



مكتب الشؤون الإنسانية والتنمية
Humanitarian, Development, and Human Rights

August 2021

Child **Soldiers** in Africa Young Warriors **in Danger**

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Study Summary on

Recruitment of Child Soldiers in Africa: The Young Warriors are at Risk

Preamble:

In the past five years, the use of child soldiers phenomenon has proliferated in nearly every conflict zone in the world and in every armed conflict. Although it is difficult to determine the exact number of these children, thousands of child soldiers serve illegally in armed conflicts around the world. It is made even crueler that girls make up an estimated 10 to 30 percent of child soldiers recruited for combat among other purposes, and are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence.

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights has released a new study entitled "The Recruitment of Child Soldiers in Africa: The Young Warriors are at Risk," which provided an overview of the troubling phenomenon of underage combatants in Africa; the number of children recruited, the reasons behind the proliferation of the phenomenon, and the countries most involved in the practice, topped by South Sudan, Nigeria, and Somalia. Besides, the study has also shed light on international and regional moves and endeavors to contain the outbreak of the phenomenon, including the United Nations countries and its bodies, the Security Council, and the African Union. As part of the solution, the study concluded with a set of recommendations made by Maat to stakeholders in the hope of preserving the lives of these youngsters.

First: an overview of the recruitment of child soldiers in Africa:

A- The number of child soldiers in Africa:

250 million boys and girls around the world live in armed conflict-affected areas. More than 8,500 children have been surely recruited until December 2020, compared to 7,747 children in 2019, most of them under the age of 7, and they were used in 14 conflicts around the world despite international

efforts to eradicate this phenomenon.¹ The phenomenon of child recruitment is widespread in many conflict areas, led by Africa.

However, it is generally noted that the number of child soldiers has decreased in three African countries, led by Somalia. Over the last five years, since 2016, 1915 children were recruited in Somalia. However, this number decreased to 1716 children in December 2020. Also, South Sudan in 2016 reported the recruitment of 1022 children, and this number decreased to 62 children. As for Nigeria, in 2016, 278 children were recruited, and by the end of 2020, it reduced to seven only.

The Second Requirement

The situation of children's rights in times of armed conflict in Africa: Notable examples

As we have already mentioned, children in conflict areas are constantly threatened by exploitation in armed conflict. Therefore, it was very important to address the most prominent examples in Africa, which has witnessed alarmingly increasing rates of child recruitment in the last five years.

First: Children of South Sudan: An Ethnic Conflict Resulted in a Disaster against Children:

South Sudan ratified the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child on January 25, 2015, thus it became obligated to implement the provisions of the Convention,² as well as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict 25 May 2000. However, over the past five years, South Sudan has recruited large numbers of children, whether by the armed forces or by opposition groups.

Second: Nigeria's children: in the front lines of terrorism

It is worth noting that Nigeria ratified the January 26, 1990, Convention on the Rights of the Child on April 19, 1991, thus Nigeria became obligated to implement the provisions of the Convention, and signed its Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children

¹ General Assembly Security Council, *Children and armed conflict Report of the Secretary-General*, 6 May 2021, <file:///C:/Users/My/Downloads/N2111307.pdf>

in Armed Conflict May 25, 2000, on September 8, 2000, and ratified it on September 25, 2012. However, the cases of child recruitment in Nigeria have been on the rise over the past five years.

Third: Child Soldiers in Somalia: Wholesale Violations!

It is worth noting that Somalia signed the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child on May 9, 2002, and ratified it on October 1, 2015, thus Somalia became obligated to implement the provisions of the Convention, and signed its Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict May 25, 2000, on September 16, 2005, and it has not yet been ratified it, but a large number of child soldiers have been documented in Somalia, especially in the last five years.

The third requirement

Efforts to Combat Child Recruitment: An Evaluative View

After reviewing the statistics and figures on child recruitment in the last five years, it was found that despite the international and regional efforts in the countries of interest (South Sudan, Nigeria, and Somalia)

- 1- Somalia is still the country with the highest record of violations of children's rights during the armed conflict. In 2018, Somalia was the first country in the world to recruit children under nine years of age into the Somali armed forces and other militias, which constitutes an explicit violation of the basic rights of the child, given the official age of recruitment of children in Somalia is 16 years old, but Somalia does not adhere to it in its armed forces, in addition to the recruitment of children by unofficial armed actors.
- 2- As for South Sudan, child soldiers recruiting parties have diversified, and in light of the conflict, the number of violations against them has increased, and children under the official age of 18 have been recruited into the armed forces, and the same is true for Nigeria, which despite its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, it did not commit to its implementation.

3- The absence of the African Union's effective role in the issue of child recruitment affects the exacerbation of the phenomenon and the increase in the number of child soldiers. The African Union Mission commits violations against children such as the recruitment and use of children, and also the United Nations verified that its members committed sexual violence such as rape and child abuse against children under the age of 15, which is taken on the African Union, which role was also limited only to holding meetings or merely holding intentions, agreements and sham campaigns without strong procedures, given that the issue of child recruitment in Africa is a vital issue in which the number of violations is increasing day by day and year after year.

4- ironically, Africa is the only continent with a child rights instrument, which is the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. However, it has arguably the worst record of protecting children's rights during the conflict, so the African Union must develop a coherent strategy and provide strong leadership to pressure states and armed groups to comply with international law. Since the AU is closer to the place where atrocities are committed, it can use its legitimacy and credibility.

5- The effective role of UNICEF in trying to communicate with the various armed groups and the concerned African authorities to demobilize children and stop their recruitment is also noted. Indeed, a number of them have been released, but these numbers are slim compared to the annual increase in numbers, which means that the gap between the numbers of released children and the number of those recruited is widening annually. The role of UNICEF in trying to establish programs for the reintegration and rehabilitation of formerly recruited children through the material, moral and psychological assistance is also noted.

Recommendations

- a) Somalia only signed the Protocol on September 16, 2005, and has not ratified it yet. Therefore, the State of Somalia must ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. Other interesting countries that have ratified the Protocol must respect and abide by its provisions.

- b) Countries of concern should stop detaining children under the age of 18 on the grounds of their association with armed groups or their parents' association with them, and stop prosecuting adults and issuing sentences such as the death penalty, as victims in the first place, and granting child protection authorities full access to these children.
- c) In light of the grave violations committed by the national forces in the countries concerned, the governments in the three countries should form a commission of inquiry, to conduct prompt, impartial, and transparent investigations into the alleged violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by these forces and hold those concerned accountable, regardless of their rank.
- d) Countries of concern should cooperate with regional organizations and local civil society organizations to strengthen capacities in child protection and work with the United Nations to implement rehabilitation and reintegration programs for formerly recruited children.
- e) Maat recommends all stakeholders - who consider all human beings without any affiliation and of any nationality even if the mentioned cases are outside their country – to think that the child recruited in the Far East is their child and the warrior child in the far west, may direct his weapon to your child in the future. Therefore, Maat Foundation invites everyone to participate and contribute to combating the recruitment and exploitation of children in armed conflicts, as today's word may become tomorrow's shield.