



We all know the tragic tale of the frightful Second World War. Soldiers pasted across the front line, families torn apart, civilizations absolutely decimated. Yes, I'm sure you're familiar. However, I bet you didn't know that the youngest recorded soldier was only 6 years old; a Soviet boy named Sergei Aleshkov, known amongst the troops as the "Son of the Regiment". Not much is known about little Sergei, except that he lived up to age 53 and received numerous awards for his service. Tens of thousands of underage soldiers were cornered into conflict due to government expectations or the mass propaganda that was spread. Scarred and traumatized these kids - children, ranging from ages 6 to 17 - were subjected to unimaginable circumstances; that of which no child should ever have had to witness.

**Article 38 of the UNCRC** makes it clear that children should not be recruited by governments to join any armed forces. The mental and physical capacity of a child is severely limited when contrasted to that of a fully grown adult. These vulnerable youths shouldn't have to find themselves in the centre of societal disagreements, which is why the article also states that children should be issued extra protection when wars are ongoing. Though in places, children as young as 15 years olds can voluntarily sign up to join armed sectors or fight in current hostilities, priority is given to the eldest children signing up. War isn't fun for anyone but can be particularly hard for younger citizens who may not have as much of an understanding of why what is happening is happening.

As of today, the Gaza strip is the most dangerous place to be for any child in the world - even after the war ends it is expected to stay that way, with the heaviest concentration of unexpected ordnance on the planet. Over a million children here are facing a shortage of food, water, shelter and medicinal supplies. A lack of these essentials is leading to a spike in diseases, malnutrition and undernutrition; causing an increase in thousands of preventable deaths. UNICEF is a neutral organization and refrains from engaging in pending political controversies. They are currently working in Israel to extend psychosocial and mental support to kids while spreading awareness for children's rights in uneducated areas. They are also working in Gaza to provide children with the necessities they are lacking; shielding as many as possible from the lifelong consequences of poverty and exclusion.

As the war enters its third year, there is still no safe place for children in Ukraine. Raid alerts, drones and explosions have become the daily norm. Children have lost their lives and sense of

safety, with an abominable 2500 either killed or injured by the conflicts. Since the war began, children have spent the equivalent of 7 months sheltered from attacks, often underground. There was a Cafe Philosophy talk I attended a while ago where we were fortunate enough to hear the story of an actual Ukrainian girl who had witnessed this for herself. My heart was shattered as I heard how her home, in the city of Lviv, was torn apart by bombs and attacks. She spoke about a local shelter for Ukrainian citizens in Aberdeen; one that re-established her sense of hope and community and reminded me that wherever we are, we can all do our part.

All this to say, we need to stay aware. We need to stay awake. So many children are suffering and dying in so many places around the globe. Article 38 is an assurance of our protection, but we must remember, not all countries uphold the values of the UNCRC. It is our social responsibility to ensure the safety of affected citizens, most especially the vulnerable, wherever and whenever we can. There are numerous establishments like UNICEF, alongside local organizations, who have opened their arms to those in need. They inspire with their determination and will to make a difference, and in the same way, we should use the power of our voices to share the word, spread awareness and strive for a change - a better change. A better world.

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