

UNICEF Topic 1: Recruitment of Child Soldiers

A report released by UNICEF indicated that as of August 2017, Boko Haram, a Radical Islamic militant group, has used eighty-three Nigerian children as suicide bombers since the start of 2017. Often, these children were kidnapped and forced to commit the bombings, while others were unaware that a bomb had even been strapped onto them in the first place¹. Additionally, the majority of the children used were female, as their garb lent to a better disguise of the bombs. Boko Haram has not only used children as human bombs, but has also been recruiting children to physically fight its battles. It recruited 2000 child soldiers into its armed forces in 2016 alone².

Though our discussion starts with Boko Haram, the conversation is much broader in scope. As we speak, there are tens of thousands of child soldiers across the globe. In the past four years, no less than 17,000 children have been recruited in South Sudan and close to 10,000 children have been recruited in the Republic of Central Africa³. In February of 2017, the United Nations reported that in the two years spanning 2014 and 2015, there was a one hundred percent increase in new child soldier recruits⁴. From ages as young as eight years old, children are either forced to fight or deem fighting necessary due to poverty at home, or by a need to defend their community⁵.

A child soldier is defined as “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, spies or for sexual purposes⁶.” Children are not only forced to fight and kill others, but are also subject to abuse and exploitation. Young girls are taken and forced to become sex slaves or marry older soldiers. After children are released from armed forces, they often have psychological struggles and have trouble reintegrating into normal life⁷. In addition, these children are years behind in schooling, making the transition all the more difficult.

Since the mid-1980s, UNICEF has made it a priority to remove these children from armed conflict and prevent child recruitment in the future⁸. Over the past 20 years, UNICEF has helped free 115,000 child soldiers⁹, reconnect them with their families, and reintegrate the

¹ <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/boko-haram-used-83-children-human-bombs-far-year/>

² https://www.unicef.org/media/media_94892.html

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/sep/11/child-soldier-recruits-double-in-one-year-in-middle-east-and-north-africa>

⁵ <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/effects-of-conflict/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58007.html

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/effects-of-conflict/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers/>

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children into society¹⁰. However there are still hundreds of thousands of child soldiers out there, and we as UNICEF must decide on the best way to help them.

Here are questions to consider:

- Why are children targeted to serve in militant groups?
- How can current child soldiers be removed from conflict?
- How have previous UN resolutions affected the issue?
- How can UNICEF reunite former child soldiers with their families?
- What methods should be used to reintegrate former child soldiers into society?
- How can UNICEF prevent the recruitment of children in the future?

Best of Luck,

Yael Blau

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YUNMUN XXVIII

¹⁰ https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58007.html