

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Establishing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programmes to eradicate child soldiers

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Introduction

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes are an initiative to retract combatants from war affiliated environments and provide a smooth transition back to civilian life. Despite our conflicted relationship with child labor and war, the use of soldiers still in their adolescence is yet still prominent.

As for a common definition, a “child” is an individual under the age of 18. In general children tend to be more susceptible to the manipulation of armed groups, and this point is a motivating factor for many militia groups, to recruit and abduct children for the use of guerilla purposes. These children lose years of their developmental years to war and are subject to viewing, inflicting and experiencing extreme violence.

A huge reason for the existence of child combatants in the first place is the socio-economic factors as well as the geo-political situation of said area. Not to ignore poverty and susceptibility of children in under developed or developing areas. Many are coerced or manipulated into serving for a militia group as well, which in many situations, is unavoidable due to lack of awareness and education.

According to UNICEF, between the years of 2005 and 2020, around 93000 children were confirmed soldiers and used in different fields such as combat, slavery, domestic help etc. Several laws and resolutions have been passed declaring the use of child soldiers to be illegal and a war crime.

While several measures have been put into place, which have even shown success rates in the past. The number of children drafted in the past two decades is close to almost

95,000 ; It is also noted that the average number of recruitments doubled in 2019 in african and middle eastern regions. It is of high urgency that we all come together to increase implementation of DDR's, as well as come up with new ways to eradicate recruitment all together

Definition of Key Terms

Disarmament

Disarmament is the reduction, limitation, or abolishment of weapons.

Demobilization

The process of releasing someone from the military, particularly after a conflict.

Reintegration

The action or process of integrating someone back into society, and usually consists of economic, educational support ; The term has more contextual use in situations of war/conflict.

Child Soldier

A child soldier is a human being less than 18 years old, recruited by an army or forced into participating in an armed conflict.

Rehabilitation

The action of restoring someone to health or normal life through training and therapy after imprisonment, addiction, or illness.

Combatant

A person or nation engaged in fighting during a war.

Sensitization

The quality or condition of responding to certain stimuli in a sensitive manner.

Armed Group

Refers exclusively to the armed or military wing of a non-state party to a non-international armed conflict. It does not include those segments of the civilian population that are supportive of the non-state party such as its political wing.

Guerilla

A member of a small independent group taking part in irregular fighting, typically against larger regular forces.

Recruitment

The action of enlisting new people in the armed forces.

Abductee

A person who has been abducted.

Cantonment

A military garrison or camp.

Stockholm Syndrome

Feelings of love or trust that a victim of kidnapping or hostage-taking may develop for their captor.

Soldiering

The service or practice of serving as a soldier.

Key Issues

Integrated DDR Standards

The United Nations (UN) **Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards** (IDDRS) were first created by the Inter-Agency Working Group in 2006, and then later modified in 2017 and 2019. to offer direction in post-conflict settings where DDR is an essential component of all-encompassing peace agreements, typically where peace operations have also been established and given a mission to support national DDR initiatives.

Through a series of several modules, IDDRS explores how several war affected areas can implement DDR programmes to eradicate combatants in general. Module 5.30 talks about children specifically and DDR's, and also provides a framework ranging from investigation of root causes to how to prevent re-recruitment. Policy makers, senior management, operational personnel, and DDR officers can use this module to get advice on how to organize and carry out child-specific demobilization and reintegration programs for kids involved with armed forces and other groups that are involved in maintaining peace. When creating and executing programs for the release and reintegration of children in situations of ongoing conflict and the prevention of (re)recruitment, with a focus on females, it is important to consider guiding principles, terminology, the role of child protection agencies, and significant concerns.

The document states that disarmament should be carried out by military personnel and awareness should be created about the harsh dangers of arms, it also suggested that a piece of documentation/certification be provided to the child assuring the surrender of their specific weapons.

Demobilization can be risky and in many situations, is accompanied by uncertainty. Many of the times, children are not aware of their basic rights and may feel a compulsion to remain in their cantonment even after the resolution of the conflict. They

may also flee, which is a type of natural demobilization without the interference of a third party under the DDR standards.

Reintegration, according to IDDRS, must be executed with the aid of psychosocial care and support as well as follow up programmes. But another huge factor of reintegration is community, and how these child soldiers are accepted back into society. Special measures must be taken so as to ensure that the community is welcoming and safe, which may not be the case with girls who were drafted into militia groups.

Psychological effects on child soldiers

The long term psychological effects on any child soldier during and/or after their service is extremely detrimental to their health. The severe intangible trauma experienced by a child combatant can not be measured to any extent . According to research, 32% of child soldiers experience post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There is also a high prevalence of anxiety disorders, depression and struggle to cope up with daily life.

According to psychologist Erik Erikson, the ages 12-18 is known as “Identity vs Role Confusion”, and is a developmental stage in adolescence where the individual explores different senses of self. It was noted that when a child does not get the freedom for this exploration they may experience “Role Confusion”, which may result in them being unsure of who they are and where they fit into the society. When a child does not have a solid sense of self, they will struggle to make basic decisions ; This will affect their careers, education, opinions and self esteem heavily.

Since these child soldiers are forced into duty, they don't have the space to explore different personalities and subsequently have stunted mental growth. Even after considering their possible return to society, the general ability to adjust to their surroundings will be uneasy due to the trauma.

The mental health of an individual directly affects their physical and spiritual health as well as how the child functions and performs tasks. At an age where they should have no difficulty in performing simple academic and domestic tasks, these combatants will struggle to both accomplish routine jobs as well as adjust to day to day life.

It is also very possible that the abductee may experience ‘Stockholm Syndrome’; As defined by the Cleveland Clinic, “Stockholm syndrome is a coping mechanism to a captive or abusive situation. People develop positive feelings toward their captors or abusers over time.” A child at such a tender age could easily start experiencing this as a trauma response, which may make their transition back into the community difficult.

Child Labor and Soldiering

Federal child labor laws restrict the hours and types of work that minors under the age of 16 are allowed to perform and forbid the employment of minors in any hazardous occupation. They also prohibit the employment of minors under the age of 14 in non-agricultural occupations.

According to the International Labor Organization, forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict is the worst form of child labour as mentioned in Convention number 182 of the International Labor Organization. Not only is it a war crime, but also extremely unethical to draft children for activities such as domestic help, combat, spying pursuits and sexual abuse during the period of a war. (Mostly carried out in their cantonments).

Female Soldiers

According to the United Nations (UN), 40% of all child soldiers are females. The impacts that recruitment can have on a child are already gruesome, but as a female combatant, the chances of gender based violence and discrimination are extremely high. Due to the many stigmas and stereotypes present in modern day society, the experience of

a male child soldier may differ from that of a female one. As a female, she may be expected to provide domestic help in the residence or be subjected to sexual abuse

In addition, they are treated differently and with less respect due to many assumptions and stigmas, such as how she is *now* "impure or dirty," and this is another extremely prevalent component of the transition for a female child back into civilian life. Fighting and militia activity is often associated with many characteristics, so when it is made known that a girl partook in such activities, she may be a source of 'embarrassment' or 'shame' for the community and is ostracized.

Sexual Violence

A female living in a cantonment is very easy target for older residents and fellow soldiers, and may very likely go through sexual harassment. They could be used for sexual exploitation, assaulted, or made slaves. Many of the times, such encounters may lead to a pregnancy, which has a likely negative impact on the mother. Being a child herself, she has absolutely no resources to raise this child, and most of the time, she will not have the support of her family or community. Usually when a girl child returns home, she is shunned or made subject to an honor killing. Naturally a pregnancy would never aid such a situation, rather it would have a negative reaction from her family and community members.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Sierra Leone

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and Sierra Leone Army (SLA) were engaged in a rigid civil war throughout the years 1991-2002. It is during this period that Sierra Leone came under the spotlight for using child soldiers in war. Both sides made use of child soldiers ; RUF did so by forcing and abducting them. Even child soldiers that were demobilized were either kidnapped again or immensely pressured into rejoining. The UN established the peace-keeping mission, the United Nations Mission in Sierra

Leone (UNAMSIL), who assisted the Government of Sierra Leone in implementing the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in the country. Though many child soldiers are now reintegrated, the long term mental effects of their service, in many cases, is non-curable.

South Sudan

Since 2013, an estimated 17,000 kids have been enlisted in South Sudan to serve as child soldiers. The Cobra Faction and the SPLA (two armed organizations that have been opposing the government) both recruited numerous minors. UNICEF has made a request for US \$4.2 million in 2020 to help with the release of 2,100 children connected to armed forces and armed groups as well as the continuation of the reintegration program for children who have been recently released in South Sudan. According to UNICEF, 145 child soldiers were freed in October, creating a slope of both future potential and improvement for the condition of child soldiers in South Sudan

Democratic Republic of Congo

UNICEF estimates between 5,000-10,000 children from DRC were associated with war situations. After the end of the conflict in 2003, the government of DRC was still shown supporting militia groups such as 'Mai-Mai' and 'RCD-ML' who took an active part in the recruitment of child soldiers. But, in 2012, the government signed an action plan to end the recruitment of child soldiers, and was aligned with the *Security Council Resolution 1882 (2009)*.

Iraq

Iraq's infamous relationship with wars is not a new concept, militia groups of Iraq affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) have been recruiting child soldiers ever since the war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980's as well as the Gulf War which took place in 1990 . Thousands of boys between the ages of 10 and 15 were reportedly

recruited into the "Saddam's Youth" military training program, according to the US State Department.

Yemen

The *Houthi Movement* or also officially called *Ansar Allah*, is a political and armed movement which originated in North Yemen and is responsible for the majority of the recruitment of child soldiers in that region. According to reliefweb, Houthis have forcibly drafted 10,000 children since 2014. Houthis started an open and required campaign to recruit minors 4 years ago. In Saada, Sanaa, Al Mahwit, Hodeidah, Tihama, Hajjah, and Dhamar, the group organized 52 training camps for thousands of kids, focusing on those 10 years old or older. The signature of an action plan by the Houthis with the United Nations on 18 April 2022 to end and prevent the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children, as well as attacks on schools and hospitals and other grave violations carves a path of hope for DDR programmes to be implemented in Yemen.

Nigeria

According to the United Nations, between 2013 and 2017, armed groups in Northeast Nigeria enlisted approximately 3,500 children as child soldiers (UN). A local militia battling Boko Haram rebels in the Northeast reportedly released roughly 900 young soldiers in 2018, according to UNICEF. The kids that were freed were among the almost 1,500 boys and girls that vigilante groups had enlisted. The use of youngsters as child soldiers could continue as the fighting in the Northeast and other new hotspots intensifies. In efforts to increase reintegration, the Civilian Joint Task Force signed an action plan to put an end to forceful and exploitative recruitment of children into guerilla movements. According to a study done in Borno and Kaduna, the high rate of unemployment and poverty is a major contributor to young people getting involved in violence.

Afghanistan

The Taliban, Zlocal Afghan Police and several other militia groups were noted as perpetrators by the UN. A history of extreme violence, oppression, and conflict is not a new concept for this country, and one such victim of these conflicts are the children. The Taliban's past history of imposing religion and harsh laws is a huge leading factor for the recruitment of these kids who are trained for carrying out military operations such as explosive planting, mass killings and law establishment. Madrasas, or Islamic religious institutions, have long been used by Taliban commanders to train and supply minors as fighters. Fighting frequently involves kids between the ages of 13 and 17 and boys as young as 6 are brainwashed and manipulated, and by the time they are 13, many have mastered the use of firearms. Children were apparently recruited and utilized by other parties to the conflict, including the Afghan government and pro-government troops, which are supported by the United States.

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
1977	Additional Protocols adopted to the Geneva Conventions (1949)	Protocols I and II now included children as a protected class. It was declared that the age of involvement in war was 15; new articles were published that children under the age of 15 will receive special protection and care under war situations
1985	UN seminar on Exploitation of Child Labor	The seminar concluded that child soldiers are in fact a form of exploitative labor. According to the UN, children under the age of 18 shouldn't be forced to participate in combat. "Children in Particularly Difficult Circumstances" was published by UNICEF. This includes a part outlining why using child soldiers is improper.

<p>1989</p>	<p>Convention of Rights of Child</p>	<p>This treaty affirms that any human under the age of 18, legally, is a child. It stated that every child deserves care and protection without discriminating and also says that every child is entitled to a safe and clean environment as well as a right to education. In conclusion the welfare of the child is given first priority</p>
<p>1996</p>	<p>Creation of Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict</p>	<p>The mandate of SRCAC urged and also strengthened the need for protecting children affected by war/conflict. As stated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC), a few fundamental agendas to enhance the protection of children affected by armed conflict were to create awareness, encourage the gathering of data regarding the plight of children impacted by war, and stimulate international cooperation.</p>
<p>1999</p>	<p>Security Council Resolution 1261</p>	<p>The UN has declared child soldiers to be an even greater threat to global security than child labor that is used for profit. The UN also urged states to establish DDR programmes to eradicate child soldiers. It also called upon UNHCR, UNICEF and SRSG-CAAC to intensify efforts to reduce recruitment and easy transition back into civilian life.</p>
<p>2000</p>	<p>Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict</p>	<p>The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict was adopted by the UN General Assembly after six years of rigorous discussions. States are forbidden from compelled recruitment of anyone under the age of 18. It stated that states also had to demobilize any individual under the age of 18. As of today, 172 countries have ratified this protocol, with 17 countries that have not signed or ratified the protocol.</p>

2001	Security Council Resolution 1379	Resolution 1379 of the UN Security Council calls for the prosecution of individuals who enlist and use children in armed conflict and was adopted by U.N. member states.
2002	Red Hand Day	The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict came into effect on February 12, 2002, and that is when the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers was established. 168 governments have ratified this convention since it was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in May 2000.
2014	“Children, Not Soldiers.”	UNICEF launches the “Children, Not Soldiers.” campaign, in an effort to end child recruitment with the help of an extensive action plan as well as reference to DDR’s

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Establishment of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programmes

The general scope of DDR programmes, in the past few decades, have been focused on adult combatants. With the vast development in the issue of child soldiers, referring to the report published by IAWG, the implementation of these programmes need to be looked at with a slightly different point of view than compared to adult combatants. While trying to reintegrate these kids back into society, the team must keep in mind the guiding principles from the Convention on the Rights of Child, as these are the fundamental rights that a child is entitled to.

In countries such as Sierra Leone and Democratic Republic of Congo, DDR’s have been successfully implemented. The United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB), the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of

the Congo (MONUSCO) are a few of the successes of this programme. Though there is still a presence of militia groups and recruitment isn't completely eradicated, since 2018, UNICEF has responded to the needs of over 13,000 child soldiers

In countries where DDR's have been a success, a process of situational analysis and planning was put into place. It also needs to be established whether the country is a mission or non mission setting, which then determines the approach to implementation. In most mission settings, DDR practitioners focus on being inclusive and working through a comprehensive plan to set up a formal demobilization process.

Children, Not soldiers

In March of 2014, "Children, Not Soldiers." a campaign which was launched by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF, aimed to raise awareness about how children should not be used in military combat and generate political and global support on the issue. Several countries were the concern of this movement such as but not limited to DRC, Yemen, South Sudan.

This campaign instantly gained popularity and got a lot of attention from other UN organizations and NGOs around the world. The campaign ended in 2016, and proved to be a success. Thousands of child soldiers were released and entered into the DDR setup. All the countries under concern signed either action plans or introduced new laws after and during the campaign that condemned the recruitment of child soldiers.

Possible Solutions

Providing access to *all* child soldiers

Many of the times, children in war conflicted areas are unaware of their rights as an individual and are easily manipulated/re-recruited due to socio economic factors as well as general poverty. This reintegration process tends to be tricky and comes with a lot of complications, as children are being retracted from environments that have provided

them with years worth of trauma and despair. DDR programmes, according to the integrated DDR standards, must aim to spread their reach to as many children as possible and raise awareness about their rights. Practitioners should also make sure that the impact of this should not only reach the kids but their families as well.

Another massive problem is how girl soldiers may face discrimination due to stigmas and not have a fair opportunity to be enlisted into the DDR programme. Some 40% of child soldiers are girls, which translates to roughly 120,000 kids. Girls tend to be neglected and may be claimed as wives or slaves by soldiers in cantonments, so practitioners should make an extra effort to make sure that girls are rightly retracted as there may be a struggle from the opposing party regarding the fact they have ‘ownership’ of these girls or have ‘claimed rights’ over them. Other than the transition to civilian life, special care groups should be made to address sexual abuse and impregnated victims, as well as young mothers.

Creating more opportunities to receive education

Countries with a high number of child soldiers have one thing in common, low literacy rates. If we closely examine the causes of the ongoing use of child soldiers, such as socioeconomic challenges and a lack of awareness, the answer to these problems can be found in the need to create more possibilities for securing education.

Most of the time, if the child isn’t abducted, they are recruited with the help of manipulation or coercion. Children are easy targets for militia groups because they are of a young age and have most probably received a poor education. Other times it may be compulsion that drives children to join armed groups, so as to solve the situation of poverty in their house or maybe escape their lifestyle.

Children who will be provided with a basic education will be able to understand their rights as well as have a lesser chance of being prone to manipulation. Not only will

educated kids be able to possibly skirt such dangerous situations, but also be able to resolve the poverty that their household may face.

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