

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**Security Sector Reform and Children**  
**David Nosworthy**

The restoration of justice and security is a priority of post-conflict peacebuilding, but children and youth – two groups especially impacted by armed conflict – rarely receive consideration in this process. This paper considers how reform of the security sector can contribute to making security provision more relevant to the concerns of young people, and to reflecting their needs and aspirations. Both security sector reform and transitional justice have been recognised as central elements of post-conflict peacebuilding, and engaging children constructively in these processes will have far-reaching implications for successfully establishing long-term stability. A special focus is placed on the central role that civil society has to play. The paper concludes with policy recommendations aimed at assisting decision-makers in integrating the security concerns and expectations of children into programmatic responses.

The end of the cold war saw the international community increasingly engaged in peacekeeping operations and post-conflict peacebuilding, and the notion of integrated missions developed, recognising the need for multi-disciplinary approaches to re-establishing rule of law and securing the peace. Key to this was addressing past crimes, and avoiding their reoccurrence. With this came recognition of the importance of good governance in the area of security provision, and the need for priority attention to security sector reform as a means of ensuring effective and accountable service delivery and minimising the potential for abuse of power.

While this paper focuses on the need for security sector reform to recognise and respond to the security needs of children, the close links that exist between security sector reform and transitional justice are recognised and explored. Some definitions of transitional justice present security sector reform as one element of that process, but at the same time security sector reform has been developing into a significant area of response in its own right of which justice reform is a vital component. Increasingly, the two are being recognised as distinct but complementary processes of post-conflict peacebuilding. Their objectives and approaches bear many similarities in terms of both the constituencies they involve and the outcomes they seek, and indeed in many ways they overlap. Ultimately, the two contribute to the overarching aim of addressing the legacies of war, establishing rule of law and ensuring respect for human rights through promoting domestic reform constituencies and building the capacity of national justice and security institutions.

Security is a public good and should be accessible to all parts of society without discrimination, with all individuals and groups having the possibility to claim its benefits whatever their legal status may be in a particular jurisdiction. Ensuring that children have a secure and protective environment to promote their healthy development will require a range of actors, both state and non-state, working together at multiple levels and across various sectors. In positioning children within this framework it is important that they are seen as active agents in their own development. Empowering young people, including through education and meaningful opportunities for participation, will build resilience allowing them to

resist peace-spoilers, provide them with alternatives to negative coping strategies, and assist them to actively engage in peacebuilding. Engaging young people will not only allow a better understanding of the issues required for designing and delivering appropriate services, but will also provide valuable insights into potential or evolving security threats. Investment in young people should be aimed at encouraging their active engagement in society. Today's children become the decision-makers of tomorrow and, naturally, their experiences will inform their future role and ability to pursue positive outcomes.

In ratifying an international treaty a state takes on an obligation to realise and respect its provisions. All state institutions share responsibility for implementing these obligations, with the state's formal security apparatus being a key duty-bearer. This has special significance in relation to commitments to children as not only are children holders of universal human rights that they share with all other persons, but they hold additional rights that recognise their particular dependence, development and protection needs. The state's ability to realise its obligations towards the respect and promotion of children's rights not only becomes a core indicator of good governance, but provides an insight into the development status and well-being of a nation. Ensuring that all parties are aware of their role and responsibilities toward young people is a key aspect of promoting the protection and well-being of children and the population as a whole. Effective application of human rights principles requires awareness and understanding on the part of government institutions and related bodies at all levels, but in practical terms, where this process is most crucial for children is at the level of local authorities and communities. Reform of the juvenile justice system in the post-conflict environment will have a particular role to play in breaking the cycle of violence.

Recognising security beyond the traditional notion of state security requires policy approaches that respond to the security concerns of communities and individuals. Accordingly, more inclusive approaches to security are being promoted based on principles of good security governance, including civil management and oversight. Those with the ultimate stake in good security are the population at large and, as such, in defining security policy they need to be given the opportunity to participate and contribute to the reform process. 'Non-statutory civil society groups' have an especially important role to play in safe-guarding children's security and safety. Not only are they closest to the issues of concern affecting the community, and children in particular, they are often themselves service providers within the community, and have a vital role to play in monitoring and reporting abuses affecting the population.

An unwritten objective of security sector reform is the need to change attitudes towards peace and security and on this level young people, who themselves represent change, have a potentially vital role to play as agents of peace. The gender aspects of how children experience security need to be a central consideration in all interventions, as well as the need to recognise the evolving capacities of children and the corresponding differences that exist between different age groups in terms of their security needs and expectations. Children will not be exclusively the victims of one form of abuse, but rather tend to be the victims of a series of causal effects and compound abuses, that make them vulnerable to exploitation. What this means is that a compartmentalised approach to child protection is not necessarily compatible with

addressing the broader security and protection aspects of many of the issues that affect children.

The synergies that security sector reform and transitional justice offer highlight the need for ensuring co-ordinated actions. Hybrid courts offer the potential to enhance and reform the judicial system while ensuring accountability; truth commissions can identify problem issues and generate recommendations; vetting can ensure that past perpetrators are not allowed back into positions of responsibility within public office or government institutions such as security services; and reparations can seek to strengthen structures and processes that enhance children's security and protection.