

The Human Rights Council

Establishing measures to ensure the
reintegration of child soldiers



Forum:	The Human Rights Council
Issue:	Establishing measures to ensure the reintegration of child soldiers
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Introduction

Imagine staying in your safe village. The place you were born, where you grew up. Then all of a sudden the violence that you have heard about claiming villages nearby finally catches up to yours. You are taken, ripped from you family, forced to witness or commit horrible, unnatural acts. This is how it feels for child soldiers to be ripped away from their home. Everything they know they are being made to think is destroyed. That all they loved is gone. Some militants even force children to murder their own parents before they abduct the children.

It is vital for us to save children from these inhumane environments and carry them back home to a normal childhood. Although they would never be able to get back the youth that was stolen from there we must make sure to align measures in order for these children to once again become functioning member of communities and society. Not only for their potential benefit, but also for that of the society as a whole. The proper reintegration of child soldiers into communities is therefore critical to achieve; and this can only be done through the careful planning and preparations of measures able to help every individual child as well as adapt to a majority of different occurrences.

Definition of Key Terms

Child soldier

According to UNICEF a child soldier is any minor, so under the age of 18, who takes part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity; including capacities such as combatants, cooks, porters, messengers or anyone accompanying such armed groups or forces that are not family members. UNICEF also includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriages in the definition. However this definition does not refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms. There is a distinction made between a child



soldier, which engage in fighting, and children associated with fighting forces (CAFF), which do not engage in fighting.

Less economically developed countries (LEDCs)

A Less Economically Developed Country, also referred to as a third world country or a developing country, is a country that usually has a very low score on the Human Development Index. They are opposite to Less Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs), also known as first world countries. MEDCs usually have a much higher score on the Human Development Index.

Forced recruitment

The UNHCR defines forced recruitment as narrowly, limiting the scope of application to situations where individuals are forced to join the armed forces Taliban under the use or threat of immediate violence. In circumstances where recruitment is based at least in part on fear, intimidation, tribal pressures or other coercive elements, it is exceedingly difficult in practice to make a full on accurate distinction between individuals joining the armed forces voluntarily and individuals being forcibly recruited.

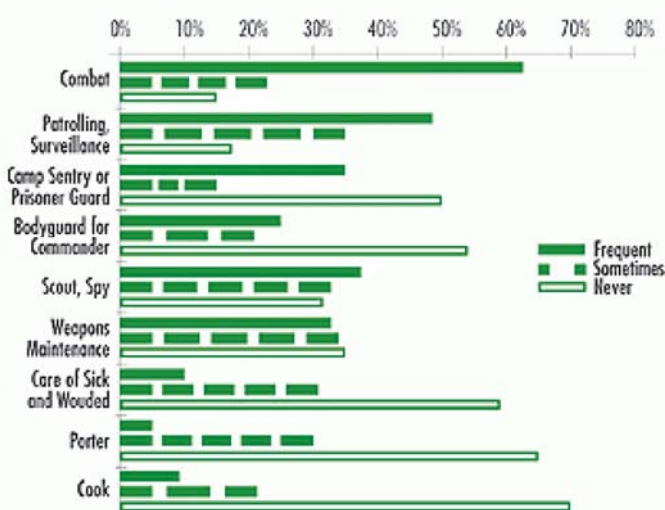
Community reintegration

This term refers to the process of transition by which an individual acts as a non-functioning member of society into a state where the individual controls and directs their own life.

General Overview

World wide there are thousands of boys and girls recruited by government armed forces and/or rebel groups to serve as combatants, cooks, porters, messengers, and for sexual purposes or forced marriages. Many of these children are recruited either by force, so

Sample Child Soldier Tasks and Duties



they were abducted, or could have joined the armed groups by reason of economy, social or security pressures; such as poverty, abuse and discrimination, societal or peer pressure, or to pursue revenge for or against their own family. Most of these children and armed groups live in LEDCs making it obvious that factors of displacement and poverty would make children much more vulnerable and gullible to recruitment.

Governments and military groups recruit children because they are cheaper to feed and clothe than adults. They are also more vulnerable to being exploitation and are easier to manipulated by making false promises, they are also easier to abduct, and easier to recruit than adults. Children are also often versatile enough to serve many roles in the military. They can fill any role from cook to soldier on the front lines, to spies, messengers or even decoys. This image on the left shows the likelihood of particular roles and/or tasks being given to child soldiers within the armed group. As can be seen combat is one of the most common roles which child soldiers play, however it is not the only task which would have to be given to a child in order to be considered a child soldier.

According to the Human Rights Watch there are around 200,000 to 300,00 child soldiers worldwide, half of which are girls as stated by the organization Save the Children. These children are most likely recruited to be soldiers in countries such as Sri Lanka, Colombia, Myanmar, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Sudan.

These children accompanying with these violent armed forces and groups are exposed to a horrific amount of violence. This violence does not only include that which the armed forces use on others, which the children have to witness but while also being abused, exploited, injured or in the worse case scenario killed themselves. Child soldiers are completely deprived from their rights and these experiences that they suffer often result in traumatic severe physical, psychological, and emotional consequences. These consequences are so severe that they highly impair the ability to integrate into a normal community successfully. It is therefore vital that they go through extensive care before they return to communities

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF aims to release children from armed forces and groups as soon as possible, even when the armed conflict are still occurring, to help these children get back to their families as soon as possible. UNICEF supports services, which take care for the physical and mental health and well-being of such children, provide them with necessary life skills, engage them in positive activities towards their future (including education), vocational skills and livelihoods training. UNICEF also aims to adopt a community-oriented approach that includes the support to other vulnerable children who have been through many of the same horrid experiences to promote reconciliation between the community and the children in order to avoid, or in the least lessen, discrimination. The reintegration however, does either



way affect the community to which the children are returned as the whole process is not just one sided but has to be a collaboration between the community and the children, with UNICEF acting as their middle-man.

UNICEF has released and reintegrated around 100,000 children back into their communities since 1998 over the spread of fifteen countries. And in 2010 UNICEF supported the reintegration of around 11,400 CAFFs along with 28,000 other fragile children affect by the conflict.

UNICEF and its partners have advocated and secured the release of children from armed forces in conflict-affected countries including Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mozambique, Nepal, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda.

In addition UNICEF also promotes the legal and normative framework that underpins prohibitions against the recruitment and use of children by armed forces; notably through ratification and implementation of the Optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and endorsement of the Paris principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups and the Paris commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is one of the most heavily populated child soldier populations. Its recruitment of child soldiers grew between the periods 1992 and 1996; the period where the government forces and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) were buried deep in conflict. All together it is estimated that around 5,400 children were forced to fight or aid the armed forces. A 1997 screening of 1,000 fighters by the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Committee reportedly estimated that around 60% of the group of fighters were children.

The conflict in Sierra Leone ended in 2001 officially and ever since then rehabilitation programs and reintegration programs for children were immediately put into place. The programme ended up being successful. At the end of the DDR programme in Sierra Leone, a total number of 4,892 children were reunified with their families from a total number of 5,037 demobilised children, according to a 2002 UNICEF report. Although deemed successful the DDR programme did not target other child soldier groups such as girls from the demobilisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration processes.



Sierra Leone is not the only country that shows all of this but it is one of the more significant ones, and is a prime example of reintegration programs which are not adaptable to all child soldier groups

Timeline of Events

- 1949; Additional Protocols I and II of the four Geneva Conventions set the age at 15 for involvement in armed conflict
- 20 November 1989; Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the UN General Assembly and is the “first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.” U.S. and Somalia are the only states who do not ratify. The Convention defines a child as anyone under 18 but does not specify the age for child soldiering. In Article 38 it reiterates the Geneva Convention’s 15 years of age and asks states to prioritize use of older soldiers.
- 1990; The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) but does is not enforced until 1999. It explicitly states that a child has to be over 18 to be able to soldier.
- 1993; Committee on the Rights of the Child adopts an Optional Protocol to raise age of recruitment and service to 18 years old.
- June 1993; World Conference on Human Rights; participants also call for an Optional Protocol
- 1994; Human Rights Watch (HRW) establishes "Children's Rights Project"; they begin publishing reports on Child Soldiering.
- March 1994; UN resolution 48/157 appoints Graça Machel to deliver a report on the status of children in armed conflict
- 1996; Graça Machel’s report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children comes out, the UN secretary general appoints a new Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Olara Otunnu
- 1998; Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines conscription of children under the age of 15 into direct participation in hostility as a crime.
- 1998-1999; Problem of war affected children gains attention in the media. Graphic and disturbing images of child soldiers from conflicted countries are shown on news platforms such as TVs and newspapers.
- May-June 1998; The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers is formed. Now includes: Amnesty International, Defence for Children International, Human Rights



Watch, International Federation Terre des Hommes, International Save the Children Alliance, Jesuit Refugee Service, and the Quaker United Nations Office-Geneva. It also maintains active linked with UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the International labour Organization.

- 1999; The UN Security Council passes Resolution 1261 identifying children and armed conflict as an issue affecting international peace and security.
- May 25, 2000; Six year of complex negotiations have passed and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict is adopted by the UN General Assembly; provides that states shall not compulsorily recruit persons under the age of 18. By June of 2000 the Optional Protocol opened for signatures and Canada is the first to sign.
- 2001; The UN Security Council passes Resolution 1379 urging U.N. member states to prosecute those who recruit and use children in war. It also requested the Secretary General to create a list of parties in armed conflict that violate international law on child soldiering.
- 2002; Secretary General generates list of offending parties
- 2003; UN Security Council passes resolution 1460 calling on offending parties to “provide information on steps they have taken to halt their recruitment or use of children in armed conflict.”
- 2005-2006; continued UN Security Council resolutions create monitoring and reporting system, and an independent review system.

UN involvement, Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The DDR committee has created and adapted plenty of programs in a variety of countries where this issue is present. However all of their programs have been known to unknowingly exclude certain groups from the DDR process. Their programs are primarily aimed at the fighter children in the armed groups and less on other children that were forced to take on other roles, such as cooking, spying, sexual labour, and cleaning, although these tasks might seem less significant it should be taken into account when forming a program. A program of reintegration should encompass guidelines, which could be adapted to any and all child soldiers regardless of their primary task in the armed forces.

- Security Council, Adopting Resolution 2225 (2015), Adds Parties Abducting Children During Armed Conflict to List Monitoring Grave Human Rights Violators; 18 June 2015; SC/11932



- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989 entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49
- ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, entry into force 1999
- The Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, entry into force 2000
- Security Council Resolution No. 1882, entry into force 2009
- Security Council Resolution No. 1998, entry into force 2011

Possible Solutions

As can be clearly seen this issue is a very pressing one and should be dealt with at once. However, it is very important to note that measures established to ensure reintegration of child soldiers into society are not too specific nor too broad. This is since each child is different they will all most likely need to go through slightly personalized versions of one general program. Clear distinctions would have to be made between the children who forcefully joined a party or those that choose to accompany the armed forces. But yet again, not too many distinctions can be made here, as there is also a middle ground. For example, child soldiers who consensually joined an armed force. This could be because of many different reasons, one of which might be revenge, or the other might be that the child perceives the armed force to provide a stable economic and social foundation.

Solutions of reintegration should also be adapted according to gender. Girls that might have been sexually abused or forced to marry might have very different psychological consequences than their male counterparts. A girl could get pregnant and if she does she has to get accepted into her society as a teen mother. This may also result in forms of discrimination among other things.

Not only establishment of new measures is needed but also awareness has to be spread to increase the attentiveness on this issue so that it is not forgotten until all children are home safe with their families.



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