In the UN Secretary-General’s latest annual report, armed forces and/or groups in 14 countries, highlighted in the map below, were listed as recruiting children.

The Secretary General’s children and armed conflict report for 2016 formally lists seven armed forces and 56 non-state armed groups in countries including Myanmar, Somalia and Syria. Additionally, non-state armed groups in several other countries are also known to recruit and use children to participate in hostilities, although the changing nature of conflicts often makes these situations difficult to formally verify.

1. Afghanistan
2. Central African Republic
3. Colombia
4. Democratic Republic of Congo
5. Iraq
6. Mali
7. Myanmar
8. Nigeria
9. Philippines
10. Somalia
11. South Sudan
12. Sudan
13. Syria
14. Yemen

**OUR VISION**

Armed conflict continues to tear apart communities across the world. From Boko Haram’s abducted ‘brides’ and Islamic State’s ‘Caliphate Cubs’, to the countless others exploited by armed groups in Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Afghanistan, many taking part in the world’s wars are still children.

We are fighting to end this. We envision a different life for children – one where they can grow up realising their full potential and enjoying all their human rights.

**CHILD SOLDIERS INTERNATIONAL EXISTS TO WORK FOR A WORLD WHERE CHILDREN ARE NOT USED IN WAR.**

This vision may be simple, but the task is huge. Only by working together – with governments, armed forces, international agencies, local partners, businesses, faith groups, affected communities, and children themselves – will we create a world where no child is recruited for war. Everyone has a role to play.
OUR STRATEGY

Our strategy is informed by one overarching goal: to prevent the military recruitment of any child.

We work with governments, non-governmental organisations, affected communities and children to identify and implement effective practical measures to prevent children being recruited by armed forces, and to ensure children who escape or are released can rebuild their lives.

But we also go beyond crisis response and immediate solutions, to tackle the problems at source. In addition to our practical, community-based programmes, we drive change in national laws and international standards – action which is essential for a permanent end to the military exploitation of children.

HOW WE WORK

Our approach uses our unique combination of specialist knowledge and country-based partnerships. We work with the right experts in the right countries to drive progress towards our goals, both locally and globally.

Community
We work with local child protection actors to bring about tangible improvements to the lives of children and communities affected by conflict around the world. We work together to foster an environment that protects children from recruitment and re-recruitment by passing on our specialist legal knowledge and connecting local partners with government and United Nations (UN) officials. This ensures our initiatives are sustainable and can protect children from recruitment in the long term.

National
We conduct national level advocacy campaigns, directly and with our partners, to bring about the political and legislative changes needed to end child recruitment. Where necessary, we work with governments to provide technical assistance and practical guidance to ensure these changes are implemented effectively.

International
We use our research at the international level to drive action, improve understanding and change the approaches of other international child rights and child protection actors, the UN, and diplomats, for a more effective, permanent solution to ending child recruitment.
ACHIEVEMENTS & PROGRESS

A snapshot of our year

**APRIL 2016**
Launches in Delhi and Jharkhand, India of our local language handbook on the laws which protect children from military recruitment.

**MAY 2016**
We meet government officials in Bangui, Central African Republic to advise on steps in law and policy which can better protect children from recruitment.

**JULY 2016**
Unveiling of our new website www.child-soldiers.org, updated to provide accessible information on current child soldier issues, advocacy and research resources.

**SEPTEMBER 2016**
We launch our specific teaching resources and campaign for schools and young people.

**OCTOBER 2016**
We present at the International Criminal Court on reparations for victims of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, convicted for recruiting and using children in DR Congo.

**NOVEMBER 2016**
Launch of our DR Congo education projects for former girl soldiers, supported by our research report representing the voices of these girls, *If I Could Go to School*.

**JANUARY 2017**
Video campaign, giving the perspective of a British Army veteran on the reality of military life for under-18 recruits, launches.

**FEBRUARY 2017**
We convene a specialist team of 12 child rights and child protection organisations for a conference at UNICEF Paris, to discuss a shared campaign for a worldwide end to the use of child soldiers.
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Central African Republic (CAR) has spiralled into increasing violence in the last year, with up to two-thirds of the country controlled by armed groups.

Thousands of children have been recruited by these groups – often with the support of their families or communities. Demobilising these children is problematic, since the armed groups who recruited them usually belong to the same communities.

Following our assessment in the capital Bangui in May 2016, we published our report, Des Milliers de vies à réparer (Thousands of lives to repair) reviewing the problem of child recruitment in CAR, and presenting our recommendations on how to prevent this abuse to the government, armed groups, the UN and the international community.

We met the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Social Affairs, to advise on policy measures and practical actions which can be put in place to better protect children from recruitment, including advice on the steps needed to ratify the child soldier treaty. We were delighted to see CAR become the 167th country to ratify the treaty in September 2017.

We continue to support the government in the finalisation of its Child Protection Code, which should effectively criminalise the recruitment of all children under the age of 18. This will be one of the next steps for the government in implementing their obligations under the treaty.

In the year ahead we will be promoting the adoption of this Child Protection Code, and supporting our prevention initiative by delivering a workshop for 30 government officials from across the country on procedural measures and practical steps to prevent child recruitment.

At the same time, we have designed a community-led programme to tackle the problem at its source.

Working closely with our Central African partner, Enfants sans Frontières, we have developed context-specific prevention booklets and illustrated training resources for community leaders, designed to build resistance to the recruitment - and re-recruitment - of children by armed groups operating in these communities.

In the year ahead we will disseminate the booklets through our workshops for a network of 40 child protection actors from across the country. We will work with these organisations to identify at-risk communities, and train them on how to use our booklets and resources. Our Congolese partner, PAMI joins us in this initiative, to present perspectives and practical experience from our community programmes in DR Congo.

At least

10,000 children estimated by UNICEF to have been used in the CAR conflict.

167th country of 198 to ratify the child soldier treaty

©UNICEF

CHILD SOLDIERS INTERNATIONAL  ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17

CHILD SOLDIERS INTERNATIONAL  ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17
In eastern DR Congo, our work continues to support the needs of former girl soldiers. These girls face particular challenges: almost inevitably subjected to sexual violence during their time with armed groups, they suffer stigma which causes them to be excluded from official release and reintegration programmes. Often, their communities, and even their families, reject them. Many feel they have little alternative than to return to the very armed group that they left.

The impact which this isolation and discrimination has upon the recovery of these girls is striking. In the words of one 16-year old:

“It is better to die there than come home and be rejected.”

This girl’s voice, and those of the other 149 girls who spoke to us, are represented in our research report, *What the Girls Say*, launched on 19 June 2017, the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

The report presents the challenges faced by former girl soldiers in DR Congo, told in their own words and with their own recommendations on the support they now need to rebuild their lives.

To respond to the problems which the girls identified, we organised a workshop in Goma, which brought together child protection actors, UN agencies and government officials. Together we discussed solutions and interventions, designed to meet the girls’ needs and facilitate their recovery, while respecting their rights.

Our practical guide to promote community acceptance of girls is the outcome of that process. Published in Swahili, Lingala and French, it presents a series of practical interventions for use by local child protection actors – based on the recommendations of the girls themselves, and devised with the NGOs and community groups who support them.

3,000 copies of the practical guide have now arrived in DR Congo. In 2017 our team returned to the country to meet our newly established National Action Group – formed of government and civil society child protection actors.

With the Group, we are mapping priority communities and providing support for members to target and train their own networks – which include local organisations, community groups and local authorities – on how best to implement the guide. This creates a cascade effect, enabling best practice initiatives to support former girl soldiers to be rolled out across remote conflict-affected communities in eastern DR Congo.

### GRACE’S STORY

Grace* lives in Katogota, a small village in South Kivu, DR Congo.

In 2015, Grace’s mother was killed by an armed militia which attacked her village. She was angry and afraid and so decided to join a rival armed group in pursuit of revenge. She was 15. After three months, she managed to escape but because of her experiences she was rejected by her family and friends.

Thanks to public donations we were able pay for Grace’s return to school in Katogota. She is one of 177 girls now benefiting from our education programme in the region.

When we visited Grace again in 2016 she told us that going back to school had completely changed her life.

“Your last visit brought so much to both me and my grandmother with whom I live with now. I can’t even believe that I’m back in school since I had given up hope and didn’t expect to be able to go back.”

*Name changed to protect identity
promote the community acceptance of girls, across conflict-affected communities in DR Congo.

With support from a group of Congolese partner organisations, and working closely with community leaders, the initial phase of our project in 2016 saw 55 girls return to either formal schooling or ‘catch-up’ literacy and numeracy programmes.

In September 2017, we were pleased to coordinate the addition of another 122 girls to this programme. We have committed to supporting all these girls through the programme for three years.

This scheme will serve as a pilot project for similar initiatives to support the reintegration of child soldiers across the world. We are evaluating the success of the intervention, and sharing the results with child protection actors looking to replicate this project in other countries where reintegration programmes for former girl soldiers need support, such as South Sudan.

Focus on education
During the year we began testing the education initiative in the practical guide to promote the community acceptance of girls, across conflict-affected communities in DR Congo.

With support from a group of Congolese partner organisations, and working closely with community leaders, the initial phase of our project in 2016 saw 55 girls return to either formal schooling or ‘catch-up’ literacy and numeracy programmes.

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AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan, severe poverty and a lack of other opportunities have driven children into fighting on all sides. Children taking part in hostilities risk being killed, injured or sexually abused, and have been used as suicide bombers.

Our research in six provinces of Afghanistan identified ongoing recruitment and use of children by the Afghan National Security Forces, and confirmed ongoing reports of the sexual abuse of children by named commanders.

This has formed the basis of our advocacy during the year to better protect children from recruitment into the Afghan National Security Forces. We supported calls for an amendment to strengthen the US’ Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA), which leverages further pressure on the Afghan government to ensure that no children remain in their ranks. Our research provided the basis for a briefing with recommendations to the Afghan government on preventing child soldier recruitment and use, and informed our campaign to raise awareness on the sexual abuse of boys within the ranks.

3,000
copies of our Practical Guide delivered to DR Congo partners

18
locations where our partners are working to implement our education programme

150
former girl soldiers told us about the support they need

177
former girl soldiers and vulnerable girls in their communities, helped back into education

4
armed groups in Afghanistan and the Afghan Police are listed by the UN Secretary-General in 2017 for recruiting and using children
UNITED KINGDOM

At 16, the British armed forces’ minimum recruitment age is the lowest in Europe, and one of the lowest in the world. Our research has shown that recruits who enlist as minors face much higher risks of abuse, mental health problems and long-term unemployment than those who enlist as adults. Specifically channelled into the most dangerous roles, child recruits also face a higher overall risk of death in action.

Throughout the year we built and broadened political support for raising the minimum enlistment age to 18. We met with representatives from all the major national parties, including in the Houses of Parliament, the Defence Committee and the Ministry of Defence, to lobby for change.

We also raised awareness among young people and their parents of the specific risks associated with enlisting as a minor. We produced and distributed a booklet challenging misconceptions about early enlistment and launched a series of 10 short videos of a young British veteran talking candidly about his experiences as a minor in the armed forces.

Our research was widely published in the mainstream media and specialist international affairs and defence publications, including the Royal United Service Institute and Chatham House journals.

23% of the British Army’s recruits were aged under 18 in 2016.

FUTURE PLANS

As a small organisation, we recognise that our goals can be best achieved through collaboration with others. In February 2017, we presented our new strategy for consultation with a panel of international NGOs working on child soldier issues. We are now working to create a network of child rights and child protection agencies working to prevent the military recruitment of all children, by coordinating a complementary series of initiatives.

February 2018 will see the 18th anniversary of the adoption of the child soldier treaty. As the organisation founded to call for the treaty we will be marking this ‘18th birthday’ with an event at the UN in New York, bringing together child protection actors, governments, UN officials and young advocates.

Here, we will take stock of past successes and obstacles; highlight best practice; develop collaborative initiatives; and galvanise the international community to take definitive action to stamp out the use of child soldiers.

At the event, we will also be launching our new Online Global Report - an internet-based information resource, with an interactive map; facts and data on child recruitment, alongside downloadable advocacy resources, to support initiatives by child rights actors working worldwide. 2018 will see the next phase of development, which we believe will see this tool become the definitive information source for anyone working on child soldier issues.

We will continue to apply the expertise we’re building through our current initiatives – promoting best practice on thematic areas such as education and reintegration, preventing the use of children by extremist groups, and community-led prevention.

It is this appetite for innovation, coupled with the strategic agility which comes with our status as a small, non-hierarchical organisation, which we believe qualifies Child Soldiers International for its niche role: driving collaboration to build a world where no child is recruited for war.

February

We travel to Myanmar to meet with local parliamentarians and child protection actors to move forward with the country’s ratification of the child soldier treaty.

March

The next phase of our CAR work gets underway. We will be training government officials and local partner organisations on measures to help prevent child recruitment in communities.

January

We will continue to apply the expertise we’re building through our current initiatives – promoting best practice on thematic areas such as education and reintegration, preventing the use of children by extremist groups, and community-led prevention.

Political parties in the UK now back our call to raise the recruitment age to 18.
1. Financial review
We maintained a robust financial position over the course of 2016-17, managing the challenge – common to our sector – of handling a portfolio of grants and contracts largely restricted in nature. Total income of £546,000 enabled us to deliver our planned schedule of ‘core’ programme activities, and to maintain our free reserves within the target range of four to six months’ office and salary costs.

Going forward, we are diversifying our fundraising efforts, with the aim of broadening our hugely valued team of individual and corporate supporters. Through this initiative, we aim to build an ‘urgent response’ fund, which will enable us to mobilise immediate responses to conflict crises.

The below illustration demonstrates our commitment to delivering the highest possible impact for the contributions we receive: in total 92% of our income was committed to our programme activities – either to support activities during the year, or for the financial year ahead.

2. Statement of financial activities for the year ended 31 March 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unrestricted funds GBP £</th>
<th>Restricted funds GBP £</th>
<th>Total funds GBP £</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations and grants</td>
<td>192,955</td>
<td>337,254</td>
<td>530,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income from charitable activities</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15,806</td>
<td>15,806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank interest</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total income</strong></td>
<td><strong>193,088</strong></td>
<td><strong>353,060</strong></td>
<td><strong>546,148</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising funds</td>
<td>8,733</td>
<td>37,465</td>
<td>46,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs of charitable activities:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National and community programmes</td>
<td>94,750</td>
<td>241,986</td>
<td>336,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International advocacy and campaigns</td>
<td>42,945</td>
<td>89,298</td>
<td>132,243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total expenditure</strong></td>
<td><strong>146,428</strong></td>
<td><strong>368,750</strong></td>
<td><strong>515,178</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net income/(expenditure) for the year</td>
<td><strong>46,660</strong></td>
<td><strong>(15,690)</strong></td>
<td><strong>30,970</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total funds brought forward at 1 April 2016</td>
<td>191,552</td>
<td>238,558</td>
<td>430,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total funds held by Child Soldiers International at 31 March 2017</td>
<td>238,212</td>
<td>222,868</td>
<td>461,080</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3. Balance sheet at 31 March 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GBP £</th>
<th>GBP £</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fixed assets</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangible assets</td>
<td>133</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current assets</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debtors</td>
<td>220,011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash at bank and in hand</td>
<td>262,995</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</strong></td>
<td>(22,059)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total net current assets less current liabilities</strong></td>
<td>460,947</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total net assets at 31 March 2017</strong></td>
<td>461,080</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funds held by Child Soldiers International</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted funds</td>
<td>222,868</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted funds:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds designated for 2017-18 programme activities</td>
<td>56,167</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangible assets</td>
<td>133</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds designated for 2017 office move and dilapidations</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted reserves</td>
<td>151,912</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total unrestricted funds</strong></td>
<td>238,212</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total funds held by Child Soldiers International at 31 March 2017</strong></td>
<td>461,080</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These summarised accounts are extracted from the full unqualified audited accounts approved by the trustees on 6 October 2017.

For further information, the full statutory accounts, which have been filed with the Charity Commission and Companies House, should be consulted. These can be obtained from Child Soldiers International, The Grayston Centre, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT.

**Auditors statement on the Financial Statements**
We have examined the summary Financial Statements set out on these pages.

**Respective responsibilities of Trustees and Auditors**
These summary accounts presented on these pages are the responsibility of the trustees. It is our responsibility to report our opinion of their consistency with the full financial statements, on which we reported on 16 October 2017. Our report on the full financial statements of Child Soldiers International includes information on the responsibilities of the trustees and the auditors relating to the preparation and the audit of those financial statements and on the basis of our unqualified opinion of those financial statements.

**Basis of opinion**
We have carried out the procedures we consider necessary to ascertain whether the summary accounts are consistent with the full financial statements from which they have been prepared.

**Opinion**
In our opinion, the summary accounts on these pages are consistent with the full financial statements of Child Soldiers International for the year ended 31 March 2017.

H. W Fisher & Company, Chartered Accountants, Registered Auditors, Acre House, 11-15 William Road, London NW1 3ER

Dated 16 October 2017
OUR SUPPORTERS AND CONTRIBUTORS DURING THE YEAR

Alistair Berkley Charitable Trust
Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School, Nebraska, US
Berwin Leighton Paisner LLP
Cambridge University RAG
CB and HH Taylor Trust
Design Corps, Pratt Institute
Dr Linda Dowdney, Consultant Clinical Psychologist
Jodie Eastman and John Eastman
Education Above All Foundation
Eleanor Rathbone Charitable Trust
Evan Cornish Foundation
Fairfield Centre School, Vermont, US
Flapjack Trust
Fulmer Charitable Trust
Garden Court Chambers Special Fund
Hillcote Trust
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
Liechtenstein Office for Foreign Affairs
Long Field Academy, Leicestershire, UK
James Mehigan, Barrister, Garden Court Chambers
Norwegian Royal Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Portrack Charitable Trust
Steven Powles, Head of Doughty Street International
The Ramsey Family Fund
Revolution in Kindness
Shelley Stock Hutter LLP
Rosie Strachan, communications consultant
Switzerland Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
Yvett Talas, legal researcher
Thread Design
Transform Foundation
UNICEF
Westcroft Trust

Thank you for helping us end the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Equally, thank you to every individual who has donated to our work over the past year. Together, we have helped make a difference.