



CHILD SOLDIERING

The Forgotten Form of Trafficking



In 2023, the UN Secretary General reported

- 7622 verified cases of child recruitment
- 23 countries used children in armed conflicts
- 12,460 children received protection or reintegration support in 2022



"No child should fight in a war. No child should kill. Yet thousands of children have been recruited into militias in Kasai, DR Congo."

-UNICEF, August 4, 2018

The Countries Involved 2010-2024

Countries Listed are from the annual U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report

- Afghanistan
- Burma
- Cameroon
- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Egypt
- Eritrea
- Iran
- Iraq
- Libya
- Mali
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Russia
- Rwanda
- Somalia
- South Sudan
- Sudan
- Syria
- Turkey
- Venezuela
- Yemen

The Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA) of 2008 defines child soldiers as:

Any person under 18 years of age who:

- takes direct part in hostilities as a member of governmental armed forces
- has been compulsorily recruited into governmental armed forces
- has been recruited or used in hostilities by armed forces distinct from the armed forces of a state



Any person under 15 years of age who has been voluntarily recruited into governmental armed forces. Child soldiers are forced to fight but also used as cooks, porters, spies, couriers, medics, guards, and sex slaves.



Case Affecting the DoD: In 2012, armed terrorist groups in Afghanistan recruited 47 children as child soldiers. They used most of the children to manufacture and plant improvised explosive devices and to transport provisions. At least 10 children were used to conduct suicide attacks. That year, a 16-year-old boy killed himself conducting a suicide attack at the entrance to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters in Kabul. During the attack, seven children were killed, and two others were injured.

"Child soldiering often results in future adversaries of the U.S. and its allies/partners. Each child soldier that AFRICOM is able to assist in preventing is not only one less possible future combatant but also a partnership opportunity benefiting local governments in the prevention of increasing regional violence, including coups."

-Daniel Perkins, Combating Trafficking in Persons Program Manager, USAFRICOM



"I was considered in the early stages of the recruitment and needed to prove myself [to the guerillas]. There were hundreds of children being recruited from middle school and high school. [We] were taught how to recruit others, how to identify targets, how to be look-outs, how to prepare smoke bombs, how to distribute subversive materials, and other tasks to test us. [Then they advanced some of us to] carrying ammunition and firing weapons."

-Carlos Dimas, child soldier in El Salvador



"One summer, the rebels attacked Kono two weeks after I arrived. They made me a laborer and I was forced to carry heavy loads of stolen loot from town to town."

-Ishmeal Alfred Charles, child soldier in Sierra Leone

