

Washington Network on Children in Armed Conflict
Bi-monthly Conference
Child Soldiers & Small Arms
Friday, December 12, 2008
10 AM – 12 PM

Meeting Minutes

Guest Speakers

Jimmy Briggs: Journalist and Author, *Innocents Lost*

Rachael Stohl: Center for Defense Information, Senior Technical Analyst and Specialist in Small Arms and Light Weapons

Jimmy Briggs:

Just returned from the Congo. Will discuss personal stories on child soldiers. Exploration of this issue began 11 years ago in Zaire (the Congo). Went to document the civil war in its beginnings. He was struck by the prevalence of children fighting in the war. The initial encounter led to a 6 - year journey. At that time, there was no discussion of child soldiers. He's currently working on a book about sexual violence and conflict. Difficult if not impossible to discuss the issue of child soldiers w/o discussing sexual violence, destruction of natural resources, etc. Focused on 5 countries. Columbia- psychosocial aspect of child soldiers (how do they cope), Sri Lanka- Tamil Tigers, Uganda (those left behind) Interest in how parents and community respond to children being taken. Rwanda (looking at justice). Afghanistan (professional military deals with child soldiers). He never imagined child soldiers would become a popular theme or "sexy". For himself, one of the key things that must happen is not only legislation, but enforcement of the legislation. With the second book he realized the fates of girl child soldiers was being overlooked. In Columbia, being pregnant it is a death sentence (FARC will kill u n baby). CEDA did a study about girl child soldiers that there is no programmatic response to handling them in the reintegration process. Most programs do not address the issue of sexual violence. Viewed a 5 minute video on CS which was shown the History Channel in 2007.

Rachael Stohl

The Impact of small arms on conflict; explores the definitions of small arms and light weapons (UN):

- *Small arms* – revolvers and self loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, sub machine guns, and light machine guns
- *Light weapons* – heavy machine guns, hand held

Facts & Figures

- 875 million weapons in circulation (small arms)
- \$4 billion annual legal small arms trade
- \$1 billion annual illicit small arms trade
- Over 1200 companies in more than 90 countries
- 8 million new small arms produce annually
- 10-14 billion new rounds of ammunition produced annually
- Small arms are extremely lethal and are involved in hundreds of thousands of conflict deaths every year.
- 200,000 non-combat deaths from firearms every year (accidents, suicides, murders)
- 50% of deaths from small arms are children.

Direct effect of Small Arms on Children:

Direct effects include death, Injuries, psycho-social trauma, and human rights abuses. As well:

- Massive population displacement – families fleeing the arms and violence produced from the guns.
- Areas become more militarized.
- Diminishment of support structures
- Limited access to public goods
- Reduced educational opportunities
- Lack of health services (hospitals overburdened, lack of resources, medical staff targeted)
- Denied economic growth and development opportunities

[Small Arms Survey](#) produces a yearbook on violence.

Consequential Effects of Small Arms on Children

- Cultures of Violence
- Weapons seen as tools for conflict resolution (conflict resolution at the barrel of a gun)
- Children believe violence is essential
- Violence used to gain power, obtain goods and services, and establish respect.
- Culture of impunity (traditional community structures are undermined)

Child Soldiers

- At least 250,000 child soldiers in conflict zones worldwide.

- Currently participating in 17 conflicts
- CS recruited or used by 8 governments
- US provides FMS, DCS, EDA, IMET, or FMF to 6 of these 8 countries

Victory - ([Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act](#)) - on Wednesday US Congress passed legislation that prohibits the US from giving military assistance (funds and arms) to countries who are not professionalizing their military by eradicating the use of children in state armed forces.

4 Prong Strategy

1. Control weapons availability
2. Address use of child soldiers
3. Protect children
4. Provide opportunities.

Multiple levels – National, Regional and global

Necessary Actions: Related to Small Arms Trade

- Reduce the availability of weapons
- Develop arms export regulations and export criteria
- Ensure adherence to arms embargoes
- Strengthen oversight of existing national laws and weapon stockpiles
- Develop a common international end-use certificate and other shipping documents
- Implement effective end use monitoring
- Improve cooperation within and between states
- Destroy surplus or obsolete weapons
- Promote safe security, management

Measures to Address the Use of Child Soldiers

- Support universal ratification of CRC
- Safeguard the security of child in refugee
- Prevent cultures of violence
- Protect children from recruitment
- Identify at risk youth and dangerous locations
- Provide Opportunities
- Ensure education and awareness building
- Develop youth specific DDR programs
- Provide and strengthen alternatives to soldiering and crime
- Youth and community must be involved in the solution

Open for questions/discussions

Importance of a stable economy – initiatives being used by WB and USAID will probably experience some trouble due to the downturn of the global economy.

Also talked about non-government actors in the arms deal and weapons purchase.

Rachael does not believe that you need a lot of money to deal with weapons proliferation.

Vast majority of weapons were in the legal markets and moved to an illegal market.

Marty Scherr - US campaign to ratify the UN convention to the rights of the child (CRC). How does the signing of the Optional Protocols by the US affect them not signing the CRC – letters were sent to the military branches asking how were they complying with the protocol. Many did not even know of the protocols. Once they were made aware that 17 year olds were being sent to Iraq, they stopped sending 17 yrs old to front line fighting. They may remain in the US until 18 or sent to Kuwait/Saudi Arabia. This has given the US authority when discussing with other states the encouragement to ratify and enforce the protocols.

Names the 8 governments that recruit child soldiers – (Rachael)
Afghanistan, Burma, Chad, DRC, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda (Based on state department HR reports)

Name successful DDR programs- (Jimmy) From his experience the better DDR programs were Columbia, Uganda (mixed in terms of success). Very little engagement of local efforts and cultural insensitivity. Traditional healings and methods are ignored. Not every child who survives has PTSD. IRC does a good job. Sri Lanka used to be good. When coming to girls there are not any programs that focus on gender or sexual violence, there are not strong examples. The IRC is doing pretty good with girls in the Congo. Marty stated that DDR worked well in Sierra Leone.

Example provided from Uganda where former female child soldiers had not gone through any reintegration DDR process focusing on gender/sexual violence. Only 1 girl had gone through a program. The young women felt that they would be shamed. Rachael stated that when DDR is interrupted by another conflict the children who had gone through the program are the first recruited and re-indoctrinated. Felix stated that part of the criteria for being in DDR is that you had or used a gun.

Reach out to children who are not a part of the conflict as combatants and make sure that you understand and include the socio-cultural aspects in your DDR process.

Rhoda from the IRC asked if there have been good examples of market research done to see what are the effective aspects of the DDR. You cannot start planning for a DDR program when the conflict ends. You must prepare your DDR program so that when the conflict ends you can hit the ground ready. The same mistakes continue to be made, there is no separation of females from males; you need a gun to be a part of the program. Felix said there is research coming out on DDR programs from London. Jimmie aid protection is critical to a successful DDR program.

Dean provided updated information from DDR program in Uganda – Finding a lack of female role models, not all girls want to participate in sports, culturally bound by dance and they wanted to dance.

Open Forum

Announcements & resources will be included in WNCAC email newsletter.