



Convention on the Rights of the Child

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment, which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

(Article 39)

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Develop and disseminate research on the physical, psychological, economic and social effects of armed conflicts on women, particularly young women and girls, with a view to developing policies and programmes to address the consequences of conflicts.
(E4.146.c)

Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocol
The special protection provided by international humanitarian law to children who have not attained the age of 15 years remains applicable to them if they take a direct part in hostilities
(Protocol II, Article 4, d)

Right to Protection and Reintegration for Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Groups

Although there is a greater public awareness of Children Associated with Fighting Forces (CAFF), relatively little attention has focused specifically on Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Groups ('girl soldiers'). Both national governments and multi-lateral demobilization programs are complicit in overlooking the issues relating specifically to the girl soldier, rendering DDR gender-biased and exclusive.

The girl child's function as a "soldier" might vary according to any of the following experiences: armed fighting, combat trainers, mine sweepers, spying, forced marriage, informants, early motherhood, sex slavery, nursing, looters, messengers, and food gatherers/cooks. Not acknowledging the gender specific needs of girl soldiers causes them to be at risk of maintaining their identity of a soldier, as well as subjecting them to social stigmatization that would prevent positive prospects with respects to livelihoods, social roles, and other opportunities. In addition to the various roles the girl child soldier has, the causes of her incorporation are equally important. Not all girl soldiers have been abducted, some chose to join for a variety of reasons: to avoid poverty, to ameliorate their livelihood, to develop skills, to escape other forms of violence, or to participate in a unified entity (*see Voices, Keairns*).

Governments and humanitarian aid organizations need to presume the girl soldier exists in all armed conflicts. This will ensure her incorporation in the DDR process, addressing her gender-specific and individual experiences of abduction, forced marriage, prostitution, and early motherhood, forced contraception and/or abortions, in addition to armed fighting roles. Traditional DDR programs have inhibited the protection and gender development needs of the girl soldier. They need to expand and to include Prevention, Release, Rehabilitation, and Integration (PRRI), (*see Actions* on next page).

PRRI programs that are gender-specific are necessary for the prevention of continual harm by men and boys on the girl soldier and their children, as well as attention to gender-specific issues. For successful reintegration, the girl soldier needs programs to address job training, education, literacy, medical attention that includes traditional healing, child agency building, religious rituals, and facilitation of community support and mediation of family conflict.

Facts to Consider

- A survey from 1990-2003 found that girl soldiers existed in 55 countries and girl soldiers were involved in armed conflict in 38 of the countries (girls younger than 18 years old were surveyed). In 27 countries girl soldiers are forcefully recruited. In 14 countries girls were abducted and transported for participation in armed conflict.
(Where, pp.21-26)

The Cape Town Principles

Child Soldier: Any person 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.

International Conference on War-Affected Children Winnipeg, Canada

There is an urgent need of more research into the gender dimension of armed conflict, particularly as it pertains to girls and armed conflict. (2000)

Where Are The Girls?

The kinds of tasks and roles girl soldiers are allotted and in some cases forced to undertake are part of a larger planning process deliberately created by those looking to sustain and gain from armed conflict. Thus, the roles of girl soldiers must be considered as an integral part of the conflict... (p18)

WGG on Girl Soldiers Christian Children's Fund (CCF)

More Information
*Working Group on Girls
NGO Committee on
UNICEFUNICEF House,
Room 1142
New York, New York 10017
wggs@girlsrights.org
www.girlsrights.org*

- Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Protocols I and II of 1977: protections are granted to female soldiers without discrimination; provisions detail gender consideration in order to reduce sexual violence and a provision of separate accommodations from males.
- Girl soldiers (and their children) are the people-groups at the greatest disadvantage in armed conflict because of their vulnerable age, their exposure to heightened sexism, and their lack of inclusion in DDR.
- Girl soldiers' (and their children's) inability to reintegrate in society is compounded by lack of access to education and to reproductive health care, by community stigmatization and familial or "husband" abandonment, which can be additionally compounded by single parenting.

Actions to Ensure effective PRRI

- Assessment: Reassess official DDR programs to include PRRI. Implement a mandatory vulnerability analysis process. Establish a holistic prevention policy on all levels from family to societal.
- Research/Training: Fund and conduct comparative gender studies to document community-based program responses and outcomes for reintegrating girl soldiers and their children as well as incorporating gender, reproductive health, market analysis, vocational and business skills, and population issues in PRRI and training of PRRI implementers (including protection monitoring).
- Capacity-building: provision of interim care and community-based reintegration programs that are gender sensitive (including conflict resolution, dialogue, and mediation), that ensure social reintegration (restorative justice), and that meet girl soldiers' holistic needs (education, job-training, health, psycho-social care, non-threatening spiritual rituals, and family planning).
- Advocacy and Co-ordination Mechanism: Form NGO partnerships and community groups for establishing effective PRRI programs.

Sources and Resources (Bibliography)

- <http://www.womenwagingpeace.net>
- http://www.unicef.org/emerg/index_childsoldiers.html
- <http://www.unfpa.org/>
- <http://www.child-soldiers.org>
- The Coalition to Stop Use of Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004
- UNFPA: *The Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls*, 2002
- UNICEF: *The Impact of Conflict on Women and Girls in West and Central Africa and the UNICEF Response*, 2005
- *Where are the Girls?*, Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, Rights & Democracy, 2004 (*Where*)
- *The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers*, Yvonne E. Keairns. Quaker UN Office and Coalition to Stop Use of Child Soldiers: 2002. (*Voices*)
- *Breaking the Silence*, Vivi Stavrou, CCF research project
- <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf>
- *Children and Armed Conflict: International Standards for Action*, Human Security Network and UN/CAAC, 2003

August 2006