

## **Panel Discussion: “Child Soldiers are Victims, Not Soldiers”**

The International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers (“Red Hand Day”) is held on 12 February of each year, and is devoted to drawing attention to the phenomenon of child recruitment and calling for the protection of children from this practice. According to international law, child recruitment is designated as a war crime; the optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, affirmed that “persons under the age of 18 years shall not be involved in armed conflicts”. Despite international condemnation of the practice, there are tens of thousands of girls and boys around the world conscripted into armed conflict. These children are recruited in various ways, including through kidnapping, manipulation, threats, or exploitation of their families’ financial situations. These children work as combatants, reporters, spies, as servants to adult soldiers, and in other hazardous duties that may endanger their health or even result in their loss of life.

The continuing phenomenon of child recruitment is of concern to the international community in general, and to those working in the field of child protection in particular. The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSrelief) is keen to protect children from being recruited, and to rehabilitate former child soldiers and help them reintegrate into society. In an effort to mobilize the efforts of the international community, and to enhance cooperation between interested and working parties in the field of protection and rehabilitation of child soldiers, KSrelief is holding a panel discussion entitled: "Victims, Not Soldiers."

The panel discussion is divided into two sessions to help achieve the goals of the meeting. The first session aims to raise awareness about child recruitment and the importance of highlighting this illegal practice, internationally and in the media. The second session aims to strengthen cooperation between interested and working parties in protecting children from recruitment and rehabilitating former child soldiers. Participants will discuss major challenges and review best practices to generate practical recommendations that will contribute to the development of future humanitarian action to reduce child recruitment.

## **First Session: “Victims, Not Soldiers”**

Title: “Victims, Not Soldiers”

Type: Virtual open awareness-raising session

Duration: 60 minutes

Session description: An awareness-raising session to highlight the humanitarian side of the phenomenon of child recruitment, internationally and in the media. The growing use of children in armed conflict has put childhood itself in jeopardy. Shedding light on this practice contributes to raising awareness about the dangers of child recruitment, and can help mobilize global efforts to combat the exploitation of children in conflict situations.

### Session topics:

- Introducing and raising awareness of the phenomenon of child recruitment and highlighting the phenomenon in the media and internationally.
- Call for unifying international action against child recruitment.
- Strengthening the mobilization of efforts at the global level to address the phenomenon of child recruitment.

## Second Session: “Children and Armed Conflict: Looking to the Future”

Title: “Children and Armed Conflict: Looking to the Future”

Type: Virtual open session

Duration: 120 minutes

Session description: This session aims to enhance international cooperation between interested and working parties in the field of rehabilitating child soldiers, in order to contribute to protecting children from recruitment and mitigate the economic, social and psychological effects of this phenomenon.

- Session topics:
- To enhance cooperation between organizations interested and working in the field of protecting and rehabilitating child soldiers to achieve Sustainable Development Goals in this regard particularly the 16<sup>th</sup> goal (peace, justice and strong institutions) in the field of child protection.
- Knowing the challenges facing organizations in the field of protecting and rehabilitating child soldiers to help develop creative solutions and improve working practices.
- Reviewing the best practices in the field of protecting and rehabilitating child soldiers that can be applied to programs on the ground.
- Highlighting the importance of promoting children's rights during and after conflicts.
- Making recommendations for implementing a session on protecting and rehabilitating child soldiers at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Riyadh International Humanitarian Forum.