

Good morning! Thank you for your invitation to join you this morning! As a representative to the United Nations for the non-government organization, Delta Kappa Gamma, I would like to update you about what the United Nations is doing to eradicate child soldiering and the other mistreatment of children in wartime.

“Fifteen year old Grace Akallo was asleep in her boarding school dormitory room on October 10, 1996, the night the rebels came. Soldiers, most no older than her, swept through the St. Mary’s College campus, threatening to burn alive any girls who didn’t open their doors and surrender to them. Those who led Grace into the dark night had themselves been dragged away by other rebel soldiers, who had themselves been kidnapped.” (Girl Soldier p. 21)

This introduction to the book *Girl Soldier*, listed on your bibliography, sounds very similar to the recent kidnapping of over two hundred young women from their school dormitory in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the situation has not improved since Grace was abducted to become a child soldier in 1996. Child soldiers, under the age of 18 and as young as 10, are recruited by state or rebel groups as fighters, cooks, suicide bombers, human shields, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes all over the world. The most vulnerable children are those who are poor, displaced from their families, have limited access to education, or live in combat zones. They may “join” because of societal pressure or to obtain food, income, and security. It is estimated that girls make up 10 to 30% of child soldiers and are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation. This summary comes from the “Do Something” website also listed on your bibliography.

Today, in the Central African Republic, Syria, and South Sudan, children continue to be robbed of their childhoods and are killed, mutilated, or forced into battle. In the Central African Republic, 6,000 children served as soldiers in 2013. Families have been separated and displaced from their homes and are “hiding in the bush” or are refugees in other countries.

The Security Council passed Resolution 1243 (2014) on March 7, 2014 to stop the military use of schools and hospitals as they are becoming battlegrounds. In Syria, three thousand schools have been damaged and 60% of the hospitals were

affected and 40% destroyed. Therefore, children are not being educated and diseases that have been eradicated like polio are returning.

On March 6, 2014 the campaign, *Children, not Soldiers* was launched by the Committee of Children and Armed Conflict of the Security Council in partnership with UNICEF. The member states of the United Nations have committed to support it. The steps in the action plan to end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict include:

- 1.) Issue military command orders prohibiting the recruitment and use of children.
- 2.) Release all children identified in the ranks of security forces.
- 3.) Ensure children's reintegration into civil life.
- 4.) Criminalize the recruitment and use of children
- 5.) Integrate age-verification mechanisms into recruitment procedures

Six countries have developed action plans with time lines with the UN: Afghanistan, Chad, DRC, Myanmar, Somalia, and South Sudan. Yeoman and Sudan are in the process of developing their plans. The United Nations will provide resources and the action plans must be completed by 2016. There is contact information on your bibliography to learn more about the campaign *Children, not Soldiers*.

You may view the March 7, 2014 Security Council meeting at which the Resolution was voted in and the *Children, not Soldiers* campaign was discussed on the link listed on your bibliography. You will hear The Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon say that we must let children be children – safe and secure and that they should have “pens and textbooks and not guns and grenades”. You will hear the compelling testimony of Alihaji Babab Sawaneh, from Sierra Leone, who was abducted in 2001 and served as a child soldier for two years. He spoke to the UN at the age of ten to ask the UN for help to enable the child soldiers to find their way back to their communities with an education and jobs. His was a success story. He has finished college with a BA in Peace and Conflict Resolution.

Children are the hope of all societies. Generations of children have been eradicated by war. The future belongs to you and your generation and I applaud you for your concern for these children and am happy to help you in any way I can with your efforts to right this terrible wrong.