

African Union

DDR

Disarmament
Demobilization
Reintegration



**AFRICAN UNION
DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILISATION AND REINTEGRATION CAPACITY
PROGRAM**

**DDR and CHILDREN
OPERATIONAL GUIDELINE**

**AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AfDB	African Development Bank
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
CAAFAG	Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups
CAR	Central African Republic
CPU	Child Protection Unit
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICRS	Information, Counselling and Referral Systems
IDDRS	UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDTF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund
MIS	Management Information System
NDDRC	National DDR Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OGN	Operational Guidance Notes
PCRD	AU Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Policy
PSO	Peace Support Operation
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
REC	Regional Economic Communities
RM	Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SGBV	Sexual and Gender based Violence
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TJ	Transitional Justice
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDPKO	UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations
WAAFAG	Women Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups
XC	Ex-combatants

A. PURPOSE OF GUIDELINE

This guideline aims to provide African stakeholders, particularly AU member states, but also the AU, RECs, RMs, and PSOs with operational guidelines to assist in designing and building institutional frameworks for a national DDR programs. The guideline will attempt to provide an outline on how, from a national perspective, African governments could best design and implement a DDR program that respond to the needs of children.

While drawing from the experiences in Africa and catering to the particular needs of stakeholders on the continent, the Guideline is also compliant with international legal standards and norms, including the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (2007), and is complementary to other existing DDR frameworks such as the United Nations Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS). At the same time these Operational Guidelines specifically aim to guide national authorities and AU PSOs in the handling CAAFAG both within and outside the framework of traditional armed conflict.

B. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Definition of Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (CAAFAG)

CAAFAG refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or was used by an armed force in any capacity. This includes the use of children as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, servants or for sexual or any other purposes. The term CAAFAG is more expansive than the term “child soldier” as a CAAFAG does not have to have taken a direct part in hostilities.ⁱ

During any armed conflict children benefit from the general protection provided to all civilians under international humanitarian law which guarantees them humane treatment. Given their particular vulnerability, however, they are also entitled to special respect, care and protection.ⁱⁱ This additional protection is included in the Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Statutes of the International Criminal Court and of the Special Court for Sierra Leone which put the minimum age for recruitment into armed forces or groups at 15.ⁱⁱⁱ As a result, the recruitment or use of children under 15 years in armed forces may be prosecuted as an international war crime.

African human rights conventions provide similar protection but raise the standard from 15 year to 18. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa require states to take all necessary measures to ensure that children under 18 are not recruited into armed forces or groups and do not take a direct part in hostilities.^{iv} This obliges states parties to criminalise recruitment. The Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict provides similar protections.^v The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement also promotes the principle that persons under 18 years of age should not participate in hostilities or be recruited into armed forces or groups.^{vi}

The special rights of the child are articulated in the above conventions as well as several United Nations Security Council resolutions.^{vii} They include states’ obligations to consider the special needs of children as well as their dependents as part of DDR and to protect them from recruitment, abduction, rape and other forms of sexual violence. These rights have been developed into several operational principles that should guide DDR programming:

B.1 Best Interest of the Child^{viii}

The best interest of the child should be the primary consideration in all aspects of DDR programming. Ensuring the well-being of the child requires authorities to consider the child's particular circumstances including the age, level of maturity, presence or absence of parents, and the child's environment or experiences. Children have a right to have their voices, wishes and views taken into account and given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity but final decisions must be based on the short and long term interests of the child which they may not be able to predict or articulate. If the option deemed to be in the best interests of the child is not feasible for various reasons the least harmful course of action should be chosen.

B.2 Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent

CAAFAG must be provided with information to meaningfully participate in decisions affecting them as part of DDR. Participation in the programme must be voluntary and based on informed consent and the wishes of the child.^{ix} Obtaining informed consent is a process of ensuring that the child and his or her family receive an explanation, in language that they understand, that enables them to comprehend the implications of the arrangement into which they are about to enter. Details of the consent given should accompany information gathered as part of DDR throughout the process.

B.3 Confidentiality and Transparency

Information related to the violations of children's rights must be treated as confidential^x by authorities soliciting the information. The very act of collecting information can endanger individuals or groups as the dissemination of this information may result in retribution by the perpetrators, stigmatization, or misused in another manner. As a general principal, DDR authorities should only share sensitive information, including to other national authorities, if they receive the informed consent of the child or guardian. DDR authorities should ensure that this information is safeguarded by putting in place the appropriate procedures and safeguards to avoid leakage. These procedures should also include the level of confidentiality attached to the type of information being gathered. At the same time, information regarding the manner in which the child is handled by authorities involved in DDR should be made as open and accessible as possible to maximize accountability and transparency.

B.4 National Ownership

National ownership is essential to the success and sustainability of DDR programming. While international partners with a protection mandate may be called upon to provide strategic, technical, operational or financial support, national actors should always coordinate and lead the process. In the absence of a legitimised government authority, agencies such as UNICEF or AU PSOs may initiate or lead the DDR process temporarily but have a responsibility to hand back authority to national authorities as the necessary conditions and capacities develop.

C. OPERATIONALISING DDR FOR CHILDREN

C.1 DDR Planning for Children

Planning for programmes to support the release and reintegration of children should commence as soon as it becomes apparent that there are children associated with armed forces. Planning should not be dependent on any formal peace process but must be grounded in a high-quality situation

analysis. It should begin well in advance of when actual disarmament takes place and contingency plans should be in place to manage any unexpected large-scale release of children by armed forces.

National DDR authorities require a clear mandate and legal framework governing DDR programming for CAAFAG and are responsible for designing and implementing timely programmes. Programming for children should be included in the national DDR policy and strategy programme documents following consultations with UNICEF and other child protection actors; it involves an array of national and international partners and ministries whose activities must be well coordinated. Operational plans with a clear division of responsibilities must be developed.

Fundraising should be adequate to cover all three components of DDR, ideally from the same basket, to avoid the reintegration component being separate and underfunded.^{xi} To increase national ownership and accountability, national authorities are encouraged to use their national budget to at least partially fund the programme. Programmes should last for a period of several years and include a definite end date and exit strategy. Beyond that date, sustainable development programmes and social protection schemes that incorporate the needs of CAAFAG should be prioritised. National authorities and AU PSOs involved in DDR for CAAFAG should provide training to those who implement the programme. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPS) should guide different agencies' activities.

Creating Child Protection Units (CPUs)

Government security forces and AU PSOs should consider establishing CPUs to manage children extracted from armed groups. CPUs are usually staffed by military personnel who are charged with handling all issues relating to children's rights and child protection. They are responsible for ensuring that staff are adequately trained, that any child passing through their custody is protected, and that violations of children's rights by the military are prevented, stopped and meaningfully addressed. CPUs allow national authorities to take responsibility for CAAFAG taking part in DDR in a manner that is compliant with international law and standards. International partners such as UNICEF are available to assist governments in creating the necessary capacity.

In several member states, CPUs function as transit sites for CAAFAG who are in the process of being referred to a national DDR programme. In the Republic of South Sudan, for example, a Sudan People's Liberation Army CPU was established in December 2009. 1,600 SPLA officers were selected and trained as members of the CPU, a military Code of Conduct was developed, and more than 10,000 officers and non-commissioned officers benefited from child protection awareness training.^{xii} At the same time military orders were released to division commanders to release and hand over child recruits. The CPU subsequently referred these children to the national DDR authority for the release process. Similar processes have taken place in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and other countries.

C.2 Entry into the DDR Process

CAAFAG may enter a DDR programme through a variety of channels, including:

- i. Spontaneous reporting to a community leader or PSO
- ii. Extraction from an armed force or group by a PSO or military
- iii. Negotiated release by an armed force or group
- iv. Other referral

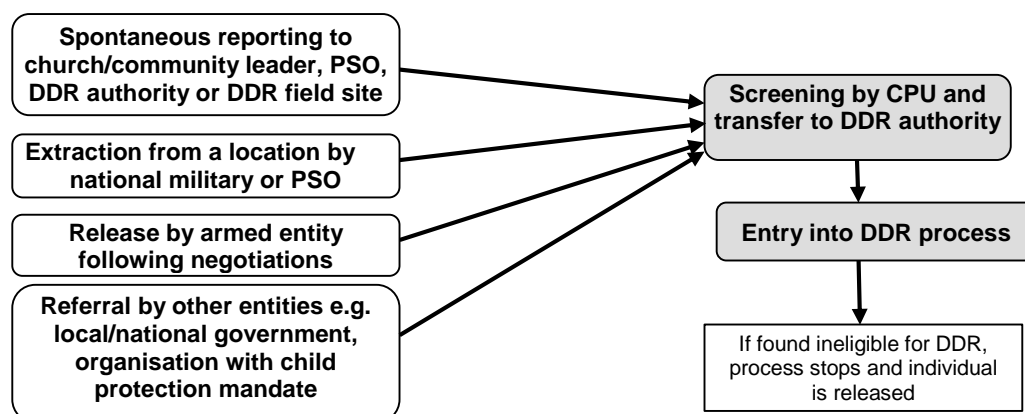
As any actor may be involved in the receipt of a CAAFAG, all authorities should be sensitized on how to handle them. National authorities and AU PSOs should also sensitize local communities including through the use of radio, written materials, community meetings and other mediums. Information provided should include which partners to contact and the rights of CAAFAG within the DDR programme.

Armed forces should be contacted and encouraged to unconditionally release CAAFAG as soon as possible. Negotiations to this end may be supported by UNICEF or other agency with a child protection mandate. Eligibility criteria should be clearly laid down and widely communicated.^{xiii} Every child, boy or girl, associated for any length of time with an armed force or group is eligible for DDR. Eligibility should never be linked to weapons possession, knowledge or use.^{xiv}

Negotiations should include an agreement on how children will be freed and transported safely away from the conflict zone. Strategies should be developed and adopted to identify and address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of female CAAFAG, in recognition of the fact that girls are often excluded from DDR processes.^{xv} Negotiators should impress upon the armed force or group that the use of children under 15 in armed conflict is a war crime. The use of girls for sexual purposes, or for domestic labour or logistical support, also constitutes recruitment.

Contact with armed forces should be established and maintained by DDR authorities, subject to national laws, in order to ensure the release of *all* children. Oversight of lists of CAAFAG prepared by armed forces or groups is essential to avoid children being withheld from DDR programmes.^{xvi} National authorities may need to adopt a staggered approach to programming so that CAAFAG begin DDR as soon as they are released. Member states should not wait until all armed forces and armed groups on their territory have agreed to release CAAFAG to begin a programme.

Entry into DDR process



C.3 Processing in the Reception Unit

The first point of contact with a DDR programme is the Reception Unit. Ideally, these units are located in a CPU within a national army or AU PSO. They may also be located within another agency with a protection mandate such as a United Nations peacekeeping operation. Reception Units may be mobile but should be physically secure.

CAAFAG should not spend longer than 48 hours in a Reception Unit. If no CPU is in place, or no facilities exist to accommodate CAAFAG, it is advisable to release children into the care of DDR authorities such as UNICEF or another agency with a protection mandate immediately after the CAAFAG is disarmed and screened.

Duties to be performed by the CPU in the Reception Unit include the following:

Step 1: Search and Disarmament

It is important to ensure that there are no weapons or harmful substances on the child when entering the Reception Unit. Searches of CAAFAG should be conducted by trained authorities of the same sex

as the child. The purpose of the search must be communicated clearly and consent sought. Any harmful substances must be confiscated and weapons registered and stored in a safe location. Searches should not humiliate CAAFAG and respect gender and cultural practices. Strip searches should not be permitted except in exceptional circumstances, and then only by order of a commanding officer. Any other items taken from CAAFAG for safe keeping should be registered and returned to them when they are transferred to the DDR programme. Direct cash benefits to CAAFAG are not an appropriate form of assistance at this stage.^{xvii}

Step 2: Orientation and Briefing

After disarmament, CAAFAG should be given an immediate orientation, including general information on the DDR process and timelines, in addition to their rights as part of DDR e.g. rights to humane treatment, services, and to report any exploitation or abuse. Physical and medical needs should be addressed, including of dependents, and a change of clothing (appropriate to the child's age, size, sex and culture) provided.

Step 3: Initial Screening and Sorting (see Annex 2)

The purpose of the initial screening^{xviii} is to capture basic biographical details in order to ascertain a child's eligibility for DDR programming. No force or intimidation should be used during the interview, which should be undertaken in a sensitive manner by personnel trained in protection. Initial screening should seek to categorize the individual as a national CAAFAG, foreign CAAFAG, or dependent (includes members of the CAAFAG's household such as children, "spouses", parents or other relatives). CAAFAG may not be subjected to questioning by any member of a national military or PSO beyond identification of personal details.^{xix}

Step 4: Reporting

Information gathered in the Reception Unit should be forwarded to the relevant national authority, normally a DDR Commission, while respecting the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and ensuring the best interests of the child. A secure and centralized database managed by the DDR authority must establish the location of every CAAFAG, and their dependents, while in the custody of a national military, PSO, DDR authority or any other actor at all times. The record must indicate who is responsible for each CAAFAG to ensure transparency and accountability. This helps to ensure that CAAFAG are not entering the programme more than once, except when an individual has been re-recruited. Handover forms must be signed every time an individual is moved from one authority to another. Access to the database must be severely restricted to prevent theft or leakage.

Step 5: Accommodation and Separation

In allocating accommodation, children must be separated from adults except when it is determined that families should be kept together, particularly mothers and children. Girls should be given separate accommodation from boys. Any opposing armed group members or individuals who may be a source of conflict should also be given separate accommodation. Siblings, relatives and friends should be kept together wherever possible.

Step 6: Transfer of Child to the DDR Programme

CAAFAG determined eligible for the DDR programme should be transferred to a civilian-run Transit Site. Those who are ineligible because they are no longer a child, have had no association with an armed force or group, or have already gone through a DDR programme and were not re-recruited, should be released.

If CAAFAG are deprived of their liberty at any stage of DDR, international, regional and national detention rules and norms apply. Similarly, the use of force in Reception Units should only be applied as a last resort, when strictly necessary, and in strict accordance with international standards. To

increase accountability, authorities running Reception Units should permit access to agencies with a protection mandate, such as UNICEF, implementing partners, and the ICRC. This access allows for oversight systems to function.

Repatriation of CAAFAG from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)

Each of the forces under the AU's Regional Task Force against the LRA operating in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan have a child protection component who is responsible for providing a secure environment CAAFAG from the LRA. Additionally, SOPs on the Reception, Safekeeping and Transfer of Ex-Combatants and Dependents were developed with each of the contributing military forces who are briefed on procedures in accepting LRA CAAFAG who enter the DDR programme. When CAAFAG come into their custody, they are disarmed, given shelter and food and protected in a secure area. A DDR focal point for child protection is contacted. In cases where there are doubts as to an individual's age, the focal point is responsible for assessing it. The focal point and a local partner document each case. Once verification and documentation has taken place, CAAFAG are handed over to the relevant child protection partner in the country of origin. In situations where this is not possible, resources of the United Nations can be used to facilitate their return.

C.4 Transit Sites

Transit Sites, also known as Interim Care Centres, are facilities that are able to provide longer-term care for CAAFAG.^{xx} They are civilian-run centres where each CAAFAG is categorized, given interim care, and prepared for family reunification and reintegration. A Transit Site is normally a camp facility that is separate from adult DDR facilities and can either be open or closed depending on security level. Open facilities encourage contact with local communities and family visits. CAAFAG who live near the site may wish to sleep at home and should be encouraged to do so.

The Transit Site should encourage a regime of daily activities, including sports and leisure, and have facilities to ensure hygiene, washing, cooking and cleaning.^{xxi} These routines are important in reassuring CAAFAG and preparing them for civilian life. A multi-purpose facility should be created to allow for social interaction and group activities. Participation of CAAFAG in the running of the sites is recommended, while ensuring that they do not organise themselves according to rank or the organisation of any armed force or group. Educational activities including basic literacy and numeracy may be offered. Informal education on expected roles and status in society, civic and community responsibilities, and political and legal issues affecting CAAFAG is also appropriate. Child care facilities must be provided for mothers.

Regular, gender-sensitive medical screening and treatment should be offered to CAAFAG, and a confidential file kept on each individual. Medical checks should include voluntary and confidential HIV testing accompanied by child-friendly counselling based on up to date medical knowledge and conducted by professional medical staff. CAAFAG living with HIV/AIDS should receive appropriate treatment, care and support in privacy and confidentiality. Referral systems must be in place to hospitals and other medical facilities for participants with particular needs.

Disciplinary rules and a Code of Conduct should be explained and posted in the site. Exclusion from the DDR programme may be an appropriate disciplinary sanction, following warnings, but force should never be used as a punishment. National authorities must ensure that children are protected from rape and other forms of sexual violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation throughout the DDR process, with a focus on those undertaking procedures or controlling access to food, water, medical and other services. Clear, accessible and confidential reporting procedures are essential for cases that do occur, in addition to referrals of serious complaints to national police.^{xxii}

Male and female staff in Transit Sites must be fully vetted and trained, and offer a range of expertise in areas including medical care, child protection, psychosocial support, logistics, catering and security. Small teams of care workers working together with responsibility for groups of CAAFAG often yield positive results. An individualised case management plan should be developed for each child that seeks to assess their short, medium and long-term needs, plan responses to those needs, implement responses, and review the case at least once every twelve weeks.^{xxiii} Clear responsibilities and timelines should be included. Female care workers should be assigned to female CAAFAG. A full-time, qualified and accessible manager with training on protection, based in the Transit Site, should oversee their work.

Duties to be performed by the DDR authority in the Transit Site include the following:

Step 1: Registration for DDR Programme

Personal details including names, sex, age, parent's names, names of dependents at the site, date of birth, age, nationality, origin and immediate (and other) medical needs must be recorded as part of registration. Biometric details, such as finger prints, and a photograph may also be sought. The details of child dependents (present and not present) should be captured including names, ages, locations and custody/guardianship status. Children of CAAFAG who are present should be given name tags, where necessary. An inventory of items removed from each person and the date, time and location of the reception must be recorded.

Step 2: Orientation and Briefing

After registration, CAAFAG should be given an immediate orientation and informed of their rights as part of DDR. Hygiene kits should be distributed to each participant, including dependents.

Step 3: In-Depth Screening

The purpose of in-depth screening, which must be conducted on a voluntary basis, is to verify the eligibility of each child for DDR and to identify capacities and vulnerabilities. In-depth screening forms serve as an official record of all persons passing through the Transit Site and should build upon, and verify, information gathered at the Reception Unit and during registration. Interviews should be undertaken on an individual basis, conducted by qualified civilian child protection staff, and undertaken on the basis of informed consent. Questions should focus on categorising the child and facilitating successful reintegration. Questions already asked in Reception Units and during registration should not be repeated. Furthermore, the child should not be required to repeat potentially traumatic information. The identity of the person conducting the screening, as well as the time and place, must be recorded.

Step 4: Reporting

All information gathered must be recorded in a centralized database with due regard for the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and the best interest of the child.

Step 5: Process CAAFAG According to Category

- i. **National CAAFAG** are eligible for DDR and must be fully processed. Time spent in Transit Sites is kept to a minimum, with a flow of children referred out of the sites once family tracing is completed or they undergo a formal rehabilitation programme lasting up to three months.
- ii. **Foreign CAAFAG** should be repatriated as early as possible, possibly with the assistance of UNHCR or ICRC. Before repatriation, the transferring authority should contact the relevant counter-part within the country of origin and agree on the procedure. SOPs may formalize the process and help to guarantee the security and well-being of each child. All repatriations

must be voluntary. If an individual is detained and transferred against their wishes, such transfers must at a minimum respect international law, in particular the principle of non-refoulement^{xxiv}

- iii. **Dependent of CAAFAG:** Should be transferred to community of origin, ideally with material assistance (e.g. food and non-food items or a subsistence allowance), and a referral to government agencies with a mandate to assist them. Child dependents should remain with their mothers, provided this is in their best interests.
- iv. **CAAFAG who becomes an adult during the release process:** Should be referred and transported to an adult DDR program. In the absence of an adult program, they should be processed with children while ensuring appropriate safeguards.

Step 6: Family tracing for national CAAFAG

Family tracing should begin as soon as possible. National authorities should create an arrangement with child protection agencies to implement tracing and reunification. The experience, mandate and capacity of ICRC can be particularly useful in re-establishing family links, especially across international borders.

Once the family is traced, it is important for national authorities and other actors such as ICRC to engage families and communities to prepare them to receive CAAFAG.^{xxv} Material support or income-generation activities may be offered to families to ensure that returning children are not perceived as a burden. Families, communities and CAAFAG should be made aware of, and supported to tackle, possible problems when children return home. These may include aggressive and rebellious behaviour, drug or alcohol use, challenges in resuming education, as well as stigmatization and discrimination.^{xxvi}

Mothers and their dependents, including children born as a result of rape, are at particular risk of stigmatisation, discrimination, abuse, and violence and programming should seek to prevent and minimize this, while also addressing it when it does occur.^{xxvii} CAAFAG living with HIV/AIDS and their dependents, who may have been born with HIV, may be at risk of “double” stigmatisation. Intensive sensitization among family members and communities may be required.

Protection and support networks, particularly those involving the extended family, should be utilised. The emphasis should be on supporting, strengthening and, where necessary, creating child protection mechanisms at local level to provide long-term support to CAAFAG, including after they become young adults. Community structures such as traditional authorities, women’s and youth groups have an important role to play.

If it is not possible or appropriate to reunify the child immediately, arrangements should be made for the child and the family to be in contact with each other either by phone or another form of communication.

Step 7: Release

After the family has been traced and preparation completed for the family reunification, the DDR authority should allow the CAAFAG to keep the hygiene kit and bedding as well as a reinsertion kit to sustain them prior to the reintegration process. The national authorities should also assist them in obtaining a national identification card. The authorities may also provide them with a Release Card,

which has no reference to the role or the name of the armed group, depending on the best interests of the child.

Checklist of physical and medical needs in Transit Sites^{xxviii}

- ✓ Adequate, nutritional, culturally-appropriate food, including for babies, with a special focus on pregnant and lactating girls
- ✓ Safe drinking water
- ✓ Separate shelter from adults with adequate privacy and space
- ✓ Separate latrines, showers and washing facilities for boys and girls
- ✓ Security, including protection for girls from sexual violence and regulated access
- ✓ Regular surveillance and patrolling by civilian security personnel
- ✓ Proper lighting
- ✓ Regular medical screening
- ✓ Comprehensive medical treatment, including for malnutrition/stunting, micronutrient deficiencies, malaria, diarrhoea, worms, respiratory infections, tuberculosis, skin infections, eye infections, urinary tract infections, sexually transmitted diseases
- ✓ Reproductive health care and counselling, including on preventing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, prophylaxis and contraception
- ✓ Voluntary testing and counselling for HIV (CAAFAG and their children)
- ✓ Anti-retroviral treatment (CAAFAG and their children)
- ✓ Specialist screening, treatment and care for babies/toddlers, including therapeutic feeding for malnourished and vaccinations
- ✓ Specialist care for children with disabilities, e.g. mobility aids, prosthetic limbs
- ✓ Psychosocial screening and treatment

C.5 Family Reunification

The majority of CAAFAG should be returned to their family and community as soon as possible, subject to their wishes and best interests.^{xxix} The principal precondition to successful reintegration is for a child to be returned, with the consent of both the child and the family, to a supportive, secure and protective environment. There are a number of methods of reuniting CAAFAG with families:

- i. Families are contacted and collect children.
- ii. Families are contacted and children are brought to them by social workers.
- iii. Families are contacted, children are brought to designated spots and local authorities reunite them.
- iv. Families are successfully traced, criteria are met for reunification, and ICRC reunites children.

Communities may provide traditional ceremonies to welcome returning CAAFAG. These should be encouraged while also recognising their limitations. They should not be an alternative to individualised and group counselling and support.

Family and community reunification may not always be possible, or significantly delayed.^{xxx} This may be due to ongoing insecurity, a high risk of re-recruitment or mistreatment, or if the child or family does not want reunification. Integration of the children of CAAFAG into communities may also be challenging, and may put the child at a high risk of violence, injury or even death due to rejection or lack of appropriate care from families, communities and traumatised mothers. Alternative family-based care arrangements may be required, taking into account prevailing social and cultural attitudes, in exchange for modest financial and other support. This may include host families who provide foster care for younger children.^{xxxi} For older adolescents, who may not wish to live as part of a family,

supervised and supported independent living arrangements may provide an acceptable alternative.^{xxxii} Long-term institutional care should be avoided.

In each case, a determination towards the child's best interest is required. This is a process of gathering information and consultation by a panel of professionals familiar with the case, with participation from the individual concerned. Decisions regarding children of CAAFAG must fully involve mothers (and fathers, where feasible), be based on informed consent, and where desired and possible, permit ongoing contact between mother and child.

D. REINTEGRATION PROCESS

Effective reintegration of CAAFAG is essential to ensuring durable peace and security. The ultimate goal of reintegration is to restore or establish meaningful roles and attachments among the returning children, their families and communities. The success of reintegration depends on the individual capacities of each child as well as the contextualized, age and gender-sensitive support and care they receive, and the opportunities made available to them. Investing in holistic DDR programmes that address the specific and complex needs of CAAFAG is an investment in a nation's future.

Unlike the release process, the reintegration process is not linear and sequential. Activities are concurrent and progress is dynamic and gradual. Whereas economic reintegration activities may take place within a relatively short time-frame (normally 6-8 months), education activities and social reintegration may take place over a number of years.

Temporary measures, including reinsertion programming, may be necessary if reintegration opportunities for CAAFAG are not available immediately after the release process ends. These include short-term work opportunities that may contribute to improving the public perception of CAAFAG but should not become the main mechanism for reintegration and in particular, should not compromise educational opportunities.

See **AU Operation Guideline on Reintegration** for general guidance on planning for, and implementation of, reintegration programmes.^{xxxiii}

D.1 Community Based Approach

Community-based approaches are central to successful reintegration.^{xxxiv} This entails seeking a balance between the needs of individual children and the needs of the communities absorbing them, and their dependents, in order to prevent resentment and a continued sense of difference. An additional advantage of community-based programming is that it addresses the needs of CAAFAG who do not go through a formal DDR process.

Communities, including the families of CAAFAG, should participate in the design of reintegration programmes at the earliest opportunity in order to promote ownership. Using this method, individual needs are met through community-based mechanisms, bringing together CAAFAG and other vulnerable children, ideally in a 1:1 ratio.

Opportunities made available to CAAFAG should including the following:

- Education, including accelerated or catch-up education.
- Employment-oriented vocational training or apprenticeship for a profession, e.g. food production, carpentry, tailoring, plumbing, welding, mechanics, brick making, masonry, hair-dressing, hotel work, catering, crafts, agriculture.

- Income generating activities determined by the local context e.g. crop farming, petty trade or small business, animal husbandry, urban gardening.

Education and training should be appropriate to the age and capacities of each child, and taught by positive role models. Social workers should monitor CAAFAG to ensure attendance. Food and transport must be provided by partners involved in DDR. CAAFAG from opposing factions or armed forces may be mixed during activities, with supervision, to promote reconciliation.

A focus on extended access to education is appropriate for younger CAAFAG or those who missed out on formal education. Options for older CAAFAG (aged 16-18) should mirror those for young adults taking part in DDR, if an adult programme exists, including an option to continue their education. Activities should be accessible to *all* CAAFAG, both girls and boys, including through the provision of child care for mothers, and flexible timing that supports work and other commitments. CAAFAG may have significant responsibilities at household level and should be permitted to attend to these in addition to reintegration opportunities. Access to training and education for CAAFAG with disabilities should be the same as for able-bodied children, but adapted to meet their particular needs.^{xxxv}

Matching CAAFAG to reintegration opportunities must be undertaken by suitably qualified social workers on a case-by-case basis using pre-determined criteria, e.g. best interests of the child, strengths of the child, labour market prospects, socio-economic profile, geographical proximity, and special needs and vulnerabilities. Programming should seek to build on the strengths, skills and resilience of CAAFAG. Counselling must be deeply informed and realistic about economic prospects in different sectors and communities. Care should be taken not to confine girls to stereotypical roles that may limit their economic and social prospects. They should be both permitted and encouraged to participate in all activities on an equal basis.

D.2 Economic Reintegration

In the absence of a well planned and executed economic reintegration component for CAAFAG, the entire DDR process will be compromised.^{xxxvi} When planning reintegration, authorities must conduct detailed assessments of the local economy in order to determine sustainable opportunities. Market research must be undertaken by qualified personnel and focused specifically on children and youth. Care must be taken to prevent markets from being flooded with the same skills and products. Comprehensive mapping at micro-level is needed to determine the quality, quantity and geographical location of schools, training institutions, potential employers, microcredit opportunities, business opportunities and support services available to CAAFAG e.g. services for children living with HIV/AIDS, drug counselling for youth, psychosocial support and disability rehabilitation.

National authorities have a role to play in creating an enabling environment for training, apprenticeship schemes, and employment for CAAFAG including through tax incentives, wage subsidies, certified education curricula, official accreditation of training schemes, certifications, and evaluations of apprenticeships. It is also crucial to invest in education systems and facilities for children and youth in conflict-affected areas. The private sector has a role to play in training and offering employment to CAAFAG and national authorities should seek to develop suitable partnerships.

Particular care must be taken to ensure that training or apprenticeships are connected to job opportunities.^{xxxvii} Following vocational or income-generation training, funds for basic upkeep, business development funds, and all the necessary tools to practice a trade must be provided by DDR programmes. It is essential to provide ongoing support for CAAFAG, their dependents and their families in a holistic manner, by ensuring that immediate (and other) medical and physical needs are met. This avoids business start-up funds being used for emergencies and tools from being sold.

Limited entrepreneurship programmes can be successful with small groups of CAAFAG using shared equipment that provides a service, e.g. generators, sewing machines, sorghum mills, solar powered equipment. Small groups may be given equipment and trained to maintain it with ongoing business support from a mentor. Support structures such as cooperatives or collectives are important for CAAFAG involved in income generation activities. By pooling resources and combining expertise these have a higher chance of success than individual schemes.

CAAFAG must be tracked and monitored until activities are completed and individuals are not considered at risk of resuming armed opposition. They should be linked to long-term development programmes, policies and initiatives targeting conflict-affected children and youth, as well as nationally-owned social protection schemes, as needed. This ensures that individuals who require additional support, including as young adults, continue to receive it based on needs rather than former status.

D.3 Mentoring and Life Skills

Life skills education and mentoring is an additional essential component of reintegration. This can be undertaken by suitable qualified social workers and mentors from the local community. Mentoring and life skills education may include guidance on:

- Career opportunities.
- Business skills training, e.g. handling of money, basic accountancy, business development.
- Family planning and reproductive health.
- Parenting support, including basic nutrition.
- Living with disabilities.
- Living with HIV/AIDS or other health consequences of time as a CAAFAG.
- Coping with stigma and discrimination.
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Legal assistance may be required to aid social reintegration, to ensure that CAAFAG are able to claim their rights in their communities e.g. gaining access to land, inheritance, or citizenship rights. Assistance must be child-friendly and accessible, seeking to explain procedures, rights and required actions.

DDR Lessons in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone^{xxxviii}

- Ensure a child-friendly environment that prioritizes children's needs over and above technical procedures
- Ensure flexible resources so that the needs of CAAFAG who are left out of DDR, especially girls, are subsequently met
- Provide multiple, decentralised demobilisation sites to reach as many CAAFAG as possible
- Ensure that programmes take into account children's need to be empowered, including by providing independent living arrangements and alternatives to family reintegration
- Ensure that CAAFAG who turn 18 do not fall through the gaps in programmes
- Ensure that guidelines, policies and structures are in place to address the needs of foreign CAAFAG in a timely manner
- Ensure that staff working for local and international child protection agencies have specialised training
- Limit staff turnover as a means of building mutual trust with CAAFAG
- Develop, provide training on, and use codes of conduct to avoid abuses and exploitation
- Support credible and independent national and regional entities capable of monitoring states' implementation of DDR

E. CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

E.1 Social Reorientation and Psychosocial Care

Psychosocial services should start during release and continue through, and in some cases beyond, the reintegration process, with social workers paying visits to CAAFAG in their communities to monitor progress and provide support. The aim of this support is to assist CAAFAG to develop new patterns of behaviour, improve their self-esteem, develop their capacity to make decisions about the future, and enable them to cope with the effects of the traumatic events they may have witnessed or participated in.^{xxxix}

Social workers and others working with CAAFAG should identify and address any obstacles to the ability of CAAFAG to develop an appropriate social role and engage in culturally-expected social relationships in their communities, as well as engage in sustainable economic activities. The following principles should inform approaches to psychosocial support:

- **Role of support networks.** The development of strong networks of peer support through community-based groups such as youth groups or boys or girls' clubs may allow CAAFAG to work together to solve problems, develop social competencies and define their roles and responsibilities in society.
- **Culturally appropriate assistance.** Culturally appropriate approaches to assisting CAAFAG with emotional and behavioural problems should be identified and used.
- **Supportive environment.** The provision of a supportive environment where CAAFAG are kept informed about what is happening, feel safe, and have their health and other basic needs met is fundamental to psychosocial well-being.

Particular attention should be paid to post-conflict trauma and mental health issues, which in combination with alcohol or drug abuse, will affect reintegration. As long as CAAFAG remain traumatised, their productivity, self-esteem and commitment to self-help and recovery will remain limited. They may also present a threat to security. It should not, however, be assumed that all CAAFAG are traumatised. Programming should focus on their strengths, rather than viewing them as perpetual victims. Indeed, CAAFAG may emerge from their experiences with new skills and strengths to build on. Likewise, care workers should avoid assumptions about which CAAFAG may be most traumatised by their experiences.

Female CAAFAG must be given the opportunity to make informed decisions about the status of relationships and supported to separate from “husbands” where desired. Forced marriages have no basis in law, either formal or customary. Girls should never be encouraged to remain in such relationships for economic or social reasons. At the same time, reintegration programmes should seek to provide for, and protect, children born to mothers associated with armed forces or groups, including by placing them in schools.

Reintegration programmes may need to include specialised, civilian-run re-education programmes for CAAFAG who have been radicalised as part of religious or political struggles. Family and community engagement is an important part of the process and should be encouraged.

E.2 Justice

Children accused of crimes should be considered primarily as victims, not only as perpetrators, and treated as such.^{xi} They should be treated in accordance with international and African norms in a framework of restorative justice and social rehabilitation, consistent with international law, which offers children special protections.^{xii} This applies to both children who go through a DDR programme and those who do not. National authorities may wish to consider offering amnesty to CAAFAG as a means of facilitating their re-entry into society.

When prosecution of children does take place under either international or domestic laws, it is important that it conforms to international law and standards for juvenile justice.^{xiii} Each child has a fundamental right to due process. Criminal laws, procedures and institutions should be adapted to the specific needs of children. Prosecution may only be applied to children who have reached the age of criminal responsibility, as per applicable national law. It is crucial that they are tried before independent and impartial judicial bodies and that the purpose of any sentence given is to rehabilitate and ease reintegration into communities.^{xiii} All accountability measures should be in the best interests of the child, support their reintegration into society, and take into consideration their age at the time of the alleged crime. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release should be imposed.

Transitional justice mechanisms may assist post-conflict reconciliation. Provided it is in the best interests of the child and with his or her informed consent (plus that of parents, where feasible), allegations of violence against children, including sexual and gender-based violence, should be promptly, thoroughly, and independently investigated and prosecuted. Where truth seeking or reconciliation mechanisms are established, national authorities should promote children's involvement, ensuring child-friendly procedures (e.g. in-camera hearings for survivors of sexual violence), and that their rights are guaranteed throughout. National authorities should also consider establishing reparations funds for CAAFAG, including for those who did not go through a formal DDR process.

Information gathered from CAAFAG may be shared for the purposes of supporting transitional justice mechanisms if systems are designed not to cause distress, to respect the principle of confidentiality, not to identify individual CAAFAG, and are in the best interests of the children concerned.^{xiv} Usually a court order is required to share such information.

It is advisable for CPUs in PSOs and national militaries and DDR authorities to develop a system, governed by SOPs, for handling requests to hand over CAAFAG to a member state's authorities for alleged crimes (see **Operational Guidelines on Detention and DDR**). When such requests are received, agencies with a protection mandate such as ICRC and UNHCR (if CAAFAG is foreign) should be informed immediately, as they may be able to identify whether the child is at risk upon transfer. Requests to a DDR authority to transfer CAAFAG to a national military or other security agency should be denied and efforts made to protect CAAFAG, including those who did not go through a formal DDR process, from arbitrary arrests and ill-treatment by law enforcement agencies.

F. PREVENTING FURTHER RECRUITMENT

In countries experiencing conflict, prevailing social conditions—including chronic poverty, high unemployment, and children without parents—may increase the risk of children being (re)recruited

into armed forces or groups. Irrespective of whether recruitment is forced or voluntary, obligations for member states remain the same.

National authorities can help to prevent recruitment by investing in social protection schemes, education systems and the creation of jobs, thereby reducing vulnerability and providing meaningful alternatives to joining armed struggles. Equally, there is a need to document recruitment, sensitize communities on the risk of children being recruited, sensitize members of armed forces and groups, assist communities to establish child protection mechanisms, and educate them on the importance of not stigmatising returned CAAFAG.xlv

Member states should take steps to raise the recruitment age to national armies to 18.xlvi Recruitment procedures should be enforced, including by introducing the following:

- Proof of age requirement. Where documentary evidence of a recruit's age is not available, alternative methods may be used to cumulatively assess age e.g. screening interviews and triangulation through interviews of people known to them.xlvii Methodologies involving medical or physical assessments alone are not considered reliable. Responsibility for establishing the age of a recruit lies with the recruiting party.
- Legal and disciplinary measures. Sanctions for those who contravene proof of age requirements can act as a powerful disincentive.
- Oversight and proactive monitoring of recruitment procedures. An independent body is best placed to perform this function.

Other preventive measures include ensuring that national birth registration systems for children are functioning and accessible, and that particularly vulnerable groups of children—such as those separated from parents, internally displaced persons and refugees—are adequately protected, cared for and, where relevant, reunited with families.

- ⁱ Based on *The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups* (2007), p. 7 (referred to as “Paris Principles” throughout this guideline).
<http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/ParisPrinciples310107English.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), Articles 23-24, 38, 50, 76 and 89; Additional Protocol I (1977), Articles 70(1), 77; customary international humanitarian law (Rule 135, ICRC Customary IHL Database).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Articles 77(2) and 4(3)(c), 8(2)(b)(xxvi) and 4(c), and 38.2-3 respectively.
- ^{iv} Articles 22.2 and 11(4) respectively.
- ^v Articles 2, 3, 4, 6.
- ^{vi} ICRC (2013), *Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children: ICRC Statement to the United Nations*, 18 October.
<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/statement/2013/united-nations-children-statement-2013-10-18.htm>
- ^{vii} Art. 13, UNSCR 1325 (2000); Art. 1, UNSCR 1612 (2005); Articles 1, 13, 15 UNSCR 1882 (2009).
- ^{viii} African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), Art. 4; Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Art. 3.1.
- ^{ix} For more on the principle of informed consent, see ICRC (2013), *Professional Standards for Protection Work*, p. 95.
<http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc-002-0999.pdf>
- ^x For more on the principle of confidentiality, see ICRC (2013), *Professional Standards for Protection Work*, p. 92.
- ^{xi} Ministry for Foreign Affairs Sweden (2006), *Stockholm Initiative on Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration: Final report*, p. 3. <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/06/43/56/cf5d851b.pdf>
- ^{xii} Sudan People’s Liberation Army Child Protection Unit (2013), *Prevention of Recruitment, Reintegration: Case Study for Implementing the Revised Action Plan*, unpublished PowerPoint presentation, African Union, Addis Ababa, 17 September.
- ^{xiii} Paris Principles (2007), Principle. 7.18.
- ^{xiv} Paris Principles (2007), Principle 2.6.
- ^{xv} Paris Principles (2007), Principle 4.
- ^{xvi} UNICEF (2012), *Leçons apprises sur le processus de désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion/réintégration des enfants sortis des forces et groupes armés au Burundi*, unpublished document, p. 7-8.
- ^{xvii} UN IDDRS (2006), Module 5.30, Section 8.5, p. 21.
- ^{xviii} Child Protection Working Group (2012), *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, Standard 11, No.5, p. 107. http://www.unicef.org/iran/Minimum_standards_for_child_protection_in_humanitarian_action.pdf
- ^{xix} UN IDDRS (2006), Module 5.30, Section 8.8. See also Paris Principles (2007), Principles 7.25 -7.29 on interviewing children.
- ^{xx} For guidance on interim care for CAAFAG, see UN IDDRS (2006), Module 5.30, Section 8.2, p. 17-19; Child Protection Working Group(2012), *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, Standard 11, No. 6, p. 107.
- ^{xxi} Child Protection Working Group (2012), *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, Standards 20-25, p. 173-207.
- ^{xxii} Child Protection Working Group (2012), *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, Standards 8-9, p.85-96.
- ^{xxiii} Child Protection Working Group (2012), *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, Standard 15, p. 135-142.
- ^{xxiv} International law prohibits transfers of detainees to the authorities of any state in violation of the principle of “non-refoulement”. This includes situations where there are real risks that an individual will be subjected to torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary deprivation of life (including the death penalty after a trial not respecting internationally recognized judicial guarantees); enforced disappearance or persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group or political opinion; or underage recruitment to an armed force or group or participation in hostilities (see Convention Against Torture (1984) Art. 3; General Comments 20 and 31 of the UN Human Rights Committee (paragraphs 9 and 12 respectively); International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006), Art. 16(1); Refugee Convention (1951), Art. 33(1); and General Comment 6 (2005) of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (paragraph 28)).
- ^{xxv} Wedge, Joanne/Interagency Group on Reintegration (2013), *Reaching for Home: Global Learning on Family Reintegration in Lower-Middle Income Countries*, p. 5.
http://www.familyforeverychild.org/sites/default/files/resources/Reaching%20for%20home_0.pdf
- ^{xxvi} Child Protection Working Group (2012), *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, Standards 11, No.2, p. 106.
- ^{xxvii} UN IDDRS (2006), Module 5.30, Section 6.5, p.13-14.
- ^{xxviii} Child Protection Working Group (2012), *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, Standards 10, 19-26, p. 97-102, 167-213.
- ^{xxix} Child Protection Working Group (2012), *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action*, Standards 11, No.7, p. 108.
- ^{xxx} A careful, rigorous and participatory decision-making process about the suitability of family reintegration is recommended. See Wedge, Joanne/Interagency Group on Reintegration (2013), *Reaching for Home: Global Learning on Family Reintegration in Lower-Middle Income Countries*, p. 4.
http://www.familyforeverychild.org/sites/default/files/resources/Reaching%20for%20home_0.pdf
- ^{xxxi} Interagency Working Group on Separated and Unaccompanied Children (2013), *Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit*, p. 126-139.
- ^{xxxii} Interagency Working Group on Separated and Unaccompanied Children (2013), *Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit*, p. 146-149.
- ^{xxxiii} See also International Labour Organisation (2010), *Children Formerly Associated with Armed Forces and Groups: “How to” Guide on Economic Reintegration*. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_159089.pdf
- ^{xxxiv} UN IDDRS (2006), Module 5.30, Section 9.3, p.26.
- ^{xxxv} One of the lessons learned from DDR in the Great Lakes region was the need for programmes to provide dedicated support for special groups, including persons with disabilities. See Multi-Country Disarmament and Demobilisation Programme (2010), *MDRP Final Report, Overview of Achievements*, p. 4. http://www.mdrp.org/PDFs/MDRP_Final_Report.pdf
- ^{xxxvi} International Labour Organisation (2010), *Economic Reintegration of Children Formerly Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups: Background Paper*, p. 7. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001907/190780e.pdf>
- ^{xxxvii} UNICEF (2012), *Leçons apprises sur le processus de désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion/réintégration des enfants sortis des forces et groupes armés au Burundi*, p. 10-11.

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- xxxviii Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2006), *Child Soldiers and Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration in West Africa: A Survey of Programmatic Work on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone*. http://www.ssrnetwork.net/uploaded_files/4225.pdf
- xxxix UN IDDRS (2006), Module 5.30, Section 9.1, p.25-26.
- xl Paris Principles (2007), Principle 3.6-3.8.
- xli Beijing Rules on Juvenile Justice (1985); African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), Art. 17; Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Art. 40.
- xlii Beijing Rules on Juvenile Justice (1985); ICRC (2013), *Children Associated with Armed Forces or Groups*, 3rd edition, p. 9 (<http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-0824.pdf>); ICRC (2011), *Guiding Principles for the Domestic Implementation of a Comprehensive System of Protection for Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups*, p. 384-387 (<http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/2011/guiding-principles-children-icrc.pdf>)
- xliiii ICRC (2013), *Children Associated with Armed Forces or Groups*, 3rd edition, p. 9.
- xliv Paris Principles (2007), Principles 8.12-8.13.
- xlV UN IDDRS (2006), Module 5.30, Section 7, p.14-17.
- xlvi See ICRC (2013), *Model Legislative Provisions on the Recruitment or Use of Children In Armed Conflict*. <http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/2013/model-law-children-eng-2013.pdf>
- xlvii For guidance on assessing a person's age, see Child Soldiers International (2012), *Louder than Words: An Agenda For Action to End State Use of Child Soldiers*, p. 57-58. http://www.child-soldiers.org/global_report_reader.php?id=562