

# Civivc Education - 12-14 years

## Student activity sheets



### **Activity Sheet: *Child Soldiers***

Child soldiers are young people under 18 who fight in wars. During the last ten years, at least 200,000 young people have been involved in wars in different parts of the world. (Countries where child soldiers are recruited to armies or guerrilla forces are: Afghanistan, Angola, Burma, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Former Yugoslavia). It is believed that there is an increased use of children and young people in wars. It is mostly boys who fight as child soldiers, but in some parts of the world, girls are recruited too.

Sometimes children are forced to become soldiers. They might be taken out of their schools or away from their villages. But frequently children join voluntarily. When a young person's school is destroyed, or when family and friends are involved in the conflict, fighting can seem attractive. It may seem better to become a soldier than to sit at home being frightened and helpless. Some children join so that they will receive food, clothing and shelter.

However, fighting has major effects on children. They can be wounded and permanently disabled. Witnessing violence is also very traumatic. Some child soldiers suffer permanent psychological damage and are unable to lead a normal life after the conflict ends.

Children who are soldiers miss out on their education. This may prevent them finding work afterwards. Some child soldiers are also rejected by their families after a war and have to live alone.

Child soldiers are fighting in the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Liberia there is evidence that child soldiers are given drugs before they are sent to fight. In Sierra Leone at least 400 children are fighting in the Government's army. The youngest are eight years old. After six months training, the children are sent to fight. One former child soldier said that children are "the bravest and the most reckless of soldiers".

In Sierra Leone and Liberia, organisations such as UNICEF are working to stop children being recruited to fight. They also support former child soldiers in rehabilitation centres. Here they receive food and shelter, education and training for employment. The former child soldiers also get counselling to help them overcome traumatic experiences. UNICEF tries to reunite child soldiers with their



families.

**Discussion questions**

1. Give reasons why children might voluntarily join up to become soldiers.
2. Why would commanders in an army want to recruit children?
3. What would be the various things that a child soldier could be expected to do?
4. What do you think could be after-effects of being a child soldier?

# Resource Sheet: The Limits upon War

## Starters for discussion and writing

5. Argument of Karl von Clausewitz, German philosopher of war (1832):

*War is an act of force which theoretically can have no limits.*

*War tends towards the ultimate exertion of forces.*

*Moderation in war is an absurdity.*

6. General W.T. Sherman, American Civil War general, (1885): *War is hell.*

7. The limit of consent:

(a) In reply to Clausewitz and Sherman, war does have limits. War is hell when people are forced to fight, when the limit of consent is breached.

(b) In modern wars, the power of the State to wage war is such, that individuals can be coerced to fight, directly, through conscription, or subtly induced to volunteer through propaganda.

8. The laws of war include restrictions on how war may be waged. These may vary with changing technological capacity. Examples have included prohibitions on:

- feathered arrows
- dum dum bullets
- poison gas
- biological weapons

9. International humanitarian law includes restrictions on who may be killed:

(a) These do not change. Basically combat should be between combatants. The crucial test: Is a soldier or airman taking aim at another, or at an identifiable military target?

- 10.

(b) Certain classes of persons have always been considered exempt from attack: those who have not been trained to fight and those who cannot or do not fight. These non-combatants include:



- civilians
  - children
  - non-service men and women
  - medical personnel
  - clergy
- surrendering soldiers
- wounded soldiers
- captured soldiers
- members of neutral states, cities or tribes

11. These restrictions, shaped over centuries by moral, legal, philosophical, religious and political considerations are known collectively as the WAR CONVENTION. International Law recognises these principles, particularly in the form of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, and their additional Protocols, signed in 1977. Article 38 of the 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child deals particularly with children's non-combatant immunity.

12. The International Committee of the Red Cross and many United Nations and non-government organisations, actively defend these principles throughout the world.

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