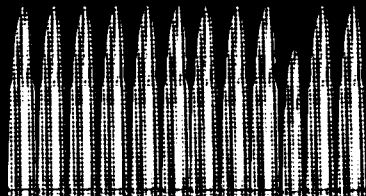


CHILD SOLDIERS

YOUTH WHO
PARTICIPATE
IN ARMED
CONFLICT



BOOKLET NO. 1 IN A SERIES ON INTERNATIONAL YOUTH ISSUES
YOUTH ADVOCATE PROGRAM INTERNATIONAL

CHILD SOLDIERS
YOUTH PARTICIPATE
IN ARMED CONFLICT

BARNITZ

YAP 
INTERNATIONAL

ABOUT YOUTH ADVOCATE PROGRAM INTERNATIONAL

The mission of Youth Advocate Program International is to promote the rights and well-being of youth on a global basis, giving particular attention to the plight of troubled and needy youth and to those victimized by armed conflict and by state and personal violence.

The Youth Advocate Program International was incorporated in 1994 and is an affiliate organization of the National Youth Advocate Program, Inc. (NYAP). NYAP is a private, nonprofit youth advocacy organization that develops and implements community-based services for troubled and needy youth. It is the parent organization of seven state affiliate programs that offer services in their respective states: Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, South Carolina, Georgia, Kansas, and Illinois. Youth Advocate Program International is registered in the United States as a 501(c)(3) organization.

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INTRODUCTION

It is our common tragedy that armed conflict has defined and shaped this century to a great degree. From the two world wars that were fought in the first half of the century to the proliferation of civil wars and tribal and ethnic conflicts that have shaken many societies in current times, much of the world's population has experienced war and conflict first hand.

Unfortunately, the tragedy of war is increasing dramatically as greater numbers of combatants are drawn from our most vulnerable population—our children. As you will discover while reading this booklet, the use of child soldiers is not confined to one geographic region or to a handful of political or religious groups. Child soldiers are found in virtually every region of our global community.

This subject, although not well-covered or understood in the popular media and completely ignored in peace agreements, urgently deserves our attention. For whether we choose to end this destruction of children's childhoods or accept that children are fighting and killing in adults' wars, our actions will critically impact one of the issues that will define and shape the century to come.

We present this booklet as a brief overview of the issue. We hope you will be motivated to read more, starting with some of the resources we have listed. We also hope you will join others who are working to establish legal norms and to rebuild moral norms that will prohibit the use of child soldiers. Most importantly, we hope that you will join us as we search for ways to repair the grave damage that has been done to our youth.

Nancy Nye
Director
Youth Advocate Program International

WHO ARE CHILD SOLDIERS?

- Children below age 18 who participate in armed organizations are child soldiers.
- Approximately 250,000 children serve in armed organizations around the world.
- Case studies report child soldiers as young as age five.
- In several countries there are girl child soldiers as well as boys.

Defining the child soldier

The most widely accepted definition of childhood includes youth up to the age of 18. However, it has been common practice in many parts of the world to recruit youth less than age 18 for military service. Children or youth below the age of 18 who serve, voluntarily or involuntarily, in armed conflicts are considered child soldiers in this text. All armed conflicts, whether internal civil strife or external conflict with another country, whether conducted by a national military or by paramilitary or guerrilla organizations, pose opportunities for the exploitation of children through the induction of children into military service.

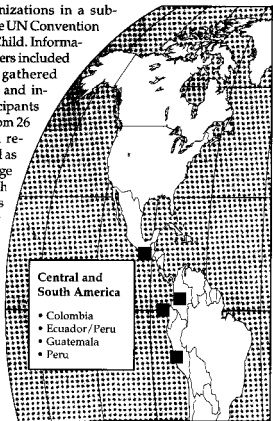
The exact number, ages and distribution of child soldiers are very difficult to calculate because of efforts to hide child soldiers, because many youth lie about their true age, because armed opposition groups do not operate under public scrutiny, and because the location and intensity of armed conflicts constantly fluctuates. However, research based on numerous reports of child soldiers in conflicts around the world indicates that the number of children existing in this condition is 250,000 or more.¹

The Child Soldiers Research Project,² completed in 1996, was the forum where much of the information gathered for this booklet began to come together. The project's members included several non-

governmental organizations in a subgroup working on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Information about child soldiers included in the project was gathered from questionnaires and interviews with participants in armed conflicts from 26 countries. Children reported to be involved as soldiers ranged in age from 5 to 17. Although most child soldiers are boys, it is clear that girls are being recruited by several armed opposition groups and by some national militias. In case studies of child soldiers in El Salvador, Ethiopia and Uganda, almost a third of the child soldiers were reported to be girls.³

Where are these child soldiers?

Where child soldiers serve changes all the time, but, according to information provided by Rädda Barnen, Stockholm (Swedish Save the Children) there are 36 current or recent armed

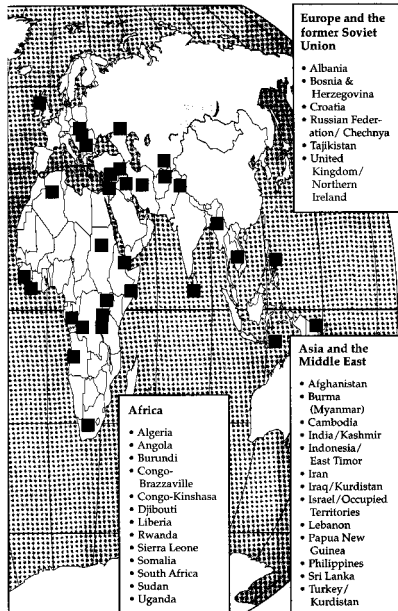


Central and South America

- Colombia
- Ecuador/Peru
- Guatemala
- Peru

Child Soldiers Around the World

■ Reported participation of child soldiers in either government or opposition forces or both is found in armed conflicts in each of the countries named (ongoing conflicts and conflicts in which hostilities ceased during 1995, 1996 or 1997).



Europe and the former Soviet Union

- Albania
- Bosnia & Herzegovina
- Croatia
- Russian Federation/Chechnya
- Tajikistan
- United Kingdom/Northern Ireland

Asia and the Middle East

- Afghanistan
- Burma (Myanmar)
- Cambodia
- India/Kashmir
- Indonesia/East Timor
- Iran
- Iraq/Kurdistan
- Israel/Occupied Territories
- Lebanon
- Papua New Guinea
- Philippines
- Sri Lanka
- Turkey/Kurdistan

Africa

- Algeria
- Angola
- Burundi
- Congo-Brazzaville
- Congo-Kinshasa
- Djibouti
- Liberia
- Rwanda
- Sierra Leone
- Somalia
- South Africa
- Sudan
- Uganda

SOME CHILD
SOLDIERS
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AND SOME
ACTIVELY
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REVENGE.

conflicts⁴ around the world where the participation of children under 18 has been reported (See the preceding map.). It is important to note that the problem of child soldiers is not just an African problem or a Latin American problem, nor can it be said to be a problem only in the developing world. Child soldiers also exist in developed countries, such as the United States and Great Britain.⁵

Who is likely to become a child soldier?

Child soldiers share a lot in common with all children. They are of every religion, ethnicity and race. They have ideas about the kind of people they would like to be and things they would like to do when they grow up. However, there also are some conditions that make it more likely for some children to be inducted into armed service. Those factors include 1) extreme poverty, 2) the loss of parents and family, 3) weakened bonds with family members, 4) living in a combat zone, and 5) the destruction of a child's immediate society, including its schools, homes, places of worship and hospitals.⁶ Children who are in refugee camps or in orphanages are particularly vulnerable to joining armed organizations when conflicts erupt.

Forcible conscription and volunteers

Even in countries where laws restrict military recruitment to those age 18 and above, poor identification documents, pressing political needs and overzealous efforts to meet quotas for enlistment do result in the conscription of youth. Sometimes families are threatened with violence unless a child agrees to join a fighting group. Sometimes teachers and caretakers cannot protect children from military groups forcibly taking recruits. Many former child soldiers have reported circumstances similar to the following passage from a case study of child soldiers in El Salvador.

The forced recruitment took place in the poor suburbs, at the football grounds, movie theatres, at the bus stops or in front of big schools, etc.; places where young men and boys of the lower classes of society moved in major quantities. Army trucks also went to poor distant villages in the countryside and swept up the streets picking up the young men.⁷

It may be surprising to note that most child soldiers report that they were not forced to join the armed group in which they participated. However, researchers disagree on the number of child soldiers that truly can be called volunteers. Economic and social pressure play considerable parts in families where children have been voluntarily recruited for warfare. The basic pragmatic desire to avoid individual starvation, to feed the family, and the promise of wages and allowances being paid directly to a child recruit's family are reasons for children's participation. However, it also is true that military service is highly valued in some societies, and parents may encourage children to participate as a means of earning prestige or because military discipline is perceived as beneficial.

In addition, children and youth may volunteer for service for protection or because they have been ideologically motivated to correct a perceived wrong. Again, an example comes from El Salvador.

Many of the youngest to join [the opposition] ranks were children, who had lost both parents in the war, either through death or exile, and had no one else to take care of them. Many had seen their parents captured and/or tortured, even assassinated by army soldiers, their houses burnt, properties destroyed or robbed. They joined to look for protection.⁸

In terms of how they see themselves as soldiers, interviews with child soldiers reveal that some of them feel strongly about the issues people are fighting for, and some are fighting only for their own survival. They might resent their parents for not protecting them from the conflict, or they might be grieving parents who were killed in the conflict. Some child soldiers try to avoid combat, and some actively seek revenge by killing people they believe are responsible for crimes and abuse.

WHAT DO CHILD SOLDIERS DO?

- Provide Labor
- Spy & Carry Messages
- Guard Prisoners
- Kill People
- Rape People
- Provide Sex
- Become Martyrs

Duties assigned to child soldiers

Most child soldiers provide labor for armed groups whether or not they participate in direct combat. These youth may be porters or cooks, or they might be ordered to construct the camps and dig the latrines. When child soldiers are weakened by the labor they are ordered to perform or become injured or sick they sometimes cannot keep up with the other troops. If this happens, they may be left behind for opposing forces to capture. They may be killed. Some are killed or permanently disabled in the process of doing difficult and dangerous jobs, such as mine sweeping.

Child soldiers are often used for espionage because they can mingle with others and not draw attention. They also are adept at hiding. Because spying poses a great threat to military operations, all children in conflict areas become suspect.

Guarding prisoners is another duty commonly assigned to child soldiers. Faced with bigger, stronger prisoners who may try to escape, this situation often results in child soldiers being forced to kill someone. Also, it is not uncommon for commanders to demand child soldiers prove their loyalty by executing prisoners.

Whether or not child soldiers express remorse for killing, these youth report that they believe that they had no choice in most instances. If they refuse a direct order they may be killed themselves.

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Others are too angry or numb from drug use or grief to question their commanders' orders. Child soldiers also experience direct combat situations where they must kill or be killed.

A review of armed conflicts around the world reveals an alarmingly common practice of terrorizing populations by encouraging soldiers to commit rape in captured territories. In Bosnia, it is estimated that at least 12,000 women were raped during the war in the early 1990s. Child soldiers in Bosnia and other conflicts have reported witnessing and committing this atrocity. Some child soldiers suffer rape themselves as part of the services they are ordered to provide. Girl soldiers are the most susceptible to these brutalities, although researchers note that information has not been gathered

on the issue of how many boy soldiers have suffered this degrading treatment. Although not all girl soldiers are sexually abused, in some conflicts girl soldiers report that they have been ordered to be the "wives" of male combatants to help the male soldiers cope with stress and fear.¹⁰

Desperate communities in war sometimes glorify heroic death or martyrdom. Children in early adolescence are particularly susceptible to the lure of public fame and notoriety that accompanies those sent on suicide missions. Deliberate military calculation plays its part as well. During the Iran-Iraq War, from 1980 to 1988, thousands of Iranian children were considered the most expendable combatants and sent out in waves ahead of adult soldiers over minefields. These child soldiers often wore necklaces with "the keys to heaven" round their necks. It is believed that nine out of ten died on these missions.¹¹

Another example of deliberate measures to encourage the martyrdom of children is evident in Sri Lanka, where several resistance groups have regularly trained groups of boys and girls to participate in armed combat.¹² Those who complete the grueling physical

and mental hardships of the training program are given cyanide capsules to bite in case they are captured, thus insuring their quick death.

Special treatment of child soldiers by adult combatants

The general treatment of child soldiers differs from conflict to conflict and may even differ among units of the same organization in the same conflict. Interviews with military and guerrilla commanders, as well as the child soldiers themselves, reflect differences in organization of child soldiers and how they participate in conflict with adults.

Some commanders say that they have refused to expose child soldiers to direct combat. Some have provided "education" programs for child soldiers, although the primary motivation for such programs appears to be greater indoctrination in the armed group's philosophy about the conflict or to better train youth to handle weapons.¹³

In some instances, however, the treatment of child soldiers appears to be frighteningly diabolical. Child soldiers in several different parts of the world have reported participating in "rites of passage" rituals that range from suffering physical torture to executing bound and unarmed prisoners to being forced to drink the blood of slain enemies.¹⁴

Deliberate brutality exhibited toward child soldiers is evident in the following excerpt from a report in *The Economist* magazine—

In some conflicts, children have been forced to commit atrocities against their own families. In Sierra Leone, for example, the Revolutionary United Front forced captured children to take part in the torture and execution of their own relatives, after which they were led to neighboring villages to repeat the slaughter.¹⁵

Providing drugs and alcohol to numb youth to the daily stress of soldiering is another practice all too common among groups that use child soldiers. Many young fighters have reported being given

alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines or a mixture of cane juice and gunpowder before skirmishes with other groups. The long-term physical effects of these substances may prove to cause permanent damage to the health of these youth.

The political end of armed conflicts does not guarantee an end to the abuse of child soldiers. In Afghanistan it was reported that 66 boys captured as prisoners of war in Jalalabad were imprisoned in an underground cell, questioned, beaten, tortured and forced to fight off dogs that were set upon them.¹⁶ In Rwanda over a thousand child soldiers were held in prisons or detention centers with adult prisoners of war for more than a year while political leaders determined who should be charged with war crimes.¹⁷ Some of the children, including those as young as five, were accused of taking part in the mass killings that plagued the country in 1994. Others were held simply because their parents faced charges.

WHY ARE THERE CHILD SOLDIERS?

- A child can carry and fire many types of automatic weapons as easily as an adult.
- Armed conflicts have left the battlefields and entered neighborhoods.
- Children can be controlled by adults both physically and emotionally.

Technological changes

Technological developments in weaponry have made it easy for children to participate in war. Children can carry and fire most handheld weapons used today. The Russian-made AK-47, the American-made M-16¹⁸ and the German-made G-3 are among the weapons that child soldiers have reported using. These kinds of

weapons are cheaper and easier to repair than planes, missiles and other sorts of sophisticated weapons, thus making them desirable and commonly used in the developing world where the majority of armed conflicts are currently taking place.

Changes in the nature of armed conflict

Any student of history can tell us that the practice of warfare has changed through time. One of the most frightening facts of life today is that social traditions and organizations that formerly separated combatants from the civilian population have been severely weakened. Acts of terrorism and fighting among groups who seek national power are more common than battlefields where regular soldiers from different nations face each other to determine whose might is greater. Approximately 85 percent¹⁹ of the casualties of war today are civilians; many are children. Also, a survey of armed conflicts where child soldiers have been reported recently reveals that at least ten current conflicts have lasted more than a decade. Entire generations in these countries know nothing of life without war and are ill-prepared to live life as anything but warriors.

Changes in the practice of warfare appear to be putting combatants in the position of seeking victory through the long-term destruction of social institutions. People who remain alive long enough to apply for international aid and put their supporters in positions of power, even when there is no recognizable country left to govern, are the people being recognized as the victors of war. Should we be surprised that moral systems have collapsed to a point where children can be used as soldiers? There is no easy answer to the issue of eliminating war, but there are strategies worth examining to stop the politicization of all social institutions.

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Deliberate exploitation of children's immaturity

Adult combatants can physically and emotionally intimidate children to undertake dangerous tasks. However, sometimes intimidation is not needed; children don't realize their own mortality. A commander in Burma stated—

When there is shelling, the younger ones forget to take cover. They get too excited. They have to be ordered to get down inside the bunkers.²⁰

In Liberia, a person working with former combatants said—

Adults need a good reason to take up arms. It is easier to convince kids to fight for almost nothing, with small promises of money and loot.... They are easy prey for the factions.²¹

Peacekeeping forces, both regionally and internationally organized, have been directly impacted by the use of child soldiers. In combat situations from Belfast to Haiti to Somalia to Peru there are reports of police and peacekeeping forces being confronted with child soldiers sent in front of hostile groups because adults would be hesitant to fire on children. The result has been the destruction of peace treaties and the destruction of the psychological conditioning to protect children.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF SOLDIERING ON CHILDREN?

- Child soldiers identify weapons and violence as their source of power.
- Some child soldiers become suicidal.
- Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, are common among child soldiers.

Immediate impact on child soldiers

Children who have been involved in warfare suffer problems such as nightmares, sleeplessness, bedwetting, eating disorders and the inability to concentrate. Some report post-traumatic stress disorders such as flashbacks to horrific incidents that they witnessed or participated in.

Although many of these problems are similar to those suffered by adults who participate in warfare, there is one significant difference. Adults have been socialized to the norms of civilian life before participating in warfare, and societies generally believe that adults can use what they learned during the socialization process to successfully return to civilian life when a conflict is concluded. Child soldiers have never had the opportunity to experience full socialization outside the context of the armed group. In a real sense, their social development is stunted by soldiering. Many simply do not know what is right or wrong.

Executive Director of the National Youth Advocate Program, Inc., in the United States, and Founder of the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence in Jerusalem, Dr. Mubarak E. Awad has worked closely with youth who have participated in the long-running, low-intensity warfare between the Palestinians and the Israeli army in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He explains that child sol-

diers, like the young Palestinian who has joined armed groups in Lebanon or the Palestinian areas, often do not understand the permanency of death or that violence is undesirable and not a constant feature of human interaction.²²

When youth engage in warfare and join armed groups, Awad says, they usually lose all contact with family and community. Child soldiers depend wholly on the armed group for identity and direction. If that group ceases to exist, child soldiers look for new sources of the militarized identity they have come to accept. They may be hired by any violent group to regain their feeling of belonging.

Destructive behavior and long-term effects

As one might expect, the experience of being tortured, humiliated, or killing other human beings may lead to unhealthy behaviors. Some child soldiers suffer depression from losing their group identity. Some become suicidal. Others live with constant fear or anger toward anyone in the role of authority—be that parents, police, elected leaders, teachers, or employers.

Accompanying the fear and anger is child soldiers' dependence on highly structured and organized daily routines common to a military environment. The military environment also does not encourage or reward child soldiers for thinking in terms of their future. As a result, these youth may exhibit an inability to plan for the future or develop long-term goals.

One of the most common problems of former child soldiers is emotional impotence. After learning to suppress a normal reaction to death and destruction, Awad notes that these youth may lack the ability to empathize with others or express themselves. While not as dramatic as overtly violent behavior, emotional maldevelopment may lead to a pattern of "explosive" behavior when the individual is under stress. Child soldiers have learned that the only power they have to influence others comes from a weapon. Conscious effort is required to unlearn that lesson and live peacefully with others.

For child soldiers who have been prostituted or raped, dependence on behavior which rewarded them with some small sense of security may lead to a lifetime of unhealthy sexual behavior. UNICEF workers providing primary care to former child soldiers

report sexually transmitted diseases are common among them, including HIV infection.²³ For girl soldiers who have sexual experience, strong community norms may prohibit them from ever being accepted into normal society.

Drug and alcohol addictions are other long-term problems that may be the result of soldiering experience.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF CHILD SOLDIERS ON THEIR COMMUNITIES?

- The return of child soldiers sometimes exacerbates community-wide fears for safety.
- Child soldiers cannot return to family life in exactly the same roles they had before becoming soldiers.
- Communities damage their future development when their children become soldiers.

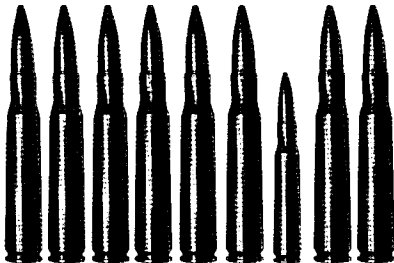
When child soldiers return to their communities they are not always welcomed with open arms. In many situations war has been fought around the youths' homes and family members are scattered. Child soldiers usually have to wait for the assistance of government or international organizations to be reunified with their families. Even for those children lucky enough to find their families alive and well, there are suspicions of the child soldier in the family and in the community at large. Often those suspicions are the result of having to determine the effect that soldiering has had on the individual child and the child's ability to reconform to familial authority and social life. In some cases, war-torn communities react to child

soldiers with fear and sometimes guilt for not having been able to protect its children from armed combat.

Crippled development

The real price paid for allowing children to become soldiers stretches far beyond the impact on the individual child. The price is a crippled development for communities where its children have lost their opportunity for education, both formal and informal, that will give them the skills and strategies for living life as responsible, successful, thoughtful adults. Especially in war-torn communities, the optimism of youth is needed for rebuilding and progressing in difficult circumstances. Behaviors leading to the destruction of peaceful social life will begin their long-term incubation if there is no assistance for the reintegration of child soldiers. As a Liberian social worker said—

Our children are the future of Africa. If we program them to kill, we'll find ourselves in a cycle we won't be able to settle for the next 50 years.²⁴



WHAT STRATEGIES ARE IN PLACE TO END THE INDUCTION OF CHILD SOLDIERS?

- An optional protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child will raise the recruitment age to 18 worldwide.
- The Convention also calls on all governments to register and document the birth of all children, leaving less room for the violation of age limits on recruitment.

It may be tempting to say that it is impossible to stop children from participating in armed conflict. Historically, child soldiers have participated in conflicts throughout the world. Indeed it is not possible to stop every child who is determined to join armed conflicts for his or her own reasons. But such arguments beg the central issue: adults are responsible for the safety and well-being of children. Those who violate that obligation by forcibly recruiting child soldiers and those who turn a blind eye to the treatment of child soldier volunteers must be made accountable to the greater society. There *are* means to significantly reduce the number of youth that become child soldiers.

Legal protection

Under international law, the most recent restrictions against recruiting children into armed service and protections for children are detailed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and ratified by every country in the UN except Somalia and the United States of America. The

ARTICLE 38 OF THE CON- VENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD PROHIBITS THE USE OF CHILDREN LESS THAN AGE 15 AS SOLDIERS.

Convention reinforces the obligations of states to abide by international humanitarian law and establishes that the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the supervisory body created by the Convention, can examine states' compliance with humanitarian law as it relates to children. Article 38 protects children under the age of 15 from recruitment and participation in military forces.

As a result of the obvious shortcoming of the age 15 limit on recruitment and military participation, a working group of the UN Commission on Human Rights drafted an optional protocol to the Convention to formally raise the minimum age for recruitment and participation in hostilities to age 18.²⁵ Also, the optional protocol is expected to directly address the issue of preventing children from joining any other armed forces within a country in addition to its nationally recognized military, and to emphasize the need to educate children and local community groups about children's rights to protection from recruitment and other effects of hostilities. The working group has been unable to complete its work because of opposition from developed countries, including the United States, which do not want to make changes in their recruitment policies. The working group is expected to reconvene and to discuss the optional protocol in early 1998.

Currently, most national governments legally ban recruitment and participation of children below the age of 18. Of those countries that do not limit all participants to age 18 or above, most do have restrictions against sending children under 18 into direct combat. However, the biggest loophole for avoiding all these restrictions has been the fact that military records of recruits ages are often inaccurate. Officials sometimes lie about recruits' ages or volunteers may lie about their age. Complicating the problem further is the fact that most armed conflicts today are internal, not international. In many countries the national military has

clear legal penalties for recruiting children, but special forces, political protection services and armed opposition groups may not be formally addressed by such legislation.

Here, too, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a meaningful tool for addressing the problem of child soldiers. Article 7 of the Convention, which calls for the provision of official birth records for all children, can help prevent underage recruitment.

A comprehensive list of recommendations to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers is provided by Rädde Barnen in *Children: The Invisible Soldiers*. In addition to supporting the optional protocol and insuring that birth records are universally established, Rädde Barnen suggests 1) UNICEF, other UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations assist governments in establishing birth registration systems; 2) these agencies should educate children and families about their rights regarding national and international laws on recruitment and voluntary military service; 3) violations of the relevant laws must be reported to the appropriate national and international authorities; 4) governments should be encouraged to accord child soldiers captured from armed groups their rights to protection; 5) continuous investment in education and vocational training are needed; and 6) governments must be encouraged to address the economic, social and political causes of their conflicts.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO REINTEGRATE CHILD SOLDIERS INTO CIVILIAN LIFE?

- After meeting primary needs, humanitarian organizations place a high priority on reuniting former child soldiers with their families.
- Strong emphasis is placed on community-based care for former child soldiers who can't go home.
- There is a great need for appropriate education programs, vocational training and life-skills training for former child soldiers.

One of the most shocking findings related to the issue of child soldiers is the fact that no formal peace treaty to date has specifically recognized the existence of child soldiers.²⁶ Even if all the preventive measures suggested worked and completely eliminated the problem in the future, *child soldiers already exist*. They need and deserve help reintegrating into civilian life.

The first step toward reintegration is to demand that all armed groups demobilize their child soldiers and to develop means locally, nationally and internationally to monitor demobilization efforts. That will not be an easy task, but one which researchers and experts have formally requested the UN to endorse with the participation of all involved child welfare organizations, refugee organizations, relief organizations, and various divisions of the human rights monitoring organizations. *The UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, specifically requests that all future peace agreements and peacekeeping mandates incorporate provisions for demobilizing children.

However, demobilizing is not sufficient in and of itself. Organizations such as UNICEF, Christian Children's Fund and Save the Children, which have been at the forefront of assisting former child soldiers, have begun to develop programs that address the other critical needs, including

- primary needs of food, shelter and clothing; family reunification; psychosocial assessment and counseling;
- educational programs and vocational training.

Research for this booklet indicates that most of these programs have come into existence only recently and have not been conclusively evaluated in terms of their success. There are some indicators of what has helped child soldiers and what has not.

Meeting primary needs

Soldiers, even child soldiers, do not give up their weapons easily. As a result, UNICEF and other aid organizations have been met with hostile reactions from child soldiers in some instances of demobilization. To entice the soldiers to turn in arms, sometimes small fees or food items have been offered in exchange. Ironically enough, once these youth have been convinced of the value of these programs, the aid-givers have been overwhelmed by their needs. Providing food, shelter and clothing is an important initial step in the demobilization process, but it is designed to be a temporary feature of reintegration programs. Child soldiers and the war-devastated communities where the aid programs are set up often need long-term support for their primary needs. Nongovernmental organizations and international organizations have to be careful not to make their offers so attractive that they become abused.

AID WORKERS
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Family reunification

Re-establishing contact with the family and the child soldier's community is considered an essential step toward their reintegration, but it can be the most difficult and time-consuming task for organizations and governments seeking to help child soldiers. There are several reasons for this, including: 1) the family members may have been killed; 2) they might be scattered in various refugee camps themselves, perhaps out of the country; 3) means of identification and means of communication often are not reliable; 4) families might fear being identified with the child's armed group; 5) poverty might make it impossible for them to support the child again.

When all efforts to find a child's biological family have been exhausted, aid workers are experimenting with a variety of other living arrangements, ranging from community-based foster care to creating peer-group homes with other child soldiers. UNICEF and other international organizations agree that locally arranged, community-based placement is preferable to putting former child soldiers into large, institutional facilities.

Psychosocial assessment and counseling

Child soldiers have lost their childhood. Upon demobilizing most experience psychosocial problems, but the intensity of those problems vary from child to child. The programs and resources available to help child soldiers overcome the problems varies from conflict to conflict and funding source to funding source. In some cases, child soldiers who have been diagnosed as suffering post-traumatic shock symptoms have received psychological counseling modeled upon western psychoanalysis. This kind of treatment is rare, primarily because it is too time-consuming and expensive to provide for many young soldiers.

It is hard to convince people of the need for counseling for child soldiers in devastated places where people—adults and children—are starving to death. Aid organizations committed to the healing and reintegration of child soldiers must seek methods of treatment that can be replicated and carried out by members of the local community and that are a comprehensive part

of other relief and development programs. Researchers are beginning to investigate traditional healing practices in different cultures where there are child soldiers. They have found that many societies do have traditional practices for healing people experiencing psychosocial problems, but there has been little evaluation of the long-term impact of these practices beyond anecdotal evidence.

In Angola, an evaluation of a child soldiers' reintegration project organized by Christian Children's Fund reported the following about traditional measures for healing.

...ceremonies involving child soldiers have the appearance of what anthropologists call rites of transition. That is, the child undergoes a symbolic change of status from a person who has existed in a realm of sanctioned norm-violation or norm-suspension (killing, war) to one who must now live in a realm of peaceful behavioral and social norms and conform to these. Until the transition is complete, the child is considered in a dangerous state.... For this reason, a child is not allowed to return to his family or hut, sleep in his bed, or perhaps even enter his village until the rituals have been completed.²⁷

By training local adults who are in a position to have long-term impact on local children—perhaps even to have permanent relationships with the former child soldiers—international organizations seek to make these programs sustainable.

Educational programs and vocational training

Left to the last on the list of reintegration components because that is where it is usually placed in the sequence of needs, it must be emphasized that education and training programs are not "fringe benefits." They should be regarded as central to the reintegration of child soldiers. In fact, a national commitment to maintaining education and training programs may be the key to preventing future recruitment of youth. The structure of education and training programs provides child soldiers with a routine, a place to be. The content provides them with the tools to take back their futures.

The UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children recommends the following:

Education, and especially the completion of primary schooling, must be a high priority. For a former child soldier, education is more than a route to employment. It also helps to normalize life and to develop an identity separate from that of the soldier. The development of peer relationships and improved self-esteem may also be facilitated through recreational and cultural activities.... Specific measures may be required, such as establishing special classes for former child soldiers who can then progressively be reintegrated into regular schools.²⁸

In addition to general education and training, life-skills training, peace education and conflict resolution measures are important components for programs designed for former child soldiers.

CONCLUSION

The deliberate recruitment of child soldiers is a saddening affront to humanity. In some cases the children involved are victims, in some cases they are the perpetrators of crimes, in most cases they are both. Considering this, it is necessary always to remember that they are children. The world community must do all it can to prevent and end this heinous disregard for children. Child soldiers deserve our assistance to return to civilian life regardless of the conditions leading to their involvement in war.

To achieve child soldiers' reintegration, all resources must be tapped. Local, national and international organizations must work in concert to bring peace to war-torn societies. Conflict resolution, relief and development, counseling, education: all are critical needs which require great expenditures of time, money and effort. Ending the recruitment, use and abuse of child soldiers is an issue that strikes at the heart of the legacy we are creating for humanity's future.

ENDNOTES

1. See Rachel Brett and Margaret McCallin, *Children: the Invisible Soldiers* (Växjö, Sweden: Rädda Barnen, 1996), 31. Brett and McCallin use the more conservative estimate of 200,000 child soldiers provided by UNICEF in State of the World's Children 1996 in their text. However, there is widespread agreement that this figure is an underestimate. Brett and McCallin use the 250,000 figure in their summary.

2. Brett and McCallin, *Children: the Invisible Soldiers*, 13. Those organizations that were integral to the project include: Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva, the International Catholic Child Bureau, Rädda Barnen, the Henry Dunant Institute, the Lutheran World Federation, World Vision International, and the research component of the UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children.

3. Rachel Brett, Margaret McCallin and Rhona O'Shea, *Children: The Invisible Soldiers*, Report on the Participation of Children in Armed Conflicts and Internal Disturbances and Tensions for the United Nations Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. (Quaker United Nations Office and the International Catholic Child Bureau on Behalf of the Child Soldiers Research Project), April 1996, 37.

4. Rädda Barnen, updated information from web site, August 5, 1997.

5. Determining the exact number of child soldiers in developed countries is not an easy task either. According to US Department of Defense statistics listed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey File, October 1994-September 1995, there were 6,952 youth age 17 in the active component of enlisted accessories. There are many thousands of youth in junior leadership military training programs in the United States. In the United Kingdom, according to *Child Soldiers*, edited by Dorothea E. Woods, a report from Quaker Peace and Service, September 1993, youth can join the army, air force and the Royal Marines at age 17 and the Royal Navy at age 16. The Quaker report included a 1987 report from *The Guardian* citing that more than 130,000 youth from age 13 to 18 were in the military cadets program.

6. Brett and McCallin, *Children: the Invisible Soldiers*, 103-115.

7. *Ibid.*, 84.

8. *Ibid.*, 96.

9. Catherine Bonnet, review of *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, edited by Alexandra Stiglmeier, *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 4, no. 2 (1996): 210. This figure is considered very conservative.

10. The sexual abuse of girl child soldiers has been reported in Burundi, Honduras, Mozambique and Uganda.

11. "Gulf War: The Child Soldiers of the Ayatollahs," *The Economist*, International Edition (17 September 1983): 64.

12. Separatist factions in the long-running conflict in Sri Lanka have often carried out suicide missions. See also, Dorothea E. Woods, ed., *Child Soldiers*, (London: Quaker Peace and Service, September 1993), report.

13. Brett and McCallin, *Children: the Invisible Soldiers*, 121.

14. *Ibid.*, 122. Studies from Colombia, Peru and Mozambique report cannibalistic acts being used as rites of passage for child soldiers.

15. "Sierra Leone: Out of the Bush," *The Economist* (6 May 1995): 41-42.

16. Dorothea E. Woods, ed., *Child Soldiers*, (London: Quaker Peace and Service, September 1993), report.

17. Jeremy Sutcliffe, "Hope for the Child Soldiers," *Times Educational Supplement* (18 August 1995): 7-8.

18. *Child Soldiers: The Invisible Combatants*, prod. by Center for Defense Information, Washington, DC, 1997, videocassette.

19. Ruth Leger Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures 1987-88*, 12th ed. (Washington, DC: World Priorities, 1987), 28.

20. Alessandra Stanley, "Child Warriors," *Time* 135, no. 25, (June 18, 1990): 43.

21. Lois Whitman and Janet Fleischman, "The Child Soldiers," *Africa Report* 39, no. 4, (July/August 1994): 65-66.

22. Mubarak E. Awad, interview by Niesha Lobo, Washington, DC, 25 July 1997.

23. Brett and McCallin, *Children: the Invisible Soldiers*, 174.

24. Liz Sly, "The Child Soldiers," *Chicago Tribune*, 9 August 1995.

25. Rachel Brett, "Child Soldiers: Law, Politics and Practice," *The International Journal on the Rights of the Child* 4, no. 2, (1996): 123.

26. *The UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, Report of the expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graca Machel, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157, August 26, 1996.

27. Edward C. Green and Michael G. Wessells, *Mid-term Evaluation of the Province-based War Trauma Team Project*. An evaluation report prepared at the request of the United States Agency for International Development. April 1997, 34. The evaluation was provided for a project of the Christian Children's Fund.

28. *The UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, Report of the expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graca Machel, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157, August 26, 1996.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CHILD SOLDIERS

Information/Book/Video List

Children: The Invisible Soldiers

Rachel Brett and Margaret McCallin, Ridda Barnen (Swedish Save the Children), S-107 88 Stockholm, Sweden, Tel: (46) 8 698 9092, Fax: (46) 8 698 9013, Email: annalena.andrews@rb.se, Web site: www.rb.se

Child Soldiers: The Role of Children in Armed Conflicts

Ilene Cohn and Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, Oxford University Press, Freeport NH 4051, Corby, Northants NN18 9BR, Great Britain, Tel: (44) 0 536 744 964, Fax: (44) 0 536 746 337, In the United States, Tel: (1) 800 451 7556, Fax: (1) 919 677 1303.

Child Soldiers: The Recruitment of Children

into Armed Forces and Their Participation in Hostilities
Quaker United Nations Office, 13 Ave du Mervelet, CH-1209 Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: (41) 22 748 4800, Fax: (41) 22 748 4819, Email: quuno@pop.unicef.org

The UN Study of the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children

Report of Graca Machel to the Secretary-General of the United Nations
Published by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Dept. of Public Information, 333 E. 38th Street, 6th floor, New York, NY 10016 USA, Tel: (1) 212 686 5522, Fax: (1) 212 779 1671, Email: information@unicefusa.org

Also from UNICEF:

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
The State of the World's Children 1996

Child Soldiers: the Invisible Combatants (video)

Center for Defense Information, 1500 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20005 USA, Tel: (1) 202 862 0700, Fax: (1) 202 862 0708, Email: info@cdi.org
Web site: www.cdi.org

No Childhood At All (a video that contains information on child soldiers in Burma)

Images Asia, P.O. Box 2, Prasingha Post Office, Muang, Chaingmai 50200, Thailand, Fax: (66) 53 406 155, Email: sitthi@cm.ksc.co.th

RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONS

International Coalition

To Stop the Use of Child Soldiers
International Secretariat
GEC, 11-13 chemin des Anemones
1219 Châtelaine (GE) Switzerland
Tel: (41) 22 917 8169
Fax: (41) 22 917 8082
Email: child.soldiers@wanadoo.fr
Web site: www.child-soldiers.org

The International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, founded in 1998, acts as the umbrella organization for several national campaigns, publishes information and organizes regional conferences.

Ridda Barnen

Save the Children, Sweden
Torgsgatan 4
107 88 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel: (46) 8 698 9000
Fax: (46) 8 698 9014
Email: Carole.henderson@rb.se
Web site: www.rb.se

Ridda Barnen (Save the Children, Sweden) is a complete resource for information and publications on child soldiers. Their web site has a searchable database and a subscription to a newsletter on child soldiers also is available.

Quaker United Nations Office

13 Ave du Mervelet,
CH-1209 Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: (41) 22 748 4800
Fax: (41) 22 748 4819
Email: quono@pop.unicef.org
Web site: www.quaker.org/quono/

The Quaker UN Office (QUNO) is at the forefront of research and international advocacy efforts. The QUNO web site provides timely updates on the issue.

Human Rights Watch

350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10118
Tel: (1) 212 216 1236
Fax: (1) 212 736 1300
Email: hrwnyc@hrw.org
Web site: www.hrw.org

Human Rights Watch has general information and country specific information, as well as a searchable web database.

Center for Defense Information

1779 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20036
Tel: (1) 202 332 0600
Fax: (1) 202 462 4559
Email: info@cdi.org
Web site: www.cdi.org

Center for Defense Information provides general information on child soldiers through publications, videos and their web site.

**Amnesty International
International Secretariat**

1 Easton Street
London WC1X 8DJ
United Kingdom
Tel: (44) 171 413 5500
Fax: (44) 171 956 1157
Email: amnestyis@amnesty.org
Web site: www.amnesty.org

Amnesty International publishes information on child soldiers including regional case studies and provides additional materials on a searchable database.

American Friends Service Committee

1501 Cherry St.
Philadelphia, PA 19102
Tel: (1) 215 241 7176
Fax: (1) 215 241 7177
Email: afscinfo@afsc.org
Web site: www.afsc.org

American Friends Service Committee has information on child soldiers available through its program on National Youth and Militarism.

**International Committee
of the Red Cross**

ICRC Delegation to the UN
801 Second Avenue, 18th Floor
New York, NY 10017
Email: mail@icrc.delnyc.org
Web site: www.icrc.org

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has general information and a searchable database on its web site.

**International Save the Children
Alliance (ISCA)**

275-281 King Street
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Tel: (44) 181 748 2554
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Web site: www.savechildren.org.jp/alliance/

The International Save The Children Alliance (ISCA) is an association of organizations working for the betterment of children. The 25 member organizations work in over 90 countries in the world.

UNICEF

3 UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017
Tel: (1) 212 326 7259
Email: jando@unicef.org
Web site: www.unicef.org/

UNICEF provides general and country specific information, as well as a searchable database on its web site.



"WE MUST NOT CLOSE OUR EYES TO THE FACT THAT CHILD SOLDIERS ARE BOTH VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS. THEY SOMETIMES CARRY OUT THE MOST BARBARIC ACTS OF VIOLENCE. BUT NO MATTER WHAT THE CHILD IS GUILTY OF, THE MAIN RESPONSIBILITY LIES WITH US, THE ADULTS. THERE IS SIMPLY NO EXCUSE, NO ACCEPTABLE ARGUMENT FOR ARMING CHILDREN."

—ARCHBISHOP DESMOND M. TUTU

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