

# The impact of child soldiers on armed conflict

This month's newsletter focuses on the role of child soldiers and their impact on armed conflict. It outlines the reasons for recruiting child soldiers and the effect this phenomenon is having on the world's armed forces.

The recruitment and use of child soldiers is one of the gravest violations of human rights. Every year thousands of children are used as spies, porters, messengers, housekeepers and cooks in the combat fields. Girls and boys often have the same duties; girls, however, are usually used more often as sex slaves.

The exact number of children working with armed groups is unknown. It is estimated that there are more than 300,000 child soldiers serving in combat fields around the globe.

## 1.1.1 Why are child soldiers recruited?

The factors that can lead to voluntary or forced recruitment of child soldiers include poverty, social disruption inside the family and countries with conflict patterns. These conditions make children vulnerable, forcing them to seek another source of income or protection to survive.

Conflict group leaders recruit children because they are seen as a cheap, manageable and efficient labor force.

According to Jens Christopher Andvig and Scott Gates from the Ford Institute for Human Security, the recruitment of children and their use on the field is the result of a new war doctrine (PDF). Children are now seen as an asset to armed conflicts because they represent a significant force that needs minimal investment.

Children are more likely to carry out dangerous tasks because they underestimate risk. At the same time, child soldiers are brutalized by their leaders and forced to obey their commands. These children live in a constant state of fear, which conditions them to behave against their natural state of being.

## 1.1.2 Impact of child soldiers on conflict

Today, child soldiers play a key role in shaping conflicts, providing armed political groups a source of labor that gives them the opportunity to prolong their activities. Using children as combat forces is changing the conception of war.

According to the utility theory, "human individuals and groups are willing to pay the costs associated with conflict because the immediate or potential benefits of the conflict outweigh the costs." The benefits of conflict include the acquisition of new resources - in this case, the acquisition

of a labor force (child soldiers) - whereas the costs include resources used to engage in conflict. The more benefits an armed group can achieve, the more likely the conflict will last.

Through the recruitment of child soldiers, various armed groups have found new incentives and opportunities to remain in conflict. The perception of children as potential combatants is having an impact not just on warfare but also on the long-term stability of the international community. Recruiting child soldiers destabilizes the social, political and economical structure of regional communities which, at the same time, is reflected at the international level.

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### **1.1.3 INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Key documents on the protection of children in armed conflicts, by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

This website includes information and resources concerning the protection, rights and well-being of children at every phase of conflict.

Convention on the Rights of the Child, by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

The UNICEF website on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides background information on children's rights in international law. The UNICEF site also includes the annual report The State of the World's Children, thematic pages on children in war, protocols and other issues concerning the protection of children.

Convention on the Rights of the Child, by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights  
This report provides the principles that protect the rights of the child. The Convention was signed in 1989 and is structured in 54 articles. It addresses the status of ratifications and the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva, Switzerland

This document encouraged by the Convention of the Rights of the Child entered into force on 12 February 2002. It is divided into 13 articles and provides core information about the protection of children in armed conflict.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva, Switzerland

This website provides resources for documentation on children's rights, including the full texts of conventions and declarations as well as information on children in armed conflict and in detention.

ILO Convention No 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour, by the ILO Subregional Office for the Caribbean

This Convention was adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1999. By ratifying this Convention No 182, a country commits itself to taking immediate action to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labor including trafficking of children, bonded child labor, forced

or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, prostitution, forced child marriage and child domestic work.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Geneva, Switzerland

The website is dedicated to children and war, with emphasis on the ICRC's activities, the relevant body of international humanitarian law and key documents.

#### **1.1.4 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Children and Human Rights, by Amnesty International, London, UK

Amnesty International's information on child soldiers, includes documentation and other background information about control arms, countering terror with justice and children and human rights.

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, London, UK

This website is the Coalition's resource collection. It provides useful links about child soldiers. It is divided into sections: global reports, themed reports, press releases, news, newsletters and photo gallery.

The Child Soldiers Global Report 2004 outlines the use of child soldiers worldwide and analyzes child recruitment legislation, policy and practice in 196 countries. It covers the period from April 2001 to March 2004. The authors analyze the phenomenon of child soldiers from different perspectives and address the role of the international community.

Child Rights Information Network (CRIN), London, UK

CRIN is an international information network that supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and children's rights overall. It has a membership of more than 1,400 organizations in over 130 countries. Since 1995 CRIN has been hosted by Save the Children. This website offers resources on a number of subjects concerning children's rights.

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, New York, US

The Watchlist project is a network of local and international NGOs. The website provides country reports detailing factors related to the impact or threat of armed conflict on children.

Save the Children, Westport, US

Save the Children is the world's largest independent organization for children and fights for their rights. Their website includes an overview of campaigns and a wide range of publications.

War Child International

War Child International is a network of independent organizations working to help children affected by war. The website provides a list of links to regional and country specific information on child soldiers.

### **1.1.5 RESEARCH AND ACADEMIA**

Child Soldiers, by the International Relations and Security Network (ISN), Zurich, Switzerland

This dossier provides a detailed analysis about child soldiers. It is divided into 9 sections: Editorial, Analysis, Topics, Databases, Documents, Reference, Links, Publications and Events.

Child soldiers: Reasons for variation in their rate of recruitment and standards of welfare, by the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Oslo

This paper examines the reasons for the global variations in child soldier recruitment rates and standards of welfare. The author analyzes why some children voluntarily join military organizations, while others are forced to join in situations of conflict. The paper attempts to answer various open questions by drawing on the results and ideas from independent lines of research such as child labor, conflict structure and child psychology.

Ford Institute for Human Security, Pittsburgh, US

The Ford Institute for Human Security at the University of Pittsburgh conducts research that focuses on transnational threats to the human rights of civilian populations. The Institute's working papers discuss human security issues such as migration, child soldiers and counterterrorism measures.

Impact of armed conflict on children (The Machel Report), by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

This report, written by Graça Machel in 1996, addresses the impact of armed conflict on children. It was undertaken with the support of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and the United Nations Children's Fund. The report demonstrates the centrality of armed conflict to the international human rights, peace and security and development agendas.

The Children and Armed Conflict Unit, Essex, UK

The Children and Armed Conflict Unit is a project of the Children's Legal Centre, a UK registered charity, and the Human Rights Centre of the University of Essex. The website offers world news, country profiles and international law documents on a range of issues concerning children and armed conflict.

### **1.1.6 MEDIA**

BBC Audio and Video on Child Soldiers, by the BBC, London, UK

This website provides a range of audio and video resources on child soldiers.

Children of conflict: A human rights issue, by the BBC World Service, London, UK

BBC Special Report on child soldiers, including audio resources.