

Child Soldiers

# Child Soldiers



**Lauren Miller**

**University High School**

**Parents: Ed and Lora Miller**

"Early on when my brothers and I were captured, the LRA explained to us that all five brothers couldn't serve in the LRA because we would not perform well. So they tied up my two younger brothers and invited us to watch. Then they beat them with sticks until two of them died. They told us it would give us strength to fight. My youngest brother was nine years old."

-Martin, age 12

For the last few decades child soldiers have been an impending problem in more than eighty-six countries around the world. This growing issue is a larger phenomenon than most realize. Since the beginning of the Ugandan War, the Lord's Resistance Army has kidnapped over 20,000 innocent young children, and forced them into a violent conflict. They have seen things no child should ever have to see, they have felt pain no child should ever have to feel, and they have done things no child should ever have to do. This twenty-three year long war has left entire generations knowing a world that has never had peace.

According to Invisible Children the Ugandan War has been called "the most neglected humanitarian emergency in the world." This ongoing brutal conflict has destroyed thousands of villages, and placed nearly two million innocent civilians in the middle of a bloody, gruesome battle, most of them being children.

For most children, fighting is not a choice, and often times the only escape they have from the conflict is "night commuting." Night commuters are children who march into the center of their villages every night to sleep in the trees, or on the street in hopes of avoiding the LRA, who often abducts sleeping children at night.

When children are abducted by the LRA, it is not uncommon for them to be forced to kill their family. Just think 9 year olds FORCED to kill their FAMILY. For twenty-three years, thousands of families have been ripped apart, siblings forced to kill siblings, and children left with no one. Often times the abducted children end up looking to the commander as a father figure, simply because they have no one else.

Along with killing families, child soldiers are physically pushed beyond their feeble bodies limits. They are denied water and food, and are subjected to physical and emotional torture. Girls are raped and exploited sexually without a second thought. They are drugged, so as to confuse them even more. They are forced to commit acts that they themselves are too young to understand, and because of their age they are incredibly vulnerable, and can easily be coerced in to appalling behavior. They are forced in to tasks such as laying land mines, punishing other child soldiers, and rape. These children suffer from disease, malnutrition, and along with terrible injuries, and they never get the medical help they so desperately need. They are told they are not valuable to the world, and the worst part is that they believe that.

Common causes of child soldier abduction are simple things such as the lack of education, poverty, lack of funding for Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration programs (DDR), and the lack of churches. All of these reasons are things that we can help with. Organizations like Invisible Children and Compassion International are doing their part to help, but they need US.

These children are caught in the war with no way out because DDR programs are not getting the income that they need, and the world turns its back on the issue. One person can make a difference and its time we stepped up.

Even as a high school student there are lots of ways to get involved. Invisible Children has a program called Schools-For-Schools. This means a high school here in the U.S. sponsors a partner school in Uganda. For as little as 15 dollars a month an entire school in Uganda can be supported. Providing children with the Education they deserve.

Another thing Invisible Children does is a bracelet campaign. Traditional Ugandan bracelets are made in refugee camps, and then sold in the U.S. along with a child's story. All profits from these bracelets are directly given to the bracelet makers, providing them with money to be able to support their family.

There are so many other ways to get involved and make a difference in these children's lives. Organizations such as Compassion International offer sponsorships to children affected by war. By sponsoring a child you can provide them with an education, food, and most importantly the opportunity to know Jesus as their personal savior.

On a personal level these children's stories are what inspired me to become a doctor in the future. I want so desperately to be able to use what God has blessed me with and give them what they need, and are unable to get. I feel so passionately about these children, that I cannot wait to do my part for them. It has even inspired me so much as to sponsor a child. Although I am just one person, I know I am changing a child's life for the better, just by doing something as simple as sending money every month.

It does not take something drastic to help these child soldiers. Just by spreading their stories, you are helping them out, letting the world know. There are so many ways to help these innocent children, and I encourage you to not simply stand by and let them go unnoticed, living the rest of their lives thinking they mean nothing to the world.

## Works Consulted

"CHILDREN IN CONFLICT." *Global Action for Children*. N.p., 2009. Web. 29 Sept. 2009. <[http://www.globalactionforchildren.org/issues/child\\_in\\_conflict/](http://www.globalactionforchildren.org/issues/child_in_conflict/)>.

"Child Soldiers." *Coalition to Stop The Use of Child Soldiers*. N.p., 2007. Web. 29 Sept. 2009. <<http://www.child-soldiers.org/childsoldiers/child-soldiers>>.

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. "Uganda." *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008* 2008: 344-348. Web. 29 Sept. 2009. <[http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/files/country\\_pdfs/FINAL\\_2008\\_Global\\_Report.pdf](http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/files/country_pdfs/FINAL_2008_Global_Report.pdf)>.

"Invisible Children ." *Invisible Children*. N.p., 29 Sept. 2009. Web. 29 Sept. 2009. <<http://www.invisiblechildren.com/home.php>>.

"Report on the Lack of Ugandan Child Soldier Relief, Relief for Girls." *Child Soldier Relief*. N.p., 17 Nov. 2008. Web. 29 Sept. 2009. <<http://chidsoldierrelief.org/2008/11/17/damning-new-report-on-the-lack-of-ugandan-child-soldier-relief/>>.

"Sponsor a Child." *Compassion International*. Compassion International , 2009. Web. 29 Sept. 2009. <<http://www.compassion.com/>>.