



Ulla Tørnæs' tale ved konferencen "How can the Danish Government promote child protection in Denmark and internationally?"

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In the past decade alone, armed conflicts are estimated to have claimed the lives of over two million children and physically maimed six million more.

Conflict deprives children of their parents, caregivers, basic social services, health and education.

There are some twenty million displaced and refugee children, while others are held hostage, abducted or trafficked. At any given time at least 300,000 child soldiers are estimated to be participating in conflicts.

With these figures in mind, the question that I have been asked to address here today - how the Danish government can promote child protection – is undoubtedly highly relevant. We ALL have a responsibility to protect the most vulnerable group in emergencies – the children. And this responsibility indeed also counts for the Danish government.

So what do we do?

The international conventions and the international institutions are obvious starting points for the Danish government in its effort to promote child protection. The mandate of the UN makes this institution a vital player - and

the Danish membership of the Security Council has provided us with a unique opportunity and responsibility to improve the existing tools for protection of children in emergencies.

But also the EU has proven willingness to focus at children in emergencies. How the Danish government in these forums work to promote child protection, I will come back to.

The close inter-linkage between security and development has been widely recognized within the last years.

Children affected by armed conflict must be provided with real alternatives to the harsh reality of war.

A long-term solution depends on the creation of possibilities for the victims of wars and conflict, including the possibility to get vocational training, education and in the end real jobs.

As minister for development cooperation I find that one of the really interesting challenges is to facilitate the link between security and development.

How development assistance can be used in conflict-situations – and especially used for protecting children in emergencies – the examples from Uganda and Sudan shows.

This conference has a special focus at the situation in Uganda. As a Danish programme country, parts of the Danish assistance focuses at the situation in the northern part of the country.

The Danish Embassy runs a scholarship programme for war-affected children in the northern Acholi region.

More than 10.000 children from the Acholi region are held hostage and used as either child soldiers or sex slaves. The programme focuses at reintegrating these war-victims.

I am convinced that education plays a vital role in development. In situations of conflict and war, the possibility to get an education is even more important.

We must not forget that children are the future.

They are the potential change-agents. If I can provide the war-affected children hope for a better future by funding a scholarship programme in Uganda, these children have the potential to help stop the conflict.

That is what I call a true privilege as a Danish minister.

At the end of 2004, 200 children had started an education under the programme. Out of these 200, 130 were girls.

At the same time, the 200 children received education in human rights with a special focus at children's and women's rights.

Not least, the programme has supported the local organisation in charge of the programme. The organisation had by the end of 2004 raised funds for 415 extra scholarships from other donors.

Another example is Sudan. As you undoubtedly know, Sudan has had a civil war going on for more than 20 years.

The southern rebel group of SPLM and the Khartoum government signed a peace agreement in January this year, which ended the war.

Knowing that the implementation of all the elements of the peace agreement is an extremely difficult undertaking, the Danish government decided to support the peace process with 500 million DKK over the next 5 years.

The plans for putting into practice the support are in their final stages of preparation. At this moment, I can say that the biggest single element in the Danish programme will be support to the development of an educational system in the Southern Sudan with emphasis on basic education.

Educating vulnerable groups is a primary building block when promoting child protection in the longer term.

As I said, the situation in Sudan, and especially in Southern Sudan, is extremely difficult and fragile, and Southern Sudan has no system for delivering basic social services to mitigate the risks of social unrest.

After more than 20 years of war there is simply nothing. Every thing has to be built from scratch. The task is immense.

Breaking the vicious circle of poverty is easier said than done. But we know, that educated women are less likely to die in childbirth, and women with access to primary healthcare give birth to children, who are healthy.

If those children are then educated, they will in turn be more productive and healthy in the future. Poverty reduction needs a multi-faceted development approach, where education is an important element.

In Southern Sudan much focus is on building systems for social service delivery.

We are allocating the biggest share of our support to basic education, because we know that education is the first priority in Southern Sudan. Southern Sudan has the lowest access to primary education in the world.

Only 2 percent of the population completes primary education, and 82 percent of all school-age girls are currently out of school.

We will enter into partnership with UNICEF to lift the task. Before the end of 2007, our aim is to have reached 1,6 million out-of-school girls, boys, orphans and other vulnerable children.

To protect children that as a consequence of war and conflict become refugees or internally displaced persons is a major concern for the Danish government.

Refugees and internally displaced persons are some of the most vulnerable groups.

They have no homes, no jobs and often no time-perspective for when they can start a normal life again. Especially children suffer, as the possibilities for receiving health services and not least education are very limited.

Through the Government's Regions of Origin Initiative, we try to enable the international partners to address some of these problems.

Through longer-term agreements and additional resources, we have entered into dialogue with NGOs and the UN on developing and consolidating interventions.

In Somalia for instance, we have an initial three-year agreement with Save the Children on developing and implementing "Alternative Basic Education" targeting primary education in the nomadic communities in areas to where refugees are returning from Ethiopia.

These are activities in the "Grey Zone" between humanitarian assistance and development assistance.

When working with the close link between development and security, we must sometimes break down barriers. We should accept that we might have to start using one form of intervention before we can end up with more long-term solutions.

The Government has decided to strengthen the Danish development assistance in regions of origin.

An important goal will be that refugees and internally displaced persons as quickly as possible are given the opportunity to return and establish themselves either where they come from or close to their home areas.

The government will increase the total funding allocated for efforts in regions of origin up to DKK 300 million in 2006 and simultaneously work for the establishment of a global repatriation facility.

Turning to the forums that the Danish government works through, I would like to draw your attention to the initiatives taken by the EU to protect children in emergencies.

The European Union and its Member States have decided to see promotion and protection of the rights of the child as a priority.

Furthermore, in December 2003 it was decided to further supplement the already existing instruments in this field with a set of Guidelines concerning Children and Armed Conflict.

Through these Guidelines, the EU undertakes to address the short, medium and long-term impact of armed conflict on children.

And the EU has the potential to do this in an effective and comprehensive manner, making use of the variety of tools at its disposal, and building on past and ongoing activities.

Since their adoption, the EU guidelines have led to a range of EU actions in the field aimed at halting the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Towards the end of this year, an evaluation is due to be undertaken in order to ascertain if implementation of the guidelines is progressing as expected.

We find it important that implementation is continuously monitored and updates or improvements are made as appropriate. We must ensure maximum impact of the guidelines at all times.

Denmark has been given a unique opportunity to influence the international community's approach to children affected by conflict and war through the Danish membership of the UN Security Council in 2005-2006.

The Security Council has since its first thematic debate on children affected by conflict been on the forefront of the international effort to address the problems of children.

Through its thematic debates and adopted resolutions, the Security Council has gradually sought to improve the protection of child-soldiers and other child-victims.

The protection of children in armed conflicts is one of the most successful and progressive developed agendas that have taken place at the UN in the last couple of years.

The success has been achieved through active involvement by concerned member states, a forceful NGO-community and the UN-system, in particular the Office of the Special Representative of Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF.

However, it is clear that the situation for children in armed conflict around the world is not improving.

Parties to a number of armed conflicts show no will to respect their international obligations neither with regard to the norms of relevant legal instruments, nor to the decisions and repeated demands of the Security Council.

More needs to be done and the Security Council must continue to play a central role in this development.

In the coming years a main priority for the Council will be to ensure the effective implementation of its earlier decisions.

Attention and political pressure must be exerted on those who violate the rights of children. And let us not forget, that the Security Council has not ruled out the imposing of sanctions against such violators.

As we move to consider targeted measures against the worst offenders, we must also ensure that we continue to receive systematic, reliable and accurate information on the situation on the ground.

In this connection, I would like to mention one of the first very difficult negotiations during the Danish membership of the Security Council, which was the adoption of resolution 1612 on 26 July 2005.

Although we did not get everything we would have liked after more than 6 months of difficult and intensive negotiations, I believe that we did in the end conclude with quite a good result.

During the negotiations we were very pleased with the excellent cooperation between the NGO-community and the Danish delegation to the Security Council.

Both sides benefited tremendously from the day-to-day exchange of valuable views and information.

In this regard, I would in particular like to mention the side-event, which took place at the Danish UN-mission in New York in April this year where Save the Children International presented their study on "Child Protection in Emergencies".

We believe that this event - at a critical moment - gave new impetus to the negotiations on resolution 1612.

It is very important that this cooperation continue among parties who want to improve the protection of children.

Together and in cooperation we can come even further to ensure that the Security Council will continue its active involvement on the protection of children.

The constructive cooperation within this area between the government and the NGOs does not stop with the Security Council.

There is no doubt that a range of Danish and international NGOs play an important role in protection of children in emergencies.

They facilitate the involvement of local civil society groups, religious leaders and other opinion makers in conflict prevention, mediation and dialogue. Not less important is the role of NGOs when it comes to alleviating the impact of wars and conflicts, which often affect children and young people most severely.

Since 2003, Denmark has granted around 230 million DKK through Danish NGOs towards development projects and humanitarian interventions benefiting children and young people.

About one third of this amount has been directed towards countries or areas in war or conflict, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia, Sudan and Uganda.

Save the Children plays an important role when it comes to putting child protection issues on the agenda, which the arrangement of this conference also shows.

A Danish evaluation of the tsunami catastrophe recommended an investigation of how to ensure that children are better protected, and how existing international guidelines are applied. I hope that this conference can contribute to this.

I will stop here to allow room for discussion.

Thank you very much.

Tags

EU, Politisk tale, Venstre

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