

Report on The National Forum 2000

and National Forum Youth during and after the Conference on War-Affected Children

Child Soldiers

What is working

- Nothing working in Sierra Leone, Uganda
- There are more options for youth to keep busy

What is not working

- No proper treatment at hospitals
- Injured are sent back into battle
- Youth are given drugs to make them strong and more courageous
- Women are used as sex slaves for the military
- Not only young men, but young girls also go to battle
- In the history of Uganda, rebels often started the recruitment of young children
- Differences in what the government says and what they actually practice
- No international law to cover guerrilla fighters, only for government (optional protocol for the CRC)
- Countries know about problems but never do anything
- Propaganda is used to encourage youth to volunteer for the armies
- Forced youth service (abductions)
- Joining the army is a means of survival
- Hypocrisy amongst government (they won't use their own children, but won't hesitate to use other people's)
- No reintegration programs in place for youth returning from wars
- International law not being practiced in third world countries, possibly due to poverty
- Youth are being used in all armed groups (government, rebel, civil militia)
- Children have no education, recreation or toys to play with to keep busy and have little choice but to join the army

What youth can do

- Youth doesn't need to wait for the government, lead the way and pressure government to take action
- Young people organizing themselves to take action, create networks for youth, a medium for contact
- Be willing to learn; make the learning process more attractive to young people.
- International community should support youth for education by aiding financially
- A program for community awareness, creation in times of use of child soldiers
- Every child should be aware of what their rights are (through school)
- Distribute/create posters/leaflets so that children can understand their own rights (in different languages). Every child should have a copy of their rights in their own.

Recommendations

- The UN should use the law in the right place at the right time. (Enforced)
- Educate children so they are not as easily misled
- Employment available for child soldiers so that they are not tempted to return to war
- Provisions for education and training for child soldiers returning from war
- The country that forced the children to go to war, should create a program for the men and women of their country. For example: all of the men are obliged for two years of service in the military and they must be at least 21 years of age. During those years those men have the right to receive education, (military, social, political, etc) Only the women who want to go there can go, they cannot be forced to go.
- People that use children as soldiers should be tried under international laws
- Form an organized group for youth to observe/monitor/propose solutions to problems within their countries
- Pressure should be placed on the countries that support rebel factions within other countries, as well as people who side with rebels, and their families
- Punishment against people who perform war crimes against children
- Rebel leaders should not be a part of the government since they can provide the rebels with government support. (Sierra Leone). Two faced government officials
- Media needs to highlight issues in war-affected areas; there should be equal exposure of conflicts so that one conflict is not represented more. Unbiased media is needed, more laws and regulations for the media to abide by
- Ask UN to create a special commission to monitor that no child be recruited as a soldier, and if needed impose sanctions upon the perpetrator.
- Every child should have a proper birth certificate

