Military service in Djibouti has been voluntary since it achieved independence. The question of conscientious objection to military service has therefore never arisen - although of course the possibility that a serving member of the armed forces might develop conscientious objections can never be ruled out, and any reporting States could be asked whether any requests for release on this basis had been made and what procedure was or would be followed in such circumstances.

Djibouti ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPCAC) on 27th April 2011. The declaration on ratification made clear that the minimum recruitment age was 18, and gives considerable detail about recruitment procedures and safeguards. However, it does not mention a voluntary national service programme – the Service national adapté (SNA), established in 2003, which reportedly accepts recruits between the ages of 17 and 25.

“One of the stated aims of the SNA was to assist unqualified young people by providing them with professional training with the Djiboutian armed forces. During the two-year training, recruits were subject to military discipline and on its completion were given priority for jobs. There was no obligation or expectation that recruits would remain with the armed forces. And military training could form no more than 30% of training provided. Military activities covered by the SNA included participation in operations to help the public in cases of natural or industrial disasters and activities relating to guarding military installations.”

Djibouti has not yet made its initial report under OPCAC, but it is to be expected that the Committee on the Rights of the Child will want to know whether the SNA is still in operation, and whether the minimum recruitment age has been increased to 18. Although those undertaking the service may not be formally members of the armed forces, a programme which provides military training under the armed forces to 17-year-olds certainly comes within the scope of the OPCAC, and may be contrary to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

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Djibouti: Basic Information

Population (November 2011, estimated\(^2\)) \hspace{1cm} 757,000

Military service voluntary since independence in 1977.

Minimum recruitment age\(^3\): 18 for the armed forces (but 17 for the voluntary Service National Adapté)

Manpower reaching “militarily significant age” in 20104: \hspace{1cm} 8,360
Armed forces active strength, November 20115: \hspace{1cm} 10,450
as a percentage of the number of men reaching “military age”: \hspace{1cm} 125%

Defence budget \hspace{1cm} US $m equivalent, 20106 \hspace{1cm} 10

Per capita \hspace{1cm} $13
As % of GDP \hspace{1cm} 0.9%

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\(^2\) Source: The Military Balance 2012 (International Institute of Strategic Studies, London), which bases its estimate on “demographic statistics taken from the US Census Bureau”.

\(^3\) Source: Child Soldiers International (formerly Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Louder than words: an agenda for action to end state use of child soldiers, London, September 2012.

\(^4\) Source: CIA World Factbook. [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html). The male population reaching “militarily significant age” - defined by the source as 16 - is more meaningful than total population in assessing the comparative impact of military recruitment in different countries.

\(^5\) As quoted by the International Institute of Strategic Studies (London) in The Military Balance 2012.

\(^6\) Ibid