

# Girl Soldiers

## The Other Face of Sexual Exploitation and Gender Violence

WALTRAUD QUEISER MORALES, PHD\*

A simple perusal of the hundreds of online resources on “child soldiers” will reveal that in the first decade of the twenty-first century, some of the worst abuse and exploitation of these victims is under way.<sup>1</sup> Mankind has made extraordinary progress over the last 300 years in enhancing sensitivity to and awareness of, as well as making policy and passing legislation directed against, many of the most egregious violations of human rights, ranging from battery and torture to outright slavery. Both international humanitarian and human-rights laws have formally and explicitly recognized children’s rights and extended special protections.<sup>2</sup> Recently, more governments have acceded to the United Nations’ Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, at this very moment, according to recent appeals by non-governmental organizations such as World Vision, the International Rescue Commission, and the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, as well as major intergovernmental organizations, including the United Nations and specialized agencies such as the United Nations Children’s Fund, millions of children around the world not only are the victims of violent conflict and war but also have been forced to become child soldiers. The International Rescue Committee has described the systematic atrocities committed against the world’s children as no less than a slow “genocide” or

---

\*A professor of political science at the University of Central Florida, the author received her BA from the Catholic University of America and her MA and PhD from the Graduate School of International Studies of the University of Denver. Dr. Morales is a generalist in international affairs and comparative politics and a specialist in Latin America (emphasizing the Andean region), third world development, and comparative revolutionary change. Published widely in her specialty, she has authored or coauthored five books, the most recent *A Brief History of Bolivia*, 2nd ed. (Facts on File, 2010). Dr. Morales has received two grants from the Fulbright Program and another from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

“holocaust” that has yet to grab the world’s full attention and prompt an organized response.<sup>4</sup>

### Underlying Causes and Consequences of Using Girl Soldiers

Conditions of civil war and armed conflict undermine the ability of families and communities to protect young members of both sexes—but especially very young girls, who are socially, culturally, and often religiously restricted, even in peacetime. Moreover, a large number of these female victims of social chaos and violence become orphans and refugees, desperately struggling to survive the hunger, pain, and disease that terrorism, revolution, and war bring. These girls are easy prey in a cycle of abuse. Global conflicts rob them of their childhood, humanity, and very lives. Sources estimate that over 300,000 children younger than 18 have been caught up in over 30 global conflicts.<sup>5</sup> Of these, some 40 percent or 120,000 child soldiers are girls, whose plight is often unrecognized since international attention has largely focused on boy soldiers.<sup>6</sup> Generally, when people speak of child soldiers, the popular image is that of boys rather than the thousands of girls who comprise the less visible “shadow armies” in conflicts around the world. Girls not only serve as active fighters but also perform other military functions, from intelligence and medical support to cleaning and cooking. Worse, a number of young—even prepubescent—girls become sex slaves to service the forces and/or are coerced into pseudomariages with commanders of armed groups.<sup>7</sup>

According to the United Nations and Save the Children, key conflict areas where the tragic problem of boy and girl soldiers has been and remains acute include Colombia, East Timor, Pakistan, Uganda, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and western and northern Africa.<sup>8</sup> However, conflict-induced atrocities against boys and girls are not entirely new. In wars historically and in modern conflicts such those in Afghanistan, Chechnya, the former Yugoslavia, Haiti, Liberia, Peru, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone, recruitment and abuse of child soldiers have occurred. Like the boys, typically the majority of girl soldiers are abducted or forcibly recruited into regular and irregular armed groups, ranging from government-backed paramilitaries, militias, and self-defense forces to anti-government opposition and factional groups often based on ideological, partisan, and ethnic or religious affinity. A minority of girls, especially, may

seem to join irregular armies “voluntarily,” but most have no choice and are desperate to escape the violence and abuse around them, enlisting simply to survive.

Once militarized and hardened by brutality, young children of both sexes are often compelled to carry guns and kill—sometimes other children and even family members and relatives. In horrifying interviews, former child soldiers have revealed that they had no choice other than kill or be killed. Often commanders of armed groups prefer child soldiers because young children, especially girls, are more obedient, vulnerable, and malleable, and their moral codes are unformed and readily manipulated. Children can be indoctrinated early to become the next generation of terrorists and rebels as well as a sympathetic support base in civil society. And because most child soldiers are unpaid and require less food, they provide quick, cheap fighter power on demand. With the proliferation of light but deadly arms, even very young girls can serve as combat soldiers. In one report, a humanitarian worker in Liberia in 2003, near the end of the 10-year civil war, reported seeing a “child soldier so small that the barrel of her gun was dragging on the ground.”<sup>9</sup> Both very young girls and boys can perform essential support functions and free up more seasoned, adult male warriors. Consequently, girl soldiers, no less than boy soldiers, have become disposable cannon fodder in the front lines of third world armies, terrorist groups, and guerrilla insurgencies.

Conditions of political and social instability and violence are often caused by or accompanied by overpopulation, scarcity, and environmental devastation such as drought, flood, famine, and other natural and man-made disasters.<sup>10</sup> Some of the worst ecological devastation and human-rights abuses have occurred in the “failed states” of Africa; however, the Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America have had their share of intrastate violence. Hans Magnus Enzensberger coined the term *molecular civil wars* to describe the breakdown of the state and the out-of-control civil wars wherein young and desperate children prey on the helpless and each other.<sup>11</sup> In his view, these irregular wars not only are rife in the economically disadvantaged developing world but also are expressed in the brutal gang violence and urban warfare that beset major industrialized and postmodern societies around the globe. Experts also have noted that these “low-intensity armed conflicts shade directly into terrorism and

the illegal traffic in weapons and drugs,” blood diamonds, rich minerals, and human and sexual slavery.<sup>12</sup> These conditions victimize the young and foster a culture of violence and lawlessness that may become an attractive—as well as the only viable—alternative for young boys and girls, who will become traumatized and more readily “socialized” into the next generation of insurgents, support forces, and warriors. Globally, entire generations of children have already been decimated by this crisis, especially young girls—once the future mothers, caregivers, and familial anchors within these societies.

### The “Shadow Armies” of Girls

Experts indicate that half the ranks of progovernment paramilitaries and rebel soldiers involved in the raging violence and civil wars in Africa consist of recruited or abducted child soldiers and that about half of these are girls.<sup>13</sup> In Uganda, for example, human-rights organizations have documented the abduction of tens of thousands of terrified children from impoverished villages during the night and their induction into rebel guerrilla armies like the Lord’s Resistance Army operating in the north. The International Rescue Committee documents that more than 30,000 children have been forced into military slavery during the decades-long civil war still raging against the Ugandan government, and that 1.7 million people or some 80 percent of the population has become displaced. In the midst of this migratory turmoil, young girls, who flee their homes and communities, are especially at risk since they are routinely raped and forced to become sex slaves to rebel commanders and troops at large.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, where conflict has rekindled recently, has also experienced horrific war-related abuses of its children. There, despite the official end of the 1998–2003 civil war among four competing rebel factions, a decade of fighting, volcanic eruptions, outbreaks of the deadly Ebola virus, and massive refugee displacement internally and into neighboring countries have provided conditions conducive to the routine kidnapping and abuse of young girls as child soldiers and sex slaves. All the battling groups have recruited and abducted child soldiers, who have made up some 40 percent of the armed groups. At least 30,000 children have engaged in active combat there. Thousands of girls, currently as many as 12,500, are in armed groups and serve these irregular Congolese forces in

support and sexual roles.<sup>14</sup> As long as the fighting continues, the process of disarmament and demobilization of girl (and boy) soldiers will remain stalled.

The Darfur region of the Sudan is another critical area of internal warfare, abuses against women and young girls, and the forcible abduction of child soldiers. Efforts by national governments as well as both private and international agencies to resolve this crisis and protect the young and vulnerable have proven unsuccessful. Since the outbreak of renewed rebellion in 2003, brutal attacks against African ethnic farming groups by the Janjaweed—a proxy, progovernment militia of Arab nomads—have killed over 200,000 people, and 2.5 million have fled, crowding into refugee camps.<sup>15</sup> In 2004 approximately 17,000 children served in the forces of the government, armed militias, and opposition groups; some 2,500 to 5,000 child soldiers served in the Sudan People's Liberation Army alone, despite the fact that the insurgent group claimed to have demobilized 16,000 child fighters, including an estimated 600 girls, between 2001 and 2004.<sup>16</sup> Also, in Liberia during the civil war between 1989 and 1997, an estimated 21,000 children were part of armed groups, and some 5,000 girls actively fought in the war. Conflict resumed in 2000, and by the end of 2003, the number of girl soldiers had increased to 8,500 as violence raged in neighboring countries, despite a peace agreement in August 2003.<sup>17</sup>

By early 2008, new conflicts in Kenya and Chad were degenerating into the lawless chaos of rapacious governmental and private armies of the Congo or Liberia and the tribal and ethnic genocide of Rwanda. In Kenya, a land of relative prosperity and stability, roving bands of machete-wielding young men and boys have committed atrocities against the rival ethnic groups, killing women and children in the rich Rift Valley region.<sup>18</sup> Armies of "glue-sniffing street children" in the volatile slums of major cities sifted through the destruction left from the looting and violence of angry mobs. To date, some 800 people have been killed, and at least 300,000 displaced. Unless conditions stabilize, these rampaging youths and homeless boys and girls are potential child armies in the waiting.<sup>19</sup> Despite oil revenues in Chad—one of the poorer, less stable African countries—fighting among rebel groups against the government and a four-year, undeclared proxy war between Chad and the Sudan have the potential to escalate into a wider regional conflict. The crisis in Chad, a country with a porous border and similar political and ethnic divisions, is an extension of the conflict in Darfur.

The army of Chad's authoritarian president has incorporated child soldiers into its ranks, some as young as nine years old and hardly taller than the automatic weapons they carry. A Human Rights Watch report of 2007 confirmed that boys and girls have been pressed into fighting for both government and rebel armies.<sup>20</sup>

The situation is also critical for girl soldiers across Asia. In South and Southeast Asia, girls joined armed groups "to escape domestic servitude, forced marriages and other forms of gender-based discrimination."<sup>21</sup> For example, in Sri Lanka, where the separatist insurgency led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has recently revived, some 43 percent or 21,500 of the 51,000 child soldiers involved in the conflict are girls.<sup>22</sup> Reportedly, 128 of 180 Tamil Tiger guerrillas killed in one government attack were young girls.<sup>23</sup> The civil war has escalated in the last two years with renewed attacks and bombings, one by a girl suicide bomber in February 2008.<sup>24</sup> In the Philippines, girls are also regularly recruited as soldiers in the various guerrilla insurgencies active for decades in that country. However, in both Sri Lanka and the Philippines, girl recruits have not been sexually abused, and, as in some other armed groups, intimate relations between men and young women are forbidden without the approval of the woman/girl and the commander of the armed group.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, in Afghanistan, girls have been forced into marriages with fighters in factional and clan-based militias and armed groups.<sup>26</sup> In Nepal both armed Maoist rebels and government forces have recruited, abducted, and tortured children. The Maoist People's Liberation Army forcibly recruited young girls (and boys) into its "People's War," abducting them from schools and subjecting them to political indoctrination. In some cases, girls and boys were never released but given arms training and placed in combat zones or used in other support roles. Some 2,000–4,000 children were recruited between 1996 and 2004, including a number of girl soldiers, who, in some cases, reported sexual abuse. In turn, government forces abducted, questioned, and tortured boy and girl soldiers as suspected terrorists.<sup>27</sup>

Although not as widespread or pernicious a problem as in Africa and Asia, in Central America and Latin America since the 1960s, both guerrilla and paramilitary groups have incorporated child soldiers—including young girls, primarily from peasant and indigenous groups—into their ranks either by enticement or duress. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Sendero Luminoso or

Shining Path guerrilla movement in Peru had a significant contingent of young females, some forcibly recruited; and the various guerrilla and revolutionary groups in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua included girl soldiers. With the end of insurgencies, many of the girls have been pulled into juvenile gangs. In a number of cases, these girls may have been voluntary recruits drawn to a popular cause or seeking to escape the general poverty, conflict, and/or reprisals by state security forces and paramilitaries. However, voluntary enlistment did not always protect them from abuse and exploitation, nor were they free to leave. Unfortunately, statistics are hard to come by since leaders of irregular forces and armies do not advertise the role of child soldiers, much less young girls, fearing prosecution for war crimes.

In Colombia, after the rise of major guerrilla movements in the 1960s and 1970s, a growing number of girl soldiers and female cadres joined or were forced into the ranks of guerrilla, narco-terrorist, and paramilitary groups.<sup>28</sup> The more prominent armed groups include the antigovernment rebels of the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, or National Liberation Army), and progovernment proxy forces of the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, or United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia), respectively.<sup>29</sup> Of approximately 14,000 child soldiers recruited by paramilitary and armed opposition groups, the number of women and girls was quite high. For example, in the ranks of the FARC and ELN, women and girls constituted up to 50 percent of all recruits. In 2001 a United Nations official condemned the use of more than 2,500 girl soldiers, primarily in the FARC, and their rape and sexual abuse by commanders.<sup>30</sup> Although paramilitaries tended to have fewer women and girls in their ranks, girl soldiers attached to armed groups on all sides of the civil war were treated harshly, reporting that they were often forced to use contraceptives and undergo abortions.<sup>31</sup>

All parties in the 40-year Colombian civil war claimed to respect international human-rights law, including that affecting children and women. Yet the tactic of irregular war itself has eroded the distinction between combatants and civilians.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, defenseless peasants and indigenous peoples (even from neighboring countries) have been victims of marauding private armies out to conquer and appropriate territory and resources. Mas-

sacres have occurred on all sides—especially of women and children—and millions of displaced Colombians have become both internal refugees and residents of camps in bordering states. Of these, over half are under 18 years of age and considered children under current human-rights law.<sup>33</sup> Indeed during the worst days of the drug wars in Colombia, children were recruited into juvenile gangs of *sicarios* (boy killers) to serve as “cannon fodder for the Medellín cartel,” providing logistics, intelligence, and propaganda support.<sup>34</sup> Paramilitaries continued this practice and systematically recruited child soldiers into their urban militias, many of which have become Mafia-like drug gangs. Also, waves of violent “social cleansing” campaigns have targeted urban “delinquents” and street children, including young girls forced into prostitution.<sup>35</sup> After the increase in kidnapping in the 1990s, women and girls, whom Colombian guerrillas held for months and years as a form of extortion and as a means of financing their cause, sometimes became recruits as well as sexual partners and “wives” to soldiers and commanders.<sup>36</sup>

### Special Challenges of Disarming and Rehabilitating Girl Soldiers

These cases demonstrate that during both internal and external warfare, irregular (and even regular) armies systematically and intentionally employ gender-based violence—or violence that targets women and female children disproportionately—as an effective instrument of terror, psychological warfare against communities, and outright ethnic cleansing.<sup>37</sup> Gender-based violence can be directed against young girls and females from all cultures and socioeconomic classes although the poor and dispossessed are more readily targeted. Armies target women and young female children because they are the most vulnerable and powerless generally—especially in underdeveloped and conflict-ridden third world countries. Particularly in Africa, for example, human-rights workers have witnessed systematic and unspeakable violence against women and very small children; moreover, they have encountered rape victims as young as 14 months. In desperate situations of survival, girl soldiers may be forced to barter their sexual services to avoid greater abuse and mutilation or simply to remain alive for another day or week. Indeed the International Rescue Committee and United Nations human-rights organizations report the use of rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and “marriage,” and general violence and mutilation as typical

weapons employed against girl soldiers worldwide. Clearly these tactics rise to major human-rights abuses and war crimes in some situations, but they also threaten the public health and safety of the populations where they occur.<sup>38</sup> In Africa, as elsewhere, the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as other sexually transmitted illnesses has been fueled by indiscriminate, gender-based violence. Other negative consequences include high maternal and infant mortality rates (as well as subsequent suicides by mothers) and the abandonment of unwanted children.<sup>39</sup>

*Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict*, a report published in 2005 by the Save the Children Fund, emphasized not only the terrible abuse against female children but also the special difficulties in correcting the consequences of human-rights violations and reintegrating girls into their communities. Programs of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) have had less success with girl soldiers because females are regularly met with censure and rejection. They find themselves in a no-man's land, "trapped between recrimination from the armed group if they leave and from the community if they return home."<sup>40</sup> Many girls, according to the report, are "too scared to stay and too scared to leave" armed groups, and many never have a choice.<sup>41</sup> Families and communities reject them as "unclean," "immoral," or even as "whores" who have sullied the family's and community's honor. Girls returning with babies found even greater resentment and isolation in their communities. Once the former girl soldiers were stigmatized as promiscuous and trouble making, and without a social-support network or livelihood, the cycle of gendered victimization and abuse often continued, compelling them to turn to the sex trade in order to survive. Without the community's protection and/or international intervention, they may find themselves at greater risk for recruitment yet again by armed groups.

The disarmament and rehabilitation of girl soldiers have been slow and difficult in Colombia. One researcher concluded that between 1988 and 1994, approximately 25 percent of rehabilitated guerrillas were women although fewer of them participated in fighting and high-risk roles.<sup>42</sup> Fewer girl soldiers and women have died in the civil war, but more women have been displaced and become triple victims. They or their families have suffered violence, endured the loss of their means of subsistence, and undergone social and emotional uprooting.<sup>43</sup> As with girl soldiers and female

victims elsewhere, this victimization made it especially difficult to demobilize and reintegrate them into society. For one reason or another, society more readily stigmatized women as “responsible for their own disgrace.”<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the psychological, cultural, and social impediments, the report also noted the chronic underfunding of DDR programs compared to the enormous need, especially in Africa. The study indicated that in Sierra Leone alone over 20,000 children were entitled to a DDR package, which included money for three years of school or skills-training fees. However just 4.2 percent of girl soldiers there and 2 percent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo received the benefits of the DDR process.<sup>45</sup> Many girls interviewed by Save the Children feared the scrutiny and stigma and were uncomfortable with the militarized orientation of the process. Unfortunately, the number of weapons decommissioned largely determined the program’s success. As funds became scarce and dried up, only girls who could prove that they knew how to fire a gun received meager assistance packages—usually a bit of food, water, plastic sheeting for shelter, and sometimes a small, one-time payment and a ride home. Moreover, as long as conflicts continued to rage, these girls could not pursue their studies or new livelihoods but often remained subject to further violation and forcible recruitment; indeed, irregular forces routinely targeted schools and training centers as prime “hunting grounds” for new child soldiers.

### Key Role of the International Community

*Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict* criticized international efforts on behalf of girl soldiers, citing the fundamental problem of gender discrimination: girls “face discrimination on a daily basis—from their fellow soldiers, commanders, fellow citizens, governments—and perhaps most shocking of all—from the international community.”<sup>46</sup> The girls themselves identified key ways that the international community could help further their reintegration into their communities: mediation and emotional support; assistance in education, training, and employment; and medical care to treat sexually transmitted diseases and promote reproductive health. Further, the report concluded that funds should continue to support the release of children from armed groups, even during conflict; that community development was essential to the DDR program for children; that a special fund should target the specific needs of girls and remain independent of

any formal DDR or political process; and that “all states should ratify, enforce, monitor and report on international treaties to protect children,” especially the recent United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol.<sup>47</sup>

Although the disarmament of girl soldiers is essential, equally important to a solution is their reintegration into communities. An important first step involves confronting misconceptions head-on and recognizing the central role that gender and gender bias play in the process. The image of girl soldiers has emphasized gender-based violence (rape and sexual captivity) and tended to ignore research showing that in a number of countries, especially during recent conflicts in Africa, significant numbers (up to half) of girl soldiers have been active fighters. On the other hand, this problem also includes girls in noncombat and military-support roles; when funding falls short, these girls in particular, as well as girls in general, are the most disadvantaged.<sup>48</sup> The report recommends that a minimum of 40 percent of funding be used for the DDR of girls and that girls in particular require and should receive special assistance outside the formal DDR process.<sup>49</sup>

The global campaign to end the tragedy of girl soldiers has intensified. In October 2006, a new study by the United Nations secretary-general—*Ending Violence against Women: From Words to Action*—and the General Assembly resolution of December 2006 to increase “efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women” represented important steps. Also, in November 2007, five former girl soldiers from Uganda, abducted in their teens and now aged between 20 and 28 years, visited Radhika Coomaraswamy, the special representative of the secretary-general for children and armed conflict at UN headquarters in New York to urge more international support for women’s programs. As leaders in a community-and-peer-based nongovernmental organization known as Empowering Hands, which facilitated the return of former Ugandan girl soldiers to their communities and civilian life, the women demonstrated not only solidarity with other girl soldiers but also hope for a humane solution.<sup>50</sup>

In the final analysis, the crisis of girl soldiers is extensive, complex, and long term. It represents an integral component of gender-based violence and the militarization of societies. No community or society is immune; even developed and relatively conflict-free countries have come under criticism for the recruitment of girls younger than 18 years of age into their

armed forces.<sup>51</sup> The solution to the exploitation of girl soldiers will require not only sensitivity and understanding but also the consistent enforcement and prosecutorial and financial commitment of home governments and of the international community. Moreover, at the root of the problem of girl soldiers lie endemic conflict and the absence of life alternatives; until a majority of countries can achieve socioeconomic stability, most solutions will remain tentative.<sup>52</sup>

## Notes

1. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has defined *child soldier* as "any child—boy or girl—under 18 years of age, who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including, but not limited to: cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups other than family members. It includes girls and boys recruited for forced sexual purposes and/or forced marriage. The definition, therefore, does not only refer to a child who is carrying, or has carried, weapons." See "Factsheet: Child Soldiers," UNICEF, accessed 13 January 2008, <http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/childsoldiers.pdf>. Covering the period April 2001 to March 2004, *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004* (London: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004), is a follow-up to the 1996 UN report on child soldiers—the so-called Machel Report by Graça Machel, the UN secretary-general's expert on the impact of armed conflict on children. According to the *Global Report*, child soldiers are involved in active conflicts in 28 countries and territories (occupied Palestinian territories), the majority in Africa (13), Asia (seven), and the Middle East and North Africa (six); only Colombia in the Americas and the Caribbean; and only Russia in Europe and Eurasia. See the Machel Report, "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children," 26 August 1996, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N96/219/55/PDF/N9621955.pdf?OpenElement>; and the Machel Strategic Review Report, "Will You Listen? Young Voices from Conflict Zones," 2007, [http://www.un.org/children/conflict/\\_documents/pdf/Will\\_You\\_Listen\\_english.pdf](http://www.un.org/children/conflict/_documents/pdf/Will_You_Listen_english.pdf).

2. Notable are the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention and the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. For a comprehensive overview, see Rachel Harvey, *Children and Armed Conflict: A Guide to International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law* (Montreal: International Bureau for Children's Rights, 2003), 25–35, [http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story\\_id/000044.pdf](http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/000044.pdf). This is a joint project with the Children of Armed Conflict Unit of the Children's Legal Centre and Human Rights Centre of the University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom.

3. The age of 18 has posed a particular dilemma for a number of countries where persons younger than 18 can volunteer and be recruited for military service. As a consequence, some governments have proven reluctant to sign international agreements that would ban military service for anyone under that age (some countries sign with reservations). The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2002) raised the standard age of 15 years, as originally set in the convention as well as the 1949 Geneva Conventions and subsequent 1977 Additional Protocols. States that become party to the 2002 Optional Protocol must increase the age for voluntary military recruitment to 18. Also in 2002 the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court entered into force, which made "the conscription, enlistment or use of children under 15 in hostilities by national armed forces or armed groups a war crime." See "Factsheet: Child Soldiers"; and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict," accessed 13 January 2008, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc-conflict.pdf>.

4. See various online reports of the International Rescue Committee, <http://www.theirc.org/resources/irc-cypd-child-soldiers-fact-sheet-august-2007.pdf>; "Forced to Flee: Uganda's Young 'Night Commuters,'" accessed 18 January 2008, <http://www.theirc.org/where/page-28828228.html>; and "Children Targeted in

Uganda's Horrific, Overlooked War," 17 March 2004, accessed 18 January 2008, [http://www.theirc.org/news/children\\_targeted\\_in\\_uganda-s\\_horrific\\_overlooked\\_war.html](http://www.theirc.org/news/children_targeted_in_uganda-s_horrific_overlooked_war.html).

5. Most sources cite 300,000 as the estimated number of children involved. See Matt Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict* (London: Save the Children Fund, 2005), 1; "Factsheet: Child Soldiers"; and International Rescue Committee, "Child Soldiers Fact Sheet," accessed 13 February 2008, <http://www.theirc.org/resources/irc-cypd-child-soldiers-fact-sheet-august-2007.pdf>. However, these numbers are in flux as conflicts decrease or intensify. Documents and fact sheets by the UN and UNICEF also have estimated that 250,000 children are involved in conflicts worldwide. Similarly, the number of conflicts has varied from 28 to 30 countries (see endnote 1 above) and even higher in earlier reports. A recent UNICEF press report notes that, "according to the new Secretary General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict, the number of armed groups and forces identified as using children has climbed from 40 in 2006 to 57 in 2007." See "Number of Armed Groups or Forces Using Child Soldiers Increases from 40 to 57," UNICEF, 12 February 2008, accessed 14 February 2008, [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_42833.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_42833.html).

6. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 1. See also Joe De Capua, "120,000 Girls Believed to Be Child Soldiers," *Voice of America News*, 25 April 2005, accessed 13 January 2008, <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2005-04/2005-04-25-voa27.cfm>; and Jonathan Steele, "Armies of Girls Caught Up in Conflict," *Guardian*, 25 April 2005, accessed 18 January 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/apr/25/child-protection.uk>.

7. For example, see Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, "Girls in Militaries, Paramilitaries and Armed Opposition Groups" (invited background paper for the International Conference on War-Affected Children, Winnipeg, Canada, 2000); Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, *Where Are the Girls? Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives during and after War* (Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 2004), <http://uwacadweb.uwoy.edu/MCKAY/Documents/girls%20ang%20v5.pdf>; Susan McKay, "The Inversion of Girlhood: Girl Combatants during and after Armed Conflict," in *A World Turned Upside Down: The Social Ecologies of Children in Armed Conflict*, ed. Neil Boothby, Michael Wessells, and Alison Strang (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006), 89–109; and Dyan Mazurana and Susan McKay, "Child Soldiers: What about the Girls?," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 57, no. 5 (2001): 30–35.

8. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, vi, 1.

9. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 78. Liberian president Charles Taylor was later accused of war crimes for his enslavement and conscription of child soldiers. The ongoing trial against him started in June 2007 in the Hague. See "War Crimes Trial Resumes for Former Leader of Liberia," *New York Times*, 8 January 2008, A8. Taylor's government-backed militias committed major atrocities in neighboring Sierra Leone to gain control of so-called blood diamonds. The conflict in northwest Africa, including neighboring Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire, involved the systematic use of child soldiers, as well as a number of girls, by Liberian government forces and two armed rebel groups. The government had a special boys unit whose members were as young as 12; children as young as seven were recruited. The abuse against girl soldiers was egregious, and older girls were made to capture and recruit younger ones for sexual services. Reports also indicated that children as young as 10 were sent to the front lines, often drugged by their commanders, and forced to witness and participate in human-rights abuses. See *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 76–78. See also Human Rights Watch, *How to Fight, How to Kill: Child Soldiers in Liberia*, 2 February 2004, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/402d1e8a4.html>.

10. For example, see Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann, eds., *On the Edge of Scarcity: Environment, Resources, Population, Sustainability, and Conflict* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002); and Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann, eds., *The Coming Age of Scarcity: Preventing Mass Death and Genocide in the Twenty-First Century* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

11. Chris H. Lewis, "Paradox of Global Development and the Necessary Collapse of Modern Industrial Civilization," in Dobkowski and Wallimann, *Coming Age of Scarcity*, 50; and Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia* (New York: New Press, 1994).

12. Leon Rappoport, "Scarcity, Genocide, and the Postmodern Individual," in Dobkowski and Wallimann, *Coming Age of Scarcity*, 271.

13. For an overview of girls in armed conflicts in Africa, see Florence Tercier Holst-Roness, *Violence against Girls in Africa during Armed Conflicts and Crises* (Addis Ababa: Second International Policy Conference on the African Child: Violence against Girls in Africa, 11–12 May 2006), [http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/violence-girls-conference-110506/\\$File/International-Policy-Conference.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/violence-girls-conference-110506/$File/International-Policy-Conference.pdf).

14. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 1, 7, 11; and Beth Verhey, *Where Are the Girls? Study on Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo* (London: Save the Children UK and the NGO Group, November 2004). The war officially ended in 2003, but the killing and death have not stopped. Renegade militias have been battling with the government in the eastern region, displacing 800,000 people. The parties reached a tentative peace agreement in January 2008. A recent study has concluded that since 1998, more than 5.4 million people have died of hunger, disease, and various war-related causes; nearly half were children younger than five years. See Lydia Polgreen, "Congo's Death Rate Remains Unchanged since War Ended in 2003, Survey Shows," *New York Times*, 23 January 2008, A8; and "Congo Opens Talks on Ending Fighting in Eastern Region," *New York Times*, 7 January 2008, A10.

15. "Sudanese Soldiers Fire on U.N. Peacekeepers in Darfur," *New York Times*, 9 January 2008, A3.

16. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 291, 318–20.

17. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 7; and Amnesty International, Liberia, *The Promises of Peace for over 21,000 Child Soldiers*, 17 May 2004.

18. Kenya has over 40 tribes, including the four major ones: the Luo, Luhya, Kikuyu, and Kalenjin. Since independence, the Kikuyu have been on top, generating ethnic jealousy and hatred. But most of the country's violence has occurred after elections, as in 1992 and December 2007, so that most experts believe that the issues are really political, blaming divisive leaders who have manipulated ethnic divisions. See Jeffrey Gettleman, "Kenya, Known for Its Stability, Topples into Post-Election Chaos," *New York Times*, 3 January 2008, A1, A6; and Jeffrey Gettleman, "Signs in Kenya That Killings Were Planned," *New York Times*, 21 January 2008, A1, A9.

19. Jeffrey Gettleman, "Kenyan City Is Gripped by Violence," *New York Times*, 6 January 2008, A6; and Jeffrey Gettleman, "U.S. Envoy Calls Violence in Kenya 'Ethnic Cleansing,'" *New York Times*, 30 January 2008, A3.

20. See Lydia Polgreen, "Fighting in Chad Stirs Fears of Wider Conflict," *New York Times*, 7 February 2008, A1. Chad has known endemic violence for decades. Pres. Idriss Déby seized power in a military coup in 1990 and was reelected in 2006. Three rebel groups, based in Darfur and reportedly sponsored by the Sudanese government, have been trying to overthrow him. The Sudan, on the other hand, accuses Chad of harboring Sudanese rebels fighting the government in Darfur.

21. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 21–22.

22. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 1, 7–8. Since 2006, when the two-decade separatist war reignited and a cease-fire broke down, over 5,000 people have been killed (some 70,000 since the war began in 1983).

23. "Information: Impact of Armed Conflict on Children," UNICEF, accessed 18 January 2008, <http://www.unicef.org/graca/kidsoldi.htm>.

24. "Bombings Mar Sri Lanka's 60th Anniversary of Statehood," *New York Times*, 5 February 2008, A9.

25. The experiences of girl soldiers in Sri Lanka and the Philippines were somewhat distinct from those of girls in Angola and Colombia—clearly, situations can vary significantly. See the early, perhaps first, study on girls in violent conflict by Yvonne E. Keairns, *The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers* (New York: Quaker United Nations Office, December 2002).

26. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 21.

27. *Ibid.*, 190–92.

28. See Keairns, *Voices of Girl Child Soldiers*. Keairns interviewed Colombian girl soldiers.

29. These are only the major irregular armed groups. In recent decades, a number of additional guerrilla forces have operated in Colombia, including the M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril, or the 19th of April Movement), the EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación, or People's Liberation Army), and various rightist death squads and paramilitary groups.

30. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 126–27.

31. *Ibid.*, 21, 127.

32. For example, a document by the AUC that circulated in 1997 noted the dilemma of an irregular war:

The present conflict, because of its very nature, lies outside the norms of International Law, which apply to conventional warfare. Nevertheless, the AUC considers that the norms of International Humanitarian Law . . . should be an inescapable obligation. . . .

It is a complicated matter for actors in the war to establish clear distinctions among active combatants, active sympathizers, passive sympathizers, auxiliaries, informants, suppliers, couriers, tax collectors, extortionists, transporters, advisers, commission agents who are benefactors, promoters, or disguised, etc., and the rest of the civilian population.

See Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia, 1990–2000: Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2001), 251, 253. The FARC (as well as the paramilitaries) has also violated its pledges to the United Nations not to recruit children. See *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 18–19, 126–30.

33. Bergquist, Peñaranda, and Sánchez G., *Violence in Colombia*, 22–23.

34. Fernando Cubides C., “From Private to Public Violence: The Paramilitaries,” in Bergquist, Peñaranda, and Sánchez G., *Violence in Colombia*, 131.

35. Luis Alberto Restrepo M., “The Equivocal Dimensions of Human Rights in Colombia,” in Bergquist, Peñaranda, and Sánchez G., *Violence in Colombia*, 95–126.

36. Reportedly, the FARC holds 700 abducted captives for ransom, including over 40 political hostages, among them Ingrid Betancourt, a former presidential candidate. A number of recent news reports have covered this situation. See Jenny Carolina González and Simon Romero, “Marches Show Disgust with a Colombian Rebel Group,” *New York Times*, 4 February 2008, A3.

37. One may define gender-based violence as “physical, psychological or emotional harm, including sexual harm or the threat of harm which is directed at an individual or group of individuals (children and adults) on the basis of their gender.” Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 15.

38. The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court considers the conscription or enlistment of “children under the age of 15 years into the national armed forces or armed groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities” a war crime in both international and noninternational armed conflicts. *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*, 25.

39. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 15. Moreover, Save the Children has documented that 32 percent of all girls in armed groups in West Africa admitted being raped, 38 percent received treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, and 66 percent were single mothers.

40. Steele, “Armies of Girls.”

41. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 12.

42. Donny Meertens, “Victims and Survivors of War in Colombia: Three Views of Gender Relations,” in Bergquist, Peñaranda, and Sánchez G., *Violence in Colombia*, 157, 168.

43. *Ibid.*, 162.

44. *Ibid.*, 165.

45. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 7; and Dyan E. Mazurana and Khristopher C. Carlson, “From Combat to Community: Women and Girls in Sierra Leone,” January 2004, accessed 18 January 2008, <http://www.womenwagingpeace.net/content/articles/SierraLeoneFullCaseStudy.pdf>.

46. Hobson, *Forgotten Casualties of War*, 1.

47. *Ibid.*, 2.

48. *Ibid.*, 21–22.

49. *Ibid.*, 27.

50. "Former Girl Soldiers Bringing Hope to Their Peers in Uganda," press release, United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 9 November 2007, accessed 18 January 2008, <http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/pr/2007-11-09171.html>.

51. For example, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom recruited into the armed forces persons younger than 18 years. Additionally, a number of Western countries, including the United States, have failed to require government recipients of military aid and training to end their use of child soldiers.

52. See Paul Collier et al., *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, World Bank Policy Research Report (Washington, DC / New York: World Bank / Oxford University Press, 2003).