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***The problem of child soldier in South Sudan***

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**2023**

***Abstract:***

 Thousands of children are serving as soldiers in armed conflicts around the world. We should stress that protection children and especially children from Sudan and especially South of Sudan, from the effects of armed conflict and their suffer by being soldier in a young age is an important question, and it must be a priority for all the international community, without ignoring and missing the role of international organization such as the UNICEF , Save the children ,African Union (AU) and also the optional protocol adopted by the UN, so the situation should be faced seriously by the leader of the Sudan. Moreover, the Optional Protocol insists that parties to conflict pay particular attention to all children involved in hostilities during the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, including special programs to provide for the “psychological recovery and social reintegration” of these children into society.

So, It is important to focus on release and reintegration of children When children associated with armed forces or armed groups are captured by opposing armed forces, the special protections afforded to them by international humanitarian law by virtue of their age remain applicable.

This question is very important, for that the media will discuss it by the documentary, Katiba Banat: Sisters in Arms, which will be published in the autumn of 2023, is being produced by Adhel Productions. Katiba means "battalion" and Banat means "female" in Arabic. The documentary series focuses on the ex-child soldiers from Sudan who gathered in Canada for a reunion in October 2022.

**Key words:**

South of Sudan, Optional protocol, child soldiers, release and reintegration, the save children, UNICEF, AU (African Union).

**Introduction:**

The use of children in combats has been a peculiar thing among South Sudan armed groups. Children recruited are given different roles by the commanding officers, while the younger ones are given menial roles, the older ones are sent into battle. The use of children in combats has been documented by the Human Right Watch (2015) from page 29-51. It should however, be stated that children are compelled to partake in these battles with the forced or voluntary intake of hard drugs. Gaining freedom by escaping into neighboring states, these children not rehabilitated endanger the peaceful existence and stability of the host states. As described by Emmanuel Jal, a former child soldier now a renowned philanthropic singer, after four years of fighting in the Sudan war at the age of eight, according to him “Violence was fun, it is excitement” (TED.com, 2015).

Child soldiers fleeing with such ideology and are not being rehabilitated are serious threats to their host countries, contributing to violence and aggravating conflicts in these countries. In CAR as many as 10,000 children were engaged in the battle between the Muslim “Seleka” coalition of armed groups and the Christian “Anti-Baleka” militias from 2012-2016. The constant usage of children in battle in South Sudan has also impacted on the use of children in battle in DRC from 2016 till date, in the conflict between Kamuina Nsapu and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) (Fohlen, 2019).

As part of the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, President George W. Bush signed the Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA) into law on December 23, 2008. Leading a military unit that enlists children as soldiers is against the law. According to the law, "any person under the age of eighteen who directly participates in hostilities as a member of the governmental armed forces" qualifies as a child soldier.

Concerning South Sudan has been included on the CSPA list for eleven years running, starting in 2012. 1 For all but one of these years, the American president disregarded the CSPA's restrictions on U.S. arms sales and military aid to South Sudan. As a result, from FY2013 through FY2022, almost $250 million in such sales and aid were sent to that country. South Sudan was initially subject to the full extent of the CSPA's limitations the following fiscal year (FY2023) because the president did not grant the nation a CSPA waiver in 2022.[[1]](#footnote-1)



Figure 1: **Total Waived and Prohibited in South of Sudan**

Since the CSPA took effect.

 In the globe, South Sudan has one of the "youngest populations, with more than 70% of the population under the age of 30." South Sudan was listed on the United Nations' "shame list," a list of countries accused of abusing children during armed conflict. Since South Sudan gained its independence in 2011, the area has experienced "subnational violence," which has prompted the use of juvenile soldiers in the country. Those under 18 who enlist in armed militias and participate in warfare as fighters, spies, or suicide bombers are known as child soldiers. Some go on to work as chefs and messengers and frequently get married as children.[[2]](#footnote-2) Child soldiers are still being recruited across the globe by both armed forces and unofficial organizations. Since there is less regulation, there are more child soldiers recruited by non-state groups, which makes it more challenging to address the problem. These organizations frequently use coercion, kidnapping, or promises of money or drugs to entice youngsters into joining them. Some individuals do, however, actively join, presumably with little understanding of what involvement will entail.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Literature review:**

A modern perspective on the identification, recruitment, and reintegration of children in Sudan is offered by this case study. The chapter looks at how young people in Darfur become involved with armed forces and groups, as well as the social environment and community dynamics that may influence their choices. The chapter examines the structural foundation for a coordinated and national Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process in place of two crucial peace agreements, lessons learned, and how the reintegration of militarized children across a geographically vast, demographically disparate, and politically contentious landscape may be enhanced by local-level child protection mechanisms, providing individualized follow-up care for specific demobilized children with political resentment(Halton,2011).

“Reintegration” is the reintroduction back into society of children who were formerly associated with armed groups or armed forces in a peaceful and sustainable way. Whether they were active combatants, or scouts, cooks or porters, their experiences leave them traumatized and robbed of a childhood. Reintegration services include prolonged psychosocial support, vocational training, quality education, health care and cater to other vital needs. Reintegration efforts should be supported by long-term, multi-year funding mechanisms.

The study of reintegration of child soldiers is devoted to the UN peacekeeping operation in South Sudan which became necessary to overcome the effects of the civil war which lasted 39 years [( Machakanja](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Pamela-Machakanja),2014)It is important to focus on the difficulties that marginalized youth, particularly South Sudanese former child soldiers, face in getting access to school, which is essential for the process of reintegration. Physical accessibility is crucial to prevent the re-enlistment of former child soldiers and to potentially lessen conflict, even though the global goal for education is shifting towards teaching and learning for all while highlighting the significance of quality and sustainability (UNESCO, 2015). We list a number of outside reasons that prevent former child soldiers in South Sudan from having access to educational opportunities. The factors that are specifically investigated as barriers to successful reintegration include their life experiences, the effects of war, their socioeconomic background, and the absence of educational systems because of ongoing warfare. (Skaras ,2017).

Young populations, also, have a reputation for being aggressive and unruly, which puts society at risk. As seen most recently in the World Development Report for 2007 from the World Bank, theories concerning the hazards of a demographic "youth bulge" influence public and policy discussions about the indicators of violent conflict. By reviewing various works on environmentalist theories of environmental stimuli, socialization processes, and the dialectical relationship between structural conditions and human agency, as well as naturalist theories of young people's innate aggression and cognitive incompetence. (Boyden,2007).

Multinational peace processes have not always benefited from thorough and far-reaching demobilisation and integration plans for former combatants. Nor have they frequently been accompanied by either comprehensive disarmament or the adequate management of weapons by the relevant authorities.(Gamba,2003).

The goal of this study was to gain a general understanding of the extent, nature, and to some extent, the root causes of sexual abuse, early and forced marriage, and physical and humiliating punishment of children in southern Sudan. It sought to document children's perspectives and experiences.( Chabar, Alphaxardi, Palmqvist, Eva,2007).

Presenting their recommendations for enhancements, as well as offering direction for upcoming interventions of the southern Sudan initiative of Save the Children Sweden.

Stopping the enlistment and employment of children in armed forces is a responsibility shared by states, non-state armed entities, and the international community. This chapter emphasises the need for better monitoring and reporting of violations and exhorts nations and parties to the conflict to uphold their responsibilities under international humanitarian and human rights law. It makes the case that individuals accountable for rights abuses against children should be held accountable and that the UN Security Council should always consider how to protect children when making decisions. Additionally, every chance that arises should be used to secure the release of children, with a focus placed on them during the demobilisation process. The international community must work with organisations to convince non-state armed actors to cease recruiting children and show a strong commitment to doing so.. (Isobel McConnan and Sarah Uppard,2001).

In the past few years, the body of literature devoted to the use of child soldiers -political and security analyses, sociological explorations, case studies of specific conflicts have been growing. but largely unheard in these books are the voices of the child soldiers themselves. (Wessells ,2007).

It should be mentioned that the right to participation as established by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other international legal instruments is often regarded as largely aspirational and not yet fully realized (Alderson, 2008).

Focused attention should be given to the divergent perspectives on issues that are crucial for children's wellbeing, such as violence against children, child labour, and the employment of children in the military, which are visible in both legislative frameworks and societal attitudes. The Transitional Provisions Article 17. Every child has the right to be free from cruel and inhumane treatment under the constitution that went into effect in 2011 when South Sudan gained independence. (Ensor,2013).

There was little hope when the civil war in Sudan began, other than to prepare for imminent death. I joined the military because I had the conviction that even if I were to perish, it would be preferable to at least fight for the freedom of the nation. (Aug. 2008 interview)

This quotation is consistent with a study from South Sudan that emphasizes the need for self-defense as a driving force behind juvenile soldiers' recruitment into the SPLA (Ryan, 2012). It demonstrates that many kids believe that remaining unarmed is riskier than enlisting in the military. (Skaras ,2017).



Figure2: South Sudan age breakdown (2016).

From the graph above persons below Eighteen years of age make about fifty (50) percent of the population. For the cause of armed groups to be established, children who make up half of the population are recruited

**Case study: South Sudan**

Case Study: In 2011, South Sudan separated from the Republic of Sudan, and soon after, fighting broke out ("Global Conflict Tracker," 2017). Ethnic tensions that were caused by fighting amongst the president's guard soldiers in December 2013 resulted in the start of a conflict ("Global Conflict Tracker.", 2017). The two biggest ethnic groups in South Sudan were split by the conflict between Salva Kiir, the president and a member of the Danka ethnic group, and Riek Machar, the vice president and a member of the Nuer ethnic group ("Global Conflict Tracker.", 201 7). The two ethnic groups have engaged in rape and sexual violence since the outbreak of hostility, recruited children as troops (Sudan People's Liberation Movement, a reform party), and even damaged property ("Global Conflict Tracker.", 2017).

the biggest food crisis on record, over 50,000 deaths in just 4 years, and more than 1.6 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) ("Global Conflict Tracker.", 2017). After Syria and Afghanistan, South Sudan has the third-largest refugee problem (Global Conflict Tracker, 2017). Due to the humanitarian catastrophe in South Sudan, many people have fled to other African nations like Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya ("Global Conflict Tracker.", 2017). The ethnic division of South Sudan is depicted in Appendix V, according to information from Stratfor (2013). Contrary to South Sudan's regulations, South Sudanese military leaders have intentionally utilised youngsters in battle. ("South Sudan: Terrifying Lives of Child Soldiers.", 2016).

.Since the war's beginning in 2013, UNICEF has estimated that between 15,000 and 16,000 children have been deployed as combatants ("South Sudan: Terrifying Lives of Child Soldiers." 2016). Children were assaulted or tortured if they refused to join the group (South Sudan: Terrifying Lives of Child Soldiers, 2016). Despite the fact that so many children have been coerced into joining the military, no commander has ever been accused of or punished for violating human rights ("South Sudan: Terrifying Lives of Child Soldiers," 2016). The 2008 Child Act of South Sudan prohibits the use of children under the age of 18 as combatants, and the invasion of schools by the military has halted the education of young people ("South Sudan: Terrifying Lives of Children,2016").

It is possible that the impact of the Kingsley 16 child soldiers' involvement in the ethnically motivated fighting in South Sudan will last a lifetime (South Sudan: Terrifying Lives of Child Soldiers, 2016).

After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005, the rehabilitation of southern Sudan is still a challenging task that may be hampered or prolonged by insufficient finance and ongoing mistrust. One of the numerous issues that organisations and the communities they serve must deal with is children who have been traumatised by the horrifying legacy of Sudan's first fifty years of independence. Due to the prolonged wars in Sudan, very few people have experienced "normal" childhoods. Additionally, the study of the social and psychological aspects of rehabilitation is somewhat recent. This article evaluates the accomplishments and shortcomings of governmental and non-governmental initiatives for the rehabilitation of former slaves, many of whom were or are children, and child soldiers, many of whom are now adults. It contrasts Sudanese actions with initiatives in other African nations (Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Mozambique).(Fegley ,2008).

 South Sudan gained its independence in 2011. After escalating political power conflicts between President Salva Kiir's army, the armed opposition Sudan People's Liberation Army, and other smaller armed organizations, the nation descended into civil war in 2013. Once authorities started arming neighborhoods, the violence worsened. The South Sudanese conflict, along with skepticism over government spending and corruption, led to a decline in foreign aid, which was especially detrimental for a nation that depended so largely on it.

Overall, the war has had terrible humanitarian effects, with the U.N. stating that the country is currently experiencing the worst hunger and famine since it became independent. Armed groups and security forces continue to oppress civilians, particularly women and children.

Experts estimate that there were between 7,000 and 19,000 child soldiers in South Sudan as of February 2021.[[4]](#footnote-4)

 On 26 February 2020 ,15 children connected to the military and armed organizations in South Sudan were freed, according to UNICEF. The youngsters, who ranged in age from 16 to 18, were captured as prisoners of war in 2019 amid fighting in the nation's north. Their time as prisoners, members of an armed gang, and beginning of a new life all ended today.[[5]](#footnote-5)

 Child soldiers have a long history of being utilized in war in South Sudan. Because the crime is not strictly monitored, it is challenging to estimate the specific amount. Armed forces in South Sudan hire more boys than girls. According to Their world, factors like poverty, displacement, or family separation—all of which are present in South Sudan as a result of the civil war—make youngsters more likely to be recruited as child soldiers.

 Those under 18 who enlist in armed militias and participate in warfare as fighters, spies, or suicide bombers are known as child soldiers. They had to go through military training. It was hard because as a child, he has nothing to do in the armed group. There is no food, no medicine, no blanket to keep you warm during the night. He has to carry a 7-kilo gun, walk many kilometers and move day and night.[[6]](#footnote-6)

 In South Sudan, UNICEF is essential in addressing the abuse of children. Each child must go through this procedure, which entails their release and reintegration, in order to stop the normalization of child soldiers. The South Sudanese government has pledged to stop using children in war by signing and ratifying a number of legal instruments, including the South Sudan Child Act and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

 All parties to the war in South Sudan are urged by UNICEF to reaffirm their commitment to protecting these rights and preventing the use of children as soldiers. International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers fell on the same day as the release. UNICEF estimates that tens of thousands of boys and girls under the age of 18 are used in conflicts globally.[[7]](#footnote-7)

 Former child soldiers are reunited with their families with the help of Save the Children's family tracing and reunification teams. The organization collaborates with local authorities, educators, and the police to establish "safe spaces" for the safety of children who are refugees or who have been displaced as a result of the war.

 There is an Optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, issued in 2000, adopted by the UN General Assembly, to protect children from recruitment and use in hostilities is a commitment that:

States will not enlist soldiers under the age of 18 or conscript children under the age of 18 to fight on the battlefield. States will demobilize anyone under 18 conscripted or used in hostilities and will provide physical, psychological recovery services and help their social reintegration. States should take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment, including legislation to prohibit and criminalize the recruitment of children under 18 and involve them in hostilities.

 The Protocol was adopted by the vast majority of nations in the globe and went into effect in 2002.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Initiatives by the African Union to Combat Child Soldiering in South Sudan

The only regional human rights pact that addresses children's civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights is the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). The Organisation of African Union, which in 1990 changed its name to African Union, accepted the ACRWC. It becomes effective in the year 1999. The ACRWC narrates the rights that children in Africa are entitled to, much like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) does. This charter was created because AU members thought it was important to specify children's rights in Africa in light of its cultural norms. The ACRWC was ratified by as of 2018. (Ike, Onuegbu, Onuh,2020)

Six AU member states, including the Central Democratic Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Somalia, South Sudan, and Tunisia, have signed the ACRWC but have not ratified it (African Union Report, 2019).

The charter specifically forbade the recruiting of children as soldiers under Article 22a, among other rights outlined for the welfare of minors. It reads, "Children should not be enlisted as soldiers." The AU Committee has been unable to effectively intervene against the ongoing enlistment of children by armed forces or organisations in South Sudan due to the South Sudanese government's failure to ratify the Charter.Due to this restriction, more than 17,000 children have been estimated to be recruited by both government and opposition forces since the conflict began in December 2013.

## Figure 3: Estimated Number of child soldiers recruited in South Sudan from 2013 to 2018

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Years** | **2013-2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017-2018** |
| **Total number of children recruited** | 9,000 | 2,596 | 1,300 | 3000 |

**Conclusion:**

The economic reasons and failed social systems are factors that lead to recruitment ([Honwana, 2006](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/S1479-358X20140000012012/full/html#bib14); [Singer, 2006](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/S1479-358X20140000012012/full/html#bib30); [Wessells, 2006](https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/S1479-358X20140000012012/full/html#bib39)). The presence of war and living in poverty are both situations that are closely linked to economy and a breakdown in social systems.

 The consequence or effect of Child Soldiering, as children have, increasingly, become victims and perpetrators of warfare (Redress, 2006). The proportion of Civilian casualties in conflict zones has continuously increased in the twentieth century. With an estimate of more than 90% casualties, about half of the victims are children (UNICEF, 2002). More than two million people have died as a result of directly from armed conflict, with over Six (6) million children being seriously injured, and about 8000-10000 children killed by landmines every year. Collier (2003) specifies, according to World Bank report, that the mortality rate of children below the age of five (5) has significantly increased with the existence of war actions.

Child soldiers subsequently have suffered from traumatic experiences that keep them mentally incapacitated. This trauma is caused as a result of their experience, perpetrated acts, torture, separation from family, insufficient adult care, abduction, inadequate shelter, etc. (Ike, Onuegbu, Onuh,2020)

 Preventive measures must focus on children's rehabilitation and reintegration, and the need to address the root causes that promote the recruitment of children in armed conflict, because the recruitment and use of children still remains the most widely reported grave violation in South Sudan.

 Former child soldiers' reintegration is a protracted process that requires substantial assistance from the international community. We aid in establishing a peaceful future for their nation by providing aid to youngsters who have been severely impacted by conflict.[[9]](#footnote-9)

 Children in Sudan have already experienced unimaginable amounts of bloodshed and suffering for decades. The first critical steps to immediately assure complete protection of the children in the nation are to stop hostilities and deescalate tensions. "The best way to put an end to abuses against children is still via peace. We urge all parties to prioritize peace talks and to do so with child protection clauses in accordance with the Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in circumstances of armed conflict, they said in their conclusion.[[10]](#footnote-10)

So many actions have been taken, nationally and internationally to restrict the usage of children as soldiers in South Sudan. The degree of success recorded can be attributed to the effective cooperation among governments, international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Actions have been carried out by these institutions in line with treaties like- the Four Geneva Convention (1949), the Addition Protocols I and II to the Geneva Convention of 1949 (1977), the Convention on the Right of the Child (1989), the Local Agreements (e.g. the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child- 1990), the Convention 182 of the International Labor Organization (1999), the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.( Ike, Onuegbu, Onuh,2020).

 In the end, There are children soldiers dream to be a peacemaker and a youth leader and to acquire a thorough knowledge on conflict resolution and peacebuilding and to go back to South Sudan and help their people to face the conflict and the violence. And they want to be part of the solution. child soldiers are represented as passive victims, while the reality of their life shows their capacity for action and decision.

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