

Child soldiers, displacement and human security

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Children who are separated or displaced from their families or communities are, as particularly vulnerable or marginalized populations, among those at greatest risk of recruitment by armed forces and armed groups.¹ At the same time, the most vulnerable and marginalized segments of society, a category which includes child soldiers, are also most at risk of becoming 'displaced'—as refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) or asylum seekers.² This leaves thousands of children around the world doubly at risk of recruitment and displacement, and sometimes trapped in a vicious circle between the two. Yet the connections between displacement and the use of children as soldiers have remained poorly understood, seriously impeding efforts to address affected children's needs.³

This paper briefly introduces the practice of using children as soldiers and the phenomenon of displacement within the context of human security. It then explores some of the links between child soldiering and displacement. International law and standards for protecting children in these situations is described, followed by some concrete recommendations.

A human security challenge

A 'child soldier' may be defined as 'any person under 18 years of age who is a member of or attached to the armed forces or an armed group, whether or not there is an armed conflict'.⁴ The age limitation of this definition is based upon the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child—the most widely ratified convention in existence—which defines a 'child' as any person under the age of 18 (art. 1).

Research has shown that children need not necessarily be 'combatants' to be perceived as members of or attached to armed forces or groups. They may perform a variety of other tasks, both military and non-military, including: scouting, spying, sabotage, training, drill and other preparations; acting as decoys, couriers, guards, porters, sexual slaves; as well as carrying out various domestic tasks and forced labour.⁵ While some children volunteer for recruitment, many others are conscripted or forcibly recruited and may be serving against their will. Additionally, 'the lines between compulsory, voluntary and forced recruitment are often blurred. Children may be subjected to various political and economic

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pressures that provide them with little alternative than to “voluntarily” join armed forces or armed groups’.⁶ Nevertheless, their association with armed forces or groups—even if forced—puts them at serious risk of attack by perceived enemy groups, whilst the tasks they are often asked to perform are a danger to their physical and psychological well-being. Consequences for the child soldier are well documented and can include death, disability, drug addiction, serious psychological trauma, social alienation or inability to reintegrate after the conflict, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, homelessness, etc.

Global attention in recent years has been focused on gaining a better understanding of the situation of child soldiers. International legislation and standards have been moving toward the prohibition of the use of any persons under the age of 18 as soldiers⁷—evidence that the Rights of the Child are increasingly accepted as of paramount importance in all societies. They are the basic foundation for present and future human security—a concept which prioritizes the well-being of humans rather than states.

While some might argue that preserving a military defence system, even if it requires the use of recruits under the age of 18, is crucial for maintaining national or ethnic security, it is nevertheless clear that the effects of armed conflict on children are devastating, not only for children themselves but for their societies. The concept of human security developed precisely ‘as a counterpoint to the idea of *national security*...’, as Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Oscar Arias explains. ‘Slowly but surely, progressive thinkers in the security and development communities got together and began promoting the notion of human security: the idea that fortified borders, armed conflicts and ideological domination do not necessarily lead to security. Security was recast as a concept that should be applied to individuals instead of states...’.⁸

With more than 300,000 children (a conservative estimate) participating in hostilities in more than thirty countries today, and half a million serving in the armed forces or armed groups of at least eighty-five countries,⁹ the consequences for human security are cast into sharp relief. The use of children as soldiers is, in many countries, an integral part of the war machine. Children fought in most of the thirty-seven conflicts occurring around the world in 2001.¹⁰ During protracted armed conflicts they are often recruited as the number of available adults dwindles, thus enabling the conflict to continue.¹¹ Some countries have extremely large populations of under-18s and relatively low life expectancy for the population as a whole, adding to reliance on under-18s in armed forces and groups.¹² Many developed countries have been doing away with conscription, but find it increasingly difficult to maintain the necessary number of recruits, thus leading to a reduction in the voluntary recruitment age or a failure to raise the minimum recruitment age to 18.¹³

Displacement, which often occurs on a mass scale during situations of armed conflict, also affects children (like others) in a way that threatens the stability and future of society. The term displacement has generally lacked a good working definition and consistent usage; in this paper it is used broadly to refer to several populations: refugees, IDPs, asylum seekers, and in some cases separated children.¹⁴ This usage refers to all persons compelled to leave their homes due to persecution, a situation of disruption or armed conflict, and who are prevented from returning to their homes at their own will.

The UNHCR estimates that there are some 22 million displaced children in the world. Many are displaced for years on end. For example, children in the worst affected areas tend to remain internally displaced for an average of six to seven years, during which time they often lack access to adequate (or any) education, nutrition, and social stability.¹⁵ Refugees, asylum seekers and separated children often face a similar lack of access to basic resources, sometimes exacerbated by discrimination that they face as marginalized populations.¹⁶

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But what exactly are the relationships between displacement and the practice of child soldiering? What are the consequences, and how might they be ameliorated or prevented?

Displacement and child soldiering

Displacement and child recruitment are not merely parallel or unrelated offshoots of war; they are often deeply inter-related. In fact, whether during war or peace, there appears to be a strong correlation between risk of recruitment *during* displacement, as well as risk of displacement as an *outcome* of recruitment.

However, it is crucial to recognize that the most serious risk arises in countries in the midst of protracted or intense armed conflict, where the numbers of both IDPs and child soldiers often soar. Even a cursory look reveals that countries experiencing the worst trends in child recruitment (both in numbers and often brutality of treatment)¹⁷ during recent armed conflicts have also tended to produce the largest populations of IDPs and/or refugees in the world, including literally millions of children. This includes countries such as Sierra Leone, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Sudan, Burundi, Somalia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Colombia and Iraq.¹⁸

A vicious circle

Displacement may occur before, during or after a child is recruited, and at any stage of armed conflict. Recruitment may affect all types of displaced children—refugees, asylum seekers, the internally displaced, and those separated from their families or caregivers. These categories are far from mutually exclusive; children often become trapped in a cycle of vulnerability to both recruitment and displacement. Bearing this in mind, we can identify at least four basic connections between child soldiering and displacement.

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- First, beginning with the most commonly recognized connection, *former child soldiers are vulnerable to displacement.*
- Second, an increasingly recognized connection, *displaced children are vulnerable to military recruitment and re-recruitment.*
- Third, *children are displaced or relocated to prevent recruitment.*
- And fourth, perhaps the most controversial of the categories, *child soldiers are displaced as soldiers (as a general characteristic of their condition).*

FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS ARE VULNERABLE TO DISPLACEMENT

Child soldiers who escape, are captured or demobilized too often find they cannot simply return to their families and communities—and instead become IDPs, refugees or asylum seekers.

The difficulty in many cases of tracing or actually reuniting former child soldiers with family or community members is well known.¹⁹ Basic instability and endemic lack of infrastructure in conflict areas can prevent children from being physically transported back to their communities. The regional

or cross-border character of some conflicts can make reunification even more difficult, requiring greater resources, communication and cooperation across vast territories and between humanitarian agencies and governments.

Even in circumstances where children can be returned, they often have no place to return to. Family members may have been displaced themselves or even killed. Tragically, some families and communities may reject former child soldiers due to crimes committed while in service, perceived alliances with enemies, or social consequences arising from disability, psycho-social difficulties, pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other possible effects of military service.²⁰

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In some cases family members may be located in conflict areas or areas controlled by armed elements, making it too dangerous for former child soldiers to return. Former soldiers are at particular risk of re-recruitment as well as reprisals (against themselves or their families), not only by the same armed force or group that may have recruited them to begin with, but by opposing groups as well.

The risk of displacement in all these situations may be exacerbated for children who escape or run away before being formally demobilized. Formal demobilization (when available) at least offers the potential for resources, protection and programmes to aid with family reunification—although even then the difficulties of demobilization, particularly for children, are many.²¹ However, some countries such as Colombia, have taken the opposite tactic; there, national legislation obliges demobilized child soldiers to live temporarily in institutions set up by the government, typically in large cities far from the children's families, regardless of their situation.²² When children are not reintegrated into their family or community, they may remain in transit or rehabilitation centres for months and ultimately have no place to go once released. Sometimes the rate of population displacement in conflict areas can make some families nearly impossible to locate from one month to the next.²³ When this happens, unless former child soldiers remain in institutional settings, they are at risk of becoming street children, being re-recruited, or persecuted for desertion or for crimes committed by armed forces or groups they once served. While it is generally agreed that long-term institutionalization should be a last resort,²⁴ the necessary amount of time needed between demobilization and family reunification is not clear at all, and indeed may be apparent only on a case by case basis—something that resource-scarce programmes may not be able to afford.

Other child soldiers may escape or be relocated to refugee camps already overburdened and unable to cope with the needs of inhabitants. Aid workers may have difficulty grappling with the unique needs of former child soldiers—often separated from their families, rejected or persecuted by members of the community, at risk of joining a 'military element' in refugee camps, or being targeted by armed elements outside the camps.²⁵

Internally displaced former child soldiers may face the greatest risk because they may still be at the mercy of the people who caused them to be uprooted, while international aid agencies may be unable to access or even identify them.²⁶ Unlike refugees, they suffer from lack of a single, comprehensive and binding international legal framework of protection specifically for IDPs.²⁷ Instead, their rights are protected through a patchwork of various broader treaties. Legal responsibility falls primarily upon the government of the state where displacement occurs, places in which the legal protections or the infrastructure to implement them may be absent or destroyed by war.²⁸

Some former child soldiers may seek asylum in a foreign country to escape the dangers of armed conflict, including recruitment/re-recruitment, punishment for desertion or persecution for crimes committed by the armed force or group they served. Those whose refugee claims are heard on an individual rather than group basis, particularly in south-north refugee movement, explicitly encounter the controversy over children's accountability for crimes committed while serving in armed forces or

groups—whether they are criminals or victims deserving of refugee status.²⁹ This movement also forces refugee-receiving countries far from the site of conflicts to grapple with the issue of accountability—something they may wish to avoid.³⁰ The number of children in this situation is unknown, but an increasing number of cases are coming to light.

Displacement of former child soldiers also occurs in non-conflict zones, although in different ways. Some professional armies in peaceful countries have high rates of ‘absent without leave’ (AWOL) soldiers who are under 18, a proportion of whom become homeless.³¹ And in most countries, governments take no responsibility for the reintegration of former recruits into society once they are discharged. Post-traumatic stress syndrome is believed to present serious challenges to successful reintegration, and can arise from even relatively short exposure to conflict situations in foreign countries.³² While such situations may point toward a broader definition of displacement than commonly used, it can be argued that at least the situation of children under the age of 18 warrants a rethinking of what actually constitutes displacement (discussed below). This could include, for example, the situation of ‘separated’ or ‘unaccompanied’ children, including street children. These children lack family or community structures to support them when, due to their age, they remain dependent on adult care and are thus particularly vulnerable.

DISPLACED CHILDREN ARE VULNERABLE TO MILITARY RECRUITMENT AND RE-RECRUITMENT

Both inside and outside refugee and resettlement camps, displaced children are vulnerable to recruitment and re-recruitment. It is well recognized that unaccompanied or separated children, such as those within settlement camps, in the street, and other children not typically thought of as ‘displaced’, are at particular risk.³³

IDPs and refugees in camps are sometimes militarized or targeted by armed forces or groups seeking recruits—even across national borders. Former child soldiers also face the danger of separation or internment with armed elements within camps and settlements, which increases risk of re-recruitment not to mention the dangers of such associations.³⁴ Slow registration processes at camps can result in recruitment that is never documented at all, as IDPs and refugees disappear without record.³⁵ These situations have been documented in numerous cases, to the extent that UNHCR mandated special protection from recruitment for displaced populations in its Guidelines on the Protection and Care of Refugee Children (1994) and Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998). Yet protection remains difficult, both due to lack of resources and inadequate awareness of the risks and necessary steps for prevention. Cross-border recruitment among refugees far from their homeland (for example, the PKK, a Turkish insurgent group, recruited Kurdish children in Sweden, Germany and France) presents even greater logistical challenges.³⁶

Due to the general disruption caused by armed conflict, IDPs and refugees typically also lack mechanisms for protection from recruitment that would traditionally be present within their communities, including viable alternatives to recruitment such as education and employment. Food scarcity, high levels of insecurity, and sometimes even a sense of family or national/ethnic/other honour may compel children to join armed forces or groups where otherwise their communities might have discouraged or prevented recruitment. For unaccompanied children, recruitment may appear to be the sole means of ensuring food, shelter or protection. Many children join or are recruited after witnessing brutality against their own families or communities, in hope of seeking revenge or out of a sense of ideological right.³⁷

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CHILDREN MAY BE DISPLACED OR RELOCATED TO PREVENT RECRUITMENT

The phenomenon of purposeful displacement or relocation to evade recruitment is mostly known among wealthier populations. This occurred extensively during the conflicts in Lebanon and South Africa, for example.³⁸ But it also occurs in many non-conflict countries on a regular basis. This is evidenced by the fact that, in many countries, the armed forces are comprised predominantly of less educated, poorer and minority populations, often from rural areas, while wealthier or more advantaged groups can evade conscription by attending university, paying bribes, or moving abroad or to other parts of the country.³⁹

However, purposeful displacement does occur among poorer populations as well, and with potentially graver consequences. Under-18s may be unaccompanied and forced to travel in hostile regions through means that wealthier children might be able to avoid.

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Whole families are sometimes displaced to protect a child or because the loss of a child to recruitment would bring its own economic consequences (e.g. loss of labour). Sometimes whole families move because armed forces or groups extort money or food from those that do not 'contribute' a child for recruitment.⁴⁰ In such situations entire families might risk grave danger as they move through unstable regions and become displaced.

CHILD SOLDIERS ARE DISPLACED AS SOLDIERS (AS A GENERAL CHARACTERISTIC OF THEIR CONDITION)

Almost all children under the age of 18 who enlist, are conscripted or forced to serve in armed forces or armed groups become 'separated' children—removed from their families and/or home environment (only a small number serve with family members or have been born in a military camp). They are also typically displaced from their communities and normal way of life, to live in military camps and militarized environments. They are physically relocated, often at great distances from their homes and often to dangerous zones. Not only are they not free to return to their family or community at will (or lack the knowledge or support for their right to do so where legislation on conscientious objection to military service exists), they also often lack the means to return without facing serious dangers, or because their families or communities have also been displaced. They are essentially in a state of displacement and as such are even more at the mercy of the armed forces or groups that have recruited them.

Unfortunately, the commonly accepted concept of displacement has not encompassed children in these situations, even those forcibly recruited, abducted or pressured to 'volunteer' against their will. As a result, a huge population of displaced children has 'fallen through the cracks', perhaps in support of the view that militaries have the right to recruit and use children as soldiers—a view increasingly falling out of fashion.

However, it is becoming clear that adults or children who are recruited, whether forcibly or voluntarily, fit the displaced definition in so far as they are *compelled* to leave their homes and/or are *prevented* from returning at their own will, particularly during conflict situations. Additionally, because of their age, children are particularly disadvantaged; they can be more easily persuaded or threatened into joining, and humiliated or terrified to prevent them from leaving or escaping. Their greater dependence on families and communities to support and protect their development and well-being creates a situation in which the effects of recruitment may be very much like the effects of displacement on children generally—often resulting in lack of traditional protection from abuse, absence of necessary

learning and health systems, and often involving an uncertain status in relation to the government or other armed groups. In many armed forces and groups young recruits (in both conflict and non-conflict areas) are subject to harsh or even brutal treatment, including hazing practices that can result in death. Before all else they become subject to the military hierarchy, formal and informal, and whether monitored or corrupt. Most militaries even have their own internal court and penal systems, which can be unduly harsh, particularly for growing children.

We therefore need to ask whether age should be taken into account in the definition of displacement. In this respect, some people might be most easily persuaded to recognize child recruits as 'displaced' in conflict zones, particularly those at extremely young ages (9, 10, 11 years old) recruited by non-governmental groups or by government forces considered corrupt or noncompliant with international human rights standards. But the internationally accepted definition of 'the child' is not context dependent, and includes *all* children under the age of 18. Thus older children in regular armed forces must be recognized as well—for example 16 and 17 year old recruits in the United Kingdom, who are categorically denied the choice of opting-out of the military contract after a certain amount of time has elapsed, and thus prohibited from returning to live with their families or communities. What are the consequences of recruitment for these under-18s? How does it affect their development, health and psycho-social well-being, not to mention the physical risks faced during training and deployment?

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The likely resistance to recognizing all child soldiers as essentially displaced could stem in part from the long-standing tendency for double standards—being lenient about child recruitment in some contexts (e.g. government forces of Western countries that recruit 16 and 17 year olds) while taking the high moral ground on child recruitment in others (e.g. non-Western countries and particularly non-state armed groups). It could also stem from a continuing unwillingness of many governments to give up all child recruits, or the lack of capacity for aid agencies to take on another tremendous population in extremely sensitive situations. However, international legislation and standards are making such stances increasingly difficult to uphold.

Rights

There is a significant and growing body of international law and standards that can be drawn upon to prevent both child recruitment and its potential links to displacement. Briefly, the most directly applicable include the following.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child entitles all children under the age of 18 to the right to personal security generally. Its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict lays out specific standards and protections against the recruitment and use as soldiers of children under the age of 18 (art. 3) and to ensure their demobilization and rehabilitation (art. 6 and 7).⁴¹ But threats to children's security are often aggravated by lack of protection by their own government, their lack of personal identity documentation and the disruption of traditional family, clan and community structures. Threats may come from a variety of agents—including armed forces or groups, political factions, police and border guards.

Not only do displaced children have the same rights to protection and assistance as all children, they are entitled to the same general protections and rights as other displaced persons and civilians through the four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. Regarding vulnerability to recruitment, they also enjoy protection through standard setting international guidelines. In 1989 the UNHCR Executive Committee adopted Conclusion No. 59(XL), which drew special attention to the

particular need to ensure refugee children's right to protection from military recruitment. The UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection and Care of Refugee Children (1991) subsequently advocated that 'no refugee, neither adult, nor adolescent nor child, be conscripted', stating that '[F]orcing refugees to be soldiers violates the principle that refugees are a neutral population in an asylum country.'⁴² Children in particular have special right to protection, as the Guidelines explain: 'once a refugee voluntarily takes up arms or otherwise takes direct part in hostilities, (s)he can no longer enjoy UNHCR's protection. However, children who may be constrained to take up arms, even if they do so voluntarily, may as minors not be considered as responsible for their own actions.' The Guidelines specify that former combatants of any age who lay down their arms and otherwise meet the definition of a refugee are eligible for protection.⁴³

The United Nation's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) similarly provide international standards (although non-binding) on protection against child recruitment. This includes Principle 13, which states: '(1) In no circumstances shall displaced children be recruited nor be required or permitted to take part in hostilities. (2) Internally displaced persons shall be protected against discriminatory practices of recruitment into any armed forces or groups as a result of their displacement. In particular any cruel, inhuman or degrading practices that compel compliance or punish non-compliance with recruitment are prohibited in all circumstances.'

To put these rights into effect they need to be widely acknowledged and properly implemented by the wide range of actors and institutions that deal with children in armed conflict situations and with displaced persons.

Recommendations

Because displacement and child soldiering are so integrally related, measures to ameliorate one situation often improve the other. But governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations must also specifically target the links between child soldiering and displacement through more holistic and integrated approaches.

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While there is a great deal of work being done on the ground for children in a variety of situations, monitoring, access to information and dissemination of best practices is typically difficult in conflict zones and where the situation fluctuates rapidly.

International standards need to be developed and applied to recognize the various circumstances, dangers, needs and capacities of different types of displaced children (refugees, IDPs, asylum seekers and separated children) and child soldiers (whether boys or girls, combatants or non-combatants, etc.), and at different points of intervention (prevention, response, monitoring). The following recommendations are a compilation of many suggested by UNHCR and others working in the field, and should be appropriately applied to protect all displaced children and child soldiers.⁴⁴

- Governments should ratify and implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and enforce the standards it sets regarding minimum recruitment age, demobilization and reintegration.
- Armed groups should express their compliance with the Optional Protocol and enforce the standards it sets regarding minimum recruitment age, demobilization and reintegration.
- Governments should ensure universal birth registration in order to prevent recruitment of under-18s by default.

- Governments and aid organizations should work to create viable alternatives to recruitment, such as education and employment.
- Governments and aid organizations should strengthen security or staff presence where children are at risk of recruitment (i.e. escape routes, reception centres, camps or settlements) to facilitate preventative actions and to ensure rapid response.
- Governments, local governments and aid organizations should monitor and investigate or report to appropriate authorities cases of child recruitment or suspected recruitment (e.g. unexplained extended absences from school), as well as the presence of former child combatants, both in the general population and among displaced populations.
- Governments and aid organizations should prioritize protection of unaccompanied or separated children, for example organizing special accommodation or safeguards for such children and others at particular risk of recruitment.
- Governments and aid organizations should locate camps and settlements at a safe distance from the border of the country of origin or conflict area in order to minimize risk of military recruitment, and should relocate those camps at risk.
- Governments and aid organizations should ensure speedy registration procedures at camps and settlements, as well as at demobilization centres.
- Governments and aid organizations should prioritize the immediate psychological, social and physical rehabilitation of former child soldiers generally and to prevent re-recruitment.
- Governments should ensure appropriate standards of juvenile justice, and aid organizations should ensure former child soldiers are not penalized by being denied access to aid.
- Governments and aid organizations should make every effort to trace and reunite former child soldiers with their families, using long-term institutional care only as a last resort.
- Governments and aid organizations should prepare families and communities for the return of their children, helping them to cope emotionally and to respond to former child soldiers' needs, including protection from re-recruitment.
- Governments, aid organizations and international bodies such as the United Nations Security Council should condemn child recruitment and inform the public and both political and military leaders of the need to protect all children from recruitment, and to demobilize and reintegrate those recruited.
- Governments and aid organizations should promote and facilitate family and community awareness and capacities to prevent child recruitment.
- United Nations agency staff, NGO personnel, government officers and security personnel should be trained to protect children from recruitment in conflict situations.
- Governments and international bodies should work to end impunity for those who recruit children.

Conclusion

The multitude of connections between displacement and child soldiering, both threats to human security in themselves, demonstrate the tremendous challenges facing us as we try to assist these marginalized populations. The first step toward addressing their needs is simply to be aware of these connections in order to make use of existing mechanisms for rights and protections in the most holistic manner possible—thereby stopping the cycle from continuing.

In this respect, the dearth of research into the causes and consequences of child recruitment in developed countries and in peace time is one major disadvantage to our understanding of the negative consequences of child soldiering generally, its links to displacement in particular, and its broader consequences for society and human security.

There are many arguments against the use of children as soldiers, to which we should also add the following: that whether 'volunteers', conscripts or forced recruits, in conflict or non-conflict zones, regardless of the country's level of development or compliance with international standards, child soldiers are essentially displaced. Displacement for these children means increased insecurity and lack of access to choice, resources and opportunities. As child soldiers, who can not simply 'go home', it means risk of death, disability and serious psychological trauma. For their communities and societies, restoring human security and building the future will be that much harder.

Notes

1. Graça Machel, 1996, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, New York, United Nations; Rachel Brett and Margaret McCallin, 1998, *Children—the Invisible Soldiers*, Stockholm, Save the Children (Sweden); Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2001*, London, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers.
2. Save the Children (UK), 2000, *War Brought Us Here: Protecting Children Displaced within Their Own Countries*, London, Save the Children.
3. One of the only articles to directly discuss this link is Rachel Brett, 2002, 'The connection between flight and child soldiers', *Refugees* (UNHCR), vol. 1, no. 122.
4. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, *op. cit.*, p. 417.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 417; also see Machel, 1996, *op. cit.*; Brett and McCallin, *op. cit.*
6. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, *op. cit.*
7. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict prohibits: the use of under-18s in hostilities, recruitment of under-18s by non-state armed groups, conscription of under-18s and voluntary recruitment of under-16s by state forces, and urges states to raise the voluntary recruitment age to 18. ILO Convention 182 prohibits forced or compulsory recruitment of children under 18. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child prohibits the recruitment of children under the age of 18 by states.
8. Oscar Arias, 2002, 'Special Comment', *Disarmament Forum* (UNIDIR), issue 2, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research.
9. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, *op. cit.* Numbers of child soldiers are notoriously difficult to estimate, in part due to difficulties in access and monitoring, but also because the situation on the ground may fluctuate rapidly; children may be soldiers today, killed or displaced tomorrow, or may reach the age of 18 while they serve.
10. In 2001 there were thirty-seven armed conflicts in thirty countries, slightly down from forty conflicts in thirty-five countries in 2000. See Ploughshares, 'The 2002 Armed Conflicts Report', *Ploughshares Monitor* (Ontario), Spring 2002, at < <http://www.ploughshares.ca/content/MONITOR/monm02e.html>>.
11. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, *op. cit.*
12. For example in Sierra Leone, where the use of children as soldiers was previously one of the highest in the world, the average life expectancy was only 38.3 (United Nations Development Programme, 2001, *Human Development Report 2001*, New York, UNDP) and children under the age of 18 made up approximately 50% of the population. See also UNICEF, 2001, *The State of the World's Children 2000*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press.
13. In the United Kingdom, for example, the government has admitted that its recruitment campaigns actively target 16 and 17 year olds due to the shortage of recruits and difficulty of recruiting adults. See the United Kingdom report in Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, *op. cit.*
14. *Refugees* are persons outside their native lands who are unwilling to return due to well-founded fear of persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees). The 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration extended this definition to include persons who flee from war and other events that seriously disrupt public order. *Internally Displaced Persons* are those who have been forced or obliged to flee

- or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1998). *Asylum seekers* are persons who are 'seeking' legal status as refugees. The term is often used to describe those seeking refugee status in a 'third country of asylum'. *Separated* or unaccompanied children are those without their family or extended family, usually in situations outside their communities.
15. Save the Children (UK), 2000, *op. cit.*
 16. Although all are entitled to rights under various national and international laws (see Rights section of this paper), implementation of or access to tools necessary to enjoy these rights are often lacking for these vulnerable groups.
 17. Based on review of country reports in Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, *op. cit.*
 18. With a low of 175,000 internally displaced children alone in Somalia and a high of one million in Sierra Leone and two million in Sudan. See UNHCR, *Refugees by Numbers*, 2001 edition, available at < <http://www.unhcr.org>> ; Save the Children (UK), 2000, *op. cit.*
 19. For example see Isobel McConnan and Sarah Uppard, 2001, *Children—Not Soldiers: Guidelines for working with child soldiers and children associated with fighting forces*, London, Save the Children, chapter 9.
 20. Jean-Claude Legrand, 1999, *Lessons Learned from UNICEF Field Programmes For the Prevention of Recruitment, Demobilization and Reintegration of Child Soldiers*, UNICEF (mimeo.).
 21. For example see McConnan and Uppard, 2001, *op. cit.*, chapters 8 and 9.
 22. Information provided by the Colombian Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, May 2002.
 23. In Colombia in 2000/2001, up to one-fifth of ex-combatant children who were in care were not able to return to their families. See McConnan and Uppard, 2001, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
 24. Michael G. Wessells and Carlinda Monteiro, no date, *Healing, mobilization, and social integration: community-based assistance for war-affected Angolan children*, Randolph-Macon College and Christian Children's Fund, Christian Children's Fund/Angola (mimeo.).
 25. UNHCR, 1994, *Refugee Children: Guidelines on Protection and Care*, Geneva, UNHCR.
 26. Children who participate in demobilization and rehabilitation programmes are often described as 'separated' rather than displaced, but in essence their situations are extremely similar.
 27. The United Nations appointed a Special Representative on Internal Displacement, and adopted Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, but these guidelines are not binding.
 28. Although numerous NGOs work in the field to meet the needs of IDPs, they are not under any legal obligation to do so.
 29. While the number of children in this situation may be far fewer compared to the other categories, it has been less recognized or documented to date, and may currently be on the rise. See Michael Gallagher, 2001, 'Soldier Boy Bad: Child Soldiers, Culture and Bars to Asylum', *International Journal of Refugee Law*, vol. 13, no. 3.
 30. International legal standards are evolving; most recently, the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court made the recruitment of children under the age of 15 a punishable offence. An important precedent was also established with the creation of a special criminal court in Sierra Leone, which determined that those most responsible for crimes should be prosecuted (typically referring to those in command, not regular soldiers), and that juveniles should be dealt with by a separate truth and reconciliation commission.
 31. See the United Kingdom report in Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, *op. cit.*
 32. For example see Barry Donnan, 1999, *Fighting Back*, London, Mainstream Publishing.
 33. Machel, 1996, *op. cit.*
 34. See UNHCR, 1994, *op. cit.*
 35. Legrand, 1999, *op. cit.*
 36. See report on Turkey in Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, *op. cit.*
 37. Causes of child recruitment generally are described in detail by Machel, 1996, *op. cit.*; Brett and McCallin, 1998, *op. cit.*; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, *op. cit.*
 38. Brett, 2002, *op. cit.*
 39. *Ibid.* Such situations are also documented in Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, *op. cit.*
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. See endnote 7.
 42. UNHCR, 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
 43. *Ibid.*, pp. 85–86.
 44. Many recommendations can be found in UNHCR, 1994, *op. cit.*

