The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers

Summary

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"If only the enemy would listen, it would have been wonderful, and the firing would stop and we would listen to each other, we would just talk and try not to use guns. I wish we could end all this violence and we could develop our country."

— Child Soldier, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Violence against children is unacceptable. Addressing this problem requires the work of governments, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and individual men and women. It also requires that we listen to the voices of child soldiers to understand their story. This is an important aspect of our work on prevention, demobilization and reintegration. This study is an effort in listening to the voices of girl soldiers from four conflict areas around the world.

February 12, 2002 represents a major event in the efforts to end the use of child soldiers. On this day the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child came into force. The enforcement of this international treaty will be important in preventing children from becoming child soldiers and living through the horrific experiences described by the girls in this study. Under the Optional Protocol governments are charged with ensuring the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers as well as protecting and not punishing them. Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, stated on February12, 2002 "We are urging all governments and armed groups to end the military recruitment of children under18 and to release those children already in service. There can be no excuse for arming children to fight adult wars."

The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, in his address before the UN Special Session on Children, May 2002, stated that "the deployment of child soldiers is a despicable and damaging practice that must end." He went on to say "those who practice this form of child abuse must be held accountable." In addition, he stated that, "for far too long, the use of child soldiers has been seen as merely regrettable. We are here to ensure it is recognized as intolerable."

WHY LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF THE GIRL SOLDIER?

Many documents have been and are being developed to address the concern of violence against children. These are necessary actions to gain understanding and agreement among international parties to prevent the use of children as soldiers and for rehabilitation. The characteristics of many of these actions are to call for "providing resources" or "establishing mechanisms to facilitate activities for children" or "ensuring provisions for demobilization and reintegration are spelled out." To accomplish these objectives, we must understand what resources to provide, what activities will meet the child's need or what provisions need to be spelled out. We can rely on theories, typically Western concepts of treatment, and we can also listen to the child and try to gain an understanding of what may be most effective in meeting their needs.

Child soldiers cannot be treated as all having the same characteristics – even in the same conflict area.

It has often been the case that child soldiers have been thought of as a common category of children who would possess the same characteristics and needs. The unique individual features and characteristics of the children were often overlooked or ignored. There was a time when the prevailing opinion was that all child soldiers were boys. We now know that child soldiers include girls as well as boys

and that demobilization and reintegration programs must take into account the unique needs of girls.

The fundamental needs of girls who have been child soldiers have not been very well documented, understood and addressed. It has only been recently recognized that girls are used in many different ways by the armed groups. Their demobilization and reintegration needs are directly related to the specific ways that they were used.

For example, it has been assumed that most if not all girl soldiers were raped and sexually abused by the armed groups of which they were a part. This study reveals that not all armed groups raped the girls. The stated position of some of the armed groups forbids sexually intimate relationships between men and women without the consent of the woman and the approval of a commander to enter into a relationship. In some armed groups contraception shots were required and abortions performed even when the girl opposed this action. In all the armed groups there were power differentials between the men and the young girls and many of the girls agreed to a sexually intimate relationship when they recognized it brought with it benefits such as more food, better living conditions, opportunities to ride rather than walk long distances and other privileges. None of the girls talked about receiving information to protect against sexually transmitted diseases.

Becoming a child soldier is very dependent on a

WHAT WERE THE KEY FINDINGS IN THIS STUDY?

The key messages include:

Becoming a child soldier

- Becoming a child soldier is very dependent on a combination of the local environment and the personal circumstances surrounding the girl's life.
- Living in poverty was an important factor in girls joining a movement or being abducted.
- Girls were not willing to remain at home and live with their family when a member was exploiting them sexually or treating them violently.
- Propaganda provided by the movement was important. (This was not true for girls abducted.)
- If significant others in their life joined, the girls were easily influenced to join. (This was not true for girls abducted.)

The child soldier experience

- It is incorrect to assume that all girls used as soldiers are sexually abused.
- The mother-daughter relationship was significant for the girls (even when it appeared they did not have a very positive relationship with their mother) prior to becoming a soldier, during soldiering and following escape or capture.
- For two of the four conflict areas, girls felt the armed movement provided them with enhanced possibilities for their life – they learned valuable skills. If it were not for the violent battles, many of the girls would have elected to stay in the movement.

The future

- The decision-making process for the girls changed after capture or escape from being a child soldier.
- Girls from all conflict areas saw education or training as fundamental to their future after being a child soldier.
- The girls are not searching for ways to retaliate and bring harm to those who had used and misused them. They were looking for ways to make a contribution, to do something meaningful and productive with their life and to make up for the harm they have delivered upon others.

combination of the local environment and the personal circumstances surrounding the girl's life. Girls were more readily abducted if they were poor and lived near a conflict zone. In addition, if left at home without the protection of an adult or separated from their family, they were an easy target for kidnapping. Girls who volunteered were usually influenced to join by a significant person in their life or because they believed the movement's propaganda that promised them a better life. They saw themselves having food, a uniform that would give them status and a group to which they could belong. On a personal level they had either dropped out of school or found going to school problematic, were poor and lived in abusive or separated families. They also wanted to participate in the important decisions that were going to affect their life. For example, they did not want to accept an arranged marriage planned by their family or be hired out as a domestic servant for low pay, cruel treatment and separation from the significant people in their life. Generally speaking, the girls who volunteered had some notion that their life would improve by joining.

Living in poverty played a key role in the girls joining a movement or being abducted. Most of the girls lived in families where there were many siblings. Often there was not enough food for everyone. Most of the girls came from villages and their family had a small plot of land for growing food or they had a small number of animals that they sold or which provided them with food. Providing for the essential survival needs of the family was a constant source of anxiety and uncertainty.

Girls were not willing to remain at home and live with their family when a member of their family (parent, sibling, parent's live-in partner) was exploiting them sexually or treating them violently. Also, the girls who had been marginalized by new family configurations (remarriage, step siblings or siblings born as a result of the new marriage) preferred to go or were sent to go and live with relatives rather than live on the margins of a family where they felt of little or no value. When living with a relative was not possible, joining the movement provided a convenient way out.

Another significant factor in the girls joining was the propaganda provided by the movement. (Propaganda was not a factor for children that were abducted.) The movement was seen as a place for adventure and excitement. For the most part, they were not attracted by the cause. It gave them a chance to experience some measure of prestige, exhibit power and gain respect. They saw the uniform as providing them with a ready made and immediate identity. It gave them a sense of camaraderie and belonging to something that would bring about significant change. Once in the movement they learned about the philosophy and political agenda. Frequently the girls felt they were contributing to a cause that would enable their own family and the masses to have a better, more productive, life. They went off to the movement for altruistic reasons because they loved their country and believed their participation in the movement would usher in a new and better era of social and economic and political change.

They also joined because significant others in their life had joined the movement and they wanted to be with them or follow in their footsteps. The significant others who had influence over the girls were boyfriends, brothers and girlfriends who influenced them to join. It was not unusual for the significant other to return to the village and escort the girl to camp or for several of them to plan to leave together.

It is generally assumed that all girl soldiers are sexually abused. This generalization is not supported by the results of this study. Many of the girls were sexually abused. The sexual exploitation was different in each conflict area. In Sri Lanka (with one exception), the girls stated nobody could have love affairs or sex. It was considered a major offense and severe disciplinary action was taken if discovered. The girls did not say if or how often this rule was broken. The armed group in Angola forced the girls to live with and sexually serve the chief and other men on demand. They were also forced to dance and entertain the men in preparation for battle. Those girls who refused were severely punished or killed. In the armed group in the Philippines, the stated policy was that men and women were not allowed to be alone together. Men and women were to be treated equally and have respect for one another. Men and women could each

approach the other to initiate a sexually intimate relationship. In order to have the relationship, permission had to be granted by a higher authority in the armed group. The women in the armed group in Colombia were the ones to decide if they would consent to sex. Men would ask to have sex and the woman decided. One girl from Colombia reported that she had been raped. Women were given contraceptive interjections. The women were not permitted to get pregnant. Women were threatened that they would be killed if they became pregnant. If pregnant, they were forced to have an abortion. There were some rare exceptions according to the girls. Men were not given contraceptives and the burden of responsibility was placed upon the women. The girls from the Philippines and Colombia would sometimes agree to a relationship because it brought with it special privileges and benefits (e.g., being able to ride rather than walk and in general have a less brutal way of life).

The desire, meaning and importance of the mother-daughter relationship was significant for the girls prior to her becoming a soldier, during the time they were soldiers and following their escape or capture. The girls longed to be in a significant relationship with their mother. When their mother was not available, the girl longed for a meaningful connection with her grandmother, an aunt or some other family member. Sometimes the girl's relationship with her mother became estranged when a new man entered her mother's life. Even though their relationship to the mother may have been uncertain the girl missed her mother and her family when in the movement.

What they wanted most was a strong family connection especially with their mother. In some instances they felt like they had abandoned their mother. After their escape or capture they wanted to be reconciled with their mother and make up for the time when they had been away.

The girls in the Philippines and Colombia felt the armed movement provided them with enhanced possibilities for their life that they otherwise would never have achieved. The movement served as a family that looked out for them. Their basic needs were met. They were respected and given a voice in "criticism" groups where they learned to confront and negotiate with others. They gained knowledge about self expression. They learned how to speak in public and teach others. They learned communication skills that would serve them in their civilian life. If it were not for the fighting, the girls would have preferred life in the armed group over their life as a civilian.

Decision-making took on a different dimension following their capture or escape. At the time of their decision to join the movement the girls believed in their choice and made deliberate and calculated plans for getting away without being caught by their families. They paid a great personal price for pursuing their choice. After having participated in the armed movement they often regretted, in part, the choice they had made for a variety of reasons. When this was the case it made them doubt subsequent decisions they had to make. It made them question their decision-making ability. They began having ambivalent feelings and doubts about decisions they had to make regarding their future as they began to reconstruct their lives. Some of the girls expressed anxiety and fear about making the decision to participate in the interviews for this study. They considered the implications their participation might have for their family and their own self with regard to safety. They struggled with the future implication of their participation in this research project.

The girls from all four countries saw education or vocational and skill training as fundamental to their future following their time as a child soldier. The girls realized after the fact the importance of education and school. Prior to becoming a soldier none of the girls had completed high school. All of the girls had dropped out of school. The educational process presented them with several problems that prevented their continuation in school. Some villages did not have schools or only a few grades. In some cases the girls' families did not have enough money to pay their tuition or purchase the necessary school supplies and clothing to attend school. In other situations if the family bought supplies and clothing they did not have enough money for lunch or for the girl to take food from home. Sometimes there was not a village school and the girl had to walk long distances because there was not money for transportation even when transport was avail-

able. In other situations the girl had to stay home to provide for an ailing parent or grandparent. Some had to stay home to provide child care for younger brothers and sisters when their parents were in the fields working. When the children did manage to get to school they were often humiliated by the teachers for not having completed homework or were treated with great cruelty for not being able to do class assignments. Attendance was often very inconsistent. On the other hand, some of the girls in Sri Lanka felt intense pressure from their families to constantly perform at the highest level of achievement. Several of the girls dropped out of school rather than live with the never-ending pressure and expectations placed upon them by their parents.

An important voice from the girls is they were not searching for ways to retaliate and bring harm to those who had used and misused them. The girls were disillusioned and angry about the way they had been treated and used in the various groups to which they belonged. They were angry with the enemy who had killed their comrades but they were not intent on finding ways to injure them. The girls wanted the fighting to stop and the war to end and the killing to be over. They were searching for ways to make up for the harm and injury they had delivered to others, recognizing they had been perpetrators of violence. They sought atonement by wanting to find ways to help others and make constructive contributions to their lives. They especially wanted to help children and their own mothers.

WHAT ARE THE POLICY IMPLICATIONS?

Key recommendations on demobilization from the girls' messages include:

- Listen to the girl and her experience and needs – provide basic needs and safe forums for discussion when she needs help.
- Work to locate some member of her family or significant adult to bring about some level of reconciliation.
- Provide new experiences that will change her identity from soldier – to reclaim who she is and to regain faith in her decision-making ability.
- Provide opportunities for education and training – the girls recognize the value of education and job skills.

A full discussion of the policy implications brought up by the study findings will be elaborated on later in the section on "What does this say about what we do?" (p. 17).

WHAT WERE THE COUNTRY DISTINCTIVES?

Some distinctive features from the armed movements were identified from the interview material that appear to be of critical importance or unique to each country. This is not to suggest that these were the only distinct features but rather they were the ones reported by the girls.

Sri Lanka

The girls were issued a "dummy gun." This gun was to be the girl's constant companion. She was instructed to keep it with her always, even when she slept. She was instructed to become one with the gun. Once it was judged that she was comfortable and at one with the "dummy gun," which was considered a great achievement, she was presented with a real gun.

"Before we were given guns to carry we had to carry a piece of wood (a dummy). All the while we had to carry and after quite some days when we were used to it, we were given rifles. The day I got the rifle I was thrilled and happy."

— Child soldier, Sri Lanka

"As long as you are frightened to handle a rifle you won't get one. You have to wait till you are ready to get a real rifle. With the 'dummy' you have to get used to it. The moment they realize you are not scared and you are keen to handle a rifle you are given one."

The girls who were fighters were issued a cyanide capsule on a necklace. The necklace was to be worn into battle and swallowed to prevent them being delivered into the hands of the enemy. The girls were told their death by cyanide was better and did not compare with the torture they would receive at the hands of the enemy. It was to assure their safety and protect them from the enemy.

"The day I was given the cyanide (capsule) I was very happy because no one would catch me alive - abuse or harass me. This was for my safety. I felt good to carry this around my neck. One day another leader didn't have her capsule. I don't know what happened; she didn't explain. She said that she wanted to use mine. That day, I never ever thought I will be caught, so I gave mine to her. I was fighting in a war. Four soldiers captured me. They surrounded me and I gave up. I had no cyanide so it was easy to surrender."

"Our leader was a doctor, she was wounded and she fell. She ordered us to take the cyanide; I didn't. The thought of the others — the way they died flashed before my eyes and I didn't want to take cyanide."

"I was given one cyanide capsule. As we began this journey we were warned - If the enemy catches you, you will be abused so do not get caught if you do get caught take the capsule."

— Child soldier, Sri Lanka

"Without the cyanide we don't go to war. Even now I don't like jewelry. I like a black thread round my neck. I had got used so much to the thread around my neck. I feel sad when I think of what happened to me. I had the cyanide and I didn't take it and when I go back I'll have to face death."

The ultimate achievement was to be honored at a "Hero's Welcome." A hero's welcome was a special honor granted to those who risked and or sacrificed their life in battle by killing and destroying the enemy. The supreme hero's welcome was celebrated and took place after the girl's death. If by some chance the girl was not killed in battle and had escaped capture and had not swallowed the cyanide

capsule, her "Hero's Welcome" might include a visit from some member of her family.

When someone goes out for a Hero's death, they are honored. I feel sorry for them. Many die and never come back. Some have come back after performing dangerous missions. They are then promoted and become respected."

"I went out to die a hero's death - you have to enter a camp and come back. I came back victorious. Finally I was major - nobody is called major, you are only given a name and you are called by that name. The rank is announced only after one's death."

— Child soldier, Sri Lanka

Angola

The girls were used as "Okulumbuissa." As soon as the girl's breasts began to form they could be impregnated and the men did not have to assume or claim paternity or any responsibility for them or for the child. If the girl did not accept the man's advances toward her she could be tied to a tree and beaten with sticks.

"…he didn't really want me to be his wife but only "Okulumbuissa." It's a common habit with chiefs in the forest - when a girl is in your care, you have to Okulumbuissa."

— Child soldier, Angola

They do this with all the girls, as soon as their breasts start to grow. After the girl becomes pregnant, the chief orders a house to be built and the girl stays there. Some let them have a husband, others don't, and when a girl gets a husband they have her killed. He sent two men to tie me to a tree and they beat me with sticks. I was there for an hour; later they untied me. These are the punishments they inflict when a woman does not accept."

The girls were used to entertain the troops. They were forced to dance, sing, respond to sexual demands and keep the men at a high level of excitement 24 hours a day. Cold water was thrown on the girls to prevent them from sleeping.

"The young girls even sang till midnight. Dancing every day, there was no sleep.... even if you were tired, if you tried to sit down, they woke you up or they threw water over you."

— Child soldier, Angola

"[T]he older girls washed clothes, cooked and danced every day: they began dancing from 18.00 to 7.30. Those who are 30 dance with the oldest of 70/60, those of 20/25 dance with the men whose hair is turning white; those who are 17/18 also with the oldest men; 14 and under, there are some of the oldest who dance with them. The young boys dance with the youngest girls. After dancing, those who have a young man/boy go and sleep with him. If you do not accept, they will take you to a place, and then kill you. Even if you don't want to, you are forced to. The soldiers who want to have sex with the girls sent their servants to fetch a girl: when they wanted to have their way with a girl, they sent a servant to call her."

"I went to four bases to teach the others to dance and sing. But whenever we traveled to teach the others we carried the chiefs' backpacks. During the time that we spend in the bases we cannot sleep. At night, after we cook dinner, we dance and sing. When the day is breaking, we go to the chief's house and then we take a nap. About 5 a.m. we have to wake up and resume dancing and singing. They did not let us sleep because they feared that the government would come and attack during the

night…And if we were sleeping who would wake us up to carry all the materials and food? That is why they did not let us sleep at night."

The girls were instructed not to talk about their former life with their family. They were not permitted to recall or talk about their family, use their family given name, speak about their village, acknowledge their birth date or age. In essence they were to give up their former identity. This created a sense of social isolation. This process led the girl to become socially and emotionally isolated from herself and others.

"It was forbidden to talk about fleeing or about your family: it is only talking about them. I didn't know where my mother was, I had no one I could talk to about my family. There was no contact with the family. You could not talk about what you'd left behind."

"At the base you cannot talk about your family, or talk about your village. They told us: here just forget your parents. You're going to live well here."

— Child soldier, Angola

"It's not worth thinking about the village you left behind. From now on forget your parents, because you came here to work."

Philippines

The girls participated in criticism groups that were held in the afternoons. The participants confronted each other about their behaviors. They reviewed the ways they related and behaved toward each other. These groups provided them an opportunity to evaluate their own behavior and insights about how others perceived them. The prevailing philosophy was that men and women were equal. Men were not permitted to abuse women.

"In the seminar, it was made clear that it was absolutely prohibited to take advantage of women, for men to abuse women was not allowed. It wasn't even allowed to touch each other, to speak to someone of the opposite sex alone, especially in dark places, this was also prohibited. I felt very safe; I had no fear."

"The times we would be all together and you could open up all your problems. And you can speak of your mistakes, and of the hurt that you caused someone."

— Child soldier, Philippines

"When there were times when we didn't have work to do, we would relax, there would be lots of jokes and we would sing together. To everyone, if you are upset about something or someone, this can be discussed. Even relationships with women can be discussed. If you want to enter a relationship, then the man can approach the woman."

"[I]n the movement, you will be criticized and admonished: Why did you not do your task? Why did you not cook? Why did you depend so much on others? And you must say things frankly. Whether that person is a commander or a teacher, as long as that person committed a violation, you can voice out your criticism. There's no place for fearing reprisal in blurting your criticisms because that person is, say, a commander. If a person has done something wrong, it is necessary that you tell the person that he has done something wrong. That's the movement's policy. You must not be wary of giving criticisms. You must shed your bourgeois ways that still come from [traits] outside the movement."

They were indoctrinated in the philosophy of the movement and sent out to politically teach and organize the people.

"We had to study about why we were there. To explain why there is a revolution now, things like that. They wanted us to really understand. My comrades were very strict during the period of education."

"It's important that before you enter the movement, they talk to you to understand the reasons why you want to join. For example, if your reasons for joining are just for personal interests only, they will give you a seminar because that's not enough good reason to join."

"…but in the movement, you have to learn to speak to large groups. So when you speak to the masses, you really have to use your brains. When you speak, you have to speak for your principles."

"We had to undergo education first. That's how it is in the movement, study first. They did not give me any task yet until I have undergone some studies."

— Child soldier, Philippines

Colombia

The girls in Colombia received some form of contraception immediately upon their entry into the armed group. The type most frequently used was contraceptive injections, although IUDs and birth control pills were sometimes used. Contraception was as much a part of their life as a soldier as their combat training. They were given the injection even when they expressed their strong objection. It was reported that condoms were given to men with AIDS. The girl was held totally responsible for any pregnancy. All pregnancies were to end with an abortion. The girls reported there were some rare exceptions made to this rule and the girl was permitted to have the baby.

"...if a girl got pregnant she was made to have an abortion."

— Child soldier, Colombia

"I think this was very painful for the girls, I mean, imagine that, making someone have an abortion. You're told, from when you join that you can't get pregnant."

"[T]hey can't use pregnant women, because at any moment a pregnant woman... they might even kill her. You were given contraceptive injections, they had many methods to stop the girls from getting pregnant. The men weren't given contraceptives. They'd say that it's the woman that has to deal with the contraception. It was just the women that were told because the commander said that it was the women that decided, the men asked to have sex and the women were the ones that decided."

"I found out about one girl who got pregnant but she was made to have an abortion after three or four months when the commander realized that she was pregnant. There was a very strong reaction. She cried, she said that she'd rather they killed her than have an abortion. She had an abortion, everybody has to have an abortion."

"[I]f any woman gets pregnant there then they make her have an abortion. You can't have the baby, it's not allowed. The commander was in charge of birth control He was the only one who knew how to give the injections. Every six months he gave you an injection. I wouldn't let them give it to me. My boyfriend said that it was for the women's good, it wasn't for them but for the sake of the woman. Think about it, a woman out there, she gets pregnant and then she has to have an abortion. I was given the pill but what's used most of all is the injection. The men were given condoms. My boyfriend said that condoms were for... that they were for those people with AIDS, that was what condoms were for. The majority of men didn't use them, there were only a few people that used them."

HOW DO WE HEAR THEIR VOICES?

The approach taken for this study was to carry out in-depth interviews from four conflict areas: Angola, Colombia, Philippines and Sri Lanka. The objective was to hear the voices of these girl soldiers. By listening to their voice we will more effectively understand their needs and learn lessons from their experience. Information can be gained by other methods (e.g., surveys, questionnaires, etc.). However, this effort is designed to allow them to tell their story and the task is for us to listen, understand and respond to the messages. We were not limited to gaining answers to specific questions, but to allow their thoughts to emerge during the interviews.

WHAT CHILDREN PARTICIPATED?

In order to participate in the study the girl soldier must have served as a soldier before reaching the age of 18 years and be out of the conflict for less than two years. Given the in-depth interview methodology, the objective was to obtain interviews from four to six girls from each conflict area. The girls were selected by the country team based on their accessibility, willingness to be interviewed and the team's ability to assure confidentiality and provide for their safety. Twenty-three girls met the criteria for this study. There were five girls from Angola, six girls from Colombia, six girls from the Philippines and six girls from Sri Lanka. A seventh girl was included from Sri Lanka; she did not meet the criteria since she had been out of the conflict for more than two years. Her data has been included, but kept separate, because of the rich contributions of her interview.

The girl soldiers were from the same armed movement within each country. This is not to say that there were not other armed movements or government armies that used child soldiers.

WHAT WERE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE CHILD SOLDIERS?

The girls interviewed were:

- From on-going conflicts (none of the conflicts had ended at the time of the interviews).
- Part of an armed movement (not part of a government army) that had a long history (i.e., they were not newly formed armed movements).
- In general, from poor or economically disadvantaged families.
- From large families – they all had multiple siblings.
- Either captured by government forces or escaped; their stories indicate that none received violent treatment after being captured or escaping. (One child — in Sri Lanka — was a special exception. Her data has been kept separate as she did not meet the criteria for this study.)
- None had completed high school; most had only completed early grades of elementary school; some could not read or write their name.

HOW WERE THE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED?

A project team, led by a representative in the country, was developed in each country. These teams carried out the interview process. A training/dialogue session was held in each country prior to the collection of data. Lori Heninger, Quaker United Nations Office, New York, and a member of the research team, conducted the training/dialogue sessions. Each of the sessions was adapted to meet local cultural needs. This session included a description of the research method developed by Irving Seidman.[1] The head researcher, Yvonne Keairns, developed ethical

[1] Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research,* Teachers College Press, 1998

guidelines, interviewer actions and responsibilities and consent forms for the child soldiers. Guidance was sought from the country teams on how to meet the concerns that may occur from the girls as a result of the interviews. Three in-depth interviews were held with each girl soldier. The interviews were conducted in the girl's native language and were (in general) scheduled to last up to two hours and were held three to seven days apart to allow for a period of reflection between each interview. There were times when this schedule was altered due to accessibility and issues of safety. The first interview was focused on the girl's life prior to becoming a soldier, the second on the girl's life as a child soldier and the third on how she saw herself moving into the future.

HOW WERE THE INTERVIEWS ANALYZED?

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. A person knowledgeable about the local culture reviewed the interviews to provide perspective on aspects of the culture that would not be clear from the message as transcribed. The transcribed interviews use fictitious names for the girls in order to maintain confidentiality and safety for the girls. Other identifying information was changed to protect the girls interviewed. To hear the voice of the girl, the interviews were read and re-read in order to appreciate, hear and accept what each girl described and revealed about her life and her experiences as a child soldier. Common themes from each of the interviews were identified, articulated, synthesized and elaborated upon in order to understand the experience of the girl soldier. The common themes then served as the basis for developing conclusions and recommendations.

WHAT WERE THE IMPORTANT THEMES?

Nine themes were selected and they can be grouped into three areas:

- Common characteristics of who they are and their experiences
    - Family relationships
    - Festivals and Religion
    - Education
    - Play
- Their evolution and journey as a child soldier
    - Reason for joining
    - Training and life as a child soldier
    - Reconsideration of the decision
- A view of who they are and how they view the future
    - Sense of self
    - Time and the future

Family Relationships

> *"I have resolved that I will never be neglectful of my family when I have a family of my own."*
>
> — Child Soldier, Philippines

All of the girls longed for and still long for a secure, nurturing relationship with their family. Many of the girls suffered from abusive family relationships. In spite of this the family bonds and attachments were strong, life-saving and enduring. All of the girls want to be reconciled to their families. They especially long to have meaningful relationships with their mothers.

Festivals and Religion

The girls enjoyed the festivals celebrated by their respective villages and countries. It provided them with a sense of belonging and enjoyment and hopeful anticipation. Most of the girls had fond memories of the preparations made by their family members and their own participation in these preparations that provided them with a meaningful role within their family.

The girls fulfilled, when possible, the customs and traditions of their religious heritage. They wanted to

have faith and trust that God would protect them in battle and watch over their families. A number of the girls raised questions about the part God plays in life.

Education

All of the girls came to realize the importance of education and recognized that it provided an avenue to some degree of self-sufficiency. This was true even for those girls who had received very little formal education. School attendance also gave them some relief from social isolation from their peers. Prior to becoming a child soldier the value of going to school and studying had to be measured against the need to care for younger siblings, caring for ailing parents or grandparents, working to provide for the family's survival needs and paying for school and its related costs.

The educational environment experienced prior to becoming a child soldier varied widely and often focused on punishment when the girls did not perform well or were weak in a subject, and they felt humiliated or stupid. The girls frequently felt as though they were failing their teachers, parents or themselves. Encouragement and support for continued study was in very short supply.

Play

All of the girls had vivid memories of play in childhood. Even when working with their families in the fields they found ways to steal a few minutes to play. One child who was not permitted to play found ways to disappear from her mother's view, to give herself a few minutes to play. Playing enabled the girls to develop enjoyable relationships and make connections with other children. Play called upon their creative energies and they were very inventive in crafting dolls and toys from natural objects. In one of the armed movements, if the girls arrived early in camp they made mud ovens like ones from their childhood play. As expressed by these girls, play may be the universal language of hope.

Reasons for Joining

> *"They found me amongst the rocks, pounding maize, and alone. There were 15 of them, all with weapons… they just take you.… Leave the corn they said."*
>
> — Child Soldier, Angola

The reasons for joining apply to girls who were not abducted, coerced and/or gang pressed into joining. According to Brett,[2] children are more vulnerable to recruitment if the children are poor and disadvantaged, they inhabit or live near a conflict zone and are separated from their family. All of these characteristics apply to the girl soldiers in this study. Some factors increased the chances of involuntary joining, such as:

- being at home for long hours without adult protection, and
- being sent for family supplies in groups of women or girls or going alone and being ambushed.

There are additional reasons shared by the girls for voluntarily joining armed groups:

- not being given a voice in decisions that would alter their life;
- being physically and/or emotionally abused by siblings or parents;
- being marginalized in a new family structure that involved step-parents; and
- living in poverty.

[2] Rachel Brett, Margaret McCallin and Rhona O'Shea, Children: The Invisible Soldiers, April 1996

Training and Life as a Child Soldier

"To kill the babies they would hold them by the feet and bang their heads on a tree and the child was dead ... hold another and bang it against another tree and it was dead. It was not worth using up ammunition to kill the children ... that is why they killed them by banging their heads against the tree."

— Child Soldier, Angola

Many experienced being in the midst of fierce battles that were terrifying. They all feared that their life could be ended at any moment. They were given weapons and trained to use them to kill. They all feared being captured because they were taught the enemy would torture them if they were captured or if they surrendered. Their sense of loss and grief was profound and relentless. Many were forced to be perpetrators of violence and kill. They were pushed to the limits of their physical and emotional capacity. They were deprived of sleep and proper health care. They provided slave labor carrying the supplies, water, food and ammunition. They served as cooks and laundresses for the officers and troops. They were used as the protectors going ahead to detonate landmines, detect enemy troops and serve as bodyguards for the officers. Their memories are filled with images and sounds of horrific violence. Their life was of less value than a commander's, a gun or a communication radio.

Reconsideration of the Decision

"You cannot believe things that you do not know, but you would believe what you saw."

— Child Soldier, Philippines

All of the girls recognize the high personal price they paid for participating in an armed movement. This was true for the girls, who were abducted, coerced, gang-pressed or who joined willingly. They realized in retrospect what it had prevented them from doing, such as continuing their education. They questioned if staying at home and accepting decisions that were imposed upon them was any worse than being in the movement. They reevaluated if their family circumstances, however abusive, were worse than being in the movement. They felt guilty for not having been able to help their families during the period of time they were with the movement. They realized that their life had been changed forever.

Sense of Self

"Who am I now? I have an identity card, which does not mean anything. I am confused."

— Child Soldier, Sri Lanka

These girls exhibited a strong sense of self or they would not have survived. They often felt broken and alone but ultimately not severed from some fundamental sense of who they were or who they could become. Even when stripped of the outward signs of their identity and forced to participate in abusive relationships they were able to maintain some sense of self. They often acted fearless when terrified, and stood up for themselves in the face of

brutal treatment and consequences. They lived with contradictions and intense feelings of ambivalence about supporting the movement and being recognized for their accomplishments and at the same time being perpetrators of violence. They wanted to be someone and they longed to be valued. The girls continue to pursue life recognizing that once others knew that they had served in armed movements, even when it was against their will, they would be viewed as untrustworthy and generally diminished in the minds of others. They struggled with who they understood themselves to be and how others conceived of them. For example, others were afraid of them when they learned they had been part of an armed group.

The girls in the Philippines and Colombia also gained a stronger sense of self because they learned how to participate in criticism groups and evaluate the ways in which the men and women in the movement related to one another. They also learned how to teach and developed skills they could use in civilian life. The girls would have gone back to the movement if they could avoid the armed struggle.

Time and the Future

"A soldier told me in the movement I would just die without a future."

— Child soldier, Philippines

All of the girls live in fear that members of the armed group in which they served will recognize them and bring harm to them or to their family. In spite of this fear they all envision themselves moving into the future, even though the future presents them with many uncertainties and fearful thoughts. They want to be able to define their future and participate in the decisions that are going to affect their lives. They all want to be in the right relationship with at least some member of their family. They want the wars to end and the fighting to stop. They are not focused on seeking revenge although they have angry, raw and unresolved feelings about their experiences as child soldiers. They want to do something constructive with their life such as return to school, participate in skill- or vocational training or begin a small business that will enable them to be more self-sufficient. They also express a strong desire to make a contribution and help others, primarily children and their own mothers. They wanted to make amends for the things they had done that they knew were wrong. This focused primarily on their participation in village massacres, raids and for being perpetrators of violence.

WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE?

"I begin to think a lot and my heart seems to become tired"

— Child soldier, Angola

There are Common Human Needs:

While this study represents a small number of girl soldiers it gives voice to their experiences in depth. These stories and descriptions took place in four countries and represent three continents. Even though the geographical distance between the countries is great and the cultures offer great variation, the human dimensions revealed are common for the girls studied. This study makes vivid the ways in which the girls are united in their needs as children. This unity is much greater than what separates them by virtue of their culture or geographical distance.

These common human needs include the need to be

- Valued; to be worthy as a human being
- Part of a family
- Respected
- Heard
- Able to participate in the decisions that affect their lives

We Must Also Address the Specific Needs of the Individual Girl

There are two aspects to this consideration: the internal conflict that a girl may feel and the variety of experiences she lived through.

The voices of the girls reveal internal conflicting feelings that confuse them. Others working with the girls will need to be sensitive to these conflicts as the girls attempt to address the source of the discomfort in their own lives as they go forward. An example of the internal conflicting feelings is the girls' longing to return home and their fear of rejection by their family or community. A second example is their desire to feel comfortable and at peace with their own self and their sorrow and guilt over violent acts committed.

The girls also had different experiences as a child soldier. Many of the girls served in combat, were perpetrators of violence, were used as sexual slaves, danced for the troops before battles, were cooks, served as radio communicators, carried supplies, stole food and supplies from villages, preached to the masses. While there are human needs that are common to all the girls, the specific needs with regard to demobilization and reintegration will vary based on their unique experiences, the length of time spent as a child soldier and the situation into which reintegration is taking place.

It is Important to Understand the Nature of the Experience

Becoming a Child Soldier is a Process

Having the identity of a soldier evolved for the girls – it is a process. This was true for girls that were forced to join or for those that volunteered to join an armed group.

Becoming a child soldier is a process and not an event. This was true of girls who were forced or volunteered to join an armed group. Five of the girls from Sri Lanka joined "voluntarily" and one was abducted. The five girls from Angola were either gang pressed or abducted. All six girls from the Philippines were "voluntary" participants and the six girls from Colombia volunteered. Voluntary must be understood in the context of pressures placed upon them from friends and external circumstances, as well as internal pressures heightened by their need to escape from some form of oppression in their life at the time they volunteered.

In some instances the event of receiving a uniform gave them an immediate sense of status and belonging. It did not, however guarantee the philosophical or psychological identity of soldier. Being issued a weapon was usually a sign of recognition that the girl had been more fully embraced as being one of the armed group. This recognition further confirmed the girl's identity as a soldier by the armed group. The girls who received weapons and weapons training were advanced in their identity as a soldier. Their identity as a soldier increased as they were taught the political and philosophical positions of the armed group. It was further enhanced in the Philippines and Colombia as they went out to "teach the masses" – a term used by the girls to indicate doing public education with the population.

The ultimate identity as soldier in Sri Lanka would have been swallowing the cyanide capsule they had been issued. It both confirmed and ended their identity as soldier. They received the highest "hero's welcome" after their death for this final act as a soldier. The identity of soldier for the girls in Angola was more the identity formed by a person who is a slave and used by others for chores, entertainment, protection and sex.

Girls were used as soldiers in each conflict area in a great variety of ways. Girls within the same armed group were given different orders and tasks, thus making each girl's way of knowing and identifying herself as a child soldier different. A day in the life of a girl child soldier was created for each conflict area. This day incorporates the different tasks that were reflected in the girls' voices. Thus it does not represent one girls experience. The day in the life of

a girl in Sri Lanka is presented at the end of this summary as an example.

It is important that we understand the identity of the child. A child who was used as a sexual slave sees herself differently from a child who was given a gun and was sent into combat. The girls who communicated the politics and philosophy of a movement had a different identity than the girls who only served as cooks. Girls who were given voices in decisions had a different identify from those that just took orders.

WHAT ARE KEY RISK FACTORS IN THE CHOICE TO BECOME A CHILD SOLDIER?

Three risks have been identified and reviewed:

- Poor and disadvantaged
- Inhabiting a combat zone
- Separated from their family

These risks were present for the girls studied and played an important role in their becoming a child soldier.

The girls in these interviews also shared other factors that were important in their becoming child soldiers. These additional risks include:

- Dropping out of school
- Not having a voice in decisions that affect their life
- Being marginalized in new family structures
- Failure to be protected by the family

Dropping out of School

"The teachers there used to hit us when we didn't bring our homework. I went out with my mum and helped her to sell cassava and plantain, other days I stayed at home and looked after my brothers and sisters."

— Child soldier, Colombia

Girls dropped out of school because the teachers were often punitive and the girls felt humiliated or they could not reach the high standards and expectations set by their parents. They also dropped out of school to provide for the survival needs of their family e.g., helping to provide food or being responsible for a younger sibling or an aging or sick family member. They often did not have money for tuition or supplies and had to drop out of school. Frequently the school was a great distance from the home village and they had to walk long distances. Public transport was very uncertain.

Not Having a Voice in Decisions That Affect Their Life

"About ten days before the day of the marriage, I started to plan to leave the house. I waited, tried to convince my parents, they were very adamant and would not listen to me. They never listened. The day before the marriage everything was ready. I ran away. I ran away to escape a marriage I didn't like."

— Child soldier, Sri Lanka

Girls were sent, without being included in the deci-

sion, to live with relatives or sent off to work as domestic servants. They also were not willing to participate in arranged marriages and would flee to the armed group rather than marry at their parents' insistence.

Being Marginalized in New Family Structures

> *"One of my mother's men tried to abuse me when I was younger. He tried to abuse me and because I didn't let him he got angry. He used to fight with my mum and he used to fight with me ... so I didn't want to live with my mum anymore."*
>
> — Child soldier, Colombia

When a parent remarried, the girl may have felt rejected by the new step-parent. They were often abused or mistreated in the newly created family structure by the step-parent as well as their birth parent. They no longer felt included in the family.

Failure to be protected by the family

> *"I was afraid of my mum. When my mother left she took my other sister and I stayed behind looking after the children. She left me with my dad, my dad also left and I was left alone in the house and that was when the guerrillas appeared."*
>
> — Child soldier, Colombia

Girls were left at home to watch younger siblings without an adult. The girls were emotionally and physically exhausted, an easy prey for armed groups. Girls and women were used to perform tasks for the family such as walking long distances to collect salt or working in the field with other women and girls. They were vulnerable to ambush by armed groups.

WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT WHAT WE DO?

The demobilization process must move the girls into a psychological place where they can begin to claim, in small pieces, who they wish to become within the realistic possibilities afforded to them by their country.

We need as a world community to offer a way into the future as well as some continuity with their past. These girls have been both victim and perpetrator. We must support them as they move away from the horrific memories and experiences and stand in solidarity with them as they begin to make their own claims on the future. They have claimed and verbalized their desire to care for others, especially children and their families. They have stated they want to do something useful with their life. They have angry feelings about the enemy who killed their comrades, but they are not seeking revenge as much as they are seeking to live a life without constant fear and fighting.

For these girls to begin to reconstruct their life there must be some level of mutual reconciliation with their families and their village or the community where they are going to return. Demobilization and reintegration programs must work with the girl, her family (if they are still alive and can be located or traced), and the village from which she came. Demobilization and reintegration programs must also begin to provide the girls with new experiences that will change their identity from soldier and begin to build their identity as children worthy of new life.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE THEMES

The following recommendations should only be considered in consultation with the girl soldiers.

Family Relationships

Aid each girl in trying to locate or trace some member of her family or a relative and work with the girl and her family, especially her mother, to bring about some level of reconciliation. When family reconciliation is not possible, because there may no longer be a family, work with each girl to help identify at least one meaningful adult where a significant relationship could be established.

Festivals and Religion

Festivals and religious observances played a meaningful part in the lives of the girls before becoming a child soldier and their reinstitution into the girl's life can provide healing and a meaningful connection to the past, to her family and community. The girl should be encouraged to identify those festivals and religious observances that are meaningful to her.

Education

The girls all recognize the value of education or some form of job or skills training. This could mean returning to school or being mentored in how to set up and maintain a small business. Educational and training programs will need to be funded, individualized and appropriate to their grade level and/or their ability to read and write.

Obstacles to education will have to be addressed, such as family resistance regarding the girl's attendance, money to pay for tuition, supplies and clothes, having to walk or travel prohibitively long distances and the availability of schools and teachers. Continued participation in education or training will be dependent on the girl being included in the educational decisions that will affect her. It will also depend on being encouraged and not punished for failure to achieve as they struggle with elementary concepts when their chronological age suggests they should know more and be performing at a higher level.

Play

Provide time for play. Having free time in which to play provides an opportunity just to be, where the demands and expectation of daily life are greatly reduced. Play can also provide relief from stress. Activities pursued in play should be chosen by the girl with guidelines and limits that keep the play from becoming too aggressive.

Reasons for Joining

Work with the girl's family to try and establish a way for the girl to be reconnected to some member of her family. Assist the girls in establishing meaningful relationships. Girls joined to avoid abusive family relationships, escape from poverty and to relieve the pain of social isolation. Listen and encourage the girls to talk and think through their values and ideals. Some joined for idealistic reasons such as helping the common people and have a better life, and later learned that what they thought was a just cause can be betrayed by violent, warring behavior. Help them evaluate other ways of bringing about change.

Training and Life as a Child Soldier

Provide ways to return to girls their history, their names, memories of their childhood, their families and their villages. Encourage them in reclaiming who they are. Those who joined because they were looking for a family may wish help in mourning their loss of belonging. When requested, work with each girl in her desire and ability to look at the violent acts she has committed and the violence that has been directed toward her.

Reconsideration of the Decision

Establish ways for the girls to regain faith in their decision-making ability. They can be given responsibility for a series of small but meaningful decisions where there is a high probability of their choice leading to a good outcome. Allow them to address their sense of loss and disappointment.

Enable them to acknowledge the lessons they learned and help them put these lessons to good use. Encourage them in their continued questioning so they can come to a fuller understanding of how they have gained new insights based on their own experiences.

Sense of Self

Provide safe discussion forums, defined by the girls, where they can begin to build their sense of trust in their own self and in other people through frank communication with others around them. Those who have been sexually abused should have the opportunity to address the ways they were used as sexual objects. Provide for their basic needs (e.g., safety, education, productive activity, food, shelter, clothing) so they feel worthy of care and protection. Respect their individual capacities.

Time and the Future

Offer the girls a safe haven for a period of time but do not keep them institutionalized. Provide safe centers to which they can return when they recognize they need help, where they know they will be listened to and where they will be respected. Work with the girls to help them think about the decisions they are making and the implication and meaning of those decisions. Support them in taking concrete steps in implementing some of their future objectives such as returning to school, skills training for establishing a small business, working on behalf of others, such as caring for children or returning to their village and family when possible.

THERE WERE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE GIRL SOLDIERS ON THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interviews provided a broad understanding of the girls' experience of being child soldiers. They also provided information on the interview process. Comments by the girls have resulted in an understanding of how they viewed the interview process. Two areas are considered: the consent forms and the interview. Most of the information on the interview process came from the interviews in Sri Lanka, Philippines and Colombia.

Affirmation of Informed Consent

Many of the girls showed heightened interest in the consent form. They took note of every word. They often went through the form repeatedly, reading it in silence. If they could not read, when the consent form was read to them, they asked for it to be read several times. They raised questions about its implications for them and for their family. They specifically asked if it would pose any danger now or in the future for them or their family. They were very interested to know how the material would be used.

Conclusions based on these observations:

- They recognize that what they do may have serious implications for meaningful others in their life; they now experience themselves in relationship to their family, their community, etc.
- They took seriously what they were being asked to do and felt responsible for the decision they were making in participating in this study; they were being thoughtful and careful about the decision they were in the process of making.
- They want to participate and take an active part in the decisions that are going to affect their life.
- They want their voice to be heard and taken into account .

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices are recommended when using consent forms for research or other purposes.

- Consent forms must be used and written at a level that the girl can understand.
- If she cannot read, the form must be read to her with opportunity for her to have it re-read and for her to ask questions until she feels comfortable with the document.
- She needs to be told of the value of the research, how it will be used, and assured of her right to withdraw at any time without suffering any adverse consequences.

- Care must be taken to fully inform and allow girls to participate in decisions that are going to affect their life.
- Confidentiality must be assured.
- A written summary based on the experience of girls who have been through the interview process could be provided so she could read and evaluate for herself how the process had helped, hindered and/or had been of value to others.

Interviews

In the beginning of the interview process the girls described feeling nervous and afraid of the process and about giving correct answers to the questions. They were reassured that there were no wrong answers and everything they said would be accepted. Some exhibited curiosity about the laptop computer and the cassette recorder. One girl wanted to review the questions that were going to be asked in advance. Another wanted to know in more depth the purpose of the interviews. Another asked if she could pretend the interview was for the media so that it would be more entertaining. Most of the girls indicated a strong desire to tell their story as they had wanted to do this for some time. They said it was a relief to go to the memories and be able to express and master the process of relating to the happy and sad moments in their life.

One girl stated, "I was a bit scared, as I did not know why you people were coming to meet us but as you went along it looked not too bad." They thought it would be useless and nothing would come out of it and that it would be another waste of time. They found however that the interviews brought some clarification to their experience and enabled them to look at their life even when that was difficult for them. For example, "All of us thought that it will be like everybody talking and talking but nothing happens, they go away and do not care about us. This has been different. It has helped me in many ways. First of all I went down memory lane and found out why I ran away." Another girl offered the following comment on the interview process: "As for me I can see myself clearly this has helped and given me encouragement to go ahead and improve my life. I can now face my future with confidence. In a way this has been useful. I am able to see what I have learned through all these experiences."

Two other girls made the following enlightening comments to the interviewer: "After talking to you, lots of thoughts went through my mind. In a way I was happy I could talk about all this to both of you. I do not talk much because I cannot trust anyone. All the time I spend here is either with the machine or with the radio." And "I have to talk to you. I have not told my story to anyone else and I must now see you and talk to you. I wanted to talk to someone; finally I have got this chance. When I saw you I thought I could tell everything. Now my burden is a bit less. Thank you." And finally one of the girls said to the interviewer, "Please listen to me; it would be good if you listen to me."

Conclusions based on these observations:

The interviews:

- were entered into with some amount of fear
- provided many girls the opportunity to tell their story
- provided an avenue for beginning a life review
- enabled the girls to begin to evaluate the future
- helped the girls to see their self in a broader perspective
- increased their capacity to trust another person
- contributed to an increase in their self-confidence
- provided the beginning of the integration of past, present and future
- provided a space and time for physical and emotional safety
- helped them see they could be valued and important to others
- enabled them to realize they were not alone
- helped them recognize that others could treat them respectfully

Based on these conclusions the following options and choices are recommended when interviewing

and for demobilization and reintegration programs:

- Make available trained sensitive interviewers to conduct in-depth individual interview sessions with each girl soldier who wishes to participate. Participation is voluntary.
- The interviews should take place in an environment that assures physical and emotional safety.
- Multiple interview sessions should be offered and the spacing of the interview sessions would be decided by the girl in dialogue with the interviewer.
- The interview permits the girl to review her life in a broad context where she can take into account where she has been, where she is now and what she sees herself moving toward in the future.
- The interviewer acts with due respect for what the girl wishes to recall, when she wishes to recall information and at what pace.
- The interviewer allows the depth of the interview to be determined by the girl.
- The interviewer does not focus on the girl's strengths or weaknesses but rather listens intently and hears and listens without judgment.
- Confidentiality should be assured.
- Resource people should be available if the interviewee feels a need for follow-up to the interview to deal with emotions that may arise from the interview process.

A Day in the Life of A Girl Child Soldier in Sri Lanka

The construction of a day in the life is a composite taken from the descriptions of the training, duties and daily activities taken from all the interviews from the girls in Sri Lanka.

The training offered each young woman was essentially the same. From their descriptions, the training involved was very rigorous and demanding. There was an initial period of three to five months called basic training and then a more expansive period of training that lasted for five to six months of more rigorous training. Superimposed on the training was additional work that involved becoming one with a wooden "dummy gun."

There was a specific training schedule that was carried out seven days a week. Very strict brothers and sisters in the movement carried out all the training. Punishment for failure to comply or inability to keep up and perform at the required level of activity resulted in being forced to do extra "rounds" of the exercises. If you could not keep up you were given a heavy rifle to hold above your head while performing sitting-to-standing exercises. At the same time you were randomly hit and kicked. These body blows were instituted without mercy.

4:00 or 5:00 a.m.	Morning ablutions: Older sisters of the movement oriented the girls and told them where they should go for morning ablutions. They were under orders to use water sparingly and to protect the water supplies at all times. The older sisters acted as guards over them and enforced the policies of the movement.
7:00 to 8:00 a.m.	Breakfast
8:00 to 12:00 noon	Demanding physical exercises that included: weight lifting,jumping, running, crawling over sharp terrain, karate, rope climbing and practice in climbing heights. (One short break was permitted for a drink of water.)
12:30 p.m.	Lunch Foods at different times included: soup, marmite, eggs (drink them raw), bread, lentils, rice and curry, apples, water and, on some special occasions, ice cream.
1:30 to 4:00 p.m.	Training in special skills that included: map reading, identification of particular geographical locations, use of the compass, knot tying, use of special codes, use of the walkie talkie and how to shoot and kill animals. Each girl was also asked to write a personal report about herself.
4:00 p.m.	Tea
5:00 to 6:00 p.m.	Parade
6:00 p.m.	Gather to say oath
10:00 p.m.	Sent to bed. They slept in small sheds on the ground in sacks (fertilizer bags) without pillows. Sometimes they used their clothes bag for a pillow.

When sick or injured they were taken care of and given medicine. They would be taken to see the doctor and may even be sent to a camp hospital.

The girls also said that nobody could have love affairs or sex. It was considered a major offense and severe disciplinary action would be taken if these rules were broken. (They did not indicate if or how often this rule was transgressed.)

Once the girls were in the armed movement they were given:

- clothes that included a clothes bag, two sets of dresses (used to deceive the government soldiers and other non-military people), a green striped uniform, jeans, shirts and shoes
- necessities during days of menstruation
- 3 months of basic training
- 5 months of rigorous training
- a wooden "dummy gun," that was always with them; it became a constant companion, they were to become one with the gun
- a real gun when it was believed they were not afraid of a gun and if they were perceived as being ready to go to war. This was viewed and experienced as a major achievement
- a cyanide capsule necklace on black thread that had to be worn when going into battle. They were told to take it before being captured. It made the girls feel safe because it was a guarantee that the enemy could not capture them alive and abuse or harass them. If they gave their cyanide necklace to anyone they were immediately suspected of being a traitor

They were taught:

- to be loyal to the movement by the leader
- that it was a great honor to die a hero's death. If they died in battle they would be promoted to a high rank and given a hero's death. If they returned alive they would be given special privileges and on some occasions see their family
- that if they were captured by the enemy they would be brutally tortured
- not to kill the enemy if they could take them alive
- to take the cyanide capsule just before being captured
- how to escape if caught
- to kill the enemy
- how to enter enemy territory and collect information
- how to conduct night raids (often not knowing who they were killing)
- how to use real weapons, guns, and grenades
- how to write detailed reports
- how to go into the village or enemy territory in disguise with guns in their trouser leg or dressed in dresses and jewelry. When the government army was checking their identity card they could shoot them at close range.
- to be the keeper of detailed records and track all materials as store keepers. They recorded the number and types of gun, types and quantities of ammunition (given as used and returned when not used), even cleaning materials

They were forced or ordered to:

- kill the enemy or be punished or disabled
- walk long distances without food
- serve as bodyguards and shields to the leaders at camp and in battle to keep them from being killed
- to continue on a mission even when they were covered with boils or scabs
- watch their fellow soldiers convulse after taking the cyanide capsule and observe them being shot (by their own side) if they did not take cyanide before capture so that they would not be able to give away the secrets

They discovered:

- how revengeful and filled with rage (at the time it was happening) they became when they saw their own fellow comrades killed by the enemy. It made them want to kill the enemy in return.
- they did not want to kill innocent people (although when they were being watched they did kill innocent people in the massacres) and they attempted to find ways to overlook civilians especially children who were hiding from them when on raids.
- how much they wanted to save ordinary people and found ways to do so when they were sent into villages.

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