

**Norm vs Deviation:
The Problem of Child Soldiering**

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ABSTRACT

This article briefly analyses the various issues associated with the practices of using children as soldiers in conflict areas. It also examines questions in regard to child soldiers: first, who are these child soldiers? And why children work as soldiers in conflict areas? Second, while most developed societies insist on liberal principles like right to life, liberty and upholding the dignity of individuals; why in most of the other parts of the world children have been forced to take up arms?. It emphasizes on the humanitarian part of child soldiers particularly the girls. The article critically examines the course of action of international mechanism working on child soldiers. But most importantly this article attempts to understand as to why in spite of having so many norms and standards in place both at the international as well as regional level to protect and guarantee children their due rights, the problem of using children as soldiers continues to remain a cause of concern in the international community.

KEYWORDS

Child soldiers, UN system, DDR programme, Armed conflicts

‘It is immoral that adults should want children to fight their wars for them...

There is simply no excuse, no acceptable argument for arming children’.

-- Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu.

INTRODUCTION

In an era when democracy has been accepted as the most desired way of life, and when liberal principles are upheld across the world, it is disturbing to know that in the same time, there exists this malevolent practice of using children as soldiers for fighting battles that are beyond any child's.

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comprehension. It is unbelievable but true that at least 300,000 children under the age of eighteen both girls as well as boys are currently taking part in hostilities around the world (Brett and McCallin, 1998: 19-24; Thompson, 1999: 191; UNICEF, 2004). Hundreds of children are recruited either in governmental forces or in armed opposition groups and are made to fight wars which are not there. While many are lawfully recruited, others are kidnapped and coerced to join armed conflicts.

The recruitment of children in armed conflicts is not a new phenomenon but there is a difference between recruitment of children in traditional civil wars and modern ethnic conflicts. Traditional wars were rule bound and limited, while new wars are anomic and chaotic. Traditional wars were rule bound and self-limiting in a number of distinct ways-having clear political objectives, having well-defined beginnings and ends that resulted in victory or defeat, there was the existence of geographically bound battle fields, wars were fought according to a set of commonly accepted rules and it clearly distinguished between civilians and combatants. But modern wars hardly have any of these features, and this is the reason why children taking part in modern wars become even more vulnerable, which generated concern in the international community in the present time (Bennett, 1998; Rosen, 2005; Cohn and Goodwin-gill, 1994). Mary Kaldor (1999) in her book *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* talks about how modern wars while sharing many common traits with traditional wars, have become distinct from the former in many ways. Modern wars, unlike traditional wars, are largely characterized by identity politics. Modern wars have this goal to claim power on the basis of a particular identity-be it national, clan, religious or linguistic. New warfare's are also defined as guerrilla warfare. In conventional war the goal used to be capture of territory by military means. But new wars mostly aim at political control of the population either through as they say "hearts and minds" or through "fear and hatred". The aim is to get rid of everyone who is of a different identity through various means such as mass killing, forcible resettlement, as well as a range of political, psychological and economic techniques of intimidation. This is why in these wars there is dramatic increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons.

Further, in contrast to the vertically organized hierarchical units that were typical of 'old wars', the modern wars are fought by highly decentralized and

disparate range of groups such as paramilitary units, local warlords, criminal gangs, police forces, mercenary groups as well as regular armies. Technology too plays a key role in new wars. In the last fifty years, there has been significant advancement in lighter weapons, undetectable landmines, small arms which can be handled by children. They also make use of modern communications like cellular phones, computer links to coordinate, mediate, and negotiate among the disparate fighting units. Another point of difference between the traditional and modern wars is what Mary Kaldor calls the “*new globalized war economy*”. It was seen during the two world wars that their economies were centralized, totalizing and autarchic. But the new war economies are decentralized and dependent on external resources to a large extent. In these wars, domestic production decline dramatically owing to global competition, physical destruction, and interruption to normal trade. In these circumstances the fighting units finance themselves by remittances from the diaspora; support from neighboring governments; illegal trade of arms, drugs, oil or diamonds (Kaldor, 1999).

1. WHO IS A CHILD SOLDIER? NORMS AND STANDARDS:

In order to understand the definition of child soldiers let us begin by understanding how a child is defined in various treaties and conventions which had somewhat binding effect on its members. The most scientific and acceptable definition of child was put forward by the convention on the rights of the child, 1989. Article 1 of the convention defines a child as “*all human beings under the age of 18 years, unless national law grants majority at an earlier age.*” Therefore, anyone below 18 years of age who is involved in armed conflicts would be considered a child soldier and the practice would be considered a gross violation of various norms that had been laid down by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in order to protect children from child labour.

Going by the norms set by the ILO, child labour can be defined as: *any work that deprives children of their childhood; something that is mentally, physically, socially or morally harmful to children; something that interferes with their education and is detrimental to their overall development.*

Further, article 3 of ILO convention no. 182 has enlisted *slavery, trafficking, prostitution, and forced recruitment of children in armed conflicts as the “worst forms” of child labour that need elimination with immediate effect.*

In addition, the minimum age convention of ILO of 1973 which came into force on 19 June, 1976 states in article 3 of its text that *“the minimum age for admission to any type of employment or work which by its nature or circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons shall not be less than 18 years”*.

The International Coalition To Stop The Use Of Child Soldiers (1998) defines a child soldiers as *“any person less than 18 years of age who is a member of, or attached to government armed forces or any other regular or irregular armed force or group, whether or not an armed conflict exist.”*

The Cape Town Principles (1997) defines child soldier as *“any person less than 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or group in any capacity other than purely as a family member.”*¹

There are a number of reasons for setting 18 as the minimum age for military recruitment and participation in armed conflicts. First, 18 is the legal noting age set by the national laws of an overwhelming number of countries. It marks the formal transition from childhood to adulthood. He/she also learns to shoulder legal and moral responsibilities and makes his/her own decisions. Second, it is also in accordance with the general definition of a child in international human rights law, set out in the 1989 UN convention on the rights of the child.²

Although, international human rights and humanitarian law currently set 15 as the minimum age for military recruitment and participation in armed conflict, national laws in the majority of the world's countries set that limit at 18. The African charter on the rights and welfare of the child also specifies 18 as the minimum age, although the charter has not yet entered into force. The optional protocol to the convention on the rights of the child on the involvement of children in armed conflict came into force on 12 February 2002.

Though in the past, the UN has allowed children under 18 to serve as peacekeepers; this practice has now been ended. Pressure to end recruitment of children in military and armed forces has come from the international red cross and red crescent movement the United Nations Children's Fund, the the United

1. However, it is difficult to decide who as child is. Children within the age group of 16 -19 may have the same level of maturity. Attaining adulthood varies from person to person hence it should never be imposed externally

2. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which set the minimum age for recruitment into the military and other armed groups at 15 years, is the most widely subscribed human rights instrument in international law, ratified by 193 states (The United States and Somalia signed, but have not ratified). Another protocol appended in 2000 and ratified by 110 countries established the minimum age as 18. A recent study by the United Nations Children's Fund puts the average age of recruitment for child soldiers in six Asian countries at 13 years; and more than a third of all child soldiers are under 12 (see Pham, 2007: 102; Wessells, 2006).

Nations High Commissioner for refugees, the export of the secretary general on the impact of armed³ conflict on children, and the special representatives of the secretary general of children and armed conflict. In most of the African war zones such as Liberia, Mozambique, Uganda and Sierra Leone⁴ girls⁵ and boys have been used as cannon fodder with the purpose of inhibiting enemy, who may be reluctant to fire at children.

Although there is a widespread agreement that children below the age of 18 should not be recruited in armed conflicts, yet this practice has only been expanding at an alarming rate so much so that since the year 2000, the participation of child soldiers in various capacities have been reported in most armed conflicts and in almost every region of the world. Many liberal democracies around the world indulge in that practice. The United States of America recruits 17 year olds in its armed forces. The United Kingdom, which continues to recruit 16 year olds on leaving school, actually encourages youth to start the recruitment process while still at school, leaving only the formal enlistment for later. In addition to the UK and us, other countries where children are recruited in armed forces or rebel groups under the age of 18 whether voluntarily or forced include Angola, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bhutan, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, el Salvador, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, India,⁶ Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Portugal, Mexico, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and many more. This shows that recruitment

3. Resolution 2(c) of the 26th Int. Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held in Geneva in 1995, strongly condemned recruitment of children below age 15, as a violation of humanitarian law, and demanded punishment of responsible, and endorsed a Plan of Action.

4. In Sierra Leone, recruitment of children between 8 and 15 years is very common. Modern ultra-sophisticated weapons weigh less than seven pounds and can be stripped, reassembled, loaded and fired easily by a child of age 10 (also see Veeken, 1994).

5. Study of Denov and MacLure (2006) shows that the term girls in fighting forces includes not only girls who are carrying or have carried arms, but also girls who act as cooks, porters, messengers and those accompanying such groups, girls who are recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. In Sierra Leone 30 % of child soldiers in oppositional forces were girls.

6. Estimates assume that over 80000 children are participating directly or indirectly in the tribal State of Chhattisgarh in the armed conflict between the State and the non-state armed rebel groups. A primary survey revealed that there are over 12000 minor children used alone by the state-sponsored Salwa Judum in countering the Maoist threat in this region of India (Zemp and Mohapatra, 2007).

of children is not resulted by military coup alone but there is also a failure on the part of states in promoting human rights and liberal principles and in abstaining from this exercise which is why the practice is still on (Verhey, 2001; Gates and Reich, 2009; Dulti, 1990; Kosonen, 1987; Thulin, 1992; Fontana, 1997).

2. Why Child Soldiers?

One may ask why children are forced to work in war zones. The answer is simple: children have good energy level, they are more readily obeyed, their moral values are still in formation so they can, suspend moral judgments and they do not ask for pay. Children are also recruited because they have qualities like obedience, quickness, fearlessness, lack of farsightedness, and most importantly, they provide cheap labor. In places like Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone children are forcibly recruited in armed conflicts and they are often given drugs so that they remain dependent on the adult leaders (Thompson, 1999). The desire to seek revenge for lost parents and destruction of their environment has been a major reason for children enlisting in the armed forces of Sierra Leone. Street children have provided an important pool of recruitment of child soldiers. Apart from that the children are kidnapped and forced to commit atrocities against their relatives, the purpose is to ensure an irrevocable break with their families. Drugs were deliberately distributed. The army has also actively recruited youngsters, often without registration, so they don't have to be accounted for when they die (Hepburn and Wolfram, 2001; Williams, 2001).

Several studies show that the reasons behind children's voluntary recruitment are ideological, survival, protection, economic and social, and even ignorance. David M. Rosen (2005) argues that many a time's children take part in armed conflicts because they associate heroism and honor with it. For example during the World War II, when all Jews were targeted for death, children and youth of Jewish community took up arms in their hands because they thought that it is now their responsibility to save their community from extermination and they can no longer afford to behave like kids but behave like men. Survival is another factor. When there is massive unemployment and hardship in a society, the starving families may decide to send their children to join armed forces as this ensures income, food,

medicine, housing, insurance, retirement plan etc. In Colombia, thousands of children have joined paramilitary groups for the same reason. In some situations, the involvements of children in conflicts as soldiers happen because of ignorance. Children voluntarily take part in warfare, not realizing the dangers and abuses they will be subjected to. The longer a conflict continues, the more likely children are forcibly recruited because of shortage of adult soldiers. Moreover, availability of lightweight, easy to use weapons like ak-47, r-15s, uzi- sub-machine guns etc. Contribute to the use of children as combatants. Since the collapse of the central government in 1991, an estimated 200,000 children have carried a gun in Somalia⁷ (Slinger, 2005; Wessells, 2006).

Illicit trade of natural resources such as in diamond and gold also leads to coerced recruitment of children. Children are often used to monitor and work in mines to dig out gold and diamonds selling which civil wars in Angola,⁸ Liberia and Sierra Leone are sustained. Coerced recruitment is often done through special recruiters pressurizing their children and their families to join the armed groups. In Uganda, the lord's resistance army has abducted more than 20,000 children since 1986. The proximity of camps for refugees or internally displaced persons to conflict zones also exposes children to the risk of forced recruitment. Various research conducted by the UN showed that when the recruitment is voluntary by children in guerrilla groups, the single major reason for this is ill-treatment of themselves or their families by government troops (Eigen, 2009; Slinger, 2005; United Nations, 2000).

Girls represent up to 40% of the estimated 300,000 children associated with armed groups and, though they remain largely invisible, many are engaged in direct combat. Girl soldiers often share the duties of their male counterparts, in addition to being used for sex and as commanders or rebel leaders' wives. While girls have historically played support roles within armed forces and groups, acting as domestic workers, cooks and porters, many do actively engage in hostilities as combatants, suicide bombers and commanders (Popovski and Arts, 2006).

7. Although availability of light weapons is considered to be another reason for proliferation of child soldiers, but weapons like M-16 are also light but not used by children, however many times children use much heavier weapons like RPGs.

8. In Angola, following the signing of a ceasefire agreement in April 2002, a wide process of demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants was initiated. On estimated 8,000 children recruited during the civil war were released.

3. INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Since the world summit for children in 1990, the United Nations, various international nongovernmental agencies, child right activists and state representatives paid a lot of attention to the situation of children in armed conflicts and made a lot of effort to materialize the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes. DDR programmes are intended to bring security and stability to a region after a conflict. The three phases of DDR programmes are sequentially imperative. First, disarmament requires that combatants are stripped off their weapons, and DDR programmes often utilize a trade-in system such as weapon for cash. Demobilization constitutes the assembly and registration of ex-combatants, orienting former soldiers on the value of DDR programme and transporting them to desired locations at a time that is in sync with the civilian life such as crop cycle and school cycles. Finally, reintegration ensures economic and social assimilation through the personal empowerment of and financial incentives to ex-combatants. Although child soldiers have much to benefit from DDR programmes, they are frequently disregarded in the planning stages of DDR programmes and mostly even during implementation. These programmes predominantly focus on adult male soldiers, rarely include women and often exclude children (Odeh and Sullivan 2004).

DDR programmes are mostly country specific and they are a mixed story of both success and failure but mostly the latter. In order to protect child soldiers' rights and to meet their special needs, the World Bank set the following guidelines for DDR programmes: “*child soldiers must be separated from military authority and protected through the establishment of special reception centers during demobilization as long as their stay prior to being reunited with their families and communities*”. Furthermore, reintegration programmes “*should emphasize three key components: family reunification, psychological support and education and economic opportunity*” (Lysanne, 2010).

The general assembly of UN recommended in its resolution 48/157 of December, 1993, the appointment of an independent expert to study the impact of armed conflict on children. Ms. Graca Machel (1996), former minister of education of Mozambique, got assigned to the task. In 1996 she submitted to the general assembly, her report, entitled “*impact of armed conflict*

on children". In responses to the "Machel Report", the general assembly adopted in February 1997 resolution 51/77, taking over Machel's recommendation to the secretary general to appoint a special representative on the impact of armed conflict on children. In September 1997 Mr. Olarra A. Otunnu got assigned to this position and since April 2006 Ms. Radhika Coomeraswamy has assumed this position. The role of the special representative is to build awareness of the needs of war affected children, to propose ideas and approaches to enhance child protection and to bring together key actors to promote concerted and effective responses (Bower, 2008; Druba, 2002; United Nations, 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; Odeh and Sullivan, 2004; UNHCR and Save the Children, 2001; Finken, 2004; IIEP, 2006).

The United Nations also "*named and shamed*" parties and countries, who were recruiting children, In 2002, the secretary general listed in his report to the security council five countries who were recruiting children for military purposes. The five countries were Afghanistan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Somalia. In 2003, this list was updated, including 15 countries: Afghanistan, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Chechnya, Colombia, Myanmar, Nepal, Northern Ireland, Philippines, Sri Lanka,⁹ Sudan and Uganda. The UN adopted resolution 1460 in 2003 and resolution 1359 in 2004 and these resolutions emphasized the responsibility of states to prosecute those responsible for egregious crimes perpetrated against children, including recruitment and use of children for military purposes and to note the progress made in the field of advocacy and development of norms and standards in this field (Rosen, 2005; Eigen, 2009; United Nations, 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; UNICEF, 2004, Odeh and Sullivan, 2004; Pham, 2007; Wessells, 2006; Somasundaram, 2002; Leibig, 2005; Alfredson, 2002).

In the reports of 2010 by the special representative of the secretary general for children and armed conflict and the secretary general the countries which included Somalia's transitional government; Congo's armed forces; Myanmar's army; and rebel groups in Congo; Myanmar; the Philippines,

9. In Sri Lanka, young girls had been recruited by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the mid-1980s. Many of them had been recruited as children and were chosen from ages as young as 10 to become suicide bombers. In the northeastern state of Manipur in India, there are more than 1,000 girl soldiers fighting with armed groups, approximately 6-7 per cent of child soldiers. Since 1998, more than 2,000 17 year old girls were among minors enlisted into active duty in the US armed forces (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

Colombia; Sudan; and Uganda, have all been under close observation. In the report it was stated that there are several countries and groups who are responsible for rape and sexual violence against children. There are around six organizations in Congo and the lord's resistance army in Uganda, which is notorious for kidnapping children and using them as fighters and sex slaves. Added to the list for recruiting children this year were, the afghan national police, the central African Republic's rebel committee of patriots for justice and peace, and Somalia's Hizbul Islam (Clifford, 2010; United nations, 2010a, 2010b).

In 2002, the UN organized a special session on children to review the progress made since the world summit for children in 1990. The outcome document "*a world fit for children*" contained a declaration and a plan of action for the promotion of children rights. In the declaration, the participating heads of states reaffirmed their obligation to take action to promote and protect the rights of each child. Apart from these initiatives UNICEF¹⁰ along with the government of France, held the 'Paris peace conference' in 2007 where representatives of 58 countries committed themselves to putting an end to the unlawful recruitment of children for military purpose¹¹ (Gates and Reich, 2009; Slinger, 2005; Eigen, 2009; Rosen, 2005; Pham, 2007; Bower, 2008).

Another issue that is jeopardizing many DDR programmes is the issue of sexual exploitation of children at the hands of aid workers and peace keepers. Sarah Lyall in her article published in the New York Times reported that in Liberia, girls as young as eight are being sexually exploited by un peacekeepers, aid workers and teachers in return for food, small favors and even rides in trucks (Sarah, 2006). This is just one example of the myriad of crimes committed against child soldiers and refugee children by aid workers and peace keepers. The fact that children get abused at the hands of

10. In Rwanda, UNICEF has worked alongside Save the Children (1992) and the International Committee of the Red Cross for the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers following rebel incursions in May and June of 2001 in the Gisenyi and Ruhengeri Provinces. Over 2000 rebels were surrendered to the Rwandan Patriotic Army.

11. In Sierra Leone, UNICEF was the lead agency for child protection during the DDR process for child soldiers from 1998 to 2002. Demobilized children were transferred into interim care centers supported by UNICEF where they were provided with health care and psychological counseling. They also participated in educational and recreational activities while family tracing and reunification was in progress. Almost all of 6,800 former child soldiers who have been demobilized since October 1999 are now reunited with their families.

humanitarian workers had come to light in 2002 following allegations of widespread abuse of refugee children and internally displaced children by humanitarian workers and peacekeepers in the whole of western Africa (HPN, 2011). Since then the international community has taken number of actions to prevent these abuse. In 2009 the members of the executive committee on humanitarian affairs and peace and security task force on protection from sexual exploitation has requested the inter agency standing committee to review the efforts in this area and to identify the extent to which policies have been implemented. The review, completed in 2010, also looked at the impact of the activities, policies, strategies and tools adopted and developed by the task force, including a high level conference in December 2006, the production of an awareness raising film to serve with pride and the adoption of the UN victim's assistance strategy in 2008.

It is seen that already vulnerable children are particularly at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation by peacekeepers and aid workers. These include orphans and children separated from their parents; those from poor families, children who are discriminated against; children displaced from their home communities; and children from families who depend on humanitarian assistance. Most of these children fall prey to transactional sex as survival tactics. Like giving sexual favours in exchange for food, water, clothes and even fancy goods like radio and mobile phones (Casky, 2008). Another important point associated with sexual abuse is that there is a general perception that sexual exploitations are crimes committed mostly against girls. However, a study by *Save the Children* shows that both boys and girls become victims of sexual abuse. Further, these crimes are committed not only by the people of the international community but also by members of the local community including teachers, police, and the military and within the family.

4. AFTERMATH AND THE PROBLEM AHEAD

On a macro level there are several challenges that the world community faces in any effort to prevent child soldiers from getting involved in an ongoing conflict irrespective of the fact where the conflict is arising. The political economy of a war or conflict bears immense consideration because in certain cases scarcity of economic resources leads to deployment of child soldiers for example in Africa. There is little interest among developed countries as the united states and European countries to arbitrate the conflicts in impoverished nations

since arbitration does not necessarily lead to domestic, political, social and economic gain eventually discouraging international activists, agencies and aid (Wessells, 2006; Brett and Mccallin, 1998; Lorey, 2001; Machel, 1996; United Nations, 2000).

Albeit any conflict is socially, politically, economically and in a number of other ways exhaustive and needs to be checked, nevertheless, it is also very important to address the specific needs of the individual soldiers especially girl soldiers. While a boy soldier can feel guilt over violent acts he committed, a girl soldier can also feel the same as well as she may feel the internal conflicting feelings and fear of rejection by her family and society. The psychological identity of a child soldier is another problem. The identity of a girl soldier in war zones was more of the identity formed by a person who is a slave and used by others for daily chores, and sex. The child soldiers who communicated the politics of a war had a different identity than the others who just took orders (Keairns, 2002).

Child soldiers are generally suffers the experience of bad dreams, both during their period in conflict zone and on return to normal life. They constantly feel a persistent fear of death, memories of killing, rape and torture. Apart from these they face difficulty in controlling anger, alcohol or drug addiction. They also lack self-esteem, hating the violent person they have become. Other children who did not faced conflicts and war like situations, often fear the former child soldiers as imminent threat to families and societies at large and many even disapprove the special support they are given in the form of special school and medical aid etc. (Machel, 1996; United Nations, 2000; Save the Children Fund, 1992).

5. SUGGESTIONS

Graca Machel (1996) in her report gave a number of suggestions which are very crucial –

1. Support should be given to the United Nations committee on the rights of the child, UNICEF, UNHCR, and International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement in their efforts to eradicate the use of children less than 18 years of age as soldiers.¹²
2. United Nations agencies and civil society actors should pursue quiet diplomacy with government and non-state forces and their international supporters to encourage the immediate demobilization of child soldiers and adherence to the convention on the rights of the child.
3. The media should be encouraged to expose the use of child soldiers and the need for demobilization.
4. All peace agreements should include specific measures to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers into society. There is an urgent need for the international community to support programmes, including advocacy and social services for the demobilization and community reintegration of child soldiers.

Apart from these suggestions girl child soldiers need to be protected by an explicit statement in some international treaty or convention. In order to accomplish this, the definition of a child soldier needs to be expanded to encompass those children, often girls, who are forced to serve in domestic or sexual capacities for an armed force, not just those children who serve on the front lines of conflict. Those children who are used by armed forces for support behind the scenes cannot be underestimated. Entire process of reintegration should only be done in consultation with the child soldiers. They must be fully informed about the demobilization and reintegration process and allow them to participate in decisions that are going to affect their life. Reintegration process must work with the girl, her family, and the village from which she came. Demobilization and reintegration programs must also begin to provide the girls with new experiences that will change their identity from soldier and begin to build their identity as children worthy of new life. Reintegration will not be sufficient if the children are unable to go to school or have other ways to acquire skills, jobs or financial opportunities. Donor countries must look beyond the immediate problems and focus more on how to overcome the long-term impact of war. It is also

12. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, May 25, 2000, U.N. GAOR, U.N. Doc A/54/RES/263 (entered into force Feb. 12, 2002), *available at* <http://www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm>.

debatable issue that whether sanctioning and removing funding for poor and conflict facing countries will work for the benefit of children or it will increase the vulnerability.

There are several other measures that can be used to link the former child soldiers with the community. For example in Sri Lanka the game of cricket is becoming a major tool in this process. Through the cricket, UNICEF, the international cricket council and the government of Sri Lanka are working to link the former child soldiers. During the three decades of civil war, thousands of Sri Lankan children were recruited by armed groups. Since 2002, UNICEF has registered some 7,000 of them throughout the country. After the end of the conflict, more than 600 former child soldiers received assistance from UNICEF programmes of education, vocational training, and psycho-social activities (UNICEF, 2010).

CONCLUSION

There is no lack of evidence that a large proportion of child population is trapped in conflict zones both boys and girls in the form of child soldiers. Decades have passed since this problem has been first recognized in 1990 in the world summit for children. However, the number of children participating in armed conflicts is growing in leaps and bounds. This compels us to think if enough has been done to address this issue. Perhaps the answer lies in the root causes of the issue. Child soldiering is the offshoot of a larger problem that is the continuation and aggravation of existing conflicts. Having said that, this paper would like to reiterate the need for concerted effort on the part of the local and state governments which need to play a crucial role in reaffirming the norms like separation of combatants from civilians and the doctrine of proportionality in the use of force. One needs to place local contexts at the very beginning and programming for support. The development of international law presents an avenue through which child soldier prevention can be further refined. Many enforcement mechanisms have subject-matter jurisdiction over specific treaty norms only. The development of customary norms is still of great value, as some mechanisms do have subject-matter jurisdiction over such norms. It is undeniable that international organizations have been proactive and vocal in dealing with the issue of child soldiers along with a lot of civil society organizations. However, it is also true that in their effort to tackle the situation the greatest hurdles are faced at the local level owing to corruption, lack of monitoring and sometimes failure on the part of the state governments to acknowledge that child soldiering is taking place within the

territory of the state. Even at the international level there is too much deliberation and very little implementation. Therefore, a concerted and cohesive effort is required from the international organizations, state authorities as well as the civil society in dealing with the issue of child soldiers and in enforcing the norms and standards of child rights.

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