



# About Child Soldiers

## *The Issue*

**MORE THAN 250,000 CHILDREN** are involved in armed conflicts worldwide. Children are exploited in state-run armies, paramilitaries, and rebel groups. Some of these child soldiers are as young as 7. Child soldiers serve as combatants, spies, suicide bombers, porters, human mine detectors, and sex slaves. Their health and lives are endangered, and their childhoods are sacrificed. In recent decades, experts estimate that more than 2 million children have been killed in armed conflicts; an estimated 6 million have been seriously injured or permanently disabled.

The lasting effects of war and abuse will remain with children long after the violence stops. Both girls and boys may be stigmatized and traumatized by their experience and left with neither family connections nor skills to allow them to transition successfully into productive adult lives. In combat situations, children also suffer higher mortality, disease, and injury rates than adults.

## *The Facts*

**IN THE PAST DECADE**, more than 2 million children have been killed in conflict situations. An estimated 6 million children have been seriously injured or permanently disabled. In Africa, up to 100,000 children, some as young as 9, were estimated to be involved in armed conflict in mid-2004. Children are also used as soldiers in several Asian countries and parts of Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East.

**CHILDREN MOST LIKELY** to be forced into military service include those who are:

- » Separated from their parent or caregiver
- » Living alone without a supportive adult
- » Living on the streets
- » From minority groups
- » Isolated or have limited social skills
- » Living in or near conflict zones

**THE DRIVING FACTORS** for forced child soldier conscription include:

- » Abduction and enticement by armed groups
- » Government complicity
- » Abundance of small arms and light weapons
- » Absence of work and education

**CHILDREN AFFECTED** by war experience traumatic events, such as:

- » Violent death of a parent or close relative
- » Separation from family
- » Witnessing of loved ones being killed or tortured
- » Forced participation in violent acts

**EXPERIENCES** of this magnitude can lead to:

- » General poor health (malnutrition and infectious diseases, including HIV)
- » Serious war injuries
- » Physical abuse or deprivation
- » Drug addiction
- » Sexual abuse and exploitation
- » Serious psychological and social problems
- » Unwanted pregnancy (particularly dangerous for girls, who are often malnourished, physically immature, and living in unsanitary conditions)
- » Death

**IN ADDITION**, girls and boys associated with armed groups and fighting forces often face:

- » Uncertain futures and a loss of hope
- » Rejection by families and communities
- » Loss of identity outside the armed group
- » Loss of childhood

(Sources: *Children Associated with Armed Groups*, UNICEF, May 2006; *Children in Conflict and Emergencies*, UNICEF; *Too Young to Kill*, Singer, Peter W., The Brookings Institute, January 2005; *State of the World Children*, UNICEF, 2005 )

## *What You Can Do*

- » Go to [www.worldvision.org](http://www.worldvision.org) to make a monthly financial pledge to help provide for the needs of children affected by war.
- » Pray for children around the world who are deeply harmed by conflict. Pray for those trying to help these children and pray for a transformation of those who are forcing children into becoming child soldiers.
- » To learn more about child soldiers, go to [www.worldvision.org](http://www.worldvision.org) or [www.seekjustice.org](http://www.seekjustice.org).

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## About World Vision

**WORLD VISION IS** a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organization dedicated to helping children and their families break free from poverty. Our work is motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ. We see a world where each child experiences “fullness of life” as described in John 10:10. And we know this can be achieved only by addressing the problems of poverty and injustice in a holistic way. That’s how World Vision is unique: We bring nearly 60 years of experience in three key areas needed to help children and families thrive: emergency relief, long-term development, and advocacy. And we bring *all* of our skills across many areas of expertise to each community we work in, enabling us to care for children’s physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

**WORLD VISION RESOURCES** educates Christians about global poverty, inspires them to social justice, and equips them with innovative resources to make a difference in the world. By developing biblically based materials for educators and ministry leaders on the causes and consequences of global poverty, World Vision Resources supports the organizational mandate to move the church in the United States to more fully embrace its biblical responsibility to serve the poor.



*For more information about  
our resources, contact:*

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