

Methodology, terms and definitions

Methodology

This report covers the period from April 2001 to March 2004 and the country entries refer to events occurring within this period. Some important developments relating to the recruitment and use of child soldiers between the end of March and the end of July 2004 are referred to in the report's introduction and regional overviews. Country ratifications of relevant international treaties are up to date as of 31 August 2004 and are included in the country data at the top of each entry, and in the global data summary chart.

Research for this report was carried out between January and June 2004. Information for the country entries was sought from a wide range of sources. These included governments, UN agencies and peacekeeping missions, other intergovernmental organizations, news media, academic sources, and human rights and humanitarian organizations. Information was also provided by Coalition members and partners and by local non-governmental organizations, journalists, lawyers, activists and others in many countries. Sources for the information contained in the country entries and the data summary chart are provided in footnotes. In some cases the identity of the source has been withheld and this is indicated in the relevant footnote. The names of child soldiers have been changed throughout this report.

Terms and definitions

Accession: Accession means formal consent by a state to be legally bound by a treaty – essentially a one-step process combining signature and ratification (see below) of a treaty. In most instances it requires action by the national parliament. States acceding to the Convention on the Rights of the Child or its optional protocols must deposit their instruments of accession with the UN Secretary-General.

Armed conflict: The term armed conflict is used to refer to both international and non-international conflicts of high and low intensity.

Armed forces: These generally refer to official government armed forces, including the army, navy and air force.

Armed groups and armed political groups: These terms are used to refer to non-state or irregular armed groups which use arms for political reasons. They include opposition forces, factional or tribal groups, armed groups belonging to ethnic or religious minorities and a range of other militia groups. These terms are also sometimes used to refer to armed groups (often paramilitaries or militias) which are backed by or allied to government forces but are not officially part of them.

Child: A child is any person under eighteen years of age. This is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 1), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Article 2), and International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (Article 2). The Coalition also refers to “under-18s” in this report, generally when referring to children between the ages of 15 and 18.

Child soldier: While there is no precise definition, the Coalition considers a child soldier any person under the age of 18 who is a member of or attached to government armed forces or any other regular or irregular armed force or armed political group, whether or not an armed conflict exists. Child soldiers perform a range of tasks including: participation in combat, laying mines and explosives; scouting, spying, acting as decoys, couriers or guards; training, drill or other preparations; logistics and support functions, portering, cooking and domestic labour; and sexual slavery or other recruitment for sexual purposes.

DDR: A commonly-used abbreviation for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (see below).

Demobilization: The formal and controlled discharge of soldiers from the army or from an armed group. In demobilizing children the objectives should be to verify the child’s participation in armed conflict, to collect basic information to establish the child’s identity for family tracing, to assess priority needs, and to provide the child with information about what is likely to happen next.

Disarmament: The collection of small arms and light and heavy weapons within a conflict zone. It frequently entails weapons collection, assembly of combatants and development of arms management programs, including their safe storage and sometimes their destruction. Because many child soldiers do not carry their own weapons, disarmament should not be a prerequisite for the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers.

Internally displaced persons: People who have been forced to flee their homes for reasons such as armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights abuses or other disasters, and who have sought safety elsewhere in the same country.

Ratification: Ratification is the means by which governments consent to be legally bound by an international treaty. In most cases, ratification follows signature of the treaty and requires action by the national parliament. States ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child or its optional protocols must deposit their instruments of ratification with the UN Secretary-General.

Recruitment: The term “recruitment” refers to three different means by which people become members of armed forces or armed groups: compulsory, voluntary, and forcible (or forced). Compulsory recruitment is defined in national legislation and typically applies to conscripted members of official armed forces. Voluntary recruitment is usually regulated by law or policy and occurs without conscription or force. Forcible (or forced) recruitment entails the illegal use of force, for instance in the form of abduction or other duress. It is important to note that the lines between compulsory, voluntary and forced recruitment are often blurred. Children may be subjected to various political and economic pressures which mean they have little alternative to enlisting in an armed force or group. The Coalition opposes all forms of military recruitment or use of children under the age of eighteen.

Reintegration: A long-term process which aims to give children a viable alternative to their involvement in armed conflict and help them resume life in the community. Elements of reintegration include family reunification (or finding alternative care if reunification is impossible), providing education and training, devising appropriate strategies for economic and livelihood support and in some cases providing psycho-social support.

Signature: A state may sign an international treaty to indicate its preliminary and general endorsement of its aims but a signature is not a legally binding step or a firm commitment to proceed to the next, and final, step of ratification. Nevertheless, signing a treaty creates an obligation of good faith not to undermine the treaty's objectives.

“Straight-18”: The Coalition campaigns for governments to adopt and implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, in a manner which prohibits the military recruitment or use of all children below the age of 18 years without exception or reservation. This is called the “straight-18” position”.