

Forum: RCRC

Issue: Question of integration and tutelage of child soldiers in society

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INTRODUCTION

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's humanitarian action is intrinsic to such an environment. Since its inception, the RCRC has striven to assist victims of conflicts, especially children because of their vulnerability. It welcomes the much more marked interest the international community is showing in them. At the operational level, the RCRC is present in all the theaters of conflict. It engages in a wide spectrum of activities contributing to the protection of children. Its action is centered on the actual situation in the field and seeks to achieve real, practical solutions based on dialogue with the people concerned. The RCRC regularly makes approaches to armed groups and to government authorities and forces on the bases of its contacts with the children's families, information obtained in other ways and its own monitoring exercises. It considers that it is crucial to establish and maintain a regular dialogue with all the actors concerned; thanks to its neutrality and impartiality, the RCRC often has access to armed groups with whom few or no other actors have contact. It constantly reminds armed forces and groups of their obligations and of the ban on the recruitment of child soldiers.

Thousands of children are serving as soldiers in armed conflicts around the world. Military organizations that recruit children find them easier than adults to entice or force into service. In general, children are more compliant and easier to manipulate. These boys and girls, some as young as 8 years old, serve in government forces and armed opposition groups. They may fight on the front lines, participate in suicide missions, and act as spies, messengers, or lookouts. Girls may be forced into sexual slavery. Many are abducted or recruited by force, while others join out of desperation, believing that armed groups offer their best chance for survival. Some children choose to join a military organisation as a route out of poverty, for protection, or as a way of making up for the loss of family or a lack of education. Children who have been unlawfully recruited and who are accused of having committed domestic or international crimes during armed conflicts should be regarded primarily as victims and treated as such. Their treatment must accord with international law and with standards for juvenile justice. States must fix a minimum age for criminal responsibility, which should not be below 12 years at the absolute minimum. No child under the age of criminal responsibility must be prosecuted. The RCRC's goal is to keep families together and, when they are separated by conflict, to reunite them. It works to ensure the protection of children separated from their parents or care-givers by identifying them and placing them in the temporary custody of an adult who can care for them. It searches for the children's families; and whenever possible, it restores and maintains contact between children and their relatives until they can be reunited.

KEY WORDS

- ***Child soldiers:*** they are children (under the age of 18) who are used for any military purpose. Some are in their late teens, while others may be as young as four.
- ***OHCHR:*** the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) represents the world's commitment to universal ideals of human dignity. OHCHR's thematic priorities are strengthening international human rights mechanisms; enhancing equality and countering discrimination; combating impunity and strengthening accountability and the rule of law; integrating human rights in development and in the economic sphere; widening the democratic space; and early warning and protection of human rights in situations of conflict,

violence and insecurity.

- **ARMS TRADE TREATY (ATT):** it regulating the international trade in conventional arms – from small arms to battle tanks, combat aircraft and warships – entered into force on 24 December 2014. It is an attempt to regulate the international trade of conventional weapons for the purpose of contributing to international and regional peace; reducing human suffering; and promoting co-operation, transparency, and responsible action by and among states.
- **UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA):** is an Office of the United Nations Secretariat established in January 1998 as the Department for Disarmament Affairs. Its goal is to promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and the strengthening of the disarmament regimes in respect to other weapons of mass destruction, chemical and biological weapons. It also promotes disarmament efforts in the area of conventional weapons, especially landmines and small arms, which are often the weapons of choice in contemporary conflicts.
- **Plan of Action Concerning Children in Armed Conflict:** This document, endorsed by the RCRC and the ICRC, seeks to promote the principle of non-recruitment and non-participation in armed conflict of persons under the age of 18 and to foster action to protect and assist child victims of conflict.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Over the last ten years, two million children have been killed in conflict. Over one million have been orphaned, over six million have been seriously injured or permanently disabled and over ten million have been left with serious psychological trauma. Since 1998 there have been armed conflicts involving child soldiers in at least 36 countries. However, the traumatic scars left on children are just one of a vast aftermath of post war problems: refugees, food shortages and mourning for lost relatives. Former Child Soldiers may at best have their needs forgotten and at worst be blamed by their communities for what happened. Children's development, health and well-being are disrupted when they are drawn into military organizations. Recruited children, particularly those used in armed violence, run a high risk of being killed or maimed, and of suffering serious psychological and social problems afterwards.

Recruiting children can have many consequences:

- Military training is designed to break children down psychologically until they obey commands without question, which can alter their personality in the long term.
- Bullying, physical violence and sexual harassment are common in a military environment.
- In most cases, child recruits are bound by military regulations that would be unlawful in civilian employment, and which can leave them with no right to leave for several years.

The first International Conference on War-affected Children was held in Winnipeg, Canada, in HUMANITARIAN ACTION FOR CHILDREN DURING ARMED CONFLICTS War frequently deprives children of access to humanitarian assistance and protection and thus the realization of their rights to health and education. The UN Security Council has acknowledged the link between violations of children's rights and threats to international peace and security and has established an annual open debate on this issue. In 2000, the General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which raises the age at which participation in armed conflicts will be permitted from 15 years to 18 years, and bans compulsory recruitment of children under 18 years of age.

Between 2001 and 2016, the number of countries restricting their military to adults has grown from 83 to 126, which is 71 per cent of states with armed forces. Thanks to this progress, combined with some strengthening of international law, the so-called ‘Straight 18’ standard is slowly becoming the norm: no recruitment of anyone under the age of 18. The bad news is that, states that still allow child recruitment tend to be larger and wealthier than average, and they spend more on their military. For example, Australia, China, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia and the USA allow enlistment from age 17. Brazil, Canada, and the UK are among the small handful of countries that set the bar even lower, at age 16.

The International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, made up of representatives of the Movement and of States party to the Geneva Conventions, has also undertaken to improve the situation of children caught up in armed conflict. Its four-year action plan for implementing humanitarian law adopted in 2011, proposes concrete measures related to preventing the recruitment of children into armed forces or armed groups, protecting the provision of education during armed conflict, rehabilitating children affected by armed conflict, and juvenile justice.

MAJOR STATES INVOLVED

The UN Secretary-General’s report on children and armed conflict includes a “list of shame”, which identifies armed forces and groups that recruit and use children. When parties are added to the list, they may be subject to punitive measures. The 2016 list includes parties which recruit and use children in conflicts:

- Afghanistan
- Central African Republic
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Iraq
- Mali
- Myanmar
- Somalia
- South Sudan
- Sudan
- Syria
- Yemen
- Colombia
- Nigeria
- Philippines



POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The first thing I will suggest to you is to improve information-gathering, data collection, research and analysis on children in conflict situations in order to improve programme implementation and policy.

Make campaign to prevent child recruitment with laws that will raise to 18 years the minimum age for recruitment into military forces and with laws that will recognize the role of education as a key preventive measure and will ensure the right to education for all children, including universal and free access, quality of content and high learning achievement.

Emphasize conflict-prevention policies that promote equitable social and economic development, good governance and respect for human rights and the rule of law and make laws to provide the support needed to enable poor families to educate children through community-based programmes that make quality education affordable.

Support reintegration: the return of child soldiers to their families and communities, for example promoting laws to protect children from discrimination, especially in access to education and in the acquisition of citizenship and nationality; also promote legislative measures for the care of children separated from their parents with the establishing of adoption.

USEFUL LINKS

<http://www.cfr.org/migration/europes-migration-crisis/p32874>

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/index_en.htm

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34242123>

https://www.familyforeverychild.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/RG_Digital_DC.pdf

https://www.udi.no/globalassets/global/forskning-fou_i/asyl/fou-rehab-reintegration-2015.pdf