

CHILDREN AS TOOLS OF WAR IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA: LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND THE NEED FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

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ABSTRACT

In 2009, Boko Haram, a sectarian, extremist group, opposed to Western education, and driven by violent ideology, launched an armed struggle against the federal government of Nigeria. Widespread killings, destruction of property and displacement of people, have characterized the ongoing conflict. It has also impacted negatively on children, as many have been killed, mistreated, orphaned, exploited and conscripted by insurgents and pro-government forces to fight. This paper probes the recruitment, use and roles of children in the conflict, which has conferred on them the fluid status of victims and perpetrators. It has been found that the insurgents and pro-government militia have recruited children below 15 years of age and engaged them in combat and non-combat duties; and those suspected of links to the insurgents have been detained in squalid conditions by the military. This has violated international humanitarian law (IHL) and internationally recognized rights of children in circumstances amounting to war crimes. The paper recommends immediate cessation of child conscription; release of those detained; and prosecution of persons responsible for the violations, preferably at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Keywords: Nigeria Insurgency, Child Soldiers, Tool of War, Humanitarian Law, War Crimes, Tool of War.

INTRODUCTION

The outburst of public violence triggered by sectarian, fanatical and ideologically deviant movements is not new among Nigerians, having survived their onslaughts in the past (Isichei, 1987). However, unlike past conflicts, which had been sporadic and short-lived, the Boko Haram insurgency has been protracted and enduring, with a great toll on human and material resources (Walker, 2012). The group Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad, also known as Boko Haram (Western education is sinful), was birthed in 2002 as a non-violent, sectarian movement led by Mohammed Yusuf (Onuoha, 2014; Walker, 2012). A face-off between devotees of the sect and Nigerian government security personnel, following the death of Yusuf in police custody, resulted in a violent confrontation in Octy 2009 in Maiduguri, Borno State (Onuoha, 2014; Aljazeera, 2009; Obateru et al, 2009; Taiwo, 2009). The ensuing conflict quickly engulfed three states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa (Daily Trust, 2019). What started as a skirmish soon assumed an unmanageable dimension and eventually acquired the status of a non-international armed conflict, which required the application of international rules of engagement within the purview of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Additional (AP) II of 1977 (Ibanga & Archibong, 2018). The violent confrontation has spanned 13 years, and without any hope of ending soon, has caused massive humanitarian crises, loss of thousands of lives, unquantifiable destruction of property and dislocation of millions of people (Montclos, 2014; United States

Department of State, 2014; Okpaga et al, 2012: 86-89; Nwokolo, 2020). The attacks, killings and destruction of property spilled over into Cameroon and Niger republics (Foyou et al, 2018; Nnam, 2018).

A unique feature of the insurgency has been the overwhelming use of child soldiers. Thousands of underage fighters have been recruited by insurgents and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), a pro-government militia, created in 2013 to support the armed forces. UNICEF puts the number of conscripted child soldiers at more than 8,000 since the inception of the conflict in 2009. Children have been major participants in the conflict in northeast Nigeria, having been conscripted by the opposing sides (Onapajo, 2020; Bukarti, 2019). In that respect, they constitute a critical asset in sustaining and prolonging the insurgency (Jorgensen, 2017). The unwavering determination, persistent efforts, and resilience displayed by the insurgents have presented the Nigerian military with an immense challenge in their arduous mission to quell the insurgency. Following international condemnation of its engagement of children in the conflict, the CJTF signed an Action Plan in 2017 committing it to end the practice (UNICEF, 2017). In one swoop, CJTF discharged 894 children, among them 106 girls and subsequently released more than 2,000 children (UNICEF, 2018; Archibong, 2019). This was greeted with the subsequent delisting of the group by the UN from the list of organizations recruiting child soldiers (UNICEF, 2017).

Arguably, the conflict has been protracted because of the unrelenting recruitment and use of children, and the accompanying advantages their participation fetches. The following questions are therefore relevant concerning the recruitment of children to fight in the conflict: Why are the armed groups endeared to child soldiers? And what are the obligations of the Nigerian government to children recruited to fight in the conflict? Using the socio-legal approach, this work explores the incident of child soldiers and provides a succinct analysis of the factors propelling their engagement by the warring parties. The work further interrogates the roles assigned to children; the legal protections offered to them with the obligations of the Nigerian government; and the lack of accountability for recruiters of child soldiers.

Conceptual Considerations

Like other vulnerable groups, the law protects the rights of children in peacetime and times of armed conflict. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as any person under the age of 18 years (Art. 1). A child soldier therefore is a person under the age of 18, who participates in an armed conflict (Haer, 2019). He or she may be conscripted or used by a regular armed force or armed group of any caliber (Kaplan, 2005). In armed conflicts, the CRC enjoins parties to abstain from recruiting any person below 15 years of age (Art. 38[3]). The 1949 Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols of 1977 set 15 as the minimum age for participation in armed conflict. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Art. 22[2]) and the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (Arts. 1 and 3) outlaw the recruitment of children. Rules 136 and 137 of customary international humanitarian law also prohibit the recruitment of children. The legal restrictions notwithstanding, the inclusion of children in armed conflicts is a recurrent episode and has become a global nightmare for governments, policymakers, researchers and human rights activists (Kaplan, 2005).

The child soldier phenomenon thrives under certain situations, such as those of social chaos and preclusion, the collapse of the state, economic doldrums and ethnic or religious strife, among other factors (Akeson, 2017). Most conscription is done forcibly, and often achieved through abductions, coercion and subjection to abuses. Enlistment could be voluntary when a child joins militant groups by choice. Their choices may be influenced by social, political, economic or ideological considerations. This could arise from family ties to armed groups and felt the need to honour their families or countries by aligning with

them in times of conflict (Meshelemiah, 2019; 7. Associated Press, 2015).

Some theories have been articulated to explain the practice (ICRC, 2012). Armed groups recruit children into their ranks due largely to some perceived advantages. Children may join armed groups as a strategy for survival and safety guarantees (ICRC, 2012). This becomes a platform for them to address issues of hunger, poverty, unemployment and other economic deprivations, as they are sometimes paid for their services (Onuoha, 2014; Schauer & Elbert, 2010). They may join armed groups to exact vengeance for abuses, rights violations, historical injustices and political afflictions.

Children are easily adaptable, indoctrinated and brainwashed and less likely to question the actions of adults (Schauer & Elbert, 2010). They are also radicalized by violent extremists and violent ideologies propagated by armed groups (Onuoha, 2014). Children can easily be swindled and manipulated and more susceptible to greater obedience than adults (Meshelemiah, 2019). This might be essentially due to their level of cognitive development. Demographically, the large number of children in war-torn countries makes them readily available for deployment (Schauer & Elbert, 2010). This has further been compounded by the large-scale availability of small arms and light weapons, which children can easily operate in conflict situations. Another advantage offered by child soldiers is their stamina, resilience, and fearlessness (Schauer & Elbert, 2010; 8. Barna, 2014). Tactically, they can easily slip through and attack enemy lines unnoticed. They are cheaper and easier to maintain in terms of needs, as they are allocated fewer resources (Schauer & Elbert, 2010).

The recruitment of children into the armed forces constitutes a crime punishable under international law (McBride, 2014). To give effect to the proscription, international law has devised a mechanism for holding violators accountable through prosecution and punishment. Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), child recruitment is a crime for which the perpetrators are culpable. The doctrine of accountability therefore ensures that persons involved in the practice are prosecuted in national or international courts (Pejic, 2002). It acts as a deterrent and serves to promote justice, peace and reconciliation.

Why armed groups in Nigeria recruit children

Children's unsuspecting disposition and perceived innocence are exploited by armed groups to perpetrate heinous crimes most regrettably (Happold, 2009). They are roped into activities far beyond their cognitive inclination and sense of rationality, due to their tender age and inability to fathom the consequences of their actions. Children's susceptibility makes them prone to exploitation by adults. Their enlistment in northeast Nigeria has been influenced by various socio-economic conditions that heightened their susceptibleness and exposed them to flowery propaganda (Onuoha, 2014). Factors such as illiteracy inaccessibility to education; unemployment and social injustice; high level of poverty lack of proper care and upbringing; and indoctrinations of various kinds have driven children into the receptive arms of insurgents (Jorgensen, 2019; Onuoha, 2014). The Almajiri system in the north exposes male children to pitiable conditions of poverty and hunger and leaves them vulnerable to indoctrination, recruitment or abduction by violent groups (Young, 2019).

The armed groups have radicalized and indoctrinated children into believing their extremist ideology (Associated Press, 2015; Onuoha, 2014), many of whom were easily convinced, beguiled and brainwashed by promises of martyrdom (Starecheski, 2015; Kajijo & Kaina, 2020). The young conscripts were misguided and misinformed that they were trained, equipped and deployed to go and kill pagans (Topol, 2017). Reports from ex-Boko Haram child soldiers revealed that they were sent for induction into the group's brainwashing education programme (Okamura, 2019), where they were infused with violent teachings, ideologies and extremism.

The groups have employed diverse conscription methods, with mass abductions emerging as the most notable among them. Most of the children were abducted at schools, playgrounds and homes and forcefully conscripted into the war (Lawal, 2019). The high point was the abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls in 2014, an act that attracted worldwide condemnation (Reliefweb, 2015; Arai-Takahashi, 2014). Some of the girls have never been found and are believed to have been deployed as suicide

bombers and combatants (Mail & Guardian, 2015; Ripples Nigeria, 2017). The abducted children underwent compulsory military training in Sambisa Forest (Lawal, 2019) before being forced to ingest cocaine, heroin and other hard drugs. Often, they were severed from family bonds and instilled with a robust, passionate and inseparable tie to the groups and their cause (Associated Press, 2015). Bukarti (2019) explains the experience of a boy who was recruited at the age of 14 and had committed many crimes, including being made to kill his mother. Outcast, unschooled and indoctrinated, the children become wholly reliant on their guns and taskmasters (Lawal, 2019). Whereas most of the conscripts were abducted, some of them joined voluntarily, to avenge the deaths of their parents and loved ones. Cases also emerged of parents who handed out their daughters to Boko Haram to serve as fighters to sustain the insurgency (Ibrahim & Agency Report, 2017). Boko Haram and ISWAP have operational bases and camps in the Sambisa forest, where nearly all of the children are housed (Lawal, 2019), and where they are trained to be cold-blooded murderers (Powell, 2015; Kaplan, 2015). They are also instructed on how to shoot an AK-47 rifle, load ammunition and aim at targets, and use bombs (Amnesty International, 2015; Topol, 2017).

Children as tools of war

Boko Haram imposed a period of brutality using children as its main tool of war (Kaplan, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2013; ICRC, 2012) with many serving in combat and non-combat capacity (, 2019). A sizeable number were forced to carry out domestic chores before being groomed to use guns and explosives. As combatants, child soldiers are employed in front-line fighting, to carry out the execution of hostages or prisoners and to perform terrorist attacks (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Children have served as foot soldiers and joined in deadly missions as they can be manipulated without difficulty and made to operate in the public arena with minimal apprehension (Jorgensen, 2019; Reliefweb, 2015). In that capacity, they have witnessed and participated in large-scale violence, while at the same time eliciting the compassion of government forces that will be withdrawn and reluctant to attack them. Child soldiers are used for tactical operations, often to launch initial attacks before reinforcement with skillful fighters (CRACO, 2015). Strategically, the employment of juveniles helps to boost national and international depiction of the groups (Kriel, 2017; Daily Trust, 2019).

Children have been turned into weapons and employed to carry out suicide bombings, with the age of the youngest bomber put at seven (The Borgent Project, 2018; Kriel, 2017; Kaplan, 2015a). UNICEF alleges that suicide bombing has become systematic and widespread, and young girls are the main favourites for this assignment, the rationale being their unlikelihood of attention and suspicion. This created fear and mistrust, as a suspicious-looking girl was lynched and her body burnt by a mob in Bauchi, northeast Nigeria (Kaplan, 2015b). By August, 2017, 83 children had been utilized as 'human bombs', four times higher than the number in 2016 (PBS News, 2017; UNICEF, 2020). In the course of their combat role, children have killed thousands of people and injured several others as well as participated in gang rape, ceremonial sacrifice, mutilating and murdering neighbours or family members (Topol, 2017). The task of hostage execution has on numerous occasions been entrusted to them to radicalize and make them merciless and thoughtless when they are assigned deadly duties on the frontline.

In a non-combat capacity, they have been used to execute several insurgent operations including spying against state troops, manning checkpoints, running errands for the kingpins, and serving as messengers, potters, smugglers, and minesweepers. The CJTF inducted and utilized children-to-man checkpoints; conducted searches on suspects, and identified and sometimes apprehended suspected insurgents in their communities (US Department of State, 2016). Children keep the night shift of surveillance while the older members sleep, serve as informants as well and provide sundry services. Domestic chores and preparation of food are carried out by female captives (Benrey, 2016), who are also forced to serve as sex slaves or 'wives' and systematically abused (Reliefweb, 2015). Male conscripts are coerced to function as slaves to the senior members of the sect.

Child soldiers have taken an active part in the looting and evacuation of spoils and other

valuables (Topol, 2017), and have also been forced to commit heinous crimes, such as summary execution of Nigerian soldiers and other innocent captives. Children participated in flogging captives who could not recite the Quran (Powell, 2015) among many unspeakable acts.

Status of the Conflict and Obligations of The Nigerian Government

The hostilities between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government's armed forces have been adjudged a non-international armed conflict by the ICC, which triggers the application of IHL (Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, 2013; Ibanga & Archibong, 2018). Several international legal instruments offer protection to children in times of hostilities. In situations of non-international armed conflict, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Additional Protocol II of 1977 protect children from attacks and any form of indecent assault (Art. 3 common to the GCs and Art. 4, 13 APII; Happold, 2009). They are also entitled to assistance and care; and those arrested, detained or interned should be treated humanely.

International law also forbids the involvement of children in armed confrontations (Happold, 2009; Art. 4[3c] APII). The Rome Statute of the ICC includes recruitment of children or their participation in non-international armed conflict in the list of war crimes (Art. 8 [2][e][VII]). States are endowed with the obligation to enforce the law and policy relating to children affected by armed conflict, and to incorporate international norms into the national legal system, as well as institute measures to implement them (ICRC, 2012). Nigeria has subscribed to international norms outlawing the employment of children in armed encounters, having ratified the relevant conventions (Geneva Conventions Act LFN 2004). It has also evolved a normative scheme for protecting the rights of children, following the enactment of the Child Rights Act (CRA), a comprehensive federal legislation on the rights of children in 2003. It domesticates the rights of children as encapsulated in various international instruments.

Performance and Motivation at Work

Obligations of the Nigerian Government

For Oravee (2019), work performance is an effective or emotional response that can be expressed in various ways, so that the individual performance of the employee is obtained it is necessary to seek ways to raise their motivation, and this can occur both by external motivations, as internal, when individuals feel motivated with the work they are willing to put more energy in their activities this way fulfilling their activities in a more satisfactory way, however if the opposite occurs, if the individual is dissatisfied in relation to organizational activities, their motivation will be affected this way leaving to be desired in the performance of their activities (Oravee, 2019; Daily Trust, 2019).

Job performance is tied to several variables, and many of them can be by individual factors such as: an individual's personality, job qualifications, the individual's skills, their marital status, and also their orientation. Social factors such as: relationships with co-workers and managers, group work, and following norms are also among the factors that have a relationship with job performance (ORAVEE, 2019).

Another factor that encourages job performance are rewards, according to Fourie (2008 apud Zondo, 2018), a proper reward system tends to increase a team's performance. Zondo (2018) reports that a reward system such as profit sharing tends to increase team performance, since in a practice such as profit sharing, the team needs to be in tune for the achievement of results, consequently improving the achievement of established goals.

Grave Violations Against Children

The insurgency has been inundated with grave violations against children, perpetrated by all sides of the conflict (ICRC, 2019). Children witnessed deaths, killings and violence, and their involvement in gruesome activities incurred grave consequences on their physical and emotional well-being (Bukarti,

2019). Heinous crimes have been committed against children, especially widespread sexual violence within the insurgency; and of children detained in facilities run by security agents (Amnesty International, 2019; Xinhua, 2019; Read, 2017). Other abuses against young girls include forced conversion to Islam, physical, psychological and emotional abuse, forced marriage, forced labour, and forced involvement in insurgency operations.

Under IHL, persons who do not take a direct part or have refrained from participation in combat shall enjoy humane treatment in all circumstances, and this applies to child soldiers (Art. 4 AP II). The law further provides special protection for any child under 15 years of age who is arrested, detained or interned for reasons relating to hostilities (Art. 4(3)(d)). The Nigerian authorities have done nothing to enforce international obligations relating to the protection of children affected by the insurgency, thus making violations a recurrent feature in the conflict. Neither side has demonstrated any willingness to respect the basic rights of children directly involved in the conflict or affected by it. The manner of their treatment has been inconsistent with the principles of IHL and, in most cases, amounted to war crimes.

Government forces captured children they suspected of involvement in the insurgency, in the course of military and security operations, during screening procedures for internally displaced persons, and based on tips (Holmes, 2019; Bukarti, 2019). In most cases, arrests and detentions were done arbitrarily on mere suspicion that they might have collaborated with the insurgents, allegations which were not substantiated due to lack of evidence (Holmes, 2019). A boy who was caught selling foodstuff to sect members was incarcerated for two years (Holmes, 2019). Thousands of those allegedly allied to the insurgents were kept in military custody. In 2017 alone, the military detained over 1,900 children at the Maiduguri Maximum Security Prison (Holmes, 2019; Bukarti, 2019).

Serious violations occurred at government detention centers, at Maiduguri Maximum Security Prison and Giwa Barracks. Children were detained in the same facility where adults and condemned criminals were held. According to those who had been released, the conditions in detention were miserable and intolerable (Lawal, 2019). Apart from overcrowding, the prison cells were of very poor sanitary conditions. Child detainees experienced severe conditions of extreme heat, constant hunger and foul odour emitted from the only open toilet provided for them ((Holmes, 2019, Aluko, 2019).

Often characterized by beatings, torture and deaths, life in Giwa barracks was tough for children (Lawal, 2019; Aluko, 2019). A child detainee described how children in anguish yelled every night because of the harsh treatment meted out to them (Dwyer, 2017). Evacuation of dead bodies of detainees from various cells by security personnel was a regular occurrence ((Holmes, 2019). The suspected child soldiers endured bad experiences and wasted years in detention, without being apprised of the charges against them or allowed access to a lawyer or UN officials (Holmes, 2019).

Impact on Child Soldiers

Children freed from Boko Haram or released from military custody suffered from nightmares (Bukarti, 2019). Their liberation has come with a huge stigma, ostracism, trauma and other challenges (Okamura, 2019). They suffer stigmatization and are shunned by their communities. No one likes them because they were once allies of the hateful enemy. The post-militancy trauma constitutes a huge emotional and psychological strain on the psyche of the children (Lawal, 2019). Reintegration and resettlement into normal life become herculean as the conscription creates, mistrust suspicion and rejection when they are eventually freed (UNICEF, 2017).

Enlistment of children into Boko Haram and other armed groups has had a devastating impact on society and deprives them of childhood and the prospects of a bright future (Reliefweb, 2015). A major problem occasioned by the conflict is the upsurge in out-of-school children, arising from the mass abduction of students, the killing of students and teachers, and the destruction of schools (Reliefweb, 2015). It compounds the problem in a country currently ranked first in the world in terms of out-of-school children.

Dearth of Accountability For Crimes Against Children

A normative framework for child rights protection exists in Nigeria. Regrettably, violators of these rights in the current conflict have not been held accountable (Sherrie Russell-Brown, 2018). Neither the personnel of the armed forces nor members of the armed groups have been prosecuted for crimes against children. Rather than prosecute sect members, the government has offered them reprieve in the form of de-radicalization, demobilization and rehabilitation under the so-called 'Operation Safe Corridor' (Bukarti, 2019). This transpires against the backdrop of total neglect of their victims by the government, save for the intervention of UNICEF.

With the application of sanctions, persons who violate IHL during non-international armed conflicts are individually criminally responsible for their actions (Sliedregt, 2012). The position of international law was articulated after the establishment of the ad hoc tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in 1993 (Mettraux, 2010), wherein the Appeal Chamber ruled in 1995 that violations of IHL extended beyond grave breaches to a range of serious violations of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols (The Prosecutor v Dusko Tadic Case No. IT – 94 – AR 72). The Rome Diplomatic Conference also confirmed this ruling and developed detailed codifications of war crimes committed in breach of common Article 3 and Additional Protocol II, which were incorporated into the Rome Statute of the ICC. The ICC Statute defines "war crimes" to include "Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities (Art. 8(2)(a)(xxvi)).

International case law has also upheld charges of recruitment and use of children in armed conflict as a war crime (United Nations, 2017; Mann, 1987). The first such rulings emanated from the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) in 2007, which indicted the Sierra Leone government forces and rebel leaders for recruiting children as fighters (Jalloh, 2020). It was contended at the Special Court that recruitment of children was not a crime under international law at the time the act was committed. A panel of the Appeals Chamber ruled that it was indeed internationally recognized as a war crime in 1996 and that the ICC Statute of 1998, which listed child recruitment as a war crime, merely codified the existing accepted situation. The accused persons were convicted for enrolling children and actively engaging them in hostilities (Human Rights Watch, 2007). In a high profile case, child recruitment, among other charges, was also preferred against Charles Taylor, at the time president of Liberia. His plea of immunity as a serving head of state notwithstanding, the Special Court found him guilty of enlistment and use of child soldiers (Jalloh, 2020; Frulli, 2011).

The ICC has also ruled on cases of enlisting, conscripting and using children under 15 years of age in combat (Arai-Takahashi, 2019; 28. Bartolini, 2019). The first case was against Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots (The Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo ICC-01/04-01/06). His indictment included recruitment and use of child soldiers in combat duties (Inder, 2011). He was convicted and sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment. Another case to be prosecuted at the ICC for child conscription was that of Bosco Ntaganda, former Deputy Chief of Staff and commander of the Patriotic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (The Prosecutor v. Bosco Ntaganda ICC-01/04-02/06). He was sentenced to 30 years of imprisonment (ICC, 2012; Kajjo, 2020).

The ICC showed interest in Nigeria following the rebellion and attendant violence in 2009 and initiated a preparatory examination on the situation in the country since 2010 (Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, 2013). A 2015 report of the preparatory examination on the situation in Nigeria recognized eight potential cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity, which included recruitment and use of child soldiers (Ibekwe, 2015). Seven

years later, not a single indictment for child conscription has been registered.

1. Recommendations
2. Former child soldiers need psychosocial support, financial support, education and vocational training to enable them reintegrate properly into society. Concerted attempts should be made to enhance their livelihood through various support programmes.
3. There should be an immediate release of children from detention. Intermittently, former child soldiers have been freed by the security forces and handed over to the Borno State government and UNICEF in Maiduguri. It is essential for other children in military custody to be released forthwith. In this regard, UNICEF has enjoined the government to sign the Handover Protocol for children caught in the conflict, who were associated with armed groups, to facilitate their release from detention.
4. The issue of how captured child soldiers in military custody are treated depends on the perception of their roles in the conflict. There is a need to employ a human rights approach in dealing with situations involving juvenile crimes, especially when it involves terrorism.
5. Perpetrators of crimes against children, especially recruitment and use in the conflict, must not go unpunished. If they are not prosecuted by the Nigerian authorities, the ICC should invoke its jurisdiction and hold them accountable.
6. The government should tackle the current high rate of poverty and unemployment, as this would make the insurgency economically unattractive to young persons.
7. The government must address urgently the large number of out-of-school children in the northern part of the country, which is a ticking time bomb.
8. The Nigerian government needs to propagate and uphold IHL at all times. It should disseminate the rules of IHL among personnel involved in the armed conflict. Military commanders and their subordinates should be acquainted with the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols, as this will enhance their effectiveness and respect for IHL and human rights. In addition to dissemination, the Nigerian authorities should invest in the training of its personnel especially those involved in the use of weapons.

CONCLUSION

Children in northeast Nigeria have been victims of humanitarian crises, poverty, inaccessibility to formal education and abuses of all kinds, for far too long, due largely to their vulnerability, gullibility, illiteracy and indoctrination, which make them easily swayed and deceived into making irrational decisions. Children get to be recruited into extremist groups and are either forced or fooled into doing things they would not have otherwise done. They get to be viewed from the lenses of perpetrators and relegated to the perpetuity of facing the resultant consequences of crimes they were 'used' to commit. Therefore, in dealing with their participation in the insurgency, there is a need for the Nigerian authorities to view them as victims and adopt a human rights concept to rescue them from the claws of extremist groups and terrorist organizations. This approach will view them as vulnerable 'tools' in the service of terrorist groups, and as such explore how to deliver them from the ordeals, they currently find themselves in.

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