



ENDPOVERTYNOW NEWSLETTER

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End Poverty Now (EPN) is a non-partisan, non-political, non-religious, non-profit Canadian charitable organization based in Montreal and dedicated to the long-term alleviation of abject poverty. EPN represents a group of dedicated individuals, mainly students, and is operated on a tri-pillar base that emphasizes Grassroots Projects, InReach and Education.

If you have questions or comments about the Newsletter, or if you are interested in joining the Newsletter Team, please email newsletter@endpovertynow.ca

Child Soldiers: Introduction

by Jennifer Sault & Carina Bleuer

"Early on when my brothers and I were captured, the LRA [Lord's Resistance Army] explained to us that all five brothers couldn't serve in the LRA because we would not perform well. So they tied up my two younger brothers and invited us to watch. Then they beat them with sticks until two of them died. They told us it would give us strength to fight. My youngest brother was nine years old."

Former child soldier, aged 13, Uganda

Welcome to February's issue of EPN Monthly. This newsletter surrounds the devastating issue of Child Soldiers in areas of warfare. According to International law, the recruitment of children under the age of 15 in the military is a war crime. These children are deprived of their family, an education, and often have resounding mental trauma. The use of child soldiers has been universally condemned; however, over the past ten years, thousands of children have been ripped from

Child Soldiers: Introduction CONTINUED

their homes and forced to fight and die in conflicts around the world. The problem is most critical in Africa, yet children are involved in conflicts in developing countries around the world. Over 250,000 reported children are forced to participate in warfare in over 14 countries according to the UN.

The issue is that children, as vulnerable as they are in situations of warfare, provide an expendable, cheap and relatively easy way to recruit/train forces for different militant groups. Positively, exceptional efforts are being made to counter the use of child soldiers, as well to instill the rehabilitation of former child soldiers.

Some organizations that are involved include:

- War Child – <http://www.warchild.ca>
- The Darfur Canada Peace Network – <http://sudan.peacenetWORK.ca/>
- Invisible Children – <http://www.invisiblechildren.com>
- Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers – <http://www.child-soldiers.org/>

World Map: Child Soldiers



Map Source: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2000/2001

Poverty in the News

by Carina Bleuer

Three Days of Justice for Child Soldiers Jan 9, 2010

3000 child soldiers serving in the Maoist group that formed one side of Nepal's civil war will be released - SOS Children's Villages Canada

<http://www.soschildrensvillages.ca>

Yemen's Child Soldiers go to War Jan 6, 2010

<http://www.UPI.com>

Sri Lanka: Child soldiers released after rehabilitation Jan 10, 2010

<http://www.reliefweb.com>

Sign the ONE Petition!

Get political leaders to keep their promises at the upcoming G8 and G20 meetings in Canada.

<http://www.one.org/international/actnow/canada/>

Organization of the month: Invisible Children

Invisible Children is a nationwide organization dedicated to stopping the atrocities against innocent children taking place in Uganda.

Read the article "UHRC Teams with 'Invisible Children' to Expose Plight of Uganda's Child Soldiers" Jan 11, 2010 on <http://www.asbarez.com>

Children at War

Join the fighters or become a target

by Nick Bond

Desperation can make initially deplorable alternatives seem like reasonable solutions in dire enough situations. Consider the dietary options of a road-weary traveler, for example. If you find yourself hungry in Southeast Asia, even a "cheese burger" from McDonald's may actually start to look like a pretty good alternative to some locally popular dishes (deep-fried crickets, anyone?).

However, there are far more grizzly examples of what people will do in desperate times. Some of the most distressing examples of this are children who get caught in bloody political conflicts, often witnessing their families

Children at War CONTINUED

decimated in the process, and who subsequently feel that the only way to secure their safety is to join the soldiers in battle. Such a decision may be based on revenge, but it may also largely be for physical protection. Join the fighters, or become their target. These child soldiers exist in many countries around the world, but are most prevalent today in Africa.



Image Source: UNICEF, Photographer: Steve Mann

Volunteering (a term used loosely as it implies choice) under these circumstances, or being coerced into participation, are not the only ways in which children become soldiers in military conflicts. The film *Blood Diamond* (2006), for example, starkly shows the way in which many children are forcibly recruited into the fight (1). Under certain circumstances, families may sell their children to the army or rebel factions, and others may join purely as a result of their own sociopolitical beliefs. Whatever the reason, it truly pains me to hear of a child that has turned to the army or an armed militia for protection because of a lack of better alternatives. No family, no friends, and no community to provide them a home - a child in this circumstance truly has lost everything. To him or her, the only identifiable way to survive is to join the forces that took away the life he or she knew.

As has been well documented, the situation for children in either a government or resistance army hardly provides a supportive relationship. With impressionable youthful minds already making them more prone to malleability on the part of their commanders, children's free thought is often further controlled through the heavy use of drugs and alcohol. And on top of the inherent risk they face on the battlefield, sexual and physical abuse is an additional unfortunate reality for many children embedded in armies or armed factions.

Children at War CONTINUED

Considering the trauma they face during their formative years, how are child soldiers ever supposed to meaningfully pursue their own ambitions and dreams if they are ever lucky enough to know a peaceful environment? Many of these children join the armies in their early adolescent years, which are some of the most vulnerable years in a person's life. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson has described adolescence as the period most critical for the formation of personal and social identity and for the discovery of moral purpose. Participating in a physically and psychologically deleterious conflict as a child profoundly impacts who, not just what, one is - for life. The reintegration of child soldiers into everyday life is extremely complicated, since almost all former child soldiers will be burdened by deep psychological scars. It is only with incredible personal strength and the compassion and empathy of others that the ability to overcome these scars can be developed, in both the short and long term.

I mentioned in an article last month that, while we're far from perfect, humans have the eventual ability to recognize an unjust situation and to institutionalize a fair solution in its place. Recent international agreements and grassroots organizations take aim at the issue of child soldiers to do just that.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child's Optional Protocol limiting the use of children in armed conflict came into force for its 125 signatories in 2002. This essentially makes it a crime punishable by international law to recruit any soldier younger than 15 years of age, although there is controversy surrounding this age cut-off (2). While it is still estimated that there are over 250,000 child soldiers in the world today, this agreement is a critical sign of progress (3), and has led to some positive, if not comprehensive, developments throughout war-torn regions.

For instance, last year in Chad, a signatory of the aforementioned Optional Protocol, the government released 85 youth rebel fighters to be rehabilitated back to society (4). Significantly, they were treated as victims of the conflict rather than as criminals (www.chadnow.com). These youths, with the help of UNICEF and CARE International are receiving psychological assistance, education, and a peaceful nurturing environment.

At a more grassroots level, the London (UK) based Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers has been raising awareness through information campaigns and social movements for years. Their next event, the annual Red Hand Day (www.redhandday.org) happening this February 12th 2010, encourages people from around the world to literally put an impression of their hand on paper with red finger paint along with their name, country, and a comment (5). The

Children at War CONTINUED

sheets are to be sent to local politicians to raise awareness to the magnitude and salience of the issue.

In the words of just one of the many ex-child soldiers, Ishmael Beah has described in his many interviews (see, for example, his 2007 interview on CBC's The Hour) that it is anger that created the problem and anger won't make it go away. With real progress beginning to be made at the international and grassroots levels, it is a continuing tone of compassion and openness that will be required to heal the wounds, tell the story, and ultimately bring an end to the injustice.

References:

1. Blood Diamond. Directed by Edward Zwick. Warner Brothers, 2006.
2. The Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 38. From the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>)
3. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (<http://www.child-soldiers.org>).
4. 'Child Soldiers from Sudan Held In Chad'. (<http://www.chadnow.com>). May, 2009.
5. Red Hand Day: A worldwide initiative to stop the use of child soldiers. (<http://www.redhandday.org>). Information retrieved on January 20th, 2010.



Image Source: Red Hand Day

Cleansing Former Girl Soldiers in Sierra Leone: An Article Review

by Alysha Kassam

The article, *Cleansing the wounds of war: an examination of traditional healing, psychological health and reintegration in Sierra Leone* (2006), by Lindsay Stark, is about cleansing former girl soldiers in Sierra Leone. Girls have experienced violence, witnessed killings and have been repeatedly raped. Their needs have not been addressed.

Many females faced rejection, stigma, and felt ashamed, hopeless, guilty and fearful. They experienced abuse and were shunned by their communities and families. In order to regain a sense of normality in their lives and to break away from their horrific past, the girls underwent a cleansing ceremony, allowing them to start anew. Additionally, it was believed that their "spiritual pollution" caused and attracted ill-fortune and problems. The girls underwent the ceremony voluntarily or were encouraged to do so by their families and communities. Healing the girls consisted of them drinking herbal liquids, cooking, dancing and singing. They were also given new clothes, representing a renewal and rebirth. According to a traditional healer, the healing process was guided by their ancestors: "The way I saw the girls, I knew I should cleanse them before their minds were set. I went to the ancestors and asked them how to help the girls. The ancestors instructed me in how to cleanse them. I went to the bush to fetch the herbs for the cleansing. I knew which herbs to pick because the ancestors had told me" (Stark, 2006). The cleansing ceremonies were also completed by community members.

Stark conducted a qualitative study looking at the health impacts of the cleansing on girls previously abused during the conflict in Sierra Leone. The study was composed of 121 girls, between the ages of 8 to 30 and carried out by holding semi-structured interviews with the participants and through observation. A translator was also present during the interviews, however, this is a limitation of the study, since perhaps information might have been lost in translation or perhaps the intended meaning was not always conveyed. The Christian Children's Fund was also involved in helping these young girls.

As a result of cleansing, the girls reported that they were no longer shunned by their families and communities, but were welcome and able to lead more peaceful and stable lives. Some also wished to perform more cleansing to increase such positive outcomes. This study's findings reveal that traditional and community led healing methods are effective and should be considered in the healing process, along with Western practices.

Stark, L. (2006). *Cleansing the wounds of war: an examination of traditional healing, psychological health and reintegration in Sierra Leone*. *Intervention*, 4(3), 206-218.

Book and Film Suggestions: Child Soldiers and Children at War

Book: A Far Way Gone
By: Ishmael Beah
Genre: Non-fiction

A non-fictional story that describes a young boy's making and unmaking as a child soldier in Sierra Leone.
Suggested by: Jennifer and Vanessa

Film: The Other Side of the Country
Genre: Documentary
Director/Producer: Catherine Hebert, 2004

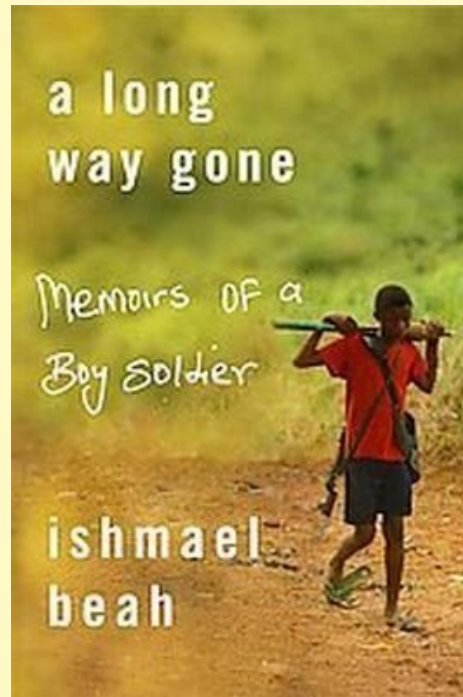
A northern Ugandan mother's story about her search for her daughter, who was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).
Suggested by: Hilary

Film: War/Dance
Genre: Documentary
Directors: Sean Fine and Andrea Nix Fine, 2007

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has victimized villages in northern Uganda for over twenty-five years, and children have been abducted and forcibly indoctrinated as child soldiers. As a result, much of the northern population resides in Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) camps. In this inspiration film, children from Potongo Primary School, located within a northern IDP camp, enter a national music competition. They visit Kampala, the capital of Uganda, in order to compete with children from the south, where they encounter a world very different from their own in the north.
Suggested by: Hilary

Book: What is the What
By: Dave Eggers
Genre: Fiction
Random House Publishers, 2006

This is the deeply personal, and at times unbelievable, story of Valentino Achak Deng, a Sudanese war refugee now struggling with the challenges of life in the United States. After his village and his family were destroyed by civil war, he had no choice but to join a group of other displaced boys to find safety in a refugee camp. Along the way, the whole while under military attack, many of Valentino's companions were recruited to join the army and others were attacked by wild animals. This is an extremely powerful novel that sheds light on the atrocities committed against children in war-torn regions, while it simultaneously exposes the deep inner strength and compassion of those trying to find a better way.
Suggested by: Nick and Vanessa
Review by: Nick Bond



Book Cover Photo Credit: John Medere

High School Outreach

End Poverty Now is starting High School Chapters across Canada and we need YOUR help!

Do you have a younger brother or sister who would love getting involved with this great organization?

Did you have a Social Studies teacher who really inspired you to be active in your pursuit for global change?

Do you believe in End Poverty Now's objectives and the power of youth?

If so, please send along any contact information including e-mail addresses, school mailing addresses or websites to hsoutreach@endpovertynow.ca. We will let them know about how they can get involved with End Poverty Now!

Your help is greatly appreciated and will go a long way to help our goal to end poverty now!

What's New with End Poverty Now, February 2010

by Jennifer Sault

EDUCATION

January's PODCAST is around Music for Change and includes numerous pieces around peace and global change. February, much like this Newsletter, will be released soon and will cover the topic of Child Soldiers. This podcast will be aired by C.K.U.T., a Montreal radio station. Listen to ckut at <http://www.ckut.ca>.

For our future podcasts, we are hosting a PODCAST COMPETITION, requiring your creative ideas! Essentially, we require a 10 to 30 second musical introduction that will be used for each one of our future podcasts. Send your entry to Jason at AlternativeMedia@endpovertynow.ca by June 15th for a chance to win EPN t-shirts, water bottles, a spot on our February podcast and the honour of knowing that thousands will hear your contribution to EPN every month.

EPN's ANNUAL ACADEMIC JOURNAL, Means to an End, has finally been mailed to libraries and universities across Canada! If you would like a hard copy of the journal, they are available for \$10.00. Our journal can also be found online at <http://www.endpovertynow.ca/home/education/publications/journal>.

We are currently working on our next journal surrounding health and poverty. We invite you to submit your article before March 15th to publish your work! Contact Neesha at journal@endpovertynow.ca for more information.

What's New with End Poverty Now CONTINUED

End Poverty Now's POVERTY RESOURCES can now be accessed online under <http://www.endpovertynow.ca/about/documents>. With this is a working book defining poverty, "What is Poverty?" as well as "Poverty 101", EPN's research and background information for schools.

Our End Poverty Now CURRICULUM continues to be piloted successfully in select schools across Canada. See <http://www.endpovertynow.ca/forschools/curriculum> for more information.

GRASSROOTS PROJECTS

As for our GRASSROOTS PROJECTS, we are happy to continue our work with the Rwanda Village Concept Project in the establishment of a bee-keeping initiative, the International Association for Transformation in the implementation of a Backyard Gardening concept in addition to our work with the Projet Autochtone du Quebec, a homeless shelter in Montreal. It is due to the exceptional efforts of these partnering organizations that poverty alleviation is being actualized in numerous communities both in Canada and abroad.

EPN IS CURRENTLY SEEKING NEW LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS to sponsor and partner with. If you have recommendations, please contact Alysha at projects@endpovertynow.ca.

EPN CHAPTERS

We are happy to announce that the success of our EPN chapters continues! Without them, our work would not be possible. In particular, we are proud to announce the ADDITION OF A NEW CHAPTER GROUP, the first high school chapter to join EPN. Many thanks and warm wishes to Souris Regional High School in Souris, Prince Edward Island. We look forward to working with you in the coming years.

If you or someone you know is interested in starting a high school chapter of End Poverty Now, please contact Alicia at hsoutreach@endpovertynow.ca.

The GUELPH CHAPTER continues their efforts. If you are interested in joining, please contact endpovertynowguelph@gmail.com.

The MCGILL EPN CHAPTER is currently organizing the Week to End Poverty, a week-long event from March 8th-12th with different events each day around poverty. As part of this campaign, students will be sleeping outdoors to raise funds and awareness for the homeless in Montreal.

This chapter is currently seeking new members to help in these efforts. Contact Albert at epnmcgill@gmail.com for more information.

The UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA CHAPTER GROUP is currently seeking new leadership. If you are interested, please contact Japneet at internal@endpovertynow.ca!