

Vol. 13, No. 1 (2007)

THE POST-CONFLICT TREATMENT OF CHILD SOLDIERS: THE CASE OF LIBERIA

By Lindsay Shorr

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of child soldiers has historically been addressed by international instruments and institutions with a uniformly preventative stance. Such a Universalist approach has mainly defined child soldiers by age and applied an unvarying standard of prevention in response to every occurrence of child soldiering. This article takes issue with this universalism as neither deterring the use of children in conflict nor providing appropriate post-conflict reintegration of child soldiers. The article instead provides a critical pluralist approach to the post-conflict treatment of child soldiers. In particular, the discussion focuses on the potential options for handling former Liberian child combatants who fought in the Liberian civil war. The case of Liberia poses an opportunity to institutionalize the first active juvenile chamber for the prosecution and rehabilitation of former child soldiers. Such a chamber—modeled after the framework set forth by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in response in Sierra Leone—would incorporate principles of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) to encourage both domestic political transition and a changed understanding of what is a child soldier and what constitutes their appropriate post-conflict treatment.