

Child Soldiers: An End in Sight for Africa?

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

Dr. John Arthur

December 2009



## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Gary and Wanda Meyer for listening and encouraging me through this whole experience.

## Abstract

This paper discusses the problem of child soldiering, specifically the child soldiering occurring on the continent of Africa. It gives a detailed overview of all aspects of child soldiering and the conflicts involving child soldiers in African countries. This paper explores the push-pull factors that lead children to become child soldiers. It follows these child soldiers from life within the armed group to life upon leaving the armed group, where upon these children enter rehabilitation centers, and finally seek reintegration back into society.

It also looks at the reasons for some of the conflicts involving child soldiers, pointing out how part of this crisis stems from colonialism. This paper also asks the question of how to stop this crisis, and examines what developed nations are doing to stop child soldiering while claiming that the ultimate responsibility for the issue lies within Africa.

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## Introduction

There is a traditional greeting of the Masai, a tribe in Africa, which is passed between warriors. The first would say, "Kasserian Ingera" – which means, “And how are the children?” If there was peace and safety in the land, the other would reply, “All the children are well” (O’Neill, 1999). This greeting shows where the tribe’s priorities are: taking care of their most vulnerable. Sadly, in many parts of Africa this priority is a luxury.

Africa is a continent in conflict. During the 1990s, many of the countries experienced bloody civil wars, some of which are still going on today. These civil wars greatly affected innocent civilians, especially the children. Children were used and are being used as soldiers to fight these civil wars. African countries that have exploited child soldiers include Liberia, Burundi, Mozambique, Somalia, Sudan, Cote d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Angola (Map 1). Child soldier recruitment is on the increase, especially in western Africa (Francis, 2007: 208).

In a world that is more advanced than any other time in history, why do we still have the brutal problem of child soldiering? One of the easiest answers to the first question is that people in power benefit from this exploitation and abuse. These people in power do not use children in war as a last resort, but because they are cheap and malleable. They are also easy to control. Charles Taylor, the former war lord and



president of Liberia, took control of Liberia by using mostly child soldiers (Wessells, 2006: 2-3).

Worldwide, in the 1990s alone, over 2 million children were killed because of armed conflicts (Wessells, 2006: 108). The main reason why child soldiering still happens is because laws created to protect children from this atrocity are not being enforced. Leaders use child soldiers because they can. They fear no repercussion because nothing has been done to stop them from committing this crime (IRIN “Africa”, 2009: 2). Many times, both sides of the conflict use child soldiers. The winning side usually gets away with child soldiering, claiming that the end justifies the means.

Child soldiering is not only a violation of human rights; it is also a threat to national survival. Once a given political conflict subsides, a nation of brainwashed children can impede the recovery and development of a nation. Child soldiers are sometimes even forced to fight against their own families. These children are forced to kill or be killed, and to carry out mutilations, while they themselves are being abused, beaten, tortured, and forced to use addictive drugs. They endure not only physical abuse but also psychological and sexual abuse, especially girl soldiers. When the conflicts are over, the children cannot just go on with their lives and pick up where they left off before the war (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 3). They are given the label of *child soldier*, which may stay with them for the rest of their lives.

These indoctrinated children have been taught to forget their customs and cultures, and once back into society they do not know how to live except through aggression and violence due to post-traumatic stress and lack of socialization. Coming back into a society without the support of family or friends they find it hard to move out of what they know (Francis, 2007: 208-209). They lost their precious childhoods and are “now stigmatized, traumatized, and uneducated” (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 3). They are both victims of violence and at the same time forced offenders (Francis, 2007: 208-209).

After the civil war is over and peace settlements are being made, child soldiers are often overlooked “and treated as a lost generation” (Francis, 2007: 209). They are viewed by society as permanently damaged, with the attitude that they can never be salvaged back to normal society. Recovering countries usually put little effort into the reintegration and rehabilitation of children soldiers. Countries participating in peace talks are more preoccupied with demobilization and disarmament. They think of the child soldiering issue as a lost cause: hopeless and a waste of time. However, this view is very pessimistic; child soldiers have proven to be able to reintegrate back into society if given the opportunity and resources (Francis, 2007: 209).

International standards created to protect children are hard to enforce in places like Africa. Since the cold war, conflicts are becoming more and more localized and internalized, with dissensions involving religion, ethnicity and nationalism. These various conflicts have led to the creation of groups that do not obey the International

Humanitarian Law, which protects children from being targeted or exploited (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 2).

What motivates this disobedience? First, the western version of what constitutes a childhood is different culturally and traditionally than Africa's version. African children work at home or outside the home to raise money for their families. Second, it is hard for these African countries that are under post-conflict reparations to put international criminal standards into their domestic laws (Francis, 2007: 209-210). There are 620 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa; 51 percent are children under the age of 18, and 31 percent of the 620 million are active child laborers. Though illegal by international standards, child labor practices have become the norm in many African countries. One of the worst forms of child labor, according to the International Labor Organization, is child soldiering (Francis, 2007: 217). Throughout known history, when any country or culture is developing, the exploitation of children as child laborers is considered necessary, in order for that society to function and survive. At this time in Africa's history the cultural norm of child labor may not promote child soldiering, but it leaves the door open for the possibility whenever a conflict might arise. Child soldiering is more a product of African governments and powers rather than of its cultural norms.

#### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this paper is to give an in-depth overview of the problem of child soldiering. Specifically looking at the continent of Africa, this paper asks how such a lush and beautiful place, filled with tradition, culture, and a wealth of the world's natural

resources, could at the same time be filled with bloody and violent coups, conflicts and wars. The paper will first define who a child soldier is and the factors contributing to child soldiering. It will also examine a few of the major conflicts in Africa where child soldiering has taken place. The paper will discuss the rehabilitation and reintegration of a child soldier, comparing and contrasting the different approaches used.

The aim of the paper is also to relate this crisis of child soldiering to criminological theory. Mechanisms put into place by developed countries (principally Britain and France) to colonize and exploit the African countries, have led to economic, political, racial, ethnic, religious, clan, and tribal inequalities. This could be due to what Conflict theorists describe as the powerful looking out for their own interests in a world of restricted natural resources. These inequalities and injustices caused conflicts, and as a result, child soldiering. Finally, the paper will look at policies and legislation of the United States and international bodies that deal with child soldiering, examining how policies are being implemented (or are not being implemented), as well as addressing the prosecution of the perpetrators of this crime.

### Methodology

This is an exploratory study that examines already published literature. I researched child soldiering in hope of better defining this problem and suggesting reasons why it is an increasing problem. The majority of the sources for this paper came from peer-reviewed journals and government documents.

Finding data on parts of this subject is difficult, and only a handful of researchers have extensively researched this topic. Therefore, some of my sources came from different reliable news sources and non-government reports. This is a qualitative study that was conducted using secondary research.

### Theory

There are many theories that could explain the problem of child soldiering, but I chose theories that would explain the problem globally. Conflict and World Systems theories are applied throughout the research, as well as Labeling theory. I decided to add Labeling theory because child soldiers are often labeled as such as they try to reintegrate back into society. Labeling someone a child soldier stigmatizes them as deviant. This stigmatization creates yet another obstacle these children have to overcome to return to a life of normalcy (Akers & Sellers, 2004: 135).

Conflict theory is also incorporated throughout this paper. Conflict theory focuses on the struggles regarding power differentials that happen between groups and/or individuals (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2007: 149). The most powerful control the law, and it in turn creates conflicts with opposing, weaker forces. Conflict theorists believe that the social order is unstable, creating a world where people are out to only save themselves (Akers & Sellers, 2004: 191).

In areas where conflicts are occurring, leaders of armed groups and the governments are the ones with the power. The ones with power therefore crush the

powerless, which are the civilians, women, children, and the elderly. An African proverb states that when elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers. The elephants are the ones in power, and the grass represents the powerless. The women, children, and elderly are taken advantage of and their lives are destroyed, but the ones in power do not feel the effects of the conflict. Therefore, in the conflicts involving child soldiers, the leaders of the armed groups win and the child soldiers lose.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel were two of the forerunners of Conflict theory. They blamed capitalism for most world conflict, because it generates dissimilarities in interests and creates hierarchies along with unjust inequality (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2007: 150-151). For the last two centuries or so, African nations have been taken advantage of by their own leaders but also by capitalistic nations. Powerful nations have been fighting over Africa's resources without giving any benefits to the African people, which leads to exploitation. Those nations who have praised and pushed democratic beliefs do not even have the courtesy to treat Africa democratically. During the process of draining Africa of its resources, conflicts occurred, and the average African citizen has been pulled into the fight among the powerful nations.

An example of this exploitation would be what people call conflict diamonds, specifically in the region of Sierra Leone and Angola. Conflict diamonds come from regions controlled by groups that are in opposition to the recognized internationally and legitimate governments, who use the funds they gain for backing their rebel militaries. Many times children are used as slaves to find the diamonds. "The [UN] General

Assembly recognized that conflict diamonds are a crucial factor in prolonging brutal wars in parts of Africa” all while they fund rebel groups (UN, 2001). Legitimate diamonds could be contributing to the development and prosperity of these countries and to the continent of Africa. Some organizations from developed nations buy these diamonds inadvertently, but others don’t care if they fund rebel groups, as long as they get the best deal. The United Nations has adopted a resolution to stop the trade of these diamonds, but since conflict diamonds are often smuggled and sold in bordering countries, controlling this trade with sanctions is difficult, as the ones in control benefit greatly (UN, 2001).

The resource of oil is abundant in parts of Africa, and like diamonds, oil is bought and excavated with little thought or advantage given to the average citizen of the region. In fact the discovery of this resource generally brings misery to the inhabitants where oil is found, except to the leaders of the region. This is because finding oil brings about conflicts, such as in Angola and Nigeria. In the process of drilling oil from these regions, the environment is damaged, causing starvation and disease. This tragedy continues because the politicians in control are not suffering, but rather gain power from the enterprise (Shaxson, 2007: 1123, 1139).

World System theory is the approach that explains the redistribution of resources from the fringes of society in underdeveloped parts of the world to the powerful and developed parts of the world. Few become wealthy, while the rest are underpaid laborers (Halsall, 1997). Immanuel Wallerstein calls a world system a “social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence” (1979:

229). This social system has its core states, which in this case would be the developed nations such as Europe and the United States, and the peripheral states, which would be the developing regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The core states intervene to help with peripheral states, in order to benefit themselves, by putting people in power that will continue to promote their interests. Wallerstein continues to say that capitalism is outside any political arena because it spans the globe and therefore is outside any political control. Capitalists have the freedom to operate in a way that gives them the ability to gain “a very skewed distributions of rewards” (1979: 229).

Powerful nations have taken advantage of Africa through colonization and the extraction of its natural resources, such as oil and minerals. Africa’s raw resources are bought inexpensively by industrial nations and manufactured into expensive goods. For example, the mineral coltan, which is used in cell phones and computers, is extremely rare but found in the country of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The people in this region have been treated like slaves in order to benefit the wealthy nations by making their products cheaper (Shah, 2008). Another example of this would be Nigerians, who live by some of the richest oil reserves in the world but do not have enough money to buy a liter of gas (Genoways, 2007: 3). The World System theory helps explain that without fair trade and democracy the continent of Africa will continue to have conflicts over its resources, which will encourage the continued use of children as soldiers.



## The Extent of Child Soldiering

As old as warfare, the deliberate use of child soldiering is not ending but is on the increase. The global estimate is that over 300,000 children are being used as soldiers in different conflicts across the world at any given time (BBC; Breen, 2007: 71; The endangered children of northern Uganda, 2006: 3; Francis, 2007: 208; Grossman, 2007: 2; Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 1; Wessells, 2006: 2, 9). Of the 300,000 child soldiers, 40 percent are girls (Francis, 2007: 208, Wessells, 2006: 2, 9). Forty percent of all child soldiering happens in Africa for over 120,000 child soldiers (Breen, 2007: 71; Fegley, 2008: 8; Francis, 2007: 208; Grossman, 2007: 2). Some reports say that even as high as half of the child soldiering cases happen in Africa (IRIN “Africa”, 2009).

Children not only serve in rebel force armies, but are recruited and abducted to serve in governmental armies (Hill & Langholtz, 2003: 279). These are only the children in armed conflicts. If children in paramilitary groups are included, it would come to around 500,000 children (Freeland, 2005: 304; Grossman, 2007: 2). This massive number of child soldiers is partly due to technological advances, through the development of lighter arms such as the AK-47 and the M16 assault rifles (Yina, 2008: 123).

Pedersen and Sommerfelt point out that in regard to child soldiers in armed conflicts, little is really known about them. For example, whenever researchers give out numbers of how many children are involved in child soldiering they always give an “estimated” number or a range of numbers (2007: 251, 254, 257). It is hard to know how

prevalent child soldiering is because hard data is not easy to obtain. Experts can only make conservative estimates, especially because commanders on both sides of the conflicts conceal the fact that they use child soldiers. Therefore, the numbers could be low (Wessells, 2006: 8-9). Pedersen and Sommerfelt go on to give reasons why it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find out exact numbers. Child soldiers are often located where information is hard to gather, and those with the information will not readily give it; furthermore, the ages of the children can be falsified (2007: 251, 254, 257).

Other factors add to the difficulty of determining an exact number of child soldiers: many are released when not needed, many escape, many become of age and are no longer deemed children, and unfortunately, many child soldiers die. When formally discharged, child soldiers can be easily counted. The informally discharged, such as the deserters, are not that easily accounted for because they are afraid they would be executed. Such was the case in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) when children would escape from the national army. This leads experts to believe that the actual numbers of child soldiers throughout the world and even in individual countries is unknowable. What we do know is that it affects too many children to let it continue (Pedersen & Sommerfelt, 2007: 251, 254, 257, and 259).

The information that is available now on child soldiers was obtained through profiling of child soldiers when they were released out of the armed groups. For example, in Sierra Leone, at the end of the conflict in 2001, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) started releasing child soldiers. At first they were just releasing boys and only a few girls.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) believed that the boy to girl ratio was more equal than that and asked for more girls next time, which was done. This made UNICEF happy, because it showed that the RUF preferred to keep the girls over the boys. On the other hand, the RUF could have also recruited more girls just to release them (Pedersen & Sommerfelt, 2007: 261). The conclusion, therefore, would be that the information gathered from releases is not that reliable.

### Defining a Child Soldier

Who is a child soldier? In order to understand and clarify the issue of child soldiering, the definition of who a child soldier is needs to be discussed. Developmental sciences and the western world view a child as any person under the age of eighteen (Francis, 2007: 210-212). In many developing countries children "grow up" much sooner and are not necessarily considered children past a certain age. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) observe a child soldier as "any person under eighteen years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular force or armed group in any capacity including, but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members" (Francis, 2007: 210; Wessells, 2006: 7). This definition continues to include "girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage" (Wessells, 2006: 7). Girls in Africa are specifically taken for their known skill in carrying heavy loads on their heads (Wessells, 2006: 8). This paper will be looking at all types of child soldiers included in the definition.

UNICEF's definition of who qualifies as a child soldier is foreign to many parts of the world, especially in developing countries (Fegley, 2008: 8). In parts of Africa a child reaches adulthood once he or she has finished the "rite of passage" necessary in their culture to become a man or a woman, usually around the age of fourteen. In other developing countries a child is an adult once he or she can carry out adult work (Wessells, 2006: 5). In many parts of the world, when a child becomes a soldier it is considered their rite of passage and they are now an adult in the eyes of their community (Freeland, 2005: 308).

"The definition [of a child soldier], should focus on mistreatments of children stemming from association with armed forces in the context of political violence" (Wessells, 2006: 6), but many children are forced into soldiering to help with organized crime. Pedersen and Sommerfelt point out that whether a conflict is regarded as war, formally, or not, is an issue with some definitions of child soldier. Whether the conflict is considered war or organized crime, both are armed conflicts and children should be protected from joining both. It is obvious that an agreement is in order for more cohesion on this topic (2007: 255-256). Pedersen and Sommerfelt have a point that children should not be involved in organized crime as they should not be involved in armed conflict. However, because child soldiering in an armed group is political, there should be a deeper concern to protect children because governments have a greater responsibility for the conflicts.

The UNICEF's definition of a child soldier is a broad statement. Some children are only with their captors for days or weeks and then released, and some, for example, are used only as porters. Are these children supposed to be put in the same categories as the ones who commanded soldiers to kill? Some organizations such as The Children Associated with Fighting Forces (CAFF) extends the support and privileges they offer to the children who were combatants as part of their "disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes" (DDR) (Wessells, 2006: 6).

According to the UNICEF's definition, it does not matter whether the child participated in combat activities or not. Anyone under the age of eighteen in the situation described in their definition is a child soldier and should be treated as such during and after the conflict. Adults start conflicts and wars and should be held responsible (Wessells, 2006: 7). On the other hand, some would say that the West should also rethink some of its ideology. For example, in 2000, in Sierra Leone a patrol of Irish peacekeepers were imprisoned after their commander refused to fire upon a band of child soldiers. In order to save the imprisoned soldiers many more child soldiers had to be killed than if the peacekeepers had originally defended themselves (Fegley, 2008: 8). In other words, in certain circumstances westernized soldiers should understand that these children are trained soldiers and should be treated as such.

## Recruiting Child Soldiers

Child soldiers are recruited either voluntarily or through coercive means. The latter is done by conscription or the quota method, kidnapping, abductions, and press-ganging (Francis, 2007: 213-214; Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 2). “Those who volunteer” join freely more or less for their own personal reasons. Actually it is not so voluntary; it is often the only real option available to them (Francis, 2007: 213-214; Grossman, 2007: 2; Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 2). It does not matter how they became involved with the conflict, they are now part of the group and are forced to stay. For commanders who recruit child soldiers, whether the child wants to or not does not matter to them. When armed forces abduct a child, he or she cannot resist them because they will only harm the child or their family (Wessells, 2006: 31, 33, 37).

Abduction is a form of forced recruitment. Children are taken from their communities, schools, and homes, and are forced to fight (IRIN “Africa”, 2009: 2; Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 3). It is hard to know how many children have been taken by this means because once taken they are hidden from view. This phenomenon contributes to the difficulty of determining how many children are involved in soldiering. Much of the evidence on child soldiering comes from the children who have been freed from the military and have testified to being abducted. Armed groups are known to abduct anybody in their path. The child has little choice; he must either go with them or be killed. Internally displaced people and refugees in camps are particularly vulnerable to being abducted by armed groups because they are filled with large numbers of children

and women with little or no protection by police. In African countries, such as Uganda, groups of soldiers go to a village and take all the children they can (Wessells, 2006: 37-39).

There is great terror at being abducted by one of these groups. To evade abduction in their targeted towns, children have turned to night commuting—where they walk long distances to churches, hospitals, and verandas in safe towns, many times moving without the company of an adult (Wessells, 2006: 40). During the conflict in northern Uganda, night child abductions were so common that children in small villages would walk up to ten miles every night to find safety away from the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in larger towns. In the morning they would walk back to their towns to work or go to school, only to repeat the migration the following night. These children would sleep on the streets. They became known as “night commuters.” This nightly migration decreased the number of children abducted by the LRA but it did not make it cease (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 12).

Both sides of a conflict have been known to abduct children, even where legislation has been put into place prohibiting child soldiering. This is due to the fact that many children do not hold identification papers with their age clearly marked and because of the lack of legal ramifications for using children in conflicts (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 3).

In Angola, the Angolan Armed Forces (AAF) abducted young boys, saying that they had to fight to save their country. State armies are doing this when they should be responsible for protecting children; instead these armies have become corrupt and predatory. No wonder people of these countries are becoming estranged from their own societies and governments. The powerful are taking advantage of the weak in society, and in Africa, like in many other parts of the world, the ones in power are the small minority (Wessells, 2006: 40). As these conflicts continue over a long period of time, a manpower shortage develops due to casualties. Desperate for troops to fill the ranks of their depleted armies, the leaders turn to child soldiering (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 2).

Press ganging is another form of forced recruitment. This is a type of mass recruitment, where soldiers and police go through and raid schools, orphanages, marketplaces, and streets to collect people for soldiering. Many of the children who are easily taken and used are those who were born into poverty and are alone in the world. This makes life all the more tragic for these children, both during and after the conflict (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 3; Wessells, 2006: 40-41).

Yet another form of forced recruitment is recruitment by quota. Recruitment by quota is a brutally clever way that armed groups gather children. The Angolan opposition group, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) used this method by threatening to destroy a village unless the leaders of the village sacrificed a required number of children to them, usually at least ten. The leaders of the village



generally turn over the children in order to save their community. Sometimes the soldiers ask that each household in the village turn over one child each (Wessells, 2006: 41-42).

### Reasons and Motivations for Child Soldiering

There are many push-pull factors affecting child soldiering. Field research conducted in Sierra Leone and Liberia uncovered a broad range of push-pull reasons for child soldiering: economic; environmental such as poverty and family circumstances; and socio-political such as environment of war, militarization of a society, armed conflicts and marginalization. One or more of these factors may play a role in why a child decides to be a soldier. Some children have never thought about joining until they believe they do not have any other options. Some think about it for years and finally join because circumstances were favorable at the time. The push-pull factors are illustrated on Table 1 (Francis, 2007: 211-212).

The push factor that makes children more vulnerable and motivated for recruitment especially in Liberia and Sierra Leone is poverty (Francis, 2007: 211-212). Children are more likely to join armed forces if they were raised in poverty (Wessells, 2006: 24, 45). In fact, child soldiers mainly come from poor backgrounds (de Silva, Hobbs, & Hanks, 2001: 126). The majority of child soldiers come from the poorest countries in the world (Freeland, 2005: 305; Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 389). Poverty as described by Mahatma Gandhi is “the worst form of violence” (Wessells, 2006: 23), and

for children poverty does not only mean a lack of money but humiliation, shame, and social exclusion (Wessells, 2006: 24, 45).

Whether they want to or not, many children believe that soldiering is their only option for survival. Children, who are starving and even orphaned because of the conflict, see the soldiers who never go hungry and join (Francis, 2007: 211-212; IRIN Africa, 2009: 2; Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 17). Many children are orphaned due to AIDS and in turn join armed groups for survival (Smith, 2003: 84-85).

Another push factor for a child that is not as common would be if he or she was abused by his or her family. Alienated by their government, powerless and lacking any positive life choices, a child may find meaning in social transformation and liberation and decide to join the fight without clear coercion. A child may also see it as joining a family, when his or her own family was taken away. Therefore, war in any country “creates a highly militarized environment in which power and authority are openly contested” (Wessells, 2006: 43). All forces included in the conflict will plunder and openly attack villages, making all protection and security vanish. Therefore, joining an armed group may be the only way a child can survive (Wessells, 2006: 3, 44, 46).

Some pull factors would include economic opportunities, family, power, education and revenge for victimization from either side (Kimmel & Roby, 2008: 744-745). Being in the military you get to carry a weapon such as the Ak47 rifle. This gives a person protection and the power to loot a village at the battle lines, but this also

empowers a boy to believe that he is a man. It gives him a sense of control as well as status attainment in this crazy world he was born into, sort of a way out, “because if you have weapons, you can defend yourself, if you don’t have any, you are beaten, one kills you, and rapes you, even the boys” (Francis, 2007: 212-213). A child can also gain respect. In conflict areas children start to see military vehicles, uniforms, and guns as symbols of the power that will save them, and as symbols of excitement and glamour (Wessells, 2006: 51-52).

The lack of formal education is another reason children become child soldiers. When in the military or armed forces they will learn how to lead and fight, something they can be proud of, and acquire skills and training they could not get on the outside. Children in these situations may not have ever lived in a time of peace to know what it should be like. Some children grow up in armed camps and do not know what it is like to live in society. Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA in northern Uganda, had his soldiers impregnate abducted girls in order to supply his next generation of soldiers (Wessells, 2006: 45, 49-50).

Children are also deceived and manipulated into joining military factions by being promised financial support and the chance to travel. Instead, the children find themselves deeply trapped in rebel camp and unable to escape. Children in internally displaced camps and refugee camps are especially vulnerable to being manipulated (Francis, 2007: 212-213). Another form of manipulation that was especially used in the eastern Congo was the promise of program support if parents sent their children to an armed group.

After a couple of months the child supposedly could leave the armed group and would receive help with school enrollment and vocational training (Fegley, 2008: 11).

Political socialization or identity may pull children to fight, through propaganda. In Rwanda, the radio was used to send out hate messages about the Tutsis to the Hutu. Children and teenagers are especially susceptible to these messages and easily manipulated because they lack life experiences to critically think about what is being said. This kind of propaganda encourages self sacrifice, which allows them to achieve their goals (Wessells, 2006: 52-53). Many schools also have military indoctrination in their curriculum (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 3).

Another reason why a child may enlist which is similar to political identity is the child's "social ecologies" (Francis, 2007: 213). Social ecologies are the values held by different ethnic groups, for instance a family's perception of the war. If a family sees the civil war as a way of righting a wrong between another clan or minority group, then they will join to fight for ethnic domination or nationalism. "It is therefore important to understand the insidious manipulation of impressionable children by their communities" (Francis, 2007: 213). A child may feel pressure to join because it is his patriotic duty to fight for his country (Wessells, 2006: 32). In this way the children are indoctrinated and brainwashed into believing that this is for their best interest (Francis, 2007: 213; IRIN "Africa", 2009: 2).

Most of the children had a hard life before the war (Shepler, 2005: 198-199; de Silva, Hobbs, & Hanks, 2001: 127). Indeed, class status plays a huge role in child soldiering. Rich parents can send their children to safe places away from the violence or have the resources to ransom their child back. Recruiters also choose to abduct children from families that cannot defend or protect their children because they lack resources (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 2; Zack-Williams, 2006: 124-125).

For whatever reason a child may decide to join an armed group or the military they should not be held accountable for that decision. A child cannot fully understand the implications of that decision. Children do not have the capabilities as adults have that allows them to differentiate between different ideologies (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 3). Children do not understand time as well as adults. A child cannot understand that when they join an armed group, it is long term, not just a few years. They are trapped sometimes for the rest of their lives.

Table 1. The Push/Pull Motivations of Child Soldiering

Push-ways to survive		Pull-ways to better oneself	
Macro	Micro	Macro	Micro
Economic	Lack of employment, training, or education	Economic	Opportunities-financial support, chance to travel, gain skills and training
Environmental	Poverty and loss of parents	Environmental	Family-encouragement, revenge
Socio-political	Government alienation Political socialization	Socio-political	Gain status attainment, power and respect Political socialization or identity-duty to fight Social ecologies

## Life Inside an Armed Group

However they became a part of the armed group, the child is treated like an adult and not given special treatment (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 3). Once a child is part of an armed force they must go through some sort of initiation ceremony to prove their loyalty to the group. Killing is usually the chosen method (Wessells, 2006: 59-60). Many children are forced to either kill a loved one or they themselves will be killed (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 3). This works well to cut bonds with his or her community and desensitize the child to violence. “This practice makes use of well-established psychological principles that through progressive exposure to violence and removal of personal responsibility for killing, even normal people can become effective killers” (Wessells, 2006: 59-60).

There are five psychological reasons why adults and children kill: survival, obedience, normalization of brutality, the satisfaction resulting from killing (out of revenge or a desire to gain respect), and ideology or the idea of supporting a cause. This shows that there are a variety of reasons why children kill, and not all of them are innocent ones; some children learn to normalize killing (Wessells, 2006: 78-81, 83).

Escaping is not an option for a child soldier. Trying to escape and getting caught can mean death by group beatings. In Angola, when escapees were killed, the killer at times was forced to drink the escapee’s blood, not only as a way to prevent remorse, but also to normalize the sight of blood for a child and harden them to bloodshed. Child

soldiers, whether they joined freely or not, are not allowed to see their families and are isolated from anybody outside their armed groups. Commanders do this in order to better control their soldiers and to make the local population think of the armed group with a powerful air of mystery. The soldiers are also highly monitored, and punished if they talk disrespectfully about the group (Wessells, 2006: 60-64).

Commanders of armed groups use political education and propaganda to brainwash recruits. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, armed groups used Rambo style movies to excite the young recruits to act like the macho fighters they see in these types of movies. These movies exalt righteous anger and corrective violence. Once these ideas or ideals are imprinted on these young minds, new recruits are more susceptible to peer pressure in the group. Rewards are also used to make a child conform, such as giving the child certain privileges when he does something right. And punishments are used to get a child to conform, such as death threats. These methods are there to wash away a child's moral sense of right or wrong. Therefore, it is of the utmost necessity that these children are demobilized "at the earliest" stage possible (Wessells, 2006: 69-71).

While a conflict is going on the only way a child can leave is by escape or being captured. Soldiers that have been captured are treated like traitors by their former armed group. The same goes for escapees. The LRA in northern Uganda would capture escapees and torture and kill them as a warning to other soldiers who may try and escape (Wessells, 2006: 173). The LRA also made it impossible for the children to try to escape by making them commit atrocious acts to scare them into submission. One such act was

forced on an 11 year old boy, “who was forced to bite to death and swallow the blood of a fellow child who attempted to escape from the LRA. He was forced to perform this heinous act as a warning so that he himself would not attempt to escape” (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 12). If child soldiers do escape they are often so brainwashed that it is hard for them to reintegrate into society. These children still live in fear of the nightmares they escaped and return to their villages only to learn that they are orphans and are ostracized from their community and family, due to their acts while soldiering (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 7, 9). So, in essence, “escape” is not truly an escape.

### Different Types of Child Soldiering

To better understand how to rehabilitate child soldiers it is necessary to recognize the three classifications given to these children in war-torn areas. The first classification differentiates between child soldiers in non-conflict and conflict areas. The second classification differentiates between child soldiers that are in institutional armies and child soldiers in rebel and armed factions. The third classification distinguishes child soldiers that are in support roles and child soldiers that are in active combat. Just because the term soldier is used does not mean that the child holds a gun and wears a uniform (Wessells, 2006: 6).

Child soldiers that are in support roles are the guards, cooks, loot and weapons carriers, sex slaves, reconnaissance, spying, or mine sweepers (Fegley, 2008: 8; Francis,



2007: 215; Grossman, 2007: 2). Even though these differences are sometimes blurred, it is necessary to understand what kind of situation the ex-child soldier came from to better reintegrate and rehabilitate him or her. A sex slave or cook may be easier to accept back into his or her community than a child who was participating in fighting and looting (Francis, 2007: 215).

Many times child soldiers' roles are blurred and evolve. One day the group may need food, so they gather food and loot villages. Other days they may be a security guard for the camp, or fighting in a bloody battle (Wessells, 2006: 76). Armed groups use societies presumed innocence of a child by using them as a messenger or a spy. This further hurts a child's chance of rehabilitation because of the suspicion and mistrust it brings to all children (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2007: 2). This has resulted in governmental forces specifically targeting and killing children in fear that they are child soldiers. There becomes a fear that all children are child soldiers and pose a threat (Zia-Mansoor, 2007: 394).

### The Desirability of Child Soldiers

Both armed factions and military commanders admit preferring children to fight their wars (Francis; 2007, 216), claiming that child soldiering is more convenient and less costly. It is often hard for commanders to replace troops lost in conflict, and the easiest option is to recruit children (IRIN "Africa", 2009: 1; Wessells, 2006: 33-34). Even if the commanders know the rules against child soldiering, they bend the rules by recruiting

boys that look old or tall enough even if their birth registration says otherwise. They cost less because children cannot demand money due to them as well as adults can (Wessells, 2006: 33-34).

Children are also exploitable, pliable, expendable, and effective. They are pliable, meaning they are easily manipulated, flexible, and controllable (Wessells, 2006: 35-37). Children are also vulnerable physically and emotionally due to their immaturity (Fegley, 2008: 7). They can be controlled through violence and terror (Wessells, 2006: 35-37). In certain conflicts children are forced to execute their parents or family members. Doing this makes sure that the children have no family or home to which to return (Francis, 2007: 216).

Children can be taught to follow commands that adults might question. They will obey, using their obedience it as a survival plan. Children are not as cognitively or morally developed as adults. As such, assessing a dangerous situation may not be as easy for them. They have a limited understanding of mortality and easily accept a suicide mission (Fegley, 2008: 8; Wessells, 2006: 35-37). They also have a huge capacity for learning, which commanders use to their advantage (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 3; Wessells, 2006: 35-37). For example, they are used as mine detectors to protect the adult troops from any damage (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 3; Fegley, 2008: 8; Wessells, 2006: 35-37).

While doing all of this, children are maimed or even killed. They do not take care of themselves as well as adults, and when they receive an injury it is harder for them to survive. Due to their smaller size, it is easier for organs to be damaged, and blood loss becomes more serious. Child soldiers also experience respiratory or skin diseases since they do not know how to take care of themselves (Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 391). Child soldiers have a much higher death rate than adult soldiers, and when they leave the fighting they take with them greater psychological and physical challenges (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 3, 7, 12). Young children may also develop deformed back and shoulders due to carrying loads too heavy for their small frames (Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 391). This is why pediatricians are often recommended to military units, especially for peacekeeping operations (Fegley, 2008: 8). Young child soldiers—ten, eleven, and twelve years of age—are usually put out first to the frontline and mowed down fast, showing how expendable they really are (BBC “Witness”, 2009: 2; Wessells, 2006: 74); “ultimately, the most exploitable are also the most expendable” (Wessells, 2006: 37).

Anybody would experience fear their first time facing combat, including even well trained adult soldiers. But children do not know how to regulate such emotions. During the first combat experience most children say they just hid and shot in the air, because they were afraid to get into trouble if they did not shoot (Wessells, 2006: 74-75). Child soldiers are also put through training to toughen them up. Even in regular governmental armed forces, child soldiers are forced into training activities and are

subjected to severe punishments that for some lead to disabilities or even death (Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 391).

Drugs and alcohol are often used to make a child conform. Drugs make a person, even a child, fearless, willing to take risks, and able to kill in battle without remorse (Fegley, 2008: 8; Wessells, 2006: 76-77; Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 391). When a child would refuse the drugs, in Sierra Leone the RUF commanders would cut the child and pack the wound with amphetamines (Wessells, 2006: 76-77). It turned into a ritual in the RUF camps to get high before combat, which was a time to show how macho they were “in a deadly mixture of fearlessness and uncontrolled violence” (Wessells, 2006: 77).

Villagers in Sierra Leone have told me that although they had always feared RUF attacks, they particularly dreaded the arrival of youths who were pumped up on drugs and had ‘that crazy look’ in their eyes, which signaled they would kill everything in sight or commit mutilations such as cutting off people’s arms or hands (Wessells, 2006: 77).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, there are strong superstitions and belief in spirits. In Liberia, commanders use spiritualists to calm the children’s fears by giving them charms and rituals to do to make them “bulletproof” in combat. In Uganda, Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, was believed to have spiritual powers given to him by his forerunner, Alice Lakwena. The idea of bulletproofing a person through rituals and charms is designed to dissolve fears of death when they are about to go into combat, especially so for children who are easier to deceive due to a child’s sense of innocence and gullibility

(Wessells, 2006: 77-78). This shows how easily cultural traditions such as rituals can be abused when used by exploitive people.

#### Countries Where the Use of Child Soldiers Has or is Currently Taking Place

Between the years of 2001-2004, child soldiering was going on in the following African countries: Angola, Burundi, Central Africa Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congo Republic, Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda (Map 1). Africa is not the only continent to struggle with the problem of child soldiering. In fact, it is happening all over the world. Between these same years child soldiering occurred in the Americas, Asia/Pacific, Europe/Eurasia, and the Middle East. This long list represents only a small time frame in history. If we went back further and up until the present, many more countries would have to be included in this list (Wessells, 2006: 10-11).

The continent of Africa has been through a tremendous amount of conflicts after Europe decided to start its decolonization process in 1955. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century different European countries conquered 85 percent of the massive continent of Africa. They colonized for strategic purposes, land greed, for the trade of its raw materials, and the labor of its people. After the continent was divided up, with new borders created and a half a century ruling the continent, Europeans decided that colonizing was not worth it financially. The decolonization of Africa was a fast process, the bulk of it happening over a twenty year span, making the colonizing and decolonization of Africa a

process that was unlike any other known in history (Smith, 2003: 86). Even though Africa has become decolonialized, developed nations still have not been able to keep their fingers out of this land filled with natural resources. Either through economic or political means, developed nations have been taking advantage of recovering Africa. Therefore the impact of colonialization still persists today.

Africa is rich in its diverse ethnic groups. The abrupt process of decolonization left the people of Africa in confusion. The Europeans left the ones they trusted in power not necessarily the ones in the majority. This created resentment and ignited deep ethnic tension (Sharnak, 2007: 2). Although Africa was not without its conflicts before European colonization, Africa was left with greater conflicts as its borders were divided without thought to ethnic and religious differences.

Communism is one political giant that controlled parts of Africa in the 1950s to 1980s. Russia, being a superpower, tried to push communism in Angola and parts of the Horn of Africa, specifically Ethiopia and Somalia. There, Russia backed communist coup-makers (Brands, 1993: 162), thus creating a political split. In Ethiopia, the coup brought on a repressive military which ended up killing 100,000 people. Somalia was also torn up due to communism's contribution to militia coups. In the 1990s, the United States as well as the United Nations tried to intervene, but failed. The Somalian leaders were not willing to stop the conflicts because they benefited from them (Smith, 2003: 94). Torn-up nations emerged, moving further from democracy and peace and creating thousands of refugees in the process.

The country of Angola, located on the lower west coast of the continent of Africa, was under war and conflict since its struggle for independence from Portugal that began in 1961. Their independence was gained in 1975, but was soon followed by conflicts involving three competing parties, which developed into a fight between communism and democracy. The three parties were the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which had links to the communist party; the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), which had links to the United States; and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which had links to the People's Republic of China and Apartheid South Africa (U.S. Department of State, 2008). The conflict continued with aid from the Soviet Union, the United States, and from natural resources in the country such as oil and diamond fields. A cease fire commenced in 2002, most likely due to the death of UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi (Wessells, 2006: 12, 163). This civil war took a toll on its children: "Evidence indicated that approximately 8 percent of Angolan children participated in armed groups, mostly through force" (Wessells, 2006: 12).

There was a brief cease fire, in 1994, with the Lusaka Protocol. This protocol made a national DDR program. Learning from Mozambique's irresponsibility towards its child soldiers, Angola included a demobilization package for child soldiers that was equal to the adult soldiers' packages. But their demobilization methods failed; only a little more than one half of the child soldiers who entered the DDR program in Angola were successfully reunited with their families and community. The other half was re-recruited

into their armed groups. Anything achieved through this protocol ended once conflict broke out again in Angola, in 1998 (Wessells, 2006: 161-163).

The DDR process in Angola was picked up again in 2002, when the conflict finally ended. The process was filled with delays throughout the government, causing malnutrition in soldiers and subsequently leaving child soldiers out of the process. Girls at this time were completely ignored as the possibility of girl soldiers had not been acknowledged. Evidence has shown that each UNITA soldier had “owned” two or three women or girls. If this evidence is correct then there must be a higher number of girls in armed camps than previously thought. The difficulties in Angola with their DDR programs show that strong advocacy is needed for child soldiers, especially girl soldiers. In order for a DDR program to work, as illustrated by Angola, all parties need to agree on peace and have the same political will (Wessells, 2006: 161-164).

Above Angola and bordering many countries is the large country of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The DRC is Africa’s richest country in mineral resources, with its abundant supply of timber, gold, oil and diamonds. However, its citizens have never benefited from this wealth. Ever since it was decolonized by the Belgians its wealth has been shared by very few (Smith, 2003: 90). It is also a country that is extremely diverse. The region of Ituri alone, a province of the DRC, has eighteen ethnic groups that have been forced to come together. It is because of these ethnic differences, that many of the conflicts have taken place (Sharnak, 2007: 2). A catalyst for one of the major conflicts was the civil war in bordering Rwanda between the Hutus and



the Tutsis. Refugees flooded the region, creating tension, which led to violence and Africa's Great War (Sharnak, 2007: 2).

The 1998 conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo involved seven nations and is known as Africa's first world war. It was called this not only because of all of the nations involved but because it was extremely deadly, killing close to four million people (Kim, 2006: 1-4; Wessells, 2006: 12). The international community ignored this crisis. This inattention is highlighted by the fact that most of those who died were not killed from bombs or gunshot, but by starvation and curable diseases (Hawkins: 3).

The country of Uganda is thought to have participated in this war largely due to the massive amount of gold in the DRC. The war was "unknowingly" backed by powerful international corporations of developed nations with much to gain from the war, for it was a fight mainly over natural resources. An example is a Swiss-based gold company who bought gold from Uganda during the war. This company has since quit buying from Uganda due to the influence of the Human Rights Watch (Nduru, 2005). This does show, however, that the ones gaining from the war did not care how many people were displaced or died, only that they got what they wanted from the war. This was done by taking advantage of the powerless.

Thomas Lubanga was the leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), one of the armed groups of this war that used child soldiers. This group lead by Lubanga was also known as one of the most "notorious ethnic militia" (Sharnak, 2007: 2). Nearly

30,000 children were soldiers, in his army; some of these children made up about 40 percent of the soldiers in the eastern part of the DRC. The war in the late 1990s between the president Mobutu and Laurent Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for Liberation used ten thousand children as soldiers. Later, after Kabila took control (Wessells, 2006: 12), through the help of Uganda and Rwanda (Smith, 2003: 90), he encouraged 12-20 year olds to join the military to battle the government's adversaries (Wessells, 2006: 12).

In 2002, the Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma (CRD-Goma) "recruited children as young as 8 years old and forced children to kill relatives or cannibalize the corpses of enemies" (Wessells, 2006: 13). The war ended in 2003, but the conflicts are still seen today. The conflicts are due to the millions displaced and refugees in the regions. These clashes make demobilizing the child soldiers incredibly hard, and since the conflicts are still occurring the re-recruitment of former child soldiers happens frequently (Kim, 2006: 1-4).

More recently there have been many attacks in the DRC. Over the 2008 Christmas holiday close to a thousand citizens were slaughtered by the LRA. The UN Security Council has authorized additional peacekeepers to go and help the Congolese people, but so far they have not arrived. The peacekeepers that are already there are stretched out too thin. Many believe that the council's good intentions mean nothing (Human Rights Watch "UN", 2009: 1-2). The council's inaction suggests that countries who are supplying the peacekeepers would have nothing to gain through sending troops; the Council just wants to look like they are doing the right thing.

Liberia, a small country on the west coast of Africa, also had a considerable amount of child soldiers in their recent conflict that ended in 2002. The former president of Liberia, Charles Taylor, is considered to be to blame for the war (Wessells, 2006: 168) and is now being held at The Hague awaiting his trial by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (Kimmel & Roby, 2007: 748). All three sides in the conflict—the government as well as the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)—recruited and used child soldiers. As the civil war went on in Liberia adult soldiers became scarce and child soldiering became the norm. Traditionally, tribal armies would use children as their mascots. Joining one was considered to be initiation into manhood (Kimmel & Roby, 2007: 741-743). Once the conflict was over, the DDR National Commission and also the U.N. Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), with the help of international peacekeepers, aided the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR). UNICEF was asked to provide services for the children soldiers separated from the adults, estimated at 21,000 in number (Wessells, 2006: 168).

Reintegration processes take a long time. Funding in Liberia decreased when the Iraq war started. Lack of funding opens the door for ex-child soldiers to re-join their armed groups because they are not offered or provided another way to live. Many soldiers believed, as was the case in many other countries that you would get cash for your weapon, which resulted in violence and some deaths. Cash is not used because it could be

used to buy drugs or alcohol and commanders take the money to recruit new soldiers (Wessells, 2006: 168-169).

Sierra Leone is another country on the west coast of the continent of Africa which dealt with its own problem of child soldiering. The Sierra Leone civil war lasted for a decade from 1991-2001. Exact numbers of child soldiers used during this conflict are unavailable, but reports estimate the number to be somewhere between 10,000 and 48,000 (Wessells, 2006: 13, 165). The government of Sierra Leone fought against the RUF, which supported itself by controlling a lot of the diamond fields in Sierra Leone and kidnapping boys and girls whenever they were running low on troops. Children made up almost half of the rebel RUF forces. Since the government could not protect the citizens of Sierra Leone, they organized themselves into the Civil Defense Force (CDF) to defend themselves against the RUF. The UN reported that 25 percent of the CDF consisted of children 7 to 14 years in age. With the ceasefire, the international community had to jump in with programs for demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration of the child soldiers (Wessells, 2006: 13, 165).

Support for the DDR program was provided by the National Commission of DDR, and UN peacekeepers were there under the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). The peace agreement included children, which allowed the DDR program to be designed to separate children from adults, instead of children programs being an afterthought. Interim Care Centers (ICC) were built for the children to have someplace to stay, and offered education and vocational schooling. These centers became over-

crowded, and security was an issue. Since children on both sides of the conflict were staying there, many children's lives were threatened. This was the case especially with girls, causing several of them to leave. The girls in Sierra Leone's ICC also believed that a lot of their practical needs were not met, such as reproductive health care (Wessells, 2006: 165-168).

Sudan is located in the northwest part of Africa, close to the Horn. It is an extremely diverse country (Smith, 2003: 96). The country has endured slavery since the Ottoman Turks invaded Sudan in the 1800s. The Sudanese people were used as soldiers to fight the Turks. Many of the Sudanese soldiers were presumed to be children (Fegley, 2008: 3).

Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) is the Sudanese rebel army in the western upper Nile of the south of Sudan, which in 2004 began demobilizing its child soldiers. UNICEF said that since 2001, it has been demobilizing close to 12,000 (IRIN "Sudan", 2009). In 2005, the government of Sudan and SPLM/A both signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which established a new shared government between the two parties (U.S. Department of State, 2009).

Darfur is the western region of Sudan. Since early 2003, the region has been under conflict, due to ethnic oppression and territory arguments. During this time over 2.7 million Darfur civilians have left their homes to live in camps. Because of this conflict and the effects of it, about 300,000 people have died (BBC "Q&A", 2009).

The International Criminal Court has indicted Omar Al Bashir, President of Sudan, for the Darfur genocide (ICC, 2009). Now and even before this warrant, he has censored human rights activists and journalists. The capital of Sudan, Khartoum, is an unsafe place, as many human rights activists have been detained and beaten. The Sudanese people are not able to know the truth about the conflict going on in Darfur. This is crucial knowledge, especially when elections are scheduled halfway through 2009. This will be the first election in Sudan in twenty years, which is required by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (Human Rights Watch “Sudan”, 2009). The Comprehensive Peace Agreement helped with demobilizing and rehabilitating child soldiers in Sudan (Fegley, 2008: 6). Why is Sudan’s Darfur getting so much attention now? Is it because of all of the deaths that are occurring? Or could it be for its resources, such as its oil. Much of African’s leaders are taking the side of President Al Bashir, saying that the international community is once again picking on Africa. It is easy to see how African leaders may see developed nations as picking on Africa and trying to control its politics to gain power over its resources.

Uganda is another country where child soldiers have been used to fight their civil war. The ruler of Uganda, Milton Obote, was overthrown by the now President Yoweri Museveni in 1986. The people who had the power under Obote, the Acholi, tried to regain their loss by forming the LRA. The LRA is a group that mixes traditional beliefs, Christianity, and Islam, which gives them the right, they believe, to murder who they want. Due to this extremism is estimated that 90 percent of the nearly 2 million of the

Acholi people in Northern Uganda have been displaced to internal camps during the last two decades. Also during this time the leader of the LRA, Joseph Kony, and the LRA forced over 20,000 children to be used as soldiers or sex slaves. The nearly 50,000 children that were lucky enough to escape the kidnapping of the LRA were forced to walk miles at night, away from the more rural areas to larger towns to find safety (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 1, 11).

This civil war in Uganda brought about a tremendous amount of violent deaths. Every month close to 3,500 Ugandans died because of torture and violence but also because of displacement. During this time it was estimated that 58 children younger than 5 died every day. Twenty-five percent of children older than ten in northern Uganda lost one if not both parents. About one million children 15 and under have been internally displaced. Due to this civil war, sixty percent of the schools in northern Uganda quit functioning and created 250,000 children who are uneducated and displaced (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 2). This creates more vulnerable children, leading to an increase of children available to be recruited into child soldiering.

To end the civil war against the LRA, the United States government encouraged leaders from towns to start their own militia. Unfortunately, due to poor screening many children, both boys and girls, were recruited to fight; so both sides of the fighting have been taking children to fight (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 2-3). The LRA of Uganda even abducted children from Sudan (Wessells, 2006: 88). During this same time, in 2006, the Darfur region was experiencing a tremendous amount of civil

war of its own, resulting in less attention to the crisis in northern Uganda (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 2-3).

A survey done in 2004 on 300 Ugandan child soldiers, (who averaged around the age of twelve), which was considered to be ground-breaking, found that 77 percent of the former soldiers witnessed a person being killed. Over half of the children were seriously beaten. The survey also found that 39 percent of the children have killed someone and have abducted children (Fegley, 2008: 8). Towards the end of the war three-fourths of the LRA army were abducted children (Yina, 2008: 127).

Recently, the Uganda army attacked the LRA headquarters near the border of Sudan in Congo's Garamba National Park. The army only informed the peacekeepers of their plans right before the attacks. As a result the peacekeepers and army did not plan for the repercussions the attacks on the LRA would have on the civilians, leaving thousands unprotected. The Ugandan army said its objectives are to track the LRA, save the civilians who have been abducted, and find Joseph Kony, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC). It is obvious that the UN needs to provide more peacekeepers to this area where so many civilians are being affected by the LRA (Human Rights Watch "Sudan", 2009), and to respond faster in situations of violence. To explain this conflict Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel would say that these capitalist nations within the UN have nothing to gain by responding faster and with more force (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2007: 150-151).



Rwanda was another country where the slaughter of its citizens and the use of its children as soldiers resulted in over one million deaths (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 5) of mostly Tutsi's, during the Hutu political administration (Wessells, 2006: 21-22). Children, some even five years old, were reported to have participated in this genocide (Grossman, 2007: 3). Hutu children and teenagers were brainwashed into hating Tutsis, and taught revenge, which divided the nation even more (Wessells, 2006: 21-22). These two ethnic groups have more in common than not, but because of the conflicts of powers, genocide took place.

Yet the international community did nothing, even though there were early warning signs of the violence to come (Smith, 2003: 93). Early on in 1994, the UN could have stepped in to stop the increasing violence, but the UN Peacekeepers troops left the civilians to fend for themselves (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 5), claiming that murdering hundreds of thousands of civilians was not genocide, but tribal skirmishes as they retreated to safer borders. About a year before the Rwanda genocide, 18 American troops died in Somalia, during a UN military mission. After this incident, the United States government did not want to be involved in UN missions. They also thought they had no place in calling what was happening in Rwanda a genocide and decided to do nothing (Caplan, 2004: 2). After that war, the international community and the United States declared that they would never let something so tragic happen again (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 5). This promise has obviously not been upheld.

The violence and conflict of the war brought about by the LRA threatened the peace in Sudan and the DRC. After the tragedies in Rwanda and Uganda, the world should have been better equipped in handling new, similar crises in the region. However, the crisis in Darfur proclaims the opposite. The friends and protectors of the LRA, the National Party of the Government of Sudan, are now the people committing the grievous genocide in the Darfur region (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 6, 55).

Similar to the situation in Rwanda, in Uganda the innocent civilians are not “off limits” to the killings. Civilians are deliberately targeted and killed. The LRA did not care about any repercussions. From the years, 2002-2005, 20,000 children were abducted from their homes by the LRA to serve in their militia. Most, if not all, LRA soldiers have participated in the abduction of children. Therefore the leadership of the LRA must be held accountable as an example to the rest of the perpetrators who terrorize innocent civilians and kidnap children, just as Liberia’s Charles Taylor was held accountable, when he was brought in front of the National Criminal Court and found guilty of war crimes (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 6-7).

In Uganda, women and children make up approximately 80 percent of the 1.5 million residents in the Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps. The United Nations is now trying a new method to ensure more assistance and protection to occupants in IDP camps. When this statistic was being reported the living conditions in Uganda were desperate and needed international attention. Throughout the world Uganda was observed

to have the third highest IDP population, with their heavily congested two hundred camps housing more than 1.5 million. Individuals are afraid to leave the camps because abductions by the LRA are high (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 11-12).

In refugee camps girls are forced to support their families through prostitution, to trade for essential items with guards (Wessells, 2006: 27). Over the last 20 years, close to 38,000 children were taken and forced to be soldiers, sex slaves, and laborers. Close to 85 percent of the abductions by the LRA are of children ages 11-16. Once kidnapped these children are forced to join the rebels in fighting and killing other children and civilians (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 11-12).

One of the major needs of the IDP camps is security. During the long conflict in Uganda, the United States urged the Ugandan government to send adequate troops to better protect the civilians in the camps from kidnapping by the LRA. Sadly, the protection was not only needed from the outside of the camp but inside as well, as the UPDF soldiers themselves can be abusive. Many reports of abuse and rape of the women and children have been recorded in the confines of the camps (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 13).

Children are not only taken by rebel forces, but sometimes by their own governments, who are often times the worst perpetrators of these crimes. Governments that are not seen as corrupt can also exploit children in this manner. Developed nations

such as the United States and the United Kingdom are two such countries who proclaim the need to protect children but recruit 17 year olds into their militaries. This legalization and normalization of child soldiering in these countries generates a global climate contributing to child soldiering in other countries and groups worldwide (Wessells, 2006: 17). In 2001, the British Armed Forces had 7,000 individuals younger than eighteen (Grossman, 2007: 2). This is an interesting comparison to the African countries in which these western societies are telling them to do something they themselves have yet to achieve. This is another example where the powerful control the laws which only benefit themselves.

Child soldiering is widespread, especially at this point in history. Most of these bloody battles are due to fights over natural resources that are ranked above human life, such as timber, diamonds, and oil. Other conflicts are over religious or ethical beliefs. Most of these battles occur in poor, developing nations, and with assault weapons, which in Africa can be traded for chickens. It is estimated that in the world today there are about 500 million light weight assault rifles and 125 million automatic weapons (Wessells, 2006: 18, 21). These light weight weapons are easy to use so that “even a 10-year-old child can be an effective fighter”; a soldier does not have to have huge muscles and skills to be a fighter (BBC, 2009: 2; Fegley, 2008: 8; Wessells, 2006: 19). Where did all of these weapons come from? Most of them were traded or sold by countries like the United States of America and the former Soviet Union (Wessells, 2006: 18). “In the first half of the 20th century, over 90 percent of war-related deaths were soldiers. By the latter part of

the century this pattern is reversed, with nearly 75 percent of the casualties being civilians. Women and children are now the majority of the casualties in armed conflicts” (Wessells, 2006: 20). This reversal is explained by the Conflict theory: when conflicts last a long time it is the powerless that suffer.

Why is child soldiering so widespread? Much of it can be linked to the colonialization of much of the underdeveloped world—the powerful taking over the weak. The resources and the people of these nations were exploited leaving them vulnerable to child soldiering.

#### Resilience of Child Soldiers

Former child soldiers are often depicted as vulnerable and beyond repair. Many times the media represents these children as a lost cause (New Scientist, 2008: 2). On the contrary, child soldiers have a tremendous resiliency to withstand long-term damage (Wessells, 2006: 23, 28-30; New Scientist, 2008: 1). Studies from African war regions indicate that most integrate well back into society upon returning home, when successfully rehabilitated. Some even suggest that child soldiers are better citizens than the children who were exposed to hostilities but did not become soldiers. They explain that this is because they have been shown how to be more productive and more engaging citizens in their societies. During war time, for all citizens, being able to produce a living and education are disrupted. Many former child soldiers in Mozambique refuse to drink

alcohol because it is what they did when they were in the armed forces (Aldhous, 2008: 1-3).

Most children can remain functional and act in ways that are appropriate to their age level, gender, and culture. Not all child soldiers obey every command; children are sensitive when knowing “which orders can be broken without invoking the death penalty” (Wessells, 2006: 73). A resilient child can find ways to keep his or her dignity and individuality. But no matter how resilient a child can be, a government should not give this as an excuse to withhold providing services to them, such as education, job training, and medical care (Wessells, 2006: 23, 28-30, 73).

Some former child soldiers take pride in what they did during the conflict, such as in South Africa during the apartheid years. They see themselves as liberators of freedom and therefore believe in what they did (Wessells, 2006: 140-141). The deviance of what they did may be neutralized among a group of people that have been traumatized along with them (Matza & Sykes, 1961: 712-719). Any bad memories of war are made okay because of the end result. During some conflicts like the apartheid in South Africa, child soldiers would receive support from their families and communities for what they were doing. This makes the after effects of war trauma seem worth it and easier to deal with given the support they receive. This is not to say that children enjoy violence. Indeed most children would avoid all violence if they could (Wessells, 2006: 140-141).

Most child soldiers do not want to fight or kill and constantly try to escape, putting their lives at risk. This willingness to put their lives in jeopardy shows that they still have retained an idea of what is right and wrong. Their moral sense is also shown when a child expresses remorse or guilt over things they had to do in order to stay alive. This guilt is not a warrior's guilt but a civilian's, revealing that they understand that any kind of killing is wrong (Wessells, 2006: 145). This resilience does not last long, but it is different for everyone and dependent on many factors. Psychologist Neil Boothby, who worked with former child soldiers in Mozambique, describes it as an "emotional threshold"; he explains that it is somewhere between months and years, but "once passed, it's much harder to repair the psychological damage" (Herbert, 2004: 49). Some child soldiers may realize that they are there to stay and change their identity accordingly (Wessells, 2006: 74, 142).

Children are very easily manipulated and indoctrinated; they should not be held accountable for things they did not have control over. "Because adults created these circumstances, adults must shoulder the responsibility for the enormous physical, psychological, social, and spiritual damage done to child soldiers" (Wessells, 2006: 84). Child soldiers should be seen "neither as passive nor as brainwashed but as active seekers and makers of meaning in difficult circumstances" (Wessells, 2006: 78-81, 83, and 99).

## Girl Child Soldiers

Contrary to what many believe, girls make up a big percentage of child soldiers. In Sierra Leone, of the 35 percent of child soldiers in the RUF armed forces, girl soldiers make up 16 percent. In Ethiopia, girls and women made up 35-40 percent of the opposition forces (Wessells, 2006: 86). In Uganda up to 30 percent of the child soldiers were girls (IRIN “Africa”, 2009: 3); many who were raped (Fegley, 2008: 8).

Girls are abducted by both sides of the conflict in Africa (IRIN “Africa”, 2009: 3). Girls are also exploited by the use of gender-based cruelty such as sexual violence and rape (Fegley, 2008: 8; Grossman, 2007: 2; IRIN “Africa”, 2009: 3; Wessells, 2006: 86). In fact, girl soldiers are expected to provide the other soldiers with sexual services, with little thought to the girl’s protection against sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, and pregnancy (Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 391). “Rape has long been used as an instrument of war” (Wessells, 2006: 86), as it is not only meant to destroy the woman but the whole family, as the family is many times forced to watch helplessly.

Rape is physically and psychologically damaging. Girls who have been raped feel like they are damaged and impure. They are also stigmatized by their community; their social status is decreased. Their husbands, if they are married, may reject them or if they are single, a raped woman is seen as damaged goods. Children born from rape may even have it worse, for they are seen as future rebels and reminders of what happened. Due to sexually transmitted diseases some women can never have children, which in some



African countries, such as Sierra Leone, is considered social death because that woman is unmarriageable (Wessells, 2006: 90-94, 101, & 116). In Sierra Leone many of the demobilized girls had children when they returned to their communities, which would be on the other end of social stigmatization (Fegley, 2008: 11).

Girl soldiers, like boy soldiers, take on multiple roles. They may be laborers, sex slaves, mothers, trainers, spies, cooks, porters, and fighters. In Sierra Leone, a soldier's wife is the same thing as a sex slave. A girl is captured for that purpose, and although legally they are not married, sometimes the girl takes the "marriage" seriously, based on cultural norms. She may not want to leave her "husband" when she could be freed. There are many reasons for this devotion: she may have had a child with him, and in some cases the "husband" does protect his "wife," so she may have an emotional attachment to him. Some commanders of rebel armies do not like it when a woman becomes pregnant. They see it as slowing them down and another mouth to feed. The result is that they may turn to brutal means to terminate the pregnancy. In Liberia, the LURD fighters pound a girl's stomach to induce her and kill the baby. Other groups such as the LRA in Uganda welcome pregnancies because they will provide for soldiers in the future (Wessells, 2006: 87, 95, 97, 100-101).

RUF soldiers in Sierra Leone believed that girls make good spies, because they can easily go into a town as vendors and gain information through gossipers. Girls in Africa are also highly valued for their ability to carry heavy loads. Because of the multiple tasks women can carry out they are sometimes more respected and valued in

armed oppositional groups than they are in their patriarchal societies. In Mozambique, girl soldiers were taught by the opposition group Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), that they need to fight to free themselves from oppression, which filled them with purpose and meaning (Wessells, 2006: 97-99).

Girl soldiers have a harder time reintegrating back into society than boys (Wessells, 2006: 195-196, 199). Girls who do not serve in combat are overlooked. Girls are also reluctant to join demobilization programs due to the stigma that would be attached to them (Fegley, 2008: 13). Many girl soldiers who are reintegrated have babies and children; therefore, besides being labeled as ex-soldiers they are seen as spiritually impure. The villagers see them as contaminated and not fit to work and live in their community. In Sierra Leone, the Christian Children's Fund paid for healers in the towns to do their ceremonial healing on these girls. After the rituals the girls were reported to feel better and were accepted into the community, free to work and marry. They are no longer seen as soiled. Some cleansing rituals are not beneficial to girls and may harm them. In Sierra Leone, girls may be subject to genital mutilations in order to be purified from being raped. These ceremonies of re-acceptance cannot be ignored by western rehabilitation methods, because in some cultures they are needed for genuine healing to occur for these girls and women (Wessells, 2006: 195-196, 199).

If women and girls are going to be saved from soldiering and not just become refugees, they need a chance to make a living. This is difficult in some countries. In Rwanda, for example, women by law are not allowed to own land. This makes it very

difficult for a woman and her children if she does not have a man to look after her (Wessells, 2006: 87-88). Therefore, once out of armed groups, special attention needs to be given to a girl's health, especially to her reproductive health; such as pregnancy, child birth and after birth care, as well as sexually violent injuries, and infections (Pedersen & Sommerfelt, 2007: 263). These services are rarely offered by DDR programs (IRIN "Africa", 2009: 3), which is why reintegration is harder for girls.

### Inner Wounds

Child soldiers are sexually exploited, badly treated, forced to kill and commit other atrocities, beaten when they try to escape, and have been filled with psychological fears, so when they are demobilized they have a lot of inner wounds that need to be healed (IRIN "Africa", 2009: 2). Long after the conflicts are over and the outer wounds are less visible, a child's inner wounds, of the heart, mind, and soul, are just barely beginning to heal. This makes living in the present just as hard as living in the past (Wessells, 2006: 126-127, 129). Separated from their parents and family members, deprived of their structure and support, their childhood taken away from them, child soldiers come out of their combat experience confused, wounded, and full of pain. This suffering can last indefinitely if healing intervention does not take place (Kimmel & Roby, 2008: 747). The conditions in postwar countries are not conducive for a child to come to terms with horrifying experiences and memories. There are commonly no jobs and little physical or psychological care available (Wessells, 2006: 126-127, 129). The enduring effects of wars are great, especially to the socio-political structure.

As mentioned, every child soldier story is different and requires different types of support. One child may be suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), unable to sleep at night due to nightmares of battle and killings. Another child may have a fear of men and marrying because she was raped many times by men and the elders (Wessells, 2006: 126-127, 129). Others report having psycho-social disturbances, such as angry aggression (IRIN “Africa”, 2009: 2). Many children lose a sense of normalcy. Many times child soldiers use drugs, while soldiering. Long-term use of drugs can dramatically affect a child’s physical and cognitive development (Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 397-398). Child soldiers are all affected by war differently depending on the duration, severity, and nature of their experiences as child soldiers (Wessells, 2006: 126-127, 129).

An ex-child soldier’s problem solving skills may be off, so he will have trouble at school or work because of lack of sleep and concentration, due to the war and violence he witnessed. Many children, if not most, have posttraumatic stress disorder. This disorder is a valid model of a child soldier’s mental health outcome and key to understanding a child soldier’s growth into adulthood. Ninety-seven percent of the ex-child soldiers tested in Uganda had PTSD (Wessells, 2006: 130, 132). Posttraumatic stress disorder is an anxiety disorder. In order to qualify as traumatic an individual has to have had their life threatened, been seriously injured, or witnessed death; also, exposure to these kinds of trauma must stimulate an intense response illustrated by helplessness, fear, or horror (APA-IV, 1994).

The ways people re-experience the traumatic event vary. Individuals most commonly experience intrusive and recurrent memories. In rare cases, the individual experiences dissociative status or “flashbacks” that can last a matter of seconds to days, where the person acts like they are reliving the event and have heightened arousal. Individuals with PTSD can also have recurrent dreams where they relive the event (APA-IV, 1994).

Children as with adults usually show symptoms of PTSD inside the first two to three months of the event, but symptoms can be delayed for years (APA-IV, 1994). The more individuals (children and adults) are exposed to trauma, the more severe their PTSD symptoms will probably be (Feerick & Snow, 2005).

Much psychological and emotional treatment is needed for these children, some of which have been child soldiers for many years. This treatment may take years, but these children are still normal and need to be shown that they have a future and a place in this world. By giving them skills and education they will have a future (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 45). The idea of psycho-therapy is generally a westernized answer to this problem.

In Angola, Uganda, Somalia, and Mozambique the prevalence of a young boy child soldier who had shot a person, lost a close friend or family member because of war, witnessed someone being killed, or had experienced a life-or-death situation, were in the 60-70 percentile. One of these experiences could create a huge negative effect on an

individual's life, but many children are finding themselves in all four of these situations (Wessells, 2006: 131).

Former child soldiers are often labeled as victims. This is dangerous for the child, because when seen as a victim a person turns hopeless and inactive. They become what they are labeled, turning their label into a self-fulfilling prophecy. In order to recover from the trauma a child needs to feel like he has some kind of control over his life (Wessells, 2006: 134).

Ishmael Beah, former child soldier in Sierra Leone and author of *A Long Way Gone*, mentions his rehabilitation and healing process. He points out that healing is not an instant process. His rehabilitation took 8 months; for some it takes longer. It is a long-term process because a child soldier has to learn to deal with their memories and eventually, as Beah has done, “transform them into something positive” because these “are things [he] will never forget” (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 21).

### Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Once the conflict is over, what is left for the child who only knows how to fight? When a child is denied protection and education, taken away to fight, what job is he or she good for in the civilized world? Many child soldiers cannot answer that question and only know conflict and violence, so they decide to travel to other conflict zones in other countries. Unlike adult soldiers who grow weary of war and stop, children soldiers can

fight for much longer because that is all they know to do in order to survive (Wessells, 2006: 3). Furthermore, a child soldier is not a soldier in just one country. Where borders are porous there also is the movement of children soldiers (Wessells, 2006: 17). This is why successful reintegration is needed (Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 398). Reintegration is a very important and long-term process for a child soldier. It is the process of soldiers going back to their civilian lives and roles (Wessells, 2006: 154-155).

In regard to reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers, some from the west say that all they need is education, resources, economic opportunities, and training. However, countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone have demonstrated that the reintegration experience is not as easy as all that. When given all of the training, education, resources, and economic opportunities these young individuals are still traumatized, have no support from their family or society, and are still drawn towards violence. These children are usually front-line active soldiers, not cooks or sex slaves. The cook or sex slave child can return home to their villages and generally their families and community accept them (Francis, 2007: 214-215). Being a child soldier is complicated and confusing: on one hand the child is a captive, feeling powerless, and on the other hand the child is wielding his or her own weapon, arguably the strongest object of power and control (Fegley, 2008: 9-10).

About 40 percent of the children in the LRA went through transition centers, which is a small number considering what they go through in order to get indoctrinated into the LRA. First they are beaten to get toughened, then they are required to kill, and

given a gun with no training. In order to survive they use the gun. Another way to survive is to move up in rank. The way to do that is to recruit or abduct other children into the LRA as well as killing many. Kony used the mind of a child to his advantage by keeping them in line with threats of spirits if they did not follow his orders (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 62-63).

Indeed, after fighting the child may not wish to return to civilian life; they may be bent on revenge and flourish on conflicts (Maslen, 1998: 450). A few learn to enjoy combat, even the sight of blood, and do not have to be told to commit atrocities (Wessells, 2006: 74, 142). This is quite a dilemma rehabilitating these children, who have developed a strong sense of camaraderie with the others in the group, intensified by shared substance abuse (Fegley, 2008: 9-10). Being born into an armed group gives a child no way of learning morals or civilian life, making violence seem common and a part of life. They may come out of armed groups with little impulse control, anger and aggression issues, and a tendency to use violence to solve problems. Having missed key periods of socialization, these children need special care and attention to be reintegrated or integrated into society (Wessells, 2006: 74, 142).

Children are not the only ones needing care and attention. In Sierra Leone, the CDF and the RUF both looted and destroyed villages, leaving great resentment and hate in these communities (Wessells, 2006: 78). There is much damage to the infrastructure of a village or town due to conflict. Homes, schools, crops, hospitals, water and electrical infrastructures can be destroyed and many times they are purposefully destroyed, by



armed groups. This makes the government's job harder when trying to protect and provide for its citizens. The government also has to provide for more troops and weapons, which leaves less money for resources for its citizens, and may open the door for more children to resort to soldiering (Wessells, 2006: 110-111).

In Uganda, there is a counseling center called the Children of War Program that is run by a Christian organization called World Vision. It is a model rehabilitation program in Uganda as it is the best established. It has a huge amount of resources available. More than 15,000 children have gone through the center. The center was established not only for child soldiers but also for adult soldiers that were recruited into armed forces when they were children. This rehabilitation shelter is the largest in Uganda and has been around since the mid-1990s. Rehabilitation is still desperately needed for child soldiers who fought with the LRA (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 17-18).

Reintegration and development are closely linked to each other; in order to have reintegration there needs to be development of the education system and the economy. A child cannot grow into an effective citizen if he or she does not have skills. Promoting a strong economy, which equals jobs, is a step needed to prevent a child from going back to a life of violence (Wessells, 2006: 154).

The implementation of DDR programs (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration) has taken place in many war-torn nations. Liberia added rehabilitation to their DDR making it DDRR. Disarmament is the process in which both armies stand

down and agree on a peace settlement. During disarmament soldiers and armed civilians hand in their weapons at reception areas, where the weapons are eventually destroyed (Wessells, 2006: 154-155, 158).

Demobilization is the process of releasing and disbanding the combatants, by taking off their uniforms and preparing them to go back to civilian life. After they have turned in their weapons, they enter another building where they get identity cards proving their discharge. When they have done all of this they receive a demobilization kit. The kit includes food, clothes, an allowance for a time, and usually seeds and tools for farming. This card protects the person from being re-recruited and proves that they are not deserters (Wessells, 2006: 154-155, 159-160).

It is important to remember that a lot of these children do not remember living as a civilian, because they were so young when they were abducted into conflict. Their worldview is primarily informed by living in an armed group (Ashby, 2002: 11). The process of reintegration takes a long time, but this opportunity is necessary because it provides a needed alternative to soldiering. In turn, the point of DDR programs is to help former child soldiers to avoid stigmatization, gain the acceptance of their community, and be able to fulfill their responsibility to their families (Wessells, 2006: 154-155, 160). These programs also help re-establish trust, self-control, self-esteem, attachment to their families, and civil identity (Pedersen & Sommerfelt, 2007: 263).

DDR programs vary depending on each particular country's political, social, and economic situations. For instance, in Sierra Leone, child soldiers had committed many heinous atrocities. Therefore the DDR programs in Sierra Leone decided to prolong a child's stay in Interim Care Centers (ICC) for as long as 6 months. These centers offer psychosocial support and health services. Girls get reproductive healthcare while at the center. The psychosocial support includes peer counseling where they talk not only about their past, but their present and future. This process is supposed to prepare them for their future and the challenges that lie ahead. They rehabilitate through song, dance, drawing, and storytelling. Remembering and doing these things that they did as children brings up memories of better times, and helps them release emotions, reduces stress, and gives them something to which they can strive to return to. These centers also have staff who track down the child soldier's family while they are staying at the center. This way they can be reunited and the child will have a place to go once he or she is ready to leave the center (Wessells, 2006: 157, 159, 191).

There is evidence which suggests that DDR programs are not the best way to reintegrate into society. Indeed, many self-demobilizers reenter society just as successfully as those who have been through the official programs. Some practitioners also believe that non-formal reintegration programs are superior to formal programs because they do not have to just help former soldiers. This way non-formal support programs do not single out former combatants. DDR programs were also designed to help adults. When DDR programs are not specifically designed for children it will mean that

sometimes children needs are left out, under the false assumption that former child soldiers have families to go home to who will accept them. UNICEF and other NGOs that focus primarily on children have found that under certain conventions such as the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, that DDRs are responsible for offering psychosocial assistance and other such benefits. Therefore, excluding children from DDR programs is a violation of rights. DDR programs have also been found to be gendered biased, because of the little understanding DDR programs have of girls integrating back into society (Wessells, 2006: 155-158).

Yet, DDR programs are a kind of safety net from being re-recruited after the conflicts are over (Wessells, 2006: 156). Without these programs child soldiers become street children after they are demobilized, as all they know is how to live in conflict. They do not have skills for a life of peace (Fegley, 2008: 3). In northern Uganda, children faced a great danger of being re-captured by their former armed group and treated like traitors. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DDR programs were created while the conflicts were still going on, making the process of reintegration very difficult yet needed (Wessells, 2006: 156).

Implementing DDR programs is a messy process politically. Leaders gain more politically in demobilizing than with reintegration because there are immediate results; funds are therefore put more into the former. This shortchanges reintegration, which is a pity because reintegration contributes to the development and peace of a country, as well as looking out for children's rights. This problem is especially pitiful for girls (Wessells,

2006: 161). Major Phil Ashby of the British Royal Marines was stationed in Sierra Leone in 2000 as a Disarmament Officer to disarm soldiers. He admits that on average he was disarming a child 12 or younger. He made this statement regarding the children he was disarming:

...it's all a bit Lord of the Flies-like. Promotion is a result of successful rebel action (ie, killing) and I've yet to meet anyone who's less than a self-promoted Captain. Generally, as long as you are firm with them you can go where you want, but they're so drugged up they don't often know their own names, let alone that there's a Peace Process (Ashby, 2002: 12).

Major Ashby continues to recount that he was shocked to discover that the child soldiers outnumbered the adults. In fact, in the city of Makeni where he was stationed the life expectancy for a male was 26 years. He recalls seeing 5 year old boys walking down the street with weapons taller than they were, claiming that they killed their own parents. The same boys were seen to have executed Kenyan peacekeepers. They look like little boys but are little boys who have lost the moral sense of right and wrong. This paints a pretty desperate and hopeless picture, but the reality is that once these children are taken out of an environment of war and brutality and given a chance of rehabilitation, they can become normal children again (Ashby, 2002: 12).

As was mentioned before, in order for child soldiers to function and be “better soldiers,” leaders of armed groups will pump all kinds of drugs into these children’s systems through all kinds of methods. When children are saved from being soldiers undoubtedly many are addicted to drugs, and this may have a dramatic effect on their

brains' development. In order for a child to reintegrate and deal with horrific memories, emotional wounds, and guilt, they must first overcome their addiction. In countries like Uganda and Sierra Leone, rehabilitation clinics have intensive drug treatment programs (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 25).

Some practitioners like to use the word integration instead of reintegration; because so many children soldiers were born inside an armed group they have never known what it is like to live a civilian life. This is especially the case for conflicts that have lasted many years, as was the case in Angola and Sierra Leone. These children are not going home to their families but are entering into a society that is foreign to them; they are scared they will not be able to find their place in that society. These fears are real; being a former child soldier stigmatizes them as troublemakers and rebels. The reintegration or integration process is needed to prepare these children and provide them a needed and respected role in society (Wessells, 2006: 181-182).

The best kind of reintegration of a child, many practitioners would argue, would include not just helping the individual child, but also supporting families and the communities of child soldiers (Wessells, 2006: 141, 183-186; New Scientist, 2008: 2). When this dual support is done then a child can better function and adapt to his new living situation (Wessells, 2006: 141). In Mozambique, for example, after a child soldier was demobilized they were immediately put into a healing centre and had child psychologists help them. However, the children ended up being unsuccessful in the

reintegration process because they were separated from their families and communities (Fegley, 2008: 12).

Family support is more lasting compared to professional counseling. Family acceptance equals community acceptance, which creates stability for that child. The families know that their children may have problems returning to civilian life, but most families accept their children back, showing their family's resiliency and the commitment they have to their family members (Wessells, 2006: 141, 183-186). Giving assistance to the community of the child soldier also takes away the resentment the community would otherwise feel for the child. Assistance in general should be given to those in need, whether they were former child soldiers or not (New Scientist, 2008: 2).

Once home, former child soldiers have a hard time going back to the way things were. Ex-child soldiers were treated as adults in their armed groups. Some were leaders who had authority over many. Going back to their civilian lives and families is particularly hard for them because they are once again treated like children (Wessells, 2006: 184, 188). Also, with former child soldiers aggression and violence during conflicts in their home is expected, because that is what they were taught to do (Fegley, 2008: 9; Wessells, 2006: 184, 188). In order to prepare their families for this type of behavior, volunteers from churches and other organizations in the community explain to the families that these children are not evil or bad, but dealing with what happened to them in the armed groups. These volunteers are a resource to the families whenever they need advice, support, or help in diffusing conflicts (Wessells, 2006: 184, 188).

For some the option of going home does not exist. There are many reasons for this scenario, such as the child being an orphan, or the family not being able to afford to take care of the child (Wessells, 2006: 141, 183-186). If a child is underage they go into foster homes in or near the community in which they grew up. If the former child soldiers are of age, they are given training and skills they need to improve their life. Also, these former child soldiers who are of age are put into a community where they know they will be safe from any sort of retaliation because of their former identity (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 26). Hostility towards rehabilitated child soldiers from their old communities is common because that is where they were first forced to commit heinous acts. The LRA made many of its 30,000 abducted children commit terrible acts to their family members and community members, leaving the child to be stigmatized by his or her community and unable to return home (Fegley, 2008: 11). Community members may even retaliate against a person labeled “child soldier” for wrongs other child soldiers have committed (Wessells, 2006: 8-9).

How well a child integrates back into society depends on many things: how they joined, if they felt accepted in the armed group, what type of work they did as well as training, if they ever tried to escape, how they were treated, and generally how they coped while living in an armed group (de Silva, Hobbs, & Hanks, 2001: 127). More study is needed on the causal factors of child soldiering to reduce a child’s future vulnerability. The UN’s 2001 Appeal stresses the need for holistic practices when it comes to reintegrating child soldiers, including the economic, physical, and psych-social aspects.



Jean-Claude Legrand, a UNICEF advisor, encourages the nonuse of military personnel when rehabilitating children. He also suggests that all children should be registered at birth, to more effectively verify age. Legrand also recommends that school security be increased to secure a child's pursuit of learning (Fegley, 2008: 9-10).

In order for the DDR programs to be more conducive and effective for working with children, I agree that certain things need to be in place: gender equity, the right timing, culture specific practices, a focus on reintegration, and separate programs for children and adults. There also needs to be reintegration and demobilization during ongoing conflicts, job training and employment, education, no cash payments (that could be used to purchase drugs), Interim Care Centers, child participation when implementing and through the whole process of DDR program planning, and child protection to prevent re-recruitment. These things are necessary for the programs, but the support and the reception of the community and families involved are also essential. DDR programs need to gain the support of the local leaders in the community, because they are the gatekeepers to the support of the rest of the community (Wessells, 2006: 179-180, 187). Unfortunately, many child soldiers who need to enter these programs do not get the chance. For example, in 2002 after Angola's peace agreement an estimated 7,000 to 11,000 ex-child soldiers were turned away from demobilizing programs because it was deemed "an adult concern" (Fegley, 2008: 11).

Even though the popularity of rehabilitation and reintegration programs is increasing, these programs frequently run out of cash, as it did in Sierra Leone in 2003,

with a UNICEF rehabilitation program. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement provided enough rehabilitation centers in the south of Sudan, but not in the Darfur region. These programs depend for much of their funding on grants and donations. With the masses of child soldiers UNICEF has been the only agency to prove it could handle mass demobilizations. (Fegley, 2008: 14).

#### Western Verses African Methods of Child Soldier Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Some former child soldiers act traumatized for the non-governmental organizations (NGO) who could help them better their life. Bettering their lives is not a bad thing, but it is a westernized concept, as is the idea of a person's rights. Some Africans fear western ways and are worried that if their children are westernized, then they will forget traditions, disrespecting their elders and not caring about their responsibility to their families. It is hard for former child soldiers to go back to being children and to their former social order, because they are used to being treated like adults, with weapons to back them up (Shepler, 2005: 198-199, 205).

The philosophy of the reintegration process is known to be based on westernized views, even though it is used in an African culture. African culture puts a strong influence on the spiritual world. The western psychologists may instead focus only on the physical, and peg a child's problems as mental health issues. African culture believes only a traditional healer may heal the person. Many analysts even question Western practices on child soldiers, claiming that their backgrounds and situations are so diverse one approach

will not fit all (Wessells, 2006: 126-127, 129). Since many believe the trauma is spiritual, western treatment may not help and could even inflict harm on a child (Kimmel & Roby, 2008: 749). Therefore, the best approach for reintegration would be a community-based one.

Randall Fegley points out that it is the western agencies that are the most funded. He questions why foreign agencies are intervening in “complex local conflicts,” especially when they have little knowledge of the local customs and language (2008: 11). He says that it is the “expensive foreign expert” that is called in when the better answers lie with local wisdom (Fegley, 2008: 11).

Following the western approach, the reintegration does not happen a lot of the time, due to the lack of psychiatrists and the fact that it is an expensive process. This means that Africans must rely on their culture and what worked for them in the past (Zack-Williams, 2006: 126-127). Some of the reintegration process has flaws; for example, the part that includes children in all aspects of planning wouldn't work in African communities. In the African culture speaking out to elders is disrespectful and inappropriate. Elders and other powerful adults in communities are the gatekeepers for former child soldiers. They will lead the way of acceptance, and if they are disrespected, then the child will not be accepted (Shepler, 2005: 198-199, 205). Therefore, in order to have a better reintegration process for child soldiers, community leaders need to be part of an ongoing discussion (Kimmel & Roby, 2008: 749-750).

In non-western societies the spirit world plays a much bigger role than it does in western societies. In Africa, a child soldier may feel that the only way to rid himself of the nightmares he has every night is to be cleansed by a traditional healer; whereas in western cultures the boy would be prescribed the aid of a good psychologist. In rural Sub-Saharan Africa, physical and mental illnesses are believed to be caused by spirits, which are the dead ancestors of the people in the community (Wessells, 2006: 146-148). African traditions believe that the spirits of the dead come back to haunt their killers and make them become insane (Fegley, 2008: 12).

The psychological stress of combat often leads to posttraumatic stress disorder in soldiers, but all the more so in children (de Silva, Hobbs, & Hanks, 2001: 126). Many soldiers who have (PTSD) will not accept healing from a mental health professional. Instead, they might ask the help of a local healer, which in their culture is more acceptable. Culture can have a protecting and buffering effect. During cleansing ceremonies the child soldiers confess their violent actions. Once confessed they are not allowed to talk about it anymore, and are again connected to protective spirits (Aldhous, 2008: 3). Therefore, after these reunification ceremonies the person is healed and they are able to start afresh, unlike western methods which require recalling what happened and going over the traumatic details. Traditional methods are experiential ways of reconciliation and coping (Fegley, 2008: 12).

If traditional methods are to be used, in order to be of help to these people a psychologist must put aside his ethnocentric tendencies and try to understand their

mindset and how they handled these situations in their past history. It is important to remember that these countries and cultures are not novices in dealing with the aftermath of war; most have dealt with hardships, such as these, before (Wessells, 2006: 146-148).

Rehabilitation and reintegration is a very important process for a child soldier if properly administered. Programs that include a combination of African traditional methods and westernized methods, I think, would be the most beneficial. This, plus programs that include the community and families of child soldiers will increase the support for the child soldiers and help them to be welcomed back into their communities.

#### Rehabilitation and Reintegration through Reconciliation

As was shown in South Africa, reconciliation does not happen through formal agreements but through grassroots works, which bring about peace. In order to protect former child soldiers, community reconciliation needs to be achieved. Reconciliation is “the rebuilding of positive relationships following destructive conflicts” (Wessells, 2006: 209-210). In Sierra Leone, the Christian Children’s Fund and the Community Development Committees brought villagers together to talk about the problems they are suffering from post-conflict, making them realize that they can’t recover on their own and that their problems are universal in their community. This realization strengthens their community and their resolve to work together (Wessells, 2006: 210-211).

## Retribution and Restorative Justice as a Way to Reintegrate

Retribution means that those who did wrong should be held accountable in order for peace to come about. In retribution, justice happens through punishment, depending on the type and severity of the crime. This model claims that wrongdoings will continue unless the perpetrators are punished. Child soldiers are included in this point of view and are many times tried as adults, which is not just. If a child committed heinous acts they should be tried as children and incarcerated as children. If children are not separated from adults, many horrible things can happen to them. The United States' policy states that children can be tried and incarcerated as adults. They argue that older children know the difference between right and wrong. In Rwanda, retribution was called for when prosecuting the perpetrators of the 1994 Tutsis genocide, often applying severe punishment, including the death penalty. Convicting children gives them little hope of real integration back into society. Children who are merely pawns ought not to be held responsible for adult actions (Wessells, 2006: 218-220).

Restorative justice is the attempt to repair damaged relationships, which is done by the offending party showing remorse and offering their services. This is not meant to be compensation, but is a symbolic way of redressing the situation. The intent is to heal the social wounds between the children and the villages who were affected by them. Restorative justice realizes, where retribution justice fails, that justice to satisfy those wronged rarely brings satisfaction, for those who are dead will never come back (Wessells, 2006: 222, 224). Restorative justice is rooted in African culture. An example of

this would be through the African word Ubuntu, which means, “A person is a person through other persons” (Wessells, 2006: 224). This attitude shows again that community-based integration rather than western-based policies and models are needed.

#### Protection and Prevention/Pre and Post-Soldier

Even after child soldiers have been rehabilitated back into society they are at risk of being re-recruited. Rehabilitation is not just about healing; it is about giving the child something substantial so they are equipped to better move on with their life (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 21). The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) not only demobilizes child soldiers, but aids them as well. Under the humanitarian law special attention is given to the children’s protection in the conflict. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child also charges states to take precautions to better protect the children affected by conflicts (Grossman, 2007: 4-5).

Pedersen and Sommerfelt have developed a table that analyzes the child soldier’s data, in order to better understand how to decrease the recruitment rates in certain armed conflict zones. It has been found that the most at risk are the children unaccompanied, living in rural areas, and children who see soldiering as their best option. Pedersen and Sommerfelt point out that most studies that investigate child soldiers focus on those that are going through rehabilitation centers. The children who have been demobilized but are

not going through these programs, or have dropped out, are rarely studied; likewise child soldiers who are still soldiering have been left out of these studies (2007: 264-265).

There are many things that need to be done to end this problem. One would be to identify where child soldiering is occurring in the world at this time and demobilizing those children. This step is very hard to accomplish as NGOs try to save children that are in war zones. Another step that needs to be taken is to give these children time to heal—physically, emotionally, and mentally from the severe trauma that they experienced in their young lives—in a safe shelter. After all of this, the goal should be to reintegrate the children back into society and reunite them with their relatives and loved ones. Girls especially should be given extreme care in their healing process. Prevention is the key to remedying the child soldiering crisis, and should be given a lot of attention (*Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law*, 2007: 17, 19). As much of the conflicts are due to the colonization of these countries, powerful nations should contribute to the prevention of child soldiering.

In order to build peace and break the cycles of violence, preventative measures need to be put into place to stop the recruitment of child soldiers, who supplied the majority of the soldiers late in the northern Ugandan and Liberian conflicts (Wessells, 2006: 154). In order to protect children from being recruited or re-recruited we must make them less vulnerable. There are ways to achieve this. Education and vocational training can decrease the child's likelihood of being recruited, because they give the child



more opportunities. The United Nations also prescribes reviving the agriculture in conflict areas to provide economic opportunity (IRIN “Africa”, 2009: 2).

With the conflict that has now erupted in the DRC again, UNICEF is afraid that all of the prevention efforts they and other organizations have been working on for the last couple years of peace are now going to be destroyed. UNICEF reports that child soldiering is on the rise in the DRC, due to the new conflicts. It also reports that children who were former soldiers are the ones highest at risk to be recruited because they are already trained. Many of the children have already gone through rehabilitation programs and have been reintegrated back into society, making this new rise in conflict all the more discouraging (Schlein, 2009: 1-2). “The challenge is to enable young people to achieve meaning in life through nonviolent venues and actions, and to create conditions of social justice, thereby preventing war and healing the wounds that, left unattended, fuel the fires of revenge” (Wessells, 2006: 106).

#### Implementing International Laws Regarding Child Soldiers

Internationally, the use of child soldiers has been condemned “as one of the worst forms of child abuse” (Kimmel & Roby, 2007: 740). “The direct consequences, for children used as soldiers reach deeper into the trough of atrocious misery to encompass an almost systemic physical, sexual and mental abuse by other, older recruits amidst a frequent disintegration of social and cultural norms” (Maslen, 1998: 445). Child soldiering, though, has only recently been considered a part of human rights law. Before

these laws, once children were combatants they could not receive the protection of civilian status. Still these laws today are for the most part international, not national. As the one who would benefit from cooperating with international laws would be generally the ruling party, the rebel forces are given no incentive to cooperate (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 3).

There are four international laws that address child soldiers: the International Humanitarian Law, International Human Rights Law, International Labor Law and the International Criminal Law. (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 3). International Humanitarian Law, or the Laws of Armed Conflict, was set into place to protect victims and establish rules of warfare. Some of the rules concerned only using the force that was necessary, and only attacking military targets. The civilians to be avoided were especially women with children, the elderly, the sick, and children. After World War II, the Four Conventions, also known as the Geneva Conventions, defined these humanitarian laws, specifically protecting those who fell into their enemies' hands during a time of conflict. These laws, however, did not mention child soldiers, until they were supplemented in 1977 (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 3-4).

The first convention to prohibit the recruitment and the use of children younger than 15 years of age in hostilities is the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 11). There are two protocols of article 77. The first protocol deals with traditional international armed conflicts between two or more parties. The second deals with conflicts between non-

international armed groups. Protocol I requires only states to take measures to ensure protection of children against child soldiering. Protocol II gives no exceptions to child soldiering. Protocol II takes into account all kinds of participation. Protocol I only attempts to protect a child from direct hostilities. Only Protocol II speaks about the restriction of child soldiering to all types of armed forces (Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 392).

The 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention received quite a bit of criticism because it was too lenient on the state. Many conflicts are not given the name of international or non-international armed conflict, so they are not protected under the protocol because they are internal conflicts. Many countries still have not ratified the protocol and it is not a norm in customary international law. Where the International Humanitarian Law has shortcomings, other global laws fill in the gaps. Individual countries have a hard time prosecuting individuals with this law, because they have a hard time proving the person committed an international crime; such was the case in the DRC (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 4-5, 8).

After the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court was negotiated in 1998, prohibiting the use of children younger than 15 in hostilities, child soldiering was considered at the status of customary international law, and became a war crime under the International Criminal Court (Causalities of War: Child Solders and the Law, 2007: 11). The Rome Statute's Preamble says that it is every state's duty to prosecute and punish those who have committed crimes under its jurisdiction. The Preamble also encourages

international cooperation, so the ones guilty for the most heinous crimes do not go unpunished (Grossman, 2007: 5).

The International Labor Organization Convention 182, which the United States ratified in 1999, says that the forced conscription of children into an armed conflict is the “worst form of child labor” (U.S. Department of State, 2008: 20). This Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (Convention 182) prohibited the forced conscription of children (Fegley, 2008: 9). It defines a child as younger than eighteen years of age and was the first international treaty to do so. It pushes states to make this form of child labor a criminal offense (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 6). The United States played a big part in this convention, being the third country to ratify it, and also helping with the outlining and finalization of the treaty (Freeland, 2005: 312).

The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), endorsed by 190 countries, defines children’s minimum rights (de Silva, Hobbs & Hanks, 2001: 126; Grossman, 2007: 4). The CRC was considered a novelty, because it took humanitarian law and based it on human rights law (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 5-6). In Article 38, a child soldier was defined as younger than 16. Developed countries such as the United States, France and the United Kingdom did not want the minimum age requirement to be below 18 years due to their own recruitment laws (Freeland, 2005: 312). Today, the only countries to have not ratified the CRC are Somalia and the United States (Grossman, 2007: 4; Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 6). The United States of America is

a military state, and in order to fill its many positions of military personnel it recruits individuals who have not reached the age of eighteen.

Recent additions to this convention defined a child as younger than 18 years of age (de Silva, Hobbs, & Hanks, 2001: 126; Grossman, 2007: 4). Pedersen and Sommerfelt point out that this convention has some confusing points in regard to a child's age. Article 38 states that a child younger than 15 shall not be allowed to participate or be recruited into conflict, the same as the 1949 Geneva Convention and the 1977 Additional Protocols, which made child soldiering a war crime. In Article 1, of the 1989 CRC, a child is defined as younger than 18 years of age. All organizations who work to stop child soldiering believe children younger than 18 should not be involved in armed conflicts (Petersen & Sommerfelt, 2007: 255). Children younger than eighteen have not reached their psychological or physical maturity and are not prepared to face war (Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 393).

The 2000 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict recognized eighteen as the youngest age a person can participate in armed combat (Fegley, 2008: 9; Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 6; UNICEF, 2009: 1). It became law in 2002 (Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 7). The United States ratified the convention in 2003. This convention was somewhat of a disappointment. It raised the minimum age for non-governmental armed groups but did not enforce the same standards as previous conventions did for state armed groups (Freeland, 2005: 313-314).

The African Charter to the Rights and Welfare of the Child is one of a kind, being the only regional treaty that addresses the problem of child soldiering. This treaty sets one of the highest standards on child soldier policies, by defining a child as younger than eighteen years of age. It was accepted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and became law in 1999 (Freeland, 2005: 3011; Madubuike-Ekwe, 2005: 6). This charter focuses on the conscription of children. This is to show that even a child being used in warfare is a crime (Coleman, 2008). Sadly, many African states are not following these standards (Freeland, 2005: 311-312). This is because the ones in power have more to gain by not following these standards than by enforcing them.

Ugandan law outlawed people under the age of 18 joining the military by signing the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of Children, in 2002. Age, though, is still a concern. The Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) is making an effort to follow this law. The Local Defense Units (LDU) still have a high number of children, mainly because there are not enough doctors to test the person's age and many local officials approve of child soldiering (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 13).

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was put into place after the country's decade long war. This court was created by the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone. It was made to convict the perpetrators of the war. Its Statute allows offenders fifteen and up to be prosecuted. There was a great debate over this issue, and in the end the prosecutor decided not to try anyone younger than eighteen years old. The argument

for this was: Why should that child be held criminally liable for something he should not have been a part of to begin with? (Monforte, 2007: 6).

In 2004, the UN Appeals Chamber backed the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which endorsed the 14 and under policy, which was international law before 1996. Whoever this court found guilty would be held criminally accountable for what they did. Therefore, leaders and commanders who recruited and used child soldiers now can be held accountable and prosecuted for this crime. Prosecutions are thought to save children from experiencing the life of a child soldier (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 11-12). Also in 2004, the UN Security Council approved Resolution 1539. This resolution asked for urgent action to end the genocide and crimes against children, specifically asking for a timeframe to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers in conflicts (Fegley, 2008: 9).

Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier in the Sierra Leone conflict, wrote an autobiography titled *A Long Way Gone* about his experience. In it he explains how at the age of thirteen, after his family was murdered by the rebels, he stayed in a village with the Sierra Leone Army, where he thought he would be safe. After awhile the army needed new recruits and forced him to join and fight or be killed. During his first battle of bloodshed watching 7 year olds dying, he became desensitized and lost all compassion and remorse. This along with forced drugs, made it easy for him to kill. He was saved two years later, by Children Associated with War, which UNICEF as well as other NGOs sponsor. It took a long time and many special people at the healing center to rehabilitate

and help reintegrate Beah back into society; eventually he became an ambassador of peace. International laws and standards that have been put into place have saved Beah and other former child soldiers from their predicaments (Causalities of War: Child Solders and the Law, 2007: 8-9).

### The United States Position on Child Soldiers

The United States' policy on this problem is not one of lamentation but of legislation (Causalities of War: Child Solders and the Law, 2007: 26). However, the United States Criminal Code does not address or criminalize the act of creating or using child soldiers (Causalities of War: Child Solders and the Law, 2007: 11-12). The United States of America does not allow military recruitment of a person under the age of eighteen, although with parental consent a seventeen year old can voluntarily join governmental armed forces. This follows the "Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OP)". This Convention also makes precautions that ensure anyone under the age of 18 is not directly involved in the hostilities (U.S. Department of State, 2008).

The United States of America does not support the International Criminal Court. Madubuike-Ewke believes the US is afraid the court will investigate and prosecute United States military and political personnel. He believes the US government is constantly trying to undermine what the international community is trying to do to protect



children. In 2002, the United States government removed its ratification of the IIC Treaty (Madubuike-Ewke, 2005: 7).

Even though internationally the problem of child soldiers is heading in a positive direction as it is becoming more and more publicized, most who are involved in this problem are never found or prosecuted in the countries to which they emigrate. One of the reasons why these people, in the United States at least, are never prosecuted is because the United States government has not made using and recruiting child soldiers a crime. It may deport for this act but it cannot prosecute (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 3).

Legislation is being introduced in the House of Representatives and the Senate of the United States government to address the problem of child soldiers in Africa and around the world. This legislation would enforce present international standards and condemn the conscription of children into any militia or government, as this is a human rights problem. If the legislation passed it would prevent the United States from assisting many nations. In late 2006, it was believed that 26 nations were using child soldiers to fight in their conflicts. With aid being taken away it is hopeful that these nations will change their policies towards children and human rights (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 3). “No child should be forced to kill anyone, not another child, another family member, or anyone. It is simply unconscionable” (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 7).

The Defense Appropriation Act of 1999 adopted by congress condemns the use of child soldiers (Madubuike-Ewke, 2005: 7). The 2008 Appropriation Act, which was passed in 2007, restricts the United States from giving foreign aid to the countries that recruit and use child soldiers. The Child Soldier Accountability Act was passed, in September 2008, by the Senate and the House. This act says that any alien who has recruited or used child soldiers is not allowed in the United States and if already in the United States will be deported (U.S. Department of State, 2008).

There are many United States governmental organizations that are involved in addressing the child soldier crisis: the Bureau of Democracy, Bureau of African Affairs, Office of Trafficking in Persons, the US Mission to the UN and the US agency for International Development (USAID), and the US Department of Labor (DOL), to name a few. The United States also works with foreign governments, non-governmental organizations, and UN agencies, in the prevention of the use of child soldiers. The DOL has 20 million dollars right now to go to projects in countries like the DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Uganda, which will specifically address the issues relating to child soldiers. The US also gave \$100 million to UNICEF in 2006 (U.S. Department of State, 2008).

In 2004, USAID funded a rehabilitation center for child soldiers abducted in southern Sudan and northern Uganda, and protection for the night travelers escaping abductions. Other reintegrating programs in African countries such as Burundi, Liberia,

and the DRC, were funded by the Department of State's Bureau of African Affairs (U.S. Department of State, 2005).

In 2005, the United States gave the people of northern Uganda \$78 million for bilateral or mutual assistance. The United States also directly funds programs that address the psychological problems of former child abductees and child soldiers. These programs reintegrate these children back into society by providing them with vocational training, counseling, and medical care. The United States also funds some overnight shelters and reception centers for the children once they have escaped captivity (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 12). Since 2005, the United States has given the Uganda People's Defense Force over \$5 million for assistance in the nonlethal aspects of combat, such as trucks, training, and communication equipment (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 13).

Right now there are around 20 countries that use child soldiers; 10 of those countries' governments use child soldiers. Even more surprising, 9 of those 10 countries who are using child soldiers in their government's armies receive aid from the United States military. The United States needs to use this as leverage to end this abuse of children. During war time, human rights are often ignored in order for the greater good to come about. This leaves a society's most vulnerable--children--to suffer and be exploited. Now 110 countries have signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but the ratifying of the protection of children from being used as child soldiers becomes meaningless without the enforcement needed from these countries. In some

countries the enforcement of this convention is coming about. For example, in Sierra Leone, 9 people are being prosecuted in the Special Court for Sierra Leone because of their use of child soldiers (Causalities of War: Child Solders and the Law, 2007: 2-3).

The Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2007 was the legislation that gave the ability for the United States to limit their military assistance to countries that the State Department Human Rights Report highlighted as recruiting and/or using child solders. Under this law the military can only help a country to remedy this problem of child soldiering (Causalities of War: Child Solders and the Law, 2007: 3).

On December 10, 2008, the US Congress adopted legislation saying that US military assistance may no longer be offered to countries that use child soldiers. This legislation could affect African countries such as Sudan, Uganda, Chad, and the DRC. The reasoning for this is simple; they do not want weapons the US provides to these countries to be used by children or have US dollars supporting the exploitation of children. In 2008 the DRC received \$800,000 in foreign military aid. In spring 2008, the State Department reported that African countries such as Chad, DRC, Uganda, and Sudan were still using child soldiers even though they had pledged to end the use of child soldiers. This new law makes failure to fulfill this promise a costly one (Otika, 2008: 1-2). This law may have unanticipated consequences, leaving the most vulnerable even more vulnerable.

Human Rights Watch observed how in the DRC children were still being recruited by the Congolese government and being sent to the front lines to fight. The same happened in Uganda with its national army. Both governments are supported by the United States. By stopping the military aid given to these countries, the recruitment and use of child soldiers may be curbed. These governments and groups will see that the political cost is too great to use child soldiers (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 12-13). This new law may work in the long run to curb child soldiering, but in the mean time it makes the situation more desperate for children as the country becomes more desolate.

Before the act of child soldiering was morally reprehensible. Now, child soldiering, according to international law, is a criminal violation. Signing and implementing the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United States is starting to show how serious they are in fighting this problem (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 5). This problem of child soldiering threatens the security and stability of communities, societies, and countries around the world for years to come (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 6). The wealthiest nations like the United States of America should assume responsibility to set a good example for protecting the world's children (Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 398).

## Prosecution of Perpetrators

Many believe the purpose of international prosecutions is not to deter or prevent future war crimes and crimes against humanity, nor to restore order. They believe rather that this prosecution shows that all citizens, no matter if they are rich or poor, no matter what ethnicity or gender, have a right to be protected under the law. In this sense prosecutions show victims that what happened to them was wrong. This gives citizens an opportunity to start trusting their government (Sharnak, 2007: 1). International laws at this point fail to define how state governments have committed offenses against their own children. Therefore criminal responsibility only lies with individuals (Freeland, 2005: 309).

In Uganda, as well in all other countries using child soldiers, the child soldiers quickly become perpetrators as well as victims. Child soldiers made up many of the foot soldiers of the LRA, reportedly up to 80 percent. Instead of convicting the whole army of the LRA the Ugandan government as well as the International Criminal Court focused on the indictment of five leaders in the LRA army, including Joseph Kony, instead of bringing every LRA soldier to justice as long as they disarmed and demobilized (The Endangered Children of Northern Uganda, 2006: 32-33, 42, 57).

The International Criminal Court (ICC) was created to give people vindication of their human rights, when their country may be either unwilling or unable to prosecute its worst offenders (Sharnak, 2007: 1). The ICC made its first charges against an individual

for using and recruiting child soldiers, by indicting a Democratic Republic of Congo man, an ex militia leader named Thomas Lubanga (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 3, 5; Gajewski, 2007). The prosecution started in late January. Lubanga, 48, who pleaded not guilty, is charged with conscripting and enlisting, training and forcing children under the age of fifteen to fight (Shubert, 2009: 2). This is a direct violation of the Rome Statue, specifically article 259 (Sharnak, 2007: 1). The prosecutor for the ICC reminded everyone that because of his crimes many hundreds of children are still suffering. There are many former child soldiers testifying as witnesses to his crimes (Shubert, 2009: 2).

Lubanga in 2002-2003, was the leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots, a political party. He claims he was fighting to prevent foreign fighters from stealing Congo's natural resources. The defendant could be sentenced up to 30 years in prison for his crimes (Stopper, 2009: 1). Many of the witnesses will be testifying anonymously, because of the high intimidation threats mounted towards the witnesses as well as the increased violence in the DRC (Shubert, 2009: 2). Obtaining witnesses is hard for these kinds of trials not only because of safety issues but because of the unavailability of witnesses. It is also hard to gain physical evidence for these kinds of trials (Coleman, 2008).

Lubanga, who has a degree in psychology, was arrested in March of 2005 in the city of Kinshasa (BBC "Witness", 2009) and handed over to the ICC the following March (Shubert, 2009: 2). The trial took seven months to start (BBC "Witness", 2009), due to

disagreements of access to the evidence from the prosecution and the defense (Shubert, 2009: 2). Because of this many are questioning the court's effectiveness and efficiency (Stopper, 2009).

This is the ICC's first trial since its inception in 2002. The International Criminal Court was established by a treaty that was signed by over 100 countries, the United States being one of them, but has never ratified. The prosecution is expected to last several months (Shubert, 2009: 2). It is being watched closely by countries around the globe. Many are hoping that this court will set a new norm, showing that the international community is putting a stop to those who have been getting away with horrible crimes against humanity (Sharnak, 2007: 1). A guilty verdict is needed to show the world that the international community will prosecute this war crime (Shubert, 2009: 2). Authorities say the real way to test the ICC's success is to see how the trial's information is released to the communities who were affected by Lubanga. Some still support this former leader; therefore the ICC is organizing ways for these communities to get information on the trial (Stopper, 2009: 1-2).

Sierra Leone's Special Court has also convicted three persons responsible for recruitment of children that were put into harm's way (Causalities of War: Child Solders and the Law, 2007: 3, 5). The use of child soldiers in the Sierra Leone conflict was so extreme that the international court had to stand up, recognize, and address the problem (Monforte, 2007: 2). The court did this in March 2003, just one year after its inception. The Special Court for Sierra Leone was established by the government of Sierra Leone



and the UN. Its purpose was to prosecute those who “bear the greatest responsibility for the serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996” (Guibert & Blumenstock, 2007: 368). The court is stationed in Freetown, Sierra Leone’s capital. It is hoped that the court’s proximity to its victims will benefit them by speeding up the process to justice, something that the UN *ad hoc* tribunals for Rwanda did not do (Guibert & Blumenstock, 2007: 367-368).

The three who were accused (Alex Tamba Brima, Brima Bazzy Kamara, and Santigie Borbor Kanu) were found guilty, all of whom held senior ranking in the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The AFRC formed an alliance with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) after the coup of the government. However, many were disappointed with the court’s treatment of the crime of child soldiering. Although it’s a ruling landmark case for the crime of child soldiering, the court also had the chance to provide guidelines on how to handle future trials involving this offense, but it did not (Guibert & Blumenstock, 2007: 369, 380-382, 391). In 2006, Liberian president Charles Taylor was also tried by the Sierra Leone’s Special Court, for war crimes (Wessells, 2006: 221).

When this court opened there was a debate whether or not to prosecute child soldiers for their actions. In the end the Special Court was given the right to try children ages 15 to 18. Even though the court has been given that right, they have yet to use it and have tried only adults. The court has recommended using alternative methods to achieve

justice for children, even the toughest cases, because of the way the children are stigmatized by the community after being tried (Wessells, 2006: 221).

The defense for those being prosecuted for the enlisting and use of child soldiers asserted that during the time when they committed these acts there was no crime. How can you convict people for acts that were considered criminal after the fact? Even the wording of the original statute stated that forced recruitments and abductions were only acts of child soldiering if the person was under the age of fifteen (Monforte, 2007: 8).

There is also the question of amnesty. Some believe that in order to have peace there must be amnesty given to the losing side. The leaders of the LRA who have been indicted by the International Criminal Court have tried to use this tactic. The RUF in Sierra Leone used this method and got away with it. They threatened the Sierra Leonean government with the following warning: there will be no peace unless you give us amnesty. After that warning happened two years later the RUF regrouped and used more child soldiers, starting the conflict all over again. The UN Security Council believes that amnesties and peace deals should not be given to those who have committed crimes against children (IRIN "Africa", 2009: 3). The United States and the international community believe a society cannot have peace unless they have justice first. If we give in to this kind of behavior, there will be an increase with this already increasing problem of child soldiering (Causalities of War: Child Solders and the Law, 2007: 24).

In countries where child soldiering is a problem, governments sometimes refuse to let U.N. peacekeepers in. They fear that they too will be punished and prosecuted for using child soldiers. This is a problem because peacekeepers are needed, yet if they do find incriminating evidence on the government's side, what are they ethically supposed to do with it, after the country has cooperated with the peacekeepers? This also leaves the government with the impression that if they got away with using child soldiers once, they will more than likely get away with using child soldiers again. The way to prevent this from happening further in the future would be to establish a court that would prosecute, instead of just creating threatening policies with nothing backing them up (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 24-25).

The practice of using and recruiting child soldiers has been banned internationally by various laws and policies, but there is a gaping hole between the standards that have been raised and the application of these laws and policies (IRIN "Africa", 2009: 1). The international community has failed to act to stop the use of child soldiers. Human Rights Watch has not found any evidence proving that sanctions have been put on armed groups or governments. Most of the time recruiters are never prosecuted by their government, and because of this, children will keep getting abused in this way (Fegley, 2008: 9).

In order for recruiters to get prosecuted, countries need to strengthen and support these standards, which will give the United Nations and other organizations the courage and strength to keep fighting this injustice. Better prevention methods and prosecution of the perpetrators, as well as stronger international laws on the use and selling of light arms

(many of which are coming from the United States), and ending support to countries that allow child soldiering, are all needed to end child soldiering for good. If societies and governments ignore this problem it will become harder if not impossible to solve, because these child soldiers grow up to be adults. The choice is between making a generation of individuals without morals or ethics, or one respected and known in civilized communities. The child soldiers today will be the rebels and the terrorists for generations to come; stopping this problem now will protect future generations from facing these struggles (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 9).

#### Future for Child Soldiers

Concerns have been raised in the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, regarding the care of child soldiers coming to the United States seeking asylum. Instead of asking how they can help the child soldier, they ask why they are here illegally. The language in the Patriot Act leads child soldiers to be treated the same as adults who have committed crimes. The Senate is looking at the Act to see how to better enhance the United States' compassion and protection towards these asylees (Causalities of War: Child Soldiers and the Law, 2007: 22-23).

The international interest in child soldiers has been on the increase in the last decade, especially so over the last couple of years. Because of the sudden increase in interest, many believe that this is the time to act to finally end this crime. The international community is starting to realize that children's interests would be better

served if resources would be directed from raising standards to enforcing the ones that are now in place (Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 395). Olara Ontnu, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict, says it is time now “to switch from talking the talk to walking the walk” (IRIN “Africa”, 2009: 1). Many believe that forgiveness is all that is needed to start over again and re-gain trust. This decision would be failing the victims of those who committed terrible crimes (Grossman, 2007: 8).

The children are not the only ones who suffer with the act of child soldiering; the community at large also suffers. A generation of children losing their education lessens a society’s economic potential for improvement. These children have grown up in violence and are emotionally scarred. This scarring increases the likelihood of this cycle of violence and conflict to keep happening. A society’s future is bleak if its children are exploited and abused. The future is not as bleak as it once was; the word is getting out to the countries that use child soldiers that the international community is not pleased. These countries are now hiding the fact that they use children in their fighting instead of showing them off as they once did. They are getting the message that child soldiering is not acceptable, because the political profile of this crime has grown (IRIN “Africa”, 2009: 3-4).

In 2003, the UN Security Council put out a list of countries still using child soldiers. The DRC, Liberia, Burundi, northern Uganda, Angola, Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and the Sudan were on that list. That was the first time such

a list was made and reported to the Security Council (IRIN “Africa”, 2009: 4). Publicly publishing this list shows that the UN is serious about this crime.

There is a unique problem facing efforts to resolve the child soldiering crisis. Once they are child soldiers they are not only the victim but also the traumatized offender. They murdered and committed heinous crimes. The question is what is to be done with them? The concerns and the healing of the victims and the nation as a whole still need to be addressed after the children have been reintegrated. Many nations are trying to exact revenge on the children who have been forced into this journey in the first place. The Congolese government, in 2001, tried to put to death four child soldiers. In 2001, some 2,500 child soldiers who partook in the Rwandan genocide, which happened in 1994, were still waiting to be released from custody. Justice is needed, especially the prosecution of the ones most responsible. On the other hand there needs to be forgiveness instead of vengeance for the children who were caught up in a conflict for which they were not responsible. Therefore, when peacemaking time comes, children should not be punished or prosecuted, and a child should be considered to be anyone under the age of eighteen (Grossman, 2007: 3-4, 8-9).

Putting former child soldiers through trial can be a traumatizing experience. It also can prevent healing and gets in the way of the rehabilitating and reintegrating process. Even if the child is pardoned it is still damaging and potentially stigmatizing to the child. There needs to be reconciliation between child soldiers and their victims as well

as forgiveness for the child soldier (Grossman, 2007: 10-11). Such is the sentiment of Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu when he said,

We must not close our eyes to the fact that child soldiers are both victims and perpetrators. They sometimes carry out the most barbaric acts of violence. But no matter what the child is guilty of, the main responsibility lies within us, the adults. It is immoral that adults should want children to fight their wars for them...There is simply no excuse, no acceptable argument for arming children (Weber, 2006: 84).

Many things contribute to the continuation of child soldiering: the lack of policies, the poor enforcement of the policies that are in place, and the ineffective application of policies. For example, countries who have signed the UN CRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child often fail to comply with them (Kimmel & Roby, 2007: 742-743). It is believed internationally, that the best way of stopping the recruitment of child soldiers is through the prosecution of those deemed accountable. Yet, the international community, so far, has done a better job at making high standards than enforcing them (Wessells, 2006: 233).

Many things need to be done in order to secure a safer future for our children. There must be a universal enforcement of the CRC, including the raising of the minimum age of conscription and recruitment to 18 years (Zia-Mansoor, 2005: 399). Since the technological discovery of lightweight weapons, children have been fighting in active combat. The United Nations Security Council has recognized the connection of the illicit

small arms trade and child soldiering. The world needs stronger laws to prevent the further widespread trafficking of light weapons (Freeland, 2005: 305).

After a war with child soldiers, what is left? A whole generation of children with little to no education or work experience. They know how to function and live in an armed group but not as civilians. These children without childhoods can drastically harm a nation's ability to recover from the conflicts for decades to come (Kimmel & Roby, 2007: 746). Therefore, more research is needed on the subject of child soldiers, especially research that examines reintegration and rehabilitation methods.

#### Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

If we value our children, why is child soldiering on the increase? The enforcement of policies and regulations on child soldiering will not work by itself. Addressing the root causes of the conflicts and limiting those causes would be more beneficial to ending the practice of child soldiering, settling the problem for good. One of the root causes would be what Conflict theory suggests, that those in power control the ones weaker than themselves. By doing so they get more power and control, so much so that they are not willing to give it up, nor indeed care to protect those weaker than themselves.

There are many opinions on who is a child soldier, but the UNICEF definition makes the most sense, with its broad description of the uses of child soldiers included in the definition, as well as the age being defined as anyone under the age of eighteen. However, some may argue that eighteen is still too young, and question if there is any age



that can prepare a human being for hand to hand combat. The age of 18 is not a magical number, where suddenly a child is an adult and can think like an adult. It greatly depends on the culture and other variables, which is why this is such a confusing debate.

Many believe that the way our global economy is set up permits warlords to preserve their affluent way of living, as the World System theory suggests. They continue to cause war because they benefit from it, while many of the people in their countries are dying from it. It is my belief that western and developed countries should stop intervening in these conflicts, which only worsens the situation. Western countries try to give their chosen country or political side the means to win, which usually includes weapons light enough for children to carry and use. If the west decides to support states in conflicts, they should help for the right reasons, based on the right principles. It should be for social justice, not for western gain or interest. We need to encourage Africans to end conflict through non-violent ways. We need to encourage democracy to take hold, without our own agenda attached to it. That way the people will be given a voice. At the same time, developed nations who have taken advantage of Africa, through colonialism and the stripping of its natural resources, have an obligation to step in when true crisis arrives, such as genocide.

It is important for the African community to come together and end child soldiering themselves. Most African countries today are experiencing conflict and rapidly changing political environments. For this reason it may not be practical to expect these

nations to independently end child soldiering. In order for them to come out in a positive way and achieve democracy they need to change some of their norms and practices.

The continent of Africa is rich and lush and because of that it should have been one of the powers of the world with its assortment of natural resources. Yet, for centuries Africa has been taken advantage of in many different ways. Its people are filled with life and culture, but carry the great burden of a history of conflict and violence. If we want Africa to be a land of peace and prosperity, we need to let Africans fight for Africa. They do not need to be saved by the west as was and is still thought today. By Africans saving themselves, only then can its people be free, and its children can be free to be children. The way to end child soldiering is not through laws and legislation but through ending the conflicts that take advantage of innocent children in the first place.

Africans need to take back responsibility for their own people. In order to prevent the atrocity of child soldiering, Africa and its leaders need to unite. This is the purpose of the African Union. Although it is less than a decade old, it has an opportunity to pool Africa's resources and solve its problems. It can do this by working with various countries to find permanent solutions to these conflicts. The African Union needs to form a strong military, with well-built child soldier protection laws, to maintain order and peace. It also needs a judiciary body similar to that of the world court to try the people responsible for these conflicts and the use and recruitment of child soldiering.

Africa needs to find better ways of resolving war. Peaceful negotiations must be encouraged first; following the Just War Doctrine, war must be a last resort. To prevent further conflicts the losing side must be integrated into society. Countries of the world need to develop protocols to stem the problem of child soldiering. The United Nations can be an avenue for bringing countries into conformity concerning child soldiering laws. What is needed to bring all this together is dialogue between groups to resolve differences and conflicts. This can be done through nonviolent methods—to establish unity—in order to bring an end to the exploitation of their children. Therefore, when unity happens, Africa's children, its future, can be a children of peace and not war.

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Map 1. The Continent of Africa

