



UNICEF: Child Soldiers

I. Background of Topic

A child soldier according to United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) is “any child-boy or girl- under eighteen years of age, who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity.” Sadly child combatants are not a new occurrence for they have been fighting on battlefields throughout history. An example of children being used as soldiers was in the closing days of World War II with the Hitler Youth. With modern Children are used because they are easily manipulated and threatened which allows them to be controlled. It is said to be that there are about 300,000 children in around 30 conflicts worldwide. The number children soldiers have risen because of three main reasons. The first being that because of the social structures in their area are deteriorating they are easily recruited. Believe it or not a majority of child soldiers volunteered, but for the most part they did this to survive. Some though join the army to get revenge for their family after they were abused or murdered. The second main reason being weapons have now become smaller, lighter, and more lethal. This allows for even the smallest of children to be able to carry a weapon. The third main reason is that children are effective while being cheap, expendable fighters. Children soldiers in parts of Asia, Africa and South America are often involved in a ongoing war which they are forced to participate in as long as they are alive. Some of the countries that have a large amount of child soldiers are Burundi, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Myanmar, Uganda, etc. Like many countries they use children as messengers, minesweepers, bomb-makers, scouts, suicide bombers, and anything else the commanders can think of. For females it is even worse. Not only do they fight and perform the other tasks given to them, but in most cases they are sexually abused and taken to be mistresses for those in charge. Even though we would not suspect females to be soldiers, 30% of armed groups use girls as soldiers. The problem with child soldiers is that is leads to confusion during war for the opposing side, these children suffer dramatic mental health problems, they are often forced to do unimaginable things, they are abused, and when they are done fighting most of them do not have the capability to take care of themselves resulting in only more crime.

II. UN Involvement

The UN realizes the importance of solving this problem because it is viewed as immoral by many countries for children as young as seven to be combatants. One of the ways the UN is trying to solve this problem is by solving and ending the conflicts that require the use of children in the first place. However, that is obviously not the most efficient way to handle this because it would take years to end the conflict if at all. So the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2002 established an age limit that they believed would suit every country. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, came about to protect the rights of children, is viewed as the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history. This includes “civil



rights and freedoms, family environment, basic health and welfare, education, leisure and cultural activities and special protection measures for children.” It has been reported that “as a member of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSUCS), Amnesty International works to end the recruitment of children into armed forces and to reintegrate former child soldiers back into civilian life.” Even though these children fighting are lethal the UN and many countries still view them as victims and treat them as such. Just recently the UN Security Council adopted a resolution which called against the recruiting of child soldiers. In this resolution they pressed countries to take action against repetitive perpetrators of violations and abuses committed against children involving situations of armed conflict. The resolution also brought extra attention to the actions that are illegal under international law which include the “recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, rape and other sexual violence, attacks on schools and/or hospitals.” While even though the UN can request an arrest warrant they do not have the legal authority to make arrest without the countries approval.

III. Possible Solutions

There are many different ways to try to solve this problem because there are many factors that play into child soldiers. First off it would be ideal if NGO’s and organizations could eradicate the use of children under 18 years as soldiers. If the age for fighting is not already 18 in a country then there should be some incentive to raise the age. While incentives may not work there are other forms of persuasion such as threats even though it is very risky and dangerous to do so. There should be constant conventions and meetings between countries leaders to continuously come up with ways to eradicate the use of children under 18. During those meetings there should also be discussion about solving the problem that requires the use of people- particularly children- and guns and ending wars. This way the need for these children to fight is no longer there. There should be specific measures to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers into society for every peace agreement created. If something is not in the peace agreements than there should at least be some international community to support various programs helping these children. Media is a way to spread the knowledge about what is occurring so individuals within a country can play an active role in eradicating child soldiers.

IV. Bloc Positions

African Bloc: “Many nations in Africa are guilty of using children as soldier within their armed forces, especially in Sierra Leone and Rwanda where the consequences of conflict still plague these nations. Many nations have unstable governmental institutions and weak judicial systems, which increases the probability of child soldiers in armed forces. Most international organizations focus heavily on demobilizing child soldiers within these nations, where UNICEF and the International Labor Organization have funded various programs to rehabilitate child soldiers.” - Report from UNICEF



Asian Bloc: "Like the African Bloc, child soldiers are used heavily within developing nations with unstable governmental institutions. Despite the implementation of national legislation banning child soldiers in armed forces, children are still used in areas where conflict is high. However, the amount of educational and vocational training has been increasing recently, leading to a decrease in the amount of children voluntarily joining armed forces. – Report from UNICEF

Latin American Bloc: "Guerrilla armies and drug related gangs are prevalent within the Latin American bloc, a prominent issue in areas where children live. Many countries have ratified the Optional Protocol, but fail to implement measures to honor it. Some nation's militaries are suspected of utilizing underage children in their armed forces."- REPORT FROM UNICEF

Middle Eastern Bloc: "Though the use of child soldiers is not heavy within the Middle Eastern countries, many children grow up within conflict area such as the West Bank plagued by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The increase in political dissent recently may cause more lax legislation in regards to child soldier."- Report from UNICEF

Western Bloc: "Most Western nations do not have problems of child soldiers, as they have been strong supporters of the rights of children. These countries need to help developing nations in their battle against the use of child soldiers, by spreading awareness about reintegrating children back into society."- Report from UNICEF

V. Guiding Questions

- 1) What has your country done to solve the problem of child soldiers?
- 2) Is your country a major player in solving this problem or continuing it?
- 3) Which NGO's does your country participate in?
- 4) What effect does child soldiers have on your country? Any political, economical, and/or social effects?
- 5) How important is this issue to your country?

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