

NOT FOR CIRCULATION

The Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Forces or Armed Groups in the Somali Conflict:

Situation Overview

November 2009



A patrol in northern Mogadishu, May 26, 2009 (REUTERS/Ismail Taxta)

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DEFINITIONS

This report uses the following definitions, in accordance with the applicable international standards and norms:

- **Child:** Any person less than 18 years of age, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- **Child associated with an armed force or armed group:** Any person below 18 years of age who is or has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including either boys or girls used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. The term does not only refer to a child carrying guns who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.
- **Armed forces:** The military institution of a State, with a legal basis and supporting institutional infrastructures such as salaries, benefits and basic services.
- **Armed groups:** Groups distinct from the armed forces of a State, as defined above.
- **Recruitment of children:** Compulsory, forced or voluntary conscription or enlistment of children into any kind of armed force or armed group.
- **Unlawful recruitment or use of children:** Recruitment or use of children under the age stipulated in the international treaties applicable to the armed force or armed group in question, or under applicable international law.
- **Release:** The process of formal and controlled disarmament and demobilization of children from an armed force or armed group as well as the informal ways in which children leave by escaping, being captured or by any other means. It implies disassociation from the armed force or armed group and the beginning of the transition from military to civilian life. Release can take place during a situation of armed conflict; it does not depend on the temporary or permanent cessation of hostilities.
- **Child reintegration:** The process through which children transition into civil society. This process aims to ensure that children can access their basic rights, including formal and non-formal education, family reunification, dignified access to livelihoods and safety from harm.

SYNOPSIS OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND NORMS

- **Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989):** Article 38 uses the lower age of 15 years as the minimum age for recruitment or direct participation in armed conflict. This language is drawn from the two 1977 Additional Protocols to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949.
- **Cape Town Principles (1987):** The Cape Town Principles and Best Practices were adopted at the Symposium on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into the Armed Forces and on Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa, organized by UNICEF and the NGO Working Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The principles have become a key instrument to inform the development of international norms and to guide decisions and actions on the ground for prevention, release, protection and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups into family, community and civilian life.

- **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998):** In its definition of war crimes the statute includes "conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities" (article 8(2)(b)(xxvi)); and in the case of an internal armed conflict, "conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities" (article 8(2)(e)(vii)). When drafting the treaty, delegates agreed that the terms "using" and "participate" would prohibit not only children's direct participation in combat but also their active participation in military activities linked to combat such as scouting, spying, sabotage and acting as decoys or couriers or at military checkpoints. Also prohibited is the use of children in "direct" support functions such as carrying supplies to the front line.
- **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990):** It defines a child as anyone below 18 years of age, without exception. It also states that "States Parties to the present Charter shall take all necessary measures to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostilities and refrain in particular, from recruiting any child" (article 22.2). It is the only regional treaty in the world that addresses the issue of children associated with armed forces and armed groups.
- **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2000):** The Protocol sets 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities, recruitment into armed groups and compulsory recruitment by governments. States may accept volunteers from the age of 16, but they must deposit a binding declaration at the time of ratification or accession setting out their minimum voluntary recruitment age and outlining certain safeguards for such recruitment.
- **Paris Commitments and Principles (2007):** The **Paris Commitments** are a set of legal and operational principles to protect children from recruitment or use in armed conflict. They complement existing legal and political mechanisms. The **Paris Principles** is a more detailed document that sets forth a wide range of principles relating to the protection of children from recruitment or use in armed conflict and their release and successful reintegration into civilian life. The principles also address the need for long-term prevention strategies to definitively end children's involvement in armed conflict. The Paris Commitments and Principles resulted from a major international conference, Free Children from War, held in Paris on 5 and 6 February 2007. The meeting, co-organized by the French Government and UNICEF, was attended by 58 countries, including dozens of government ministers, donors, the heads of UN agencies and many non-governmental organizations. The Transitional Federal Government of Somalia under President Abdullahi Yusuf was also represented at the conference.
- **UN Security Council Resolutions on Children and Armed Conflict (1999-2009):** The Security Council has passed a series of resolutions condemning the recruitment and use of children in hostilities since the issue was first placed on its agenda. These are resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000) 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009) on children and armed conflict. Over time, the scope of the Council's resolutions has expanded along with its attention to issues of accountability for perpetrators of grave violations of children's rights. All parties to conflict that unlawfully recruit or use children and/or engage in patterns of killing and maiming children and perpetrating rape and other sexual violence against them are listed in the annexes of the annual Secretary-General report on children in armed conflicts.

SUMMARY

The recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups is one of the six egregious child rights violations falling within the scope of Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005). The Resolution established a monitoring and reporting mechanism to track such violations, which is central to the mandate of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

The United Nations, has been monitoring violations of children's rights by parties to the conflict in Somalia since late 2005, under the imperative of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and because of its monitoring and reporting obligations under the Security Council Resolution 1612/2005. During 2007 and 2008, evidence has strengthened as to the scale and nature of unlawful recruitment and use of children by fighting forces in Somalia, including for direct combat on the front line. This led to the commissioning of a study on child recruitment in April 2009.

The study testifies to the recruitment or use of children by all parties to conflict. However, patterns of recruitment and involvement of children vary from group to group. The recruitment of children by government forces has been found to be less systematic, targeting a slightly older age group (14 - 18 years) than the recruitment patterns of some of the insurgent groups. Amongst the fighting groups allied to the government, as well as those opposing the government, the targeting of vulnerable children is more widespread and systematic, often involving force or deception. Children are mostly recruited from schools or madrasas and from camps for internally displaced people in Somalia and refugee camps in neighboring countries. Mostly targeted are vulnerable or destitute adolescent boys. There are also reports of girls being recruited by anti-government elements to 'marry' fighters, provide logistical support and collect intelligence.

The study found that the majority of children associated with armed forces or armed groups are aged 14-18 years, though there is also evidence that children as young as nine are being recruited and used in the conflict on the side of the anti-government elements. The research includes information on training camps belonging to all sides to the conflict. The total number of children being used in the conflict is not known, but the information collected indicates that thousands of children and young people are being trained in basic arms techniques as well as more sophisticated skills such as assassination, intelligence collection and use of improvised explosive devices. Trainers include both Somalis and foreigners.

Recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups in the Somali conflict is not a new phenomenon, as confirmed in subsequent annual reports of the United Nations Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict to the Security Council and the General Assembly.¹

The United Nations humanitarian agencies are deeply concerned by the growing evidence of the recruitment and use of children by fighting forces in Somalia. Especially troubling is the use of children below the age of 15 for direct combat and the enormous physical, developmental, emotional, mental, social and spiritual harm resulting from this systematic violation of children's basic rights. Such recruitment violates international human rights and humanitarian law. Recruitment of children under age 15 for direct participation in hostilities is also a war crime.

All humanitarian and political actors operating in Somalia should endeavor to work together, in accordance with their respective mandates and the obligations arising from international humanitarian law and human rights law, to (1) develop a coordinated advocacy strategy to obtain the immediate and unconditional release of all children associated with the armed forces or armed groups, even in the midst of conflict, and (2) to secure their protection from further violence, exploitation and abuse, and reintegration into the communities from which they come. Advocacy should take place with all those responsible for this unlawful recruitment and use of

¹ See S/2002/1299 of November 2002; S/2003/1053 of November 2003; S/2005/72 of February 2005; S/2006/826 of October 2006; S/2007/757 of December 2007; and S/2009/158 of March 2009.

children. However, States bear the primary responsibility for providing security and ensuring the protection of children in their jurisdiction.

It is hoped that this report will help to mobilize support and political commitment at all levels to address this severe child protection issue, and to promote freedom for Somali children from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation associated with the on-going conflict.

METHODOLOGY AND VALIDITY OF FINDINGS

This study was conducted by an independent expert with extensive contacts inside the various armed groups in Somalia in May and June 2009. The expert based his findings on telephone interviews and e-mail correspondence with a wide range of actors inside the various armed groups in Somalia. For security reasons, all names and details of commanders involved in recruitment or use of children from all parties to the conflict have been deleted from the report. Detailed case studies, names of children recruited and sources of information have been purposely omitted. Citations giving the date and context of interviews with individual sources are also not provided in this report. Where possible, information contained in the report was verified by the United Nations through a network of partners on the ground. This network is one of the UN's major sources for its monitoring and reporting obligation under the Security Council Resolution 1612. However, complete triangulation of all information was not possible given the security situation, limited access and the sensitive nature of the information itself. Also, a more forceful and overt gathering of information would in itself restrict access to it. An empirical survey was therefore not an option. The study therefore, while not laying claims to being empirical, nevertheless presents strong evidence of violations that is indicative of a severe protection problem in Somalia.

1. INTRODUCTION

There has been intermittent civil conflict inside the country for the past 18 years, but the current, intense fighting can be marked in escalation since July 2006. At that point, the fragile Transitional Federal Government (TFG) found itself faced with a political and military challenge from the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), headed at that point by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and Sheikh Dahir Aweys. The ICU continued to control much of southern and central Somalia until December 2006, when they fled Mogadishu, and the TFG, backed by Ethiopian troops, entered and held the capital.

Thereafter, the ICU leadership went into exile in Asmara, where they formed the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia, committed to removing the Ethiopian-backed TFG. The more radical and militant elements of the former ICU separated and formed the insurgent groups Al Shabaab, and since the beginning of 2009, the Hizbul Islam, whilst the more moderate faction entered a UN-led reconciliation process in late 2008 with the TFG, resulting in a power-sharing arrangement which saw the election, in early 2009, of Sharif Sheikh Ahmed as president of the TFG.

At the time of writing of this report, the TFG is fighting for survival against an increasingly fractured, but nonetheless strong coalition of Al Shabaab (consisting of various, regionally-based groups, financed by various sources, domestic and foreign) and the Hizbul Islam. At the time of writing, Al Shabaab controls the great majority of the territory of southern and central Somalia. However, the tide of the conflict turns often and quickly, and 2009 has been characterized by some of the worst fighting Somalia has seen in more than fifteen years.

The human cost of civilians and combatants wounded and killed continues to mount. Children – *boys and girls* – have become active participants in the violence of the conflict and are a tragic part of its human cost. From the information gathered to date and presented in this report, recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups appears widespread,

particularly in southern and central Somalia. This is not new in Somalia, as confirmed in two subsequent reports prepared for the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in accordance with the provisions of Security Council Resolution 1612/2005.²

What is new is that children are being *systematically recruited and used in ever larger numbers* for military and related purposes *by all of the major combatant groups*. These groups include Al-Shabaab, Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaa (ASWJ), Al-Xizbi Al-Islaami, warlords, pirate groups and the KM60 militia. The Government of Somalia has also featured four times in the United Nations Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict to the Security Council among the parties involved in recruitment or use of children for military purposes.³

The exact number of children being recruited and used by parties to the conflict is difficult to determine and may never be known. However, available information indicates that a large number of children have already been recruited, and there is an active and deliberate campaign amongst some of the parties to the fighting to add more. The number of bases and camps used to train these children is commensurately widespread and appears to be growing.

An analysis of case studies and other information suggests that children likely to be recruited by the major combatants come from a variety of backgrounds. The most vulnerable groups are children who are orphaned, destitute, displaced, separated from family and victims of war. School children have also been targeted. Recruitment techniques used by the armed forces and the insurgent armed groups vary. Both sides appear to have used force and deception. The anti-government elements have been considerably more focused in their targeting of young people, through fear, force, promises of benefits including money and glorifying of *jihad*. Previously recruited children are also used to recruit other children. Training ranges from basic physical training and shooting exercises to the sophisticated techniques of intelligence collection, assassination, assembling of explosives and sharp shooting. Correspondingly, children are used for a range of military purposes from ground combat on the front line – for which they have become cannon fodder – to assassination, intelligence collection and logistics support.

During preparation of this report, the Al-Shabaab and its allies and the TFG and its allies were engaged in a major military operation involving periods of heavy fighting in Mogadishu. Both sides were using children on the front line. The number is unknown but estimated to be considerable. Preliminary information also indicates extensive losses on both sides, including a considerable number of children wounded and killed.

2. PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT INVOLVED IN THE USE OF CHILDREN

This section presents the actions of the major named combatants with regard to the recruitment, training and subsequent deployment/use of children, particularly in the country's central and southern regions.

² See Reports of the Secretary General on children and armed conflict in Somalia S/2007/259 of 7th May 2007 and S/2008/352 of 30th May 2008. A third report is being finalized and is expected to be reviewed by the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in the coming months. Both reports stress that the level of grave violations against children in Somalia has been increasing over the past years, particularly with regard to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict; the killing, maiming and rape of children; and the denial of humanitarian access to children.

³ The Transitional National Government (TNG) features in Annex I of the 2002 and 2003 Secretary-General's Reports on Children and Armed Conflict among the parties to the conflict recruiting or using children (see S/2002/1299 of November 2002 and S/2003/1053 of November 2003). The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was included twice in Annex I of the Secretary-General's Reports on Children and Armed Conflict (see S/2007/757 of December 2007 and the latest S/2009/158 of March 2009).

Al-Shabaab

In June 2009, the Somali President Sheikh Sharif Ahmed made a public statement against Al Shabaab leadership, accusing them of the recruitment of children. Of all the major combatants identified, available information indicates that Al-Shabaab has been the most aggressive in its pursuit of what has become the widespread recruitment and use of children in the conflict. This practice has been adopted by other groups, thus setting in motion a pattern of activity with an ever-increasing and devastating impact on the physical and mental well-being of an entire generation of children.

Information indicates that Al-Shabaab led the way in successfully using children, primarily trained by foreigners, in intelligence collection, assassination, logistics and other roles. Al-Shabaab reportedly deploys children on the front line. In battle zones, Al-Shabaab generally views children as the first line of defense, adult fighters the second line and 'foreigners' as the third.

Al-Shabaab targets children who have lost their families, especially those whose loss resulted directly from military action by Ethiopian and TFG military forces. Al-Shabaab thus assumes the role of surrogate family, making it easier to manipulate the children. Newly recruited and trained children are encouraged to commit their first assassination within one month of recruitment, when their hatred for the Ethiopians and the TFG soldiers/police is still strong. After the child's first assassination (for which he is paid around \$25) Al-Shabaab moves to complete psychological control of him/her.

Al-Shabaab is reported to use children to recruit other children, especially among their classmates. Recruitment procedures include persistent psychological manipulation. During the Ethiopian occupation between 2006 and 2008, for example, children were told by their instructors that the Ethiopians were infidels and a legitimate target. They were similarly told that the TFG headed by former President Yusuf was a legitimate target because it had killed their families. As such, they learn, every member of the TFG continues to be a legitimate target. The children have been told that killing the enemy is part of the *jihad*⁴, and if they die in the effort they will go to heaven.

One of the first things recruited children are allegedly taught is how to handle a pistol. They learn to shoot and to disassemble and re-assemble it, and they are familiarized with the noise and taught to tolerate it. When these young recruits go on a mission they always carry three or four hand grenades in case there is an 'opportunity' to kill the enemy.

Al-Shabaab recruits and trains children younger than 15 years old. At the age of 15, a child is considered to be an adult and is typically 'promoted', such as to a leadership position in connection with other children associated with the group, or is given a choice of assignment.

As of December 2008, Al-Shabaab was reportedly recruiting children at settlements for internally displaced persons, including at Hamar Bile, located near Mogadishu Stadium, and in Somaliland and Puntland. In Puntland, Al-Shabaab recruited about 56 children in the Bosasso area from the settlements of Rafaad, Raaho and Tuur. In Somaliland, it recruited up to 46 children from the Sheikh Nur Camp and other centres in the Hargeysa area.

Training Camps in Mogadishu and Elsewhere

⁴ Jihad is an Islamic term that means literally (in the Arabic) 'struggle', and appears frequently in the Qu'ran. It's most common current usage, however, is to denote 'holy war' on behalf of Islam, most commonly against apostates, infidels and non-Muslim combatants, with a view to expanding and defending the Islamic state, rather than to the conversion of non-Muslims.

Al-Shabaab is training children in various locations in Mogadishu (figure 1) and elsewhere in south and central Somalia including the Bay, Bakool, Galgaduud and Hiraaan regions and in Raskiambooni, in the extreme southeastern coastal area. The Al-Shabaab also has a big training base at El Barde in the Hiraaan region. About 400 children have undergone training at this base.

Camps in Mogadishu

Children are trained at a number of sites around Mogadishu and other locations. The Al-Farooq Brigade of Al-Shabaab has a training camp for children in the Sooqahoolaha district of Mogadishu, located in a former Ethiopian military base. Some of the children, most of whom are orphaned, are reported to be as young as 9 years old.

Children are also trained at the Salaaxudin base in Huriwa District of Mogadishu. It was closed during the first week of May 2009 due to the conflict between the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia - Djibouti group (ARS- D) - and the Al-Shabaab. The trainers went to Raskiambooni, but it is not clear what happened to the children.

At the Eel-Aarfiid training base, sources state that recruits are trained for suicide missions and kidnapping (of staff of international NGOs). About 60 children are currently being trained there (at the time of writing the report), of whom four were trained to commit suicide attacks. Others received training in logistics, transport, intelligence collection, assassination and combat training. In this training base, the trainers are reported to be from Bangladesh and Pakistan, as well as Somalia.

The suicide attackers who attacked the Mogadishu base of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in February, known to be under 20 years old, received three months of training from foreigners in Hodon and Holwadag districts of Mogadishu and in Eel-Aarfiid. Children are trained at two other bases, one in the vicinity of Arafat Hospital and the other in the vicinity of SOS Children's Hospital near Sooqahoolaha.

Children younger than 13 are trained to use the AK-47 with the folding stock, as well as pistols and hand grenades, and to smuggle detonators. The Al-Shabaab is reported to be training about 15 children in a base in Huriwa district of Mogadishu.

Also, around 13 May, the Al-Shabaab took over three new areas formerly used by the TFG: Saabhaan Dhiga, Harunta Xisbiga and Stadium Mogadishu. Children are receiving military training, including weapons skills, at all three bases.

In May, the TFG accused the Al-Shabaab of abducting 11 children from Buulo Mareer and Golweyn in the Lower Shabelle region to forcibly recruit them into the Al-Shabaab's militia. Al-Shabaab denied these claims during a press conference in Mogadishu on 31 May.

Camps outside Mogadishu

The Mu'askar Farooq base in the Raskiambooni area (Lower Jubba region, coastal area) is reported to train children exclusively. They range from 12 to 19 years old, and most come from the Benadir and Lower Shabelle regions. Weapons and self-defense training are provided at the base by a number of teachers from Somalia and abroad. Every six months, sources indicate, approximately 270 children complete their training and are subsequently sent to Al-Shabaab units. During the first week of May, the Salahuudiin training base (Huriwa District, Mogadishu) was closed because of tensions between the Al-Shabaab and the TFG.

Approximately 1,800 children ranging from 9 to 19 years old are at the Galduuma base, located on the border of the Lower Shabelle and Bay regions, in the forest near the village of Kabsuumo. The children receive weapons and self-defense training from Somali instructors. Afterward they remain at the base and are periodically deployed as military/combat needs arise in the Bay and

Bakool regions. During March, the Al-Shabaab reportedly recruited approximately 600 children, who are being trained in various camps in the Bay, Middle Shabelle, Galgaduud and Middle Juba regions.

Around 13 May 2009, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys and Abu Mansoor Mukhtar Roboow agreed to send 2,000 Al-Shabaab militia, including a large number of children, from Mogadishu, the Bay region and Guri'el to Barawe, Lower Shabelle region. The militias were to receive a short, intensive course in various aspects of military training including self defense and weapons, in preparation for a quick return to Mogadishu to fight the TFG. Foreigners, including Kenyans and individuals from unspecified countries of the Middle East, are known to be involved in the training. Al-Shabaab also has trainers from Saudi Arabia (who allegedly train and finance training of children in the Kismaayo area), and from Yemen.

Al-Xizbi Al-Islaami (Islamic Party, also known as Hizbul Islaam)

The Hizbul Islaam consists of four groups: (1) the Raskiambooni group under the command of Sheikh Hassan Turki and his son-in-law Madobe; (2) the ARS-Asmara led by Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys; (3) the Jabhadda Islaamiga under the command of Abdulqadir 'Kuumaandoos'; and (4) the Mucaskarka Faaruuq (Caanoole) (Soldiers of Faarooq).

The Hizbul Islaam was created during early February 2009 to strengthen the insurgency against the TFG. The President of Somalia, Sheikh Sharif, was reaching out to the less radical elements of the opposition in the hope of incorporating them into the TFG militia/army, so a more united front was needed amongst the opposition groups. Until 25 May the Hizbul Islaam was led by Dr. Umar limaam Abubakar; its deputy leader is Sheikh Hassan Turki of Raskiambooni.

Hizbul Islaam commanders have noted that many of the Al-Shabaab's military successes have resulted from the involvement of children, who "fight without fear". As a result the Hizbul Islaam is now reported to be recruiting children aged 12 to 17 years. It wants children as young as possible so they can be controlled and used to fight in the *jihad*.

The Hizbul-Islaam uses similiar techniques to those of Al-Shabaab, with which it has a shifting alliance. Thirty of its members have the sole task of identifying potential child recruits. These members also go to schools and madrasas to recruit children. Hizbul-Islaam is using an estimated 450 to 500 children, both boys and girls. Their trainers consist of Somalis and foreigners from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Kenya, Pakistan, Tanzania and other countries. Some of the trainers live near Ifka Halane, near Mogadishu Stadium.

Children recruited by Hizbul-Islaam receive extensive military training: physical training; marksmanship skills; intelligence collection; transporting, assembling and planting explosives; use and maintenance of small, hand-carried firearms such as the AK-47 (with folded butt) and pistols (such as the TT Tokarev); heavy weapons training, such as the use of anti-aircraft guns and portable anti-tank weapons; how to pass checkpoints without being noticed; and assassination techniques. Sources have stated that children who try to resist the training are either killed, forced to participate in an assassination or put at the front line with the objective of breaking their will.

After completing training, children are incorporated into a unit. The commanders then ensure that they 'enjoy' the situation/position by giving them money, a car and driver or a prolonged stay in a hotel.

One Hizbul-Islaam training camp holds about 180 children, who operate out of the former pasta factory in Mogadishu is located in Maslah. Another location, between Balad and Eel Aarfiid, was previously operated by the Al-Shabaab but is now jointly used by the Al-Shabaab and the Hizbul-Islaam.

The children fight against the TFG and AMISOM troops. Commanders allegedly ensure that the children are often deployed on the front line so they are exposed to combat and can adjust to the confusion and extreme emotional trauma of such situations. One commander stated that this is a positive experience for the children because they will “become winners”. Hizbul-Islam commanders also involve children in an assassination or have them witness one, which helps to get the child fully under their control.

In May, during training in how to assemble explosives, something went wrong and the explosives detonated. One of the children was killed and four others were wounded. The parents of the child who was killed were allegedly told by the Hizbul-Islam commanders that he was killed in the *jihad*, and his parents received compensation of \$9,000.

Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaa (ASWJ)

The ASWJ, has allegedly recruited some 500 children aged 13 to 17 since the beginning of 2009. The children come mostly from poverty-stricken nomadic communities and cattle herders. They were recruited to fight the Al-Shabaab, and commanders consider the children the most useful because they are easy to manipulate. The strategy is similar to that of the Al-Shabaab – children are recruited and trained and then used to collect intelligence, transport supplies, conduct combat operations and carry out assassinations. It is reported by sources that the recruitment of children has been organized and supported by the Ethiopian military, as part of a broader strategy of support to armed groups opposing Al Shabaab.

The ASWJ mostly recruits and operates in the Hiiraan and the Galgaduud regions. It has a number of training camps for children, including one between Matabaan and the border area between the Hiiraan and Galgaduud regions and camps in Balanbale, Guri’el and Dhusamareeb. These camps train both adults and children; an average of 60 per cent of the trainees are children, both boys and girls. The training is rudimentary compared to that provided by the Al-Shabaab and the Hizbul-Islam. The children receive basic physical training and a weapon (AK-47 or pistol) and are often sent to the front line to participate in combat operations.

Some of the children now fighting with the ASWJ were previously with the Al-Shabaab and fought against the presence of the Ethiopian military in Somalia. After the Ethiopians departed, these children changed sides and now fight against the Al-Shabaab. This is partly because the ASWJ is primarily a clan-based militia, operating in its own territory, while the Al-Shabaab fighters were considered to be ‘invaders’ because they came from other regions. Another motivation for switching sides was the better salary offered by the ASWJ, according to the children. The Ethiopian military, for example, pays the children between \$100 and \$150 per month depending on their training and skills. Two children fighting for the ASWJ confirmed that they received their salary directly from Ethiopian officers. Both children’s parents pushed them to join the militia because of the money.

The ASWJ is reported to recruit children from a variety of environments, including schools and towns. Recruiters focus on children living on the street with no families, children of nomads (described by the ASWJ commanders as easy to manipulate) and children who have lost one or both parents. Child recruits are also given an alternate name.

Former TFG (until January 2009)

The TFG under former President Yusuf forcibly recruited children for combat purposes on some occasions. It was reported that children were threatened with death if they spoke of their forcible recruitment.

In a particularly telling and painful example of forced recruitment, during August 2008 about 100 children aged 13 to 18 were imprisoned in several jails controlled by the TFG in Mogadishu because they were suspected of working for the Al-Shabaab. The TFG and Ethiopian military

commanders took the children from jail, gave them weapons and told them to go to the battlefield and fight the Al-Shabaab. They were further instructed that if they refused to fight or retreated, they would be executed with a bullet to the head. Some children refused and were indeed executed.

In August/September 2008 the TFG allegedly opened an office to recruit children in Mogadishu at the police school and headquarters for the police commandos, Villa Somalia (located between the Airport and the Seaport). An office in Baidoa was used for the same purpose. The TFG officials misrepresented their true purpose, telling children that registration would make them eligible for scholarships in Sudan and Egypt. An unknown number of children who registered ended up at an Ethiopian military base, where they were given military training. The fenced base was guarded and patrolled day and night to prevent the children, aged 14 to 18, from escaping. The children were told that anyone attempting to escape would be executed. They were held at the base for three to four months and were told their mission was to protect and defend their country.

When word got out about what happened to the first groups of 'scholarship' children, others who had been enlisted disappeared before they could be enrolled by the TFG. As a result, in mid-2008, TFG security forces began to apprehend all the children aged 13 to 15 years they could find in the streets in Mogadishu. Captured children were given the choice of going to the training base in Ethiopia or infiltrating the Al-Shabaab. Children who chose the latter option were told they would remain in Mogadishu. When the Al-Shabaab learned of this, they executed 18 children by cutting their throats.

Current TFG (since January 2009)

The current TFG is also reported to recruit children, typically those aged 14 to 18 years. Some have been sent to what was referred to officially as the Rehabilitation Centre, in fact a training base for children who previously fought for other armed groups. This base was located at Harunta Xisbiga, near the Stadium in Mogadishu, until it was taken over by the Al-Shabaab. Some of the children were asked to infiltrate groups such as the Al-Shabaab and the Hizbul-Islaam to convince other children to leave their group and join the ARS-D. Sources have reported that the current government has a training camp for young people at Golaha Sha'abka in the Wardigley district of Mogadishu.

Shortly before the Al-Shabaab took over the Harunta Xisbiga area, the TFG, especially individuals from ARS-D, trained about 3,000 militia, approximately 80 per cent of them children aged 11 to 16 years, in self defense and weapons. These militia received green camouflage military uniforms and were deployed along the route from KM 4 to Villa Somalia. The ARS-Djibouti allegedly decided to use them as a first line of defense against the Al-Shabaab.

KM60 Militia

The KM60, based in the Lower Shabelle region, is a freelance militia of 1,800 to 2,000. It has allegedly received arms and money from the Ethiopian military. The Ethiopian officers then insisted that the KM60 and the ASWJ demonstrate some results in the fight against the Al-Shabaab by 'copying' the Al-Shabaab in recruiting children. The Ethiopian military provided funds to recruit and train 200 children aged 13 to 19 years. The Ethiopian military preferred the younger children because they are easier to manipulate psychologically.

By the end of March, the KM60 had recruited 50 children. They were trained in self-defense, the use of weapons and military tactics. The Ethiopian military commanders planned to supply everything the children wanted to keep them happy and willing to fight.

The KM60 militia has a limited training capacity. The commanders apply the 'warlord system' – they provide simple physical training, a weapon, a small salary and drugs such as qat, hashish and/or alcohol to make them 'fearless'. The training was previously financed by the Ethiopian

military, and the trainers were Ethiopian soldiers from the Oromo clan who speak Somali. The training camp is located about 15 kilometers from the previous Ethiopian base in Laanta Buuro, in the direction of Afgooye.

However, during May, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, leader of the ARS-Asmara, convinced the KM60 militia to change sides and fight for him. He then combined the two militias. By May, the KM60 militia had about 80 to 100 children in its ranks, and the militia of Sheikh Aweys had about 40 to 50 children. Upon combining the two militias, the number of associated children totalled about 120 to 150. It is likely that Sheikh Aweys will introduce the KM60 militia to the more sophisticated child recruitment and training techniques used by the other militant groups such as the Al-Shabaab and the Hizbul Islaam.

3. OTHER SITUATIONS OF CHILD RECRUITMENT AND FIGHTING

Boys Associated with Pirate Groups

There are reports of pirate groups based in Kismaayo which are recruiting adolescent boys in the Dhadaab and Hagar Dheer refugee camps in Kenya. In collaboration with the Al-Shabaab, positioned along the border with Kenya, the pirates look for boys who have nothing to do, with no money and no future. The pirates tell the boys that if they come with them to Somalia they will get food, weapons, women and money to help themselves and their families, and that with money they will be able to go to Europe or elsewhere.

The pirates are allegedly seeking to recruit, train and use boys no older than 16 years, but they will also recruit boys who are 17 or 18 if they look younger. The pirates believe that if a boy under 18 years is caught by the international community it will be more difficult to prosecute him since he is a minor. As of 10 May, the pirates based in Kismaayo have recruited 80 of the 150 boys they seek to recruit. They have been divided into groups of 20, each attended/supervised by two adult pirates.

The pirates have a training base in the Hawaay area (Lower Shabelle region). The boys learn to swim, use weapons such as pistols, the AK-47 and the RPG-2, and use global positioning systems. They are then sent with older pirates to the open sea to conduct practical exercises for a 24-hour period. The pirates intend to open a new training base for recruits at a location between Hawaay (Lower Shabelle region) and Homboy (Lower Jubba region).

Girls Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups

Different parties to the conflict recruit and use girls as soldiers, particularly the Al-Shabaab, Hizbul Islaam and ASWJ. Since the ASWJ primarily fights the Al-Shabaab, and the ASWJ commanders assume that Al-Shabaab fighters typically hesitate to check a girl, the ASWJ uses girls to transport explosives and collect intelligence. The Hizbul-Islaam uses girls especially to collect intelligence.

The Al-Shabaab appears to be the most aggressive in its use of girls. In February, Sheikh Hassan Turki brought 100 girls aged 15 to 18 to his fighters (militia) based in Afmadow. They 'volunteered' after being lured by older women with the promise of marriage to Shabaab fighters. When the girls arrived at Afmadow, their shoes were collected and put in a pile. Each fighter selected a shoe at random, and the girl it belonged to became his 'wife'. Accordingly, the girls are now understood to be part of the *jihad* and will be required to support the cause in any way necessary.

Girls also receive training in intelligence collection, transport of explosives and driving from women in special camps. The girls, between 14 and 18 years old, were recruited/volunteered after women came to their school and told them about their 'responsibilities' on behalf of the *jihad*.

Their training camp is near Kismaayo, in the direction of Afmadow. It was reported that about 120 girls are trained just in this camp.

Use of Children in the May 2009 fighting in Mogadishu

During May, heavy fighting occurred in Mogadishu between the Al-Shabaab and the TFG (and their allies). Each side used children as part of combat forces. Between 9 and 12 May, sources indicate that Al-Shabaab brought at least 50 children to Mogadishu to participate in fighting, and the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia - Asmara (ARS-A) brought approximately 40 children, arriving in small groups. They came from the training bases in Eel-Aarfiid, the Kismaayo area and the Bay area. The Hizbul-Islaam and Al-Shabaab also brought 25 trainers, all foreigners (from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Russia [Chechnya]).

The TFG, which was pushed back by an alliance of Hizbul-Islaam and Al-Shabaab fighters, brought some of its associated children to Villa Somalia via the strategic position known as KM4. They faced a group of about 80 children from the Hizbul-Islaam and Al-Shabaab. Approximately half of these children were brought by Sheikh Hassan Turki from Afmadow.

About 48 children were killed and another 140 wounded on the side of the Al-Shabaab and the Hizbul-Islaam during the May fighting. The high number of child casualties affected the Al-Shabaab's capacity to treat the wounded in its own medical facilities in and outside Mogadishu.

4. REACTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Persons and institutions such as parents, teachers, schools/madrasas and mosques are arguably the first to witness the loss of children to armed forces and groups. They are therefore good barometers of civil society exposure and reaction to recruitment and use of children in the conflict. Within each of these categories of people and institutions are those who resist child recruitment efforts and those who willingly participate. Some parents are instrumental in their children's recruitment, blinded by the income promised by the militia. Those who oppose the recruitment are helpless to deal with it.

An example of the difficulty is parents who try to resist the recruitment of their children by the Hizbul-Islaam. A commander may go to the home of a prospective 'recruit' and talk directly with the child, even if the parents attempt to refuse him access to the child. The commander tries to determine the child's interests; for example, if he always wanted a bicycle, the commander will offer him one. This is the first step of the recruitment process. Once the child is under the control of the armed group, the parents can do nothing. It is difficult for a child to return home, even if he or she wants to.

To ensure the child's participation, the Hizbul-Islaam uses force and brainwashing to gain control of the child and threats and violence towards the parents. Sources have suggested that the group will not hesitate to kill a parent if he or she becomes a threat to the child's participation. The Hizbul-Islaam also has intelligence staff who monitor the child's activities and contacts and intervene if they perceive a risk that the child may try to escape. In some cases, parents have no idea what has happened to their child. One day a commander simply shows up at the family's home and informs them that their child was killed or wounded and is in a hospital.

If a child associated with Al-Shabaab is wounded in combat he or she is treated in the Al-Shabaab medical facilities. This avoids parental involvement in the child's care and maintains control over the child.

Information collected in preparation of this report strongly suggests that teachers routinely experience the loss of children to the combatants. A teacher from a school in Mogadishu estimated that 70 to 80 per cent of the students are involved in some kind of military training programme run by an armed group. Based on his exposure to the phenomenon and his

investigation, this teacher believes that about 60 per cent of the children in his district are part of a militia. As a result, he is now afraid of the children he used to teach because their training in violence has made them dangerous. He knows of parents and teachers who tried to find out what happened to their children; some have been merely threatened by an armed group, but some have been killed. His findings led him to quit his teaching job. However, teachers closely linked with a particular militia will 'push' children into its hands.

The situation with regard to schools and madrasas depends on the relationship with a particular militia. Particularly in schools, as indicated above, recruitment mostly depends on whether the teacher has links with the militia. However, some of the madrasas are funded and controlled by Islamic extremists such as the Al-Shabaab. In this situation the institution itself (the madrasa) becomes the recruitment centre. For example, a madrasa funded by Al-Shabaab in the Towfiq district of Mogadishu encourages its students to leave their school for the madrasa, with the purpose of brainwashing and controlling the children. Hizbul-Islaam has also started funding madrasas as a base to recruit children to participate in the conflict.

A similar situation exists in the mosques. An imam who supports the Al-Shabaab, for example, will encourage the population in general, and the youth in particular, to participate in the *jihad*. However, some imams disapprove of *jihad* and preach against the recruitment of children. Some of these imams have been threatened by the Al-Shabaab, and forced to leave their positions.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Over the past almost two decades, an entire generation of Somali children has known only violence and conflict. Deepening levels of poverty, school enrolment rates lower than 25%, lack of social development and employment opportunities for young people and lack of a birth registration system (which makes it easier to conscript and enlist children in violation of international standards) all contribute to the widespread and systematic recruitment or use of children in the Somali conflict. A more recent 'pull' factor is the pressure to join the *jihad*, which is methodically exploited by groups like the Al-Shabaab to lure a lost generation of Somali children and young people into the fighting.

With fighting escalating, the situation is very likely to deteriorate further. The United Nations remains extremely concerned about the impact of the conflict on this largely uneducated and highly impressionable age group and the lack of respect for children's rights as spelled out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights treaties. In accordance with the provisions of Security Council Resolution 1612/2005, the United Nations will continue to advocate forcefully with all parties to the conflict for the immediate and unconditional release of all children unlawfully recruited or used by armed forces or armed groups and to secure their protection and reintegration in society, even in the absence of a ceasefire or peace agreement.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recalling the obligations additionally arising from **UN Security Council Resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004) and 1882 (2009)**, the **2007 Paris Commitments and Principles**, as well as the recommendations included in the 2007 and 2008 reports of the Secretary General on the situation of children and armed conflict in Somalia (**S/2007/259** of May 2007 and **S/2008/352** of May 2008) and the subsequent conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (**S/AC.51/2007/14** of July 2007 and **S/AC.51/2008/14** of December 2008), the United Nations strongly urges all relevant parties to the conflict to:

- Establish procedures for conscription and enlistment into armed forces or armed groups and that these procedures comply with applicable international standards;

- Facilitate the release of all children recruited or used unlawfully by armed forces or armed groups and secure their access to protection and reintegration programmes, even in the midst of conflict.
- Develop and implement formal, concrete, time-bound action plans to halt the recruitment and use of children, with necessary assistance from the international community.

The United Nations also urges the international community, as part of its technical assistance and funding roles, to make every effort to uphold and apply the 2007 Paris Principles in conformity with relevant international obligations. This includes the obligation to fight against impunity and to effectively investigate and prosecute individuals who have unlawfully recruited or used children in the conflict. Under any peace agreement, amnesty provisions should not be granted to perpetrators of international crimes, including those committed against children.

The violations currently being inflicted upon children by parties to armed conflict must continue to be monitored as intensively and accurately as possible, with a view to carrying out stronger advocacy with State and non-State parties as the political and peace processes continue.

For that purpose, the United Nations also urges the international community to use all available means to support efforts to monitor and report on violations of children's rights in the Somali context, including the unlawful recruitment or use of children. Particular efforts should be made to support the monitoring and reporting mechanism established by Security Council Resolution 1612/2005.

Monitoring child rights violations should also provide evidence for a transitional justice process in Somalia, when circumstances allow. All parties to armed conflict should be made aware that in the future they may face trial for breaches of humanitarian law and human rights law, and in particular for recruitment of children under the age of 15 years for direct participation in hostilities.

7. ANNEXES

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia (S/2007/259) and the subsequent Conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2007/14)

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia (S/2008/352) and the subsequent Conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2008/14)

Figure1. Known camps for training children associated with armed forces and armed groups



GPS coordinates: 2°05'20.75"N 45°22'14.61"E