Committee: General Assembly 1

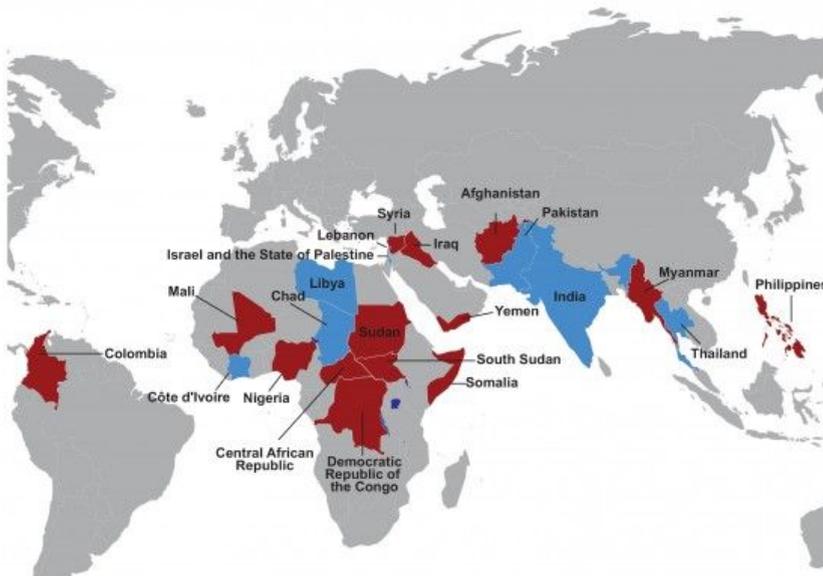**Issue:** The Problem of Youth Participation Within Conflicts

Student Officer: Makara Poy

Position: Deputy President of General Assembly 1

Introduction

Eighteen percent of the world's population is considered youth, ages 15 to 24 years old. Some of them are fighting for education and some are finding jobs, while countless thousands of others are trying to survive in regions devastated by conflicts. These young people often live in a place where their leaders take advantage of them, even forcing them to adopt an ideology of violence. In many places, girls and women suffer from sexual mutilation and exploitation, threats of rape, trafficking, and humiliation. When conflict ends, many young people are left struggling to cope with the trauma, as they try to find sustainable livelihoods. In addition to psychological and physical trauma, they also suffer financially. They can remain unemployed, contributing to a less stable economy for the whole nation. The most important adverse effect of conflicts on youth is that they are at a high risk of utilizing violence. They might believe the ideology that violence is the only way to deal with issues. Unfortunately, youth have very little say in politics and forming new policies. To them, they only have two choices: either obey the order to kill other people or die themselves.

Caption #1: Countries where children are affected by armed conflict (2017)

Definition of Key Terms

Conflict

A strong disagreement that occurs naturally and involves two or more parties with differing interests and/or perspectives on a particular issue or idea

Human Trafficking

Organized criminal activity in which humans are being treated as objects to be sold and/or traded illegally to other countries to be under the control of others and for the purpose of sexual exploitation, prostitution, forced labor, servitude, removal of organs, etc.

Exploitation

treating someone unfairly when they have less power and less of a voice than the abuser in order to gain benefit from them

Peacebuilding

A process that eases the establishment of peace and tries to reduce the risk of the recurrence of violence by strengthening a society's capacity to manage conflict in a non-violent way and provide governance structures related to peace and development

Ideology

A system of ideas, beliefs or principles an individual, political party, or society holds, which form the foundation of the economic or political theory and policy of a particular nation or culture (ex: capitalism, communism, socialism, marxism)

Propaganda

Ideas, information or images that are often false or exaggerated, and which can manipulate other people to believe them because it emphasizes only one part of the situation or argument

Background Information

History of Child Soldiers

Many will think that the use of child soldiers is contemporary. However, this practice sadly began way back in human history. Child soldiers were being used as additional military forces and to combat other parties in an unexpected way.

Child Soldiers in the 18th and 19th Centuries

The British navy was one of the military forces that benefited greatly from child soldiers. They recruited young boys into the Royal Navy to act as cabin servants. Similarly, over 250,000 child soldiers under the age of 18 also played an important part in the American Civil War, ultimately making up around five percent of total soldiers. Also, in many traditional African cultures, this idea of child soldiers has formalized in the nineteenth century when tribal leader Shaka Zulu was in power. Boys were required to be involved in the conflict when they were just six years old.

Child Soldiers in World War I and II

During this period, the use of child soldiers dramatically increased. Almost all the countries in both World Wars used child soldiers as weapons to protect themselves. For instance, in World War II, youth were being recruited for training since they were easy to poison with the Nazi ideology. Germany was also fighting against other nations that used child soldiers, such as Russia and Poland. Child soldiers were not only used in Europe, a large percentage of Asian armies also used children.

Post-war Era Child Soldiers

After World War II, there was a decline in the rate of child soldiering. However, this method was still being carried out in some countries. As early as the 1970s, terrorists recruited children to perform attacks. During the war between Vietnam and the United States, the Viet Cong employed children and women to ambush the Americans and then return to be normal civilians, which adversely affected the ability of American soldiers to distinguish between their allies and enemies. Furthermore, the technique of using child soldiers was also present in the Iran-Iraq war and during the Cambodian genocide. Children were being forced to clear active landmine areas before adults made their way through, and in Cambodia, children were being taught to use guns, activate and bury mines, and kill people that Pol Pot wanted to eradicate.

History of Forced Child Labor

During the Industrial Revolution, disease spread due to rampant urbanization. Many families became suddenly impoverished and many children were being forced to work to earn money to support their family. It was so much easier to control the children, and they followed the orders seriously. Another reason is that children could be paid less than adults, and the factories

could benefit from their ability to move in small places. Work took priority over education and exploitation and poverty were often common results.

History of Child Trafficking

In conflict zones, children are often killed or exploited to be slaves. They could be taken out from their schools, homes, or maybe refugee camps. Street children had to confront great danger such as sexual abuse and substance abuse and girls are more likely to be sold into prostitution. For instance, according to 2001 International Labor Organization, there are approximately 12,000 Nepalese children trafficked to India annually. This problem of child trafficking happened way back in the past and is still a reality today.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1949	Geneva Convention protocol set an acceptable and reasonable age at which children can be involved in war, which is 15 years old
1984	UNICEF conducted studies in Uganda and South America about child soldiers, to see the the effects of war on children
1985	The United Nation declares that child soldiers are a form of exploitative labor
1990	The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU)
1994	The Human Rights Watch begins to publish articles on child soldiers in Africa
1998	The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court rules that it is a crime when a child below the age of 15 is forced into combat
1998	First debate of the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict
May 25, 2000	The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict is adopted by the United Nations General Assembly
June 2000	Canada becomes the first country to sign the Optional Protocol; other nations follow
2002	The Secretary General creates a list of which nations are violating the law of having no child used in battle

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Although the United Nations has indirectly and directly attempted to solve this problem, they have not gone far enough yet. The Third Committee of the General Assembly and the Commission for Social Development both discuss youth issues and form resolutions once every two years. The UN also stresses the importance of youth participation within their society and promotes peaceful and collaborative decision-making rather than conflict. However, the question that needs to be answered is "how can it be implemented for all youth at all ages?" Despite the implementation to all youth, there is an action plan for youth created by the UN to raise awareness and bring the voices of youth across the world to an online platform.

Additionally, the UN has supported the Children, Not Soldiers campaign with the intention of ending and preventing any further recruitment of children in conflict areas. Since this campaign launched in March 2014, many member States signed the action plan and some of them have already created positive changes to enact this campaign.

An additional problem is that after a conflict or war ends, child soldiers are left without a means of income, and often with the traumatic effects of war. Their country is fragile, and they do not have stability, especially in terms of a sustainable economy. That is why the UN has launched a new policy on creating employment in post-conflict nations. It can help these countries survive and recover from the atrocious conflict they experienced.

- United Nations Security Council condemned the targeting of children as soldiers in conflicted areas: 25 August 1999 **(S/RES/1261)**
- United Nations Security Council called all parties using child soldiers to halt this practice: 30 January 2003 **(S/RES/1460)**
- United Nations Security Council stated that if states do not follow resolution 1460, the UN will take more action in eliminating child soldiers: 22 April 2004 **(S/RES/1539)**
- United Nations Security Council established monitoring and reporting systems for all child soldiers in use at that time: 26 July 2005 **(S/RES/1612)**
- United Nations Security Council identified six of the worst violations related to the treatment of child soldiers, as well as a list of 56 parties who break these rules: 4 August 2009 **(S/RES/1882)**
- United Nations Security Council came up with steps to combat violence against children, especially their right to education: 22 February 2014 **(S/RES/2143)**
- United Nation Security Council enhances the international community's mobilization in support of children in areas of armed conflict: 18 June 2015 **(S/RES/2225)**

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