



**SPC2:** Special Conference on Health and Family Welfare

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**Issue:** Addressing the reasons for the involvement of children in armed conflicts

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| Committee:       | Special Conference on Health and Family Welfare (SPC 2)                   |
| Issue:           | Addressing the reasons for the involvement of children in armed conflicts |
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## I. Introduction

Children are bearing the burden of the world's eroding peace and security crises. They were severely harmed by the escalation of violence, violent conflicts, and contempt for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. These boys and girls are often referred to as "child soldiers," although they are subjected to several types of exploitation and abuse that are not completely conveyed by this term. The West and Central Africa region has the largest number of children verified as having been recruited and used by armed forces and non-state armed groups worldwide. Many of them, particularly girls, are victims of gender-based violence. Children join armed forces or groups for a variety of reasons. Armed actors threaten, coerce, abduct, or manipulate some; and subsequently, the others are propelled by poverty or feeling forced to provide for their families. Others gather with each other in order to survive or secure their communities. Regardless of their role, the recruitment and use of minors by military forces is a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

In the case of a child being involved in an armed conflict, it is inevitable for them to face different types of violence when working alongside the armed actors. They may be expected to be involved in grueling training or initiation rites, to perform hazardous labor, or to intervene directly in combat, all of which carry a high risk of death, disability, and permanent injury. Children make obedient soldiers because they are often physically defenseless, easily influenced, and subject to psychological manipulation. Child recruits are frequently subjected to arduous physical labor as well as intellectual indoctrination as part of their training for violence. They may also encounter, suffer, or be compelled to participate in torture and murder. These events have a significant impact on children's connections with their families and communities. Conflicting parties also deprive children of nutrition and safe living conditions, or subject them to substance misuse, with serious effects on their mental and physical health.

The use or fear of violence to coerce juvenile recruits to kill and torture other militants and conduct human rights violations against civilians is prevalent across the globe and is frequent amongst government forces, paramilitary groups, and armed opposition groups. Furthermore, families and communities may be dealing with their own difficulties and trauma as a result of the conflict, making it difficult to comprehend or



accept children who return home. The United Nations (UN) collaborates with governments, community organizations, and others to address the causes of child recruitment and prevent violations from occurring.

## II. Involved Countries and Organizations

### Afghanistan

For more than two decades, the Taliban has been using children as human shields in Afghanistan's violent conflicts. They have recruited children as fighters, improvised explosive devices, detonators, and suicide bombers. Thousands of minors may still be among them today. The UN confirmed 2,577 grave violations against 2,430 minors (1,579 boys, 798 girls, 53 sex unknown) ("25 Years of Children and Armed Conflict"). Following the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, the country task force for reporting and monitoring breaches against children had serious security and maintenance issues. A Secretary-General report released in 26th of July 2021 states that "The Taliban were responsible for the recruitment and use of 230 children (88 percent), (Human Rights Watch), all used in combat roles, for instance, to plant improvised explosive devices, to carry out suicide attacks and to participate in hostilities against government forces, as a result of which some were killed or maimed." Despite the Taliban asserting that they solely recruit soldiers with "mental and physical maturity," and that they do not recruit "boys with no beards" in military operations, some of the children recruited from Islamic schools in some provinces such as Kunduz are 13 or younger. During the reporting period, it can be seen that the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated children's vulnerabilities and added to the strain on health care. Increase in poverty rates and unemployment could also be deemed as potential factors in the increased child recruitment, coercion and sexual violence.

### Central African Republic

Despite the ratification of the Central African Republic's Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in February 2019, signatories, including government security officers and militant groups, continued to perpetrate severe grave violations against children. The prefectures' unstable security condition was exacerbated by the lack of State authority, which were the inevitable results of the absence in financial resources, capacity, and sufficient infrastructures, as well as severe security risks which were the inevitable results of the lack of financial resources, the absence of capacity, the insufficient infrastructure, and the severe security risks in Central African Republic. The statistics reported in a Secretary-General report reveals that: "Between July 2019 and June 2021, the country task force verified 1,663 grave violations against 1,280 children (727 boys and 553 girls), namely, recruitment and use (845), killing and maiming (155), rape and other forms of sexual violence (249), abduction (116), attacks against schools and hospitals (72) and denial of humanitarian access (226)." UNICEF's emergency child protection initiatives are likewise vastly



underfunded. In 2020, less than half of the interventions directly affecting the well-being of thousands of children were funded. A UN dialogue with armed forces resulted in the release of 134 children from the Patriotic Front for the Renaissance in the Central African Republic (FPRC) (92) and Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) (42).

## Iraq

Child soldiers became quite prevalent in Iraq, with a practice dating back to 1975, when Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party attempted to establish a paramilitary group for children as young as 14 years old. As Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) marched into nations such as Iraq and Syria in the subsequent years, it became familiar with the concept of recruiting children as soldiers. The poverty rate in Iraq was drastically and temporarily triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving children profoundly affected. Leaders from several countries, including Iraq, attended workshops and discussions on child safety in armed conflict in November 2016. The opportunity intended to educate organizations on international norms while also looking for practical ways to achieve and sustain compliance to these rules. According to a Secretary-General report published in 2022 there were “288 grave violations against 167 children” (“Children Recruited by Armed Forces or Armed Groups”). The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba has stated that ‘Despite a significant decrease, incidents of killing and maiming of children continue to be disturbingly high, and it is distressing that most of these child casualties were caused by explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. I call upon the Government of Iraq to continue promoting mine clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance and stockpile destruction, including prior to any movement and return of internally displaced persons back to contaminated areas. The United Nations will continue to support the Iraqis in that regard.’

## Syria

From the beginning of Syria's popular movement for independence in March 2011, hundreds of kids, together with their parents and family, took part in peaceful marches across the country, standing as symbols of hope and innocence. However, by July 2012, the popular movement had devolved into an internal armed struggle as a direct result of the Syrian regime's unrelenting, harsh, and reckless mass arrests and targeting, shooting, and murdering of unarmed protestors, including children. During conflicts and attacks, however, children fight alongside adults, with the majority of the child soldiers whose casualties that were documented within the ranks of the Syrian regime forces being immediately pushed into active military participation in battle. A Secretary-General report verifies that there were 2,271 grave violations against 2,202 children (1,824 boys, 235 girls, 143 sex unknown). In addition, 74 grave violations against 73



children (58 boys, 14 girls, 1 sex unknown) that occurred in previous years were verified in 2021 (“25 Years of Children and Armed Conflict”).

## Yemen

The Houthis descended from their northern enclave and took over Sanaa in 2014, forcing the globally renowned government to retreat to the south. In early 2015, a Saudi-led alliance entered the fight to restore the government to power, unleashing a damaging air campaign and supplying anti-Houthi forces.

The war has killed over 150,000 people, including over 14,500 civilians, and has driven the country to the brink of famine, resulting in one of the world's greatest humanitarian catastrophes. For years, child soldiers have been engaged in Yemen's war. According to UN analysts, about 2,000 Houthi-recruited youngsters were murdered on the battlefield between January 2020 and May 2021 (“Children Recruited by Armed Forces or Armed Groups”). However, seven years after Yemen's disastrous conflict, the Houthis have adopted an action plan with the UN, promising to stop recruiting and using children as soldiers, killing and maiming children, and doing raids on hospitals and schools.



Image 1: Crayon Boy-Banksy

### III. Focused Overview of the Issue

According to the Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2007), the definition of a child soldier refers to any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes. Their responsibilities range from soldiers to



cooks, spies, messengers, and many more. Furthermore, the exploitation of minors in terrorist acts, particularly as suicide bombers, has arisen as a modern warfare occurrence. This situation is identified as one of the six grave violations which are: killing and maiming of children; 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

Grave violations are currently being committed against children and youth in over 20 war-torn nations ranging from the Middle East, Asia and Africa to Latin America. Girls and boys are murdered, maimed, abandoned, abducted, deprived schooling and health care, sexually assaulted, and left with severe physical and emotional scars. Thousands of individuals are involved in state and non-state armed groups. Their involvement in conflict has significant consequences on their well-being. Children are also affected by other effects of violence, such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate governance, and community breakdown. Rehabilitation and integration are especially important for children and teens who have previously been involved with armed groups in order to reduce the occurrence of violence and build a new life after a life of conflict and anguish. They have specific post-conflict needs, such as identifying family members, restitution and social reintegration, psycho-social rehabilitation programs, involvement in disarmament, demilitarization, and reintegration programs, and peacebuilding frameworks.

Being a member of an armed organization does not always imply being contacted or recruited by a specific group of combatants. Armed organizations may just be a normal part of life, rather than a distinct entity from the communities in which children grow up. Children and communities may also perceive social value in armed organizations, particularly in areas with little state presence or access to basic amenities. The determinants vary by context but are essentially driven by and link back to the prevalence of conflict and the normalization of violence in society. As the world strives to eliminate and prevent the use of child soldiers, it is critical to address all reasons, including those that drive youngsters to join armed groups.

Children can become involved with armed forces and groups in a variety of ways. Some of them are abducted and forced into servitude, while others join military organizations to escape poverty, protect their communities, seek retribution, or for other reasons. While many children are still illegally recruited and utilized by armed organizations or groups, research has demonstrated that socioeconomic and environmental reasons can lead boys and girls to join an armed group when they have no other option.

Children involved in armed conflicts are victims, regardless of how they are recruited or what roles they play, and their engagement in a conflict has major consequences on their physical and emotional well-being. They are frequently abused, and the majority of children encounter death, murder, and sexual violence. Many are compelled to commit violent acts, and some suffer long-term psychological problems as



a result. Reintegrating these children into civil life is a critical component of the process in assisting child soldiers reconstruct their lives.

### 1. Rationale

Aside from extreme coercion and violent recruitment, a variety of causes push and draw children into joining military forces. Many are overlapping and interconnected; there is rarely a single driving element. According to the research called “Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica” (2017) the need for protection from various types of threats, including physical safety and protection from armed actors; real or perceived threat of the state; proximity to armed forces/groups; joining one group in order to avoid being recruited into another; fear, particularly if physically separated from family in displacement; loneliness; boredom; ideas of power and authority conferred through participation in an armed group; admiration of the armed forces/groups’ accomplishments; the lure of easy money or not having to work a normal job; weak or non-existent state structures; lack of schooling; poor quality schools; rejection from the national military; ideology/agreement with the cause of the armed group; desire to avenge the death of a loved one; abuse or intrafamily violence; the influence of a relative or a boyfriend/girlfriend already in the armed group; and more structural causes such as poverty and inequality.

There are various interpretations on determining factors in a child being involved in an armed conflict, which are parallel to psychological and behavioral aspects of being underage. It has been proposed that the global proliferation of light automatic weapons, which children can easily control, has made the use of children as direct combatants more feasible; that overpopulation has made children a cheap and accessible asset for military organizations; and that the children being more willing than adults to fight for non-monetary incentives such as religion, honor, prestige, revenge, and duty.

|         | Central African Republic                       | Colombia                                       |
|---------|--|--|
| Drivers | Vengeance                                      | Family breakdown                               |
|         | Defending a cause/territory/community          | Lack of opportunity                            |
|         | Presence of conflict/normalisation of violence | Poverty/inequality                             |
|         | Lack of opportunity                            | Displacement                                   |
|         | Poverty/inequality                             | Presence of conflict/normalisation of violence |
|         | Family breakdown                               | Substance abuse                                |

Image 1: “No Choice | A Research Report | February 2019  
Prominent Factors Table”

These motivational factors were detected to varied degrees in the settings where this research was conducted. The elements that emerged most strongly in the Central African Republic and Colombia are included in the table below and are explored in greater detail throughout the five contexts. Many of the same



factors appear in both principal sites, as seen in the table. However, it also demonstrates how, depending on the settings and dynamics at play, one driver might be substantially more prominent in one situation. This is a key consideration for defining the understanding and responses, and it asks for programs to be adapted to local reality rather than follow the standard frameworks.

## 2. Repercussions

Armed warfare has both direct and indirect effects on children. Physical harm, developmental delay, paralysis, behavioral and mental health complications, and death are examples of direct effects. Military activities, narcotic violence, arbitrary airstrikes, or other types of armed conflict murder and maim children, both intentionally and unintentionally. Indirect impacts include the demolition of infrastructure necessary for children's survival and development, environmental exposures, and other downstream effects on socioeconomic influences on health, such as deteriorated living conditions. Armed groups are increasingly targeting traditionally secure settings for children such as schools, hospitals, and play areas through uncontrolled crossfire, theft, or direct targeting. As a result, schooling is disrupted, and economic development is delayed. They are vulnerable to physical and mental harm, as well as mortality, sexual exploitation, sexual assault, and highly contagious infections. Following their escape, these children face extended confinement, during which they are judged as perpetrators instead of victims.

## 3. International Law

Law stipulates the age of 18 as the legal minimum for the recruitment and use of children in hostilities. Recruiting and using children under the age of 15 as soldiers is unlawful under international humanitarian law (both treaty and custom), and the International Criminal Court considers it a war crime. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), also known as the child soldier treaty, is a multilateral treaty in which states agree to "prohibit the conscription of children under the age of 18 into the military; ensure that military recruits are no younger than 16 and prohibit recruits aged 16 or 17 from directly participating in hostilities." The International Labour Organization's Convention No. 182 defines child soldiering as one of the worst forms of child labour and The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child outlaws child soldiering. Non-state armed groups are likewise prohibited by the treaty from recruiting anybody under the age of 18 for any purpose. According to a commentary upon the convention, there were loopholes that the states have used against the conflict which is a proposal for the parties to "take all necessary measures," which became "take all feasible measures" in the final text, which is not an absolute prohibition because feasible is defined as "capable of being done, accomplished, or carried out, possible or practicable."



## IV. Key Vocabulary

**Grave Violation:** The six grave violations serve as the basis to gather information and report on violations affecting children, and are: Killing and maiming of children; Recruitment or use of children as soldiers; Sexual violence against children; Abduction of children; Attacks against schools or hospitals; Denial of humanitarian access for children.

**Recruitment:** the process of finding people to work for a company or become a new member of an organization, the army, etc.

**Abduction:** the act of forcefully making a person go somewhere with you, especially using threats or violence

**Non-State Armed Groups:** International law does not provide one single definition for non-state armed groups to be an “international legal person” vested with a fixed set of international rights and obligations. It is accepted that whether a certain group is party to an armed conflict governed by international humanitarian law (IHL), bears human rights obligations, or if its members can be criminally responsible for certain acts, the group in light of the body of law has to be examined

**Child Soldier:** Any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes

## V. Important Events & Chronology

| Date (Day/Month/Year) | Event  |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1996                  | Publication of Graça Machel report   |
| 1997                  | First Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict   |
| 1999                  | First debate of the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict   |
| 2000                  | The Security Council, in its resolution 1314, requested the Secretary-General to continue to report on the protection of children in armed conflict. |
| 2002                  | The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict entered into force.              |



|      |  |
|------|--|
| 2003 | The Security Council, by its resolution 1460, requested the Secretary-General to report on progress made with the listed parties.  |
| 2004 | The Security Council, by its resolution 1539, requested the Secretary-General to prepare an action plan to establish an Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations against children. |
| 2005 | Security Council resolution 1612 endorses the MRM proposed by the Secretary-General to collect timely and reliable information   |
| 2014 | Launch of “Children, Not Soldiers” campaign  |
| 2015 | Adoption of the Safe Schools Declaration   |
| 2021 | UNSC Resolution 2601: On safeguarding and promoting the right to education, including in armed conflict and on developing effective measures to address attacks against education facilities.          |

## VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

- S/RES/1314 (2000): “Resolution 1314”

<http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1314>

Contains proposals upon the deliberate targeting of children in situations of armed conflict

- S/RES/2601 (2021): “Security Council Resolution 2601[on children and armed conflict]”

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3946448?ln=en>

Emphasizes the primary role and responsibility of Governments in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict.

- S/RES/2427 (2018): “Security Council Resolution 2427”

[http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_res\\_2427.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2427.pdf)

This unanimously approved resolution offered a framework for promoting inclusive child protection, rights, wellbeing, and empowerment throughout the conflict cycle and in maintaining peace efforts. The



Council emphasized the necessity to handle children who are connected to or allegedly connected to non-State armed groups with particular care and stressed that such children or those who are accused of committing offenses amid conflicts should be considered primarily as victims. It welcomed the commencement of a process to compile practical advice on integrating child protection issues in peace processes and reaffirmed its intention to keep tracking and reporting on parties that commit severe violations affecting children. It also urged Member States to take into consideration non-judicial measures as an alternative to the prosecution and detention of children in armed conflicts, in a list annexed to the Secretary-General's annual report on the issue.

## VII. Failed Solution Attempts

The Special Representative and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched the campaign Children, Not Soldiers in 2014 to support the remaining eight states: Afghanistan, Chad, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen. According to the press statement, children in Iraq and Syria remain vulnerable to recruitment due to the proliferation of rebel forces and advances by ISIL, whereas children in South Sudan continue to face the impacts of a violent conflict, with high levels of recruitment and use. The reason behind this campaign remaining unsuccessful in eradicating the issue of children being involved in armed conflicts is that the factors determining the situation of the states were not sufficient enough to support the citizens, thus leaving the children to be or feel compelled to join an armed force mostly being non-state actors. Some factors such as security and financial resources were not enough to maintain the well-being of individuals in a stable environment.

## VIII. Possible Solutions

While legal and policy frameworks, as well as numerous programs, are in place to prevent and terminate recruitment, international action has primarily focused on the demand side, that is, altering the attitudes and behaviors of armed groups regarding child recruitment. Less emphasis has been placed on decreasing the number of children exposed to recruitment. The delegates should focus on finding out the factors that are the roots of the problem which are stated in the rationale subsection of the detailed focus. The credibility and transparency of this method can be ensured by getting the highest utility out of the solution as possible, thus there should be provisions such as designing an ethic research program, which remains as respectable as possible for the victimized individuals without triggering the already existing ethics and religious factors that makes the conflict more susceptible. When forming a research group to find and work upon diminishing the detrimental effects of the factors that make up the roots of the issue, delegates can specifically form a focus group, composed of researchers, officials etc. After the



identification of non-uniform factors, there should be a crisis management operation conducted to protect the rights of the children, therefore the resolutions should mainly focus on an integrated plan as the first step taking a legal action, then endeavoring the armed groups to release the child soldiers with a disincentivizing method determined by the delegates, and finally helping the children to reintegrate with their communities, which plays an important role in rehabilitating the victimized children.

## IX. Useful Links

- [https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/WorkingPaper-1\\_SixGraveViolationsLegalFoundation.pdf](https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/WorkingPaper-1_SixGraveViolationsLegalFoundation.pdf)

Working Paper-1: Six Grave Violations Legal Foundation

The six grave transgressions are examined in this Working Paper in light of their justifications under relevant international law. By doing this, we intend to clarify the pertinent concerns and support the child protection partners' claims as they deal with these transgressions in their line of work.

- [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related\\_material/childsoldierresource.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/childsoldierresource.pdf)

The Red Hand Day Campaign

One million red hands against the use of child soldiers: On February 12, 2009, the anniversary of the day the treaty banning the use of child soldiers went into force, the Red Hand Day initiative aims to collect one million "red hands," the emblem of the worldwide effort to end the use of child soldiers, and give them to UN representatives in New York. Students, young people, children affected by armed conflict, community organizations, and civil society organizations from all over the world are taking part in the campaign to draw attention to the need for more robust international action to halt the use of child soldiers.

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

Child Recruitment and Use

In the annexes of the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict, the recruitment and use of children is a prerequisite for listing parties to armed conflict.

- <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>



Investigation into the mandate's development from 1996 through 2021

This is the first research that thoroughly examines the difficulties, opportunities, and achievements in carrying out the United Nations mandate on children and armed conflict since it was established in 1996.

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Image 1: Crayon Boy- Banksy

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