

## LESSON PLAN: CHILD SOLDIERS

### Resources

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- Child soldier photos
- Resource list and fact sheets for download from [www.rightwords.org.uk](http://www.rightwords.org.uk)
- Extract from Ishmael Beah 'A Long Way Gone' (optional)
- Blank map of the world with countries named (optional)

### Lesson objectives

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The lesson will aim to provide an overview of the manner in which children globally are used to fight as soldiers.

By the end of the lesson / period of study on child soldiers **all** students will be able to:

- Describe 2 reasons why child soldiers are used
- Name 5 countries around the world where child soldiers are used
- Give 3 examples of the types of things a child soldier would have to do
- Describe what is meant by 'international community'
- Describe 2 things that the international community is doing to eliminate the use of child soldiers.

**Most** students will be able to:

- Describe how child soldiers may be integrated back into their communities
- Describe the emotions a child may feel at being made to choose between his own life and the life of a friend or sibling.

This will be assessed in the form of a written piece of work at the end of the lesson and verbal input during the lesson.

## 1. Task One: Comparing childhoods (20 mins)

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Resources: Photos of child soldiers

Ask your students to describe what their lives were like when they were 11-12. What was school like, what did they do after school and at the weekends, where did they go on holiday?

Prompt with questions.

Then show them the photos (photocopy/circulate or if available show them on the screen) and ask:

- What is happening in the picture?
- What is their life like?
- What is their school like, what do they do after school?
- Where could it be?

Explain that these are photographs of child soldiers.

## 2. Task Two: Imagine being recruited as a child soldier (5 mins)

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Read the following paragraph to students.

*You are 15. You live with your family; your mother, father, older sister and two younger brothers. Your father often works away from home leaving you responsible for the rest of the family. You have recently heard that armed groups are moving through areas in the north fighting government forces for control of the gold mines close to your home. Your family depends upon the gold for their livelihoods. One morning you hear that the groups are heading to your village to recruit more soldiers including boys as young as 7 or 8. This means that not only you but also your younger brothers are in danger. Your father is away from home.*

*You wake in the night to screams in the yard. Your youngest brother is being held by two men, more men fill the streets stamping their feet. You run outside shouting to let him go. Someone grabs your arms forcing a gun into your hand. "Kill him" they shout, pointing at your brother. "Kill him or we will kill the rest of your family".*

Ask students the following:

- What do will you do and why?

## 3. Task Three: Child Soldiers: Facts and Figures (10 mins)

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Give students background information on child soldiers below:

There are many different definitions of a child soldier.

Here are two:

One definition: "Any person below the age of 18 who is a member of or attached to government armed forces or any other regular or irregular armed force or armed political group, whether or not an armed conflict exists".

Another definition: “A child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking part has taken a direct part in hostilities”

- Currently thousands of children under the age of 18 are fighting in armed conflicts as part of government forces or armed rebel groups. Some are as young as eight years old.
- Technological advances in weaponry have led to the increase in the use of child soldiers as lightweight automatic weapons are easy to use.
- Both girls and boys are used as child soldiers. In some conflicts girls are raped or taken as “wives” by the commanders.
- Once recruited child soldiers may serve as porters or cooks, guards, messengers or spies. Many are pressed into combat, where they may be forced to the front lines or sent into mine fields ahead of older troops. Some children have been used for suicide missions.
- Some children are forced to commit atrocities against their own families or neighbours. This ensures that the child is stigmatised and as such unable to return to his or her home.
- In 2000 the United Nations adopted an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The protocol prohibits the forced recruitment of children under the age of 18 or their use in hostilities. To date, it has been ratified by more than 128 countries.

How do children become soldiers?

- Children are likely to become child soldiers if they are poor, separated from their families, displaced from their homes, living in combat zones or have limited access to education.
- Many children join armed groups because of economic or social pressure, or because they believe that the group will offer food or security. Others are forced to join or are kidnapped.

Optional extra input: Extract from ‘A Long Way Gone’ By Ishmael Beah

## 4. Task Four: Where are child soldiers deployed in conflict? (15 mins)

Optional extra input: Using the map ask students where they think most child soldiers are deployed. Then go through the list below highlighting additional countries not identified. Otherwise read out the list from below.

The following 19 countries or territories have seen the deployment of child soldiers between April 2004 and October 2007

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| • Afghanistan                            | • Iraq  |
| • Burma                                  | • Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory |
| • Burundi                                | • Nepal   |
| • Central African Republic               | • Philippines                                   |
| • Chad                                   | • Somalia                                       |
| • Colombia                               | • Sri Lanka                                     |
| • Côte d’Ivoire                          | • Sudan   |
| • Democratic Republic of Congo (the DRC) | • Thailand                                      |
| • India                                  | • Uganda  |
| • Indonesia                              |   |

Challenging perceptions – beyond Darfur, Sierra Leone and the DRC

- A number of under 18s were deployed to Iraq by the British armed forces between 2003 and 2005, although most were removed from the theatre of war within a week of their arrival.

What happens when the wars are over?

- In some countries, former soldiers have access to rehabilitation programmes to help them locate their families, get back to school, receive vocational training, re-enter civilian life. However, many children have no access to these kinds of programmes. They may have no way to support themselves and are at risk of re-recruitment.

## 5. Task Five: Class discussion topic (10 mins)

“Children are small and agile and it makes sense that they are used to fight in wars”

To facilitate this discussion undertake a ‘post-it’ activity; on one post-it note students must write an argument in favour of this proposition and on another post-it students write an argument opposing this proposition. Teacher to collect and organize on board. Which argument is the strongest?

## 6. Task Six: Writing assignment (ongoing – entries for the Right Words competition)

Building on the information given in class ask students to undertake some independent research into child soldiers. There is a list of targeted resources on the Right Words website which can be found at <http://www.rightwords.org.uk/>

Then set students a writing assignment, giving them the option to write an essay, a story or a poem.

Possible essay titles (only use if students are struggling to find appropriate titles)

“Why I think we have a moral obligation to protect children being enlisted as soldiers in other countries”

“Why the use of children as soldiers is wrong”

“My letter to a child soldier”

“Why I think it matters that people in England know about the problem of child soldiers”

“How I would help child soldiers become reintegrated back into society”

### Sources:

- HRW Facts about Children Soldiers at <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/12/03/facts-about-child-soldiers>
- Page 11, [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/Child\\_Soldiers\\_Global\\_Report\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/Child_Soldiers_Global_Report_Summary.pdf)
- Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers <http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/facts-and-figures-child-soldiers>