

Child soldiers

Increasingly, conflicts take place in towns and cities rather than two armies facing each other across a 'battlefield'. The civilians are forced to run, and many are killed.

In today's wars, around 90% of those who are killed or injured are not fighters but innocent men, women and children. Children have always suffered in wartime, but the wars now harm them more brutally than ever before – because in some places, children have been forced to become soldiers.

Why do children become soldiers?

While most child soldiers are between 15 and 18 years old, some are as young as ten. In 2006, over 300,000 children under the age of 18 were working as child soldiers. Most of these children come from poor families.

Some children join militia groups for survival. They feel it offers the chance of regular meals and maybe even an income that they can use to support their family. Other children, already orphaned by illness or violence, might join to find protection. Horribly, others are kidnapped and forced to fight and kill.

The effects on children

The children who survive the ordeal of being soldiers face serious long-term effects. They suffer from psychological trauma, and may be rejected by their community.

Their physical health suffers too, either because of injuries or because they have contracted HIV and AIDS. Without an education, and limited by injury and illness, they can't find work or earn a living. Their lives, and futures, have been lost to violence, hatred and fear.

Around the world

Since the beginning of armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998, an estimated 30,000 children have worked as child soldiers.

Between 2002-2007, approximately 7,000 children in Sri Lanka have been recruited as soldiers.

Child soldiers are also involved in armed conflict in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Liberia, Colombia and Uganda.

For more detailed information on countries see The Child Soldiers Global Report 2008 at:

www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/

Governments should not allow children under 15 to join the army. Children in war zones should receive special protection (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 38).

All children have a right to an education (Article 28) and a right to relax and play (Article 31).



In Northern Uganda, thousands of children have been used as soldiers and weapon carriers in armed conflict