

Servir

Child Soldiers *Educating to protect children*



In this issue: *Education, Aceh, Namibia,
Grands Lacs, Liberia.*



Jesuit Refugee Service

Providing alternatives to children

Lluís Magriñà SJ

In 2005, JRS will mark its 25th anniversary accompanying, serving and advocating the cause of refugees. Over that time, the people with whom we have worked have changed and the reasons why they are in need of international protection have also changed. Technological advances in weaponry and the proliferation of small arms have contributed to the increased use of child soldiers. Light-weight automatic weapons are simple to operate, often easily accessible, and can be used by children as easily as by adults.

JRS works with child soldiers because refugee and displaced children are among those most vulnerable to being recruited into armed forces or groups. They have often been separated from their families with no other means of survival. Living in camps they are frequently targeted by recruiters. It is the experiences that they have gone through which have led to their displacement. Also, many children become displaced while they are soldiers, and many become refugees as a result of being recruited into armed forces or groups. If they escape from the armed force or group or are demobilised, they are often unable to return to their families or communities.

In 1998, JRS helped to establish the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC) and on the 17 November 2004 the CSC published its second Global Report on child soldiers, (available at <http://www.child-soldiers.org>, the CSC website). This report details the recruitment and use of child soldiers by government armies, paramilitaries and armed opposition groups in every country around the world. It also provides information on the demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers into civil society.



New recruits, Shan State Army, Myanmar

Around the world JRS manages specific projects that work to prevent the military recruitment of children, particularly in Colombia and in neighbouring countries. These projects promote human rights and peace education with young people. One of the most important elements that can provide a child with protection against military recruitment is a place in school. JRS runs many educational programmes, often in conflict zones, thus contributing to the protection of these children from recruitment. JRS' income generation and technical training programmes also provide young people with a means of supporting themselves and therefore with alternatives to military recruitment. Also JRS educational and pastoral programmes often encounter former child soldiers, and assist their reintegration into society. In some countries such as Indonesia and Burundi, JRS country offices have joined national campaigns against the use of child soldiers, and have worked to develop these local coalitions and are able to inform the work of the CSC through its experience in the field.

This edition focuses on a particularly vulnerable group, children, and on the

increasing use of children in warfare, be it as frontline combatants or as messengers, sentries, porters, servants, cooks, and sexual slaves. It focuses on the children caught in conflicts in Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia and Liberia. It outlines why education is a crucial tool to both integrate former child soldiers and to prevent children from becoming involved in armed conflicts.



Lluís Magriñà SJ, JRS
International Director



Education: a tool for protection, an instrument for transformation

Roxanne Schares SSND

Despite the numerous international treaties and statements by world governments about the right to, and value and strategic importance of universal education for children, over 121 million children worldwide, the majority of them girls and some 24 million in Africa alone, are out of school, often directly due to conflict. However, not only victims, children have become direct participants in armed conflict. More than 300,000 children, recruited as young as 10 and even younger, are fighting in more than 30 countries, mostly in Africa and Asia. In case studies by Human Rights Watch in El Salvador, Ethiopia, and Uganda, almost one third of the child soldiers were reportedly girls. The children are not only used as soldiers, wielding lightweight weapons, but also as spies, messengers, sentries, servants, sex slaves, to lay and clear landmines, and even as human mine detectors.

As society breaks down, many children are recruited by force. Others join armed groups out of desperation or the promise of food, security, and even education. In some cases, children are the incidental victims; in others, they are caught in wars where the aggressors specifically try to maim, kill and spiritually destroy the children of the enemy.

Children are particularly vulnerable to recruitment and easily intimidated or conditioned into fearless killing and unthinking obedience. Tortured and made to torture or take part in terrible atrocities against others, even their own families and friends, they are traumatised, stigmatised, lacking self-esteem, uncertain of the community's reaction toward them, and unable to return home. Child soldiers are often treated brutally and sometimes killed during harsh training. Due to their immaturity, they suffer higher casualties than adult soldiers.

Even though the journey towards a better future can seem endless, education can be a tool for protection. It can lessen the psychosocial impact of trauma and displacement and provide opportunities for students and their families to begin the healing process. The routine of schooling re-establishes a sense of normalcy and security that is beneficial to the well being of the children and the adults. Former child soldiers, usually requiring special care, rehabilitation and education, can be restored to health and to their families and communities.

Attending schools, or other non-formal education centres, provides professionals with an opportunity to identify and support children with severe psychological and other health problems. Education also provides a constructive alternative for children who may be vulnerable to recruitment, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, prostitution, the use of drugs and criminal activity.

Where education empowers, fosters human values and focuses on the development of the total person, it can bring awareness of the wider world and human rights. It is not only about “learning to know” or having information on particular topics, but also about “learning to do” with necessary skills, “learning to be” based on a set of core values necessary for life, and “learning to live and work with others” to envision and create a hope-filled future.



Roxanne Schares SSND, Refugee
Education Resource Person for Africa

Angola



Children caught in con

Ingvild Solvang

Aceh, the westernmost region of Indonesia, is a resource rich province. For decades, a conflict between the Indonesian authorities and the separatist movement known as GAM has killed thousands, and caused suffering to the local

A recent report released by the Indonesian government and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) states that displacement and the lack of security in the region has increased the level of responsibility borne by children. Furthermore, as a result of the war many children were suffering from malnutrition. Consequently, they were being forced out of school and into work. More than 600 schools were burnt during the period of martial law. In addition, there have been numerous anecdotal reports in the media that children are directly involved in the armed conflict, contrary to national Indonesian and international law.

The Child Soldier Global Report 2001 stated that children between 16 and 17 years old have been involved with GAM. An analysis of media reports during the Martial Law period indicates that this practice continues. Children have reportedly been recruited, in many cases forced to participate in dangerous and violent activities such as burning schools, spying, holding of communication equipment or working as informants. There are fewer reports available of children's involvement with the Indonesian military (TNI). The minimum recruitment age is 18 years old, in line with the UN optional protocol relating to the involvement of children in armed conflicts, which Indonesia has signed but not ratified. Children are not officially recruited although there have been anecdotal reports of children running errands, guarding and working as informants for TNI. Furthermore, there have been reports of children involved in civilian anti-separatist groups aimed at rooting out GAM members in the local communities. These activities place children at great risk as they may suffer retaliations from either side. Media reports during the Martial Law period show that children have been detained on allegations of supporting GAM and in May 2003 children as young as 11 were killed during a shoot out with the TNI.

A commander of the Indonesian military stated in an interview with a local Indonesian newspaper (Serambi Indonesia, August



Aceh

population. In May 2003, with the introduction of Martial Law, the Indonesian Government launched an integrated military and humanitarian operation to win the support of the Acehnese and restore security, law and order. The conflict intensified. Although Martial Law ended in May 2004, the military operation to defeat the separatist movement continues, prolonging the risk of civilian casualties. Although humanitarian organisations and media have limited access to the region, media reports make it possible to draw general conclusions about the situation of children trapped between conflicting parties.

Children in an IDP camp, Aceh. The banner reads: "Join GAM misery. Join prosperous Indonesia".



Conflict in Aceh

4, 2003) that children involved in GAM were recruited because they are unskilled. Other sources claim that children, who have witnessed family members and villagers being abused by the authorities during the former dictator Suharto's era are more prone to get involved with GAM because they want to take revenge, and are motivated by separatist ideology. Other children living in GAM strongholds in Aceh have said that they had been deceived, forced and threatened into working with GAM. The GAM leadership living in exile in Sweden has denied all such allegations and encouraged independent investigations. Regardless of the reasons for their involvement, these children are not being protected from violence and danger.

Through the militarisation of daily life where violence is normalised by its frequency, it is difficult not to become involved. The same is true for children. Forty-thousand military personnel and 12,000 police were sent to Aceh during the Martial Law period. Equipped military vehicles patrol the villages and the main roads. In addition, GAM has had a strong military presence in some parts of the region. Children living in conflict areas are victims of the makings and doings of adults. There is something fundamentally unfair about this, most of us will acknowledge. Even more so, as we know that children are especially vulnerable to acts of violence and physical and emotional damage. This basic understanding has become the foundation for the movement to create legal tools for child protection such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the relating protocol on child soldiers. When there are tools, the struggle is to ensure that they are implemented, not only through full ratification, but also through action taken by both the responsible government and non-state actors. It takes all parties involved to place the interest of the children and civilians first, and put an end to violence and hostilities.

Systematic information about the involvement of children in the war in Aceh is lim-



A boy in an IDP camp in Aceh

ited. Strong documentation is needed to respond adequately to the needs of children in conflict. JRS Indonesia, together with many other organisations who make up the humanitarian community in Indonesia, continues to engage with the Indonesian government to try and ensure access for humanitarian agencies in the region. Meanwhile, the Indonesian networks to ban the involvement of children in armed conflict are urging the government to ratify the optional protocol on child soldiers. Ensuring the full protection of children, with a focus on education and on rebuilding the community, is essential to ensuring a peaceful future in Aceh.



Ingvild Solvang, Advocacy Officer, JRS Indonesia

An IDP camp, Aceh



Lost Time... “yesterday

Francesca Campolongo

It's the start of summer in Namibia. In a few weeks time about 180 students are going to sit for their grade 10 national exams. The students at the junior secondary school in Osire refugee camp are filled with hope and fear. But they also are excited by the prospect of being the first refugee kids to graduate from a school that just three years ago seemed like a distant dream.



Osire junior secondary school where former child soldiers are now students

It is a normal school from a number of different perspectives. Attentive teachers, strict school principal and vice-principal, ever present masters of discipline, kids roaming around the school compound during break time in their red or turquoise uniforms, the photocopy-machine breaking down during exam time, soccer teams winning all the competitions. A quick look at a picture of the students may induce a distracted viewer to think that it's just another school.

However, the school background is far from normal. According to a report by one of the teachers, about 84 students in the secondary school served as child soldiers in southern Angola (boys and girls). There is a strong indication that the number might be higher. Most of them are in grade 10

this year. When we asked the vice-principal if they were good students, he replied, “They certainly are if they're in grade 10, otherwise they would be repeating grade 9”.

Most of the students from Angola fled their country alone; some have families still in Angola but most child soldiers have lost contact with their relatives. The school becomes a very useful tool to recreate normality. Rules to respect, assignments to accomplish, tasks to fulfil, responsibilities and rewards become part of a long road to regain the time lost during the fighting.

“Lost time”. That's how most of the students who wrote their stories, describe the years they spent fighting, working as soldiers, carrying loads for the adults or running from one hiding place to the next.

We tried to talk to them. We sat with a group of five students, two girls and three boys. We started chatting, trying to get them to talk to us about their past. The reaction was surprising. Probably fearing that we would punish them or worse, they all denied very firmly being former child soldiers. They told stories where every year of their childhood was accounted for, with exact references to places where they lived and schools attended. None of it matched the information we had. So we decided, together with the staff of the school, to try a different route. A teacher asked them to write down their stories and the truth came out.

“After my training I was forced to fight against my brothers. We were told that the aim of the war was to take out Cuban troops from the Country”... “Sometimes I feel frustrated when I think about the time I have lost during that bad period of my life”... “I was twelve years old”... “They captured me when I was going into grade 4”... “That spirit of being a soldier has gone. Sometimes I feel just a bit worried when I imagine I was fighting again”... “I feel good because yesterday was and today is”.

y was and today is."

These quotes from former child soldiers are a mixture of memories, hopes, broken childhoods, strong will and determination, every single story ends with the hope of being able to continue studying. As time goes on, this hope replaces the fear of the past; it provides the students with a sense of normality. Education is giving them hope for the future.



Francesca
Campolongo,
JRS Namibia



Osire junior
secondary school

The Osire Boys and Girls Club

Supported by JRS staff, 25 refugee women, age 18-60, carried out a survey in the camp during the December 2002 holiday, with the aim of assessing the needs of the girl population of the camp, with a special focus on marginalised minors. It was decided that there was a need to assist the young people, especially the girls, to stay in school and complete their education, to entice those not at school to come and to assist them in making healthy life choices. Consequently, they decided to establish the Osire Girls' Club. 800 girls took part in the first meeting of the Club. The Osire Boys' Club was established as a direct consequence of the female project.

The male teachers of both the primary and the junior secondary school in the camp raised the issue of the need to educate

the boys on non-violent behaviour and respect for women. They emphasised that by raising the awareness of the boys – on issues like teenage pregnancy, STDs, violence, conflict resolution, etc – the programme would have a real impact in changing attitudes in the camp. It became clear that further needs assessments were not necessary.

Ten male mentors were identified and the activities of the Boys' Club started in November 2003 with a workshop on "violence and other forms of abuse against women and children". These trained mentors and peer educators (refugees) offer them counselling and advice and organise activities on healthy life choices, conflict resolution, reconciliation, non-violent behaviour etc. Currently about 2,700 kids age 10-20 take part in the activities of the Clubs.



Osire school's
extracurricular
activities are
designed to support
young people staying
in school and to
teach alternatives to
violence as a way
to solve problems



Burundi

Child Soldiers: advocate for their future, a promise of peace

Louis Falcy

K*adogos* in the Congo, *Doriya* “guardians of the peace” or the *abajene* in Burundi, there are no lack of names for child soldiers in the African Grands Lacs region. Ravaged by years of civil and interregional wars, the region is one of the world’s hotspots for the use of child soldiers.

Following the different peace agreements since 2002, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo almost simultaneously began the process of demobilising child soldiers. The demobilisation process has been extremely slow and some say that it amounts to just a demobilisation smokescreen. The children often remain hostage to the various armed groups in the region. Often easy to recruit and mobilise, they are seen by many of the region’s leaders as guarantees of their political future. The demographic structural disequilibrium of the countries in the Grands Lacs region where the population is largely less than 18 years of age, the ease by which they can be manipulated, as

well as their limited financial demands, encourages massive recourse to their services.

Faced by this reality, JRS Grands Lacs began in 2003 to advocate on behalf of child soldiers. It identified two objectives. In East Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC), in particular in South Kivu, JRS decided to support – through its advocacy work – local civil society and its efforts to secure the demobilisation of child soldiers. While in Burundi, the fight against impunity was highlighted as the key issue. Here, JRS Burundi advocates for the ratification and implementation of international standards, in particular the Protocol to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child Relating to the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts, UN, 2000.

In South Kivu, there is no lack of armed groups, all of which engage, on a massive scale, in the use of child soldiers. The Province is a mountainous area and almost inaccessible, which

contributes to an underestimation of the scale of the use of child soldiers. It also remains a significant obstacle to ending the use of child soldiers. These children are the main resource fuelling the region's war. It was children, the *Kadogos*, who in 1996 brought Laurent Désiré Kabila to power in DRC and since have been the main engine of the war.

In this context, two main advocacy foci were identified: the armed groups and the international community. From the international community, JRS sought financial assistance to support the ongoing local initiatives, to conduct research to evaluate the extent of the problem and to identify ways forward and to highlight the issue internationally. JRS has supported a number of Congolese NGOs in South-Kivu. Only certain local actors can enter into contact with the armed groups. It also falls to them to advocate for a demobilisation process for children to the war lords. Information collected by them is then used to attract the attention of the international community. The ongoing peace process was identified as a unique opportunity to gradually convince the armed groups to free the children. Despite the setbacks, armed groups have on occasion been persuaded to free some children.

To bear witness to the suffering of these Congolese children and also to advance the process of demobilisation, JRS supported the production of a film on child soldiers in South-Kivu. This film, produced in October 2003, was shot in a Mai-Mai rebel camp. The raw images of children – sometimes very young – proudly displaying themselves as soldiers in front of the cameras, brings the issue directly to the viewer. It portrays a sense of devastation, of how children, manipulated in deadly political power struggles, may ruin the future of a country.

In Burundi the advocacy strategy adopted by JRS took into account the more advanced state of the demobilisation process in Burundi than in the DRC, as well as a different institutional context. JRS Burundi has contributed significantly to the establishment of the Burundian Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, (BCSC). This Coalition, established in April 2004, brings together a dozen national and international associations.

JRS Burundi decided to work for the establishment of a Coalition to help to build the capacity of the relevant actors in Burundian civil society to work on the issue and to act as an important advocacy conduit. It evaluates and publicly condemns abuses when the circumstances warrant it. The BCSC also participated in the production of the Global Report on Child Soldiers 2004, a publication by the International Coalition, which will be used as an information base for international-level advocacy on the use of child soldiers. Equally and very importantly the Coalition takes on the more discreet work of lobbying, aimed at promoting the rights of this much abused group of young people. Burundi has not ratified any of the principal international and regional human rights instruments on children. JRS Burundi, as part of the Coalition, supports advocacy efforts to persuade the Burundian Government to ratify these conventions and to bring them into national legislation since it believes that they will be efficient and durable tools for protecting children and preventing the use of child soldiers.



Louis Falcy, former Advocacy Officer, JRS Grands Lacs

Byumba camp, Rwanda



Guns and lost childhood

C. Amalraj SJ

Liberia gained notoriety for its long chronic war. A small country with immense natural wealth, the West African nation entered into a chronic war mode in 1990. Militias, warlords and assorted groups of armed men looted, raped and brutalised at will. Successive governments killed their own citizens and forced thousands more to flee. The shopping list of death is staggering: 200,000 killed in a country of 3 million people, 750,000 displaced and 73,000 combatants in various militia groups.



Liberia

Looting was the norm. Militias looted everything. When they entered villages, they looted the clothes people were wearing, snatched slippers from children's feet, and abducted young girls as sex slaves. The cruellest among the militias were always the leaders. He who looted the most was held in the highest esteem among his rag tag army of drugged militias.

Of all things they looted, the plunder of childhood was the most tragic, a festering wound in Liberian society. Most of the children were abducted, snatched from their parents, brutal-

ised beyond belief. The warlords needed children. Children obey promptly, had no ideological baggage and could be disposed of at will. Once addicted to drugs, they could commit atrocities which grown up men would think twice before doing. More than anything else, a child is never a serious contender for any warlord's position of power. In resource rich Liberia, the warlords sought diamonds and power. They needed children, who would not ask for a share of the bounty.

So, Liberian children soon lost their childhood innocence. The rebels abducted many children, like in Genie Brown in northern Liberia. Until they were big enough, they carried food for their comrades. When they grew taller, a gun fell on their shoulders and they learnt the power of holding a gun. Most of the children were given drugs. When a child needs food and drugs he can loot. When he meanders into adulthood, he can always abduct a village girl and keep her as a slave. As slaves, they had no rights. The camps in Liberia are full of teenage mothers, some as young as 13 years of age, most of them victims of militias.

JRS offers hope to children who were coerced into war. In the Salala and Montserrado camps in Liberia, hundreds of children who were abducted by various militia groups are coming back, some openly, some incognito. In the seven schools which cater for 15,000 children, former child soldiers are learning to be normal once again. Some of these students are recognised by their teachers. The teachers once bore the brunt of militias. In one incident, a teacher recognised his former tormentor. Now the child is soberly seated as a student in the class, neither the student nor the teacher want to recall the painful past.

More directly JRS tries to give skills to the former child soldiers. Two such children, Flomoa and Moses are in Salala Camp. Flomoa is a typical Liberian child who grew up during the war, squeezed of his humanity by callous militia training. Now he has returned. In a long talk with the writer, he painfully recalled how



Liberia

his childhood was stolen from him, as he was made into an inhuman soldier. He was captured by the former Government militias, starved for two days until he agreed to hold the gun. The militias took Flomoa and other children to the frontline. Many of them perished. Many were asked to be spies in the front line, sitting targets for other militias. He was never allowed to meet his parents. His attempts to escape were foiled on three different occasions.

Moses was a distressing case. He came from a tribe that laid great emphasis on family values. At 14 years of age, he was taking care of his old and sick grandmother. When he was captured by militias, he was forced to abandon his grandmother. He remembered leaving her at a river bed to die. The thought that he abandoned his grandmother weighs heavily on the young man's mind. He was fighting for one of the militias, which he described as 'not human beings'. He came to the displaced people's camp last year when the UN peacekeepers arrived. He chose to do a course in carpentry managed by JRS in the camp. When asked why he said that the 'JRS people did not ask many questions about my past'. Now he is a trained carpenter, and grateful for the opportunity, he looks forward to the future. About the possibility of returning to his home he said 'JRS must come with us when we return to Lofa County'.

For a generation mutilated by violence and thrown into the limbo of war, hope breaks forth as peace limps backwards and forwards in a

wounded country. JRS walks with the displaced, particularly these children, in their long journey of hope. In the camps, JRS manages many programmes: education, skills development and income generation. All are hope creating activities. Our schools and the training centres are the therapeutic centres where people can come and relate their stories and seek fellowship with other young people who have gone through the same hell.



C. Amalraj SJ,
JRS Liberia
Country Director

Jah
Tondo
school
for IDP
children,
Monrovia,
Liberia



How to help one person

The mission of JRS is to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people, especially those who are forgotten about and who do not attract international attention. We do this through our projects in over 50 countries world-wide, providing assistance in the form of education, health care, pastoral work, skills training, income generating activities and many more services to the refugees.

JRS relies for the most part on donations from private individuals and development and church agencies.

Here are some examples of how JRS funds are used:

- To educate a refugee child for one year in Tamil Nadu, India
\$10 US

- To pay a teacher's salary for one month in a primary school in Monserrado camp, Liberia
\$20 US

- To provide a start-up kit of carpentry tools to a Liberian IDP enrolled in vocational training
\$36 US

- To pay a scholarship for one displaced child to attend school in Ambon, Indonesia for one year
\$80 US

- To assist one landmine survivor to participate in an income-generating programme in Luena, Angola
\$105 US

- To assist one child mine survivor in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina with medical, material, educational, legal and psychological support for one year
\$400 US

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