will or because he or she was coerced and indoctrinated? Is a child still a child when pressing the barrel of a gun to your chest? Those child soldiers' eyes were wide and brilliant, screaming of pain and anguish and fear and hatred; what had they seen and what effect had it had on their souls?

"Civil" is ironically what we call a war where civilians are the primary target, and power over them is the principal gain—a war where combatants mingle with civilians and use them as shields, as camouflage, as bait and as recruits for the "cause." In the failed states and war-

plagued regions of the globe, young recruits exist in unlimited numbers, available at will.

It may seem unimaginable to you that child soldiers exist. It seemed impossible to me when I first encountered them that anyone would abuse the state of childhood so ruthlessly. And yet the reality for many rebel and gang leaders, and even state governments, is that there is no more complete end-to-end weapon system in the inventory of war machines than the child soldier. Its negligible technology, simple sustainment requirements, unlimited versatility in all possible facets of low-intensity conflict, and capacity for barbarism has made the child soldier the weapon of choice in over thirty conflicts around the world, for governments and non-state actors alike. Man has created the ultimate cheap, expendable, yet sophisticated human weapon, at the expense of humanity's own future: its children.

Thanks to a worldwide proliferation of light weapons and ammunition, combined with the limitless resource of children as a result of the overpopulation in developing countries in conflict, such as we see in so many cases in Africa, there is no more readily available, cost-effective and renewable weapon system in existence today. Desperate children, boys *and* girls, are cheap to sustain, have no real sense of fear, and are limitless in the perverse directions they can be manipulated through drugs and indoctrination since they have not yet developed a concept of justice and have been ripped away from their families to fend in the new perverted family of armed force.

Children are vulnerable and easy to catch, just like minnows in a pond, especially in places where families are being destroyed by famine, epidemic, AIDS, warring factions. Children are faceless and they are considered expendable. The guns are light enough for children to carry, and they are plentiful. There are illicit arms traders in the dozens who (for blood diamonds, especially) are most

accommodating. The children dig up the diamonds and sustain the weaponry, and they are the expendable platform to conduct the killing. Girls are an even greater asset, as they can do everything that boys can do, and so much more. They set up bivouacs, prepare the food, control the younger children and are used as sex slaves and bush wives.

Children are excellent as combatants, as bait for ambushes, as cannon fodder. They are light to transport but still heavy enough to explode land mines so adults can move safely in their wake.

Young children are walking the earth right now with no sense of youth, of imaginary worlds, of joy, of love, of human warmth. They are not truly children in any definition except biological. But of course they are still children, are they not? Have conflict, abject poverty and abandonment mutated them into some other type of being that is neither child nor adult? A category of their own that does not fit any description of what civilizations over the millennia have called a child?

What has humanity created? What have we permitted to be created? Alive and breathing in the hundreds of thousands in not-so-far-off lands are beings who have the physical form of children, yet who have been robbed of the spirit, the innocence, the essence of childhood.

It is hard for me to believe that in the twenty-first century, after hundreds of years of renaissance, of enlightenment, of modernity and human rights, we are faced with child soldiers in their hundreds of thousands. Where do we go from here?

As I will describe later in the book, my first encounter with child soldiers came in 1993 in Rwanda, where I was serving as the UN force commander of UNAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda). It was not meant to be a hot spot of an assignment. I was sent with minimal troops

to help ensure that all parties adhered to the peace agreement that had been brokered between the government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel army composed mainly of second-generation refugee Tutsis who had won significant military victories against the regime. I was also to help prepare the way for democratic elections that were designed to enshrine power-sharing between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority. While in Rwanda I bore witness to preparations for what ultimately became a genocide designed to annihilate an entire ethnic group, the Tutsis, along with moderate Hutus and opposition politicians. Despite my increasingly desperate pleas and the presentation of overwhelming evidence, the international community insisted that I not, under any circumstances, interfere in these preparations, raid arms caches or otherwise take action. I was commanding a peacekeeping mission, not fighting a war.

A hundred days. Eight hundred thousand innocent people slaughtered.

I stayed at my post throughout the genocide that began on April 6, 1994, along with a small contingent of Canadian and African—mostly Ghanaian—soldiers who decided to stay with me, doing what we could, which was nowhere near enough.

Even now, a sensation, especially a smell, can send me back to scenes from that slaughter. I hear a sticky, tacky sound, and then flash to decaying bodies slithering like fish in the net of an open mass grave, and I am briefly unable to extricate myself from this quicksand of memory.

Despite the increased responsibilities and the more and more senior appointments I took on after I got back to Canada in September 1994, I spent the next six years intensely reliving the Rwandan genocide—in my mind, at podiums around the world, and at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. I made no progress in healing. Rather, I maintained a pace designed to drive

myself to the self-destruction I felt I owed the people of Rwanda as retribution for my part in the failure of the international community to come to their aid.

Then, in April 2000, I was given a medical release from the Canadian Forces and asked to clear out my office at National Defence Headquarters. April, of course, is the anniversary of the beginning of the genocide, and is a difficult month for anyone with ties to those horrible events. Though I understood that I was no longer able to cope with my job as assistant deputy minister (human resources—military) at National Defence, I could not imagine being cut loose from military life, which had been my first love through my childhood as the son of a non-commissioned officer (NCO) in the Canadian Army and my own reality for thirty-six years. Since I also had absolutely no idea of what I would (or could) do in civilian life, I entered a period of ever more turbulent days and nights that no amount of medication could ease. I could not imagine being "retired," with nothing but therapy to break the hamster wheel of regret, self-doubt and self-flagellation that left me relentlessly rethinking every action I'd taken, every order I'd given, through every moment of my time in Kigali.

One morning during the exit process from the forces, I received a standard briefing from the group public affairs officer, and he happened to mention that his wife was heavily involved at Foreign Affairs with a large international conference on war-affected children, which was to be held that September in Winnipeg. She and I soon spoke, and we agreed that I should present a paper. To my surprise, her boss endorsed her recommendation.

I had given hundreds of speeches and written thousands of words on Rwanda, but there had always been one reality of the genocide that I hadn't allowed myself to fully explore. It was one thing to remind people of the children who had been orphaned, maimed or murdered, and another

thing to remember them myself. The usual mental image conjured by the phrase “war-affected children” is of the child victims of conflict, and I had encountered many vivid, heartbreaking examples.

But what about the other kind of war-affected child, the one compelled to pick up the machete or the gun, the one who becomes a crucial part of the killing machine? I had also met many such children in Rwanda and had witnessed the consequences of their work: they inhabited my nightmares.

As a military commander I’d been forced to deal with the fact that children were foot soldiers of both the genocide and the resistance in Rwanda—much as I still wanted to write them off as an aberration, a one-time-only historical phenomenon. I’d blocked the knowledge out of my mind: there were so many horrors, so many unthinkable things. Now I decided I was finally going to talk about the children. All of them.

What I couldn’t know when I agreed to prepare a paper and participate on a panel of “experts” on war-affected children was that I was about to find a vocation to replace my long commitment to the military—a calling to act on behalf of children affected by war, children drawn into the arena of war as child soldiers. To this day, this commitment is the driving force of my humanitarian work, and of this book.

By 2000, humanitarians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments had made great strides at identifying the scope of the crisis facing our children and in putting the issue of child soldiers on the world agenda. The UN achieved its landmark Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. The most significant work since then had been done by Graça Machel, the widow of the Mozambican president Samora Machel (killed in a plane crash in South Africa in 1986), who was appointed by the UN to lead a

study focused sharply on the dangers to children who found themselves in the midst of war, as victims or as victimized perpetrators. Her report, “The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children,” presented to the UN General Assembly in 1996, called on the international community not just to note these harsh realities but to respond. And to some extent it did, appointing a UN special representative on children and armed conflict and (around the time I was being retired from the Canadian Forces) adopting an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that pledged its signatories to limit the military use of children.

The Canadian government was actively involved in the diplomatic and UN action on the issue, riding a wave of optimism over its ability to play a leadership role on humanitarian and human security issues. More than optimism, in fact, since the Ottawa Treaty to ban land mines was proof that Canada could in fact lead global change. Lloyd Axworthy, then the minister of foreign affairs, and Maria Minna, the minister in charge of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), had now dedicated themselves to drawing attention to the gaps in the international efforts to protect children affected by war. The conference at which I’d just been invited to speak turned out to be the first global ministerial-level conference on the issue, drawing delegations from 132 countries and 126 NGOs, as well as representatives from the UN, the corporate sector and academia, and fifty youth delegates who were to bring the voices of child soldiers and child victims into the discussion during two days of dedicated talks.

We convened in Winnipeg on September 10, 2000, and I spoke on the second day of the section of the conference devoted to hearing from those in the know. The relatively small room where we met was packed to the rafters with attendees and media. Since this was my first foray into the spotlight out of uniform, I suspected that most of the

journalists were interested in my command of the Rwandan mission, and questions during the scrum before the session proved me right. That was fine in a way, as it provided me with an initiation into speaking my mind without previous guidance from government officials on what to say or avoid saying.

My fellow panellists spoke of war-affected children as victims of circumstance, describing various parts of the world where failing states were unable to stop massive crimes against humanity, including the abduction and abuse of children by the belligerents. When it was my turn to speak, I remember squeezing the microphone as I described how youths in Rwanda had been indoctrinated by extremist ideologues, had been captured by the mass hysteria of racism and hatred, and had literally chopped their way across a nation in a rampage of human destruction encouraged and energized by adult leaders and racist radio broadcasts. In Rwanda some children had been abducted by one force or another and others were victims and innocents, but many were disenfranchised youths enticed by power, by the machismo of weapons, by the idea of belonging to an organization that was feared by all. At the end of my twenty minutes or so, I was sweating—literally burning with the desire that people understand how inconceivable it was for children to be used in this fashion. I don't remember much about the question period after the panel, but I do remember the absolute silence in the room when it was my turn to respond, as if the audience was expecting me to take them somewhere they did not want to imagine. To my own chagrin, I delivered on that expectation with vivid scenes from the genocide. But my point was that we had to stop extremist adults from turning children into killing machines.

Maria Minna had attended the session, and later that night offered to make me a member of Canada's official delegation to the conference so that I could participate in

the resolution-framing part of the exercise. At the closing news conference, the minister announced that she had made me a special advisor on war-affected children to CIDA, reporting to her, the first position of its kind. I could not have asked for a better place from which to address the moral, ethical and legal dilemmas of using children, arming them and employing them as the principal weapon in conflict. I now had the chance to influence the actions of my own country through the minister, to help make war-affected children and child soldiers a *cause célèbre*.

As the minister's special advisor, I took my first trip back to Africa since I'd come home from Rwanda, travelling to Sierra Leone and Guinea in 2001 to gather information on what was happening to African children, attempt to advance the demobilization process that was already launched, and bring their stories and some ideas for long-term solutions back with me. As I was operating outside the regular bureaucratic stream, and because I had been a general not a humanitarian groomed inside the UN or on the board of an NGO, I soon found that I came at the issues from a different place than most.

I met with the UN political leaders and military commanders, and talked to peacekeepers at all levels, right down to the young corporal guarding a demobilization site. They spoke of frictions and difficulties in coordinating with their civilian colleagues from the political and humanitarian realms and how complex it was to gain their confidence and support in security matters. Because I was retired from the military, those same NGO workers so often leery of people in uniform briefed me equally candidly, though I think the old hands in the world of humanitarian work probably viewed me as more odd than useful. As for the leaders of the armed groups and the child soldiers themselves, my rank gave me access to their world view in a way that wasn't offered to either the aid workers or the UN troops. I came away thinking that maybe I really would

be able to dig into the nature of this beast from a different angle than my civilian colleagues.

What stood out starkly for me then was the continued influence that the child soldier leaders had on their peers—and even on the adults delivering the demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. These were fourteen-year-olds who were going on twenty-five, who were still very much in charge and who were not going to buy into any simplistic Dick-and-Jane rehab programme delivered by adults, no matter how well-meaning. They were seeking much more than just a short-term return programme to social normality. They could influence and they could command, and they demanded recognition of the power, the potential and the respect they had earned over years in the bush. They could spell the success or failure of any programme; to work effectively with them, the adults needed to realize who they were dealing with, and figure out how to help these youths find a path away from brutal addiction to power, toward using their powers of leadership to beneficial ends.

Later I travelled to Brazil to meet children who'd been hauled into the gang wars that raged in the *favelas* of places like Rio de Janeiro, and it struck me that the drug lords found children useful for the same reasons that combatants in Africa did: they were easily recruited, cheap to maintain, they could fire a light submachine gun as well as any adult, and occasionally the fact that they were children could disconcert an opponent for a crucial moment.

—

At the same time as my involvement in the subject of child soldiers deepened, I was also at last working on my account of the genocide, *Shake Hands with the Devil*, published in Canada in the fall of 2003. Needless to say, the

act of disinterring memories and researching every step and misstep was both gruelling and gruesomely clarifying. I was able to travel back to Kigali for the tenth anniversary commemoration of the genocide in April 2004 with a certain amount of strength drawn from my close examination of events, and pay tribute to the lost, to the mourners, to the survivors, without being completely hijacked by shame. For a time, the attention paid to the book threw me full-time into the work of genocide prevention, and when I was offered a fellowship for the academic year of 2004–2005 at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, which is part of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, I believed that my academic and research work would focus on conflict resolution, and the new role of peacekeepers actively attempting to make peace, not just enforce it, in the planet's numerous barbaric wars in failing states.

But in the end, the children kept drawing me onward. Since the Machel report had been released in 1996, there had been some research done on the recruitment of children—mostly anecdotal—and on the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers, but there was almost no analysis of the child's own experience during conflict and even less on the recruiters and the commanders using them. Absolutely no one was looking at the tactical advantage of using children in war, and no cohesive or concrete results were coming forth as to why they were being recruited in the first place let alone what made them so valuable to commanders. After some cursory research, I discovered that no country had developed tactical responses to this issue from the military or even the policing point of view. No doctrine existed to deal with child soldiers in the field, even though soldiers and police were facing them daily. This new weapon of war had snuck into the inventory of conflicts around the world and—despite the diplomatic conventions

and protocols we were passing and signing and ratifying—we were acting as if it wasn't there. Much money and effort were being spent, are still being spent, on picking up the pieces in post-conflict settings. Children were being cared for in the aftermath of war, but no one was thinking of ways to neutralize this weapon, nor successfully preventing child recruitment in the first place.

My experience in Rwanda taught me that soldiers—be they rebels, armed thugs or conscripts—respond to soldiers: it turned out that I could use my military rank and my operational credentials as a bridge to negotiate even with the bloodied youth leaders of the Interahamwe, whose machetes had hacked their neighbours to death. No matter what force you fight there is an unspoken respect for rank that could be taken advantage of. Rebel leaders who relied on child soldiers had been bombarded with attention from the NGOs, which would of course never discuss the actual tactical and strategic value of the use of children with them, but they had never been approached by a former senior operational commander in a humanitarian role. No one seemed to be speaking the language the rebel leaders were using when it came to their primary operational forces, these child soldiers. No one was making the argument that the inexhaustible availability of child soldiers as well as the proliferation of small arms were actually fuelling conflict and keeping wars going.

Quickly my research began to focus on children being used as weapons of war. *Tools* used by adults to wage war. Much like a soldier would use his gun or grenade, the child had become another weapon in their repertoire. The thesis of my research became clear: in these conflicts around the world, and especially on the African continent, children had become a weapon of choice for commanders. Indispensable. My very keen and adroit research team was soon deep in the exploration of what exactly made this weapon system so attractive to commanders. Beyond the

ubiquity of children, what made them a military weapon of choice?

I was amazed to find that my new military or operational vocabulary shocked people working in the field. But out of it came my mission and the mission of this book. If it is possible to use a child as a weapon system, it should be possible to decommission or neutralize that weapon system: to eradicate the use of child soldiers. Not to eradicate the child, but to eradicate the use of that child in war.

This book explores how I am attempting to decommission a weapon system that is itself a crime against humanity yet is used extensively in the ongoing conflicts around the globe. On the battlefield, how does one render such a weapon ineffective—even turn it into an impediment? How does one prevent such a choice weapon from being used in the first place? How does one change these human weapons into plowshares after demobilization?

Child soldiers are not weathered warriors who have consciously, willingly and wholeheartedly committed their adult life to the use of force against others and are prepared to pay the price of the same against them. We are not speaking of Sparta and Athens in ancient times, where young boys (and only boys) were selected by competition and breeding to be indoctrinated into the warrior caste through years of education in the knowledge of war, of training to hone weapon-handling skills, of experience through deliberate apprenticeships mentored by seniors, of bathing in the stories of exploits of great fighters and of being led by wise and astute generals once they were of age. Nor are they combatants in countries that consider the use of force as limited exclusively for protection and self-interest, and use it under strict rules and codes, whereby civilian leaders issue mandates to those who are professionals in the art of war and conduct themselves

within an honourable ethos. These children fight and die where there seem to be no rules except self-preservation—basic survival.

There are now international and national laws against the use of children under the age of eighteen in armed combat. Couldn't we eradicate the use of child soldiers by applying those laws to the adults who recruit children to fight their wars? Couldn't we simply arrest the culprits at every opportunity and have them thrown in jail *ad vitam aeternam*? Can't we stop this impunity?

We immediately run up against the question of who will apply these laws and international arrest warrants. What political will or capital would be expended by foreign governments to go into a sovereign nation in conflict and conduct operations to arrest the adult leaders, be they from the government forces or the rebels, on the basis that either side or both sides are using children as weapons of war? And what tactics do you use to secure an arrest when these adult leaders are surrounded by drug-induced "brain-dead" child fanatics?

The 2007 Paris Principles—a culminating point in a decade of activism and legislation guided by Graça Machel, in particular—vigorously argue that the long-term impact on child soldiers is so horrifying that the international community needs to assume the responsibility for enforcing its own laws. But the response has been slow, barely noticed, uneven and often overshadowed by more pressing concerns in the search for ceasefires, truces, peace agreements and permanent freedom for the people afflicted by the conflicts.

What if, rather than waiting for the great powers of the world to rise up in unison and come crashing down on these sovereign yet imploding and chaotic states, we were able to create another solution? What if we were able to bring to the field a sort of tool kit of actions that could be

taken by a variety of players and institutions attempting to solve the conflict in the first place?

What if we addressed the problem of this new low-technology weapon system by confronting it directly, on the ground and in the bush where it hides and preys on its victims? Leave to others the complex socio-economic quagmires that have created the conflict in the first place. Leave to those already well versed in these things, the demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of those children who have escaped, been abandoned or rounded up.

What if we actually went after the weapon system itself? What if we directly attempted to neutralize its effectiveness in the field and in the conduct of its evil crimes? What if we introduced a set of tools that would eradicate this weapon system from ever being employed or even created ever again? What if?

Today more than ever, on distant and disparate battle zones, we find the professional soldier, buoyed by years of experience and tradition in the most modern of technological instruments of war, coming face to face with the absolute opposite. It would be nearly impossible to invent a more complete antithesis to the modern, mature warrior-cum-peacekeeper than the child rebel, the child fighter, the child soldier. And what response can there be when the child combatants fire the murderous weapons in their hands? Do you kill children who kill? Do you use force to prevent their continued use of the guns they carry?

Can we actually eradicate from the minds of evil adults the very idea of using children as weapons of war? Is there room for innovative research and training to counter and prevent their use? Is there a way by which we free citizens can engage with political leaders to stop the massive abuses of children in conflict-riddled and imploding nations where poverty drives desperately corrupt and ill-begotten power?

This book is my best effort to show some of the ways in which we can answer yes to these questions. It is also an attempt, drawing on my own experience and the research I've undertaken over fifteen years, to understand the exact nature of the crime against humanity that is involved when a child is used and destroyed in this manner. A small warning to readers: I've done my best to come at these questions imaginatively as well as through facts and argument, and in three of the chapters of this book, I have created a fictional narrative involving the abduction of a child, the indoctrination of that child as a child soldier, and the moment in which that child and a UN peacekeeper meet in combat. I tell the story from the child's point of view in chapters three and four: "Kidom" and "Kidom Lost." Then in chapter eight, "The Moment: Killing a Child," I switch to the vantage point of the peacekeeper.

I believe that because this material is so painful, and because many of these children live in places many of us have never travelled, we create barriers in our own minds that prevent us from recognizing and feeling the damage that is being done to the fabric of humanity by allowing our children to be abused in conflict zones around the globe. Just as this book is a plea to protect the imaginative growth of children everywhere, it is also me putting my money where my mouth is by trying to use the power of my imagination to help the reader to connect to the reality of child soldiers. In my humble way, and with no comparison implied, I took my inspiration in this attempt from *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's classic. I believe that none of us will hesitate to act if we at last connect to these children through the child that survives within ourselves.

Imagine yourself on a hillside.

1.
WARRIOR BOY

WHEN I WAS a child, my father set out to build a cabin in the bush in the Laurentian Mountains in Quebec. The site was on a small cliff overlooking a violin-shaped lake, with virgin bush for tens of kilometres in nearly all directions around it. In the late fall and winter, the local farmers would go into the woods with their enormous horses and chains and tackles and sleighs to cut and then haul out spruce and cedar, and even the odd oak, to the provincial road where the logs would be piled sky-high until spring. I would marvel at these weather-beaten and muscle-bound farmers and their sons, who seemed to effortlessly wield enormous axes and bucksaws a hundred feet long.

My father was a staff-sergeant serving in the Canadian Army, with three children and a wife to support and no money to spare on any kind of a dream cabin. And so he brought down some of the huge trees around the site (he'd been a lumberjack before he joined the army in 1928), had them sawn into lumber at the village sawmill, and over the course of several years scrounged the rest of what he needed to complete what we not-so-affectionately dubbed the Slave Camp. Nothing really fit, be it window, plumbing or stairs. The dock regularly went astray, as the battle

between man and beast (the beavers) kept the water levels in constant flux. A trip to the cabin meant steady work.

Beyond the need to constantly tweak the make-do materials of our shelter in the woods, there were other reasons for the unending labour. Dad was a huge man with a very powerful chest, heavily tattooed arms, and hands that could smother a pineapple. He was a veteran of the Second World War, and like many veterans was haunted by that experience, sometimes to the point of allowing that destructive world to invade our home life. When the brain injury we now call post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) took hold of him, he was reliving, not remembering, the carnage he had witnessed, and perhaps caused. Sometimes he could damp down the horrors with alcohol, but often that didn't work. The cottage turned into a therapeutic instrument that provided him with a healthier outlet for his demons. He essentially lived for the summer weekends and the two weeks of vacation each year when he could escape to the bush and work on "his" cabin.

Dad really needed to keep busy, and he expected his only son to act as his gofer. How I despised that job. Go get this, and that, and the other, for hours on end when the lake was beckoning me to swim, to fish. But no, that was play and there was no time for that when he was at the lake.

I lived for the summer days when Dad had to be in town, leaving my mother, my two sisters and me at the cabin. Although he'd pile enough chores on me to keep two men busy all week, I now had the lake to swim in without having to guiltily avoid him, and the nearby sandpits to disappear into, where I built grand fortresses and fought the greatest battles of all time on its plains using small plastic soldiers and Dinky Toy tanks. And I had the endless bush to discover.

The forest was dense and totally enveloping. I would roam at will, stopping often to idle, to listen for birdsong