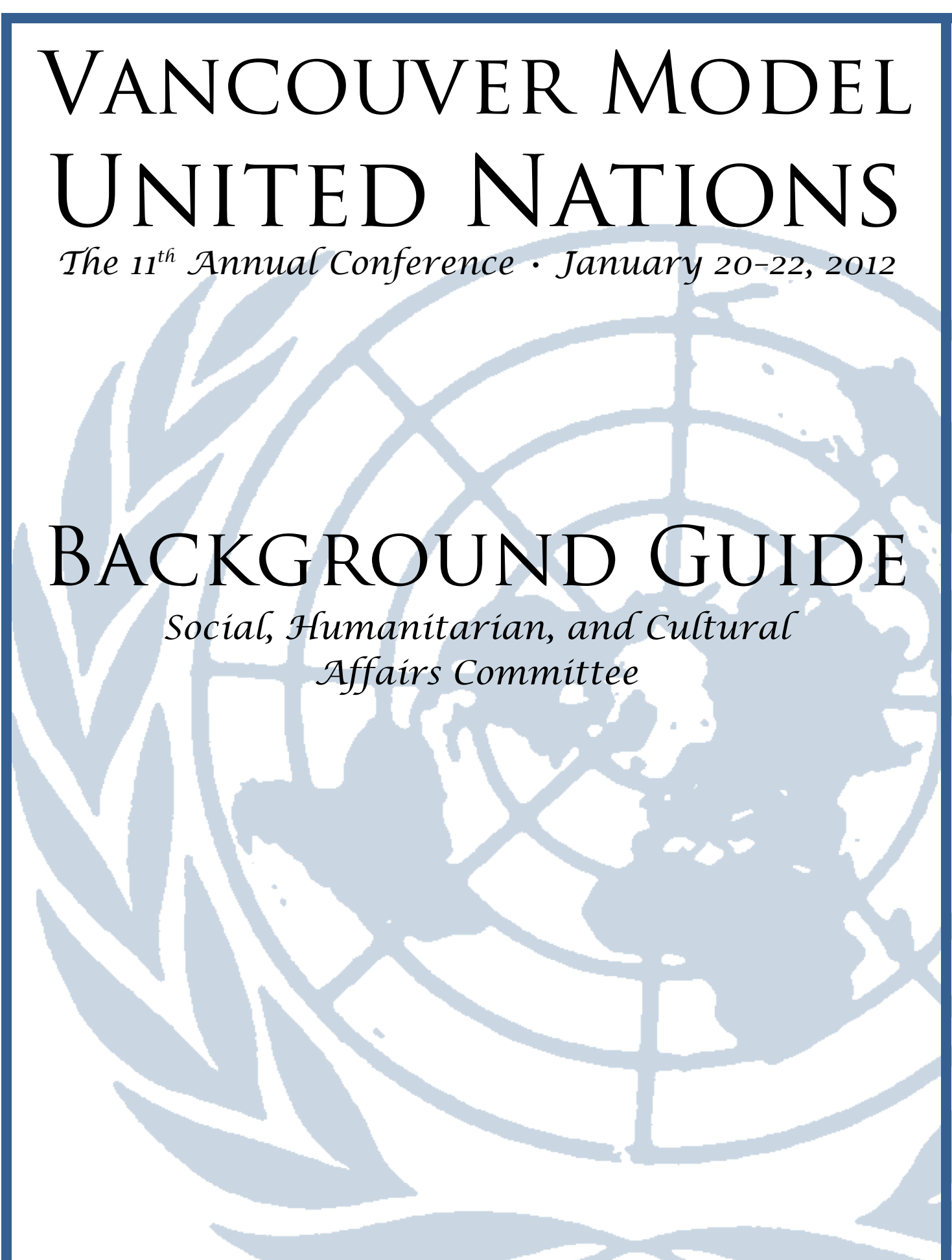


VANCOUVER MODEL UNITED NATIONS

The 11th Annual Conference • January 20-22, 2012

BACKGROUND GUIDE

*Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural
Affairs Committee*





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The 11th Annual Conference • January 20-22, 2012

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Cara Jin and I am the director for the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am a grade 12 student at University Hill Secondary and I am excited to be able to work with you during the course of this conference.

I hope you will find the two topics that the staff of SOCHUM have selected engaging and thought-provoking. These topics are very important and relevant to the present time. Womens' rights in many third-world countries have frequently been disregarded and overlooked. Although progress has been made, there is still a long road ahead of us. Child soldiers have been and are still used in quite a few developing countries. It is important not only for the child soldiers who are currently in combat to receive aid but also for the children who have been discharged from service to be rehabilitated.

I wish you all the best of luck in your research and I look forward to seeing everyone at the conference.

Sincerely,

Cara Jin
Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Affairs Committee

Topic B: The Use of Child Soldiers in Armed Conflict

Introduction

Many children are currently living in countries devastated by war. At least hundreds of thousands of adolescents have been used to fight in warfare, and even children under ten years old are being recruited as child soldiers. Child soldiers are subjected to extremely harsh conditions that no child should have to face. Oftentimes, they are given no training or instructions on weaponry and are forced to use lethal guns and explosives. They are not always given sufficient nourishment once recruited, and are especially susceptible to beatings and humiliating treatment. Moreover, female child soldiers are often subjected to rape or sexual abuse.

The use of child soldiers has grown into a severe problem, especially in developing nations. Children sign up, sometimes voluntarily, due to their poverty-stricken lifestyles, influence of warfare, or desire for power or status. Some girls even choose battle as an alternative to domestic violence or enforced marriage. Many other children are abducted from their homes and forcibly recruited.



Child soldiers are frequently the expendables, given the dangerous tasks like laying land mines. They are often drugged and brainwashed in order to make them easier to command and more acclimatized to war. Essentially, children are used so often in warfare these days because they tend to be cheaper to use as soldiers and tend to be more docile. There are now organizations, such as Amnesty International and War Child, that fight against the use of child soldiers. The First Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which restricts the use of child soldiers, was signed by more than 100 countries and was made legally binding in 2002. These organizations and agreements have already made a huge impact on the use of child soldiers, but more work is most certainly needed.

Timeline

1949 — The Geneva Conventions encompass 4 treaties and 3 additional protocols to establish standards for the humanitarian treatment of war victims. The age of 15 is set as the minimum for involvement in armed combat.

1989 — The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is held in New York.

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1990 — The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is adopted by the Organization of African Unity. This charter defines a “child” as a person under the age of 18.

1993 — The Committee on the Rights of the Child is created.

1998 — The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court identifies conscription of children younger than the age of 15 in warfare as a crime.

1998 — The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers is founded in the UK.

2000 — The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict is adopted by the General Assembly.

2002 — The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child comes into force.

2008 — The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers hosts a conference to release the 2008 Child Soldiers Global Report.

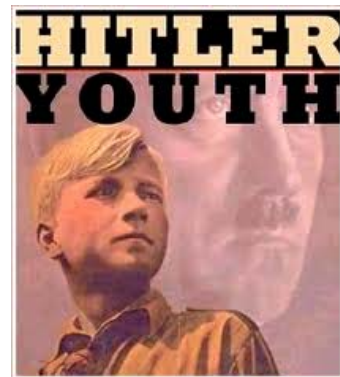
2008 — President Bush makes law the Child Soldiers Accountability Act that allows the US to prosecute Americans who have recruited or used child soldiers.

Historical Analysis

Many of the armies of the ancient world used child soldiers as part of their manpower. The Greeks, the Romans, and the Ottomans Turks enlisted children under the age of 16 to fight in their ranks. Child soldiers were even used during the Crusades, when young men were able to fight in the name of God. Back then, the outcome of battles depended heavily on how many soldiers an army could field.

During the American Civil War of the 1860s, young boys took part in the hostilities. Many of them were slaves who had escaped their plantations to fight for their families’ freedoms, while others still were Northerners who joined the army swayed by the patriotism of the times. Teenage boys dug trenches and fought on the front lines. Things had not changed much five decades later, and when World War I began in 1914, militaries often had trouble getting enough able-bodied men to enlist in war. Even after the implementation of conscription forced adult men to sign up there were still not enough troops. As a result, recruiting officers often ignored the statutory age requirements for military service and allowed boys who were clearly underage to join the army.

Even in World War II (1939-1945), many of the belligerents used child soldiers. In the Soviet Union, orphans joined the Soviet Red Army unofficially and performed many different types of missions. As well, there were children who joined the Jewish resistance during the Holocaust as a part of the *Hashomer Hatzair* youth movement. In the Axis countries, a group called the Hitler Youth was formed as an extension of Hitler’s belief that Nazi children would be the future of Germany. The boys in Hitler Youth were training to be soldiers in the army. The girls in the organization prepared for good, Aryan housewifery.



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There have indeed been many wars in which child soldiers were used, but forms of help for survivors have also been created over time. In Africa, boarding schools opened up for victims of child soldiery to help rehabilitate them, starting in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These small steps toward alleviating the horrors of the conditions these children had to go through helped victims to see hope for their futures.

Current Situation

There are several nations that have not agreed to ban the use of child soldiers and still use them actively. And, of course, in many other nations that have signed these treaties, words on the page have very little relevance to conditions on the front lines. According to UNICEF,¹ there are about 300,000 child soldiers in the world fighting yearly. Within the last decade, 2 million children have died and about 5 million have been left permanently disabled. However, these numbers do not even compare to the 10 million children who are living with post-combat psychological trauma. The use of child soldiers is most prevalent in Eastern African countries, South America, and Asia.

Voluntary vs. Forced Recruitment

In many developing societies, children don't have access to the basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, or education. Due to extreme poverty, children often believe that enlisting in military service will allow them to gain these provisions. Incentives include escaping poverty, avenging family members, gaining social status, and escaping abuse at home. For most of these volunteers, the conditions in the militia turn out to be far worse than what they dealt with at home. The children are poorly fed and often live in the most squalid of conditions.

Along with the children who willingly become soldiers, there are many children who are abducted from their homes and forced into war. In Northern Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has kidnapped over 10,000 children over the past 15 years.² Similarly, the military in Ethiopia utilized the "vacuum cleaner approach" in the 1980s by recruiting children from schools, markets, and festivals, often at gunpoint.³ Once youth are recruited, it is usually next to impossible for them to quit and return home. Children who try to escape are swiftly executed. Often, the comrades of escaped soldiers are subjected to beating, torture, or even amputation.

Lack of Formal Training

In professional armies, soldiers usually get formal training for the basic survival and combat skills necessary to stay alive. However, child soldiers in developing countries often don't get any training. They are merely handed a gun and told to shoot at the enemy. The number of accidental deaths caused by a lack of training for child soldiers is staggering. As well, adolescents are often the ones who perform more dangerous tasks such as laying down land mines. Land mines are very easily triggered and are deadly when activated. Children can accidentally set off a mine while burying it if they don't have the proper training.

¹ "Factsheet: Child Soldiers." UNICEF. United Nations Children's Fund. 13 Aug. 2011.
<<http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/chilsoldiers.pdf>>.

² Machel, Grace. "Children in Conflict: Child Soldiers." SOS Children's Villages. 1996. 14 Aug. 2011.
<<http://www.child-soldier.org/>>.

³ "Children at Both Ends of the Gun." Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. 15 Aug. 2011.
<<http://www.unicef.org/graca/kidsoldi.htm>>.

Treatment of Child Soldiers

Children are frequently punished for missteps in their military performance and abused if they fail to do what is asked of them. Female soldiers particularly are vulnerable to sexual harassment. Youth are sometimes deliberately brutalized in order to turn them into ruthless soldiers. Besides the harsh conditions the children have to endure when in the military, child soldiers are also susceptible to forced actions that are at times inhumane. Many of the children are given drugs and tranquilizers to help them numb their fear and pain. This has a negative impact on their health and causes lasting mental damage.

Child soldiers are often exploited; they are used as human shields and sex slaves and are often forced into child labour. In Myanmar, child soldiers have been placed at the battlefield, ready to be used as a human shield for adult soldiers. Children are used so unsparingly in dangerous situations because soldiers are less likely to attack young children than armed adults. The Taliban have been using this technique for years, and they have even admitted to training children to be suicide bombers.⁴ The Taliban have been using children because they can easily approach their targets unnoticed while carrying explosives hidden in their clothes. Once the children are trained, they can be sold to Taliban leaders for thousands of dollars.



Areas of Tension

Myanmar

Myanmar has the greatest number of child soldiers worldwide. According to Human Rights Watch, there were 70,000 child soldiers as of 2002 in Myanmar alone. Boys as young as 11 years of age are forced into the army.⁵ They are confronted at schools and even in public venues; they are often threatened with jail time if they don't join the military. The harsh methods of recruiting children have been reported to have been in use for over 20 years. Much of Myanmar's child soldiers are in the ranks of Myanmar's national army. The severe situation in Myanmar is due to the country's political wing. Myanmar is ruled by the military, which has been styled into a type of presidential republic.



⁴ Mehsud, Baitulla. "Pakistan: Taliban Buying Children for Suicide Attacks." CNN World. 7 Jul. 2009. 12 Aug. 2011. <http://articles.cnn.com/2009-07-07/world/pakistan.child.bombers_1_baitullah-mehsud-taliban-leader-taliban-officials?_s=PM:WORLD>.

⁵ "Education Under Attack 2010- Myanmar." Refworld. 14 Aug. 2011. <<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,UNESCO,,MMR,,4b7aa9dc26,0.html>>.

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The United Wa State Army is the military division of the United Wa State Party of Myanmar. This military consists of the largest opposition force as well as the largest number of child soldiers out of all the opposition groups. The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) is the military wing of the Kachin Independence Organization. According to people who have been interviewed by Human Rights Watch, the KIA is the only armed force in Myanmar to enlist girls. Myanmar's armed corps has been named in four successive reports of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict to the UN Security Council.⁶

Afghanistan

Children have been and still are being recruited in Afghanistan to participate in hostilities; in particular, they have been enlisted to perform acts of terrorism. The Taliban have used the *madrassa* system, which indoctrinates not only Taliban teachings but also fundamentalist Islamic theology and religious law. This system ensures that young recruits will join their militias. The Taliban rely on academic institutes to use the *madrassa* system on students. They mostly target children who are living in poverty or have been displaced from their homes. These adolescents are taught how to act as suicide bombers. Once trained with the knowledge they need, the children can sneak up on their enemies and activate the explosives, killing hundreds in the process. Trained Taliban children may be worth thousands of dollars and are oftentimes sold to Taliban leaders.

Not only the Taliban but also the government of Afghanistan have been known to utilize child soldiers in combat. Because the government is so lax about recruiting underage soldiers, the training the children receive is not sufficient to prepare them for battle. Children as young as three are told to gather spent cartridges, sell drugs on the streets, and to protect adult soldiers in combat. Teenagers are given motorcycles and other vehicles to plant roadside bombs.⁷ Other tasks that children are used for are espionage, carrying wounded Taliban soldiers, and covering the movements of the adult soldiers. Because children are less likely to be attacked, they are frequently used as human shields, a very, very dangerous endeavour. However, any child who tries to escape can expect to be punished with death.



Northern Uganda & Southern Sudan

Since the late 1980s, about 25,000 child soldiers have been forced into armed conflict in Northern Uganda. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has been known to train children to take part in guerrilla warfare. This army tried to overthrow the Ugandan government in the 1990s, causing much damage and conflict in war

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Zoroya, Gregg. "US Military Report: Taliban Uses Youths in Afghan Fight." USA Today. 13 Sept. 2010. 14 Aug. 2011. <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/afghanistan/2010-09-12-child-soldiers-afghanistan_N.htm>.

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zones. It has forcibly recruited many children over the past 30 years. Amnesty International reported that without the abduction of children, the LRA would have very few combatants.⁸

Girls have been used as sex slaves and even as gifts for dealers in other African countries. Many of them have been subject to rape, beatings, and other forms of torture. In a study performed in 2006 by researchers from the University of Hamburg in a government boarding school in Uganda designed to help war victims studied 330 former Ugandan child soldiers. According to the study, almost all the children had experienced shootings and beatings, half the children had killed someone, and the majority was experiencing emotional trauma and psychological illnesses.⁹ The study found that about 90% of the soldiers continued to be exposed to violence when they returned home.

Colombia

Child soldiers have been recruited in Colombian guerrilla groups for many years. It has been reported that armed groups have waited outside of schools in order to abduct students. These illegal forces have damaged schools and have targeted teachers, often killing the teachers in front of their students. According to War Child, there were about 14,000 child soldiers in Colombia by 2007.¹⁰ One in four child soldiers are under the age of 15. More than half of the children belong to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the National Liberation Army, two of the biggest guerrilla groups in Colombia.



Post-War Rehabilitation and Reintegration

The adolescent survivors of war are often traumatized by their exposure to violence, torture, and death. It is often hard for these children to rebuild their lives and once again join society. Reintegration is extremely hard for children after war when they try to go home. At times, the family members of the children have all died in war or have disappeared. This results in the search to find other family members or friends. Even if relatives are found, oftentimes they won't allow the children to stay for fear that the children might still be dangerous or still have ties with the groups they fought with. Programs that have been created to help reunite families have failed to underscore the need for reconciliation between the children and their families before the children are understood to be safe enough to return to society. For some of the children

⁸ "The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)." Global Security. Org. 13 Aug. 2011.

<<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/lra.htm>>

⁹ "Studies Explore Effects of War on Former Child Soldiers." Science Daily. 16 July. 2010. 14 Aug. 2011.

<<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/07/100715090640.htm>>.

¹⁰ "Education Under Attack 2010- Colombia." Refworld. 13 Aug. 2011.

<<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,UNESCO,,COL,,4b7aa9e328,0.html>>.

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who do come back home, they go back to an abusive life style. Many of the soldiers continue to be exposed to violence within their families, which don't allow them to heal and return to peaceful society.

Then there are those children who cannot find any living relatives or friends to stay with. Their futures seem uncertain in the current system of dealing with this issue. Some countries have tried building schools that focus on the rehabilitation children who have survived war. However, these schools rarely get proper funding and lack the number of staff members required to support the overflowing number of students. In Rwanda, the Kadogo School was built in 1994 for the demobilization of child soldiers. The school filled up very quickly and was soon housing almost 3000 children, twice as many as it was built for. With only 41 instructors and 15 social workers, the rehabilitation of the children was impossible. After two years only 400 of these children were reunited with their families. By 1998, the school had shut down because it did not have the staff or funding needed to remain open.¹¹

Due to the stigma that comes with being an ex-soldier, survivors are rarely welcome back to their villages. Without the acceptance of their communities, it becomes extremely difficult for children to reintegrate into society. Without being able to be rehabilitated and reintegrated, survivors may have to live with mental illnesses and emotional shock for the rest of their lives. Sometimes, escaped child soldiers who cannot return to normal society are even driven back into the militias they left.

UN Involvement

Optional Protocol to the UN

In 2000, the text of the First Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, was approved. The minimum age for legal participation in combat was changed from 15 to 18. This protocol came into force in 2002. As of today, two-thirds of the world's countries have accepted this treaty; however 61 nations have not made a commitment to stop using child soldiers.

Committee on the Rights of the Child

This committee is a body of independent experts that monitors the implementation of the Optional Protocol and the implementation on the Convention of the Rights of the Child by state parties. This committee holds sessions in Geneva, Switzerland three times a year to discuss the annual reports that states must hand in.

UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Fund has been emphasizing the importance of ridding the world of the use of child soldiers for years. It has worked for the protection of children worldwide and has raised awareness of the current situation through the UNICEF Factsheet, in which the statistics of child soldiers are presented.

¹¹ Nowicki, Daniel. "Background Guide." 14 Aug. 2011. < <http://www.scribd.com/doc/8661290/3rd-SOCHUM>>.

Possible Solutions

Establishing Safer Living Environments

Many of the children who are targeted to be made child soldiers come from impoverished societies. Developed, stable regions hardly ever encounter problems with forced recruitment of child soldiers. If children could receive a better education, have sufficient food and water, and good shelter, they may also be less tempted to voluntarily join armies. A solution to this issue is providing developing nations with a good supply of clean water to drink and enough food to eat. As well, building schools that are safe learning environments for children would greatly reduce the need to join the military.

For the safety of citizens, legal and responsible police forces should be on guard for suspicious activity. They should be located outside of schools and public venues in order to keep smugglers from abducting children. Any person caught kidnapping or forcibly recruiting children to fight should be prosecuted. These basics of Western life are often not the case outside of North America.

Providing More Money for Rehabilitation Centres

Countries where there are boarding schools run by the government in order to rehabilitate ex-soldiers are more likely to be able to demobilize child soldiers and better prepare them to reintegrate back into society. However, many of these schools are on the verge of shutting down due to a lack of funds and shortage of staff members. More money needs to be invested in these schools to help victims move on. This way, more teachers and social workers can be hired to help the children rebuild their lives. If more money is given to these schools, the children can be better fed, better sheltered, and better treated. With the extra money, more efforts can be put into reuniting families.

More of these institutions should be built in order to take in as many demobilized soldiers as possible. In areas where schools are not available, children have a hard time finding their families and being accepted back into society. Children must be able to rebuild their lives after leaving existences as child soldiers.

Bloc Positions

Africa

The use of child soldiers in many parts of Africa is still prevalent. It is important to note that the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child that was created in 1999 has helped protect children's rights, but even though it has helped some societies become more aware of children's rights, not every African countries has ratified this charter and the use of child soldiers remains a large problem. Impoverished areas make up a very large portion of the African continent and because these regions are where children are targeted the most, there must be ways to decrease poverty levels and make societies safe for children to live in.

The Americas

The US has taken bold steps to rid the nation of the use of child soldiers. In 2007, the US Congress passed the "Child Soldier Prevention Act" that has encouraged other governments to demobilize and rehabilitate child soldiers. The Child Soldiers Accountability Act was also made law in 2008 by President Bush to prosecute those who use or recruit child soldiers in the US.

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In South America, Bolivia is the only country to admit to recruiting children. Due to drug wars and insurgencies against governments, child soldiers are known to be used throughout South America. Even though the use of child soldiers is widespread, many nations in this region would like to see the end of this issue.

Asia

Asia is second to Africa in issues with using child soldiers. The utilization of child soldiers has been named to be one of the most horrible forms of child labour. Countries such as Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Myanmar, and India have been known to be some of the most frequent users of child soldiers. All of these countries, except for Myanmar, have signed the Optional Protocol. India has signed it but not implemented it. In order for resolutions to be attractive to Asian nations, an alternative to child soldiers must be given in order to keep the strength of their militaries up.

The Middle East

According to the UN, countries in the Middle East such as Israel, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon have objectified children and have, in particular, used them as human shields. Because the Taliban controls parts of the Middle East, it is difficult to curb the use of child soldiers. In Iraq, the Sons of Iraq program recruits children to enlist in the military. In order to make resolutions attractive to these countries, they must relate to Islamic practices.

Europe

This is the most stable area and overall one of the most developed regions in the world. Most European countries tend to frown upon the use of child soldiers with the exception of Russia. Although Russia ratified the Optional Protocol and abide by most of its rules, males at military institutes start training at the age of 15. The strictness of following international conduct is crucial for this issue to come to an end.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some more ways of getting child soldiers reintegrated into society?
2. What can be done to help the survivors who have been victims of war?
3. How can children be kept from being lured into the atrocities of warfare?
4. In what ways can foreign aid be provided to those children in battle?
5. What can countries do to keep underage children from buying weapons?
6. How can children be better prepared for the hardships that come with joining the army?
7. If armies in developing countries are more likely to use child soldiers, what are some ways to change the society and economy to keep children from wanting to enlist?

Additional Resources

<http://www.child-soldier.org/>

<http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/06/12/myanmar.childsoldiers/index.html>

<http://www.unicef.org/graca/kidsoldi.htm>

<http://www.cfr.org/human-rights/child-soldiers-around-world/p9331>

<http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/childsoldiers.pdf>

<http://childsoldierscasestudy.blogspot.com/2008/09/child-soldiers-on-agenda-timeline.html>

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<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,UNESCO,,MMR,,4b7aa9dc26,0.html>
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