



Youth Action and Intergenerational Cooperation on Peace and Disarmament.

## CONTEXT

The conscription, recruitment and use of children in armed forces constitute one of the most egregious human rights violations due to the defencelessness of the victims. As former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated in his 2000 Report on Children and Armed Conflict, '[children] depend, even more than adults do, on the protection afforded in peacetime by family, society and law'. There are approximately 300,000 child soldiers in the world, with African nations largely considered the hardest hit by this practice. Recent reports have estimated that 3,000 child soldiers are being held by armed forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), while the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) has recruited an estimated 2,500–5,000 children in the conflict in Darfur the civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Mozambique notoriously involved children in the conflict. The escalation of violence and insecurity perpetrated by terrorist groups like Boko Haram, Al Shabaab and the various affiliations of Al-Qaeda, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, Ansar Dine, the ongoing conflicts in the East of Cameroon by the Seleca and Anti Balaka groups from the Central African rebellion, the northern part of the Cameroon by the terrorist group Boko Haram, the Anglophone crisis specifically in North-West and South West of Cameroon through a battle launched by separatist rebels for their own state, asking for the separation of the country has involved a thousand of children as combatants, mine testers, messengers and cooks some of them have even been used as human shields or as sex slaves for military leaders. In this presentation we are going to showcase the conclusions of the study we have been implementing on children to understand the reasons of their recruitment as child soldiers and the psycho consequences of that recruitment (i) before focusing in the contribution of children for democracy, human rights, and peace in the security crises context in Africa (ii)

### **I - Focus on the field study undertaken by children for peace on child soldiers in Central Africa**

#### **A- Presentation, target and scope of the field study**

In the frame of our project, I am standing up for peace, my mates and I have been carrying out a field study entitled **Child soldiers in Central Africa: from children for war to children for peace understanding the reasons of child mainstreaming in armed groups and psychological consequences**

That study is running in the East, the far north and the Anglophone part of Cameroon and targets 25 groups of 50 children from Nigeria, Chad, CAR, Angola, DRC and Cameroon made of children refugees, children who have belonged to armed groups and former bomb-carrying children radicalised by boko haram: The average age of the target group is 17 years old.

#### **B- Key conclusions of the field study**

One of the first observation of that study demonstrates, that more than 50% of the population in Nigeria, Chad, CAR, Angola, DRC and Cameroon conflict or post-conflict zones consists of children younger than 18 years old. Consequently, one of the reasons for employing child soldiers is that "they are viewed as expendable, replaceable" – and they are cheap to maintain. They are also psychologically more vulnerable than many adults, who already have a more shaped personality. Since younger children, in particular, can lack a sense of fear, they might be preferred over adults because they accept more dangerous tasks without scrutinising them. Children's and adolescents' identities are still being formed, meaning that they can be more easily influenced and controlled, since they are dependent on protection and guidance.

A total of 54 percent of the children reports having killed someone, and 28 percent reports that they were forced to engage in sexual contact. 35 percent of the interviewed children had developed a fully developed posttraumatic stress disorder, a debilitating mental health disorder

According to the study, The most common traumatic life events of those who had been abducted were: forced to skin, chop or cook dead bodies (8%), forced to eat human flesh (8%), forced to loot property and burn houses (48%), forced to abduct other children (30%), forced to kill someone (36%), forced to beat, injure or mutilate someone (38%), causing serious injury or death to somebody else (44%), severe human suffering, such as carrying heavy loads or being deprived of food (100%), given birth to a child in captivity (33% of girls), threatened to be killed (93%), seeing people with mutilations and dead bodies (78%), sexual assault (45%), assault with a weapon (77%) and physical assault including kicked, beaten, burnt (90%).

## **II- The contribution of children for democracy, human rights, and peace in the security crises context in Africa**

To address this horrible situation faced by children, Children for peace that is a grassroot teenagers girls led movement whose strategy is based on the Realization of documentaries on peacebuilding ; Creation/production and distribution of Children Peace Cartoons; Organisation of children capacity building workshops, Awareness raising campaigns , realisation of studies on the ground , the creation of digital tools , the psycho social assistance have implemented a critical number of projects among them .

### **A- The project “Silence the Guns”**

**Silence the Guns** is an integrated project which ambitions to contribute to address the causes and the consequences of violent extremism/terrorism and illicit proliferation of weapons. the project aimed at democratizing and reshaping the local governance and management of conflicts, thereby liberating endogenous approaches and innovative solutions to build peace and improve children rights in affected areas by war.

Key results of this project are as follows:

- 120 children capacitated on thematic related to peacebuilding, violent extremism and human rights focusing on children rights, disarmament and illicit proliferation of weapons.
- 07 Peace clubs set in communities and the capacity of 175 members built in leadership for peacebuilding, conflict resolution, human/children rights and gender-equity.
- 50 children including internally displaced children and refugees’ children participate in the children march for peace entitled ““Ceasefire – Silence the Guns””
- 02 advocacy meetings gathering 50 local traditional and religious authorities; State officials organised on matters related to (1) children rights, demobilization reintegration and disarmament of youth/teenagers ex combats; (2) KidsRights; (3) the implementation of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child and the UNSCR 2250 and 1325 (relating to youth and children participation in peacebuilding) and the fully implication of children in peacebuilding (4)fight against early and rough marriages; (5) the importance to mobilize all stakeholders including private sector and multi-nationals to invest in girls and children education and youth employment.
- 1 sensitization meeting mobilizing 100 community members including internally displaced people and refugees organised in 5 communities on (1), Children rights and early marriage; (2) the importance of the living together and peacebuilding, (3) the consequences of early marriage; (3)

the importance of disarmament, reintegration of children/Youth ex-combatants (4) the importance to fight against the illicit proliferation of weapons; (5) children and girls' education

- 2 networks composed of at least 50 religious, traditional leaders are set up and are working closely with the children to advance the Silence the guns project related issues
- 2 multi-stakeholders networks constituted by religious and traditional leaders and children operationalize community sensitization and advocacies in villages, markets, schools, mosques, churches and in local media and on the internet that have touched at least 10 000 people among which 5 000 children/teenagers.
- 500 children; 50 local authorities and 300 community members directly involved in children rights disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-child/youth combatants as well as in the fight against violent extremism, radicalization, proliferation of weapons through the project.

#### **B- Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Technology for ex child soldiers DDR-Tech**

Children for Peace has been working closely with the African Network of Young Leaders for Peace and Sustainable Development to develop an application called DDR Tech aiming to fight against enrolment of Children in armed groups and contributing to the restoration of security by disarming ex- child soldiers and providing them with viable socio-economic reintegration opportunities in civilian life.

Through this application, we intend to reduce by 25% incidents caused by weapons; increase community confidence; the resettlement by 20% of abandoned communities; the relaunch of informal trade and production activities; increase reintegration of children and youths; revive political activities; reduce by 25% risk of conflicts in sensitive areas.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The international laws as they exist currently are inadequate to protect all African children in conflict situations and more effective means of enforcement are also needed Children are key stakeholders and are capable to drive societal transformation. We must invest in them to foster democracy, human rights and peace. The finalization of the DDR-Tech will be an important step toward our vision. We are opened to all partnership that may help to overcome our technical and financial difficulties and contributing to the effective implementation of the DDR-Tech.

I will conclude by saying that

If you think a smile is stronger than a weapon,

If you believe that what unites people is more important than what divides them

If for you the foreigner is a brother who has been proposed to you,

If you share your bread and know how to attach a piece of your heart to it

If you believe that peace is possible,

Then peace will come

