



FORUM:

QUESTION OF:

STUDENT OFFICER:

POSITION:

INTRODUCTION:

It has often been claimed that the number of child soldiers has increased significantly recently, especially in the "new wars" where internal conflicts are often fought by rebels or guerrilla groups, often targeting civilians as victims. One of the most common reasons for those groups to use children is that they are more likely to fall victim to brainwashing and indoctrination, because the moral sense of a child is influenced strongly by its surroundings and influences.

These children were forced to fight in wars and missed out on a life with a regular upbringing or access to education. This caused the children to grow up without a guarantee for a secure future. It is easy to imagine the relief these children felt when the war ended, but it also caused new problems. These children have to rejoin their civil society. As these children were often forced to kill their own communities to show their loyalty, they might have trouble with reintegrating into their old society. When they do go home, they are often traumatized and are struggling to recover. Due to growing up in war, they are likely not to be well educated and have great difficulty in finding a profession, which often causes more difficulties in providing resources for daily life.

Unfortunately, ensuring the successful reintegration of former child fighters is a matter many countries struggle with. Children who grow up surrounded by violence are more likely to also use violence ones they grow up. Those who have been forced into being part of military groups often return home to be shunned, stigmatized and pushed to the edge of society by their own communities.



HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT:

In 1989, the new version of the Universal Children's Rights Declaration was signed. This version is way more detailed than the earlier one, which was made of by only two pages. The version also included efforts to abrogate the use of child soldiers: "State parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 15 years do not take a direct part in hostilities." (article 38, Universal Declaration of Children's Human Rights)

Children between the ages of 15 and 18, are still able take part in a national military organization with their consent and the consent of their legal guardian.

In 1998, several non-governmental human rights groups co-founded the charity organization "Child Soldiers International". This was the first organization ever focusing only on stopping the usage of child soldiers and reintegrating them into society.

The nations that still have child soldiers tend to be Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs). In order to make the elimination of child soldiers possible, these countries are likely to need support by better developed countries.

Approximately there are currently hundreds of thousands of children below 18 serving in a force or armed group. Up to this day there have been reports stating that in on going or recent armed conflicts in almost every region of the world, there have been child soldiers taking part in the conflicts.

In puberty, many of the children have disrupted emotional and physical statuses, which makes them especially vulnerable to recruitment. Manipulation becomes easy and they are unlikely to resist or understand what they are forced to do during the heat of a battle.

Child soldiers are cheap and expendable soldiers. Most child soldiers are recruited in areas where the conflict persists. This usually leads to situations in which the fathers have already died in the war and the mothers are not able to take care of the families on their own. The children join armed forces hoping for a sustainable life with food, shelter and work. Usually the groups actually have these services provided, which persuades the children into staying and fighting. The problem with eliminating the use of child soldiers is that conflicts are often unclear and authorities are not able to provide the children with needed accesses to vital means. Also, there is the problem of reintegrating the child soldiers. Some armed groups force the children to kill their own families or sometimes their entire villages. This helps those groups to make sure that these children are not able to flee because thus they have no place to



go to. Even if a conflict comes to an end, it usually means that these children either end up shunned or in a different armed group because they have no family to go to.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

Thinking of solutions to reintegrate child soldiers there are the possibilities of trying to solve the entire issue or to focus partial aspects

A possible solution presented by the UN to help children in armed conflict is summarized with the acronym DDR: Disarmament, Demobilization, and Re-Integration.

Disarmament means stopping child soldiers from using weapons.

Demobilization means suspending entire armed forces so that the children no longer feel threatened by members of these groups.

Re-integration is the process of leading these children back into a normal life by giving them access to education, housing healthcare, as well as finding their families.

Another possible solution in preventing the use of child soldiers in armed conflict could be to increase the minimum age for military services. Many governments have different opinions on a minimum age and this is an issue of national sovereignty. Also, most armed groups are not part of the official military and may not feel the need to follow an UN treaty.

A third method could be a faster set up of peace keeping forces. The peacekeepers are able to open up protection zones. They can also assist helping disarming children in rebel groups. To stop child soldiers from fighting in armed conflicts there are economic, political, territorial, religious or cultural issues that will have to be solved.

KEY TERMS:

-*'CAAFAG:*' children associated with armed forces and groups (UN definition)

-*Child Soldier:* Any child – boy or girl – under 18 years of age, who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to: cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups other than family members. It includes girls and boys recruited for forced sexual purposes and/or forced marriage. The definition, therefore, does not only refer to a child who is carrying, or has carried, weapons. (UNICEF)



-*DDR Programs*: Rehabilitation of Child Soldiers in three steps: Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration.

-*Re-integration*: Reintegration represents the process of establishing a civilian life. Reintegration programs need to support the child in constructing a new, positive course of development. (Child Soldiers: Preventing, Demobilizing and Reintegrating. Africa Region Working Paper Series No. 23, 2001)

EXPECTATIONS FOR POSITION PAPER:

You are expected to write a Position Paper that is a minimum of two pages long. The Position Paper should contain general information on the issue in relation to your country and specific policies your country introduced to act upon this issue.

Further questions you could also consider during your research:

- Has your country signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child?
- Does your country have children involved in armed conflict and what does it think about child soldiers?
- What programs and services, such as DDR, are needed to help children in armed conflict and what measures has your country take so far?
- How can children be protected from the physical and psychological impacts of an armed conflict?
- From what age can Citizens join the military or military groups in your country?

USEFUL LINKS/SOURCES:

The optional protocol on the Involvement of Children in armed Conflicts, 25 May 2000 (A/RES/54/263)

Children in Armed Conflicts, 30 August 1999, (S/RES/1261/1999)



Rights of the child (most recent review), 19 December 2011 (A/RES/66/458)

Research Sources:

<https://invisiblechildren.com/>

<https://www.unicef.org/crc/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/armed-conflict/>

<https://www.hrw.org/topic/childrens-rights/child-soldiers>

https://www.unicef.org/protection/option_protocol_conflict.pdf

https://www.warchild.org.uk/what-we-do/protection/risks-for-child-soldiers-are-huge-and-the-effects-can-last-a-lifetime?gclid=Cj0KCQjw5s3cBRCAARIsAB8ZjU0Q1b7JFC55YAKuk_C9eYL9kY5kuOI4qUXou6pAX_9ePtoKUixVkiYaAtLpEALw_wcB

<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/87/5/09-020509/en/>

<https://invisiblechildren.com/program/rehabilitation-project/>

<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>