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Finding the way back to childhood

A study on child soldiers with focus on southern Sudan

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Abstract

Finding the way back to childhood is a dissertation, written to clarify whether or not there exist any rehabilitation plan for the child soldiers being released in southern Sudan.

Children are today, worldwide being released and let back into their communities, after years of abuse and violations against their rights.

According to The Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is protected from involvement in direct hostilities. Psychological help and reintegration plans should be provided if a child has been exposed to armed conflict.

Nevertheless reports indicate that countries and leaders across the world do not follow the conventions and protocols they have ratified and children across the world are today suffering from neglect and limited resources when it comes to rehabilitation plans for former child soldiers.

With the help of former child soldier Michael of the SPLA in southern Sudan, I have been given an up to date and accurate picture of how the life of a former child soldier can develop without the help of international organisations or reintegration programs.

Key words: Southern Sudan, Child Soldier, SPLA, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and The Convention on The Rights of the Child

Abbreviations

AMIS	African Union Mission in Sudan
AU	African Union
CAC	Children and Armed Conflict
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration authorities
GoNU	Government of National Unity
GoS	Government of Sudan
GoSS	Government of Southern Sudan
ICC	International Criminal Court
JEM	Justice and Equality
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
SLA	Sudan Liberation Army
SSUM	South Sudan Unity Movement
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
UN	The United Nations
UNAMIS	United Nations Advanced Mission in Sudan
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
UNMIS	United Nations Mission in Sudan
WFP	World Food Program

1 Introduction

The illegal use of child soldier is today spread worldwide and over hundreds of thousands children are effected by armed conflicts around the world.

The use of children in armed conflicts is today condemned and unacceptable according to the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the optional protocol to the convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict. However, when this dissertation was written, many children are being used and deprived of their lives.

Children are denied their most basic human rights, namely the right to education and the right to have a childhood. They are both forced and recruited by own free will and by government armed forces and militias.

Although children across the world are being released, and let back into their communities, it is hard to determine whether or not this is done in a successful way. Many of the children have been subjected to different forms of inhuman and brutal methods, and have most definitely witnessed things above normality for a child. Furthermore I believe that a former child of armed conflict might be use to solving problems through violence and other means then verbal. Therefore it is important that the child gets help to find the way back to a non-violent everyday life style.

In 2006, the 27th Brigade of the SPLA released around 200 boys and girls¹. The fact that the children are being released and that there is a possibility of tracing the children's families, is a tremendous progress. However reintegration programming, schooling and important support mechanisms have been and still remain very limited and underfunded.²

¹ Sudan People's Liberty Army, www.splamilitary.net

² Watchlist on children and armed conflicts, Sudan's Children at a Crossroads An Urgent Need for Protection, access report at www.watchlist.org.

1.1 Purpose and research question

By writing this dissertation, I want to highlight and clarify whether or not former child soldiers are being justified and reconciled for the massive abuse they have been subjected to. Even though we hear news of children in armed conflicts being released, we seldom hear of what the aftermath has to bring and what rehabilitation opportunities the children encounter.

I would like to explore;

- What responsibility a country has to preclude and stop the use of child soldiers and if the country is unsuccessful in this task, who is responsible and who gets prosecuted?

According to *art 39* in the UNCRC, a child who has been exposed to an armed conflict, the state parties should provide recovery and reintegration.³

- Furthermore, is Sudan being accused or charged for not following the UNCRCs principles?

Looking at the country Sudan, with regards to rehabilitation and reconciliation;

- Has there been any success in integrating the former child soldiers in Sudan? Is there a rehabilitation plan for the former child soldiers as they are being released? Is it a part of southern Sudan's plan, to help them find their way back into society?

*“Former Child Soldiers may at best have their needs forgotten and at worst be blamed by their communities for what happened.”*⁴

³ Convention on the Right of the Child, art 1, art 38 and art 39: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf>

⁴ Vera Chrobok and Andrew S. Akutu, *Returning Home Children's perspectives on reintegration*, A case study of children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Teso ,eastern Uganda, accessed through www.child-soldiers.org, pp 11.

1.2 Theory

The theory I have chosen to use in this dissertation is the Ecology of Human Development, with focus on the child's development. This model looks at a child's development through the interaction and relationships with the world, to determine the environment around them.

I will also highlight some authors in this chapter who have through their work helped me develop my research and also my purpose of the dissertation. Mats Utas dissertation *Sweet Battle Fields Youth and the Liberian War*, helped me get a picture of child soldiers in Liberia and how their life can vary from the life of a child soldier in southern Sudan. Graca Machels report she published in 1996, drew attention to the importance of rehabilitation and consist of recommendations what should be done.

1.2.1 Ecology of Human Development

The reason why I chose this theory to work with is because the surroundings around a former child soldiers are very important when contemplating reintegrating into society in a successful way. What this theory highlights is that it is not only the immediate surroundings of a child that affects them, but also how they interact with the larger environment around them. The interaction between these ever-changing environments are the key-factors to how a child develops and, with regards to reintegration, plays a big roll on how it goes forward. This theory looks at the interaction between humans, as considers their relationships as systems.⁵

This theory developed in a different environment to Sudan, and it is therefore important to bare in mind that the circumstances are different. I do however believe that the theory can be implemented to understand the reintegration process.

The Ecology of Human Development originated from general system theories and was originally outlined by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The model focuses on children and

⁵ <http://family.jrank.org/pages/823/Human-Ecology-Theory.html>

points out that humans do not develop in isolation, but in relation to their family, friends, society and community. The model consists of four system surroundings; the micro system, meso system, exo system and the macro system.

The *Micro system* comprises of the child's close surroundings, which includes family, friends, school and other forms of settings that a child directly interacts with.

The *Meso system* consists of the interaction between the networks on the micro system. This interaction is considered very important and often crucial to the reintegration process. According to this system the family's interaction with neighbours and friends, can determine the process and the outcome of the reintegration.

The third system becomes relevant at an *Exo* level, where the system affects the child, but the child is not in direct contact with the surroundings. However, the child might come in contact and interact within the exo system and it can have an impact on the child and can feel the positive or negative outcome from the connection. These structures could be authorities, media, health-care, or in a former child soldiers case in Sudan's, the NGOs.

The last system is the *Macro system*, which consists of values of society, laws and ideologies. A way of interpreting the society you are a part of. This system may affect the child's parents for instance, and therefore has profound impact on the child. In Sudan's case, it is in what way for instance, they have interpreted UNCRC, or what laws, treaties or protocols Sudan has signed when it comes to reintegration of child soldiers.⁶

1.2.2 Watch list on children in armed conflict

In Sudan, the global non-governmental organisation Watch list on children in armed conflict collects data and information about violations against children in armed

⁶Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Child Development, see bibliography.

conflicts. By doing so they hope to influence the key-decision makers and prevent these violations and they work to secure the rights of children worldwide.

According to a report they published in 2007, Sudan's Children at a Cross Roads, an Urgent Need for Protection, the future of the children in Sudan, are at crucial junction. The humanitarian organisations are strictly watched by the government in southern Sudan and are constantly threatened by armed forces around the country.⁷

1.2.3 Mats Utas

In his dissertation, Sweet Battle Fields Youth and the Liberian War, Mats Utas asks similar questions to mine. What happens to the former children of armed conflicts? Does the former combatants, who have committed horrible crimes, due to influence and peer pressure, have a home to go back to, and if they do, are they accepted? Although his dissertation treats the former child soldier in Liberia, one can find many similarities in the reintegration part of the process. They are all children, who have missed out on a crucial part of life, their childhood.

Utas argues in his dissertation, that children who are put in a reintegration process or a remarginalization process, have been outcasts and outside the society as child soldiers and the chance of being outcasts once again when returning to their communities is big. He indicates that once children were being released, the children had no idea if their parents had survived the war in Liberia, and they were not in any position to find out either. Instead they created new families with their friends from the time of war, and in many cases moved on from there, or joined the army again.⁸

With the help of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and optional protocols, it is possible to determine what responsibilities and obligations countries have towards their children to secure and protect them. Using these legal tools it is possible to see

⁷Sudan's Children at a Crossroads an Urgent Need for Protection, access report at www.watchlist.org

⁸ Mats Utas, Sweet Battlefield Youth and the Liberian War, pp 226

where Sudan is failing on account of the children and go against several of the articles and guidelines given through the conventions and protocols.

1.2.4 Graca Machel

Graca Machel published a report in 1996, on the impact of armed conflict on children, which according to the UNICEF drew global attention to the devastating impacts of armed conflicts on children. In her report Machel highlights that education is a high priority when discussing rehabilitation of former child soldiers. Not only because education will make it easier to get employment later on in life, but also because it helps the child to form a personality and develop an identity outside of the army. This helps the process of living a normal life again after being in an armed conflict. She states that many of the children who have been exposed to armed conflicts are far behind with regards to education and therefore might have to be schooled with students of a lower age after returning home. This can result in bad self-esteem and that the children prefer not to go to school and find employment.

The education part of reintegration is very important according to Machel since this affects the child's ability to be reunited with its family, and if reuniting is impossible finding other ways of uniting the former children into peer-group living, which are well integrated in the community. This arrangement may also be needed for children who have found their families and have chance of reuniting, but as Machel states, it can be very difficult for a child to come back their families, where traditions and cultural believes may result in the child who is coming back wont be accepted.⁹

By combining Urie Bronfenbrenners theory with Mats Utas interpretations of Liberia, and with Garca Machel report, together with the International Convention on the rights of the child, I find this is a good and stable ground for my dissertation, where I can proceed with my arguments and get questions answered from consistent sources, and time to time fall back on.

⁹ Graça Machel ,The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, A critical review of progress made and obstacles encountered in increasing protection for war-affected children, *pp* 25

1.3 Methodologies and Material

Due to the scarce information regarding the released children in south Sudan and the life they are living as former child soldiers today, I found it important to go there myself, to get hold of firsthand information.

Before travelling to Juba, I was in contact with Suzy Belcher, who is in charge of a camp called The Bedouin Camp situated in Juba. It was through her that I got in contact with Michael, who I later on interviewed.

1.3.1 Qualitative Method Interview with Michael

When writing this dissertation, I looked for personal and detailed information. Considering this I chose to do a qualitative study. This was done through a semi-structured in-depth interview with a former child soldier. I write semi-structured in the sense that I had a basic foundation for my intended questions, but with enough flexibility to be able to ask other questions and keep the ability to change directions of the questions during the interview.

I would have preferred to do more than one interview and that was my intention when going to Juba. I only spent four days in Juba, and during these days, the other two apart from Michael I was suppose to have talked too, where not in Juba. And also because of the current situation, where many of the former child soldiers are still reluctant of sharing their story, I ended up doing one interview. However, by doing one interview, I got to know Michael very well and recorded four hours of material with him. Because of this I have had to limit the content when summarizing it in the appendix. The interview developed into an open discussion and therefore I choose to summarize the interview as a written text. Michaels answers during the first interview were further explained in the second interview, and the interviews where therefore compiled.

I was lucky to have contacts in Sudan, who could help me get in touch with Michael. I had through out my planning of writing this dissertation wanted to do an interview with a former child soldier, and what better place then to do it in southern Sudan.

While planning the trip to Juba, I also planned the outline for my dissertation and tried to get as much done for my theoretical parts of the dissertation and getting as much knowledge about Sudan and how to make an in-depth interview.

While in Juba before doing the interview, I sat down with Michael and explained to him the purpose of the interviews and what it was going to be used for. He understood the consequences and reasons for choosing him.

As for his anonymity, the name Michael was not used during his time in the rebel army and therefore we considered and agreed upon using Michael in the dissertation, since it would not be possible to link him to that name. The first time I spoke to him, we did not record and it was not seen as an interview, more as a meeting. Where he told me a short version of his time as a child soldier. After this I started to prepare questions for him, since I then knew a bit more about him and had gotten a feeling of what questions would be okay for me to ask.

By recording the interview, I could concentrate on the questions and guidance I needed to give Michael as he spoke about his time as a child soldier and the years to follow. When I got back home, I could listen to the interview several times and carefully analyse it, without missing any important content.

I considered doing interviews with professionals working with child soldiers, with the thought of not exposing young children. But when I got in contact with Michael, who escaped from the SPLA ten years ago and being assured he wanted to talk to me, I choose to go that way instead. The use of interpreters was not needed, since Michael's English was perfect. This also made my interview with him personal and gave me a good connection with him.

I find the qualitative method does have a disadvantage in the fact that the information I got from the interviews with Michael only covers his side of the story. What Michael told me are his personal thoughts and interpretations of what happened in Sudan and to the child soldiers in the SPLA. Therefore, the information is credible to Michael and it can be questioned whether or not it is credible when including other people in his interpretations and thoughts about a certain occurrence or happening. Although my method has disadvantages, I experienced many positive outcomes by

doing the in-depth interview. I would not have been able to hold such a good quality if I would have been using for example the quantitative method. Since it would have been hard to put together a survey that would have been accurate for the amount of answers I would of needed from the child soldiers.

Further, it should be kept in mind that this information may not have been told or been interpreted in the same way if told by or to someone else.

Because of this criticism has been directed at this method, since much of the information may never repeat it self again, in the same way it did in this study.

It is also hard to control and verify the information's reliability. Related to my dissertation, this means that if someone else where to contact Michael and ask further questions regarding my interview, Michael might tell his story in a different way because his relation to this other person would be different from ours.

1.3.2 Written Material

Apart from the interview I made, I have based much of my material from the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, primarily by looking at Sudan as a country and by evaluating whether or not they are following the ratified conventions and protocols.

I have tried to limit the use of NGO resources, without excluding them. The NGO organization Watch List on Children and Armed Conflict released a report in 2007 with the topic Sudan's Children at a Crossroads An Urgent Need for Protection, which has been a good source for inspiration on the harsh interpretations of the life's of child soldiers. What I have kept in mind when using NGO reports is that they are often generalizing the term "child soldier", as if the information they distribute concern all child soldiers worldwide. I do not agree with this since situations, interpretations and experiences vary from child to child and conflict to conflict. For example, the children of southern Sudan who were members of the SPLA had a different experience then the children of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda.

Having that in mind, I have been careful when interpreting the term “child soldier” as a universal word.

As for the literature, I have mainly used three books. Jok Maduts book, *Sudan, Race, Religion, And Violence*, gave me a good stance and understanding for Sudan as a country and its disunity within the politics and religion.

Akol Lams book *Southern Sudan, Colonialism, Resistance and Autonomy*, which explains and helped me understand Southern Sudan, as an “independent” part of Sudan.

Without the help of Holme Idar Magne, Solvang Bernt Krohn, *Forsningsmetodik Om kvalitativa och kvantitativa metoder*, it would have been hard for me to do the interview in Juba. By reading this book especially the parts about in-depth-interviews, made me think and transform my questions into something completely different from what I otherwise would have done.

1.3.3 Outline

In the first section of the dissertation, which is chapter two, I will examine basic and fundamental information concerning children in armed conflicts. Where I examine the background and history of child soldiers, and also what the Convention on the Rights of the Child, optional protocols and Sudan as a country are doing to prevent the use of under-age soldiers. Chapter two also contains relevant cases that are taken up by the International Criminal Court at the moment, where the current president in Sudan Omar Al-Bashir has been accused on several counts.

I will in this first part try to answer one of my outlined questions: *What responsibility a country has to preclude and stop the use of child soldiers and if the country is unsuccessful in this task, who is responsible and who gets prosecuted?*

The second part of the dissertation, which is chapter three, concentrates on Sudan. It examines the history of the conflict between the northern and the southern Sudan, and also the current situation in southern parts of Sudan. The end of this chapter takes up

the potential future crisis in Juba, where I spent a couple of days in May, if nothing is done in the near future it can lead to devastating consequences.

The third part concentrates on the child soldiers in Southern Sudan. This is the chapter where we get to know Michael and read about his experiences in the SPLA. How he interpreted his time in the army and how he experienced the years as an under aged soldier. Through out this chapter I have quotations from Michael, which all can be found in Appendix A, which is my summarized version of our interview.

The fourth part, the fifth chapter, is the discussion and analysing part. Where I summarize my work from the rest of the chapters.

1.4 Terminology

I will be using the terms “child soldiers” and “children in armed conflicts” as established by the Cape Town Principles:

*“Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms”.*¹⁰

My definitions of these terms also include the meaning given to them in *art 1* of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. This article defines a “child” as any person under the age of 18, unless under the law applicable to the child adulthood is attained earlier.¹¹ Therefore any child under the age of 18 involved indirectly or directly in armed conflicts is a subject to my research.

¹⁰ Cape Town Principles, accessed through http://www.unicef.org/emerg/index_childsoldiers.html

¹¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf> part 1

Even though the Convention of the Rights of the Child¹² does not prohibit recruiting of children between the ages of 15 and 18, I still choose to include children between these ages in the dissertation.

Further, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict clearly states in *art 1*, that all possible measures are to be taken by state parties to exclude children under the age of 18 from direct hostile situations.¹³

1.5 Limitations

Because of limited time, I have decided to focus on child soldiers as one gender and not look upon the difference of children in armed conflicts as girls and boys. By doing so, one might think I will overlook crucial information and not get an accurate picture of child soldiers today and the rehabilitation opportunities they encounter. Even though girls and boys may face different kinds of challenges in an armed conflict, the difficulties of finding their way back to childhood after being released are, in my opinion, somewhat the same in terms of psychological stress, finding their families and what help is being offered to them through organisations.

Apart from the gender point of view, I have limited myself geographically to the southern part of Sudan, and what is being done there at the moment to secure that the released child soldiers are being helped to reintegrate into society.

¹² <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf>

¹³ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc-conflict.htm>, art 1

2 Children of armed conflicts

When mentioning child soldiers today, most people associate this with young and aggressive African boys running around with machine guns shooting everything in sight. This is necessarily not an accurate picture of what a typical child of armed conflicts is today.

In this chapter I will attempt to answer the first of my research questions; *What responsibility a country has to preclude and stop the use of child soldiers and if the country is unsuccessful in this task, who is responsible and who gets prosecuted?*

2.1 Background

The use of child soldiers dates back to the ancient Greece and history has continuously shown usage of child soldiers. In both Europe and America, the use of underage soldiers was not uncommon, even though it was mostly supporting roles the children played, the iconic drummer boy in the American military has put a permanent mark in history.¹⁴ It was not until the 20th century the worldwide desire to protect children arose and the using of under-aged children in violent situations was considered unacceptable. There soon followed a stream of efforts trying to eliminate the use of children in armed forces and in 1959 the United Nations Declaration's of the Right of the Child was released, guaranteeing amongst other things children's right to a name, right to a nationality the right to be raised in a peaceful environment.¹⁵ Although the release of this declaration was an important first step, little changed and the fight for the children's rights had hardly begun.

¹⁴ Victor Mobley, The History of Child Soldiers, When Kids were used as Warriors, accessed through, http://militaryhistory.suite101.com/article.cfm/the_history_of_child_soldiers

¹⁵ Declaration on the Rights of the Child (1959), accessed through <http://www.cirp.org/library/ethics/UN-declaration/>

In November 1989, the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This convention is legally binding and was created to make the world recognize that children were entitled human rights too. The countries that have agreed to oblige to this convention have a responsibility to protect the children in their countries and ensure that the children are treated in a correct way, as instructed by the convention.¹⁶

2.2 Under what protection is a child from armed conflicts?

Children today, are under the protection of several Conventions and Protocols, widely spread and ratified worldwide. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most recognized of all, more countries have ratified the convention than any other Human Rights Convention.¹⁷

2.2.1 The Convention on the Rights of the Child

In November 2009, 194 countries had ratified the Convention, which is every country in the UN except the US and Somalia. The US even though they have signed it, has not yet ratified it.¹⁸

The Convention consists of 54 articles and two optional protocols, its four core principles as spelled out by the UNICEF *”non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child.”*¹⁹

By ratifying and undertaking this convention or an optional protocol, the state is obliged to respect, protect and promote the rights included. It is the government at

¹⁶ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf>

¹⁷ http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30229.html

¹⁸ http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30229.html

¹⁹ <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

first hand who is responsible to make sure that the convention or protocol is being correctly followed. Countries who have ratified the convention are obliged to hand in reports regularly to the UN committee on the Rights of the Child, on what they are doing in their country to actualise the rights of the children. This committee normally meets three times a year in Geneva, where they overlook reports in two parallel chambers. They also publish their interpretations and outcomes from the sessions, known as the general comments.²⁰

Something interesting is that the convention has been accepted by non-state entities, among them is the rebel movement SPLA in the southern Sudan.

The SPLA did also in November 2009; sign an action plan where they commit themselves to end the use of soldiers under the age of 18. During the signing in November 2009, it was estimated that there were 1,200 children who were a part of the SPLA. One would think this is a lot, but compared to 2005, when the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement took place, there were approximately 12,000 children within the SPLA and within 2010, one hopes to see progress made from the 1,200 children a part of the SPLA today.²¹

The convention is important for the UNICEF and their ambitions to help children worldwide, it provides them with guidelines and irreplaceable help in the fight for children's rights.

As for this dissertation dealing with children in armed conflicts, there are two articles in particular which apply and where it's evident that Sudan has failed in many ways, *art 38* and *art 39*.

Article 38, states that all state parties should refrain from recruiting children under the age of fifteen, and prioritise those who are older.²² As mentioned in chapter 1.1,

²⁰ <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

²¹ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/media_51875.html

²² Convention on the Rights of the Child, accessed through <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf>

article 39 states that the state shall take all measures for physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim.²³

2.2.2 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

When referring to Sudan, and most other African countries, the African Charter on The Rights and Welfare Of The Child, protects children from involvement of direct hostilities, according to art 22.²⁴

Sudan ratified this charter in 2005, and the country is therefore obliged to take all possible measures to make sure that no under age recruiting and to *“take all feasible measures to ensure the protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflicts”*²⁵

The countries are obliged to hand in a report after two years of implementing the charter, and then every three years, on their progress and fulfilments of the charter.

2.3 Relevant cases in the ICC- International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court is an independent international organisation, which was created with the intention to end the impunity of perpetrators around the world

²³ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf>

²⁴ <http://www.africa-union.org>, see bibliography

²⁵ <http://www.africa-union.org>, see bibliography

committing crimes, concerning the international community. It is governed by the Rome Statute,²⁶ and has its seat in The Hague.

There is today an ongoing trial, against the former rebel leader in the Republic of Congo Thomas Lubanga Dyilo. Lubanga is accused by the ICC of conscripting, enlisting, and using child soldiers. He is charged with committing three war crimes of the Rome Statute; conscripting children under the age of 15 years into armed groups; enlisting children into armed groups, and using children to participate actively in armed conflict.

He is held responsible for these crimes on the grounds that he was the leader of both the political group the Union of Congolese Patriots and its former military wing, the Patriotic Forces for the Liberation of Congo.²⁷

The trial was originally scheduled to start March 31 2008, but has been postponed several times, for different reasons.

The situation in Darfur, Sudan, was referred to the ICC in 2005 by the United Nations Security Councils resolution 1593. The current president in Sudan, Omar Al-Bashir is one of the three cases presented and he is accused on seven counts, five crimes against humanity and two war crimes. The crimes against humanity includes, murder - Article 7(1)(a); extermination - Article 7(1)(b); forcible transfer - Article 7(1)(d); torture - Article 7(1)(f); and rape - Article 7(1)(g), and the war crimes includes attack of civilians not participation in the hostilities -Article 8(2)(e)(i), and pillaging - Article 8(2)(e)(v). His warrant for arrest was in 2009, but the surrender to the court is still pending.²⁸

It is a big step for the ICC, Al-Bashir is the first chief of state to be prosecuted by ICC. By doing so, the ICC sets an example for other powerful people, especially in

²⁶ Rome, Statute, accessed through <http://www.icc-cpi.int/Menus/ICC/Legal+Texts+and+Tools/Official+Journal/Rome+Statute.htm>

²⁷<http://www.lubangatrial.org/qa/#three>

²⁸ Case information sheet, accessed through, <http://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/PIDS/docs/AlBashirCisEng.pdf>

Sudan. If the current president can be arrested and be individually responsible for crimes, no one is too powerful to be prosecuted. Even though he is not charged with any crimes including children, it is still a warning to other leaders around the world recruiting children under the age of 15, since this is a war crime according to article 8(2)(e)(vii) of the Rome statute.

When trying to determine who gets prosecuted in terms of child soldiers, there can be both individuals and countries put responsible for the crimes. Through the ICC, like in the cases shown above individuals are put responsible, whereas countries that have ratified convention and protocols to protect the rights of a child and are not doing so can be put responsible.

3 Sudan

3.1 History of the conflict in Sudan

The civil war, waged almost entirely between the Government of Sudan (GoS) in the North and Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in the South, has led to disastrous aftermath for the country.

After Sudan gained independency from Great Britain and Egypt 1956, the civil war between northern and southern Sudan started blooming, and resulting in the longest and complex civil wars of our time. Reasons for the war where many, but the foremost reason was the conflict between the Muslim Arab community in the north and the non-Muslim, non-Arabic south. Like many other post-colonial countries in Africa, a crisis followed, whether or not they where going to keep the colonial configuration they had inherited or redefine their frontiers.²⁹ The civil war has been estimated to have directly or indirectly killed up to two million people, due to illness, famine and other war related situations.³⁰

A Sudanese southerner asserted Jok Madut:

“(And) this is why the Arab government keeps fighting, as the Arabs in the north do not know what it is like to live under protracted conflict... if it were the case that Arab children could experience the hunger, disease and lack of education as the rest of Sudan's children have, northerners would have rallied against the war a long time ago.”³¹

Throughout these years, violations against the whole population in Sudan have been well documented, but one group in particular has been badly treated, namely the children.

²⁹ Jok Madut, Sudan, Race, Religion, And Violence, Oxford 2007, p 54

³⁰ UNMIS Background, accessed through, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmis/background.shtml>

³¹ Jok Madut, Sudan, Race, Religion, And Violence, Oxford 2007, p 284

Both governments have used children as soldiers and violated children on all areas identified by the UN Security Council in its Resolution 1612 on Children and Armed Conflict (CAC). Although the GoS and SPLM signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Jan 2005, putting an end of 20 years of civil war in Sudan, the recruiting of children has not stopped.³²

The CPA reconstructed the GoS, making them include an interim national constitution and establishing the Government of National Unity (GoNU).

They also created a semi-autonomous government in the South, Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS). This created a one-country, two-system model where they share power, resources and wealth, but maintain separate armies.³³

Even though the civil war was put to an end, there were still many unresolved conflicts and discontent in the country like for example the Darfur conflict. UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1590 (2005), establishing the UN's peacekeeping operation in Sudan, United Nations Mission in Sudan, (UNMIS). The United Nations Mission in Sudan's main task was to support the GoNU and the SPLM, in implementing the CPA. The UNMIS grew out of the United Nations Advanced Mission in Sudan (UNAMIS).³⁴

Sudan is the largest country on the African continent, and with that Darfur is today according to the UN, the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world.

Approximately 70% of the World Food Programs (WFP) budget is set for Sudan with majority to Darfur. The WFP support the CPA, which includes a three-month reintegration program, for returning Sudanese, who have been displaced in different camps or countries, coming back home.³⁵

³² <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmis/background.shtml>

³³ Watchlist on children and armed conflicts, Sudan'S Children at a Crossroads An Urgent Need for Protection, access report at www.watchlist.org.

³⁴ <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/sc8343.doc.htm>

³⁵ <http://www.wfp.org/node/3192>

3.2 Current situation in Southern Sudan

After more than 50 years after independence, Sudan is still divided on the countries cultural outlook, its system of government, and the racial, ethnic and religious views in the different part of the country.

In April 2010, the first democratic election since 1986 took place in Sudan.

This was a big step for Sudan, even though the election according to several sources was expected to have been rigged by Al-Bashir, the current chief of state of Sudan. BCC News published an article with an interview, where Sudan opposition claims to have proof of election fraud.³⁶

Although peace has been restored between the northern and southern parts of Sudan, there is this tension, and the situation is anything but stable. Although the CPA was implemented in 2005, it has been a very slow and difficult process. The CPA did end one of Africa's longest running wars, and the international community shifted attention to the Darfur conflict. Without enough support for the CPA, parties have been able to exploit gaps and ethnical tension is still a big issue.³⁷

After the CPA was ratified in 2005, and peace was restored between the north and south of Sudan, the SPLA was pressured to release the soldiers under the age of eighteen. At the time, UNICEF had committed it selves to help reintegrate the children and help them finding their way back to the childhood they once knew. The UNICEF received funds for this, but they never got the project going. So the children who where being released during this time all had to rely on their families and in Michael's case, to sell illegal arms to be able to set up a future for himself. The agreement for CPA was that within six months all child soldiers where to be released from the SPLA. After two years 1,500 where reported to have been released, but because of limited sources and follow ups of the releases, resulted in that many of the children returned to the army, thinking there was no other way to survive. Many

³⁶ http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/2010/04/100427_sudan_akol_reaction.shtml

³⁷ U.S Department of State, Diplomacy in Action, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5424.htm>

children didn't have families anymore or anyway of finding them, so the easiest way to go was back into the army, where you felt safe and had your home.³⁸

As we await the election in January, to see whether or not southern Sudan will be independent from northern Sudan, it's hard to say what the future holds for the largest country in Africa. It is evident that the southern Sudan wants to be independent from the northern parts, which just a couple of days spent in Juba verified. At every corner a poster was hanging encouraging voters to vote for Salva Kiir, the southerner's representative in the presidential election.

At the moment there are very little aid organizations in Juba, because of the election earlier on, which many thought might have erupted in violence and because they are awaiting the election in January 2011.

Many parts of southern Sudan and Juba as I experienced it, are in a stand still, waiting to start building and recover their city from the years of civil war.

3.3 Future crisis in Juba

Looking at future perspectives in Sudan, there are several reasons to take this issue seriously. If continuous neglect of the children who are being let back into their communities, for instance in Juba, there can be devastating consequences for the town itself.

The next generation in Juba, will be highly consistent of an uneducated and traumatised youth. There fore, it will be hard for these young people to benefit from the investments being made in the southern Sudan, in terms of rebuilding the local infrastructure and regenerating the economy.³⁹

As mentioned above, as a former child of armed conflict, you are very limited. In Michael's case when he was released, he was lucky enough to have a friend who

³⁸ Saskia Bass, <http://sudanwatch.blogspot.com/2010/05/south-sudan-child-soldiers-spla-sudan.html>

³⁹ http://www.unicef.org/sudan/children_4343.html

could help him to get money from selling his AK47s. He had never had money of his own, and did not understand the value of the money he had gotten from the firearms. If Michael had not gotten the opportunity to sell his two guns, his struggle for education and future would have looked very different from what it does today. He would have had the same future as many of the people his age are facing today, poverty and no education.

4 Child soldiers in southern Sudan

In this chapter, the reader will get to know Michael and his story. How the daily life of a child soldier was seen through the eyes of a child who was actually there and experienced it at first hand.

I will in this chapter attempt with the help of Michael's interpretations amongst other material to answer my third research question; *has there been any success in integrating the former child soldiers in Sudan? Is there a rehabilitation plan for the former child soldiers as they are being released? Is it a part of Southern Sudan's plan, to help them find their way back into society?*

4.1 Who recruits a child to an armed conflict?

As mentioned in the introduction part, the use of children in armed conflict is not new. It is a well known historical phenomena. The use of child soldiers have increased in the past thirty years, as instability have increased in many parts of the world, and as development of lightweight weapons has increased, it is today easy for a child to control a firearm.⁴⁰

A misinterpreted thought is that all child soldiers have been forced and kidnapped into the militias and rebel groups. The child soldier is often described as victimized and help-less, but by interviewing a former child soldier of the SPLA in southern Sudan, the image of the simplified assumption of child soldiers with no thoughts or opinions by their own is challenged. It is actually many children who by them selves seek their way into the armed groups, for different reasons. Some children may be seeking physical support, orphans seeking a place to belong or children on the search for revenge.⁴¹ The term voluntarily should however be used cautiously, as in many cases

⁴⁰ Graca Machel <http://www.unicef.org/graca/kidsoldi.htm>

⁴¹ Graca Machel, <http://www.unicef.org/graca/kidsoldi.htm>

children have no other option but to join the armed forces, as poverty and orphaned children may have no other place to go.⁴²

As for Michael, former child soldier of the SPLA in Sudan, he was recruited as a twelve-year-old boy, in a peaceful way. The chief in his village Bor⁴³ gathered all the boys within Michael's age, and gave them to the rebel army. After being recruited into the army, it was determined who was to go out into the field for training, and who would be put in the school.

*“The AK47, they stand it to be straight, then if you by pass, you are ready to go actually to the bush but if you are below, they take you actually to the school”.*⁴⁴

As Michael explained, the children's life could depend on whether or not you were a short or a tall child. Michael was short, so he went to the school. Michael also points out that the school was located under a tree nearby, and what they got to learn was the alphabet. But within two months, the young boys were taken to the field, and trained for six months in combat.

“ We didn't even finish the ABCD letters, both capital and small”.

When children are abducted or kidnapped in the case of making them into children of armed conflict, why do the armies and other forces choose children and not adult men? One reason might be that children are more easily manipulated than adults, they can easily be indoctrinated and be made to do actions and crimes without asking questions or understand what they are actually doing.⁴⁵ Coulter also points out the young children are taught that the army is their “mother and father” and the only family they need, and have to protect is the army.⁴⁶

⁴² *Child Soldiers, Care and protection of Children in Emergencies*, A field guide, Mark Lorey, Save the Children Federation, 2001, s 3.

⁴³ See appendix B, Map

⁴⁴ See appendix A

⁴⁵ *Child Soldiers, Care and protection of Children in Emergencies*, A field guide, Mark Lorey, Save the Children Federation, 2001, p 5.

⁴⁶ Bertil Lintner, Senior Writer, Far Eastern Economic Review, accessed through

http://www.unesco.org/courier/2001_09/uk/droits.htm

Another reason is of course that it is a lot easier abducting children than adults and they are a less threat to take over and challenge the leader of the group. Children are cheap labour, they eat less, and need no pay. I also think using children is a way to create a dilemma for their enemies, are they able to kill a child?

Michael explained that in the SPLA armies case, it was simply because there was not enough men in the south of Sudan, for the army to withstand the northern Sudan's army, and therefore had to use children. A child can be just as dangerous as a grown up, if given a gun and encouraged to use it.

Child soldiers are more likely to be killed in conflict, than their fellow older soldiers and adult leaders. As they are sent out to scout and research unknown places, unpredictable incident may occur.⁴⁷ The children are in most cases willing to take more risks than adults, and in the search of acknowledgement from the leaders, they are willing to endanger their lives.⁴⁸

The first battle Michael participated in, took place about 8 months after he had been recruited. After walking for 24 hours, him and his fellow soldiers reached the area of the fighting.

“ We found some of the few soldiers that where there before, so they actually dig the hole, small hole, so that you can hide yourself, while shooting, or either you maybe target yourself to the tree”.

He explains that he was very scared, not only the first time he was in battle, but every time. He was scared on the way there, when he knew that he was going to participate in battle, but that the fear disappeared once the battle begun.

⁴⁷ Coulter Chris, Being a Bush Wife, Womens Lives Through War and peace in northern Sierra Leon, 2006, pp 186.

⁴⁸ www.un.org

“But when you begin to popp your gun, that fear goes away, but before you popp your gun, you feel that your not going to survive, maybe someone will go and shoot you dead”.

“Actually it was a very very very terrible situation, for us as young we where actually fearing”. “ Actually sometimes you feel like even to through your gun away then you go back to your mother, but at that time you don ’t even know where you where”.

There are more dangers to child soldiers then the actual danger of being killed. The danger of being psychologically destroyed and being unable to mentally recover from incidents during the times of being a child soldier.

According to a report written by the Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers, in training the children in the Ugandan Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), on how to use guns, they children where forced to shot other children, including their friends.⁴⁹

When speaking to Michael about this, he says that nothing like that occurred in the SPLA, but rather that the children where treated well in the army. He thinks that was a big difference from being a child soldier of south Sudan and a child soldier of north Sudan. Because the south was fighting for freedom and was a rebel army against the government in the north, Michael thinks that the armies had different reasons for recruiting children and that the SPLA had in mind that they where fighting for the people in the south, and that the children of their army where the future of what they where fighting for.

Even though Michael never was put through and forced to kill his friends or other people in his surrounding, he did experience loss and traumatic situations. He says that during many of the battles, when the soldier next to him was shot or hurt and not able to continue, he wanted to help them. But by doing so, he would have by disrupting the line endangered himself and the other soldiers around him.

⁴⁹Vera Chrobok and Andrew S. Akutu, *Returning Home Children’s perspectives on reintegration*, A case study of children abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army in Teso ,eastern Uganda, pp 1

“You feel like either to take this persons dead body, across side. And as you take that person across side, that’s a technical problem for you, if you take long time to come back, actually in the line.”

4.2 Narcotics

Many children, who are a part of an armed force, are regularly given drugs.

It is not only the children who participate in battle and are in direct contact with a conflict who are given drugs, even young girls who are in place to satisfy the men are given drugs. They are given stimulants as cocaine and amphetamines as well as cannabis and alcohol, to distance them and enhance their performance.⁵⁰

As for the quotation below, where Coulter interviewed a girl from Sierra Leone, she explains the fear of cocaine.

“Mariatu also told me that she was more afraid of the small boys than the commanders. ‘in fact,’ she said, ‘ they where more wicked. If they say “We kill you,” they will do it! They were not afraid of anything, because cocaine was working in the system. Those children knew how to shoot with gun. They slaughtered people like chicken, and also they will say “My father is dead and my mother is dead.” The drug also was in their bodies, so (they had) no sympathy for people.”⁵¹

This can lead to long lasting devastating consequences, not only because of the harm it might cause the child’s body and mind, but also as they are trying to reintegrate in their communities.

If no help is provided for these children, abstinence symptoms and withdrawal problems may well be a danger for the child let back into the community. According to an article published at the website www.afrika.no, as many as 95% of child soldiers today, use drugs.⁵²

⁵⁰ Graca Machel, Children at both ends of the gun, <http://www.unicef.org/graca/kidsoldi.htm>

⁵¹ Coulter Chris, Being a Bush Wife, Womens Lives Through War and peace in northern Sierra Leon, 2006, p 193.

⁵² Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) / Monday, 25 January 2010,
<http://www.afrika.no/Detailed/19250.html>

Another point of view is given by Michael, who said that drugs were optional in the camp he was located for most of his years as a child soldier.

It was only two years out of six, where the use of drugs was a must. As he also explains is that it was very hard to get hold of the drugs and alcohol, since they were located in the bush. When they had alcohol at their camp it had been brought from the nearest village, and was mostly homebrewed. The other four years of Michael's stay in the army drugs were optional, and looked like cigarettes, Michael doesn't know what kind of drugs they were.

4.3 Freedom

There is a number of ways, children of armed conflicts find their way to freedom after being apart of an armed conflict. Being released, escape or released in case of an injury, there are several ways. In the past five years, progress has been made in southern Sudan, where a number of child soldiers have been released and the number is rising. But the term freedom and opportunities for the children released are very limited if no help is provided. Even if help is given to find your family, the family itself might not be able to pay school fees or have the knowledge how to cope with a child who has been put through the worst thinkable situations. Many of the children returning back to their villages and communities are too old to be put in first or second grade, are considered by their parents to be providing for their families at that age and not being going to school.

Michael escaped, after six years in the SPLA. As he grew older and more aware of the world outside of the SPLA army, he started to understand the importance of education and that there was a life to live outside of the army.

He had escaped with two AK47s, one was his own gun, and the gun of one of his enemies that he had shot dead, and by not reporting this, he hid the AK47 and was able to escape with two.

"I just shoot a person dead in the forest, and then I used that gun."

This decision turned out to be his ticket back society and education. He didn't know where he was supposed to turn for help. So he went to the nearest refugee camp, it

took him three days of footing to get there. Michael was so frightened to go directly to the refugee camp, since someone might recognize him from the army, so he hid close to the camp for two days, until he felt it was safe to go. He hid his two guns he had brought and joined the refugee camp. While being there Michael heard of a market by the northern Kenya border, where they were trading and selling weapons, he went back to the place where he had dug down his two AK47s and began the trip to the Kenyan border. After selling these two weapons and some magazines, he had enough money to put him through four years of boarding school in Uganda.

Michael survived and put himself through school by selling illegal weapons as a 17-year-old former child soldier.

4.4 Returning home, not guaranteed to get your childhood back

When asking Michael about how he feels now as an adult, thinking back at the time as a child soldier, he sits quiet for a while thinking. He says that he tries not to think about it, that sometimes at night it comes back to him, but he doesn't want to think of it and tries to push the feeling away. It's evident that he is tormented by the thoughts and situations he has been put through during his six years as a child soldier. What one might find surprising is that today, when asking Michael if he is angry or blaming someone, he says no.

“ Actually I can say I'm not blaming at the moment. But in the past I was blaming the army itself. I was blaming the army itself by allowing us to be soldiers when we were still young ”

He was blaming in particular the late John Garang, the leader of the SPLA, for recruiting Michael and his fellow young soldiers. But as Michael has grown older, he now realizes why Garang and the SPLA recruited the children, they did this for south Sudan. With this said, Michael has been thinking about going back to the army. He would do changes, the recruiting of children would stop and violence against the civil population would be put to an end.

According to Coulter, in Sierra Leone many girls are afraid of returning to their villages and homes after have been involved in a rebel movement. This mainly because of the fright to be blamed for the horrible crimes that have been committed by the rebel group they were once a part of.⁵³

Michael told me that he hardly had any contact with the boys he had been in the army with, and did not know what anyone was doing at the time. According to Mats Utas, in Liberia the community is semi-built up by who is a former child soldier and who is not.

*“To have participated in the war, as opposed to not have done so, was clearly seen as a ‘touchstone of fraternity’”*⁵⁴

What this shows is that in Sudan, it is still such a sore subject to talk about if you were in the army or not, in contrast to in Liberia, where it today is know who are former soldier and who are not.

⁵³ Coulter Chris, *Being a Bush Wife, Womens Lives Through War and peace in northern Sierra Leone*, 2006,

⁵⁴ Mats Utas, *Sweet Battlefield Youth and the Liberian Civil War*, p 248

5 Discussion

Writing this dissertation, has led me to think in my opinion, that it is a very complex problem organisations and countries around the world are facing, when it comes to reintegrating former child soldiers back into their communities.

It is clear that money is put in, and that there is a will and opportunity to help these children. One way or another it is evident that the process is not working and that aid organisations are not being able to do what they set out as goals. In this case it's a combination of the restrictions the aid organisations are facing with the government in for example Sudan, but also the way things are handled inside the organisation.

According to the UNCRC, Sudan could be held responsible for breaking several of the 54 articles, especially the four core principles that the UNCRC stands for, "*non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child.*"⁵⁵

Why is Sudan not being held responsible for all the children who are underage and involved in armed conflict? According to several protocols, conventions and document, child soldiers and children involved in armed conflict, have the right to rehabilitation and help to reintegrate into their communities. What this dissertation is questioning is if this is being done or not. Are children being justified? In my opinion they are not, but its hard to understand why nothing is being done, by for example UNCRC, who have set out rules and regulations that you have to follow. Those rules are obviously not being followed by Sudan. I think that in this complex case, it is hard to determine who should be taking the blame. Is it Sudan's government or is it the international organisations with conventions and set up rules on how children should be treated? I think it is both, but no one is at the moment taking blame or responsibility of what is happening in Sudan.

⁵⁵ <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

According to my impressions, after interviewing Michael and talking to people around in Juba, Sudan's government appears to not be doing enough for its people in southern Sudan and especially not for its children. Just the lack of infrastructure in Juba confirms that. At the time Michael escaped, he had as mentioned above, no idea where to turn, and didn't even have the slightest idea of turning to a UN organisation. This was 2000, ten years ago, and the release of child soldiers is today is more common and acknowledged today than what it was then. When children return to the armies after being released the reintegration process is not working. This process is equally important as the actual release of the child soldiers. What use is it to release the children if they have no home, family or future to think of? I think much of the responsibility in Sudan's case should be put on the CPA who are pressuring the SPLA to release the children, but also the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) authorities, who the process is supposedly going through.⁵⁶

Although we see little progress in Sudan amongst other countries where child soldiers are being used, I think Sudan has a better chance than many to develop and stop the use of underage soldiers. The fact that ICC has their eyes on Omar Al-Bashir and he is at this moment accused of several crimes means there is interest in Sudan. Even though he might not be proven guilty, it will set up an example for other leaders and powerful people around the world. That one person can be held responsible for actions made by several people.

After spending time with Michael and getting to know his personal story, it challenged my idea of the typical child soldier I had drawn up in my mind. Even though I got the feeling Michael might have left out some details that he thought were hard to talk about, I found him very honest and direct when answering my questions and during our discussions. I think it is very important to identify and find people like Michael, who wants to fight for a better Sudan. Who has first hand experience from the violence, but also now trying to get through school and after that attend university. What is crucial now in Sudan is educating the children who have missed several years of school, so that they can help their country. Life in Juba has the past five years been semi-peaceful, there is still political uncertainty, but progress

⁵⁶ The Sudan Tribune, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article33227>

is being made. Having been to Juba, one acknowledges the lack of adequate hospitals, sanitation, roads and other basic infrastructure.

The situation in Liberia, as interpreted by Utas, confirms and shows similarities to the process in the southern Sudan, where I interviewed Michael, who was moving on without his family and living several years in freedom, without contacting them. He did this because he had no idea how to get in contact with them or if they were alive and also because of the fright of returning back to a society where they might think of him as a killer and send him back to the army he had once escaped from.

As Urie Bronfenbrenner explains in his theory of Ecology of Human Development, children grow up and develop in relation to their families, friends and surroundings. I agree with Bronfenbrenner and his theory when contemplating it on this subject, where it is so obvious that children in armed conflicts developed in relation to each other and surroundings in their atmosphere.

I believe that the only way Sudan will get stable and find permanent peace is to help Sudan help itself. To make sure that education and help is provided for the under aged soldiers being released, that they will have the chance to find their families and attend school once again. The conflict between southern and northern Sudan is infected, and even if southern Sudan gain independency from the north, the issue will still be there and does not guarantee peace. What I hope is that the Sudanese people will want to help their children and educate them, so that they in their turn can help their country and see themselves as one. Michael is an example of one of these people who can help his country. He has considered to go back to the army, but only because he wants to make changes. Make sure no underage soldiers are being recruited and to remove the fear the civil people have against the SPLA in Juba. Because he is now educated outside of the army and been on both sides.

The children are getting older for each day, and more children are escaping and been let free from the armies. If help is not given directly after the time in the army, I think in many cases it will be too late for them to find the way to the life and childhood they once knew.

Supplement A

Michael's Story-Interview in Juba

As I am sitting down with Michael listening to his story, it hits me, how little I know of the cruelty of this world. This is Michael's story, his interpretations and his memories of being a child soldier in the rebel army SPLA.

Michael is a 27 year old, former child soldier of the SPLA army in Sudan. He was recruited in 1994 as a 12 year old boy living in a village located on the east side of Juba, southern Sudan. The boys in Michael's village, were given to the SPLA army, by the local chief in Bor. As it was a condition the army had at the time. They were taken away from their parents in a peaceful manner, into the "field", where they started building a permanent camp to live with the SPLA army. It was here decided whom would go to the bush and fight, and which children would stay in the camp for school.

This was determined through,

"The AK47, they stand it to be straight, then if you by pass, you are ready to go actually to the bush but if you are below, they take you actually to the school".

The school was located under a tree, where Michael and the other boys who were to young to be sent into combat training, learnt the ABCD: s written in the sand.

But within two months, the young boys were taken to the field, and trained for six months.

"We didn't even finish the ABCD letters, both capital and small".

As the situation worsened for eastern equatorial and the centre equatorial Michael was a part of, the army needed more people. All the young boys who had been put through training had to go and fight to protect their side of the army. The only way of getting anywhere was by foot, and to get to the place where the SPLA army needed Michael and the rest of the young boys were 24 hours away by foot.

As they arrive to where the fighting took place, they found some soldiers already at the place,

“ We found some of the few soldiers that where there before, so they actually dig the hole, small hole, so that you can hide yourself, while shooting, or either you maybe target yourself to the tree”.

After succeeding with the first combat as a child soldier, Michael and some of the younger boys where sent back to the camp, where they continued with schooling under the tree.

“Some of us don't actually hold the gun properly, when you try to shoot, some people where just weak to hold.”

After finishing the ABCD: s the school was over for Michael. In Aug 1995, he got his own gun, an AK47.

In the field Michael explains that the young soldiers and the older where mixed, and had a good relationship to one another. The young soldiers where treated good, and Michael tells me that when the meal of the day was served, it was the young soldiers who got to take food first.

“In the beginning we didn't know what we where doing, we where just being told actually what you are going to do”.

After two years in the same camp, Michael and some of the other boys where transferred to Poltacka, where they also spent about two years.

These two years spent in Poltacka, where according to Michael, two of the hardest years. *“That two years actually that's the time we where seriously fighting, because the army in that side was actually going down.”* When I ask him about how he felt as a boy and during these two years he replies, *“Actually it was a very very very terrible situation, for us as young we where actually fearing”*, he also tells me *“Actually sometimes you feel like even to through your gun away then you go back to your mother, but at that time you don't even know where you where”.*

I ask Michael what scared him when he was a child soldier,

“ Like the bullet, and these machine guns, some of the machine guns scared us”

“Infact in the beginning, as we where being introduced, the fighting itself was even making us to fear. IN the beginning”

“But when you begin to popp your gun, that fear goes away, but before you popp your gun, you feel that your not going to survive, maybe someone will go and shoot you dead”.

After being transferred again, to a place close to the Kenyan border, Michael started thinking about running away.

“After that they transfer us to another side, almost to the Kenyan border, that’s the place I actually escape from”

As Michael grew older and more aware of the world outside of the SPLA army, he started to understand the importance of education and that there was a life to live outside of the army. The camp that they where currently staying at was located close to a refugee camp, where they also got supplies for food. Many of the refugees where unhappy with their situation, and some of the refugees wanted to join the army.

Being a refugee, stories of being a soldier sounded far better then being at the camp they where currently located at. These people coming to join the army from the nearby refugee camp, where often older and of an age appropriate for being a soldier. They also brought the knowledge about education, that if you are educated you make a good life for your self.

“We where just learning that there’s something called education, and it is beneficial for us as individuals”.

As the sixth year soon approaching for Michael as a child soldier, he escaped.

“I just get a chance, by deceiving them that I’m just going to cut a tree, and I will come back. That’s actually how I escape”.

Michael escaped with two AK47s and about four magazines, one gun was his own, and the other belonged to one of the external army,

“ I just shoot a person dead in the forest, and then I used that gun. “

The time Michael shot this person in the forest, he was already thinking about escaping, and therefore did not report this kill, and hid the gun outside of their base. So when escaping he brought that gun too. After walking for three days, with only short brakes for an hours sleep, constantly looking over his shoulder, Michael reached

the refugee camp. But at this time, he didn't go to the camp. Since this was the place where the army sometimes collected food, he didn't want to take the risk being recognized.

"I stayed away another two days"

He tells me that he knew he was risking his life by escaping, but it didn't matter, for him it was worth the risk to be killed or be free. He also tells me that one crucial thing made it able for him to escape, the dry season. The grass was short, and made it impossible to see which way he had gone. Michael had a fellow soldier who tried escaping during the rainy season when the grass was high, it was just to follow the tracks he had made by running through the grass. He was captured and later on killed.

Michael got a hold of his grandparents who are at the refugee camp, and through them got information about what was happening there. They helped him and he moved in with them there. Where he started going to school in primary two at the age of 17.

After two years at the refugee camp, sleeping with one eye open at night he heard of a market by the Kenyan border, where you could sell guns. Michael heard that there was good money to be earned by selling weapons. He dug up the two AK47s he had hidden outside the refugee camp, and with the help of one of his older friends on the camp, they started the journey to the Kenyan border. While there after selling the two AK47s and remaining magazines, Michael found himself with money, he had never had money and especially not in this amount. He knew he had gotten a good bargain, but he had no idea how far this money would bring him in life.

As Michael continues to tell his story, he reveals that the money he got from selling his guns, was enough to pay his school fees at a boarding school in Uganda, where he will be safe and not have to worry about the SPLA finding him at the camp. With the help of his friend at the camp, who also came with him to Uganda, they opened a bank account in Michaels name. He still at this time had not gotten a hold of his parents, he did not know if they are alive or not. When Michael had two years left in school, his money was finished, and he could not continue in school. He went back to the refugee camp where he had once begun his studies after escaping. While there he finds out his parents are still alive and well in Bor. Michael is still much to frightened

to go there himself in person, so he sent a letter to them, explaining he was still alive and well and that he had put himself through school, but now needed some more money to be able to finish. His parents were happily surprised and very glad to hear from him and they did everything to help him finish school in Uganda.

After he finished his last two years in secondary school at boarding school in Uganda, Michael now knew it was safe for him to go home to Bor and visit his family during the holidays. After he finished school, he moved to Juba, and got the job where he is currently working, at Bedouin Camp.

Michael wants to continue studying and get a degree at a university level. But he does not know if he will be able to finance it by working at the same time as he has to have time to study.

Supplement B

Map of Sudan



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Interviews

Interview one Michael, given upon request

Interview two Michael, given upon request