

Child Soldiers Worldwide: Uncharted Cycles of Slavery Beneath the Surface of International Shame

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Abstract

This paper is a result of qualitative case study of 25 formerly abducted children from Northern Uganda, who are now serving in the official government forces. These children who had served under the rebels of Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), as fighters for periods ranging between 9-10 years were purposively selected and interviewed between August and September 2005. The results show that demobilization and re-integration of child soldiers is mere change of guards in Uganda as is the case worldwide. Children forcefully recruited by opposition forces are quickly recruited into official government forces after their escape, rescue and or release by the rebel forces. Re-integration means accepting either to be recruited into official armies or benefiting from temporary Amnesties.

Additionally, three key issues stand out explicitly internationally; firstly, there is a worldwide threat posed by over 300,000 children armed and indoctrinated to kill at will. Secondly, the increasing participation of girls as young as 7 years in armed conflict is going un-noticed by the international legal instruments except for the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Finally, the proliferation of more than 640 million small arms which result in the death of over 500,000 people each year has increased the possibility of worldwide spread of terrorism.

The situation is made worse in many states by political disenfranchisement, long term economic under-development, over-representation of children in the military and the existence of war economies in which ongoing conflicts meet the vested interests of specific groups in power. These are concealed beneath the surface of many of the international legal instruments, including the most contested of universality of Human rights with the claim that everyone has duties to the community. The biggest shame is whether the duties of everyone represent to abduct, conscript and force children into killing machines.

Not only are these threats universally unacceptable, but also the environment, which they help sustain – one of negative international conditions, hierarchies of power, dominations, oppositions and inconsistencies in application of international laws – is a shame to the world and a threat to the security of us all.

In this paper, I have argued that international shame resulting from these crimes goes beyond mere political and economic manifestation to include legal imperatives, intellectual commitments and the uncharted cycles of child slavery to which the

international community has paid little attention. My contention is that these cycles could be broken by protection of Human Rights, more intellectual commitment, and imposition of the universal international machinery that challenges impunity of those committing the atrocities.

The arguments are presented in four parts. Part one deals with the uncharted worldwide situations of child soldiers. Part two deals with the irrelevant and inadequate application of international laws to the problems of child soldier worldwide. The third draws on the experiences of child soldiers in Uganda. The final section explores alternative approaches of breaking the cycle recruiting and sustaining child soldiers worldwide.

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