



FACTSHEET: CHILD SOLDIERS

As defined by the Paris Principles (2007), a *child soldier* is:

- Any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys, and girls used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.
- The United Nations' Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child forbids forced recruitment of children less than 18 years into armed groups. Implemented in 2000, more than 110 countries have since ratified the Protocol.
- While exact figures are unknown, the United Nations (UN) estimates that there are currently 250,000 child soldiers worldwide.
- 40% of all child soldiers are girls. In addition to fighting, girls are most often used as sexual slaves by commanders and domestic labourers (e.g. cooks, nurses, porters).
- Child soldiers are and have been used in almost all regions of the world: Africa (Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone), Asia (Burma, Sri Lanka), Latin America (Colombia, Mexico), Europe (Russian Federation, Former Yugoslavia), and the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq).
- Children may be abducted, forcibly recruited, or given the very limited alternatives, "volunteer" to become child soldiers. Contributing factors to joining armed groups include: poverty, separation from family, displacement, and living in areas exposed to armed conflict or severely restricted social and economic opportunities (e.g. schools, employment).
- Improvements in weapon technology as well as the proliferation of small arms and light weapons have made it easier for children to engage in combat. Such weapons are often accessible in conflict zones and are relatively easy to use.

- Children abducted by armed groups may be forced to commit violent acts against their own family members and community. This deliberate 'stigmatizing' strategy makes reunification processes for former child soldiers very challenging.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor forbids forced recruitment of children less than 18 years for armed conflict. More than 150 countries have ratified the Convention.
- Some Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR) programs specifically target child soldiers. These programs, however, need increased funds and resources to achieve long-term, sustainable impacts and should include courses tailored to the often gender-specific experiences, such as sexual violence of former girl child soldiers.

Where are Child Soldiers?

Governments that have used child soldiers between April 2004 and October 2007¹:

1. Chad
2. Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
3. Israel
4. Burma
5. Somalia
6. Sudan and Southern Sudan
7. Uganda
8. Yemen
9. Additionally the UK has deployed under-18s to Iraq where they were exposed to the risk of hostilities.

Countries where children were recruited and used by paramilitaries, militias, civilian defense forces or armed groups linked to, supported by, or acting as proxies for government²

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| 1. Chad | 8. Burma |
| 2. Colombia | 9. Peru |
| 3. Cote d'Ivoire | 10. Philippines |
| 4. DRC | 11. Sri Lanka |
| 5. India | 12. Sudan |
| 6. Iran | 13. Uganda |
| 7. Libya | |

¹ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers Final Report 2008 p16
http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/files/country_pdfs/FINAL_2008_Global_Report.pdf

² Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers Final Report 2008 p18
http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/files/country_pdfs/FINAL_2008_Global_Report.pdf

Government armed forces which used children as spies, informants or messengers³:

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|-------------|--------------|
| 1. Burundi | 5. Indonesia |
| 2. Columbia | 6. Israel |
| 3. DRC | 7. Nepal |
| 4. India | 8. Uganda |

Countries where there were child soldiers in non-state armed groups⁴:

Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territory, Lebanon, Liberia, Burma, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan Thailand, Uganda

³ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers Final Report 2008 p19
http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/files/country_pdfs/FINAL_2008_Global_Report.pdf

⁴ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers Final Report 2008 p24
http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/files/country_pdfs/FINAL_2008_Global_Report.pdf