

child soldiers

an educational guide for teachers

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Many countries experience armed conflicts that put their civilian populations at risk, in particular children who have been directly exposed to the brutality of war.

Almost all States have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, recognised as one of the most important instruments concerning human rights. It represents a starting point for the recognition and improvement of the situation of children worldwide and applies to children affected by armed conflict. The coming into force of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict was decisive step in the fight against the use of boys and girls as soldiers.

In this context, education for peace and human rights is highlighted as a fundamental element in the process to strengthen a culture of peace based on the respect of human rights as opposed to a culture of violence.

This educational guide focuses on the phenomenon of child soldiers by using a concept that informs us and brings to life the reality and the conditions child soldiers endure. Additionally, through this educational process, which puts human rights - especially child rights and education for peace - at its core principles, this guide invites us to reflect and participate.

The guide has been designed for use by teachers as a work material not just on an informative level, but also to allow them to nurture the awareness and the participation of students in secondary education as key players in building peace and as defenders of the rights of children across the world.

The guide is structured as follows:

- Part One: a contents manual on the main themes regarding the involvement of children in armed conflict.
- Part Two: a space for reflection and action with a practical element to be developed with students in secondary education.
- Part Three: bibliographical and consultation sources for continued study.

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Only the moon's nectar will amaze the daydreams of the children (...)

*Arturo Corcuera. Declaration of love for Child Rights.
Radda Barnen*

Contents Manual

1. Our world, a world in conflict

1.1. Armed conflicts

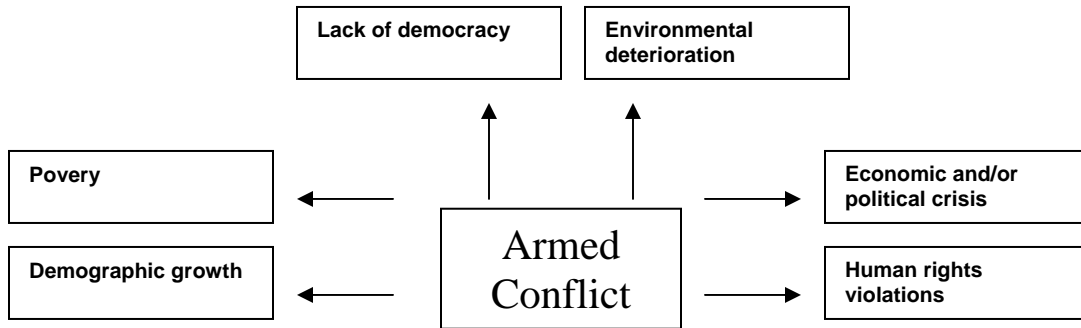
Definition

The word conflict creates a dilemma, that while not always negative, implies a struggle between distinct points of view, generally associated with the values, beliefs or interests of two or more persons or groups.

This incompatibility generates processes of interaction that may come together in a constructive fashion. However, on many occasions it descends into violence or the use of weapons. Armed conflict can be described therefore as any confrontation carried out by armed groups of distinct natures, which organise themselves and take up arms or other methods of destruction. (*Pau School of Culture, Alerta 2006, Report on conflicts, human rights and peace building*).

When we talk about armed conflicts, we can make a distinction between international armed conflicts, those external in nature, that is to say those between two or more states - and those armed conflicts an internal nature, which take place within a state.

1.2. Characteristics and effects



Disputes for the control of natural resources	Minority groups with aspirations of political power	Civil population, the most affected	Lingering conflict
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1.3. Countries in conflict and evolution

By the end of 2005, there were 21 ongoing armed conflicts, four less than in 2004, which shows a decreasing tendency for war in recent years.¹ Children were especially affected in all of those conflicts:

Africa: Algeria, Burundi
 Ivory Coast, Liberia
 Nigeria (centre and north)
 Nigeria (Niger Delta)
 Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan (Darfur), Uganda

Middle East: Iraq
 Israel-Occupied Palestinian Territories

Asia: Afghanistan, Philippines
 India, Indonesia, Nepal
 Sri Lanka, Thailand

America: Colombia, Haiti

Europe: Russia (Chechnya)

¹ See Pau School of Culture, Alerta 2006, Report on conflicts, human rights and peace building.

2. Children and war... a reality

Nights are the worst part of the day. Sometimes I am afraid of sleeping because, when I sleep, I dream that I am dead. In my dreams, a soldier in uniform comes to look for me. He is annoyed with me, arrests me, and takes me away. The soldier questions me for a long while. I tell him that I don't know what I have done wrong. No one listens. I think someone takes a pistol and shoots me, not just once, but three times...

Source: *Adult Wars, Child Soldiers: Voices of children involved in armed conflict in the East Asia and Pacific Region, UNICEF, 2002, p.6.*

2.1. Child soldiers

Who are they?

Children are being used right now to fight in armed conflicts all around the world. It is difficult to calculate how many have been recruited, although some studies estimate there are 300,000.²

The Cape Town principles as adopted by UNICEF define a child soldier as a person under eighteen years of age who is a member of or associated with governmental armed forces or with any regular or irregular armed group whether in places where conflict exists or not. This definition includes those children who carry out tasks as varied as participating directly in combat, placing landmines or explosives, spying, scouting, cooking, being victims of sexual slavery or who are recruited for other acts of a sexual nature.

Where are they?

Child soldiers are a reality in many countries in the world: boys and girls associated with a variety of armed groups or conventional armies and who are exposed to situations of extreme violence.

Child soldiers where?³

	AFRICA	LATIN AMERICA	ASIA	MIDDLE EAST	EAST EUROPE
Countries	Angola, Burundi, DRC, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Uganda.	El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Colombia, Brazil.	Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Indonesia.	Occupied Palestinian Territories	Chechnya, Former Republic of Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo.
Context	Africa bears a harsh legacy of conflicts, where children have been directly involved. It is estimated that more than 100,000 under 18s have participated and are currently implicated in armed conflicts.	The reality of child soldiers was marked by the end of various conflicts in countries in the region, although the effects of war (orphans, displaced rural communities, lack of rehabilitation strategies) caused other forms of violence such as youth gangs.	Armed conflict in Asian countries is characterised by the recruitment – forced and voluntary - of thousands of children.	Recruitment has been continuous in the region. Palestinian children were victims of excessive force by the Israeli army, while they were also used by the Palestinian armed groups to carry out suicide attacks.	Countries of Eastern Europe have been involved in different conflicts where the use of child soldiers has been a recurrent feature. In these, children carried out tasks of espionage and carried guns. Their involvement took place mainly in armed opposition groups.

² *Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, UNICEF, 2004. Guide to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.*

³ *International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Child Soldiers Global Report 2004.*

Other spaces for information

Girl combatants in Colombia

According to a recent Human Rights Watch report, all irregular armed groups in Colombia recruit women and girls for combat. From a quarter to one-half of all active members of some of these groups are women and girls including girls as young as eight. These young girls endure all the hardship of military life. Their tasks are the same as those of the young boys. They are taught to manipulate weapons, gather information and participate in military operations. Like all combatants, they usually end up wounded or dead.

Furthermore, young girls who participate in the rebel forces are victims of gender-related harassment. Although generally they are not subjected to rape or sexual assault, many leaders use their power and influence to instigate sexual relations with underage girls. "They choose the prettiest girls...and they offer them presents and privileges", stated a young girl quoted in the Human Rights Watch report. It appears that these relations are not instigated by force, but that they develop within the context of the commanders' authority of life or death over the combatants under their command. Girls as young as 12 are compelled to use contraceptives and are subject to abortions if they become pregnant.

Source: Human Rights Watch, *You Will Learn Not to Cry: Child combatants in Colombia*, chapter 7, Girls, September 2003.

2.2. When war becomes an option: recruitment

My father worked in the gold mines until he became sick. After that, we had nothing and we had to leave school. When Kabila's troops from Katanga entered our village, they pillaged all the goats and chickens and made us carry heavy loads. After being looted three times, I was angry and I signed up for the army to get my revenge and to escape the attacks. In the army, they paid me 100 dollars a month and I was happy.

(Children - Not Soldiers. Guidelines for working with child soldiers and other young people associated with combat forces Save the Children. 2002. A 17 year old adolescent in the DRC).

The reasons why a child becomes actively involved in combat forces are associated with the realities of a community at war and the imperative to survive. From poverty to kidnapping, including rage or intimidation, various situations arise which lead children to consider war as a viable option.

Children become associated with armed forces or armed groups in a number of ways, one of which is **conscription or voluntary military service** in the national armed forces. **Forced recruitment** is another way by which children become embroiled in hostile situations, be that in national armed forces, paramilitary groups or armed opposition groups. Another form of recruitment is through **methods of persuasion**, such as propaganda or offers of food, clothing, money or better opportunities. Lastly, there are many cases where youths **enlist voluntarily** as belonging to the armed group may be seen as an "opportunity" in the face of necessity.

2.3. What happens to the rights of the child?

*Let not even the slightest cloud darken their horizon.
Arturo Corcuera.*

Declaration of love for Child Rights. Radda Barnen

Since 1990 more than two million children have died as a consequence of armed conflict. Many more have been maimed or seriously injured. Sexual violence has especially affected young girls, many have been kidnapped and raped, and have been infected with **sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS**. Many of the youngest children are forced to leave their homes or are made orphans; these children make up more than half of the 20 million people who have been made **refugees or displaced** by armed conflict.

However, child rights are enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international standard that is used to conceptualise the principle of best interest of the child, a judicial formulation pivotal in protecting children in all matters relating to them (Alfageme, E., Cantos R. and Martínez, M. 2003).⁴ Article 38 of the Convention requires that all possible measures be taken to ensure the protection and care of children during situations of violence and war. This implies the respect of all their rights.

Additionally, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict raises the minimum age of all recruitment for direct participation in hostilities and compulsory recruitment, and all sorts of recruitment by non-government armed groups from 15 to 18. It also calls upon states to raise their minimum age for any type of voluntary recruitment into their government armed forces.

International human rights standards include several provisions to benefit or protect children as civilians. Furthermore, in recognition of their needs and special vulnerability, children have the right to “special respect and protection”, by which the parties to the conflict will provide them with the care and help that they require. For example, states are obliged to let humanitarian assistance destined for children pass into occupied territories.

⁴ On 20 November 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Practically all United Nations Member States have ratified it. Its main objective is to improve the situation of children in society by recognising, protecting and promoting their rights.

Various international legal instruments exist for the protection of child soldiers

International legal Instrument	Coming into force	Description
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict	12 February 2002	The aim of the Optional Protocol is to prohibit the recruitment of children less than 18 years of age into armed forces and groups and their participation in hostilities.
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	November 1999	States commit to respect and ensure that others respect the principles of International Humanitarian Law that is applicable to armed conflicts: protecting the civil population, particularly children.
Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court	17 July 1998	Recruiting or enlisting children under the age of 15 into armed forces or to use them to actively participate in hostilities is considered a war crime.
International Labour Organization Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182	1999	Considers recruitment as one of the worst forms of child labour. The convention requires from states the adoption of measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including the forced and compulsory recruitment of children.

2.4. Children after war

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts.

Article 39. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Disarmament and demobilisation are the first phases in the process to help children reintegrate into their homes and communities. Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) programmes are formal procedures normally set in motion by a peace agreement. The aims of demobilisation range from verification of the participation of children in combatant groups or forces to gathering information about the child's identity and providing information about their situation after the war.

DDRR programmes are initiatives promoted by the international community as measures to care for and protect former child soldiers. These programmes need support from governments, United Nations agencies and child protection organisations to ensure that the needs and rights specific to children, especially girls, are taken into account. Additionally, the participation of affected children in the planning of DDRR programmes should be considered, ensuring that their points of view as main protagonists are taken into account.

Security Council Resolution 1314 states that both sides in conflict should include provisions for the protection of children in peace negotiations or peace agreements, especially concerning disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of child combatants and that as far as possible they take children into account in these processes.

Underlines the importance of giving consideration to the special needs and particular vulnerabilities of girls affected by armed conflict, including, inter alia, those heading households, orphaned, sexually exploited and used as combatants, and urges that their human rights, protection and welfare be incorporated in the development of policies and programmes, including those for prevention, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

UN Security Council (2000). Security Council Resolution 1314 on children and armed conflict.

3. Human rights and peace education

Preparation for peace through education is the most effective constructive work against war, given that wars today are not justified by the demands of the people nor offer them any hope of progress.

Montessori, M. Education and Peace. Editorial Popular, 1993.

Armed conflicts make us reflect on the need for education for peace. It is vital to break the culture of war that has marked the lives of millions of children. It is everyone's responsibility to build a culture of peace as well as to acquire the necessary resources to make people aware of the urgent need to avoid war and stimulate international unity and respect for human rights.

The current idea of peace is a concept that stands against all forms of structural violence. In this sense, peace can be understood as a constructive process of social reform that aspires to much more than just the absence of direct violence. In this way,⁵ the concept of positive peace incorporates freedom, equality, solidarity and justice as essential components.

Education plays a key role in building a culture of peace both at local and global levels. Both these spheres should be taken into consideration when working with young people about the reality of child soldiers.

In the same way, human rights education is a process in which individuals are informed about their rights and those of others by participating and interacting within a learning framework. Human rights education is a deliberated and participatory task designed to strengthen individuals, groups and communities by promoting knowledge, skills and attitudes coherent with the human rights principles recognized internationally.

Human rights education has the following objectives: make human rights notions known; encourage reflection about the system of values in our society; analyse the ethical and moral principles of human rights standards; and remind those being formed of the imperative need to ensure that no human being is denied their fundamental rights as established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

⁵ *Galtung, Johan. Peace by peaceful means. Peace and conflict, development and civilization. Bakeaz/Gernika Gogoratuz. Bilbao,*

Human rights and peace education is and should be not only the responsibility of educational institutions but of the community in general. It is necessary to carry out actions aimed at transforming society and which can overcome those elements that feed structural violence and that are at the heart of situations that threaten human rights.

Other spaces for information

UNICEF defines peace education as:

The process of promoting the skills, attitudes and necessary values to achieve changes in behaviour allowing children, young persons and adults to prevent conflicts and violence, both manifest and underlying, to resolve conflicts peacefully and to create the conditions that lead to peace, be that on an intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, national or international level.

Mediator's manual. Colouring in the peace. Spanish Red Cross

3

A space for reflection and action

1. Introduction

We have started down a path that has allowed us, firstly, to review the main issues regarding child soldiers, from “who are they?”, “where are they?”, and “what is happening at the moment?” then, to consider a proposal to get involved in a collective action of human rights and peace education, a factor that brings us to a key point in our path: reflection and action. There is a need to consolidate our role and reflect on the prevailing reality that makes us question and act. Teachers play a greater role in this process of informing and making young people aware of the situation, inviting them to reflect and create a spirit of leadership in the struggle for the defence of human rights, especially child rights, and for a culture of peace. For this, in the second part of this guide we have included activity blocks through which we aim to launch an educational process based on the idea of transmitting values that nurture the afore mentioned culture of peace and the consolidation of education as key tools to generate knowledge and awareness as well as to foster youth's participation.

- Violence and armed conflict
- Child rights and armed conflict
- Child soldiers

2. Activity Blocks

Each activity block is made up of:

- **Introduction**, where the general content of activities is explained.
- **Activities** on relevant themes proposed in exercises for students
- **Help notes** to support and complement the activities undertaken.

2.1. Block 1: Violence and armed conflict

Violence is a word with negative connotations, incompatible with the values of consensus and common understanding. Human beings often find answers in attitudes that do not consider respect or dialogue and that lead us unnecessarily to abuse and cruelty. As such on many occasions, we find ourselves in situations of conflict, which force us to act directly against the rights of other people. Armed conflicts are a clear example of violence where all human beings experience the extreme brutality of war.

In this first block, we will work on aspects relative to violence and armed conflict from an analysis of the reality and by questioning the current context.

Activity 1:

—————War... another world

Objectives:

- Find out how students perceive the scope or effect of armed conflict in different environments.
- Reflect on the importance that is given to situations of violence in the world.

Materials:

- Work sheet containing a chart with questions.
- Explanatory diagram included in the contents manual showing the characteristics and effects of armed conflict.

Programme:

Students should reflect on the impact of wars on different environments. For those who submit a work sheet, it should contain a chart with questions related to the possible effects of armed conflicts on different environments, which the student should respond to from their own perspective. Later they will exchange their perceptions. Finally, the teacher will use the chart to summarise what armed conflicts are.

How do they affect? -----

- How do armed conflicts affect the world?
- How do armed conflicts affect my country?
- How do armed conflicts affect my community?
- How do armed conflicts affect my family?
- How do armed conflicts affect my friends?
- How do armed conflicts affect me?

Help notes:

Violence generated by armed conflicts does not go unnoticed by those who live with that reality on a daily basis. They come to terms with the situation despairingly and without a clear way out of it. For those of us who witness it from a distance it seems incomprehensible, harsh and cruel but it does not affect our personal daily lives. "The world is broad and distant, without a trace of coincidence".⁶

However, we should strive to increase our capacity for reflection and analysis, as well as our sense of responsibility and initiative. We should be aware that we should use our ability to organise ourselves to search for values where respect and the defence of human rights are paramount.

Activity 2:

—————"Imagining my world"

Objectives:

- Students get to know the violent situations that many countries of the world are experiencing.

⁶ Phrase taken from the title of the book "The World is Broad and Distant" by the Peruvian writer *Ciro Alegria*.

Materials:

- Question cards.
- Text about a country.
- Map of the world showing countries that are currently experiencing or have experienced armed conflict. (Page 5).

Programme:

Cards will be made with questions that refer to the world's armed conflicts. Students will each choose a card and will try to answer the question orally. After finishing the round of questions the teacher will describe the particular situation in a country or region and then the questions and answers will be revised again. Finally, the teacher will show a map of the world where the students will be able to observe the various countries affected by war.

Questions:

- 1---- Are there armed conflicts in the world?
- 2---- Are there many armed conflicts in the world?
- 3---- What characterises armed conflicts?
- 4---- Do you believe that there is space for dialogue?
- 5---- Who is most affected during an armed conflict?
- 6---- Do you believe that all men and women want conflict?
- 7---- Why do you think countries suffer armed conflicts?
- 8----What is the hardest thing about armed conflicts?

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formally Zaire)

Capital: Kinshasa
Population: 57.549.000
Currency: Congolese franc
Languages: Swahili and a wide variety of languages and dialects.
French: Official language.

Located in the centre of the African continent, the country occupies most of the catchment area of the river Congo and has a narrow exit into the Atlantic. It has considerable mineral resources: copper, zinc, tin, gold, cobalt and uranium. The south, covered by savannah, is where most of the population lives. Agricultural products are cotton, peanuts, coffee and sugar cane.

Since 1994, the DRC has suffered an ethnic struggle that triggered a civil war in 1996. It has been the most deadly conflict since the WWII. On 17 May 1997, Kabila proclaimed himself president and changed the name of the country to the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the summer of 1998, a new rebellion flared up with military support from other countries (Rwanda and Uganda). A cease-fire was declared in 1999 although fighting continued to intensify, principally in the East of the country. In recent years, the North East region of Congo has suffered the worst violence with diverse factions fighting for control over resource-rich areas.

Hundreds of civilians have been killed and have suffered human rights abuses. The militia has used thousands of refugees as human shields. Hundreds of repatriated people have been massacred by armed groups and by the security forces or have simply disappeared. Around 250,000 Congolese have been displaced from their homes due to fighting (1996, UNHCR). It is estimated that 71,600 persons have taken refuge in other countries, mainly Burundi, Angola, Tanzania, Sudan, Uganda and Zambia (1996, UNHCR).

Since 1996, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, child combatants have represented around 35% of the troops in all the armed groups over an uninterrupted period of seven years of fighting. Thousands of children

have been forced to join the army and militia. These children have been abducted in the streets or taken from classrooms, refugee camps or camps for internal displaced people. Many others have been forced to leave their homes at gun point. Some children have been reportedly recruited while playing near to their homes or walking along the street. Some children are known to have voluntarily joined the armed forces or militias when faced with separation from their families, poverty and the collapse of basic social services such as education and health.

Help notes:

Many countries in the world try to overcome long years of political, social, economic and cultural instability that arise from conflicts over differences of objectives, interests, beliefs...where dialogue and understanding have not been able to flourish. Entire generations have been born into and grown up with war, without finding a common objective. These countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe try to build hope and peace instead of the culture of war they live under.

Armed conflicts do not meet the needs of any community, do not allow for progress and sacrifice the lives of men, women and children. Countries affected by war, although different, share the disadvantages of conflict and they all hope that their conflicts can be resolved without violence.

Activity 3:

—————**“We are everyone”**

Objectives:

- Reflect on the positive and negative aspects of an armed conflict.
- Understand the role of the different parties to an armed conflict.

Materials:

- Worksheets with the description of the roles that each of the groups of students will take.

Programme:

Prepare a role-play situation. Students will split into four groups with each group representing an interest group involved in armed conflict and one of them will represent an external participant. The first group will be the government forces, the second, the opposition groups, the third, will represent the civilian population and the fourth an external movement or organisation. Each group will have a worksheet describing their different positions. The students in each group should try to defend their position while a fourth group tries to encourage dialogue and reach an alternative solution.

WS

Worksheet Group 1:

Government forces:

Armed forces associated with the government defending the continuation of the government and its policies.

Main ideas:

1. What we are doing is best for the country.
2. We will not negotiate with opposition groups.

WS

Worksheet Group 2:

Opposition groups:

Armed groups linked to opposition forces against the government and its policies.

Main ideas:

1. The policies of the government do not address the needs of the people.
2. Our policies are more appropriate to govern.

WS

Worksheet Group 3:

Civilian population:

Unarmed groups that live in a state of armed conflict.

Main ideas:

1. We do not want war and we are not interested in their problems.
2. We are the first ones to be affected by violence.
3. We have to leave our communities and our possessions to protect ourselves.

WS

Worksheet Group 4:

Organization for Peace:

External group trying to mediate to avoid armed conflict.

Main ideas:

1. Conflicts can be resolved peacefully and through dialogue.
2. Nothing justifies violence, injustice or human rights abuses.

Help notes:

The current context opens up opportunities for us to find a path that leads to change, a path that requires us to work together, where human beings and their well-being are the ultimate goals. There is a responsibility and a duty to deal with the different problems the world faces, and in this specific case – armed conflict.

Knowledge is the first step in a process of reflection and meaningful action. To be aware of what has happened and continues to happen in the world makes us participate in these situations and opens up different possibilities to strengthen our active role within a process that aims to break with the culture of violence and consolidate a culture of peace.

2.2. Block II: Childhood, armed conflict and child rights

All across the world children are exposed to extreme situations where their special needs are not met. In countries suffering from armed conflict, children are not isolated from this reality; rather they become both protagonists and victims at the same time, both as a reaction to the circumstances and as victims of the effects that war creates. With the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by almost all countries, there is a new way forward in the recognition and defence of childhood. The international community has made a commitment to their rights.

Child soldiers as a group require immediate action to avoid continued abuse of their rights to be protected and have their needs satisfied, and to strengthen their rights of prevention and participation. The international community has attempted to respond to this urgent need by drawing on the recognition of their rights and the duty of all States to fully defend them.

In this second block, we deal with the rights of children involved in armed conflict in a practical way, from recognition of the situation to participation to resolve it.

Activity 1:

—————“These are my rights”

Objectives:

- Reflect on our fundamental rights.
- Detect differences in how our rights are denied and how those of child soldiers are denied.

Materials:

- Support document for teachers.
- Worksheet.

Programme:

The teacher should initiate the activity explaining precisely what is meant by the rights of protection and provision as stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, using the support document. Later, students will be given the corresponding worksheets where they will analyse the differences between how their rights are respected on a daily basis and how those of child soldiers are respected.

Support document

The state and the International Community have the obligation and duty to protect and guarantee the rights of children in times of war:

Right to life, survival and development (art. 6)

Apart from the generic recognition of the right to protection, the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifies other rights:

- Right to life, survival and development (art. 6)
- Right to protection from all forms of violence (art.19)
- Right to health and health care services (art.24)
- Right to protection from all forms of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (art. 34)

- Right to protection from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and deprivation of liberty (art.37)

Despite these rights, children are those who most suffer from the consequences of war and armed conflict. Since 1990, more than two million children have died because of armed conflict. Many more are maimed or suffer serious injuries. Girls are particularly affected by sexual violence; many have been abducted and raped, becoming victims of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Right not to be separated from their parents (art. 9)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child also recognises the following rights:

- Right not to be separated from their parents (art.9)
- Children deprived of their family: right to special protection (art. 20)
- Right to protection from abduction, sale or traffic (art. 35)

Many children have to abandon their homes, sometimes unaccompanied by an adult, losing contact with their family and friends. Children are forced to leave their homes or become orphaned. These children represent more than half of the 20 million persons displaced or made refugees by armed conflicts; and children are even more vulnerable in the context of war. Currently 100 million children live or work in the streets. The dangers of the streets are multiple: prostitution, child exploitation, recruitment by armed groups...For example, in Sri Lanka, some children were recruited by the LTTE, an armed group, soon after the Tsunami in December 2004.

Right to education and to attend school (art. 28)

In times of war it is very difficult for children to attend school. This situation is especially difficult for adolescents as there are more likely to be conscripted into the military service than younger children. They will abandon school due to lack of opportunities or because of family responsibilities, be economically exploited and – especially in the case of girls – suffer sexual abuse. Currently, there are 50 million children in countries in armed conflict who are not able to attend school.

Right to rest and leisure, to play and to be with friends (art. 31)

Millions of children are not able to attend school, but they also cannot play with friends or share with them their hopes and dreams.

MYSELF-----	
Rights of protection	Rights of provision
Community	Community
School	School
Family	Family
Child soldiers-----	
Rights of protection	Rights of provision
Community	Community
School	School

Family	Family
--------	--------

Help notes:

When we reflect on our own lives and our daily environment, we think of normal situations such as going to school, living with our parents...however, these situations are not always the norm for everyone. Thousands of children are not able to attend school, are separated from their families and are not protected. Their fundamental rights have been violated.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child aims to overcome the deficiencies of many countries, make the protection of children the paramount principle, and ensure that children, as a group in society, play a role. Respecting and protecting their rights should be a duty and a commitment, not only of the international community, but also of all of us.

Activity 2:

—————**“Imagining our Framework for Action”**

Objectives:

- Get to know the international legal framework regarding the use of child soldiers.
- Consolidate the ideas that students have about how to protect child soldiers.
- Work in teams and reach agreements.

Materials:

- Summary document about the legislation. The Optional Protocol will be used.
- Table of the international agreements regarding child soldiers drawn up in the contents manual.

Programme:

Teachers will present a table that summarises international agreements regarding the involvement of child soldiers in armed conflict. These will focus on the Optional Protocol and a short summary of its main provisions adapted for students will be handed out. Later, the students will form working groups and will complement the Protocol with other measures that they consider necessary to stop the use of child soldiers. Finally, one democratically chosen member from each group will participate in a working group that will write up a single document using the information gathered from the previous working groups. The document will represent all the students and should be approved by them as their legal framework against the use of child soldiers.

Summary document

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict

Document officially approved by the United Nations General Assembly which entered into force on the 12 February 2002, for the protection of children against the consequences of their involvement in armed conflict.

Main provisions:

1. Individuals under the age of 18 may not participate directly in any type of hostilities.
2. Individuals under the age of 18 may not be conscripted into the armed forces.
3. All countries should commit to comply with international standards for the protection of children.

Presentation of reports:

Two years after the Protocol enters into force, each country will submit a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in where it will explain the measures that it has adopted to meet the provisions of the Protocol.⁷ After the initial report, the reports will be produced every five years.

Help notes:

Considering the lack of progress shown by certain countries in respecting and protecting the rights of children, the international community has accepted its responsibility by adopting international legal standards on the use of children as soldiers.

These legal standards must be ratified by each country and must be incorporated as legally binding into their respective national legal systems. Thus, governments commit to work for the protection of children affected by conflict and violence.

Nevertheless, this responsibility and commitment should also be assumed by the societies that make up each country, as a part of a process of working together where we all have a role to play. As such, it is necessary to know and understand the international legal standards that support the initiative aimed to fight against situations of risk and of abuse of child rights.

Activity 3:

—————“**And... where do children come in?**”

Objectives:

- Recognise the importance of consulting with children affected by armed conflict in all actions of support.
- Reflect on their right to participate and have an opinion about what is happening in the world.

Materials:

- Document about a child soldier’s story.
- Worksheet “***We need to know more***”.

Programme:

A real case with the story of a child soldier will be given to the students. Having read it, the student should take on board the importance of consulting those same children’s opinion about the actions that are being taken in the defence of their rights. A worksheet entitled “We need to know more” will be used as a guide to the most important aspects of the situation of these children that the student needs to know about. Finally, the students should compile a series of questions “***What would you ask a...***” based on the worksheet.

⁷ The Committee on the Rights of the Child is an international body composed of 18 experts chosen by the States Parties to verify compliance with and application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

WS

Worksheet: “We need to know more”⁸

1. There is little information about how children individually or collectively face difficult situations.
2. There is little information about what children do for themselves, how they participate in the definition and solution of their problems, and how that affects their resilience and control of the situations they are involved in.
3. There are very few studies on how children have become more resilient by participating in efforts to confront their problems and those of their community.

One of many stories...

“After training they sent me to the Kapalata camp in Kisangani, where I escaped an outbreak of cholera that killed many of my companions. I fought on various fronts. I killed and many of my companions fell at the front. I suffered a great deal. My commanders beat me. In Uvira, I had nothing to eat and had to attack the local people so that they would give me food. The commanders sent me to loot the villages, but they gave us nothing of what we took and shared it amongst themselves. I learnt to smoke drugs and drink liqueur and I raped the woman that the commanders kept. I learnt many bad things. I tried to escape but they caught me and shut me in a container for a month and a half, beating me morning and night. Later they transferred me and demobilized me. Now I want to go home and help my parents.”

Adolescent, 16 years old, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Help notes:

The consequences of armed conflict on children have been enormous and tremendously damaging. It has been necessary to start a movement that brings together all key players, from governments and the United Nations, to civil society to find a way of working together to help the children who have been used in armed conflict and alleviate the consequences of the violence that has physically and psychologically affected the child soldiers.

International legal standards are an instrument to achieve our objectives. However, working directly with children is fundamental and should be based on a real understanding of the problem and on an appropriate perception of the situation, aspects that are only possible by listening to them and by taking into account their opinions. Programmes for children should also work with those same children. Furthermore, their rights should not only be protected but also promoted.

2.3. Block III: Child soldiers

Child soldiers live in this situation because of the armed violence that exists in many countries. Children, a vulnerable group with special needs, are involved voluntarily or by force in situations that limit their development and well-being.

The reality of children in wars is alarming. Armed forces and groups from countries across the world have targeted children, recruiting them to take part in hostile situations and carry out tasks that directly deny them their rights.

⁸ Adapted from McConnan, I. and Uppard, S. (2002) “Children - not soldiers”. Save the Children.

This block will explore the issue of the use of girls and boys as soldiers, suggesting positive situations, assessing the information obtained and defining appropriate actions to be taken.

Activity 1:

—————**“Positive thinking”**

Objectives:

- Reflect positively on the situation of children in the world, and specifically on child soldiers.
- Think about possible situations or contexts where children involved in war become children living in a peaceful environment.

Materials:

- Worksheets.

Programme:

The teacher will give the students worksheets containing two scenarios: “*Children in war*” and “*Children in peace*”. First, they should write three news items (they may use information that they have previously received) about child soldiers and their situation. Then, they should write a contrasting position to each news item where these children enjoyed a peaceful environment.

Children	
Children in war	Children in peace
1. Yesterday at eight o’ clock in the morning an armed group made up mostly of children between 10 and 13 years old entered into a village and destroyed everything in their path...	1. Yesterday at eight o’ clock in the morning a large group of children were working in various villages talking about their experiences, about justice and the need for solidarity...
2.	2.
3.	3.

Help notes:

Child soldiers live in hostile environments, where the possibility of survival is based on principles of violence. The resources available to them are limited. They often experience cruelty and brutality as part of the negative reality that they have to accept in their lives as soldiers.

Children that have been caught up in armed conflict should not be seen as an obstacle for peace; on the contrary, they should be key players in a process that help consolidate justice, respect and solidarity. The lives of children, just as those of men and women, should take place in an environment of peace and respect for human rights.

Activity 2:

—————“I ask myself and I answer myself”

Objectives:

- Revise all the information and contents learned so far.
- Reflect and define ideas and perceptions regarding the issue of child soldiers.

Materials:

- Questionnaire

Programme:

The teacher will hand the students a questionnaire with nine questions about the subject. Later the students will debate their different answers and interpretations.

Questions:

- 1---- What is a child soldier?
- 2---- How does a child soldier live?
- 3---- What do you think about the countries where child soldiers are recruited?
- 4---- Who do you think is responsible for the problem of child soldiers?
- 5---- Do you think the international community is responding appropriately to the problem of child soldiers?
- 6---- How does the problem of child soldiers affect us all?
- 7---- Do you believe that the school is a key place to learn and reflect about these types of problems?
- 8---- How can we contribute to a culture of peace?
- 9---- What can I do to contribute to the defence of human rights and stop the use of child soldiers in armed conflict?

Help notes:

The definition of child soldiers is mainly determined by their age and the tasks they carry out in a given context, in this case, in an armed conflict. Countries exposed to hostility suffer economic, political and social instability.

The understanding that we have gained regarding the problems around the use of children in armed conflicts prompts us to reflect and ask ourselves some questions. Through analysis, we have found new means to achieve common objectives for the benefit of children everywhere; and, mainly, we have drawn up a goal to reinforce the role of education as a key element to encourage peace and human rights.

Activity 3:

—————“Hands on the job”

Objectives:

- Encourage the capacity of students to create material or information sources about the subject.
- Motivate students to become actively involved in specific tasks to spread the information.

Materials:

- Presentation of the Spanish Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers (See chapter 5 of this guide).
- www.menoressoldado.org
- Paper.
- Drawing materials.
- Newspapers and magazines.
- Photographs and adverts.

Programme:

Teachers will invite students to design a poster aimed at other young people to encourage them to join the campaign against the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts. The students will be put into work groups and given the necessary material to be able to design their poster.

Help notes:

Civil society plays a fundamental role in the initiatives to combat human rights violations and abuses. Non-governmental organisations are currently leading important campaigns to stop the recruitment of child soldiers and to motivate the general public to become actively involved in this process. Education is at the core of these initiatives for raising awareness and building peace.

People's involvement and participation takes many different shapes but always have a common objective. It is through understanding and tolerance, fighting against discrimination and intercultural dialogue that we can progress in the consolidation of peace.

4

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- 14---- Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, UNICEF (2004). *Guide to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*.

Web pages consulted

- 1----- International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers: www.child-soldiers.org
- 2----- Spanish Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers: www.menoressoldado.org
- 3----- Human Rights Watch: www.hrw.org
- 4----- Child Rights Information Network - CRIN: www.crin.org
- 5----- International Save The Children Alliance: www.savethechildren.net
- 6----- United Nations High Commission for Human Rights: <http://www.ohchr.org/english>
- 7----- United Nations: www.un.org
- 8----- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/treaties/crc.htm>
- 9----- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of children in armed conflict: <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/treaties/opac.htm>
- 10---- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child: www.child-soldiers.org
- 11---- United Nations Children's Fund -UNICEF: www.unicef.org

5

Who are we?

The Spanish Coalition, created in 2003, is formed of a group of Spanish organisations working in the domains of child protection and human rights.

Alboan www.alboan.org

Fundación El Compromiso www.elcompromiso.org

Amnistía Internacional www.es.amnesty.org

Save the Children www.savethechildren.es

Entreculturas www.entreculturas.org

Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados www.jesref.org

Our objective

To stop the recruitment and use of boys and girls – considered to be anyone under the age of 18 – as soldiers and to promote their disarmament and reintegration into their communities.

What do we do?

The Coalition's work is focused on three main principles:

- To raise awareness amongst the Spanish population.
- Mobilization campaigns and advocacy.
- Research.

What are we asking for?

- To governments: not to recruit or in any way use children as soldiers and to ratify the Optional Protocol.
- To armed groups: not to recruit children as soldiers.
- To the international community: to take urgent and vigorous action to avoid the recruitment of children and to promote the prosecution of perpetrators; to prioritise the rehabilitation and reinsertion of child soldiers; and to provide resources for disarmament, mobilization and reintegration programmes.

If you would like to know more about the work of the Spanish Coalition, please read our newsletter or contact us

www.menoressoldado.org
info@menoressoldado.org