

CLEIMUN19

“Collaboration in a Polarized World: Hope for the Future?”

A Research Report

COMMITTEE: Human Rights

QUESTION OF: Child Soldiers in Various Armed Conflicts in Yemen, South Sudan,

Afghanistan, and the Philippines

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Introduction & Background

“Childhood should be carefree, playing in the sun; not living a nightmare in the darkness of the soul” – Dave Pelzer

Children are innocent creatures who deserve the right to be protected from the evils of our world at a young age; they are not born as mature and responsible adults equipped with the capacities to do adult jobs. Unfortunately, children are ripped of their innocence by being forced into bloody, brutal combat and dredging labor, when instead they deserve to play, learn and live a happy life.

Child soldiers are persons under the age of 18 who are used by national armed forces or other armed groups not associated with a state in various occupations such as cooks, porters, messengers, actual soldiers or any other activity. Today, 46 nations around the world employ approximately 300,000 child soldiers to engage in bloody conflict. In 2006, the UN estimated that children made up nearly 10% of all combatants currently engaged in conflict worldwide.

After becoming soldiers, children never remain the same, suffering from great psychological and physical impacts from their forced labor.

Why are child soldiers used in war?

Child soldiers are used by nations and groups is simply because children are malleable and easily manipulated into joining such organizations, often not willingly. If they come from low income and poorly educated families, often children themselves will volunteer to join the military or be pressured to do so by their families, as in most nations, the the military or militia groups serve as a stable source of income. Children who are orphans, refugees or of religious or ethnic minorities are also more likely to become child soldiers as they also come from limited opportunities. Graça Machel notes, “in Afghanistan, where approximately 90 percent of children now have no access to schooling, the proportion of soldiers who are children is thought to have risen in recent years from roughly 30 to at least 45 per cent.” In many cases, children are simply abducted and forced to join a military group to save their life, or their family. Requiring little pay and maintenance, children are easy sources of labor, expendable to militias to serve for any cause, especially if there is a lack of adult manpower.

Although in the past children were not sought for military combat due to their small size and overall lack of skill, in the post-World War II era, it is much easier for children to directly engage in combat by learning how to operate simple and light weapons. Having a malleable mental state, children are searching for a sense of identity and are easily trained to become dedicated to a cause and make brash and dangerous decisions to advance their missions. This makes them far bolder than their adult counterparts, who may be more hesitant. In fact,

according to the UN Secretary General's report in 2012, ideological indoctrination has caused groups in nations such as Sri Lanka and Lebanon to train children to act as suicide bombers. Children are also given drugs to create a sense of dependency toward the militias, come under their control and make destructive decisions.

Where are child soldiers primarily used?

Today, child soldiers are used in approximately 46 nations by militaries or insurgent groups. Approximately 300,00 child soldiers are employed worldwide. Child soldiers have been used by armed groups in various past and currently ongoing conflicts in South Asia, Africa, the Middle East and South America. Child soldiers are predominantly used in countries with long-term ongoing conflict which causes weak economies and limited opportunities to gain education and stable jobs. For example, the conflict in Yemen drew the Houthi rebels and other insurgent groups to employ child soldiers. Many terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Middle East and Boko Haram and al-Shabaab in Africa employ child soldiers to act as informants, combatants or suicide bombers. Additionally, certain governments also recruit children under the age of 18 to use in their armed forces.

How are children impacted by engaging in combat?

Child soldiers suffer from a variety of mental disorders or physical disease from their time in combat due to the fact that their mostly unaccompanied. Child soldiers who become rehabilitated share their stories of becoming desensitized to killing others at a very young age and lose a sense of moral compass and the ability to foster normal social relationships. One of

the causes of deficiencies is the loss of connection to family that child soldiers undergo when they are separated from their family at a young age. In a survey of 3,030 children conducted by UNICEF in Rwanda in 1995, nearly 80 percent of the children had lost their immediate family members, and more than a third of these children had actually witnessed their murders. These atrocities indicate the extreme situations children have been exposed to during combat which impact their psychological state.

Child soldiers also suffer from extraordinarily high rates of depression and anxiety. According to Forbes magazine, studies showed that 90% of child soldiers in Liberia showed evidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 65% displayed symptoms of a major depressive disorder.

Child soldiers suffer from great stress, displaying a wide range of symptoms which include increased separation anxiety and developmental delays, sleep disturbances and nightmares, lack of appetite and overall withdrawn behaviour. Child soldiers tend to display a lack of interest in childlike activities such as playing and show greater learning difficulties. Children are more likely to show aggressive behavior and have antisocial tendencies, with an overall pessimistic view towards life.

Children, particularly those who are female, are at great risk of sexual abuse or other forms of exploitation when they serve for a military group. Females consist of 30% of child soldiers and many of them perform the same functions as boys. In Guatemala, insurgent militias use girls to prepare food, attend to the wounded and wash clothes. Girls may also be forced to provide sexual services. In Uganda, girls who are abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army are "married off" to rebel leaders at a young age. However, boys are also affected by sexual abuse;

cases of young boys who have been raped or forced into prostitution are under-reported. In areas undergoing long term conflict, boys and girls are often forced into entering prostitution to secure themselves and their families financially. This abuse causes psychological and physical trauma. Sexually abused girls get sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, which affects both immediate health and future reproductive health. In Cambodia, according to a study conducted by the Secretary-General, it is estimated that 60 to 70 percent of the child victims of prostitution were tested positive for HIV. In most cases, females who have been sexually abused find it very difficult to reunite with their families due to cultural beliefs and acceptances that make it difficult for families to want to accept girls back.

Past Efforts To Solve This Problem

The United Nations has addressed various aspects of the issue of child soldiers. The UN General Assembly first began to understand the grave issue of the use of child soldiers and its various facets after commissioning expert Secretary-General Graca Machel to conduct research and write a research report on the issue of nations employing child soldiers in 1996. This report led to the creation of Resolution 77 by the General Assembly in 1997 which established the Conventions on the Rights of the Child as a universal treaty committed to ensuring children's rights. The UNCRC, as it became known, lists all the human rights of a child and is signed by 195 nations today, not including all UN member nations. This treaty allowed the use of child of child soldiers to be clearly deemed as a violation of human rights. This resolution also allowed for the creation of a Special Representative of the Secretary General who solely focused on the

issue of Children involved armed conflict and could develop action plans to help children in conflict.

The UN Security Council has passed resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011) and 2225 (2015) on the issue of children and armed conflict.

In August 1999, the Security Council passed Resolution 1261 which was the the Security Council resolution to address the issue of child soldiers by aiming to provide humanitarian assistance to take care of the children and protect and resettle displaced children.

In 2005, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1612 to solve the issues not addressed by the previous resolution which included addressing regional and ethnic tensions that caused children to become soldiers and developed a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism(MRM) to detect violations against children

In 2015, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2225 regarding to the violation of a child's human rights that addressed the inhumane methods of militias to recruit child soldiers and urged nations to protect children from being unwillingly recruited.

Possible Solutions

The use of child soldiers is a multifaceted issue ranging from the causes that compel children to become soldiers to the detrimental impacts that result after children become soldiers and the issues that prevent former child soldiers to successfully reintegrate into society. The best method to prevent the use of child soldiers to start at the root cause of the issue and find ways to

create stable environments for children and their families to ensure that families are not compelled to join the military or participate in ongoing conflicts to secure a means of financial security. However, bettering the situation of current child soldiers is also crucial through finding exit strategies for current child soldiers as well as finding effective methods for them to reintegrate back into civilian society.

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