

UN IN YOUR WORLD AT SAINT JOSEPH HIGH SCHOOL

On Wednesday, April 1, 2009, students in Saint Joseph High School's Global Studies Group participated in Part Three of a Four Part *UN in Your World* Distance Video Conference (DVC) series entitled "*War Affected Children*".

The Four Part Videoconferencing Series from the United Nations connects students from different countries with each other to explore the work of the United Nations in today's turbulent world. Saint Joseph High School partners with Global Education Motivators (GEM) to bring this information to the forefront.

Students discussed with their peers the effects of war on children and what the United Nations is doing to combat it. Guest speaker was Lucas Solimeo for the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

According to Mr. Solimeo, today as many as 250,000 children under the age of 18 serve in government forces or armed rebel groups. Some are as young as eight years old. The participation of child soldiers has been reported in 33 on-going or recent armed conflicts in almost every region of the world. Child soldiers are used by armed opposition forces, although many are used by government armies.

Children are uniquely vulnerable to military recruitment because of their emotional and physical immaturity. They are easily manipulated and can be drawn into violence that they are too young to resist or understand. Both boys and girls are used as child soldiers. Children are sometimes forced to commit atrocities against their own family or neighbors. Such practices help ensure that the child is "stigmatized" and unable to return to his or her home community.

Few peace treaties recognize the existence of child soldiers, or make provisions for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Many former child soldiers do not have access to the educational programs, vocational training, family reunification, or even food and shelter that they need to successfully rejoin civilian society. As a result, many end up on the street, become involved in crime, or are drawn back into armed conflict.

In a major and ground-breaking development, the UN Security Council voted unanimously for a series of measures, including the establishment of a comprehensive monitoring and reporting mechanism, to ensure the protection of children exposed to armed conflict. The mechanism will monitor grave violations by all parties, both governments and insurgents, focusing particularly on:

- killing or maiming of children
- recruiting or using child soldiers
- attacks against schools or hospitals

- rape or other sexual violence against children
- abduction of children
- denial of humanitarian access for children

For further information, please contact The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict: www.un.org/children/conflict