

Human Rights & Refugees

Militarisation of Youth

QUNO works for a peaceful, just and sustainable world by engaging with the wider United Nations (UN) community. Quakers are known for speaking out against injustice and war, and we act as a Quaker presence at the UN. Our work is rooted in the Quaker testimonies of peace, truth, justice, equality, and simplicity. We understand peace as more than the absence of war and violence, recognizing the need to look for what seeds of war there may be in all our social, political, and economic relationships.

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Box 1

“Militarisation”

“To become militarised is to adopt militaristic values and priorities as one’s own, to see military solutions as particularly effective, to see the world as a dangerous place best approached with militaristic attitudes”.

- Cynthia Enloe

As cited in ForcesWatch (2013) [Militarisation in everyday life in the UK: a conference report](#)

Education & the Military:

A human rights & peace perspective

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Questioning the presence and influence of the military in primary and secondary education from a peace and human rights perspective

Children and young people around the world encounter the military and military ethos in everyday life, including in their schools. The military can be involved in school life in numerous ways, including: offering activities; hosting career days; giving lessons; influencing the training and development of teachers; and providing input into the curriculum. Through such activities, the military can access schools for recruitment purposes and use the education system to develop future political support for the military.¹

Concerned at the military’s involvement in schools and the militarisation of education (*see Box 1*), QUNO draws attention to relevant international human rights standards that promote education for peace.

1 In 11 countries, recruitment is the main purpose of a military presence in the education system, whilst in 14 countries it seems to be the promotion of uncritical support of the military. As cited in War Resisters’ International (2013) [Sowing Seeds: The Militarisation of Youth and How to Counter It](#)

In the UK, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) states two objectives for engaging with young people: an awareness of the armed forces and their work and recruitment. See MoD (2011) [Youth Engagement Review](#) and MoD (2007) *Engagement with UK schools: Supplementary Memorandum from the Ministry of Defence*, House of Commons Defence Committee, Recruiting and Retaining Armed Forces Personnel, 14th Report of Session.

In the US, the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) aims to “create favourable attitudes and impressions towards the Services and toward careers in the Armed Forces”. As cited in C. Lutz and L. Bartlett (1995) *Making Soldiers in the Public Schools: An Analysis of the Army JROTC Curriculum*

The Right to Education

Everyone has the right to education, as enshrined in international human rights law.² The right to education includes access to education and, in addition, international standards relate to the purpose and content of education (*see Box 2*). Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, education has been recognised in various human rights treaties as important for the respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the maintenance of peace.

Box 2

UN International Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights

(1976), Article 13.1

“[E]ducation shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms... [E]ducation shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace”.

One of the key purposes of education is defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 29.1) as “the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples”.

2 United Nations [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), Article 26
United Nations [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), Article 28
United Nations [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), Article 13.1

Other relevant standards can be found in the work of the [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation](#) (UNESCO), most notably the [Convention against Discrimination in Education](#) (1962)

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which is comprised of independent experts, monitors the implementation of the aforementioned Convention by reviewing how well governments protect and respect children’s rights. The CRC has developed additional guidance to help governments implement the Convention, including on the aims of education. In this guidance, the CRC proposes that education should “promote and reinforce the specific ethical values enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including ‘education for peace, tolerance and respect for the natural environment.’”³

International Human Rights Standards

In addition to the right to education, there are a number of other international human rights standards that are relevant to the question of the military’s use of schools and the militarisation of education.

Military Recruitment & Best Interests of the Child

One of the key guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the need to take into account the best interests of the child; specifically it states that:

“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration”.⁴

3 Committee on the Rights of the Child [General Comment No. 1](#) (CRC/GC/2001/1 of 17 April 2001), “The aims of education (Article 29.1)”

4 United Nations [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), Article 28

International Human Rights Standards (cont.)

Governments have a duty, therefore, to consider the best interests of the child in all actions, including those taken within the education system and by the military. However, research suggests that it is not in the best interests of the child, nor young people, to be recruited into the army, as younger recruits are more likely to be affected by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), common mental disorders (including certain types of depression and anxiety), alcohol misuse (harmful levels of drinking), violent behaviour after deployment, self-harm and suicide.⁵

One purpose of the military's involvement in schools is recruitment. QUNO supports a "straight-18" position, that those under the age of 18 should not be recruited, conscripted or participate in armed conflict, upholding the fact that children are protected until the age of 18 under international law.⁶ The International Labour Organisation explicitly prohibits the compulsory recruitment of under-18s.⁷ However, voluntary recruitment of under-18s into government armed forces is permitted in certain circumstances under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC).⁸

The OPAC is also monitored by the CRC. Whilst reviewing governments' progress in implementing this treaty, the CRC has engaged with the issue of military involvement in education and schools. In particular, the CRC has raised concerns that recruitment activities may target vulnerable groups, particularly ethnic minorities and children of low-income families.⁹ In terms of the best interests of the child, research shows that younger recruits from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are most likely to occupy military roles with high levels of exposure to traumatic events and are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems.¹⁰

Recruitment through schools, in particular, can target large numbers of young people, whilst bypassing parents, influential adults or other "gatekeepers" in a young person's life. The CRC recommends that parents are included during the entire process of recruitment and enlistment.¹¹

5 ForcesWatch (2013) [The Last Ambush? Aspects of mental health in the British armed forces](#)

6 See in particular the United Nations [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

7 International Labour Organisation (1999) [Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour \(No. 182\)](#)

8 According to the United Nations [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict](#) (A/RES/54/263 of 25 May 2000), those under-18 (but over the age of 16) may be conscripted if the recruitment is genuinely voluntary, carried out with informed consent of parents or legal guardians, full information regarding the duties of military service is provided, and that reliable proof of age of is provided prior to acceptance into the military.

9 Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding Observations on UK](#) (CRC/C/OPAC/GBR/CO/1 of 17 October 2008), para. 15

10 ForcesWatch (2013) [The Last Ambush? Aspects of mental health in the British armed forces](#)

11 Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding Observations on UK](#) (CRC/C/OPAC/GBR/CO/1 of 17 October 2008), para. 15

International Human Rights Standards (cont.)

Box 3

Recruitment & Recognition

“Public understanding of the military and recognition of their role will always determine the climate within which the [Armed] Forces can recruit, and the willingness of the taxpayer to finance them adequately”.

[Report of inquiry into national recognition of our Armed Forces](#)
(UK, 2008)

Critical Thought & Peaceful Places

It is important to note that the militarisation of education goes beyond the question of recruitment (see Box 3). It also upholds a military ethos in education and aims to develop future political support for the military.

The CRC recommends that peace education is included in the school curricula and teacher training (see Box 4), and that a culture of peace is fostered through the education system.¹²

There are concerns that the involvement of the military in education can create an environment that does not foster critical thinking and informed debates about war and violent conflict.

In their guidance on education, the CRC proposes that essential life skills are learnt by every child, and specifically lists the resolution of “conflicts in a non-violent manner” and the development of “critical thinking” as essential life skills.¹³

12 Committee on the Rights of the Child [General Comment No. 1](#)

13 Committee on the Rights of the Child [General Comment No. 1](#)

Peace should not only be taught in schools, but schools should also be peaceful places. According to the CRC, education provision should promote non-violence in schools.¹⁴ Therefore, schools and learning environments should, in themselves, “reflect the freedom and the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples”.¹⁵

Box 4

Peace Education in School Curricula and Teacher Training

In Brazil, peace education will be included in the educational curricula of schools in the city of São Luis. The project, [Peace, how to do it? Sowing a culture of peace in schools](#), will be delivered in partnership between the city authorities and UNESCO. The project will encourage students to: respect life, reject violence, be generous, listen to understand, care for the planet and rediscover solidarity.

The [UN International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World](#) (2001 to 2010) included a focus on peace education and shared examples of successful initiatives around the world through the [Culture of Peace News Network](#).

[Teachers Without Borders](#), which works in numerous countries including the Democratic Republic of Korea, Mexico, South Africa & Uganda, provides teacher training as part of their Peace Education Program.

The [International Network for Conflict Resolution Education and Peace Education](#) (INCREPE) is a global network of individuals & organizations committed to promoting and implementing peace education and conflict resolution education.

14 Committee on the Rights of the Child [General Comment No. 1](#)

15 Committee on the Rights of the Child [General Comment No. 1](#)

Concluding Comments

In response to concerns about the militarisation of youth, particularly with regards to military involvement in education and schools, QUNO highlights key international human rights standards that promote education for peace and non-violence.

Civil society is encouraged to provide information to the CRC about violations or abuses of human rights that they witness in their own countries, including information about the militarisation of education. QUNO encourages civil society groups¹⁶ concerned about this issue to use the international human rights bodies and mechanisms, including the CRC.

To find out when your country is next being reviewed, please check the website of the [CRC](#). Further guidance on how you can interact with and contribute to the work of the CRC can be found through [Child Rights Connect](#).

¹⁶ There are a number of civil society groups and non-governmental organisations already engaged with this issue, including:

[Child Soldiers International](#)

[ForcesWatch](#), UK

[German Peace Society - United Opponents of Military Service](#) (DFG-VK), Germany

[National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth](#) (NNOMY), US

[New Profile](#), Israel

[War Resisters' International](#) & their affiliated groups around the world

Box 5

Further Resources

To learn more about the militarisation of youth:

- ForcesWatch (2014) [Engage: The Military and Young People](#) [Film]
- New Profile (2004) [The New Profile Report on Child Recruitment in Israel](#)
- Quaker Peace & Social Witness (2014) [The new tide of militarisation](#)
- War Resisters' International (2013) [Sowing Seeds: The Militarisation of Youth and How to Counter It](#)

For further resources and examples of peace education:

- [Friedensbildung an Schulen](#) (Germany)
- [Peace Education Network](#) (UK) including [Quakers in Britain](#)
- [On Earth Peace](#) (US)
- [Open Minds Project](#), the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (Pakistan)

The Quaker United Nations Office

The Quaker UN Office, located in Geneva and New York, represents Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers), an international non-governmental organization with General Consultative Status at the UN. QUNO works to promote the peace and justice concerns of Friends (Quakers) from around the world at the UN and other global institutions. QUNO works to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights through the United Nations system, with particular reference to the interface between human rights and armed conflicts.

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