

# **The Recruitment of Child Soldiers: Humiliation Compromising Childhood**

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## **Abstract**

The recruiting of children under the age of 15 is considered a war crime under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), however it is calculated that at least 250,000 children are fighting as soldiers all over the world<sup>1</sup>. This is only an estimate since the recruiters - who mostly consist of militias that disrespect the rules of war - do not acknowledge their use.

Because of this sort of violation, child soldiers can be considered invisible combatants. From the moment they are recruited into these militias, they no longer receive the civilians' protection nor the benefit from combatants' special protection, being consequently transformed into illegal soldiers.

The invisibility of these unlawful combatants is the main reason why this issue is not taken into consideration. The further away the problem is from public international awareness, the more difficult it will be to draw the attention of the international community towards this immeasurable humiliation. Due to the fact that this humiliation is taking place in far away battlefields, especially in African countries<sup>2</sup>, there is almost no public policy planning concerning this ongoing matter.

The concept of humiliation pervades all the recruitment phases.

In numerous cases, the process of recruitment begins through abduction of the children or through pressure placed on the children by threatening their family. Subsequently, children are submitted to violent trainings that do not take their special needs into consideration. Moreover, they are constantly prompted to use drugs in order to lose their fear of fighting and in some cases girls are used as sexual slaves by high commandants. After being demobilized, former child soldiers must receive special attention from DDR Programs<sup>3</sup>. These programs should not only seek an efficient reintegration into the society for the children, but also prevent them from being re-recruited.

Although there are just a few countries facing this problem, it is the international community's responsibility to protect children against all kinds of humiliation and violence. Thus, this paper aims to bring the problem of child recruitment to international community debates in order to make the humiliation of

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<sup>1</sup> According to the **Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (A/61/275)** in <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/GA/61/documents.htm> [13-07- 2009]

<sup>2</sup> Most of child recruitment takes place in Africa, but this problem also exists in other countries such as Colombia, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

<sup>3</sup> The UN is introducing "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs" in post-conflict reconstruction. The programs consist in disarming warring parties and reintegrating combatants into civilian life.

these children more visible and to eventually eliminate their use in such a dangerous and harmful atmosphere.

Everyone that suffers humiliation certainly deserves attention; however, international public policies should also focus on the ones affected by war, particularly children, so that when they grow older, they can sow peace instead of violence and war.

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