



**Issue:** Implementing measures to improve the reintegration of child soldiers into society

**Forum:** African Union Peace and Security Council

**Position:** President

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## Introduction

Child soldiers are highly at risk of being maimed, killed or sexually abused. Witnesses and especially participating in armed conflicts causes huge emotional and physical damage to children, whose minds are still undergoing major development. Children are often recruited by terrorist organizations because they are an easy target: they are quickly intimidated and easily manipulated under coercion. This experience makes it unable for them to have a regular and carefree youth: they carry a trauma with them for the rest of their life.

Furthermore, this leads to a lack of education, and many child soldiers eventually end up in the vicious circle of poverty.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Child soldiers

Child soldiers are boys and girls of 7 seven years and older who are recruited to serve in armed conflicts. While girls are usually forced into sexual slavery, boys are used as spies, messengers, lookouts or they are forced to fight at the front line or participate in suicide missions. Some are abducted, while others join the forces 'voluntarily', as they believe this offers them the biggest chance of survival in the conflict areas.

### (non) state armed actors

State armed forces are units that are authorized by a state and its laws and operate under the authority of a state government. On the other hand, non state armed forces are groups of various sizes, goals, and methods, that are independent of state governments and use violence to achieve their goals. Some non-state armed actors are allies of their government, while others are opponents.

### Action plan

An action plan is a written and signed commitment between the UN and the parties who have committed grave violence towards children, and includes concrete, time-bound steps to provide for a safer future for children.

## General Overview

### The statistics

Unlike many people assume, the number of "300.000 child soldiers worldwide" is not a hard fact. This number is actually an estimate from the 1990s, used by child protection organisations. Verification difficulties like access, communication, and how the role of girls in different situations is viewed complicate the identification process. In 2017, the UN stated that 56 non-state and 7 state armed groups were recruiting children that year. About 30-40% of the cases were girls, unlike the assumption that all child soldiers are boys. These girls are sexually abused, used as domestic slaves, forced to steal or fight. Not all child soldiers are recruited in Africa either; 1 out of 2 reported cases in 2016 was outside of the continent, in countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Myanmar.

### Recruiting

Children end up as soldiers in various ways: some are abducted, others join 'voluntarily'. In Somalia for example, al-Qaeda-linked terror group Al-Shabab intrudes villages and demands parents to give up their children. If they refuse, the militants often abduct the children on their way to school and force them to join the military. This danger results in people moving to the major cities, where they feel safer, or parents keeping their children out of school. On 14 April 2014, 219 Nigerian girls were abducted by Boko Haram, a terrorist organisation. The (mostly Christian) girls were about to take their final exams when they were taken away at night time. Boko Haram attacked them because the Muslim terrorist organisation is against the western education the girls were following.

It is hard to determine whether children actually join the forces voluntarily: they are usually misinformed and their recruitment is not genuinely free, but simply their least harsh option. Insecurity, lack of education, their ethnic, religious or economic situation can all make children see no other option but to take up the arms. Especially the fact that some units provide food, as well as stability, plays a key role for children to volunteer. Furthermore, education is hardly accessible, even though it is regarded so highly. In Rwanda, where 39% of the population lives under the poverty line, relatively high tuition fees make children join the army. They hear you can earn money by joining, plus friends encourage them, but they are subsequently taken away to training camps.

### Life after war

There are various organizations devoted to the reintegration of former child soldiers into society or the treatment of traumas. For examples of such organizations, please see Major Parties Involved.

## Major Parties Involved

### Child soldiers international

Child soldiers international was established in 1998 by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Save the Children and works with communities to prevent the recruitment and stimulate the reintegration of (former) child soldiers. They follow their six core values Collaboration, Integrity, Independence, Respect, Accountability and Equality.

## UNICEF

UNICEF was founded over 70 years ago to protect children regardless of their background. UNICEF helps reintegrate former child soldiers into local communities introduced the “Children, not soldiers” initiative.

## Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch is a non-governmental (NGO) organization, established in 1978, with a staff consisting of human rights experts like lawyers, journalists, and academics of different backgrounds. It is known for its targeted use of media, effective advocacy, reporting, and partnerships with local human rights groups. Each year, they publish more than 100 reports on human rights conditions, part of which on the topic of child soldiers. In addition, they meet with important bodies such as the UN and the EU.

## War child

War child was established in the '90s and has now programmes in 15 countries and reaches hundred thousand children each year. They offer psychological help to help children deal with their trauma from the war.

## 10 countries where recruiting of child soldiers still occurs:

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

## Timeline of Key Events

what	when
The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) came into force.	12 February 2002
Boko Haram’s kidnapping of 276 school girls in Nigeria.	14 April 2014
UN and Special Representative of the	2014-2016

Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict installed their campaign “Children, Not Soldiers”.	
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## Previous attempts to resolve the issue

### Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC)

The OPAC, also known as the child soldier treaty, came into force on 12 February 2002 and was a supplementary protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. When negotiations on the implementation of the original Convention of the Rights of the Child stagnated in 1998, Child Soldiers International was brought to life. They eventually managed to reach their goal, and the treaty was accepted. It included the following points:

- 1) prohibit the conscription into the military of children under the age of 18;
- 2) ensure that military recruits are no younger than 16;
- 3) prevent recruits aged 16 or 17 from taking a direct part in hostilities. The treaty also forbids non-state armed groups from recruiting anyone under the age of 18 for any purpose.

As of February 2018, 167 states had ratified the treaty, and 13 others had signed it but not yet ratified it.

### Children, Not Soldiers

From 2014 until 2016 UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, which serves as the leading UN advocate for the protection and well-being of children affected by armed conflict, ran a campaign called “Children, Not Soldiers”. The aim was to generate momentum and make an end to the recruitment of children in conflict situations. The initiative immediately received a positive response from Member States, NGO partners, UN Security Council, General Assembly, and the general public. At the time of the launch the campaign concerned Afghanistan, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen. By 2016, thousands of child soldiers had been released and reintegrated thanks to UNICEF, political or peacekeeping missions, and UN and NGO partners.

The most crucial campaign achievement was the fact that all countries concerned engaged in an Action Plan mandated by the UN. Some of the achievements of these action plans were:

- The government of Afghanistan criminalized the recruitment of children.
- Chad put in place all necessary measures to end and prevent the recruitment of children in its armed forces and is no longer listed.
- Over 800 children (and youth recruited as children) were released from Myanmar’s army since the signature of the Action Plan in 2012. In September 2015, the country signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict;

- Somalia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in September 2015.

## Possible Solutions

One possible solution to reduce the risk of children becoming involved in armed forces or exploited in other ways is establishing and enforcing a minimum recruitment age of 18. Parties who have not done so yet are encouraged by politicians to do so.

Another solution is to make alternatives to military recruitment, such as access to education, available, and to ensure that children's economic and social rights are respected in order to offer education, employment, and protection.

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