Conscription has never applied in Belize. Since independence in 1981, the armed forces have been manned on a volunteer basis, with a minimum recruitment age, specified in Section 16 of the Defence Act, of 18.

Should there be a shortage of volunteers, however, the Governor General has the power, under Section 167, of the Act to impose male conscription, including setting the applicable age.\(^1\)

On 1\(^{st}\) December 2003, Belize ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict with a declaration stating that 16 was the minimum age for recruitment into any military service. It has not yet however delivered its initial report.

It appears that there is no minimum age for joining the police force, which could be deployed in the service of the armed forces in the event of a national emergency. The Police Youth Cadet Corps provides recruits to both the police and the armed forces. Set up in 1994 to “rehabilitate troubled young men”, this organisation in 2006 had some 800 members, male and female, aged between 8 and 17.\(^2\)

Although there is no evidence of problems, Belize might be asked to clarify that in no circumstances will a person aged under 18 be recruited to any armed force, and that, in the perhaps unlikely situation that conscription were ever enforced, due recognition would be given to the right of conscientious objection to military service.

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2 Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Child Soldiers Global Report 2008 p64.
BELIZE: Basic information

Population (November 2011, estimated\(^3\)) \(321,000\)

Voluntary recruitment since independence in 1981, but legislative provisions enabling conscription exist.

Minimum recruitment age\(^4\): In principle 18, but see text.

Manpower reaching “militarily significant age” in 2010\(^5\): \(3,723\)

Armed forces active strength, November 2011\(^6\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>compared to the number of men reaching “military age” annually:</th>
<th>1,050</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Military expenditure (US $ equivalent) 2011\(^7\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per capita</th>
<th>$49</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As proportion of GDP</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^3\) Source: The Military Balance 2012 (International Institute of Strategic Studies, London), which bases its estimate on “demographic statistics taken from the US Census Bureau”.

\(^4\) 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.

\(^5\) Source: CIA World Factbook. 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.

\(^6\) The Military Balance 2012 (International Institute of Strategic Studies, London)

\(^7\) Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), April 2012