



AIDE-MEMOIRE

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES RESPONSES TO PREVENTING THE UNLAWFUL RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT



Aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Aide-mémoire : Mesures prises par les forces armées canadiennes pour prévenir le recrutement et l'utilisation illicites d'enfants dans les conflits

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction **1**

- Aim **2**

- Definitions **3**

- Collaborative and Multi-Dimensional Approach to Prevention . . . **4**
 - Factors Affecting the Recruitment of Children **4**
 - Military Responses to Preventing the Unlawful Recruitment of Child Soldiers . . **5**

- Conclusion. **12**

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Introduction

1. In situations of armed conflict, the unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups continues to be among the most common verified violations against children. The UN reported that in 2022 there were 7,622 verified cases of unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers.¹
2. In 2017, Canada led the development of, and adopted, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (VP).² The VP are motivated by the conviction that preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers is not a peripheral issue, but rather critical to achieving overall mission success and setting the conditions for lasting peace and security. By endorsing the Vancouver Principles, Member States acknowledge the unique challenges posed by children associated with armed forces and armed groups. They commit to making prevention of the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers a priority in UN peacekeeping operations and to helping ensure that all peacekeepers—military, police, and civilian—are prepared and directed to take appropriate action.
3. Of note, VP 17 calls for to support the transformation of these high-level political commitments into concrete actions by Member States. As a contribution to the fulfillment of VP 17 – Canada, in collaboration with experts and stakeholders from across the international community, developed and launched the Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles (IGVP) in 2019. The IGVP is a strategic document to assist States to operationalize the VP by providing suggestions on how each principle can be implemented.

1 Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict. 5 June 2023 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/144/96/PDF/N2314496.pdf?OpenElement>

2 Launched in Nov 2017 at the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial conference in Vancouver, the Vancouver Principles are a set of political commitments focused on child protection in peacekeeping, including all stages of a conflict cycle. They comprise 17 principles that focus on preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers by armed forces and armed groups.

4. Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) doctrine related to preparing the CAF to deal with child soldiers consists of the *Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 2017-01 Child Soldiers*, which focuses primarily on encounters with child soldiers, and the subsequent Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Planning/Initiating Directive for Child Soldiers Doctrine and Training, 14 July 2017, which directs that *JDN 2017-01 Child Soldiers* be included in all future training evolutions and operations. In June 2022, the Chief of the Defence Staff issued a directive outlining how the CAF will fully implement the VP. The first step in implementation is the development of *JDN 2023-01 Canadian Armed Forces Responses to Preventing the Unlawful Recruitment and Use of Children in Conflict (JDN 2023-01 Prevention)* which identifies the possible roles of the military in preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers by armed forces and armed groups across all relevant operations.
5. *JDN 2023-01 Prevention* supplements *JDN 2017-01 Child Soldiers* by focusing on prevention and articulating a common understanding of the challenges, ongoing strategic and institutional level preparatory measures, and potential tasks and responsibilities of the CAF in preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of girls, boys and gender diverse children by armed forces and armed groups while deployed on operations. *JDN 2023-01 Prevention* differentiates itself from extant CAF and United Nations (UN) documents by specifically focusing on preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups. Although the VP were developed specifically for UN peacekeeping operations, children associated with armed forces and armed groups can be found in any type of operation conducted by the CAF, therefore, this JDN is applicable to all CAF operations and is not restricted to UN peacekeeping missions.
6. *JDN 2023-01 Prevention* has been developed and refined by applying the Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) process.³ The GBA Plus process was conducted early and throughout the research, collaboration, writing, and revision stages of this JDN, as well as how GBA Plus factors in the expected outcomes of the JDN's implementation by CAF personnel.

Aim

7. This aide-memoire to *JDN 2023-01 Prevention* provides a summary of actions the CAF could take to prevent the unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups given the appropriate mandate and in coordination with other government departments, mission elements, international organisations, civil society groups and child protection actors. These responses should always be informed through deliberate Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) assessment early in strategic and operational planning stages.

3 Steps of the GBA Plus process include: problem identification; challenging personal and institutional assumptions; gathering facts while researching and consulting; developing options and making recommendations; as well as monitoring and evaluating outcomes.

8. Commanders, policy advisors, analysts and planners can use this aide-memoire to better develop responses which can assist in the prevention of the unlawful recruitment of children. This aide-memoire should be used in conjunction with *JDN 2023-01 Prevention* and recognized training tools and directives issued by the CAF and the Government of Canada.
9. While this aide memoire is focused on preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers it should be noted this can be linked to the other Six Grave Violations against Children during Armed Conflict: 1. Recruitment and or use of children; 2. Killing or maiming of children; 3. Rape and other forms of Sexual violence against children; 4. Attacks against schools or hospitals 5. Abduction of children; and 6. Denial of humanitarian access to children, and as such CAF members must be able to identify the six Grave Violations and report them through the appropriate reporting mechanism.⁴

Definitions

CHILD SOLDIER – A child soldier is defined as a person under 18 years of age unlawfully recruited or used in any capacity in armed conflict by armed forces or a non-State armed group.⁵

ARMED FORCES – the entire military forces of a nation.

ARMED GROUPS – groups distinct from the armed forces of a State. An “organized armed group” is the armed wing of a non-state party to a non-international armed conflict, and may be comprised of either: dissident armed forces (for example, breakaway parts of state armed forces); or other organized armed groups which recruit their members primarily from the civilian population but have developed a sufficient degree of military organization to conduct hostilities on behalf of a party to the conflict.

GENDER BASED ANALYSIS PLUS (GBA Plus) – an analytical tool used to assess how diverse groups of women, men and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. The “Plus” acknowledges that the analysis goes beyond biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences to consider other factors that intersect to determine individual identity. These factors include race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical disability.

- 4 In 2005, the Security Council established a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to systematically monitor, document and report on violations committed against children in situations of concern around the world. On the basis of this information, the United Nations Secretary-General names parties to conflict who recruit, kill or maim children, commit sexual violence, abduct children and attack schools and hospitals in his annual report on children and armed conflict for engagement with the goal of ending these violations. In conducting strategic assessments and operational planning CAF should take into consideration those actors and conflicts named or of interest in the UN Secretary General’s report.
- 5 Defence Terminology Board record # 696540. For this definition unlawful recruitment includes compulsory recruitment, recruitment in violation of international law, recruitment without proof of age, or recruitment without informed consent of the child’s parents/guardians. Unlawful recruitment does not include voluntary recruitment for the purpose of attending schools operated by, or under the control of armed forces. The term “used” refers to the exploitation of children in any capacity, including as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, labourers, spies, and human bombs, in security roles, or for sexual purposes. The term “used” does not include employment with armed forces that is consistent with international law.

Collaborative and Multi-Dimensional Approach to Prevention

FACTORS AFFECTING THE RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN

10. Children's association with armed forces and armed groups occurs for a multitude of complex and inter-related reasons. Each child's trajectory is often gender and context specific, depending on their identity combined with risks, needs, and resilience factors. No specific combination of factors can perfectly predict whether child recruitment will occur, rather a host of intersectional identity factors (such as age, gender, physical ability, ethnicity, and socio-economic) will make children more or less susceptible to recruitment. Moreover, links between child recruitment and specific factors are highly contextual where the same factor (eg. education or family networks) can serve as a push towards recruitment in one context or be a source of resilience that makes recruitment less likely in another.
11. These factors are:
 - a. **Structural Factors Affecting the Recruitment of Children** – Structural factors operate at the macro level, serving as far reaching conditions that make the recruitment of children more or less likely. They generally take the form of broad political, economic, cultural, social, legal, and demographic patterns. While not necessarily permanent, these patterns often have long histories and can be difficult to change. Structural factors affect the recruitment of children because they constrain the agency of individuals, including children and their families, by limiting the roles, opportunities, and range of choices available to them.
 - b. **Community-level Factors Affecting the Recruitment of Children** – Local, regional, and national communities inevitably shape patterns of recruitment. They may play a protective role, or they may facilitate children's association with armed forces and armed groups.
 - c. **Individual-level Factors Affecting Recruitment of Children** – Individual-level factors are often presented in terms of 'push' and 'pull' factors – things from which children want to escape, and things that make association with an armed force or group enticing – although a 'push' factor like poverty may work in combination with a 'pull' factor like having a reliable income.
 - d. **Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Forces and Armed Groups** – Armed forces and groups recruit children for a variety of reasons related to the group's history, composition, strategic and tactical-level goals, and the context in which it operates. Reasons for recruiting children may also vary over time, with some motivations carrying more or less weight as conflict dynamics evolve.

12. The Dallaire Centre of Excellence for Peace and Security (DCOE-PS) has developed a list of indicators and warnings for child recruitment based on the risk factors outlined above. A detailed explanation of the factors along with the associated indicators and warnings is available for consultation in *JDN 2023-01 Prevention*.

MILITARY RESPONSES TO PREVENTING THE UNLAWFUL RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

13. There are a range of actions that the CAF could take to prevent the unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups given the appropriate mandate and in coordination with other government departments, mission elements, international organisations, civil society groups and child protection actors. These responses should always be informed through deliberate GBA Plus assessment early in strategic and operational planning stages.
14. At minimum, the CAF must always monitor for and report on the Six Grave Violations against children. Specific military responses to prevent the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers can be divided into three types of response:
 - a. **Assess.** Ongoing and iterative actions aimed at providing or increasing understanding and situational awareness, while ensuring a GBA Plus is conducted and informs all assessment activities.
 - b. **Act.** It is critical to take the analysis which results from Assess and use it as a planning factor during military planning processes (OPP, targeting, and other related processes). Doing so results in integrated military actions to prevent or pre-empt children from becoming associated with armed forces and armed groups. Informed by GBA Plus, and in coordination with mission civilian child protection actors, these actions include both physical and information activities.
 - c. **Support.** Support activities are military activities that allow others (political groups, human rights organizations, humanitarian and development actors, police, child protection actors, and local communities, etc) to deal with structural, community, individual and armed forces and armed groups factors that make children susceptible to becoming associated with armed forces and armed groups. Accordingly, support activities would not usually entail being a lead actor performing the actual prevention actions.
15. Each action (Assess, Act or Support) is used to address the structural, community, individual and/or factors related to armed forces or armed groups that contribute to recruitment. While the risk factors for recruitment can be considered individually, there are intersectional and context-specific factors that must be understood by applying the findings from a GBA Plus to determine the appropriate level and type of military response to achieve the desired result as follows:

- a. **Structural.** Military actions targeted at the structural factors that make children susceptible to becoming associated with armed forces and armed groups are primarily focused on supporting other groups/agencies in dealing with the root-causes influencing the recruitment and use of child soldiers.
 - b. **Community.** Military actions targeted at the community factors that make children susceptible to becoming associated with armed forces and armed groups by supporting other groups/agencies in dealing with the root-causes.
 - c. **Individual.** Military actions should not be geared toward addressing individual-level risk factors for child recruitment. While important in broader prevention efforts, these factors are best addressed by actors other than military personnel. The CAF has a significant supporting role to play in this regard, but family members, civil-society groups, social workers, police officers, and others are better equipped to respond to individual-level risk factors and solicit help from military personnel as needed.
 - d. **Armed Forces and Armed Groups.**⁶ Military actions targeted at the armed forces and armed groups factors to prevent or pre-empt the recruitment of children, or convince armed forces and armed groups to no longer use children.
16. When considering the factors for child recruitment into the analysis, planning and execution of military operations, it is useful to group them into four broad contextual categories: type of conflict; social, economic, and political context; state capacity and governance; and characteristics of armed forces and armed groups. For ease of integrating into the analysis and planning processes, the factors, and associated indicators and warnings are formatted as a checklist of critical questions that can be used to determine the most relevant factors and for a given situation (see table below).
 17. Asking critical questions, like those provided below, provides a contextual understanding of recruitment dynamics across settings and social groups, information that is crucial for equitable prevention that effectively upholds the rights of all children. The questions and potential tasks listed below need to be considered at the strategic, operational and tactical levels and must take into account the historical, cultural, and socio-economic dimensions of a specific conflict. Many of these questions should also be integrated into ongoing strategic and operational-level activities that precede and follow the deployment for specific operations, and included in the Commanders Critical Information Requirements (CCIR), Primary Intelligence Requirements (PIR) and as part of Intelligence Preparation of the Operating Environment (IPOE).

⁶ This section is applicable to all armed forces and/or armed groups including those supported by or partnered with CAF.

18. Applying GBA Plus to the questions and responses ensures a child-centric approach that reflects the different experiences of girls, boys, and gender diverse children and helps CAF members understand the intersectional and context-specific factors that contribute to the unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups.

Type of conflict. The type of conflict can shape the operational environment and it provides the context in which children may become associated with armed forces or armed groups.

Critical Questions		Possible Actions/Potential Tasks
1	Is the conflict ongoing, a recent outbreak, or is it a resumption of a previous armed conflict?	Assess the degree to which the mandate and political objectives support the use of the military to prevent the unlawful recruitment of children by armed forces and armed groups.
2	Is the conflict transitioning from one type of warfare to another?	Provide military advice regarding the use of military in preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of children.
3	Is there an increase in the activity and/or use of armed gangs or community self-defence groups?	Ensure that defence strategic level policy, orders and directives enable the operational and tactical level forces to respond to prevent the unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups.
4	Is there a high or increasing availability of small arms and light weapons?	Ensure the force is structured, trained to be able to conduct assess, act and support tasks.
5	Is there a presence of armed groups or proxies that use child soldiers, and how are they associated with different actors?	Provide directive/orders specific to child protection to the operational and tactical level commanders.
6	Are there cross-border attacks on strategic asset points?	Issue authorities, including ROE that specifically allows military forces to prevent the unlawful recruitment and use children by armed forces and armed groups.
7	Are there porous borders and highly frequented cross-border trade routes (legal and illegal)?	Establish contact and maintain liaison with both mission and non-mission child protection actors.
8	Is there the presence of underground (human, smuggling, migratory, arms, drugs, or other) trafficking routes?	Support national, regional, and local security forces to address factors that make children susceptible to becoming associated with armed groups/forces.
9	Are there high or increasing rates of Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV)?	Work with local security forces to increase security, with specific focus on security for girls, boys and gender diverse children.
10	Is there a high or increasing numbers of refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs)?	Support appropriate agencies and Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGO), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) for the return and/or movement of refugees or IDPs, and humanitarian access/assistance.

Social, Economic and Political Context

- This level of analysis is found in existing CAF doctrine. Therefore, this section focuses on those aspects directly related to child soldiers.
- Social cleavages and grievances are specific aspects that can contribute to, and be exacerbated by, ineffective state governance.

Critical Questions	Possible Actions/Potential Tasks
<p>1 Has there been a decrease in the reach, effectiveness, or access to informal governance mechanisms and service providers?</p>	<p>Assess and report on the reach and effectiveness of state institutions with an understanding of the factors which impact children being susceptible to becoming associated with armed forces and armed groups.</p> <p>Assess and report on the reach and effectiveness of informal services and non-state institutions with an understanding of the factors which impact children being susceptible to becoming associated with armed forces and armed groups.</p> <p>Determine impact on CAF operations and likely requirements to support political, human rights, humanitarian and development actors.</p>
<p>2 Is there a high or increasing number of public appeals aimed at encouraging community mobilization to counter, either by increasing defensive measures or taking offensive actions against, real or perceived security threats?</p>	<p>Support diplomatic, aid, development, and protection groups to address underlying factors that make children susceptible to becoming associated with armed groups/forces.</p>
<p>3 Is there a high or increasing number of public appeals aimed at promoting collective mobilization to advance a political or ideological causes?</p>	<p>Support national, regional, and local security forces to increase reach and effectiveness of state institutions.</p>
<p>4 Is there a high or increasing number of public appeals based on politicization of identity (eg. ethnic or religious affiliation)?</p>	
<p>5 Is there a high or increasing number of calls to avenge perceived wrongs or grievances?</p>	
<p>6 Does school curricula support or reinforce patriotic or ideological appeals from armed forces and armed groups?</p>	
<p>7 Are girls, boys and gender diverse children politically and socially marginalized?</p>	
<p>8 Are women and girls politically and socially marginalized?</p>	
<p>9 Is there a large or increasing proportion of local population under the age of 18?</p>	
<p>10 Is there a high or increasing levels of poverty, both in prevalence and severity?</p>	

11	Is there a widespread or increasing use of child labour?	
12	Is there a high or increasing number of orphans or children without adult caregivers?	
13	Is there a high or increasing number of families displaced and/or separated?	
14	Are there high or increasing levels of sexual and gender-based violence in the form of domestic abuse, neglect, and/or forced marriage?	
15	Are there high or increasing levels of sexual exploitation and sexual and gender-based violence?	
16	Is there an absence of children in areas where they are normally observed, or presence of children in areas where they are not normally observed?	
17	Is there the destruction or closure of sports and leisure infrastructure that cater to children?	

State Governance and Capacity to Provide Security

- Effective governance addresses the underlying causes of conflict and, in the broader sense, can pre-empt or reduce the impact of conflict by meeting the needs of the population.
- Security is a specific responsibility of the state and needs to be considered from both a state and individual perspective. Current CAF doctrine considers state security. Therefore, the indicators listed here are focused on individuals or groups and reflect the real or perceived effectiveness of the State in providing security for all of its diverse groups. The actions listed can be considered in conjunction with other protection tasks (e.g. gender, CRSV, POC) but are focused on children.

Critical Questions		Possible Actions/Potential Tasks
1	What is the reach and effectiveness of state institutions (eg. national and local institutions providing for education, health, justice and social protection) in meeting the needs of the population?	<p>Assess and report on the reach and effectiveness of state institutions with an understanding of the factors which impact children being susceptible to becoming associated with armed forces and armed groups.</p> <p>Assess and report on the reach and effectiveness of informal services and non-state institutions with an understanding of the factors which impact children being susceptible to becoming associated with armed forces and armed groups.</p> <p>Determine impact on CAF operations and likely requirements to support political, human rights, humanitarian and development actors.</p>

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2	Are there attacks or abuses against local communities or diverse elements of the population by non-state armed groups?	Conduct Key Leader Engagement (KLE) with other intervening security forces to develop a common understanding and approach to preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of children.
3	Are there attacks or abuses against local communities or diverse elements of the population by state security forces?	Conduct KLE with persons of importance or influence to develop a common understanding and approach to preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of children.
4	Are there community self-defence groups? What is their composition, and why have they formed?	Provide a safe and secure environment for children and child protection actors.
5	Are there attacks or abuses carried out by community self-defence groups/gangs/proxies against other communities or diverse elements of the population?	Provide physical security as appropriate for children and child protection actors.
6	Is there increasing attacks on schools, teachers, and real or perceived local representatives of the state?	Provide reporting, including the Six Grave Violations, on situation, needs and violations of rights specific to girls, boys, and gender diverse children.
7	Are there attacks on refugee or IDP camps?	Provide a deterrent force when presented with credible information of imminent threat to children.
8	Is there a high or increasing levels of sexual and gender-based violence in the form of domestic abuse, neglect, forced marriage, and/or conflict-related sexual violence?	Adjust locations, temporary and permanent, of forces and patrol routes to deter the exploitation of children.
9	Is there the reporting of abduction of children?	Support diplomatic, aid, development, and protection groups to address underlying factors that make children susceptible to becoming associated with armed groups/forces.
10	Is there the destruction, closure, or occupation by armed forces or armed groups of schools and hospitals?	Support national, regional, and local security forces to address factors that make children susceptible to becoming associated with armed groups/forces.
11	Is there tailored, long-term programming for children previously associated with armed forces or groups?	<p>Work with local security forces to increase security, with specific focus on security for girls, boys and gender diverse children.</p> <p>Support national, regional, and local security forces to increase reach and effectiveness of state institutions.</p> <p>Provide a secure environment for refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) to reduce vulnerability of children.</p> <p>Support appropriate agencies and organizations for the return and/or movement of refugees or IDP, and humanitarian access/assistance.</p> <p>Support Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs.</p>

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Characteristics of armed forces armed groups

- These reasons will vary based on a group's history, composition, strategic- and tactical-level goals, and the context in which it operates.
- Reasons for recruiting children may also vary over time, with some motivations carrying more or less weight as conflict dynamics evolve.

Critical Questions		Possible Actions/Potential Tasks
1	Are armed forces or armed groups already using child soldiers?	Task intelligence assets to analyze patterns and linkages of factors to the recruitment of children.
2	Are effective actions taken to ensure accountability for members of armed forces or armed groups who commit grave violations against children?	<p>Conduct KLE, where situations permit, with senior armed group leaders to develop a common understanding and approach to preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of children.</p> <p>Conduct KLE with senior host nation military leaders to develop a common understanding and approach to preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of children.</p> <p>Through training, exchanges and interaction, shape culture of targeted partnered/supported force(s) so they do not recruit and use children.</p>
3	Is there a high or increasing reliance on illicit funds or external sources of funding? From where/whom?	Support diplomatic, aid, development, and protection groups to address underlying factors that make children susceptible to becoming associated with armed forces or armed groups.
4	What is the proximity to and reliance on natural resources (eg. gemstones, minerals, etc...) by armed forces or armed groups?	Support diplomatic, aid, development, and protection groups to address underlying factors that cause an armed force or group to recruit and use children.
5	Is there a decreasing access to financial resources by the armed forces or armed groups?	Support national, regional, and local security forces to address factors that make children susceptible to becoming associated with armed groups/forces.
6	Are there public promises to alter traditional gender roles and emancipate women and girls?	Work with local security forces to increase security, with specific focus on security for girls, boys and gender diverse children.
7	Are there public promises to provide members with food, security, or financial rewards?	Establish contact and maintain liaison with non-mission CP actors.
8	Are there public promises to provide education, employment, or other skills?	Support CP actors and armed forces and armed groups to release child soldiers.
9	Are there public promises to avenge perceived wrongs or grievances?	Support national, regional, and local communities and CP actors to prevent the use of children as part of community self-defence forces.
10	Are there public promises to establish a new political order and/or take control of existing State institutions?	

Conclusion

19. Ensuring that preventing the unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups is an operational imperative. Ensuring that CAF personnel are prepared to proactively prevent the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers while on operations broadens how the CAF views and deals with wider issues of child protection within the wider CAAC framework, and the overarching issue of vulnerable populations.
20. Military responses to preventing the recruitment and use of children must be tailored and applied according to relevant Canadian, UN, NATO, or coalition mandates, authorities, directives, processes, and procedures. Implementation of the actions noted in this aide-mémoire will allow the CAF to integrate the Vancouver Principles into planning processes at the strategic, operational and tactical levels, increase overall mission effectiveness, and help protect the most vulnerable. Implementation and integration of the Vancouver Principles will contribute to CAF operational effectiveness when reinforced with training and education, and will ultimately help prepare troops for the tactical challenges and psychological challenges often present in current operating environments.

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