



OCTOBER-2020

# ANALYSIS

## CHILD SOLDIERS USED BY ARMENIA IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH WAR

**27.09.2020- 29.10.2020**

Since Azerbaijan started its counteroffensive against Armenia's repeated military provocations on 27 September, Armenia has been suffering heavy battleground losses. Azerbaijan has managed to liberate parts of its occupied territories, including four occupied cities (Jabrayil, Gubadly, Zangilan, Fizuli) surrounding the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region. Despair over the battleground losses turned Armenia's incumbent leadership into war criminals, having shelled peaceful Azerbaijani cities and civilians that are well beyond the theater of military hostilities. Repeated missile attacks against Azerbaijani cities such as Ganja, Barda, Tartar, Aghjabadi, Dashkesen, Gadabay, Mingachevir, etc., killing and injuring dozens of civilians, children included, are heinous war crimes and blatant disregard to international humanitarian law, which will not go unpunished.

On top of all, just recently, worrying reports were unearthed testifying to the recruitment of child soldiers by the armed forces of Armenia during the current escalation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In a vividly clear [video footage](#) that were shared on social media platforms it is apparent that Armenian military are

1. Screencap of a video where a teenager is involved in military attacks (1), 2020



Recruiting and using children as soldiers is prohibited under international humanitarian law and is a war crime. In “Prosecutor v Thomas Lubanga Dyilo [Case](#)” (Decision on Sentence) ICC-01/04-01/06, Trial Chamber I (10 July 2012) ICC decided against enlisting and conscripting child soldiers. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo was found guilty, on 14 March 2012, of the war crimes of enlisting and conscripting of children under the age of 15 years and using them to participate actively in hostilities. He was sentenced to 14 years in prison.

News was also [disseminated](#) about the Armenian commanders recruiting rebel child soldiers in the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh after Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, refusing diplomatic efforts to resolve the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, called all Armenians to arm. He said, “an acceptable solution to the conflict can be achieved with arms in hand.” He also called on the Armenian

people to form volunteer squads, choose a commander, prepare and go to the frontline. It was reported that a volunteer squad led by Yerevan's mayor Aik Marutyan has already been created in the Armenian capital. Reports suggest that there are underage children among the volunteer squad.

The children, [some said](#) to be as young as 8-year-old, are recruited for Armenian government forces and armed separatists in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and also used as spies, messengers, lookouts. Some of them are abducted or recruited forcefully, others, join out of desperation, thinking that Armenian government may offer them better opportunities for survival.

II. *Screencap of a video where a teenager is involved in military attacks (2), 2020*



In her recounts about the plight of child soldiers during the 1988-1994 Nagorno-Karabakh War, "*Childsoldiers of the Karabakh War: Life Stories of a Militarized*" Nona Shakhnazarian also [highlights](#) the plight, psycho-emotional state and

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traumas of teenage Armenian boys, who were turned into child soldiers, thus having lost their childhood and many more opportunities of those years.

By pursuing aggressive and occupational policy against Azerbaijan and having left the negotiation process towards the peaceful solution of Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict through embracing heightened militarism, Armenia's incumbent leadership has now also embarked on another grave violation of international law: enlisted Armenian children and minor teenagers in the military attacks against Azerbaijan.

It seems that this is not a new occurrence in the ranks of Armenia's military, as also testified by [some sources](#). It was [reported](#) that in 2003-2004 underage Armenians "were believed to have been forcibly and illegally recruited in the military". There were [evidences](#) that previously, teenagers of 15-16 years old were called to register for conscription and a student, in the tenth grade, aged 15 or 16, was reported "to have been seized from his schoolroom and conscripted into the army".<sup>1</sup>

III. *A twelve-year-old Armenian boy (Miko Avonesyan) holding a gun*



<sup>1</sup> Article 38(3) of the Rights of the Child Convention stipulates: "States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, States Parties shall endeavor to give priority to those who are oldest".

A global report of child soldiers conducted in 2004 by *Child Soldiers International* [writes](#) that children of the unrecognized “self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic received “military training in school”. In elementary schools they have “military patriotic clubs” for the children, and later in the secondary school the children take “initial military training” course. In 2004 although there were official military schools for the children in the area, nevertheless, there were military-sports lyceum programs. The same report also [notes](#) that the child soldiers within the Nagorno-Karabakh region were treated brutally by superior officers. Some of these facts are also [reflected](#) in US State Department’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices of 2003-2004.

According the [Global Report](#) on Child Soldiers (2008) in 2006 in one school in a poor suburb of Yerevan military training started much earlier. A class consisting of 18 boys and six girls aged 11 and 12, many of whom were orphans, were chosen to pilot military training for preadolescents, with the aim to improve school discipline. They were taught by a former paratrooper to march, handle automatic weapons and use combat skills. The Ministry of Education and Science reportedly planned to extend the course to 11 other “special schools” with disadvantaged children around the country, and to allow those who wanted military careers to transfer to such schools.

Military training after secondary-school was provided through officer training at the Vazgen Sarkizyan Military Institute, the Military Aviation Institute, and the Military Medical Faculty of Yerevan Medical University. Cadets could be accepted for military higher education from the year they turned 17. During their studies, they were considered to be military personnel, with all the corresponding rights and duties. The inclusion of children under 18 among this group was not explicitly mentioned in Armenia’s declaration on ratifying the Optional Protocol in 2005.

#### IV. Teenage Armenian girls holding guns



Child Soldiers Report 2008 Armenia also underlined that military training was compulsory for school students aged about 16-18. Boys and girls in grades 8 and 9 in weekly classes learned how to handle automatic weapons. Girls could begin a nursing course from grade 9. It also noted that “under a pilot scheme children as young as 11 received weapons training in school”.

The reports containing information about child soldiers also noted that radicalization of Armenian youth begins at the earliest possible age, with the “military and combat action, taking the place of family and community in shaping their education, values and outlook on life”. It is noted that this child recruiting model resembles that of Houthi model employed in Yemen, which turn them into soldiers and also uses them as hostages. These children are trained to be killing machines, however, lack the training for self-defense, which make them as easy target and victim of a military attack. They can also be propagated as martyrs and against the adversary to blame the latter in killing children.

V. Armenian military men meeting in a kindergarten, 2020



According to [some sources](#), recruiting children is also economically advantageous for Armenia. Children are usually paid less, if at all, and require less food to survive, be it in support roles or as combatants. This makes children less expensive than adult combatants. Children become part of an armed force or group through abduction, threats, coercion, or manipulation by armed actors. Others may also be driven by poverty, and the necessity to provide income for their families. There may also be others that associate themselves with the protection of their communities. Irrespective of reasons and motives, child recruitment by armed forces is a grave violation of child rights and international humanitarian law.

Up to date, 170 countries, including Armenia have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in

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armed conflict of 25 May, 2000, agreeing not to use children under the age of 18 in direct hostilities and to criminalize the recruitment and use of children by non-state armed groups. The 1949 Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War prohibits the use of children under the age of 15 as soldiers. In 2005, Yerevan also declared that under Armenian law, citizens under 18 cannot be recruited for military service, even if it is voluntary, which, as the evidences surface today, is not properly executed.

It is also a blatant violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UNICEF Paris Convention. Some sources [suggest](#) that by recruiting child soldiers Armenia's leadership commits war crime and repeats the same illegal actions and German Nazis did during the Second World War. The latter were known for attracting minors and women to the front.

Armenia is apparently in violation of its obligations under the above documents and abuses the rights of children in the name of short term political and military gains. As noted above, it involves children in military conflict against Azerbaijan during the current escalation of the conflict since 27 September. This callous attitude to children's rights coupled with other war crimes committed by Armenia's leadership in relation to Azerbaijani children is a testament to the former's neglect of international humanitarian law and its commitments therein.

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