Received: 26 September 2010 Accepted: 22 October 2010

Published online: 15 December 2010

Available on WWW: www.defenceandstrategy.eu

DOI: doi:10.3849/1802-7199.10.2010.02.089-100

DĚTŠTÍ VOJÁCI JAKO NÁSTROJ MODERNÍHO VÁLEČNICTVÍ (?): ROLE DĚTSKÝCH VOJÁKŮ V „NOVÝCH VÁLKÁCH“ – PŘÍČINY A DŮSLEDKY

CHILD SOLDIERY AS A TOOL OF MODERN WARFARE (?): THE ROLE OF CHILD SOLDIERS IN “NEW WARS” – CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstrakt

Nepříliš známý, ale bohužel stále častější fenomén dětských vojáků, který lze považovat za nový vývoj v moderním válečnictví, se může dotýkat přibližně 250 000 až 300 000 dětí na celém světě. Podle odhadů 40 % ozbrojených sil nebo ozbrojených skupin ve světě nasazuje „dětské bojovníky“ na různé úkoly, zatímco mezinárodní společenství stále bojuje proti této formě zneužívání dětí. Globální povaha využívání dětských vojáků vyvolává řadu otázek v mnoha oblastech, protože má hluboké politické, sociální, ekonomické, vojenské, ekologické, etnické, náboženské a další kořeny a dalekosáhlé důsledky v takzvaném třetím světě. Pokud se navíc zaměříme na africké mírové mise Evropské unie, může mít dětská účast v bojích i nepřímé dopady na evropské společenství. Cílem této studie je nabídnout komplexní přístup v souvislosti s dětskými vojáky a poukázat na souvislosti mezi post-koloniálními konflikty a touto formou porušování lidských práv.

Abstract

The hardly-known but regrettably prevalent phenomenon of child soldiery, which can be considered as a new development of modern warfare, might affect approximately 250,000 – 300,000 children worldwide. According to the estimates, 40% of our planet's armed forces or armed groups deploy “child combatants” for different tasks, while the international community is still struggling against this form of the abuse of children. The global nature of child soldiery raises many questions in many fields, because it has deep political, social, economic, military, environmental, ethnic and religious etc. roots and far reaching consequences in the so-called Third World. Moreover, if we focus on the African peacekeeping missions of the European Union, child soldiery might also have indirect impacts on the European community. The aim of this study is to offer a comprehensive approach in connection with child soldiery, and pointing out the links between the post-colonial conflicts and this form of human rights breaches.

Klíčová slova

Dětské vojáky, nové války, post-koloniální konflikty, komodifikace dětí, porušování lidských práv.

Keywords

Child soldiers, new wars, post-colonial conflicts, commodification of children, human rights breaches.

INTRODUCTION

Although the conscious deployment of children has been a long existing practice, we have to pin down that this form of using child soldiers differs from the ancient examples. The most

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significant distinctions are the deployment of them *en masse* and the commercial aims in connection with child soldiers. Such “kid heroes” like child crusaders in the 13th century, the drummer boys during the Napoleon-era or even the members of the Hitlerjugend during the siege of Berlin in 1945 cannot be compared to the child soldiers of these days. Whereas child fighters before modern times were primarily accommodated for psychological deterrence, modern child combatants are used because of their cheapness and other advantages originating in their ages (subservience, lack of fear, aspiration to become an adult by doing things mostly associated with adult life, etc.).

In spite of the strong normative frameworks in international (humanitarian) law, there are frequent breaches of these rules for children just like the basic rule of warfare (*ius in bello*) through the numerous armed conflicts in the Third World. On the other hand, we should keep in mind that some taut situations from Europe’s recent past have triggered similar cases, too.¹ It is no doubt that the case of one-time African colonies can offer a better basis for examination, because they demonstrate all the alarming problems of weak, failed or even collapsed states characterized by Richard Rotberg. These countries cannot protect their residents because of the lack of democracy and constitutionality, the local tribal traditions, poverty and rampant corruption. In a lot of cases, governments – if there is a government at all – do not have adequate tools to guarantee the protection and rights of children, so they could be the most endangered citizens when an armed conflict takes place. Children’s defencelessness to survive often urge them to find alternative ways of living, such as child work, child prostitution or even child soldiery.

The issue of child soldiery does not only emerge in terms of moral aspects of the international public opinion, but it is related to the practical fields of peacekeeping missions. The traditions of mondialism are still respected principles by the European Union, plus Africa’s future is high on the agenda, so it is worth to pay a little attention to this form of warfare in Central Europe, too. My firm belief is that this knowledge could be useful when the Hungarian Defence Forces or other Central European troops are expected to further extend their peacekeeping missions to African states as well within UN- or EU-missions.

DEFINITIONS OF CHILD SOLDIERY IN THE INTERNATIONAL LAW

The presence of child soldiery has not been dealt with since the middle 90’s, when in 1993 Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former UN-Secretary General asked Graça Machel² to start an examination in Africa in order to examine the consequences of contemporary wars on children. Her study about the *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* was the first study – published in 1996 – which focused primarily on the child victims of post-cold war armed conflicts in the African continent. Machel wrote that the escalation of local tribal riots could transform rapidly into regional conflicts, and these conflicts could not be prevented due to the lack of state control. Another problem, Machel said, was the behavior of residents who did not respect such taboos like maltreatment of women and children during the unstable periods. Machel referred to this specific phenomenon as “moral vacuum” where children were directly affected by war.³

This remarkable study changed the whole approach towards child soldiery on behalf of international organizations. Different organizations of the United Nations, for instance the UNICEF or the Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as some NGOs (Human Rights Watch, International Save the Children Alliance) started dealing with the issue extensively and they also declared their demands to create clear-cut legal frameworks in order to prevent and moderate children’s suffering. The first milestone document came out in 1997 under UN-auspices. The Cape Town Principles pronounced that “*any person 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. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and for forced marriage.*”⁴ This

document applies an extended definition of child soldiery, because children who carry arms (“combatants”) are equal with children who work as servants in military camps.

Further documents, such as The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups – ratified in 2007 – do not accept this approach. The text of the Paris Principles distinguishes three groups among children: child combatants (who are carrying and using weapons); children associated with armed forces or armed groups (they are the group which was defined in 1997); and children affected by armed conflicts (refugees, IDPs, orphans).⁵ Thus, the first problem in connection with the legal regulation is the misunderstanding of the extension of categories.

The second problem is to be found in the different approaches to the age limit of childhood. Some document follow the method of the Cape Town Principles and use the word “child” for everyone under the age of 18. But other papers set the age limit to 15, which means that every boy or girl can join troops or can be recruited beyond this age. The cause of this debate lies in the distinct interpretation of being a child in Africa; it is obvious that being 15 years old in e.g. the Sub-Saharan region is totally different than being 15 years old within the European culture.

Furthermore, there is an inconsistency of legally binding sanctions (see the chart below). Most of the documents do not contain strict and clear rules for punishment of warlords who recruit children to take part in hostilities, and their enforceability in armed conflicts faces obstacles, too. Finally, we also should not use the word child “soldier”, because these boys and girls do not have all of the four characteristics of being combatants.⁶

To sum it up, law enforcement would be vital, but it still fails to prevent recruiting children, so other efforts are needed on behalf of the international community. At the same time, the work of some special judicial forums, especially the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague, can hopefully provide deterrent precedents through strict sentences of warlords in the near future. The ICC, which defines child recruitment as a war crime in the Rome Statute,⁷ is examining the case of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, former commander of a Congolese militia (UPC), and SCSL is investigating former Liberian prime minister, Charles Taylor’s case in connection with recruiting children to participate in hostilities. Talks are going on now.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CHILD SOLDIERY AND “NEW” WARS

Before we start explaining the presumable links between child soldiers and “new” wars, it is important to clarify that when we are talking about the number of child soldiers, both in the world or just in one country, we should not operate with exact indicators. The UN and most of the NGOs accept and use the estimated numbers of child soldiers (250,000 – 300,000 children) in their works, but skepticism towards these figures is reasonably right. Child soldiers cannot be counted exactly, because they live in separated military camps and it is hard to make them talk about their military life because of their fear from stigmatization on the part of society. During my research, I reviewed an NGO called Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, which produced the most relevant work in this field. Their study (*Child Soldiers Global Report 2008*)⁸ lists those countries or non-state territories where children can take part in hostilities directly, either on the side of the governmental forces or in paramilitary groups. These states are Burundi, Chad, Cote d’Ivoire, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Columbia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Libya, Myanmar, Nepal, Peru, Philippines, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe.⁹ On the other hand, the study does not find countries like North-Korea, Bolivia, Brazil, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Kazakhstan guilty, because military training of children is involved in their national education syllabuses. Strict regulations are applied in the practice of the United States, the UK or Canada where teenagers from the age of 16 or 17 can join the army with parental permission, but they are only responsible for non-hostile tasks.

Table 1: Milestone documents in the field of child soldiery

Document	Year	Age limit	Extended or narrowed definition?	Legally binding? Sanctionable?
Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols (I, II.)	1977	15	narrowed	Yes Yes
Convention on the Rights of the Child	1989	15	narrowed	No No
Cape Town Principles	1997	18	extended	No No
Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court	1998	15	narrowed	Yes Yes
International Labour Organization Convention Nr. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour	1989	18	narrowed	Yes Yes
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child	2000	18	narrowed	No No
UN Security Council Resolutions on Children in armed conflicts 1261 (1999) 1296 (2000) 1314 (2000) 1379 (2001) 1460 (2003) 1539 (2004) 1612 (2005)	1999-2005	18	narrowed	No Yes
Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups	2007	18	extended	No No

Edited by: Dóra Szijj according to NYULÁSZ, Viktória: *How effective are the international community's efforts in dealing with children associated with armed conflict in terms of prevention, disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration?*, p. 13.

The expression of “new wars” is a relatively new term in international studies. Although the nature of post-colonial wars was not totally unidentified in the fields of IR (analyzed by some thinkers, for example William Reno or even Adebayo Olukoshi), but the label of new wars has spread after the publication of Mary Kaldor’s famous book, the *New and Old Wars – Organized Violence in a Global Era*.¹⁰ The theory triggered a lot of debates, but also encouraged the birth of other excellent key thinkers’ studies.¹¹ The central opinion of Kaldor’s theory emphasizes that the conventional rules of warfare described by Clausewitz have been overwritten after the Cold War.

These international or civil wars of low-intensity conflicts result in serious aggression. The powers at war ignore the classical rules of warfare, for example they launch undeclared wars breaching the rule of *ius ad bellum*. Some of the most significant patterns of new wars are infamous for limitless violence (*rise in crime*) which is often hardly distinguished from criminal or political violence. Indirect effects of warfare (asymmetric warfare) have become involved while the role of civilian population has also changed (human shield, residents as targets). Systematic breaches of human rights and the long-term nature of *slow nature wars* are further characteristics.¹²

Figure 1: States deploying child soldiers

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If one wants to study the backgrounds of child soldiery thoroughly, it is worth reading the book *Die Neuen Kriege* from Herfried Münkler.¹³ The German thinker analyses very profoundly the roots of the privatization and commercialization of new wars and he declares that the deployment of child soldiers is in connection with these comprehensive economic- and also political – military – ethnic – social circumstances. In Africa, where inter-state wars are rare phenomena, the escalation of intra-state armed conflicts often leads to problems like refugee movements or even genocide. Most of the African states inherited artificial borders from their colonizers and this could be the root of almost every post-colonial war.

Another problem can be found in the lack of statism, which manifests itself in the de-statization or privatization of military force. Münkler says that these conflicts are not as expensive as in the past due to the fast proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs), such as the symbolic AK-47, the use of civilian infrastructure and transport, and the well-arranged mobilization system of warlords sustained by corruption and violence.¹⁴ The asymmetry of military force (rules, war fronts, major battles do not exist; growing role of guerrilla warfare tactics) and the automation of forms of violence (strategy of “fear and hatred”¹⁵; “strategy” of sex and rape) lead to “short wars between states, long wars within societies.”¹⁶

Since the new criminal groups of warlords often keep in touch with international criminal groups (see the case of “blood diamonds”), it is to be feared that a global network of these military groups might develop (e.g. via the private military companies). The commercial nature and the de-statization of new wars are in favor of warlords and, of course, trans-regional entrepreneurs. And how does child soldiery fit in this process?

Münkler cites a sentence from the book of *Riekenberger: Warlords* reveals the essence of the process. It is the “*transformation of violence into a commodity or a service*”.¹⁷ Territories which are under total control of a warlord are liable to the will of the owner: women can be kidnapped and made sexual slaves, children can be recruited to take part in hostilities.

A young Hungarian expert, Beáta Paragi lists the advantages of a child soldier in one of her studies. She uses the Marshall-cross model to measure the “usefulness” of a child combatant. If we consider the possibility of using a demand (D) – supply (S) model, we can enumerate the following advantages of deploying children during hostilities:¹⁸

- Causes in terms of demand (D):
 - Fast proliferation of SALWs,
 - Advantages of children’s age (they learn fast, they are loyal, they have no criminal responsibility, etc.),
 - It is unnecessary to provide payment for them,
 - Structure of the armed group (ratio of children to adults),
 - Adequacy for the aims and military qualifications of the armed group.
- Causes in terms of supply (S):
 - Bad social and family background,
 - Losing family members, friends resulting in loneliness,
 - Feeling of becoming an adult,
 - Impact of warlike environment and experience,
 - Following family members (often siblings) or friends,
 - Individual beliefs (religious, ideological),
 - Shrinking opportunities to gain land (by marriage or inheritance),
 - Poverty.

Although the economic background of child soldiery is the primary area of this explanation (deploying child soldiers or joining troops are results of economic calculations), we should not still omit other possible reasons which might also foster the whole phenomenon. Thus, we can establish further reasons as well. Therefore, we should analyze the political, social, environmental, military (and psychological) relations of child soldiery with the method of *securitization* of Barry Buzan and Richard Little. The table below summarizes the possible reasons for child soldiery, both from the point of view of warlords and child soldiers.

Although there is strong evidence in support of correlation between new wars and child soldiery, we should keep in mind that some recent conflicts possessing the aforementioned characteristics do not employ child soldiers. Deploying child soldiers is a fairly common practice in the poorest regions of the Earth (for example Black Africa) where so-called young states are located, so child soldiery could also be a consequence of a societal hiatus due to the slight number of grown men. But this fact does not exclude the relationship between child soldiery and new wars.

Table 2: Possible reasons for child soldiery

Aspects	Background; reasons and conditions		
	Conditions which foster the employment of child soldiers	Motivations of children to join troops	Motivations of warlords to employ children
Political	The approach of the famous neoliberal journalist, Robert D. Kaplan → In developing countries which the western enlightenment did not reach and where residents are suffering from extreme poverty often find relief in violence. ¹⁹		
	Weak political parties/lack of parties, widespread corruption, faulty bureaucracy, lack of respect for laws.		
	The existence of statism is in danger → Children do not receive protection, which leads to promotion and exploitation of children.		
Social		Breaking up of extended families → Less attention towards a child → Desire for companionship.	
	Weak social network → Ignorance of children's rights → The forms of child protection guaranteed by international law are not known or not respected.		
		Armies can offer better living during a conflict (food, water, public spirit, protection).	
	<i>"For the law in force is this: whoever has weapons eats first."</i> ²⁰		
	If reintegration programs are not successful and other obstacles occur in the societal system (lack of workplaces, constant conflicts, etc.): → Children will not be able to break away from the repeated cycle of violence. → They		

	re-join troops.		
Military			Advantages of a child (small, cheap, brave, loyal, fast, easy to motivate, narrow consciousness) → Economic calculation → It is worth deploying children.
			Guerrilla warfare → Their tiny figure can be very useful in a hit raid or while hiding.
Environmental		Indirect effects of environmental scarcities → According to Thomas Fraser Homer-Dixon → The fewer environmental sources, the more aggressive struggle for them ²¹ → Less soil → Less work and food → More difficult living conditions → Joining of troops.	Applying children in so-called “greed” conflicts, which are aimed at pillaging precious and rare natural resources (e.g. “blood diamonds”) → Economic calculation → It is worth deploying children.
Psychological		Vindictiveness for killed family members; desire to express their maturity.	
			Commanders take up father’s/headmen’s role among children. → Strong will for being eligible.
			Children follow all patterns they see – without any payment.

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Naturally, the enumerated forms of child soldiery are not always clear-cut during a conflict, but they symbolize well the complex problem of child soldiery. And this complexity leads to the tragic fate: joining troops voluntarily in order to survive or getting kidnapped to fight. After conscription, children have to live in military camps with adults, which demands imitation from children. Older boys (from the age 10-11) receive their first uniform and rifle to learn fighting, while younger boys are charged with secondary tasks, e.g. cooking, washing. Girls are often chosen for sexual abuse and practically function as slaves of commanders, but they can also become combatants. Children often use drugs to distort their personality and watch action films to maintain fighting spirit. They must become totally inhuman while learning the basic rule: “you kill or you get killed”.²²

HOW DOES THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TRY TO HANDLE THE PHENOMENON?

As mentioned before, international legal documents do not fulfill their preventive aims. They do not exert enough strictness to deter warlords from deploying children, and when the direct aims

of international law fail, alternative solutions must be found to reintegrate children in society. This was the incentive to arrange special remedial programs for former child soldiers. The process is called DDR which contains the three elements of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Disarmament means physical removal of weapons from troops, which means collecting and destroying them. This step is often supervised by international peacekeeping forces in order to prevent the selling of weapons. Demobilization entails the disbanding of armed groups, and sending ex-soldiers to special DDR-camps. The blue helmets can also take part in this process, because they often have to negotiate with commanders to release children – but sometimes children have to escape individually putting their life at stake (traitors will be executed by commanders). The third step – which can be considered as a turning point in the DDR – is a special rehabilitation process to help former child soldiers' integration into civilian society. During the reintegration, children re-learn the norms and customs of normal life while they are going to school and having psychological sessions with musical- and drawing-therapies in order to get over their war experience. They are also trained for easy professions like car-mechanics or hairdressers.²³

The DDR – which can be a part of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) in many African countries – is often blamed for its idealistic aims. DDR-programs are very costly for the donors (UN, NGOs, and international donors like IMF or World Bank) and they cannot offer adequate jobs for former combatants. A number of obstacles forestall the success of DDR: the social network in societies affected by the problem of child soldiery usually suffers from overpopulation and poverty, governments cannot guarantee workplaces for livelihood, and the chances of a new war are always hidden in the fragile peace agreements between the states or regions. When a new conflict arises, many ex-combatants go back to fight.

CONCLUSION

I fully agree with the statement of those who contend that child soldiery cannot be dealt with without cooperation and individual willingness – symptomatic treatments are not enough. DDR is a really complex mechanism from the point of view of social policy, humanitarian affairs and economy as well. But on the other hand, if reintegration of former combatants proves to be successful and there are suitable job opportunities for making a living, they will be able to avoid further deployments as child soldiers. The example of the Democratic Republic of the Congo shows that DDR can be very beneficial: according to the data of Amnesty International, 23,000 former child soldiers from a total of 30,000 have become reintegrated and found workplaces after the start of the national DDR-program between 2005 and 2007.²⁴

Africa's problems – including the problem of child soldiery – cannot be solved without a stable political, social and economic basis. Short-term goals must be transplanted into long-term strategies with international support. At the same time, this approach requires a sense of responsibility both on behalf of developing states and their supporters. Developing countries need a drastic transformation in the way of thinking about child soldiery: states that deploy child soldiers must recognize independently that their practice is a war crime. Donor countries ought to avoid giving financial aid under the label of "sustainable development", and they have to secure workplaces and encourage states to retain peace in order to support cooperation and domestic development. They should also avoid being accused for neocolonization, which can be a leverage of welfare states in connection with Africa's future.

But the key element is prevention – beyond a normative framework. Durable peace is needed to prevent children from being easily affected by armed conflicts. Therefore, states have to prevent the escalation of local conflicts into civil wars, while the international community should moderate the proliferation of SALWs. Moderating the number of child soldiers is as important for the international community in the third world as handling the problems of food and water security, refugees, piracy, illegal drug or human trafficking, proliferation of SALWs, illiteracy, AIDS, etc.

Child soldiery is not just an isolated and deviant characteristic of the Third World, but it is a result of decolonization and new wars. Additionally, some child soldiers live in some of the operational areas of the EU (Somalia, DRC). According to the present framework of international law, child soldiers cannot be categorized yet, so child combatants need a totally different treatment during a peacekeeping mission. Thus, getting acquainted with this topic will be useful in the long run – for Hungarian and other Central European peacekeepers as well.

NOTES

¹ During the Balkan wars approximately 3000 youngsters joined the Bosnian Army or other militias on the opposite side. Child soldiers of the Balkans [online].

² Graça Machel (born: Graça Simbine) also served as Mozambique's first post-independence Minister for Education. She is the widow of the country's first President, Samora Machel, killed in an airplane crash in 1986.

³ Impact of armed conflict on children [online], p. 9.

⁴ Cape Town Principles [online], p. 8.

⁵ The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups [online].

⁶ According to the international martial law combatants have to (1) carry their weapons visibly, (2) wear an unmistakable badge to identify their corps, (3) respect and observe the rules of martial law, (4) be under command. In the case of child soldiers, we could see that the second and third points are not realized. BOKORNÉ SZEGŐ, Hanna: *Nemzetközi jog (International Law)*, p. 336.

⁷ „For the purpose of this Statute, <war crimes> mean: [...] Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities [...]” Rome Statue, Article 8/e (vii) [online].

⁸ Child Soldiers Global Report 2008. [online].

⁹ Child Soldiers Global Report 2008 [online], p. 2-3.

¹⁰ KALDOR, Mary: *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era*.

¹¹ Other supporters of the theory are Herfried Münkler (Germany) and Martin von Creveld (Netherlands).

¹² KALDOR, Mary: *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era* (2nd edition), p. 4-8.

¹³ MÜNKLER, Herfried: *Die Neuen Kriege*.

¹⁴ MÜNKLER, Herfried: *The New Wars*, p. 3.

¹⁵ KALDOR, Mary: *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era* (2nd edition), p. 9.

¹⁶ MÜNKLER, Herfried: *The New Wars*, p. 11.

¹⁷ MÜNKLER, Herfried: *The New Wars*, p. 11.

¹⁸ PARAGI, Beáta: *Gyerekkatonák Afrikában (Child Soldiers in Africa)*, p. 71.

¹⁹ KAPLAN, Robert David: *The coming Anarchy*.

²⁰ KAPUSCINSKI, Ryszard: *The Shadow of the Sun*, p. 255.

²¹ HOMER-DIXON, Thomas Fraser: *On The Threshold: Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict*.

²² Giving a comprehensive and also objective description of child soldiers' life is a difficult task. During my work I was reading authentic narratives provided by field workers, personal interviews with former combatants or the best-seller book of a former child combatant Ishmael Beah. BEAH, Ishmael: *Gyerekkatona voltam Afrikában, amíg ti játszottatok (A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier)*.

²³ SPECHT, Irma: *Children and DDR*, p. 192.

²⁴ DRC, *Children at War: Creating Hope for their Future* [online].

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