

RESEARCH REPORT

Forum: UNICEF

Issue: The situation of engaging children in armed conflicts

Student Officer: Kyra Benecke

Position: Deputy President of UNICEF

Introduction

Around the world thousands of girls and boys are being recruited into armed forces and rebel groups to serve as child soldiers. There are currently 300.000 children fighting in global conflicts. Those children participate in all types of warfare, serving as armed combatants, cooks, spies, human shields, suicide bombers or performing sexual activities.



The United Nations Children's Fund is trying to find ways to terminate the use of child soldiers, preventing the recruitment of children and the reimplantation of the soldier children in civilian life.

Definition of key terms

- **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict**

Better known as OPAC, was the world's first international treaty focused on the ending of the use of child soldiers. It prohibits the recruitment of children under the age of 18 years. It also outlaws the voluntary recruitment of children by non-state armed groups.

Selected organizations Fighting against engaging children in armed conflicts

- **War Child**

A non-governmental organization founded in the UK in 1933 which empowers children and young people in conflict areas by providing psychosocial support, education and protecting children from the effects of the war.

- **Child Soldiers International**

An UK-based non-governmental organization. It tries to stop the recruitment, use and exploitation of children by armed forces and groups. Publishing researches, analysis and recommendations, they work towards a world where all children grow up enjoying their full human rights. In 2012, the organization published an agenda to end the use of child soldiers

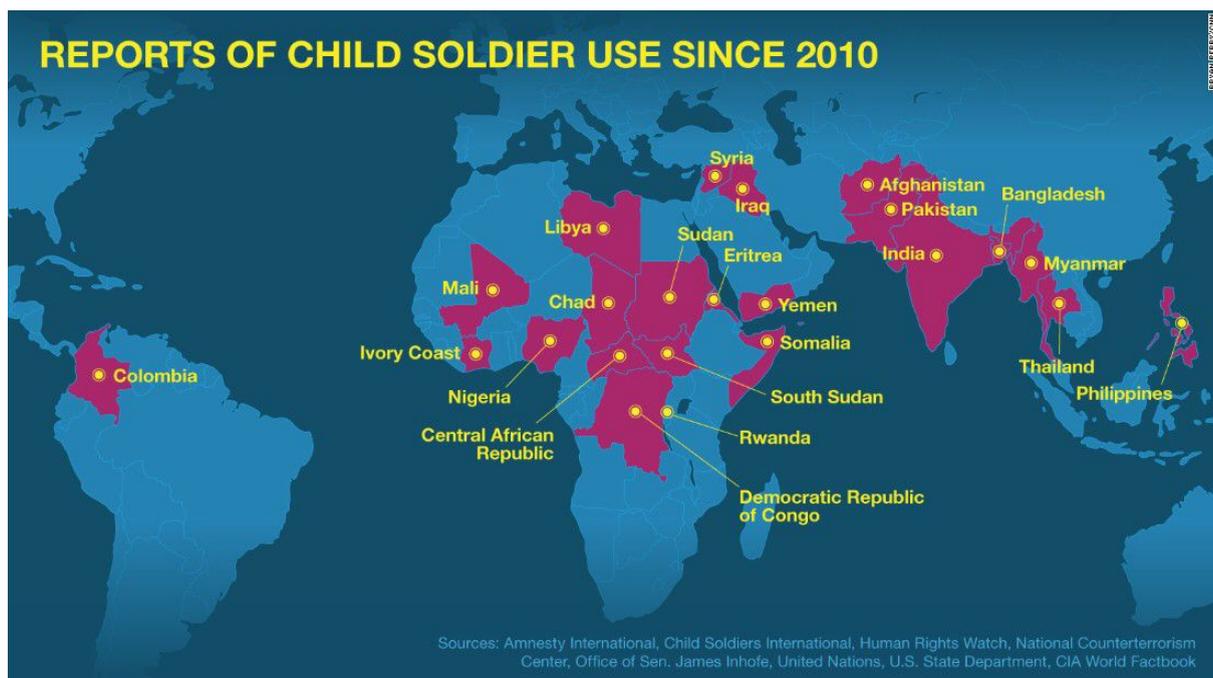
- Following countries are mainly involved in the issue (United Nations identified them in 2017)

- Afghanistan,
- Myanmar,
- Philippines,
- Somalia,
- Syria,
- Yemen,

Background information

- Child soldiers around the world:

The map below presents countries around the world dealing with children in armed conflicts.



- Armed groups target children for several reasons. They are easier to manipulate; they need less food and they don't have a highly developed sense of danger. Children often join armed forces to fight for a cause that they or their family supports, usually with little understanding of consequences.
- Some are beaten and kidnapped into submission. Sometimes children join the military groups to escape poverty. In almost all cases children do not have access to education. Numerous children have missed out on school and they need to join education system in order to make a stable life for themselves.
- More than 40% of the current number of child soldiers are girls, generally used as sex slaves.
- Many child soldiers end up accustomed to violence. A great deal of them are traumatized by the actions they have been forced to do or have witnessed. Generally, they are left with psychologically damage. They need to undergo reintegration programs to help them to return to civilian life. Additionally, girls face

the difficulties of social stigma because they were repeatedly abused by other military members. Children who survive armed conflicts suffer from psychological illness, poor literacy and issues with aggression.

- Since the child soldier treaty in 2000, the recruitment of under 16-year-old children became prohibited and since the *child soldier treaty* (OPAC) came to life it ensured that the military recruits are no younger than 16.

Possible Solution

In 2014 UNICEF launched the campaign “Children, Not Soldiers”, to end the use of children in armed conflicts. The campaign worked towards the prevention of recruitment of children by national security forces in conflict.

- UNICEF Action plan:



SHOW YOUR SUPPORT
TELL THE WORLD THEY ARE

#CHILDREN NOT SOLDIERS

ACTION PLAN
HOW TO END THE RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT:

ONE Issue military command orders prohibiting the recruitment and use of children

TWO Release all children identified in the ranks of security forces

THREE Ensure children's reintegration into civilian life

FOUR Criminalize the recruitment and use of children

FIVE Integrate age-verification mechanisms in recruitment procedures

CHILDRENANDARMEDCONFLICT.ORG

United Nations unicef

UNICEF is vocal about reintegration of former child soldiers in ways such as preparation for returning to civilian life.

Solution:

- Develop the highest possible standards of child protection in relation to military exploitation
- Promoting universal adoption of OPAC
- Advocate that the age of 18 should be the minimum age for military recruitment of any kind
- Work towards the prevention of recruitment of children by national security
- Release of child soldiers and reintegrating these children in civilian life

Useful links

<https://www.child-soldiers.org/>

<https://theirworld.org/explainers/child-soldiers>

<https://www.savethechildren.org.nz/what-we-do/the-issues/education/>

<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/children-not-soldiers/>