



**German Coalition to Stop  
the Use of Child Soldiers**

 **terre des hommes**  
**Help for Children in Distress**

# **Children in Armed Conflict**

**Panel Discussion**

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**German Mission Geneva**

**Statement**

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**terre des hommes - Help for Children in Distress**

**German Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers**

THANKS....

Before starting, I want to remember a person, who played a crucial role for the evolution of this meeting and cannot be here today: Barbara Dünnweller.

> 1 year ago, when she met Mr. Schuhmacher, the idea for this meeting evolved. But in January, Barbara got seriously ill and just a few weeks ago, she passed away, and we are still sad and shocked. Barbara was one of the most excellent and most active child rights experts in Germany and a very kind and warm-hearted colleague and friend. She was working for Kindernothilfe and was active in several NGO networks, also in the German Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. We miss her and still feel her presence. Thanks Barbara.

I am working for terre des hommes Germany, a child rights organisation. Here on the panel, I am representing the German Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (GC), a network of 11 human rights and development organisations, focussing on awareness raising and advocacy work on child soldiers, on national and international level. Many member organisations of GC also support aid projects for child soldiers and children in armed conflicts.

Member organisations: Kindernothilfe, Unicef Germany, World Vision, Plan, Amnesty International, missio, terre des hommes, ...

WHAT DOES THE GC DO?

- The GC was one of the initiators of the Red Hand Campaign, an international campaign to stop the use of children as soldiers (see flyer, including the political demands of the Campaign) **[www.redhandday.org](http://www.redhandday.org)**

- Shadow Report Child Soldiers: German version is available here (**[www.kindersoldaten.info](http://www.kindersoldaten.info)**), the translation in English will be done and submitted to the UN-Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2013 as alternative report in the monitoring procedure of the Child Rights Convention implementation of Germany.

## THE BALANCE OF THE LAST YEARS on the issue CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICTS

### Positive Developments

- Awareness has risen: Red Hand Campaign worldwide, > 370.000 participants, especially young people, in > 50 countries, activities reaching high political level (UN General Secretary, German Foreign Office, German parliament,...)
- Report of UN-GS with List of shame > excellent source of information & it is working, is creating pressure on recruiters, BUT: more and stronger sanctions for perpetrators are needed!
- Jurisdiction: ICC-Convictions of Lubanga and Taylor were milestones, also a few national trials happened (Murwanashiaka in Germany, trials during the demobilization of paramilitaries in Columbia), BUT: still nearly total impunity on national level > much more court cases on national level are needed!
- 150 OPAC (Opt. Prot. Children in Armed Conflicts) signatories & several new Action Plans of the UN with governments who are recruiting children  
BUT: often poor implementation, transparency sometimes problematic (Somalia, DR Congo) > more pressure on governments needed
- Some armed conflicts ended, and the abuse of children as soldiers in these countries, i.e. Nepal, Sri Lanka, Indonesia (Aceh), Sierra Leone, Liberia;  
CHALLENGE: reintegration, BUT: new armed conflicts came up, i.e. in Libya, Syria, Mali, Southern Thailand,...
- Current peace negotiations in Colombia, the Philippines, Myanmar,  
CHALLENGE: integrating issue of child soldiers, often forgotten or not valued enough

> THERE IS PROGRESS

BUT (UN figures): Still 250.000 child soldiers (CS), still > 20 countries where CS are used in armed conflicts, 9 countries where government armed forces do  
Still >30 countries recruiting minors below 18 years of age in the state army, among them also Western countries as the US, the UK and Germany.

> We are STILL FAR AWAY from reaching the STRAIGHT 18-Standard worldwide:

Straight 18 – no child under 18 should be part of any armed group

(The central idea behind t. Opt Prot & based on the basic principle of the CRC)

**4 issues, that from civil society perspective, are fundamental for achieving lasting progress**

(PREVENTION!!! REINTEGRATION)

They are formulated as appeal to the national governments worldwide, and especially to the governments in the Security council, who play a crucial role in these issues:

1. Respect Straight 18 standard and stop military propaganda directed to minors (rising issue), take your responsibility as a positive role model (contributing to PREVENTION of recruitment)

2. Stop the massive exports of arms, and especially small arms and ammunition, to conflict areas and countries with human rights violations (this appeal is especially directed to the biggest arms exporters: EU (Germany, UK, France), USA, Russia, China, India...) (PREVENTION)

“Arms don’t create stability or peace”, current examples: Libya, Syria, Mali, Israel-Palestine-Conflict,

Big Problem: Number of arms exports is rising constantly since years (Source: SIPRI, etc.), conflict areas ARE FLOODED with arms, big business

3. Don't close your borders to refugees coming from conflict areas. Most of them are very young, many are unaccompanied children. Many of them are seriously affected by war, for example fleeing recruitment, displacement or sexual violence in countries like Somalia, Afghanistan, Sudan or Eritrea.

(PREVENTION, REINTEGRATION)

Negative Example: „Fortress Europe“: EU borders – many minor refugees from conflict areas are sent back at the border with force, often brutal force, or even before reaching the EU border they are sent back from countries like Turkey, Libya or Algeria

Few reach the EU. Even then, their rights, guaranteed by law like the CRC, are often not respected.

4. More serious efforts to solve conflicts peacefully and to mediate between conflict parties are needed – best BEFORE the armed conflict starts.

(PREVENTION))

“Peace, even fragile peace, is always better than war”

- Also: Children and youth should learn how to solve their own conflicts peacefully!

> Peace education is a very important issue that should be given much more attention and support (PREVENTION)

CONCLUSION:

So, in our view, reaching substantial progress on these issues would fundamentally improve the dramatic situation of children in armed conflicts. Some important successes could already be reached in the last years, but related to the immense suffering of children in armed conflicts all over the world, the progress is still small. **Much more has to be done** – by all actors, by armed groups, by national governments and by international bodies, especially by the Security Council.