



Social Issues

Child Soldiers



Definition:

Children who are soldiers and fight in wars and conflicts. (Simple definition.)

For the purposes of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, UNICEF defines a 'child soldier' as any child – boy or girl – under 18 years of age, who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to: cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups other than family members. It includes girls and boys recruited for forced sexual purposes and/or forced marriage. The definition, therefore, does not only refer to a child who is carrying, or has carried, weapons. (Based on the 'Cape Town Principles', 1997)

Examples:

- Children in Rwanda who fought in the wars between the Hutus and Tutsis.
- Child soldiers fighting in Guatemala and Sierra Leone

Why the situation occurs?

When countries are at war, often children can be forced to fight in the army of that country, or in a rebel army. They may be taken from their parents and homes and have to rely on the army for clothes and food.

They may be threatened or tortured if they try to leave or escape, and fear can stop them from even trying to get away from the situation. They will be forced to learn how to kill, maim, torture and abuse the enemies of the army, and will be quickly introduced to a culture of killing and bloodlust. They will be inundated with propaganda material and taught to hate.

These child soldiers will have to live with the crimes that they commit and see every day, and this will cause incredible psychological damage. If a child does manage to leave the army, they will face an enormous range of problems when they try to re-establish their lives and live in society again. They may have no family or friends to support them, and may forever live haunted by their experiences, but there is much that can be done to ease this suffering and re-educate them.

How you can make a difference?

Tackle the issue - learn about the issue and how to empathise with the situation that child soldiers find themselves in. Learn to recognise what difficulties they will face if they try to reintegrate themselves into society. Why and how will they need to be re-educated, and

how can Scouting help?

Use the materials and tools provided to follow the process of:

1. Identifying the problem
2. Developing Awareness and Empathy
3. Taking action
4. Measuring the change

Resources and Links:

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) website: <http://www.unicef.org> (English, French and Spanish)

UNICEF fact sheet on Child soldiers:

<http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/childsoldiers.pdf>

UNICEF Voices of Youth website, which provides a safe and supportive global cyberspace within which young people can explore, discuss and partner on issues related to human rights and social change: <http://www.unicef.org/voy>

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

<http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

United Nations "CyberSchoolBus" website (English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese and Russian) for the UN global teaching and learning project:

<http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/index.html>

Briefing paper on Child Soldiers from the UN CyberSchoolBus website:

<http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/briefing/soldiers/index.htm>

International Labour Organization (ILO) website (English, French and Spanish) - The United Nations specialised agency which seeks the promotion of social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights: <http://www.ilo.org>

ILO 1999 Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour:

<http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C182>

WOSM Strategy Promising Practice Documents (English and French) on the Sub-regional programme for peace education in the Great Lakes region of Africa, including the re-education of Child soldiers through Scout programmes:

<http://www.scout.org/strat/pplist.shtml>

World Scout Conference Resolution 16/90 on the Convention of the Rights of the Child

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