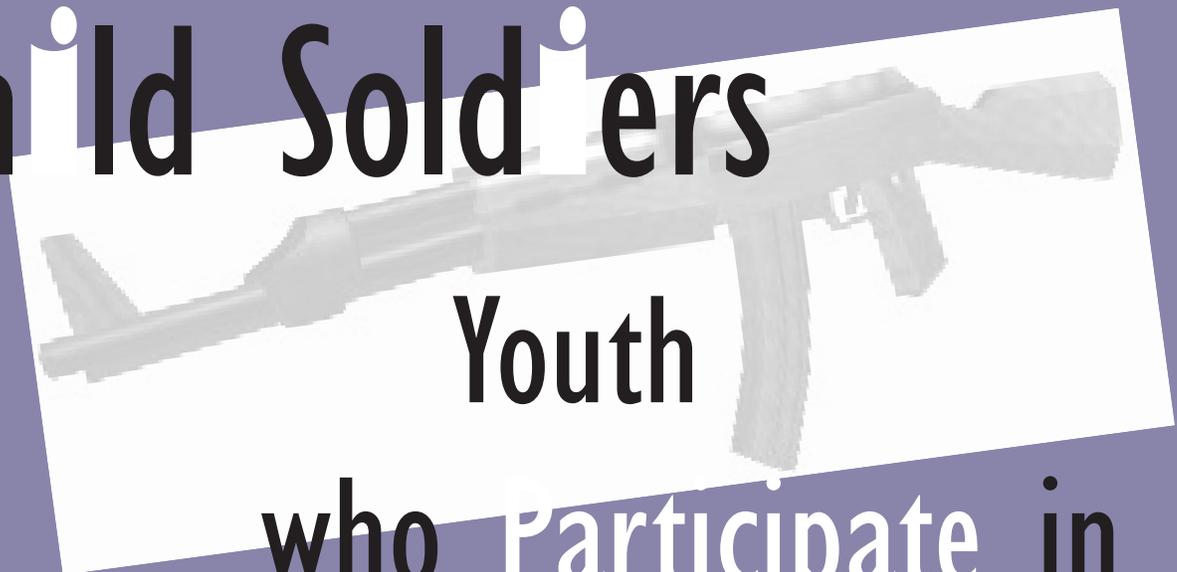

Child Soldiers



Youth

who Participate in Armed Conflict



Youth Advocate Program International
4545 42nd Street, NW, Suite 209, Washington, DC 20016, USA

Child Soldiers



Teacher Resource

What Does your Class Know? - p.3

Basic Facts - p.4

Issue Background - p. 5

Discussion Questions - p. 8

Classroom Activities - p. 9

Beyond the Classroom- p.10

In Focus on Child Soldiers - p.11

Case Study: Butterfly Garden -p.12

Map: Global Perspective - p. 13

C
o
n
t
e
n
t
s

C
o
n
t
a
c
t

Youth Advocate Program International
4545 42nd Street, NW, Suite 209
Washington, DC 20016, USA

202.244.1986
202.244.6396 (fax)

www.yapi.org
yapi@yapi.org

Contents & Contact



Child Soldiers



Does Your Class Know...?

During what years of your life are you considered a child?

How many countries would you guess use child soldiers in today's world? A few? A lot?

Why would an army want to use children as soldiers?

Can children be accepted into the United States Armed Forces?

Key Definitions

UN: United Nations is an international organization comprised of 191 member states. The purpose of the United Nations is to bring all nations of the world together to work for peace and development, based on the principles of justice, human dignity and the well-being of all people.

CRC: The **C**onvention on the **R**ights of the **C**hild is an international treaty that recognizes the human rights of children, defined as persons up to the age of 18 years. It obligates states to ensure the rights to survival, development, protection and participation of all children without discrimination.

Child Soldiers



-  There are 300,000 children involved in over 20 armed conflicts; existing in nearly every region of the world.¹
-  Child soldiers range in age from 5 to 17.⁶
-  There are approximately 70,000 children in Myanmar's (Burma's) government armed forces.²
-  More than 20,000 children have been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) since May 2002.³
-  Between 1986 and 1996 alone, 2 million children were killed in armed conflict and over 6 million children were injured.⁴
-  In past conflicts 80 percent to 90 percent of casualties were adult soldiers; today, 80 percent to 90 percent of casualties are women and children.⁵

¹ "Child Protection: Armed Conflict," <http://www.unicef.org/protection/index_armedconflict.html> (3 March 2004).

² "Child Soldier Use 2003: A Briefing for the 4th UN Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict," January 2004, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers.

³ "UNICEF-led team finds 163 Congolese child soldiers in Uganda" November 22, 2003, UNICEF. <<http://www.unicef.org/newsline/01pr19.htm>> (29 March 2004).

⁴ *supra* 2.

⁵ *supra* 2.

⁶ "Special Report: Child Soldiers," 12 December 2003, United Nations: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, <www.IRINnews.org/webspecials/childsoldiers> (3 March 2004).



Child Soldiers



Definition

“Any child – girl or boy – under the age of 18, who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group, including but not limited to combatants, cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups other than as family members. This includes girls and boys recruited for sexual purposes and/or forced marriage” (UNICEF).

Child Soldiers in the World Today



image courtesy of the campaign to stop the use of child soldiers
Among the worst offenders today are the Lord's Resistance Army (Uganda), National Army (Myanmar), and the guerilla rebels (Colombia).

Where are child soldiers used?

Child soldiers are used in more than 30 countries throughout the world (Human Rights Watch). Some of the most infamous countries utilizing child soldiers are Myanmar (Burma), Liberia, Sri Lanka, Uganda, and Colombia. The Myanmar government conscripts approximately 70,000 children as soldiers. In Liberia, 15 years of civil war has left an estimated 21,000 child ex-combatants. In Colombia, more than 11,000 children have been recruited to fight in the conflict. In Sri Lanka, there are still more than 1,300 child soldiers, despite the fact that a ceasefire has existed since February 2002.

Understanding Definitions

Disarmament: Removing all weapons from child soldiers.

Demobilization: The point at which the child leaves military life

Rehabilitation & Reintegration: Prepares the child for life without war.

What are the responsibilities of child soldiers?

Child soldiers have many responsibilities, both directly and indirectly related to the conflict. Children fighting on the front lines of the conflict are directly involved. Other roles include scouts, spies, trainers, saboteurs, decoys, couriers, guards, and landmine clearers. Indirectly, children work as porters and domestic servants. In addition to fighting in combat, girl soldiers are often used as sexual slaves or are given as rewards to male soldiers as a “wife.”

Why are there child soldiers?

Child soldiers increase the number of fighters. They are more easily manipulated and controlled. They follow orders readily and are less likely to question or refuse a command. Their physical frames are small, allowing them to hide in tight quarters. People do not typically suspect children so they slip through many security checks unexamined. In addition, the advancement in weaponry technology has created lighter weapons that children are able to carry, like the AK-47 and M-16, which are light and easily handled by children. These weapons are also cheap, selling for as little as \$6 each in some African countries (UN Research Institute for Social Development).

Background Information



Child Soldiers



Who is used and which children are affected?

More than 300,000 children participate in more than 30 ongoing conflicts around the world (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers). However, the children most susceptible to conscription by government and rebel forces are the marginalized children in society.

Children in extreme poverty may volunteer out of desperation for food and shelter, and are often less able to refuse conscription. Children without identification papers are vulnerable because it would be hard for them to be found by family. Orphans and children with weak family structures may seek out protection from military groups. Children living in conflict zones are susceptible to kidnapping (such as the LRA in Northern Uganda). Children living in refugee camps tend to be extremely militarized and are much more vulnerable to falling under the control of rebel or government armies. Sometimes children are forced to join under threat to their family or community.

How are they affected?

Children are affected by war physically, emotionally, and socially. They often suffer higher casualties than adults because of their lack of experience and immaturity to handle the situations they are forced to live in. Because of their immaturity and/or drug use, they can be less cautious and often unaware of their own mortality. Sometimes, children become physically disabled.

The violence they experience often scars them emotionally and psychologically. Children complain of nightmares, sleeplessness, bedwetting, eating disorders, and inability to concentrate. Children familiar with the life of a soldier tend to be unable to cope in a peaceful society. They do not know what is right or wrong because they never received social instruction within civil society. Child soldiers often suffer from drug and alcohol addictions they may have developed while fighting.

Case Study: Uganda

Throughout Uganda's 17-year conflict, at least 20,000 children have been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army. The children are forced to cook and clean, act as porters and messengers, and kill. Both boys and girls are kidnapped and the average age is 12 years old. In a survey conducted through Gent University, 77 percent saw another person killed, 39 percent killed someone, and 64 percent were forced to fight.¹ Many of the children's parents have been abducted or killed. Ten percent of former child soldiers interviewed were orphans.

Returning Home

The horrors for a child soldier do not always stop at the end of the war. Often, these children are unable to rejoin their families. Sometimes the families have been killed in the fighting. Other times, the families have moved because of the war and are unable to be contacted. Child soldiers are often associated with war, killings, and burning houses and crops and the community may refuse to allow the child to return.

¹ Derluyn, Ilse, Eric Broekaert, Gilberte Schuyten, Els De Temmerman. 2004. "Post-Traumatic Stress in Former Ugandan Child Soldiers." *The Lancet*. 363:861-863.

Even if the child is rehabilitated into society, he or she often finds it difficult to adjust: hands used to holding AK-47s are unable to grasp a pencil and write a name; and children used to walking on patrol for years, do not remember how to sit still.

Background Information



Child Soldiers



What is being done to stop the use of child soldiers?

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989. Article 38 of the CRC protects children under the age of 15 from recruitment and participation in armed military forces. Article 7 of the CRC mandates the provision of an official birth certificate from the State, which helps to prevent underage recruitment and conscription. The CRC has been ratified by every country aside from Somalia and the United States. On May 25, 2000, the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The Protocol raised the age of direct participation in conflict and compulsory recruitment by governments from 15 to 18. The Protocol also prohibits non-governmental armed groups from recruiting soldiers under the age of 18, or using them in hostilities.

What is being done to reintegrate child soldiers into civilian life?

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) is the most common strategy used to assist former child soldiers return to civilian life. Disarmament means removing all weapons from child soldiers. Demobilization takes the child soldiers away from the fighting to a transitional location. In demobilization and reintegration camps, providing food, clothing, and shelter is an essential first step. If funding is available, counseling (depending on the conflict and child) and vocational or educational training is next. Finally, if possible, reunification with family members is attempted, although this often proves difficult since families or communities may not accept the child back into the community. The reasons include: association with the conflict or enemy groups, and/or the child had previously committed atrocities against their

Reintegration Process

Reintegration is the process of preparing a former child soldier to live in a peaceful community. Sometimes child soldiers have only lived with the army and never attended school. They may not know how to hold a pencil or articulate their thoughts. Reintegration tries to prepare these children for the challenges of living in a community.

The UN and other NGOs often facilitate this process. Reintegration includes psychosocial support, education and economic opportunity training, and, if possible, family reunification. However, these programs are often under-funded and may be unable to properly meet the needs of these children.

own families or the community which alienate them, including being forced to kill members of their family to ensure allegiance to the military group.

How you can help

You can first help by educating yourself about the issues, just like you are doing now. Next, talk to other people about the issue of child soldiers to increase the awareness of this problem. Write letters to the editor of your newspaper and to your congressional representatives. Join our mailing list to keep better informed of this issue. You can also write advocacy letters to anyone of influence and participate in marches and rallies protesting all forms of child slavery, including child soldiers. Finally, encourage peaceful resolutions to conflicts and support organizations working to stop the use of child soldiers.

Background Information



Child Soldiers



- ✗ Why do you think that so many wars continue today, even though we are an advanced society?
- ✗ What jobs do child soldiers perform?
- ✗ What are some of the risks children face as child soldiers?
- ✗ What tactics are used to ensure children's compliance?
- ✗ Why do children make good recruits in the minds of commanders?
- ✗ Why are child soldiers still used today even though our society has continued to modernize?
- ✗ If you had to kill someone, how would you feel? What would you do to deal with your guilt?
- ✗ What can be done to protect children from being conscripted?
- ✗ What would you do if a child soldier was a student in your class?
- ✗ What sort of rehabilitation strategies do you think could work?
- ✗ If you could create your own Butterfly Garden what would it look like?

Optional Protocol:

The Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict

On May 25, 2000, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. This Optional Protocol increased the minimum age of compulsory recruitment and direct participation in conflict from 15 to 18 years of age. Furthermore, the treaty prohibited all non-state actors (such as guerilla organizations) from voluntary and compulsory recruiting of children under the age of 18. The treaty entered into force in 2002 and to date 115 countries have signed the Optional Protocol, including the United States, which ratified the document on December 23, 2002.

Discussion Questions



Child Soldiers



Introduction Activities

Have students divide into groups and draw the following images. You could turn it into a game of Win, Lose or Draw.

Soldier, child, gun, chef, porter, spy, slave

Have students imagine a raid on the classroom.

What would they do? Where would they hide? How would they feel?

Ask students to brainstorm their fears.

Do they fear violence? For their physical safety? What if there was a war in their country? Would they go to school? Would they leave their houses? How would their lives change?

Look at a world map and have students point to places where they know of a war. Then point out to them all of the countries that currently use child soldiers.

Class Follow-up Activities

Imagine you are a child soldier.

- What would you do? Would you try to escape? Where would you go?

Have students read the case study

- Answer the questions on the worksheet
- Discuss their answers in small groups or as an entire class.

Have students come up with a rehabilitation plan. Encourage them to address:

- Education
- Job training
- Housing and shelter
- Safety and security of the child
- What aspects are most important?

For More Information

Youth Advocate Program International

www.yapi.org

Center for Defense Information

www.cdi.org/atp/childsoldiers

Human Rights Watch

www.hrw.org

**International Coalition to Stop the Use of
Child Soldiers**

www.child-soldiers.org

UNICEF

www.unicef.org

War Child

www.warchild.org/home

Homework Assignments

Create a layout of the Butterfly Garden the way you imagine it.

What rooms would you include? What animals and activities?

Read a newspaper article or online news article about child soldiers and write your reactions.

Research what countries signed the Optional Protocol. Which countries have not signed it and why have they not signed it?

Classroom Activities



Child Soldiers



Papers

Pick a country that currently uses child soldiers.

- Research why they use child soldiers, how many they use.

Find an organization that works with rehabilitating child soldiers.

- What programs do they have?
- What challenges do they face?

Research post-traumatic stress disorder.

- How does it impact everyday life?
- What are symptoms of the disorder?

Projects

Interview an organization that works with child soldiers. Report on what you learn.

Write to an organization that works with child soldiers and ask what they need.

- Do a fund raiser to help the organization meet the needs of the children it serves.

Write letters to your congressional representatives asking for their position on child soldiers.

- Ask what legislation they have approved or worked on to eliminate the use of child soldiers.

Extra-Curricular Ideas

Begin a social awareness/human rights club.

Write a letter to the editor about how child soldiers are used today. Address it to your local newspaper.

Attend an advocacy meeting or protest.

Volunteer at an organization working with child soldiers.

Just in Case...

Student Experience

- If you know the student has personal experience with this, let him/her know of the class in advance.
- If the student volunteers this information, ask the student if he/she would to talk about the experience.

Student Openly Emotional

Crying

- Don't draw attention to the student.
- Follow up with the student.

Angry

- Ask the student questions to try and channel the emotion positively.

Skeptical

- Find out what questions the student has.
- Encourage the student to complete additional research about the topic and report to the class.

Hopeless/Guilty

- Offer ways for the student to get more involved.

Beyond the Classroom



Child Soldiers



INFOCUS

on Child Soldiers

John's Story

After his election as president of Liberia in 1997, Charles Taylor relied heavily on the militia and paramilitary forces he created to defend his government. When LURD began its uprising in Lofa County, Liberia in 2000, paramilitary and militia groups led by Taylor loyalists began actively recruiting men, women and children to fight. Initially, these groups drew on former soldiers of the NPFL, including child soldiers, yet they increasingly sought new and younger recruits. These militia groups also included child combatants from the Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front (RUF) which Taylor had supported since its inception in 1991.

Since the uprising in Lofa County, John's family was struggling to find enough food to feed the entire family. His family was living in Monrovia and John was doing small jobs whenever he could. One day near the Duala market he was standing on the side of the road selling goods. Government forces came by in pickup trucks. There was nowhere to run. They kidnapped six boys, including John, right from the road side. The boys were transported to Bomi and then to Lofa County. John and the five others were some of the first forces sent to Lofa.

When John was kidnapped by the government forces he was 14 years old. Despite his age John was trained in how to fire weapons, take position during fighting, and how to take cover and dodge bullets. Nearly one hundred boys completed the training, and more came from neighboring camps. The training lasted about two weeks and then John was sent to the front lines.



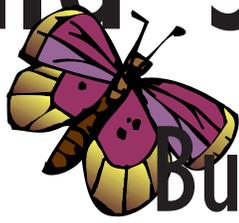
John struggled with his captors, but it was clear he had no choice. The men beat him severely during his initial two weeks there so he would not escape. He recalled other boys were content to be in the army because it meant they were providing food for their families when using their guns against others. However, some were given alcohol and drugs to gain their obedience.

When the army stayed in Lofa one night, in an area John knew well, he managed to escape while the rest of the troops were sleeping. When he returned home, many people in the community did not trust him. Now he is trying to adjust to daily life and regain much of the childhood he lost by witnessing and participating in the atrocities and tragedy of war.

— this story is based on actual events



Child Soldiers



Butterfly Garden, Sri Lanka

History

In 1983, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam initiated a separatist campaign against the government in north and east Sri Lanka. For 20 years a civil war raged in Sri Lanka. A peace deal between the Tigers and the government was brokered in 2002. However, throughout the conflict, more than 65,000 people died. The killings and violence resulted in an entire society of traumatized citizens – especially the children. “Over 40 percent [of children] had personally experienced conflict related violence (e.g. home attacked or shelled, being shot at, beaten, or arrested). Over 50 percent had close family members killed violently, including disappearances of a family member following abduction or detention.” (Helping Children Outgrow War, 41).

The Garden

In an attempt to help some of these children address and overcome their trauma, a peace garden was created in the Batticaloa district of Sri Lanka. This region had been profoundly affected by the civil war. In 1995, the Butterfly Garden opened. The garden offers a place for children from all backgrounds (child soldiers or not) to interact in a low-pressure environment. The children have freedom to process their experiences from war with the help of animators/counselors in an atmosphere of creativity and life. On any given day, 50 children from two to four villages of different ethnicity and gender attend weekly sessions geared toward helping children recover from their traumatic experiences. Children participate in a variety of art activities including: music, drama, storytelling, painting, claywork, arts and crafts. They also help cultivate the garden, caring for the plants and animals. It is in the space of the garden that children are free to be children. Children play games, create crafts and present an opera at the end of the nine-



month program. More than 600 school children from 20 communities around Batticaloa have taken part in the center's activities.

Further Resources



<http://www.hri.ca/children/conflict/srilanka2000paper.htm>



http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/apr01/13_01_058.html



<http://www.thestupidschool.ca/bpg/>

Case Study



Where child soldiers are used in the world today:



Image courtesy of the campaign to stop the use of child soldiers

Bibliography

'Child Soldiers Use 2003: A Briefing for the 4 th UN Security Council Open Debate On Children and Armed Conflict', Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. 8 June 04 <http://www.child-soldiers.org/cs/childsoldiers.nsf/f30d86b5e33403a180256ae5003812132e8d17b9344ab30780256e1c004b9fb2?OpenDocument>

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
<http://www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict/English/index.html>

Human Rights Watch. www.humanrightswatch.org

United Nations, "United Nations: An Introduction for Students" <http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/unintro/unintro.asp>.

UNICEF. "Factsheet: Child Soldiers" <http://www.unicef.org/protection/childsoldiers.pdf>

--- *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict* 12 February 2002 <<http://www.unicef.org/crc/annex1.htm>>