

## Child Soldiers

HIRANO Miharu(F)  
Kokusai High School  
2<sup>nd</sup> Grade

In the more than fifty violent conflicts going on worldwide, it is estimated that there are approximately 300000 child soldiers. Data shows that more than 50 percent of countries in the world have child soldiers, and most of them are in developing countries. Many of them have not become child soldiers of their own will, but have been forced.

I learned about child soldiers from a lecturer from the Foreign Ministry who came to my school and told us a story about child soldiers. I was very shocked to hear that so many children my age are forced to participate in fierce fighting. After her lecture, I became interested in the lives of child soldiers, and this past summer I read a book called "A Long Way Gone, Memories of a Child Soldier" by Ishmael Beah. When Beah was twelve years old, he was a forced child soldier for the government in Sierra Leone.

In his book he says "I came to think that killing people was an easy task, like drinking water." I was very shocked at the loss of his humanity through war. In the book I learned that the child soldiers are assigned many difficult tasks such as kidnapping, espionage, and transportation of war materials. They also take drugs like cocaine or marijuana to ease of their fears.

You might wonder why are there so many child soldiers, if life is so terrible for them. There are three main reasons for the increasing number of child soldiers. Firstly, today's weapons have become smaller and lighter. This means that children can use them easily, making them as effective as adults on the battlefield. Secondly, for poor children, joining the army is an opportunity to have a stable life. They are provided with meals, shelter and clothing. Finally, children do everything that they are told to by adults. Even if they are afraid, they will still obey the army, so the army can force dangerous tasks upon child soldiers.

The UN has established laws that prohibit the army from conscripting children under the age of 18, but many armies disregard this law and still recruit child soldiers. Despite this legislation, the number of child soldiers continues to increase. I think the UN and governments should work harder to abolish the system of child soldiers, because children have a right to education, protection, and to not be forced into wars.

But what can we do? I think people throughout the world must be educated and be made aware of the problem. I think it's important to understand them if we are to help them. School should have more lectures from guest speakers to create awareness. What do they do as child soldiers? How do they become killers? What does war look like through their eyes? Children will, in turn, pass on this knowledge to their families. We can then take action. We can sign petitions against child soldiers and schools can be encouraged to have fund raisers and collect money to support organizations such as UNICEF or Amnesty international. With our support these organizations can help child soldiers reintegrate into communities by offering education, accommodation and opportunity.

In war, people lose many precious things such as their native land, happiness and humanity. No problem can be solved by war. While we are safe in our comfortable homes we must remember the child soldiers, because we can do something to help.