



# carmelngo

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"Every human life is special, and people are more important than objects. ... When children are forced to commit violent crimes, they are deprived of the quality of life that we all deserve. Additionally, when children are forced to fight battles, they are obviously forced as well to take the lives of others. These experiences often scar children for life, and their actions subsequently deprive others of their lives."

Catholic Social Teaching



## Child Soldiers Struggle to Adapt Back to a Child's Life

Child soldiers are any children under the age of 18 who are recruited by a state or non-state armed group and used as fighters, cooks, suicide bombers, human shields, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. Since 2000, the use of child soldiers has spread to almost every region of the world and every armed conflict.

Children who are poor, displaced from their families, have limited access to education, or live in a combat zone are more likely to be forcibly recruited. Others who are not forced to be soldiers volunteer themselves because they feel societal pressure and are under the impression that volunteering will provide a form of income, food, or security, and willingly join the group. Girls make up an estimated 10 to 30 percent of child soldiers used for fighting and other purposes. They are especially vulnerable when it comes to sexual violence.

The recruitment of child soldiers breaks several human rights laws. Children who have committed crimes as soldiers are looked upon more leniently. Crimes committed voluntarily are subject to justice under the international juvenile justice standards.

The Tribune Newspapers ran an article entitled "Ex-Child Soldiers Struggle to Adapt" in May 2014. The article follows Charly, from the Central African Republic, who not long before had all the money he needed, a rebel uniform, an AK-47, and the feeling that he had power. The writer found Charly after he had returned to his old life: a helpless boy. "The thought of it makes him (Charly) sit rigid with anger, his eyes flashing."

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Countries which had child soldiers involved in conflict between 2001 through 2004. Children who are poor, displaced from their families, have limited access to education, or live in a combat zone are more likely to be forcibly recruited. Others who are not forced to be soldiers volunteer themselves under the impression that volunteering will provide a form of income, food, or security, and willingly join the group. *Map courtesy of one-europe.info*

The conflict tearing the Central African Republic apart has turned neighbor against neighbor and erased any trace of childhood for thousands.

Children have been pawns in virtually every conflict in this country plagued by coups, mutinies, and rebellions. Some, like Charly, were handed guns. Others toted cargo or were taken as sex slaves.

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, made dozens of the children available to speak about their former lives as child soldiers. Charly recalled when the rebels arrived. Although he was afraid, his need to survive was even more pressing. He went along with the group in order to eat.

At first the rebels were suspicious of the local boy who appeared in their midst. Then they found he could help them. He was not afraid and he knew the places they could rob. He was given a Kalashnikov assault rifle and went on patrols through his town. When an old woman tried to curse his grandmother, he shot her in the foot.

Another young man, Jordy, joined the rebels as a way of protecting himself and a way to survive. It was also a way to seek revenge against the rebel fighter who had killed his brother and cousin.

Jordy did not like what he did while with the rebels: ransacking, pillaging, and stealing. When the rebels continued their advance, the young soldiers went with them. Some were forced to go, but others were enticed by the prospect of looting. When Charly and Jordy saw them killing people, they left.

Jordy was one of the fortunate ones. He knew who his family is. Other children do not even know where their relatives are-- hundreds of thousands have fled their homes in the fighting. Even when family members can be traced, they may be reluctant to accept a former fighter into their homes. And children who are used to carrying weapons can find it hard to obey their parents.

Some cannot forgive the children for joining the rebels. A man who recognized Jordy assaulted him on the street.

Mireille was 14 when a rebel colonel spotted her. That night the rebel showed up at her home. Their widowed mother was gone. The colonel took her, gave her a new name, and raped her repeatedly. None of the other rebels were allowed to touch her. An aide was assigned to watch her when the colonel went out. After several months, the colonel lost interest in Mireille and took other "wives."

Ending the use of child soldiers by states is possible, but it requires a greater investment in reducing the risks, even before boys and girls are used by the military. Real prevention means that these problems should be addressed starting from the recruitment phase along with a global ban on the military recruitment of any person below the age of 18 years.

CarmeNGO is published four times each year and is distributed to those interested in the mission of the NGO. For more information or to add your name and address to our mailing list, please visit our website ([carmelitengo.org](http://carmelitengo.org)) or write to us by email ([jremson@carmelitengo.org](mailto:jremson@carmelitengo.org)) or by regular post at 1725 General Taylor Street; New Orleans, LA 70115; USA)

## Related Websites This Issue:

World Commission on Culture and Development  
[www.unesdoc.unesco.org](http://www.unesdoc.unesco.org)

Creative Europe: Supporting Europe's Cultural and Creative Sectors  
[ec.europa.eu/culture/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/index_en.htm)

Cultures of the World  
[gws.ala.org/category/social-sciences/cultures-world](http://gws.ala.org/category/social-sciences/cultures-world)

Do Something  
[www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-child-soldiers](http://www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-child-soldiers)

Facts and Figures on Child Soldiers  
[en.kindernothilfe.org/Rubrik/Topics/Child+Soldiers/Facts+and+figures.html](http://en.kindernothilfe.org/Rubrik/Topics/Child+Soldiers/Facts+and+figures.html)

Peace Direct: Supporting Local Action Against Conflict  
[www.peacedirect.org](http://www.peacedirect.org)

Amnesty International  
[www.amnesty.org/en/children](http://www.amnesty.org/en/children)

Information about Children Soldiers  
[www.mtholyoke.edu/~aelapine/ChildSoldierInfo.html](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~aelapine/ChildSoldierInfo.html)

Child Soldiers International  
[www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org)



## The Importance of Culture in Any Sustainable Development

Culture can be defined as, the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. It can also be defined as the predominating attitudes and behaviors that characterize the functioning of a group or organization.

What goes into a culture? Culture incorporates all those factors that go into the refining and developing of humanity's diverse spiritual and physical endowments. It means the efforts of the human family

to bring the world under its control through its knowledge and its labor. It means the efforts to humanize social life both in the family and in the whole civic community through the improvement of customs and institutions. It means efforts to express through its works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of all peoples throughout the ages. And it means the efforts to communicate and to preserve them to be an inspiration for the progress of many, indeed of the whole human race. In this sense, culture must be held as the common good of every person, the expression of its dignity, liberty and creativity, and the testimony of its course through history.

“ Culture is a core value of sustainable development. Culture is not an add-on.

” A person's understanding of his own and others' cultural identity develops from birth and is shaped by the values and attitudes prevalent at home and in the surrounding community. This identity becomes more complex and fluid over time as people develop allegiances to different groups within the broader society. At the same time, cultures themselves are not static but develop and change as the belief systems and ways of life of different groups adapt under other cultural influences including mass media and popular culture to create new identities. In a culturally diverse society individuals may have multiple identities through identification with several different sub-cultures. These identities may include identity based on cultural heritage, family or birthplace; religious or social identity; and identity as members of particular society.

Culture is not an add-on, an ornament that humans use. It's what makes us human. Culture is made up of traditions, beliefs, and ways of life, from the most spiritual to the most material. It gives meaning, a way of leading our lives. Human beings are creators of culture and, at the same time, culture is what makes us human.

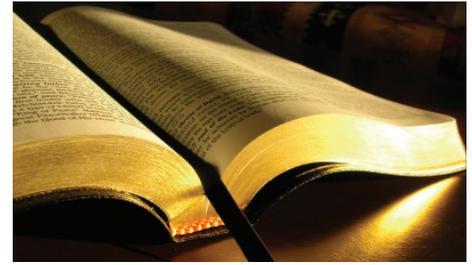
Fulfilling today's human needs while preserving and protecting the natural environment for future generations requires equitable and harmonious interactions between individuals and communities. Developing cultural values that support people-to-people and people-to-nature values has traditionally been the role of religion in most societies. Religion provides a theistic code of morals for use in binding order in society and culture.

Society and culture are bound together by codes of behavior, and by tacit agreements to live together in harmony. Some cultures identified themselves by their religion; i.e., their religion was the center which held the culture together. Home, farming, relationships, marriage, birth and death, these are all common events in cultures; often these events have a religious significance. Religion gives transcendental meaning and purpose, and often, a goal to aspire to when life is complete. So many cultures have bound themselves together in common that they might all achieve the goal of life in common, by providing those social structures that bind religion and humans. The word *religiare* (from which we get our common word *religion*) means to bind back.

Religion gives codes of behavior for society and culture, such as the Ten Commandments. Another example is “Love God, have morality in society, and abhor sin.” All religions have values. Values are guides to behavior, such as do good, avoid evil. All religions have the five human values, Truth, Right Conduct, Love, Peace and Non-violence at their core. These are values which sustain the very core of family, home, society, nation, and world. Religion is a major influence in the world. People in all cultures have a set of beliefs that go beyond both the self and the natural world. They use these beliefs to help explain reasons for human existence and to guide personal relationships and behavior.

Religious beliefs have a strong influence on the culture of a community. For many people around the world, religious beliefs are central to their culture and pro-

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## Scriptural Calls for Justice and for All to Participate

According to Catholic teaching, the person is both sacred and social. How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. Here are a few Scriptural passages for reflection:

**Leviticus 25:23-43**

*What you own belongs to the Lord and is given for the good of all.*

**Jeremiah 7:5-7**

*If you act justly with one another, God will dwell in the land.*

**Micah 6:6-8**

*Act justly, love kindness, walk humbly with God.*

**John 15:12-17**

*This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.*

**Acts 2:43-47**

*Life among the believers.*

**Romans 12:4-8**

*We are one body, individually members one of another.*

**Hebrews 10:24-25**

*Rouse one another to love and good works.*

**James 2:14-17**

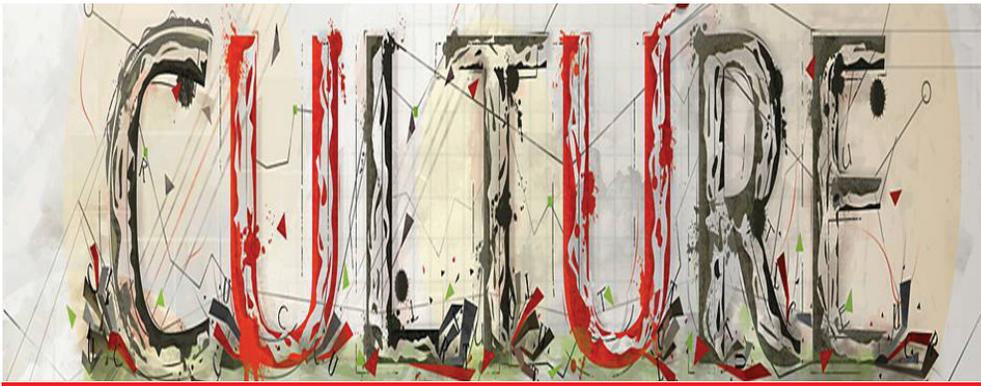
*Our faith is dead if we ignore others in need.*



## UN's Plant a Billion Trees Project

The Billion Tree Campaign was launched in 2006 by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) as a response to the challenges of global warming, as well as to a wider array of sustainability challenges, from water supply to biodiversity loss. Its initial target was the planting of one billion trees in 2007. One year later, in 2008, the campaign's objective was raised to 7 billion trees. Three months before the conference, the 7 billion planted trees mark had been surpassed. In December 2011, after more than 12 billion trees had been planted.

<http://www.plantabillion.org>



...is, and always has been,  
*the "key"!*

vide the moral codes by which they live. Even where people in the contemporary world believe that the traditional beliefs of their parents and societies are not so relevant to their everyday lives, underlying religious beliefs about human worth and how to relate to other people and the Earth are still important parts of their lives.

The World Commission on Culture and Development ([www.unesdoc.unesco.org](http://www.unesdoc.unesco.org)) defined culture as 'ways of living together' and argued that this made culture a core element of sustainable development.

Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept of sustainable development does imply limits - not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. But technology and social organization can be both managed and improved to make way for a new era of economic growth. The Commission believes that widespread poverty is no longer inevitable. Poverty is not only an evil in itself, but sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life. A world in which poverty is endemic will always be prone to ecological and other catastrophes.

Sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs.

"Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture, that is through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature. Wherever human life is involved, therefore, nature and culture are quite intimately connected one with the other.

The word 'culture' in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family.

Thence it follows that human culture has necessarily a historical and social aspect and the word 'culture' also often assumes a sociological and ethnological sense. According to this sense we speak of a plurality of cultures. Different styles of life and multiple scales of values arise from the diverse manner of using things, of laboring, of expressing oneself, of practicing religion, of forming customs, of establishing laws and juridic institutions, of cultivating the sciences, the arts and beauty. Thus the customs handed down to it form the patrimony proper to each human community. It is also in this way that there is formed the definite, historical milieu which enfolds the man of every nation and age and from which he draws the values which permit him to promote civilization," (*Gaudium et Spes*, 53).

by Jane Remson, O. Carm.

## Carmelite NGO Coordinating Team

Jane Remson, O. Carm.  
Main Representative

Joseph Chalmers, O. Carm.  
International Liaison

Beth Fitzpatrick, O. Carm.  
Spirituality Reflection Team

Jennifer John Wanjiku, TOC  
Kenya, Africa Region

Hariawan Adji, O. Carm.  
Asian Region

Conrad Mutizamhempo, O. Carm.  
Carmelite General Council

Annah Theresa Nyadombo, HOLMC  
Zimbabwe, Africa Region

Helen Aricaya Ojario, O. Carm.  
North American Region

Eduardo Scarel, O. Carm.  
South American Region

Arie Kuil, O. Carm.  
European Union Region

Andrea Ventimiglia, TOC  
European Union Region

William J. Harry, O. Carm.  
Communications

## Committees

North American Climate Change  
Blaise Fernando, O. Carm.

Spirituality Reflection Team  
Beth Fitzpatrick, O. Carm.  
Barbara Breaud, O. Carm.  
Camille Anne Campbell, O. Carm.  
Craig Morrison, O. Carm.  
Dionysius Kosasih, O. Carm.  
Christopher O'Donnell, O. Carm.  
Joseph Chalmers, O. Carm.  
Eduardo Scarel, O. Carm.

## Carmelite NGO

### Main Office:

1725 General Taylor Street  
New Orleans, LA 70115 USA  
Tel: (+01) 504.458.3029  
Fax: (+01) 504. 864.7438  
[jremson@carmelitengo.org](mailto:jremson@carmelitengo.org)

### New York Office:

211 East 43rd Street - Suite 708  
New York, NY 10017 USA  
Tel: (+01) 646.416.4690  
Fax: (+01) 212.682.8013  
[hojario@carmelitengo.org](mailto:hojario@carmelitengo.org)  
[carmelitengo.org](http://carmelitengo.org)