

FACT SHEET

Post Conflict Reforms Child Soldiers - where are they?

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A typical perception of a child soldier pointing his gun



A typical 14 year old afghan boy who has lived in Kabul through out the conflicts

PHOTO: POST CONFLICT REFORMS

Post Conflict Reforms (PCR) is a cross cutting program dealing with the security sector issues that arise upon the cessation of fighting. Left unresolved, the issues may reignite, fetter or delay the Mission’s reconstruction efforts and its wider objectives which support the authority of the Government and the wishes of the people.

The issue of child soldiers in Afghanistan arises from time to time but is felt to be a self fulfilling prophecy by some in a Country affected by over 25 years of conflict; with a population where 50% is below the age of 18 and where traditional roles and responsibilities of teenagers have to be looked at in perspective to enable households to meet their daily needs.

Creative Associates reported for the US Dept of Labor in December 2005 that some war affected young people were involved in armed groups and combat related activities but that the voluntary participation was attributable to many causes – economic, social, political, and religious factors – madras’s deliberately training young children in Pakistan.

The definition applied in Country by UNICEF is defined by the Cape Town Principles dated 20 April 1997. The definition addresses the typical picture of a drug crazed child soldier with an AK47 who has murdered his family, taken part in other atrocities, has no family support and places no value on life or death. The definition also includes cooks, porters, messengers, and others accompanying such groups, young girls and those providing the logistical support that an army on the move requires, but excludes general family members who may just follow groups when on the move.

The African experience is not deemed relevant to Afghanistan in the eyes of some, where out of necessity a person below the age of 18 will have been treated by the community as a semi responsible adult for several years, where the members of the various groups that fought in armed conflicts over the last 25 years have typically been part time soldiers who were regionally based, maintained regular links with their community and subsequently returned home to their family.

The term Afghan child soldier is therefore controversial, deemed misleading and the numbers involved sustaining a stand alone program questionable. This “intervention” unfortunately diverts limited funds from other badly needed mid to long term programs which are focused on sustainably meeting the identified needs of those children that do need assistance and will very shortly grow into the next generation and be responsible for taking the Country forward.

Further detailed information is available on www.ddrafg.com