

YOUTH AND ARMED CONFLICT



HIGHLIGHTS

- Children and youth represent the majority of the population in most countries affected by armed conflicts and are thus disproportionately affected by war. Their suffering bears many faces - they are recruited as child soldiers, are killed and maimed, deprived of education and health care, and separated from their families. Sexual violence is increasingly a characteristic of conflict with detrimental long-term psychological effects on children and youth.
- The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict coordinates the UN system wide efforts to alleviate the suffering of these children.
- Children and armed conflict is at the centre of the UN Security Council's peace and security agenda. On several occasions, the Council has imposed sanctions against persistent violators recruiting, sexually abusing, maiming and killing children and youth in wars.
- To date, 18 action plans to end violations against children have been signed with 20 armed forces and groups, resulting in the release of thousands of children.

Today, grave violations are committed against children and youth in over twenty war-affected countries from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa to Latin America. Girls and boys are killed, maimed, orphaned, abducted, deprived of education and health care, sexually violated and left with deep emotional and physical scars.

Children and youth are uniquely vulnerable to recruitment. Hundreds of thousands are associated with State and non-State armed groups. Their participation in conflict has serious implications for their physical and emotional well-being. The prominence of civilian casualties, including children and youth, in contemporary conflicts is a reflection of the changing nature of conflict, in which we see the increased use of improvised explosive devices and new technologies, the conduct of hostilities increasingly in urban or densely populated areas, and a blurring of the distinction between civilians and combatants. In some country-situations, children and youth are also used as suicide bombers and schools are systematically attacked jeopardizing the life of children and preventing them from

going to school.

Children and youth also suffer from other consequences of conflict such as poverty, unemployment, poor governance and the disintegration of families and communities. Rehabilitation and reintegration is particularly critical for children and youth formerly associated with armed groups in order to break cycles of violence and to find a new existence after a life of conflict and distress. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes should build on individuals' strengths,





especially their resilience. Children and youth should be consulted in this process, with specific issues, including the needs of girls, explicitly addressed.

United Nations, Youth and Armed Conflict

Since the 1990 World Summit for Children, the United Nations has increasingly sought to draw international attention to the plight of children affected by armed conflict. In 1996, an expert appointed by the Secretary-General, Graça Machel, submitted a report to the General Assembly depicting the terrible reality of children in war. The groundbreaking report drew global attention and led to the adoption of resolution 51/77 recommending the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

Today, Leila Zerrougui serves as the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. In this capacity, she speaks as a moral voice and an independent advocate to build awareness and give prominence to the rights and protection of boys and girls affected by armed conflict.

Systematic engagement with Member States is an essential aspect of her work. She uses various frameworks, such as the General Assembly, the Security Council, regional organizations, bilateral contacts and field visits to garner political will from the international community to effectively protect war-affected children and youth.

As the issue of children and armed conflict cuts across various UN mandates, the Special Representative works closely with other UN agencies and programmes to develop and implement the children and armed conflict agenda. UNICEF remains a key operational partner, designing projects that assist in the release, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations has also expanded significantly the incorporation of children's issues in their work.

In order to raise the minimum age for recruitment of young people into security forces to eighteen, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General continues to build support for the "Zero under Eighteen" campaign, which aims to achieve universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

Through advocacy efforts by the Office of the Special Representative and its partners, the Security Council has become systematically engaged in the issue of children and armed conflict, which has been progressively placed on the international peace and security agenda.

Progress

Collaborative efforts of the international community over more than ten years have resulted in tangible results for the children and armed conflict agenda, such as increased global awareness of the issue, the strengthening of international norms and standards, and the deployment of Child Protection Advisors in UN peacekeeping and political missions.





In 2005, the Security Council adopted resolution 1612, one of the greatest advancements in protecting children. The resolution established a monitoring and reporting mechanism in various conflict-affected countries to collect timely and reliable information on violations committed against children. It led to the systematic listing of parties to conflict that recruit or use child soldiers in the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

The Paris International Conference “Free Children from War” in 2007 had the goal to bring together countries, NGO’s and international organizations to discuss ending the unlawful recruitment and use of children in warfare. The Paris Commitments¹ and Paris Principles² are significant political-level instruments with strong commitment expressed by 76 Member States, including a number of conflict-affected countries. The Paris Commitments and Principles provide guidelines on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of all categories of children associated with armed groups.

In 2009 and 2011, the Security Council expanded the listing criteria to include the killing and maiming of children, sexual violence against children and attacks on schools and hospitals. The listing exercise – or “naming and shaming” as it is commonly referred to – is a powerful measure to put pressure on perpetrators to end violations. It is a public list that indicates to the world where the violators are located and can trigger Security Council action including sanctions. To get off the list, parties to conflict have to enter into time bound action plan to end violations. The agreements usually include activities such as the immediate release and reintegration of children, the criminalization of child recruitment through national legislation as well as unimpeded access for United Nations staff to military installation to verify the presence of children. To date, 18 action plans to end violations against children have been signed with 20 armed forces and groups, resulting in the release of thousands of children.

The Security Council recognized early on the need for robust action, including sanctions, against individuals who persistently commit violations against children in armed conflict. These sanctions include arms embargoes, asset freezes, and travel bans. Several individuals in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Cote d’Ivoire have been sanctioned for such grave child rights violations.

The International Criminal Court likewise took action to end impunity of child rights violators and set an important precedent in the case of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who was convicted of conscription and enlistment of children under the age of 15 and the use of children for the active participation in hostilities.

The way forward

¹ Available at: http://www.unicef.org/media/files/ParisCommitments_EN.pdf

² Available at: http://www.unicef.org/media/files/ParisPrinciples_EN.pdf





The following key recommendations, contained in the Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review, serve as future guidelines to protect children and youth in situations of war:

- **Securing universal compliance with international norms and standards** — The international community should strive for universal adherence to international standards, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, that protect children from the adverse effects of war.
- **End impunity for violations against children** — Member States must ensure systematic and timely investigation and prosecution of crimes against children and youth in the context of armed conflict and provide assistance to victims.
- **Strengthening the monitoring and reporting mechanism** — Member States, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations must continue to enhance the existing common framework to timely collect information on violations against children and youth.
- **Promote justice for children** — Member States need to uphold international standards on juvenile justice with detention used only as a last resort and a guarantee that detained juveniles be separated from detained adults.
- **Support inclusive reintegration strategies** — Stakeholders should ensure that release and reintegration strategies are in line with the Paris Commitments and Principles. Strategies should ensure long-term sustainability and community-based approaches, with emphasis on education and employment.
- **Integrate children's rights in peacemaking, peacebuilding and preventive actions** — All peacemaking and peacebuilding processes should be child-sensitive, including specific provisions in peace agreements.
- **Increase the participation of and support for children and youth** — The participation of children and youth in the child rights agenda is one of the key recommendations in the Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review.

For further information

- <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>
- <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/library/documents/publications/>
- www.facebook.com/childrenandarmedconflict
- www.twitter.com/childreninwar
- <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/our-work/paris-principles/>

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