

Forum: General Assembly Third Committee

Issue: The Question of Children and Armed Conflict

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Introduction

Several armed conflicts are currently taking place around the world. These armed conflicts have severe consequences that include the harm inflicted on children. Due to armed conflicts children are being killed, maimed, raped and they are denied aid and medical care. Bombing of schools and hospitals is also a grave danger for many children. According to the annual report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict more than 10 000 children were killed or maimed in a conflict in 2017. Alarminglly the number of children killed or maimed has risen drastically in the last decade.^{1 2 3}

Across the world tens of thousands of children are also used and recruited as child soldiers by armed groups and armed forces. Their tasks include fighting in battles, working as spies, cooks, messengers or even sex slaves. Children as young as 8 years old have been reported to be associated with armed forces.⁴

The number of children living in a conflict zone has increased by more than 75 percent since the early 1990s. Currently, one in six children lives in areas impacted by conflict. The most dangerous countries for children include Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. The Middle East and Africa are the worst regions for children threatened by war as most of the ongoing armed conflict take place there.⁵

Definition of Key Terms

¹ <https://www.savethechildren.net/warchildren/pdf/warchildren.pdf>

² <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/06/1013232>

³ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/armed-conflict/>

⁴ <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/questions-answers-about-the-recruitment-and-use-of-child-soldiers/>

⁵ <https://www.savethechildren.net/warchildren/pdf/warchildren.pdf>

Armed conflict

A conflict between governmental or non-governmental forces and groups, involving armed force.⁶

Child soldier

A child soldier is an individual under the age of 18, who is used for any military purpose. Child soldiers may for instance work as combatants or messengers.⁷

Maim

To wound or injure an individual so severely that part of the body is permanently damaged and no longer works as it should.⁸

Recruitment

Refers to compulsory, forced or voluntary enlisting of children into armed forces or armed groups.⁹

A non-governmental organization (NGO)

A citizen-based association that operates independently of any government. NGO's purpose is typically addressing a social or political issue. NGO's are usually funded by benefactors or by the UN.^{10 11}

Urbanization

Urbanization refers to the increasing number of people that live in cities instead of the countryside.¹²

Explanation of the Question

Armed conflicts result in several levels of destruction: physical, human, moral and cultural. Not only is a large number of children killed and maimed, but many of them are

⁶ <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/article/other/armed-conflict-article-170308.htm>

⁷ <https://www.child-soldiers.org/who-are-child-soldiers>

⁸ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/maiming>

⁹ <https://www.savethechildren.net/waronchildren/pdf/waronchildren.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://thelawdictionary.org/non-governmental-organization-ngo/>

¹¹ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ngo>

¹² <https://www.sciencedaily.com/terms/urbanization.htm>

deprived of their emotional and material needs and are witnesses to horrible events such as losing their families. War also violates children's rights such as the right to protection and the right to education.¹³

The United Nations Security Council has identified and condemned six grave violations that are to serve as the basis to gather information and report violations against children. These violations include killing and maiming, recruitment or use of children as soldiers, sexual violence against children, abduction of children, attacks against schools or hospitals and denial of humanitarian access for children. Sadly these violations against children are on the rise.¹⁴

According to PRIO's (Peace Research Institution Oslo) research the level of children's rights violations in conflict is higher than at any time over the past two decades. In the Central African Republic, the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts quadrupled compared to 2016. Additionally, Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic had an alarming level of children used as soldiers. Increasing recruitment and use of child soldiers has further led to an increase in the number of children killed and maimed.^{15 16}

Abduction is also a concern children face in armed conflict and regrettably more children and civilians are abducted than before.¹⁷ One emerging problem is that children are being recruited or abducted across borders to fight and serve outside of their countries of origin. Not only are these boys and girls subjected to highly traumatic abduction and recruitment they are also separated from their families or their caretakers.¹⁸

Many children are also subjects of sexual violence in a conflict as in some instances sexual violence can be used as a tactic of war to humiliate a group of people or force displacement. Children who face sexual violence suffer from many consequences such as psychological trauma, health consequences including transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS and early pregnancies. Young mothers of babies born of rape are usually forced to stay with armed groups due to the family ties and dependency that has evolved over time. They additionally stay with armed groups to avoid social stigma in the communities at home.¹⁹

¹³ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306

¹⁴ <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/>

¹⁵ <https://www.savethechildren.net/warchildren/pdf/warchildren.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1815109.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/abduction-of-children/>

¹⁸ [9-october-2018-presentation-of-annual-report-to-the-un-general-assembly-third-committee/](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306)

¹⁹ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306

The reasons for the increasing number of violations are various. One of these reasons is rapid urbanization. Due to rapid urbanization conflicts are often in areas which are densely populated. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas the impact on civilians including children is devastating. In addition to that the use of such weapons damage vital infrastructure, including hospitals and schools which may deny children access to education and healthcare. Attacks against schools and hospitals have become frequent in the past few years and have risen significantly over the past decade.²⁰

Children have also become more vulnerable because of the increasing number of diversity in armed groups. The absence of a clear battlefield is also a factor why violations against children are on the rise.²¹ During the last few years growing concern is as well the use of children to carry or plant explosive devices. The armed group Boko Haram in Nigeria has been reported to use children as suicide bombers which has led to over half of all the verified child casualties in the country.²²

Child soldiers

One of the most alarming trends in armed conflict is the participation of children as soldiers. There are several ways how children become associated with armed forces and groups. The children most likely to become soldiers are those separated from their parents or those from impoverished and marginalized backgrounds.²³

Children are recruited in many ways. Some are conscripted or abducted while others join the armed groups to defend their families or themselves. One reason why a child joins an armed group is the economic situation of the child's family. Poverty and hunger may force parents to offer their children for service considering that in some cases armies pay minor wage. Children may also join opposition groups after experiencing harassment from government forces. Children are recruited since they are easier to entice and force into service than adults. It is also easier to manipulate children than adults. Inadequate or non-existing birth registration is also a

²⁰ <https://www.savethechildren.net/waronchildren/pdf/waronchildren.pdf>

²¹ <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/questions-answers-about-the-recruitment-and-use-of-child-soldiers/>

²² <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1815109.pdf>

²³ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306

reason why children are recruited as child soldiers; There is no way to know how old the child is.²⁴

Child soldiers face many threats. Many of them are subjects of abuse and most of them witness killing, sexual violence and death. They are also forced to commit acts that cause them long-term psychological consequences.²⁵

Key Member States and NGOs involved

Syria

Due to the war in Syria, Syria is one of the most dangerous conflict-affected places for a child and the situation in Syria is the largest single factor to the increasing amount of violations against children. In Syria the war is fought by a complex patchwork of non-state and state armed forces and all parties of the conflict have been marked to lack respect for the international Humanitarian Law.^{26 27}

Afghanistan

Afghanistan along with Syria and Somalia is at the top of Save the children's ranking of the 10 most dangerous conflict-affected countries to be a child in 2016. According to the annual report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, conflict-related violence continues to severely affect children in Afghanistan. In 2017 more than 3000 children were killed and maimed in Afghanistan.^{28 29}

Democratic Republic of Congo

Children are in grave danger in Democratic Republic of Congo; In 2017 the shifting alliances and further fragmentation of armed forces made it more difficult to protect children. It is reported

²⁴ <https://www.child-soldiers.org/who-are-child-soldiers>

²⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/21/interview-how-security-forces-somalia-fail-protect-children>

²⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/12/2017-deadliest-year-of-syrian-war-for-children-says-unicef-psychological-ruin>

²⁷ <https://www.savethechildren.net/waronchildren/pdf/waronchildren.pdf>

²⁸ <https://www.savethechildren.net/waronchildren/pdf/waronchildren.pdf>

²⁹ <http://undocs.org/s/2018/465>

that in 2017 more than 1000 children were recruited by armed forces and 369 attacks on schools and 119 attacks on hospitals were verified.³⁰

Central African Republic

In 2017 the conflict in Central African Republic escalated and attacks against civilians and humanitarians increased, leading to mass displacement and child casualties. The number of children recruited more than quadrupled compared to 2016.³¹

International Committee of the Red Cross

The International Committee of the Red Cross is an independent organization that operates worldwide and helps people affected with armed conflict. They are focused in helping particularly vulnerable groups of children including those separated from their families and those associated with armed groups or forces. Their work also involves preventing families from becoming separated, talking to armed forces and groups in order to prevent children from being recruited and addressing the impact of armed conflict and other violence on children's access to education.³²

Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch is a nonprofit, non governmental organization that defends the rights of people around the world. Human Rights Watch is also focused on protecting Children Rights. The organization's work involves investigating abuses and pressuring those with power to secure justice and respect rights.³³

UN Involvement

The United Nations has been working for decades to advocate children rights and to help children in armed conflicts. In 1959 the UN's General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and following that in 1989 the UN introduced the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines the civil, political,

³⁰ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2018/502&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC

³¹ <http://undocs.org/s/2018/465>

³² <https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are>

³³ <https://www.hrw.org>

economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. In February 2002 The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict entered into force. The Optional Protocol stated that anyone under the age of 18 cannot be recruited or drafted into a military.^{34 35 36}

UNICEF, The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, is also essential in helping children in armed conflict. UNICEF was created in 1946 by the UN's General Assembly. UNICEF works in 190 countries to protect the rights of every child. UNICEF's work is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.³⁷

Relevant Resolutions

- [Security Council Resolution 1261](#), 30 August 1999 **(S/RES/1261)**
The resolution identified and condemned grave violations against children in times of conflict.
- [Security Council Resolution 1314](#), 11 August 2000 **(S/RES/1314)**
The resolution noted that the deliberate targeting of civilians, including children, may constitute a threat to international peace and security.
- [Security council resolution 1612](#), 16 July 2005 **(S/RES/1612)**
This resolution condemns the recruitment of child soldiers in armed conflict and calls for a method to monitor and report the use of child soldiers. The resolution also presents specific mandates for the protection of children by United Nations peacekeeping units and encourages regional organizations to take appropriate measures to prevent the exploitation of children.
- [Security Council Resolution 1882](#), 4 August 2009 **(S/RES/1882)**
the Council defined patterns of killing and maiming of children in contravention of international law as a trigger for inclusion in the Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.
- [Security Council Resolution 2143](#), 7 March 2014 **(S/RES/2143)**
The resolution endorses the campaign “Children, Not Soldiers” to prevent child recruitment and use by government armed forces in conflict by 2016.

³⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

³⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/about-unicef>

³⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opaccrc.aspx>

³⁷ https://www.unicef.org/about/who/index_introduction.html

- [Security Council resolution 2427](#), 9 July 2018, **(S/RES/2427)**
The resolution aims to strengthen mechanism to avoid violations against children in conflict.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
November 20, 1959	UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. ³⁸
September 2, 1990	Convention on the Rights of the Child comes into force. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was introduced in 1989.
August 26, 1996	Publication of Graça Machel Report “Impact of Armed Conflict on Children”. Machel’s report identified children as the main victims of armed conflict and highlighted the disproportionate impact of war on children.
December, 1996	The mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is created by the General Assembly following the publication of the report by Graça Machel.
February 12, 2002	The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict is created by the UN General Assembly to protect children under 18 from recruitment.

Possible Solutions

It is of utmost importance to protect all children and to defend children's rights. Therefore it is especially important to find solutions to the question of children and armed conflict. The solutions to this issue could, for instance, include preventing the recruitment of child soldiers and addressing the main causes of the violations against children. Reintegration of children is as well essential to help children in armed conflicts.

³⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/1959-Declaration-of-the-Rights-of-the-Child.pdf>

Reintegration is the action of integrating a child into society.³⁹ Reintegration includes putting children back into schools, helping them find their families or housing those who have been displaced or become refugees. Preparing children for a return to civilian life also includes giving children psychosocial support and the needed education. Reintegration is a long and complicated process and due to that support from the international community is required. Especially ensuring continuous and flexible funding for the reintegration of children in armed conflicts is crucial. It is also necessary to note that children associated with armed groups and forces should be seen primarily as victims. Detention should be seen as a last resort.⁴⁰

Preventing the recruitment of child soldiers is also fundamental. Many states and non-state armed groups have established 18 as the minimum age for recruitment. However, there are parties who have not done this and they should be encouraged to do so. For many children joining an armed group is the only viable option for education and safety. To prevent this being the only option, the social and economic rights of children should be respected.⁴¹

To prevent violation against children it is also important to address the main causes of such violations. The main causes involve political, territorial and economic issues that cause armed conflicts. Dialogue with armed groups concerning the protection of children should also be considered. The international community should also support organizations and commitments aimed to help children in armed conflicts.

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³⁹ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/reintegration>

⁴⁰ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1815109.pdf>

⁴¹ <https://www.child-soldiers.org/faqs/how-can-this-problem-be-solved>

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