

Dear Shahram Hashemi, Ellen Dorsey, Curt Goering,

I am writing to you, the leaders of the National Advisory Council of Amnesty International, to ask you to reconsider your position on advocating for amnesty for all child soldiers. I ask you, respectfully, to consider that the child soldiers who decide to stay in the army, and continue to kill, should be prosecuted.

Some child soldiers are the world's perpetrators in training. Imagine this: you wake up in a cold room filled with many children. A large gun that is propped up next to you comes into view as your dreams of blood and violence fade away. "Get up," you hear your commander say as you grab your gun and prepare to fight. This scenario is actually a reality for many people under age eighteen around the world who are in conflict: child soldiers. As the *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008* informed, there are many tens of thousands (the exact count is unknown) around the world. I believe that many zealous child soldiers are the perpetrators, not the victims, based on the evidence that they make a decision to join, make a decision to stay, and that they are the ones who are actually killing.

A reason why I believe these child soldiers aren't the victims is that they make a decision to join. As the majority of child soldiers actually join without being forced into it, by making their own decision, they can't be victims. In fact, Mark Drumbl of Oxford University Press stated in his video interview, that two-thirds of child soldiers volunteer. Drumbl announced when on the topic of dispelling child soldier myths that most child soldiers aren't: "forcibly abducted, conscripted, or kidnapped . . . they become enlisted." This proves that in most cases, child soldiers aren't in any way physically forced to join. Also, the majority of child soldiers are adolescents. Drumbl shared the news that, in fact, most child soldiers are between the ages of fifteen and seventeen. This means that as the majority of child soldiers are within three years of being an adult—eighteen—they are old enough to make that decision to join. In that decision

they are enabling themselves to become perpetrators in the conflict that has arisen in their nation.

Another reason that suggests child soldiers are the perpetrators is that they are the ones doing the killing, and in many cases, they seem to enjoy it. Many fierce child soldiers aren't forced to kill but choose to do so. For example, Awil Saiah Osman, a child soldier in Somalia said, "What do I enjoy? I enjoy the gun." This illustrates the idea that many child soldiers are not the victims of violence, but the perpetrators. As well as seeming to enjoy and carry out many of the killings in conflict, many also show little mercy. An example of this behavior is when Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier of Sierra Leone, shot a group that consisted mainly of children. "We opened fire until the last living being in the other group fell to the ground . . . we walked toward the dead bodies, giving each other high fives," Beah said, remembering the time.

How could this merit amnesty? This type of comment demonstrates that some child soldiers in conflict do not show remorse for the violence they have inflicted. Beah even continues to describe this moment in *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* as he talks about how his group didn't care about the shooting, and after went to sit on their victims' dead bodies. These memories from Beah and statement from Osman both go to show that many times committed child soldiers are the ones killing and frequently showing little remorse. Therefore, if the children are inflicting violence, they can't be considered victims—and they and their victims need for them to be held accountable.

The final reason why I believe devoted child soldiers aren't the victims is because they decide to stay. As the *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008* informed, tens of thousands of child soldiers have left armed groups since 2004. If tens of thousands of child soldiers have escaped, this then implies that, in many cases, the children have the option to abandon their group. Therefore, if they didn't escape while they had the opportunity, it is their fault, so

they can't be considered victims. Also, as Drumbl stated that the majority of child soldiers leave on their own, they aren't rescued by government agencies. Based on this fact, as most child soldiers leave on their own accord, it indicates that many child soldiers have the ability to leave or abandon their post. If they, in many situations, are choosing to stay, they are also choosing to commit the crimes, making them the perpetrators.

Though it's logical based even on their own stories to believe that child soldiers are perpetrators, many sympathetic, warm-hearted people believe that child soldiers are victims. The well-meaning other side may think that all two-million child soldiers that have been in combat around the world have been killing against their will. Yet though it is true some kids have been forced to kill, that is an incomplete picture. As Beah, former child soldier, said while remembering his days in conflict: "I saw myself holding an AK-47 . . . we opened fire . . . all around us, fresh blood leaked from the bullet holes in their bodies." In this description of Beah's, no sign of being forced to kill was shown for himself, as well as the rest of the children in his group. Therefore, the argument that all child soldiers have to kill against their will is incorrect. It doesn't give the full picture. Another idea the opposing view may have is that many child soldiers work for government forces, so they feel pressured to help their country. This is partially true as numerous child soldiers work in government groups, though the majority of child soldiers don't. In fact, as Jeffrey Gettleman of Upfront's article *Armed and Underage* reported, only twenty percent of government groupings are made up of children. Hence, if eighty percent of government forces aren't made up of children, it would be inadequate to claim that child soldiers are forced into working for the government army.

There are estimated to be more than two-hundred thousand child soldiers world-wide. The question is, overall, are more of these hundreds of thousands of children victims or perpetrators? That

question can be answered by the evidence that so many fervid child soldiers choose to join, stay, and kill, leading me to the conclusion that many of these child soldiers are perpetrators.

With the greatest respect for what you do to support children, I ask that you consider supporting the potential victims of these young killers. Perhaps if more of the fierce child soldiers were held accountable for their acts, more of them would consider putting down their guns, or fleeing, or even turning on their own commanders and changing their world. It's just not right, to not push for that.

Yours sincerely,

G. C.

### **Bibliography**

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