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## Help Eliminate the Child Soldier Trade

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The child soldier trade is one of the most heartbreaking issues for us in the Hearts family. We want to help the thousands of children that are being taken from their homes and forced to live a hostile adult life. Thankfully, there are many things that we as individuals can do to help prevent the child soldier trade, save current child soldiers, and help rehabilitate former ones. Act with us by participating in the movement to end the practice of using to child soldiers.

### Quick Guide: Child Soldier Facts

- **250,000 child rebel soldiers worldwide:**<sup>[i]</sup> These children are fighting wars in 14 different countries,<sup>[ii]</sup> 40% of which are girls (many used as sex slaves).<sup>[iii]</sup>
- **Every region uses child rebel soldiers:** Children are often easier to manipulate than adults and are used in every region around the world.<sup>[iv]</sup> In Afghanistan, child soldiers are recruited by the Taliban and the Afghan Police for fighting and for conducting suicide attacks. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) boys and girls are being abducted by The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). In Iraq, children are used as Al-Qaeda spies, carriers of explosive devices, and suicide bombers.<sup>[v]</sup>
- **A day in the life of a child soldier:** Child soldiers are beaten to make them "stronger," little girls are raped, sometimes being used by multiple men, and many are killed when they fail to do a task.<sup>[vi]</sup> They are robbed of community and family, poorly cared for, and lack socialization.<sup>[vii]</sup>
- **Emotional scars for child soldiers:** Girls used as sex slaves experience shame, shock, loss of dignity, depression, and low self-esteem (as well as young motherhood). Forced to commit atrocious acts,<sup>[viii]</sup> child soldiers are taught mistrust, violence, and aggression.<sup>[ix]</sup> Reintegration for these children is often extremely difficult.<sup>[x]</sup>

## Take Action! Support the Elimination of Child Soldier Trade

1. **Refuse to buy products made with conflict minerals:** Conflict minerals – blood diamonds, as well as the 3Ts in electronics, tin, tantalum, and tungsten – fuel unjust wars and the use of child soldiers. Our articles on [conflict-free diamonds](#) and [ethical electronics](#)
2. will help you find more peaceful choices.
3. **Buy products that support former child soldiers:** The proceeds of such products go to supporting the rehabilitation of former child soldiers. Two fantastic options include [Falling Whistles](#) and [Invisible Children](#).
4. **Fight for legislations against recruiting child soldiers:** Check out the [2002 Optional Protocol](#) which was developed to raise the minimum age of voluntary recruitment into armed forces from 15 to 18 years of age. And support [Amnesty International USA's](#) call for an Arms Trade Treaty that would require states to determine whether arms and ammunition are meant to be used in international human rights violations prior to approving their transfer.
5. **Support campaigns against recruiting child soldiers:** Sign petitions that call for the abolishment child soldiers recruitment such as [Child Soldiers Initiative](#), [Go Petition](#), and [Help Child Soldiers](#).
6. **Fight to ensure international fugitives are brought to justice:** Certain international fugitives that are being sought out by the International Criminal Court for their crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide are being protected by strong states and supporters. Support [Amnesty International USA's](#) petition to the UN to push for the arrest of these wanted international criminals.
7. **Donate to nonprofits that are liberating child soldiers:** Some of these are [Amnesty International USA](#), [The Child Soldiers Initiative](#), [Falling Whistles](#), and [Raise Hope for Congo](#).
8. **Spread the word:** [Child Soldiers Initiative](#) has an activist kit that you can use as a resource for spreading the word on the issue of child soldiers.

## Dig Deeper: Child Soldier Statistics and Helpful Resources

- [Child Soldiers Initiative](#) has a list of books and films that shed greater light on child soldiers.
- Watch the Invisible Children video: [Who is the LRA?](#)

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