I am not trash

A CALL TO ACTION FROM CHILD SOLDIERS
There are two words that should never go together: ‘child’ and ‘soldier’. Yet there are 300,000 children currently serving in armies and militia around the world. ‘Child soldier’ is a term that we are beginning to hear frequently. But what does it actually mean? I can tell you, because I was one.

The civil war in Sudan took my family. Government forces destroyed my village. There were no schools throughout the whole of the south of the country, and so the rebels ordered the children to walk into Ethiopia where we could go to school. I was seven when I made that 600km trip. Many of my friends died along the way. When we reached Ethiopia we were put into a UN camp of 33,000 children. But the rebels would infiltrate the camp, and many of us were conscripted into the rebel forces. We were so vulnerable to their politics, to the promise of taking our land back and getting revenge for our murdered families. They even gave us food.

I was trained how to use an AK-47. But when I was 11, civil war exploded in Ethiopia. More than 12,000 of us trekked back into Sudan. They called us the ‘lost boys’. We were a homeless tribe of children, child soldiers: we had many names. After months of fighting, I managed to escape with about 300 other child soldiers. Another trek.

Negotiating our way through minefields, avoiding wild animal attacks, starvation and ambush from the army – only 12 of us survived the trip.

I eventually found refuge. But I was no longer a child soldier – how was I going to survive? People in the town where I was staying were desperately trying to live in the face of acute poverty. I had no family, no education. It was tough. But I was one of the lucky ones. A friend smuggled me across the border and into Kenya. My friend was able to support my education, and eventually I was able to develop my career as a successful rap artist. But what has happened to the children I left behind? What has happened to the thousands of child soldiers in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo? Children who, like me, have managed to escape from the war, but unlike me have not had help to go to school or get training?

Many of these children know only one thing: conflict. And without the help of a friend, they are left to fend for themselves, to the point of desperation in order to survive. They’re difficult kids to work with. But they are still children, and they have a right to peace and security. You need peace and security to heal the soul – then you can have a life.

Most child soldiers have been denied their childhoods. We cannot now deny them hope. So take action. Read this report; it won’t take long. Then visit www.warchildmusic.com and subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter. By signing up to our campaign, you are supporting War Child to address the prosecution of war on children. Thank you.

Emmanuel Jal

Emmanuel Jal’s 2005 album ‘Ceasefire’ was critically acclaimed, while his performance on the Eden Project stage at the Live 8 concert last year brought his work to the attention of people around the globe. Emmanuel recorded ‘Gua’ for War Child’s ‘Help: A Day in the Life’, the NME’s compilation album of the year (2005). ‘Gua’ describes Emmanuel’s astonishing experiences as a child soldier and his hopes to peace in his native Sudan.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Democratic Republic of Congo is larger than the whole of North-West Europe.
- It is a country that has not had free and fair multi-party and presidential elections in its recent history.
- In one way or another, war has ravaged Democratic Republic of Congo since 1998.
- The war has involved forces from seven other countries, fighting continues in the east.
- Four million people have died as a result of the war.
- Upwards of 50,000 children – boys and girls – have been conscripted into the various militia.
- A minimum of 30% of the children that War Child is working with in Northern Democratic Republic of Congo have been unable to reintegrate with their families and communities.
- These children face similar conditions to children elsewhere in the country, suggesting that at least 10,000 children are struggling to reintegrate countrywide.

There are some 300,000 children involved with fighting forces worldwide. Many of these children live with the same conditions as those children War Child works with in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This suggests that some 100,000 are not successfully reintegrating with their families and communities. War Child’s research strongly implies that this is a conservative estimate.

This report presents the findings of research carried out by War Child on the effectiveness of reintegration programmes for children who have been involved with armed groups. It complements research that has already been carried out by academics and other non-governmental organisations. War Child has been able to add a new perspective on reintegration programmes, because of our ongoing presence in countries, especially the Democratic Republic of Congo, where these programmes have been set up. War Child has been able, for the first time, to examine at first hand the success and failure of reintegration programmes over an extended period. This long-term view informs this report.

War Child has played an important role in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) projects in Northern Democratic Republic of Congo, and this experience forms the basis for this report. War Child’s work in this area has raised questions concerning the effectiveness of current efforts at reintegration, especially where family reintegration is the accepted measure of success, identifying the lack of long-term follow-up and community support as a key factor. This report focuses on those children who are being failed by current disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes, and the policy implications of this challenge.

In addition to being a major child welfare challenge, this problem is also a significant value-for-money issue because of the amount of UK tax payers’ money that is invested in supporting disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes across the globe. The effectiveness of DDR programmes is, therefore, the central point of emphasis for War Child’s call to action.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is larger than the whole of North-West Europe. It is a country that has not had free and fair multi-party and presidential elections in its recent history. In one way or another, war has ravaged Democratic Republic of Congo since 1998. The war has involved forces from seven other countries, fighting continues in the east. Four million people have died as a result of the war. Upwards of 50,000 children – boys and girls – have been conscripted into the various militia. A minimum of 30% of the children that War Child is working with in Northern Democratic Republic of Congo have been unable to reintegrate with their families and communities. These children face similar conditions to children elsewhere in the country, suggesting that at least 10,000 children are struggling to reintegrate countrywide.
War Child works with and for children who are marginalised by conflict: street children, children in conflict with the law and child soldiers.

Our approach has its foundations in an exciting form of participatory action research. As required by Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all our programmes and campaigning work is based on thorough research that places the child at its centre, and gives them a voice. By using focus groups and informal tools, such as floor mapping, we are able to consult children directly on the issues they face and what they believe needs to be done to address them. In addition, we draw up local decision makers into this consultation with the children. The children map out information with these decision makers and analyse it from different viewpoints, developing new ways of conceptualising their problems, and in doing so they identify new ways of overcoming them. By discussing this with the decision makers they can negotiate and agree on immediate actions. In this way, participatory action research technique is not part of the process through which we support the development of a protective environment for the children. This approach also enables us to work closely with groups of children who are very challenging and often dangerous or difficult to engage, such as child soldiers.

The research upon which this report is based was carried out in northern Democratic Republic of Congo over a three-week period, from 25th October to 15th November 2005, with over 400 people taking part.

This research placed children, their families and the community at the heart of the process, encouraging them to raise issues, identify problems and then create and support solutions. We invited participants at every stage of the research to discuss and present ideas and opinions in their own environment, through drawings, tables and diagrams. Structured discussions, floor mapping and the drawing of timelines were also used to enable participants to express their ideas. We sought to verify the findings and test our assumptions through discussions with other organisations and a comprehensive literature review that examined the existing body of research in this area.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

There are a number of different ways of referring to children who have been involved with armed groups, and who have then returned to the communities from which they left. This report uses the term ‘children formerly associated with fighting forces’ throughout. The term is applied both to those children who served as soldiers themselves and to those who were involved with armed groups in other ways (for example, serving as porters or cooks), but who may have been no less affected by their experiences.
THE PROSECUTION OF WAR ON CHILDREN

THE SCALE OF MALTREATMENT OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT

- Two million children have died because of conflicts worldwide over the last ten years - that’s a child every three minutes
- War is prosecuted on children in many ways, one of the worst being their conscription to armed groups.
- It is a war crime to involve children in hostilities of any kind.

Involving children in war is, therefore, one of the most serious violations of their rights. Yet there are many conflicts around the world that have involved or continue to involve children.

This is not a new problem: underage soldiers have been used for centuries. But this is a notable characteristic of recent wars. While it is impossible to be exact, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers estimates that over the last 20 years, more than half a million children – both boys and girls under the age of 18 – have been recruited into armed groups, and 300,000 are still involved today in more than 30 conflicts worldwide.

Most of these children are between 15 and 18 years old, though some as young as five are known to be serving in armed units in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, where militia have been known to abduct and rape young children because they believe this will strengthen their powers as warriors. Children can be found in a wide variety of armed groups opposed to central government rule, groups composed of ethnic, religious and other minorities, clan-based or factional groups, or government-backed paramilitaries, militias and self-defense units. And children can be recruited into regular or irregular armed forces in many different capacities, ensuring that children bodily associated with fighting forces are not just those who have carried arms. Children are used as combatants, but also as messengers, porters, spies and cooks, as well as for forced sexual service.

BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Independence from Belgium came in June 1960. Colonialism political factors disintegrated the country and enabled Joseph Mobutu to take power through a coup in 1965. Mobutu changed the name of the country to Zaire. With support from western nations, Mobutu remained in power for 32 years. His regime was marked by a level of corruption and state neglect that led the country into deep and entrenched poverty. In the face of failing health and loss of allies – due to conflicts in neighbouring countries – Mobutu was finally ousted in 1997. The rebellion was led by Laurent Kabila with support from Rwanda and Uganda, which themselves were threatened by Rwandan and Ugandan rebel groups taking refuge in Zaire. Kabila changed the name of the country to Congo.

A ceasefire was signed in 1998, but the nature of that was being generated by Rwandan and Ugandan business interests has not been easily relinquished. Arms have continued to flow freely from both countries into the Democratic Republic of Congo in order to destabilise the area and to enable the exploitation of its mineral wealth. This military assistance has variously supported rebel groups as well as local militia, and it has been used to inflame ethnic conflict.

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Equateur remains one of the most remote regions of Democratic Republic of Congo and the challenges of working there are significant. War Child is currently the only international NGO working in the region.

Human Development Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>DR Congo</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human development index</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita ($)</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>30,253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Expectancy at Birth (age)</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant Mortality (per 1000 births)</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS Prevalence (%)</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age Structure (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>DR Congo</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-14 years</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-64 years</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and over</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age (years)</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In December 2002 Kabila was successful in negotiating the Pretoria Accord, which sought to establish a government of national unity. A transitional government was set up the following year with Kabila remaining as President. He was also joined by four other Presidents representing the various opposition groups. A constitutional referendum was held in December 2005 as the first step towards multi-party elections, which are planned for 2006. However, as the Democratic Republic of Congo approaches its first free elections in over 40 years, the stability of the country remains in danger as the different factions face the prospect of losing the power they have been sharing over the last few years. Violent attacks on civilians in the east where elections are likely to radically alter the political landscape. The involvement of Rwanda and Uganda in this has yet to be resolved.

The war in the Democratic Republic of Congo has been marked by the forced conscription of children throughout. In some areas this still continues. The ongoing insecurity, mass displacements and inability to develop the economy and physical infrastructure has aggravated what was already an acutely felt poverty to an extreme level. The Democratic Republic of Congo is now one of the poorest countries in the world.

WHY DO CHILDREN BECOME INVOLVED?

The reasons for children becoming involved with armed forces are manifold. Take Beni, for example. He was a child soldier. He was conscripted into the army during the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These are his words:

’When I was 11 the soldiers came to my home and made me join them. They promised to feed and educate me. They promised my parents they would pay me in dollars to help support my family. They took me to the frontline and gave me a gun. They sent me ahead as a decoy. Many of my friends were captured, some were killed. As I got older they made me join many more. They said I would become bullet proof. I fell in love with Marie Agathe. We have a son. His name is Moses. Last year, when War Child negotiated my release, I came back home with Marie Agathe and Moses. Now I want to marry Marie Agathe properly. I want Moses to go to school and eat every day. But it’s difficult for me. The army never did pay or educate me. The friends who returned with me are now stealing for a living. No one in our town trusts us. I want to work, I want to start my own business so that I can support my family.’

These are some of the reasons why children become involved with armed groups:

- Enforced conscription
- Separation from their families
- Displacement from their communities
- Widespread poverty and lack of access to food
- Living in conflict zones
- Limited access to education
- To escape abuse at home
- To seek revenge for violence directed against them or their families

In areas plagued by long-running wars, where there is often a shortage of older male combatants as death tolls rise, armed factions may resort to recruiting children to make up for losses. HIV/AIDS may also decimate the adult population, making children an increasingly attractive resource for armed groups.

Children may be seen as cheap to employ, obedient and easily manipulated, while lighter modern weapons mean that children can be used as frontline fighters. In many countries affected by war, child soldiers are often seen as adult responsible at a much earlier age than they do in the West, and lack of enforcement of existing laws means that there are inadequate legal deterrents to the recruitment of child combatants.

Moreover, in countries where the vast majority of children are conscripted into armed units.
Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes form a vital part of peacekeeping operations and strategies for national recovery once conflicts have ended (and in the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, before they have ended). Their aim is to help restore peace and security by transforming combatants into society and providing them with alternative, sustainable livelihoods to prevent them from being re-recruited by armed units or criminal groups. The most common element of the reintegration stage of the process for children is family reunification. In some locations this is supported by education and training.

Although there are 12 countries that have officially established children’s disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes since 1999 (e.g. Sierra Leone, Liberia), these programmes are often not appropriate for the specific needs of children or in practice leave many of them out.

Generally, little flexibility is shown in applying disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes to children. Programmes for adults tend to be applied to children, but with less overall support. While adults are often given a cash grant for handing in their weapons, for example, as well as further financial support, children are usually returned to their families - after years of separation, and having been denied an education - with nothing. These children represent an additional burden for their families and communities, which in the face of acute poverty and the breakdown of local and economic infrastructure, can be unsustainable. They are inevitably challenging to care for and are therefore marginalised, which often leads them into crime or recruitment by an armed group once again.

In some countries, governments do not want to admit that children have been involved with fighting forces and so are not even included in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes.

Children who are parents themselves are not catered for properly in the reintegration phase because the emphasis is placed on reuniting them with their family, whereas it would be possible to establish their own home. Other children who do not fully benefit from reintegration might have a disability or physical impairment, or might not have been frontline combatants. Girls in particular have been disproportionately overlooked: Save the Children have estimated that some 12,500 girls have yet to benefit from disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration support in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In many instances, programmes to demobilise and reintegrate children formerly associated with fighting forces fail to gain access to girls and young women who have been abducted during war, to serve as sex slaves.

War Child’s research in the northern Democratic Republic of Congo establishes that disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes are struggling to reintegrate many of the children they are seeking to benefit. Specifically, the research shows that as much as 70% of all children processed through disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes are not actually reintegrated.

Although reintegration means different things to different children, War Child’s research establishes that of the 70% at least half have been unable to reintegrate with their families and so remain acutely marginalised. This means that the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process is not working for at least 35% of children in northern Democratic Republic of Congo.
Henri avoids his son Jean-Pierre, who has returned from the army, because he thinks he is a danger to him and the community. He believes that Jean-Pierre was not trained properly. He knows he was drugged and forced to commit violent crimes and fears he will do this again.

After returning home, parents left her at that Michel wouldn't be able to look after his ‘wife’, his father bought on credit a bag of flour and sugar so that the family could prepare for the birth by generating from the house and resold it in town.

Seven months after her demobilisation and reunification with one of her aunts, Sophie still has no friends and remains alone at home where her aunt often mistreats her. She is so lonely that she talks seriously about enrolling in the Michel’s parents place. Realising Michel got a girl pregnant. Her this never materialised.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers is the WHO’s Integrated Regional Information Networks reported earlier this year that 5,000 children in Congo Brazzaville who recently went through the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process have been unable to reintegrate with their families and communities. In 2004, the UN Children’s Fund found that 25% of demobilised children in Sierra Leone were re-recruited by armed groups in Liberia. There are 300,000 children currently enrolled in armed groups around the world. Young people are exploited and used to commit crimes and atrocities.

The conditions facing the children formerly associated with fighting forces that War Child has been working with for many years are similar across the Democratic Republic of Congo. Most of these children live in similar or even more acute conditions than the children involved in War Child’s research. Therefore, these children are continuing to live with the conditions that they were subjected to in the army once more.

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The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers estimates that there are 15,000 children who have either self-demobilised, surrendered or are going through the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Most of these children live in similar or even more acute conditions than the children involved in War Child’s research. Therefore, these children are continuing to live with the conditions that they were subjected to in the army once more.

The strong suggests, therefore, that at least 10,000 of these children will struggle to reintegrate with their families and communities. This, of course, will not even account for those who have self-demobilised.

The problem facing the reintegration of children formally associated with fighting forces is not limited to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The UN’s Integrated Regional Information Networks reported earlier this year that 5,000 children in Congo Brazzaville who recently went through the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process have been unable to reintegrate with their families and communities. In 2004, the UN Children’s Fund found that 25% of demobilised children in Sierra Leone were re-recruited by armed groups in Liberia. There are 300,000 children currently enrolled in armed groups around the world. Young people are exploited and used to commit crimes and atrocities.

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The strong suggests, therefore, that at least 10,000 of these children will struggle to reintegrate with their families and communities. This, of course, will not even account for those who have self-demobilised.
Communities are frequently suspicious of or antagonistic towards children who have been involved with armed groups, often because of the pain and suffering of their families and community members. Some children are branded as evil – referred to as ‘les fils de Satan’ – and return to their community. In other instances, political leaders may choose to offer the children back, despite the fact that the child will not be protected from the armed forces that have no family to return to or, at best, are incapable of conforming to social norms and disrupting family and community life. This kind of tension is found in many post-conflict zones cross-culturally.

In January 2006, The Lancet medical journal reported that in the Democratic Republic of Congo some 1,350 people every day were dying because of the consequences of war. This appalling death rate means that children formerly associated with fighting forces as their family’s ability to survive. The children are often kept at home, sometimes at great risk, if they should be discovered by the community, while they were associated with an armed group they may have had regular meals, a role with responsibilities, a sense of identity, even power. Children are to be successfully reintegrated into society then disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes should help them to reconceptualise their identity within the community to which they are returning. We cannot underestimate how the child’s experience of war will change them, just as we cannot underestimate the extent to which the war transformed the communities to which they were returning, being involved with armed forces trying to reintegrate with their community can be a considerable economic burden. In many cases, with a local economy already ravaged by war, some families go to extraordinary lengths to re-naturalise their child’s demand that the international aid community accepts responsibility for their welfare.

Children often have very high expectations that children will return to the army with something to offer because those children who were voluntarily fed so poorly had done so purely because the army offered the opportunity to eat something. But children who were working with the children themselves. The army stole our children, but it is giving us back completely warped adults to educate.

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Rival communities feel that the help they receive from non-governmental organisations may even make things worse for them. Community leaders and family members have explicitly stated that the responsibility for these children lies with the government organisations, such as War Child. With the children being marginalised in this way, and given their experiences of violence and trauma, many of them turn to negative ways of coping – and are subsequently further marginalised.

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Restoration of the community depends on an extent to which is much less known about the abuses suffered by the children during the war, and whether the child was abducted by the fighting forces (with the abduction being spontaneous), being involved with armed forces, the community. However, even when children have been taken forcibly by armed forces, with the community) doing little to prevent the community from being involved (the community generally accept little responsibility for the child’s involvement in war or their subsequent rehabilitation. As one person in Equateur put it: ‘The army stole our children, but it is giving us back completely warped adults to educate.

The army stole our children, but it is giving us back completely warped adults to educate. Some residents of Businga, an area of northern Democratic Republic of Congo, believe that children formerly associated with fighting forces were forced to undertake dangerous forms of work (e.g. diamond mines, for example, bag, or resort to early marriage,Girls may be coerced into prostitution or early marriage. As one person in Equateur put it: ‘The army stole our children, but it is giving us back completely warped adults to educate.

ECONOMIC PRESSURES

Average GDP per capita in the Democratic Republic of Congo is US$107 per year, compared to US$12,235 for the UK. And so children formerly associated with fighting forces trying to reintegrate with their community can be a considerable economic burden. In many cases, with a local economy already ravaged by war, some families go to extraordinary lengths to re-naturalise their child’s demand that the international aid community accepts responsibility for their welfare.

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Peace and security

Unless children are able to reintegrate it is likely that the culture of violence that has been so normal to them will continue into their adulthood. This poses a long-term security threat to the communities in which they live. But it is more than the safety of the children and their communities that is at stake in failing to reintegrate them. With 10,000 children formerly associated with fighting forces unable to reintegrate and remaining excluded or on the margins of their communities, their vulnerability to re-recruitment is high. This is a major threat to security and the transition to peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Experiences from Liberia and Cote d’Ivoire demonstrate how the failure to reintegrate children formerly associated with fighting forces in one conflict can inflame another. In 2004, Save the Children found that 25% of demobilised children in Sierra Leone were re-recruited by armed forces in Liberia. So whose responsibility is it to ensure that disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes are working effectively?

The Convention on the Rights of the Child draws a clear line between children and adults, and confers on children certain rights, including protection against violence, exploitation and torture, and the right to be reunited with their families. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo is responsible for securing and maintaining the rights of all children, including those of ethnicity, gender, religion and social or economic status.

Furthermore, Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Article 1 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child establish that all signatories who are able to provide financial and technical assistance for ‘rehabilitation and social reintegration’ of children are obliged to do so. The UK, as a very significant signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, has a responsibility to try to end the marginalisation of children who have been involved with armed groups. Significant amounts of UK aid money have gone into disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes around the world. As the second biggest provider of overseas aid to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the UK has a responsibility to ensure that its funding is effective.

What is at stake?

As a very significant signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UK has a responsibility to try to end the marginalisation of children who have been involved with armed groups.
A WAY FORWARD

WAR CHILD'S WORK WITH CHILDREN FORMERLY ASSOCIATED WITH FIGHTING FORCES IN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

War Child’s recommendations for improving disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes come directly from our experience in the field.

War Child has co-funded a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme for war-affected children in northern Democratic Republic of Congo. From the start of the disarmament process in September 2004, approximately 500 children were demobilised during the following six months. With funding from UNICEF, War Child Australia and War Child USA, and in partnership with local non-governmental organisations, we supported children through transition centres in a number of locations, providing food, education, health services and psychological support, and worked to trace family members and their communities in order to reunite them. Subsequent to this work, we focussed on those children in the programme who were most likely to be excluded after being reunited in their communities. Starting with those who have the greatest responsibilities – the children who have returned home with young partners and babies, or parents and the most acutely marginalised and in need of support. As such, we focussed on those children in our community who are the most vocal in the War Child’s research and experience of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, follow-up mechanisms have been put in place. War Child has co-funded a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme in northern Democratic Republic of Congo. "What the children said they wanted..."

Every evening, we meet up in the main square in town with a bunch of other kids. Most of us are child soldiers but some street kids join us too. We divide up areas of the market where we spread out to steal whatever we can get. We then get back together to go to the Avenue de la Mort where we can drink, smoke weed and find girls...

A significant group of demobilised children - with children of their own - who are living outside the traditional family unit with little or no support, and with hope of establishing their own livelihood.

Gemolo was demobilised last year. He is living on his own with his partner and small child. His partner, parents, however, has taken the girl and the child home as he cannot afford to pay the bride price. He works in the market where we spread out to steal whatever we can get. We then get back together to go to the Avenue de la Mort where we can drink, smoke weed and find girls...
Exclusion: These ideas revolve around a combination of economic self-sufficiency and a breakdown of negative attitudes, which they believe will result in the acceptance of the children by their communities. They include:

- Provision of small grants for the children to start their own income-generating businesses, such as a farm project.
- Arranging activities such as sports and local theatre to bring the children formerly associated with fighting forces into contact with other children in the community and to negotiate common behavioral standards, norms and values.
- Setting up livelihood programs to address issues of blame and forgiveness.
- Encouraging community initiatives that provide employment for the children while enabling them to contribute to a project that benefits everyone.

Economic Empowerment = Real Power

Although education and training are important, according to the children War Child works with, these are not necessarily the most appropriate starting points. Because the education infrastructure is poorly developed, there are few opportunities to provide teaching to children formerly associated with fighting forces in a way that is relevant and meaningful to their lives.

Many demobilised children have been humiliated by attending classes with children five, sometimes ten, years younger than they are. This in turn impacts upon their identity and feelings of self-worth. The starting point must therefore be geared to the realities facing children who return to their communities.

The sharp end of these realities includes:

- Unemployment
- Lack of respect from educated peers
- No training or opportunities to develop skills
- Unfulfilment of plans, ideas and dreams
- Being perceived as a burden and antisocial
- Personal frustration

The children have told us that they want to make a practical contribution to their community. They feel that this will defend their respect, create new opportunities and enable them to determine their own destinies.

To make this happen, they suggested that War Child provide them with small start-up grants to help them make their business ideas a reality.

Creating a viable livelihood establishes the child as a responsible member of the community. This is the platform upon which they will overcome their marginalisation and exclusion. This will lead to new possibilities, such as providing more relevant and flexible forms of education for children formerly associated with fighting forces. Similarly, education is a key socialising process, regardless of age. But this cannot be achieved unless and until the children have attained the respect and support of their community.

A former child soldier presents his disarmament and demobilisation papers.
The reintegration of children formerly associated with fighting forces is a long-term challenge, especially given the continuing trend of mobilisation of children into armed groups around the world. It is, therefore, an issue that needs to attract concern, commitment and understanding over the long term in order to ensure that it is properly addressed. Gaining the support of young people here in the UK is, therefore, vital.

The interest shown by young people in the UK towards problems facing children in war zones, especially the reintegration of children formerly associated with fighting forces, has been enormous. Between 100,000 and 250,000 visit our websites every month and more than 20,000 receive our newsletter. Young people are exercising their citizenship by calling for action on this issue. War Child has responded by working with a number of schools in helping young people to participate in the democratic process. It is hoped that this will ultimately lead to positive change for children formerly associated with fighting forces.

For example, War Child has been working with Archbishop Tenison’s School in Oval, south London, for the past year. In November, two Year Ten students participated in a War Child presentation to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Street Children. These students called on MPs to undertake a fact-finding mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo. A number of Parliamentary Group members have subsequently agreed and will be visiting War Child projects in Democratic Republic of Congo in September 2006.

These young people understand the issues faced by children formerly associated with fighting forces. One commented:

“This is a real problem. If their communities don’t have any respect for those boys, then you can’t blame them for committing crimes.”

Significantly, these students see parallels with the rhythms of their own daily life.

“There are always kids who are told to ignore: if you get involved with them, it will affect our school work; excluded kids who are told ‘if we get involved with them, it will affect our school work’. Excluded kids can be helped and they probably aren’t at as great a disadvantage as the ones we were talking about in Congo.”

Meanwhile, the students have a clear grasp of the routes away from the problem.

“But you can see there is hope here. There’s one boy who has a wife and young child now and all he wants to do is do the best by his family.”

“This is all about responsibility: who was responsible for Beni joining the army… who is responsible for Beni’s child… who is responsible for helping children like Beni.”

Furthermore, the students identified the role the British public, media, schools and politicians have in the situation.

“Your money is spent inefficiently, when efforts at reintegration are so often failing. On behalf of all the students in Archbishop Tenison’s School, we want to inform the public of how their money is being spent on the Democratic Republic of Congo. We want to know this in case there is a computer. We don’t know if our money is being spent efficiently, when efforts at reintegration are failing. We want to know in case there is a computer. We don’t know if our money is being spent efficiently.”

Young people in the UK want to see something done about this problem. They want a clear and targeted call to action.
A CALL TO ACTION

- A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO. THIS MUST EXPLICITLY FEATURE THE NEED TO ENSURE THE GENUINE REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN FORMERLY ASSOCIATED WITH FIGHTING FORCES.

- DONOR SUPPORT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND MONITORING OF THIS STRATEGY, AND ESPECIALLY FOR THE STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL CAPACITY TO DELIVER IT.

- INCREASED PUBLIC AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHALLENGES FACING THE REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN FORMERLY ASSOCIATED WITH FIGHTING FORCES, AS A BASIS FOR INFLUENCING THE POLICIES OF RELEVANT POLITICAL AND DONOR INSTITUTIONS.
Inclusion. The database must also seek to define what for securing their sustainable and meaningful nomination and monitoring of the authority responsible located and then use the information to inform the to reintegrate, ascertain why this is, where they are associated with fighting forces who have been unable database must track the proportion of children formerly processed through disarmament, maintaining a database that tracks the current status of the •

The United Nations what War Child will do

We will:
• Work with donor institutions in the Democratic Republic of Congo to influence the development of Erna Eide and effective reintegration processes for widespread application.
• Raise awareness, understanding and concern for the plight of children formerly associated with fighting forces among ourodiac youth groups in the UK through our websites, events and coverage by media partners. We will take every opportunity to encourage politicians to make positive changes to policy.
• Lead a delegation of the UK’s All Party Parliamentary Group for the Democratic Republic of Congo on a fact-finding mission in order to generate political commitment to addressing the marginalisation of children associated with fighting forces.
• Co-fund and support the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Great Lakes and Prevention of Genocide in order to raise awareness of the scope and scale of the problem and the need for more robust indicators of genuine inclusion.
• We are calling for the Department for International Development to ensure that their Country Strategies explicitly recognise the need to establish relevant structures and mechanisms for working with local actors and the international community to drive a coordinated and coherent response to securing the rights and wellbeing of children formerly associated with fighting forces.
• We are calling for the Foreign Affairs Select Committee to investigate the current effectiveness of the use of UK tax payer money in re-integrating children formerly associated with fighting forces. We are specifically asking the Select Committees to emphasise the importance of an effective engagement with those children and to ensure that the right dialogue takes place between the government and these children to ensure that they are reintegrated in meaningful ways.

What War Child is calling for

We are calling for like-minded international non-governmental organisations to work with us in establishing an inter-agency body that ensures the coordinated:
• Lobbying of government both locally and in the UK
• Awareness raising and advocacy locally, as well as here in the UK
• Sharing of experience and development of best practice examples.

The Media

We are calling for local and international media to:
• Report on the scale of the problem facing the reintegration of children formerly associated with fighting forces, and how this affects their lives and the security of their communities.
• Engage donors in a way that champions the rights and needs of children, by negotiating for better access to financial assistance and the commitment to support more effective approaches to reintegration.
• Report on the ways forward that are being developed and piloted by the various actors in their various terms of reference, targets and indicators for the effective reintegration of children formerly associated with fighting forces and recognise that this is a long-term endeavour requiring a long-term planning and resourcing commitment.

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