



“Their fight, our future”

What children and young people around the world
think about children in armed forces and groups

Includes their calls to the UK Government

It takes a world is World Vision UK's campaign to make ending violence against children a priority for the UK's humanitarian policies, programmes and aid. A quarter of the world's children live in countries affected by conflict and disaster. They are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, child marriage, hazardous labour

and recruitment by armed forces and groups. All children deserve to be safe. The UK can make a difference. Join our campaign at worldvision.org.uk

This publication was prepared by Dr. Carine Le Borgne (Senior Policy Adviser, Ending violence against children, World Vision UK).

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Foreword

**Tim Pilkington, Chief Executive,
World Vision UK**



I would like to say a big thank you to all the children and young people who have worked with us on this report for *It takes a world*; our campaign to end violence against children in emergencies.

We have called the report “*Their fight, our future*” because around 250 million children and young people live in countries affected by armed conflicts: conflicts they did not create, conflicts in which they have no say, conflicts which are destroying their childhoods.

So, it was important to us to work in partnership with children and young people on this report and give them a voice.

Take South Sudan, the world’s youngest country, where conflict is the reason why 72% of children and young people are not in school. And where 19,000 children have been recruited by warring armed forces and groups as fighters, messengers, cooks and porters.

Some of the numbers are extraordinary and on a scale hard to comprehend. So, what I always remember is that behind every statistic is a child’s life and story.

Among them is Iranya who fled from South Sudan to Uganda, where World Vision is now helping him in one of the world’s largest refugee responses. You can read Iranya’s story in more detail in the report, but one day he was a young boy watching over the cattle for his parents; the next day he was told by an armed group to carry their dead.

Now it doesn’t take me to tell you that no child should have to suffer this. It does take a world, however, to come together to end the violence against children like Iranya.

In this report you’ll be able to read four children’s stories, in their own words, talking about their experiences of armed forces and groups in different countries and contexts.

By reading their stories you’ll be joining children and young people from seven countries around the globe who have also read these words. These children and young people then set out their views about children and armed forces and groups. Giving their vision for a more peaceful world. The recommendations in this report come not from World Vision development or humanitarian staff, rather they’re from these children and young people themselves.

And they set out challenges for all of us involved in ending violence against children in emergencies – including to the UK Government and global INGOs, like World Vision.

What shines through on every page is the huge potential of children and young people to contribute to peace building through changing beliefs and attitudes. We need to encourage this effort through our Peace Clubs and Young Leaders Programme. Indeed they have the specific right, according to Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, to be involved in anything which directly impacts their lives.

So, I invite you to read these children’s and young people’s stories, views and recommendations. This is what children who have experienced so much are calling for. Will you hear them?

Foreword

Mr. Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders



I am pleased to provide an introduction to this inspiring report “*Their fight, our future.*” I am inspired particularly because it is children and young people themselves speaking out on the impact of armed conflict on their lives and

futures. And it is their calls for change.

My work as Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders is to meet children and young people around the world to collect their stories and testimonies – including of great injustice – and to make recommendations to the States. I see a key part of my role as being the voice of those children and young people who otherwise would not be heard.

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders states that “everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”. Therefore, anyone who acts, at any moment, for any human right is a human rights defender.

So, children and young people who take action to promote their rights or the rights of their peers are human rights defenders. This report is, therefore, full of human rights defenders.

This report provides an excellent illustration of what is possible – that a global movement for children and young people as human rights defenders is possible. In this case it is to defend the rights of children involved in or impacted by armed forces and groups. The report demonstrates a true start to such a movement – involving nine countries, 65 children and young people, aged between 13 and 22 years old.

The innovation in this project, is to enable young people who are not directly affected by armed conflict a space to express themselves and stand up with their peers, for the rights of the most disadvantaged children such as the child soldiers. I was inspired by Asini, aged 19, from the United Kingdom who said: “I would like to help increase awareness for what is going on, in the UK general public and amongst people who can actually help make a difference. Once the awareness is there, I would like to use methods to help, encourage the government to aid in preventing the recruitment of child soldiers.”

We also need to give more platform for former child soldiers as mentioned by Kabila, aged 13, from the Central African Republic: “Former child soldiers are the best solution to sensitise other children to not join any more or not to be enlisted by the armed groups.”

It is only together with children that we can truly build the futures they want. I would like to see more of this type of initiative to encourage, promote and engage children and young people as Human Rights Defenders. It is their future after all.

Methodology

Children's participation means children and young people contribute to decisions and take action on issues that affect their lives. Among the approaches World Vision has developed are: our Young Leaders Programme, designed to engage young people in campaigns across the globe to end violence against children; and our Peace clubs, which empower children and young people to promote peace building initiatives in their own communities.

The first step for the research was a consultation for the UK's *It takes a world* campaign with four groups of children and young people from 10 to 18 years old in London: a total of 75. They were introduced to four stories of children in humanitarian crises (a child labourer, a child bride, a child soldier and a child refugee). 38 young people (51%) selected the child soldier as the one they most wanted to support and protect.

The second step, in July and August 2018, was to speak to and record stories of four children and young people aged from 13 to 21 years, directly impacted by armed conflict, from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and North Uganda (fleeing from South Sudan) through our national offices' child protection and media teams.

The third step was focus group discussions on these case studies in August and September 2018. They involved 61 children and young people aged from 13 to 22 years, from World Vision Young Leaders Programme (Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka) and World Vision Peace Clubs (Kenya,

West Nile Response Uganda, Central African Republic).

World Vision UK also organised focus group discussions through existing youth groups in the UK. All the facilitators received a guideline document to help conduct the sessions and to collect views of children and young people – to understand how they felt about the stories and what they hoped for the four former child soldiers – with recommendations and messages to the UK Government.

We report the personal comments of children and young people wherever possible. However, in some countries, participants wanted to give their comments as a group. Wherever this happens the comment is reported as the name of the country.

Ethics were considered throughout the entire project, including analysing harm and benefits; securing informed consent; ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. For instance, the names of participants have been anonymised for the case studies, children and young people were involved voluntarily and can withdraw from the project at any time. We also provided information so they understood the project, how the data collected would be used and the next steps. The entire project applied the World Vision UK Safeguarding Policy.

All groups who participated in the project will receive this report and feedback from the discussions with decision-makers and influencers on the recommendations.



Participants

“If other children wanted to join the militia, I would tell them absolutely not to join – we suffered a lot when we were there.” (Marie, 13, Democratic Republic of Congo)

United Kingdom

Asini (19), Lily (21), Raphaëlle (19), Faheemah (22), Paige (22), Thrinayani (20), Namir (20)

South Sudan



John (21)



Iranya (16)

Central African Republic

Begbanou (15), Bouyembe (17), Kabila (13), Paterson (17), Modeste (16)

Democratic Republic of Congo



Noah (13)



Marie (13)

Key:

Case study countries

Commenting countries



Sri Lanka

Vithushan (15), Rahimshan (16), Sivanuhan (18), Arulthas (17), Kowsalya (16), Thunupriya (16), Shomiya (13), Thamilini (15), Prasantha (16)

Bangladesh

Shimul (16), Kotha (17), Papon (16), Rimjhim (17), Sarowar (17), Samia (16), Foysal (15)

Ethiopia

Hillena (14), Samarawit (15), Eyoel (16), Nahom (16), Abdurazaq (15)

Kenya

Kalo (15), Grace (16), Awatif (14), Apat (18), Meshaki (17), Lucky (18), Namoe (19), Shadrack (20), Nhial (19), Martha (18), Yom (18)

Uganda

Samuel (15), Peter (15), John (15), Chandia (17), Alafi (17), Kasapia (15), Martin (13), Betty (15), Asumpta (16), Mamawi (15), Rabeth (14), Florence (17), Suraya (17), Leni (17), Philip (17), Hellen (17), Simon (16)





John's story (South Sudan)

"In 2009, my father, a soldier, was shot in the leg and he could no longer help us financially. He was transferred to Juba for immediate treatment and life became very difficult for my family because there was nothing to eat. We were lacking everything in the house and nobody was there to help us.

I joined the army so that the salary I received could be used for supporting my family. My elder brother is a soldier. He did not support my idea of becoming a soldier. He tried to persuade me to leave the army, but I joined when I was 12 years old, for two years.

Life in the army did not go as I expected, the training was very difficult. Sometimes I become very tired and ended up in a deep sleep to a point where I wouldn't know it was time to get up and begin training.

Sometimes I slept and by the time I ran to join the others, the soldier in charge would say I was late. He got water to be poured on my body and then they began to beat me thoroughly until they were stopped by a person higher than them in ranks. If you made a small mistake, you would not be given food for the whole day. You would stay hungry, watching the rest eating.

On my first assignment, I was frightened to see fellow soldiers burning houses, beating people and killing others. I didn't think that was the right thing to do and I was very scared.

Then, one day I came home and my relative sat down with me, he convinced me to leave the

army. They said if I left the army and studied, I would get a better paying job with lots of money to support the family. With the harsh treatment I was getting, I decided to leave the army in 2012 at the age of 15. I am now 21 years old.

After leaving the army, I enrolled in school and started in primary three. I am currently in my final year, in primary eight. I love playing football and listening to gospel music.

My relative turned me from lost direction to one that will help me become a better person.

I live with my disabled father, my mother and my seven siblings. Only three of my siblings are in school because my parents cannot afford to send them to school. I am not sure that I will join high school because the school fees will be too high for my family to pay. My goal is to finish primary eight with good performance.

I am benefiting from the World Vision education project, where I received exercise books, pens, and pencils, and from the new computer lab and library in my school.

I want to become a doctor because there are many diseases and there is no hospital in my village. I want to open a clinic in my village and charge little money because most of the doctors come from abroad. My second ambition is to become a lawyer so that I can judge cases fairly.

I want the government to support children to go to school because many children join the army as an easy way to get their own money."

What children and young people think about this story

John's experience was reviewed by 10 young people from the UK and Kenya. Here are some of their comments:

"As young people, the story makes us feel bad and remember our experiences as former child soldiers; the torture and the mistreatment we went through... We can see what our friends go through." **(Namoe, 19, Kenya)**

"When we are educated, we find ways to escape the mistreatment and torture. Education is key, can we even get it?" **(Martha, 18, Kenya)**

"We are being mistreated by the state because we are minors, because we don't have a voice and strength. It's like we are on our own." **(Deruka, 16, Kenya)**

"The life of John completely changed from being in a situation where he was recruited as a soldier. And he completely changed with the help of World Vision and through the power of education and the sense of community." **(Thrinayani, 20, UK)**

"We still live with children being forced to fight in wars that are not their own. And that is not right. As a kid I went to school, I played Pokémon and I learnt about the world. That is what children should be doing. But these child soldiers are learning about a very different world, one that shouldn't exist." **(Namir, 20, UK)**



Messages to the UK Government

"There is nothing positive about being a child soldier, children should not be involved in armed groups." **(Edjide, 20, Kenya)**

"Education will transform the life of a child. My hope is for an education for children in armed conflict, as well as support for their families to lead to a brighter future for children with security and peace. I'm passionate about education for all young people and advocate for the protection of all children from conflict around the world." **(Thrinayani, 20, UK)**



LEFT: John (21) © 2018 Lisi Emmanuel Alex / World Vision ABOVE: Young people from Kenya commenting on John's story. © 2018 Mc lemy Dhieu / World Vision



Marie's story (Democratic Republic of Congo)

"I was almost 12 when my father died. A conflict had erupted in our hometown and people started to flee. My father was too sick and did not have the strength to flee along with the other people, so he was left behind. That's how he died.

Everyone else from my family and village fled. My siblings and I couldn't tell which direction the others had gone to, so we took another direction. As we were hiding, we didn't have anything to eat. During the journey, I became separated from my brothers and sisters and I ended up in the town, alone. Eventually, I managed to find some members of my family.

One day, some people approached us and told us to join the militia in order to get some money. We decided to join as we did not have anything, and we were starving. We were subjected to a sort of 'baptism', it was our initiation.

There were both adults and children as young as five in the militia. While we were with the armed group, we would perform some tasks, but we never went into battle as we were scared of being shot by the military.

Life was hard. We never received the money we were promised. We didn't have anything to eat and we were really suffering. We had to sleep in the bush, as we didn't have any beds. After three months, my siblings and I decided to leave the armed group.

It took us one month to go back home. Now, we live with an uncle. There are 12 of us in the family

and we all live in the same house. We are too poor to afford school fees. My routine: I wake up, I fetch water, go to the fields to work on the crops. After, I sweep the house and clean the dishes. I get hit when I don't fetch water.

We don't have anything to eat or drink. We're just here, hungry. Sometimes we're lucky enough to receive food from other families. That's when we eat. If I find some food – such as fufu – we eat it, but otherwise we go to bed hungry.

Sometimes, I go to a Child Friendly Space set up by children's charity World Vision. Children go there and play to forget what happened to them. We play football, dice, and cards and we talk to World Vision staff, who tell us we should never join the militias again, and we should study instead.

If other children wanted to join the militia, I would tell them absolutely not to join – we suffered a lot when we were there. Other children should refuse to join.

I would tell decision-makers that militias should not recruit children into armed groups. If I could ask them anything, I would ask them to help us here. Give us food and things to drink, so that we could have some energy. Our country in general, our village, isn't good. I want our country to get organised so that we can have something to eat and we are able to go to school."

What children and young people think about this story

Marie's experience was reviewed by 14 young people from Bangladesh, Ethiopia and the UK. Here are some of their comments:

"It's not the right place to be, I want a safe place for Marie to live so she would have not gone to the militia. DRC is a country in war, so we need to provide a safe place for Marie and other children. We need to organise a big conference to share Marie's story and tell decision-makers her message." **(Eyoel, 16, Ethiopia)**

"My initial feelings from the story are obviously those of shock and concern. Thoughts and questions are raised over what is meant by the "baptism" process, and what "tasks" were performed as alternatives to active combat by the children? One of the most distressing aspects of her story is that despite the trauma endured, Marie desperately wants to learn and yet has no access to education." **(Lily, 21, UK)**

"It's a sad story, but I am inspired by Marie's story because she escapes from the militia and she wants to protect the next generation. I am not a victim like Marie but I believe a world without violence against children is possible." **(Foysel, 15, Bangladesh)**



Messages to the UK Government

"We are urging to all world leaders, please come to the same platform at least for the one issue, that there are no arms in the hands of children." **(Bangladesh as a group)**

"We are asking governments to enforce the relevant laws for child protection in countries where there are child soldiers. Children in countries affected by war need safe places to stay." **(Ethiopia as a group)**

"We still live with children being forced to fight in wars that are not their own. We have the resources, the opportunity and the knowledge. Now, we need you to spearhead these efforts and protect these innocent children from harm. Just like we would our own." **(Namir, 20, UK)**



LEFT: Marie (13) © 2018 Kate Shaw / World Vision ABOVE: Young people from the UK commenting on Marie's story. © 2018 Carine Le Borgne / World Vision



Iranya's story (South Sudan)

"In July 2016, I was 14 years old. I was a cattle keeper looking after my parent's cattle in South Sudan during the fighting in Upper Nile between the government and the rebels. At around 1pm near my home, I ran with my parents and my brother to a safer place for protection. My brother went a different direction and my parents were shot in front of me.

The rebel group told me to carry out their dead bodies, but I was too young, and I couldn't manage. I was beaten and forced to carry out the commander's bag after they killed my parents until I reached the camps where the rebels were settled.

At the military camp, I was with other children carrying big, heavy guns. I was trained and started to fight. My biggest fight was when I shot more than five government soldiers. On my way back to their camp, we were ambushed, and I was shot in the arms and legs. I was injured for five months because there was no medicine. I couldn't move.

One day, a plane delivered food for the rebels and medical doctors were on board. I was treated for my injuries and after one week I felt better. I continued to fight until one day, I went fighting and something came to my mind. What if I could hide in one of the abandoned houses? The fighting went on until 7pm when both soldiers and child soldiers left. I stayed with my gun and uniform and slept there.

The next morning, I left my gun where I was hidden. I went to one of the houses, wearing my uniform, where an old man was living. The old man attacked me with a machete because I was in uniform which belonged to the rebel group. I raised up my hands and explained to him what happened to me.

I stayed with the old man and the following morning as the government soldiers were making patrols, he called them and explained my story. The government soldiers took me to the military barracks where government soldiers stay. I spent two months until I was transferred to Juba, where I stayed for three months.

My brother who was already living in one of the settlements in Uganda contacted me. In January 2017, I was given some money by one of my caretakers to come to Uganda to look for my brother. When I reached Uganda, I went to the settlement where there were people from the same tribe as me. Fortunately, I met one of my former neighbours from South Sudan who helped me until I found my brother.

Now, I am going to school. I want to complete my studies before returning to my country. I am still afraid to speak and play with other children.

I am 16 years old, an orphan and a former child soldier, and I want the government to advocate for children's rights and make leaders from armed groups put their guns down, and live peacefully."

What children and young people think about this story

Iranya's experience was reviewed by 15 young people from Sri Lanka, Central African Republic and the UK. Here is a sample of their thoughts:

"Former child soldiers should be helped, since their decision in leaving armed groups is courageous and could be a warning for those who still hesitate or can be tempted to join armed groups."
(Begbanou, 15, Central African Republic)

"I felt shocked to read how much disregard was given to the age of these children and the subsequent implications that exposing them to death, war and killing can have on their mental health due to their young age and immaturity. It disgusted me to hear the horrific experiences these children were having to endure at such a young age when this is the age they should really be most blissful at. Furthermore, it made me sad that these were things that are completely unknown by the majority of individuals in the world who as a result are unable to help to prevent it from happening."
(Asini, 19, UK)

"The help of the old man, helped Iranya to come out from the armed group. He can feel the freedom and the relief, happiness and is now eager to achieve his ambition."
(Sri Lanka as a group)



Messages to the UK Government

"World leaders must attempt to address the horrific reality that is the number of children around the world who are forced into armed conflict, and should be taking every possible measure to protect them. We must utilise resources in order to offer alternative opportunities to these young people and strike a dialogue with countries in conflict, in order to help facilitate a lasting peace process. It's time to act with World Vision."
(Lily, 21, UK)

"We are decided to help our brothers, who have stayed among the armed groups, to come out like us. But how to do that if we don't have anything to convince them in this sense, or tell them that our life changed or we can restart our life?"
(Paterson, 17, Central African Republic)

"We need to stop children in armed groups and to protect them. We need to create a new community without child soldiers."
(Sri Lanka as a group)

LEFT: Iranya (16) © 2018 Denis Onyodi / World Vision **BELOW:** Young people from Sri Lanka commenting on Iranya's story. © 2018 Suresh Gnanaprakasham / World Vision





Noah's story (Democratic Republic of Congo)

"I live in a town in the heart of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Before the war, life was still hard, and we struggled to eat. But with war, all our sufferings were multiplied.

When soldiers arrived in the village, they were everywhere. That's when the war came to us and we all fled in different directions. Children went one direction, mothers went to another, and fathers to another. I didn't know where my parents went.

And then, when the hunger was really hitting me, they cornered us and tried to get us to join the militia. We joined in the hope of finding something to eat, but what we found was the opposite.

The person who trapped us and made us join the militia was a chief. The chiefs were the ones who forced us to join the militia. They had us swallow magic potions, and once we swallowed them; it would push us to go and fight. We left to go fight for our country.

I spent just two weeks in the militia, but it was long enough that the experiences are ones I have tried hard to forget. There were adults as well as children in the militia group, but the vast majority were children, who leaders believed were better at following the rules and rituals they thought would make them safe from bullets. Sadly, many children died in battle, or from disease in the bush while they were hiding.

The war got worse, and we fled to find our parents.

Although I am freed from the militia, my life still has not gotten back to normal. Before the war, my father was just able to manage to pay school fees, selling charcoal. After the loss of our belongings and one of our houses due to looting during the conflict, today his meagre earnings are struggling to feed the family.

I wish my family and I could have more to eat and better places to sleep. But most of all, I want to go back to school. I don't go to school because to go to school, I need to have money to pay school fees. School costs a lot of money.¹ It's a prerequisite in order to study, you must have money. If you don't then you can't go to school.

Instead of going to school now, I do my chores each morning, sweep the yard and fetch water, and then I go to the World Vision Child Friendly Space where I can play football with my friends.

If the war started again, I would tell my friends not to join the militia – that they stay here safe with us, come play with us at the Child Friendly Space, so they don't take part in the war.

My dream is to become a minister for the government. I want to be Minister of Sport. Then, I'll be able to take care of myself. I'll have the means to be someone who can also help others to sort out their lives."

¹School fees are 2500CF (\$1.50) per child per month. Some education zones have waived the uniform requirement to lower barriers to education since the crisis, but others still require it as well.

What children and young people think about this story

Noah's experience was reviewed by nine young people in the UK, Uganda and the Central African Republic. Here is a sample of their thoughts:

"We need to stop children in armed groups because it causes loss of life, dropping out of school, physical body disability, mental health problems. Children have to get knowledge, go to school and learn more."
(Uganda as a group)

"As former child soldiers in Central African Republic, we experienced this situation. When the crisis started, we joined armed groups for protection and for our survival. Before joining armed groups, most young people don't have access to education and there's a lack of employment. So, as children, we are vulnerable to financial offers since our families are already poor and have been impoverished because of the war."
(Central African Republic as a group)

"It makes me angry that not every young person has equal opportunities and a sense of security. Why should a child the same age, with the same human rights and aspirations for the future have such different options about what they can do. It makes me realise how different life is for children in countries like Democratic Republic of Congo, that being recruited as a child soldier is seen as almost normal."
(Raphaëlle, 19, UK)



Messages to the UK Government

"Child soldiers have had the misfortune of being unwillingly born into countries where their pure childhoods are completely ruined. And is it fair for world leaders to turn a blind eye to such an incredibly corrupt situation? Take responsibility for what is happening in the world. Globalisation has meant individual countries are heavily linked so it's time for governments to stop purely focusing on their own countries, be altruistic and help out humanitarian crises too."
(Asini, 19, UK)

"Children are forced to join armed groups. Is it for me to put more effort or is it community leaders, is it political leaders? We have to join hands. So these children will be rescued from the army. They will become powerful future leaders in their community. Dear leaders, we have to work hard so children will not face more problems."
(Mamawi, 15, Uganda)

"It's an error to consider the former child soldiers as young people who don't want to go to school. Many of them still want to go to school, are still an age to go to school."
(Bouyembe, 17, Central African Republic)

LEFT: Noah (13) © 2018 Kate Shaw / World Vision BELOW: Young people from Central African Republic commenting on Noah's story. © 2018 Bertrand Gailemas / World Vision



Children and young people call for action

In total 65 children and young people from nine countries, aged 13 to 22 years, provided a set of recommendations, both for the UK Government to use their political influence on governments in conflict-affected countries, and also directly for the UK Government's own policies. The group includes the four children and young people

from the case studies (from South Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo) and 61 children and young people involved in group discussions from Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Uganda and from the UK.

Here's what they have to say:

Call 1: We call on the UK Government to use their political influence and diplomacy with governments of conflict-affected countries.

"If other children wanted to join the militia, I would tell them absolutely not to join – we suffered a lot when we were there." (Marie, 13, Democratic Republic of Congo)

a) Raise awareness of the devastating consequences for children when they are involved in armed forces and groups

- Share the stories of former child soldiers, about devastating consequences to children and parents.
- Challenge world leaders publicly to stop child recruitment in armed forces and groups.

"We need to stop [child recruitment] because children are suffering, injured, [with] physical body disability, amputation, it causes mental health problem for children and ruins their future."

(Mamawi, 15, Uganda)



b) Ensure access to education and technical training for children

- Ensure that all children are kept in school.
- Provide free school resources (uniforms, books) for vulnerable children.
- Help young adults to start businesses, to promote jobs in youth and remove people from poverty.

"I want the government to support children to go to school because many children join the army as an easy way to get their own money." **(John, 21, South Sudan)**



c) Include more children and young people in discussions about solutions and responses to children being used in armed forces and groups

- Recognise and include children as partners for peace, by including their voices in designing solutions and engaging with their experience and solutions to keep them safe.

"Former child soldiers are the best solution to sensitise other children to not join or not to be enlisted by the armed groups." **(Kabila, 13, Central African Republic)**





d) Focus on the root causes of recruitment

- Work on the common root causes and push factors of child recruitment such as poverty, loss of parents and lack of educational opportunities.

e) Implement laws to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers

- Implement international treaties² to ensure that it is considered a global issue.
- Put pressure on the governments and opposition parties of those countries where children are engaged in armed forces and groups.
- Implement legislation to ban recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.
- Enforce laws that punish the offenders who enrol children in armed groups.
- Enforce relevant laws to protect children in conflict.

f) Encourage countries affected by conflicts to create and sign a peace agreement

- Encourage dialogue with conflict-affected communities to create and sign a peace agreement.

“Finding the root cause of child recruitment is crucial. The root of the problems prevails above causes. In doing that, it will help us to predict the outcomes of dealing with the effects and to stop child recruitment.” **(Faheemah, 22, UK)**



“We, the youth, cannot continue to allow children to enter armed conflict. We hold you accountable to not only prevent it but protect and help those affected by armed conflict. This is your responsibility.” **(Paige, 22, UK)**



“I want the government to make leaders from armed groups put their guns down, and live peacefully.” **(Iranya, 17, South Sudan)**



ABOVE: Young people in Uganda © 2018 Denis Onyodi / World Vision

²Example: UN Convention on the Rights of the Child with the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict



Call 2: We call on the UK Government to provide more funding for projects in countries affected by conflicts and to use the UK's global leadership to encourage other governments to do the same.

“Children’s rights matter globally and every government should be concerned for children’s safety around the world. Our government is globally recognised and we shouldn’t have to think twice about using this platform to create important change in countries where children suffer most.” (Raphaelle, 19, UK)

a) Allocate funding for protection programmes, for example, Child Friendly Spaces and Peace Clubs.

- Provide resources and safe places for children to go to if they’re separated from their parents, so they have another option aside from joining the militia.
- Have greater support for children and their families to prevent children from being recruited into armed forces.
- Include more peace clubs in schools and communities or local support groups for children.

“If the war started again, I would tell my friends not to join the militia – that they stay here safe with us, come play with us at the Child Friendly Space, so they don’t take part in the war.” (Noah, 13, DRC)



b) Allocate funding for rehabilitation programmes, mental health and psychosocial support.

- Provide safe places and shelters for former child soldiers when they cannot go back to their families.
- Have more programmes for girls after joining armed forces and groups.
- Assist former child soldiers when they’re rescued, through such initiatives as mental health and psychological support.
- Help with re-integration of former child soldiers into their families and communities.
- Provide access to free education and free materials for former child soldiers.
- Provide access to free technical training for former child soldiers.
- Offer sports activities to help promote positive relationships and friendship between former child soldiers and other children in their communities.

“Since I left the armed group, I still feel sometimes the desire to take revenge. I need help to restore my life and avoid thinking about this past.” (Begbanou, 15, Central African Republic)



Call 3: We call on the UK Government to provide a platform for British young people to raise awareness and discuss solutions to children being used in armed forces and groups.

“I would like to help increase awareness for what is going on, in the UK general public and amongst people who can actually help make a difference. Once the awareness is there, I would like to use methods to help encourage the government to aid in preventing the recruitment of child soldiers.” (Asini, 19, UK)

- Involve children and young people in raising awareness within the UK public through the media and other platforms.
- Include the topic of children in conflict in the British national curriculum.
- Encourage children and young people from the UK, to participate in UK Government meetings and conferences about stopping children being used in armed conflict.

“Children and young people should engage in discussion and not simply adults. Because it affects us, we should discuss it.” (Paige, 22, UK)



LEFT: Young people from Kenya © 2018 Mc Lemy Dhieu / World Vision **BELOW:** Young people in Uganda © 2018 Denis Onyodi / World Vision





#ItTakesAWorld #ChildNotSoldier

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World Vision believes that by working together with children, their communities, and our supporters and partners, the lives of the world's most vulnerable children can be transformed. As a Christian organisation, we aspire to reflect God's unconditional love in all we do.

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