DN THINKING CAP*

AFP photo

CHILD SOLDIERS: Prosecutors allege that children as young as 11 were abducted from their homes.

War and death a 'game' for children

THE HAGUE
Agence France-Presse

Using children as soldiers was "particularly abusive" as their ignorance of death made them fearless, a UN expert told the war crimes trial Thursday of Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga in The Hague.

Children under 15 had "an under-developed notion of death", Radhika Coomaraswamy, a special UN representative for children in armed conflict, told the International Criminal Court. "The lack of the concept of death makes them fearless in battle, often thinking of it as a game and rushing straight into the line of fire," she testified. "For this reason ... it is particularly abusive to utilize children."

Lubanga, 49, went on trial a year ago charged with war crimes for using children under the age of 15 to fight. He pleaded not guilty. The trial was set to have resumed with the defense, but continued with the court calling Coomaraswamy as an expert witness. She testified that in tribal conflicts, children easily fell prey to romantic notions of dying for their community.

"Children are easily exploited by those kinds of imageries of romantic death and heroic death," Coomaraswamy said. She urged the court not to give too much credence to the fact that many child soldiers had in fact volunteered to fight.

"I heard so many stories of children who ... told me they felt they had no choice but to join an armed group in order to feed themselves or because they were maltreated by family members.

"The court should see children as a special category, creating a framework that protects their vulnerability." Prosecutors allege that Lubanga's militia abducted children as young as 11 from their homes, schools and football fields and took them to military training camps where they were beaten and drugged. The girls among them were said to be used as sex slaves.

Antalya gathers best debaters of the world

Zennube Ezgi Kaya
ANTALYA - Hürriyet Daily News

Some 1,350 students from 60 countries have gathered in Antalya for the World Universities Championship 2010, organized by Koç University. The topic of the final match was 'whether the images of war should be published or not.' Sydney University won and Shengwu Li from Oxford became the best debater of the world

PROUD ORGANIZERS: Koç University Debating Club hosted 1,350 attendees from prestigious schools from 60 countries in the championship including Hacettepe, Bilkent, Middle East Technical, Boğaziçi and Galatasaray from Turkey.

It was the largest brain storming session of the year that took place in Antalya last week. With an attendance of 1,350 students from 60 countries, several important issues of the world were debated in The Vehbi Koç World Universities Championship 2010.

In the final match "whether the images of war should be published or not" was debated and the World's Debating Champion Team and the world's best debater of 2010 were determined.

Teams from Harvard, Oxford, Sydney Universities and London School of Economics competed in the finals, at the end the Sydney University Debating Team was crowned champion.

Shengwu Li from Oxford University, grandchild of the first president of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew and nephew of the current president of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong was nominated as the best debater of the world, with his high points in preliminary rounds.

The World Universities Debating Championships was held in the southern city of Antalya, Turkey from Dec. 27, 2009 trough Jan. 4. It also marked the 30th round of the Championship that brought together bright minds from every continent on Earth.

Koç University Debating Club was elected to host this organization during the Universal Debating Council 2007 held in Thailand. The vote was 70 percent in favor of Koç University, which was the first Turkish team to reach the semifinals in the championship.

Koç University Debating Club hosted 1,350 attendees from prestigious schools from 60 countries in The Vehbi Koç World Universities Championship 2010 including Hacettepe University, Bilkent University, Middle East Technical University, Boğaziçi University and Galatasaray University from Turkey.

In the Vehbi Koç World Universities Debating Championship 2010, participants tried to show their debating skills to the negotiation team by competing to pass the nine preliminary rounds and go on to the octofinals, quarterfinals, semifinals and the final.

At the end of the championship not only the best debater and debating team was identified but also there were other categories of competition such as the English as a Second Language competition, the English as a Foreign Language competition, World Masters Competition, Comic Public Speaker Competition and World Public Speaking Championship.

During the championship, in addition to debates, several social events took place for the visiting students to meet fellow debaters from various countries, having good leisure time activities to relax and have fun. Every night both fun and functional events took place. Among them were such events as the opening and closing ceremonies, gala dinners and concept parties like traffic light night, Turkish night leading to oldies but goldies with a concept of traditional Turkish bazaars and houses.

The chairman of the organization committee, Fatih Mehmet İnal said, "here is 1,350 students from 60 countries with different point of views, different beliefs, different cultures and they are now exchanging ideas and integrating their traditions."

Can Okar, the chairman of the World Debating Championship and the chief adjudicator, said he was proud of having organized the largest non sporting event in the world with the help of students and academics of Koç University. He also added that he was pleased to see how debating is gaining importance in Turkey.

Jens Fischer a jury member from Germany said this organization is one of the best events that he has attended. He thought this was an exceptional one.

İnal also said they have received the recompense of their exertions of two years and that every member of the organization team did the best. İnal thanked to The Vehbi Koç Foundation for their support and trust in this organization. For further information, please visit http://www.kocworlds2010.com.

One guidance counselor for 1,285

KÜBRA POLAT
Doğan News Agency

Officials in the southern city of Adana express grave concerns about the inadequate number of guidance counselors. There is apparently only one guidance counselor for every 1,285 students.

Guidance counselors are present to keep students away from bad habits and violence, to increase their success and to coordinate rehabilitation works, officials said. Inadequate numbers of guidance counselors result in increased violence at schools, provincial officials said. Adana's provincial director of education Abdulgafur Büyükfirat said in several schools in Adana there were no guidance counselors. He pointed out that in 916 schools, there were 450,000 students and only 350 guidance counselors. This figure was far from adequate, Büyükfırat said, adding, "Our guidance counselors are like life coaches, they are like big sisters and brothers to students. They guide them as their name implies. We are working hard to increase their number."

The presence of guidance counselors in the school was extremely important Büyükfırat said: "Guidance counselors are the only solution to violence."

Education union Eğitim-Sen's Adana branch president Güven Boğa said despite the increase in violence in schools in Adana, new guidance counselors were not appointed yet. "Our schools are deliberately being distanced from scientific, democratic, modern and secular education. If violence in schools is not stopped, there will be bigger problems," he said.

There were street fights in front of schools, incidents where parents raid schools to solve problems, and violence directed at students and teachers, Boğa said, claiming these incidents were now considered common. "Poverty, uncontrolled urbanization, an increase in the number of Mafioso-type groups, cultural degeneration, overcrowded classes and an increase in the number of shows depicting violence in the media all contribute to this situation," Boğa said.

LIFE COACHES: Experts say the presence of guidance counselors in schools decreases violence.

Expert Talk

JENNIFER EATON GÖKMEN

Social media aids expat life

It can be posited that the rise of social media is of particular benefit to women as its primary features are reflected in the social strengths common to most women – the making of and tending to personal connections. But social media also has the benefit on a much larger scale useful to expatriates of either gender. According to cultural entertainment producer and American expat Anastasia Ashman, "Social media consolidates networks and erases cultural, geographic and time-zone disadvantages by providing access to state-of-the-industry practices, trending thought, and leading players in your profession."

Ashman alludes to how generations of expats have gotten used to putting their lives on hold, pointing out that they no longer need to wait until their overseas assignment is done and they're back home before continuing with their career pursuits, hobbies and interests.

"Now social media affords expats location independence (work where you are and where you'll go), self-actualization (be an expert in whatever you choose), language (communicate in your preferred tongue), and flexibility (time and location become irrelevant). You can be current, involved, and a player in your field thanks to the new platforms available. Once upon a time, we expats were disconnected from our bases of operation that our countrymen back home had available to them. Now, the divide is digital. Virtual. Non-existent for the expat who makes use of technology."

Everyone is his or her own platform now. Or can be. Business opportunities emerge from creating a personal brand, raising one's profile, digitally distributing free content, and establishing expertise and credibility in one's field.

Another "local" example of social media for personal and professional branding is American expat Tara Agacayak, who, in addition to her profiles on social media Web sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Ladies Who Launch, etc,, cultivates her online presences via the following blogs for artisan tours, entrepreneur training, Web consulting, women's microcredit, and more:

Behind the Bazaar, designer excursions in Istanbul: http://behindthebazaar.blogspot.com/

Citara, an online boutique of handcrafted Turkish products and stories about the designers who make them: http://citarasblog.blogspot.com/

Intarsia, creative strategies for Web, print, and product: www.intarsiaconcept.com/

Turquoise Poppy, Tara's personal blog: http://taralutmanagacayak.blogspot.com/

Co-creator of the best-selling anthology "Tales from the Expat Harem: Foreign Women in Modern Turkey," Anastasia Ashman's Web presences as a cultural entertainment producer include her blog: http://anastasiaashman.wordpress.com/; her Expat Harem group blog for global citizens + identity adventurers: www.expatharem.com ; and a multitude of other networked media.

"Even if you don't know what you want to do, social media provides an education that you can design yourself," says Ashman. "Generation Y in general has a different take on lifestyle design where you customize your work routine to create more productivity and more leisure. The way to do this is to use the substantial technology tools available. Take a cue from Gen Y. You don't have to be a cog in the corporate machinery anymore – which is good news for expats whose frequent location changes may have precluded them from that option anyway. Web 2.0 technology allows you to determine (or create) the factors of your professional life."

If you're an expat interested in pursuing your career interests in your new, unfamiliar surroundings, then investigating the benefits of social media should be one of your top priorities. You might want to start here with a social media presentation by Ashman and Agacayak: http://www.slideshare.net/Thandelike/social-media-for-pro-international-women-09 In the next social media installment, we will explore Generation Y and how their philosophy of life and work is changing the face of corporate culture.

Jennifer Eaton Gökmen is the development officer at Istanbul International Community School.