



JISMUN'25

**UNICEF: PREVENTING THE
RECRUITMENT OF CHILD
SOLDIERS**

Study Guide

Agenda Item: Preventing the Recruitment of Child Soldiers

Table of Contents:

1. Letter from Secretary General
2. Letter from Under-Secretary General
3. Introduction to the Committee
4. Introduction to the Agend Item
5. Key Words
6. Overview
7. The Issues
8. Legal and Policy Framework
9. Conclusion
10. Questions to Be Answered
11. Bibliography and Further Reading

1. Letter from Secretary General

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to JISMUN 2025, Aljazari's first-ever MUN conference!

As your (very sleep deprived but incredibly excited) Secretary General, I'm proud to welcome you to something we built from scratch, with a lot of passion and probably too much caffeine.

Whether you're an experienced delegate or nervously holding your placard, this is your moment. Speak boldly, debate fiercely, and most importantly: have fun.

Let's make history.

With love and under-eye bags,

Salsabeel Hassan
Secretary-General

JISMUN 2025

2. Letter from Under- Secretary General

Esteemed Delegates, As the Under-Secretary General of this committee, I, Tuana Gülten Ak, am honored to create an agenda item for you. UNICEF will always remain special to me because it had a topic that I enjoyed learning new things about. As you know, UNICEF is the world's leading defender of children's rights, and I can say that I gained very different perspectives while writing the study guide for this committee, which you will read in a moment.

Aside from achieving the rights that children already have, it was really sad and disappointing to realize that we live in the same world as people who put guns in their hands, sent them to death, and tried to use them for completely different purposes, even before their development was completed. But the way the world is going, of course, will not remain like this. Because the information you learn while reading this guide and the ideas you will discuss at JISMUN'25, which will be one of the best conferences of the year, will constitute a hope for children to become children, not soldiers.

Remember, everything starts with a little hope.

The issue of preventing the recruitment of child soldiers will offer you a wide range. You will learn who child soldiers are, why children are soldiers, what the states and the UN are doing on this issue, how policies are being followed and should be followed. As the Under-Secretary General of the committee, my advice to you will be to continue your research from the links I have added in the bibliography section. Especially since the articles written on this subject are written as a result of careful and detailed research, it will be useful for you to continue your research from there. I am sure that you can get inspiration from there for the solutions and ideas you need, and you can get rid of any confusion from there.

However, you can always forward your questions and problems related to the topic, the guide or the committee to me at any time. I would be very happy to help and reassure you.

My gmail adress: tuanagultenak@gmail.com

3. Introduction to the Committee

UNICEF, originally the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, officially United Nations Children's Fund since 1953, is an agency of the United Nations responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide. The organization is one of the most widely known and visible social welfare entities globally, operating in 192 countries and territories. UNICEF's activities include providing immunizations and disease prevention, administering treatment for children and mothers with HIV, enhancing childhood and maternal nutrition, improving sanitation, promoting education, and providing emergency relief in response to disasters.

UNICEF is the successor of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, and was created on 11 December 1946, in New York, by the U.N. Relief Rehabilitation Administration to provide immediate relief to children and mothers affected by World War II. The same year, the United Nations General Assembly established UNICEF to further institutionalize post-war relief work. In 1950, its mandate was extended to address the long-term needs of children and women, particularly in developing countries. In 1953, the organization became a permanent part of the United Nations System, and its name was changed to United Nations Children's Fund, though it retains the UNICEF acronym.

UNICEF Mission Statement:

- UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential.
- UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and strives to establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children.
- UNICEF insists that the survival, protection and development of children are universal development imperatives that are integral to human progress.

- UNICEF mobilizes political will and material resources to help countries, particularly developing countries, ensure a "first call for children" and to build their capacity to form appropriate policies and deliver services for children and their families.
- UNICEF is committed to ensuring special protection for the most disadvantaged children – victims of war, disasters, extreme poverty, all forms of violence and exploitation, and those with disabilities.
- UNICEF responds in emergencies to protect the rights of children. In coordination with United Nations partners and humanitarian agencies, UNICEF makes its unique facilities for rapid response available to its partners to relieve the suffering of children and those who provide their care.
- UNICEF is non-partisan and its cooperation is free of discrimination. In everything it does, the most disadvantaged children and the countries in greatest need have priority.
- UNICEF aims, through its country programmes, to promote the equal rights of women and girls and to support their full participation in the political, social and economic development of their communities.
- UNICEF works with all its partners towards the attainment of the sustainable human development goals adopted by the world community and the realization of the vision of peace and social progress enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.



4. Introduction to the Agend Item

Thousands of children are recruited and used in armed conflicts across the world. Between 2005 and 2022, more than 105,000 children were verified as recruited and used by parties to conflict, although the actual number of cases is believed to be much higher.

Often referred to as “child soldiers,” these boys and girls suffer extensive forms of exploitation and abuse that are not fully captured by that term. Warring parties use children not only as fighters, but as scouts, cooks, porters, guards, messengers and more. Many, especially girls, are also subjected to gender-based violence.

Children become part of an armed force or group for various reasons. Some are abducted, threatened, coerced or manipulated by armed actors. Others are driven by poverty, compelled to generate income for their families. Still others associate themselves for survival or to protect their communities. No matter their involvement, the recruitment and use of children by armed forces is a grave violation of child rights and international humanitarian law.

While living among armed actors, children experience unconscionable forms of violence. They may be required to participate in harrowing training or initiation ceremonies, to undergo hazardous labour or to engage in combat – with great risk of death, chronic injury and disability. They may also witness, suffer or be forced to take part in torture and killings. Girls, especially, can be subjected to gender-based violence. Warring parties also deprive children of nutrition and healthy living conditions, or subject them to substance abuse, with significant consequences for their physical and mental well-being. These experiences take a heavy toll on children’s relationships with their families and communities.

Whether or not children are accepted back into society depends on various factors, including their reason for association with armed actors, and the perceptions of their families and communities. Some children who attempt to reintegrate are viewed with suspicion or outright rejected, while others may struggle to fit in. Psychological distress can make it difficult for children to process and verbalize their experiences, especially when they fear stigma or how people will react.

What’s more, families and communities may be coping with their own challenges and trauma from conflict, and have trouble understanding or accepting children who return home. Communities need support to care for their returning children – just as the thousands of boys and girls who exit armed forces each year need it to rebuild their futures.

Since the 1960s, a number of treaties have successfully reduced the recruitment and use of children worldwide. Nonetheless, around a quarter of armed forces worldwide, particularly those of third-world nations still train adolescent children for military service,

while elsewhere, the use of children in armed conflict and insurgencies has increased in recent years.

During this annual session of JISMUN'25, discussions and solutions are expected about the effectiveness of the measures taken to recruit child soldiers and what can be done in this regard.

5. Key Words

Recruitment: The action of enlisting new people in the armed forces.

Hazardous Labour: Work that, by its nature or circumstances, is likely to harm children's health, safety or moral development.

Maim: Wound or injure (a person or animal) so that part of the body is permanently damaged.

Kidnapping: The action of abducting someone and holding them captive.

Deploy: Move (troops or equipment) into position for military action.

Violation: An action that breaks or acts against something, especially a law, agreement, principle, or something that should be treated with respect.

Framework: A system of rules, ideas, or beliefs that is used to plan or decide something.

Armed Forces: A country's military forces, usually an army, navy, and air force.

Cape Town Principles: The Cape Town Principles are the outcome of an international research project which brought together scholars from Canada, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, South Africa and the UK to examine the processes by which judges are appointed in their countries.

Conflict: A serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one, fighting between two or more groups of people or countries.

6. Overview

Twenty nine years ago, international humanitarian advocate Graça Machel released her ground breaking Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. It became a *cri de coeur*, drawing the attention of governments, child protection agencies and civil society. The former First Lady of Mozambique and South Africa compelled States to confront the fact that children were being used as weapons of war, and the phrase 'child soldiers' became a rallying call for action.

The international community called for an end to the outrage and recommended actions to protect children from recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups. Almost a generation later, this report sets out areas where important progress has been made towards ending the recruitment and use of children in conflict, including through the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, and makes recommendations for action by governments.

Despite considerable progress, however, tens of thousands of children – boys and girls under the age of 18– are still estimated to be recruited and used in conflicts worldwide. As many as 16,000 children in South Sudan alone have been recruited and used by armed forces and groups since the start of the conflict in December 2013, and all parties to the current conflict on the ground in Yemen have engaged in widespread recruitment of children. As long as these grave violations continue, the international community has not honoured its promise to end, once and for all, the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

Children are used for various functions by armed forces and groups, including but not limited to fighters, cooks, porters, messengers and spies, or they are subjected to sexual exploitation. Some children are abducted or forcibly recruited, while others are driven to join by poverty, by circumstances of political or social exclusion, or the desire to seek revenge for violence committed against them or their families. In all cases the conscription of children for military purposes and their use by armed forces or groups is a grave violation of their rights.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000) requires States to ensure that children under age 18 are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces. Additionally, it requires them to raise the minimum age for voluntary recruitment to above age 15. It also forbids anyone under 18 to participate in hostilities. States are also required to take all feasible measures to prevent recruitment and use of individuals under the age of 18 by non-State armed groups. And yet, despite the clear directives of this legal instrument, and the fact that some 176 countries have either ratified or signed it, the recruitment and use of child soldiers continues.

In adopting the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, governments around the world agreed to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers and fulfil the provisions of the Optional Protocol. Specifically, Target 8.7 compels States to take immediate and effective measures to “secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.” Adding to these clear mandates for change are no fewer than 11 United Nations Security Council resolutions aimed at preventing and ending grave child rights violations in armed conflict.

Prohibition under International Law

Human rights law declares 18 as the minimum legal age for recruitment and use of children in hostilities. Recruiting and using children under the age of 15 as soldiers is prohibited under international humanitarian law – treaty and custom – and is defined as a war crime by the International Criminal Court. Parties to conflict that recruit and use children are listed by the Secretary-General in the annexes of his annual report on children and armed conflict.

We are “Children, Not Soldiers”

In 2014, with UNICEF, the Special Representative launched the campaign “Children, Not Soldiers” to bring about a global consensus that child soldiers should not be used in conflict. The campaign was designed to generate momentum, political will and international support to turn the page once and for all on the recruitment of children by national security forces in conflict situations.

The campaign received immediate support from Member States, UN, NGO partners, regional organizations and the general public. The UN Security Council and General Assembly welcomed “Children, Not Soldiers” and requested regular updates through the Special Representative’s reporting.

At the time of the launch, the countries concerned by the campaign were: Afghanistan, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen. Representatives from each of these countries attended the launch event and expressed their full support to reach the objectives of “Children, Not Soldiers”.

The campaign ended at the end of 2016, but the consensus envisioned is now a reality and thousands of child soldiers have been released and reintegrated with the assistance of UNICEF, peacekeeping and political missions, and other UN and NGO partners on the ground. All Governments concerned by the Campaign are engaged in an Action Plan process with the United Nations. Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo put in place all necessary measures to end and prevent the recruitment of children in their armed forces and are no longer listed.

National campaigns to promote the objectives of “Children, Not Soldiers” have been launched in most countries concerned and beyond.

7. The Issues

7.1. Who are child soldiers?

This guide uses the definition of child soldiers as established in the Cape Town Principles: “Any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and those accompanying such groups, other than purely as family members. It includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage. It does not, therefore, only refer to a child who is carrying or has carried arms.”

Save the Children designs child soldier programs that target not only those children who have actively participated in combat, but also the many other children used by government or opposition forces. Children are often required to play a number of roles in addition to the roles identified in the definition above. These roles include spies, bomb carriers, sentries, and human shields. Children are also often used to lay and clear landmines. As they grow older and stronger, children in armed groups may be ‘promoted’ from lesser servant roles to active combat roles. Child soldiers often include very young children, as young as seven in some situations, as well as older children and teenagers. The upper age of eighteen as defined in the Cape Town Principles corresponds to the threshold between childhood and adulthood defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children may be forced to join armed groups through forced conscription or abduction, or they may join ‘voluntarily’ for their own protection and survival. The term ‘voluntary’ should be used cautiously when discussing child soldiers, as joining is often the only option available to children and this action is rarely ‘voluntary’ in any genuine sense.

Children are recruited and used by armed groups around the world — both government and opposition — for a variety of reasons. It is generally easier to abduct, subjugate, and manipulate children than adults. Children are more impressionable and vulnerable to indoctrination. They can learn skills and tasks quickly, and they can be fast and agile on a battlefield. They are more willing than adults to take risks. Children are seen as more loyal and less threatening to adult leadership. It is easier for children to slip through enemy lines unnoticed, making them effective spies and bomb carriers. Children are typically viewed as cheap and expendable labor; they require less food and no payment. In addition, using child soldiers can present a moral dilemma to enemies: should they kill children?

7.2. The Impact of Displacement on the Risk of Recruitment

Children who become internally displaced as a result of natural disasters or armed conflict are usually at greater risk of recruitment or use by armed forces or groups. This is due to reduced social protection and coping mechanisms, discrimination on the basis of their displaced status or their perceived allegiance with a belligerent in the armed conflict. Additionally, lack of economic, educational or other opportunities caused by displacement can

make internally displaced children more vulnerable to recruitment. Children separated from their families are particularly exposed and, where the security situation is fragile, for example when IDP camps are close to conflict areas or infiltrated by armed actors, the potential for forced recruitment through abduction of children or other means is very high. Girls constitute up to 40 per cent of children associated with armed forces or groups. While their experiences may lead to significant problems, particularly regarding their reintegration, their specific needs are rarely adequately addressed. Gender roles may contribute to girls' vulnerability to recruitment, which may be heightened in situations of displacement, for example by having to fetch water or firewood unaccompanied in conflict zones.

7.3. Why Children Are Recruited into Armed Forces or Armed Groups?

Children become associated with armed forces or armed groups for many different reasons depending on the context. A situation analysis is essential in order to identify the specific causes of recruitment in any given operation. While many children are forcibly recruited, others "volunteer" because of their circumstances. War itself is a major determinant, but children may see enlistment as the only alternative when they lack access to education or employment or when their families are abusive or violent or fail to provide proper care. Girls frequently join up to escape sexual violence or other forms of discrimination. In such contexts, children may see participation in armed forces or groups as their best option for survival for themselves, their families or communities. Children living in highly militarized or politicized communities or those where violence is organized or commonplace may also be vulnerable to recruitment; children often join armed groups to support or remain with their families. Armed actors may target children due to a need for manpower or because children are particularly useful in certain roles, for example as spies; or because they are more likely to obey orders or work for food, security or status rather than wages.

7.4. Vulnerabilities of Child Soldiers

On the battlefield, children armed with light weapons can be as deadly as their adult counterparts. They are often sent on the most dangerous missions, such as checking for mines, spying, and leading attacks. Thus, it is not surprising that child soldiers typically have higher casualty rates than adults. They are more likely to take ill-judged risks, and their bodies are more susceptible to complications if injured. In addition to injuries, child soldiers may face a variety of other health problems, including malnutrition, poor hygiene and health care, respiratory and skin infections, and punishment by physical abuse or deprivation.

Some armed groups force children to use drugs to desensitize them to violence and enhance their performance. Use of cocaine, amphetamines, and other stimulants is especially common. These drugs can cause lasting harm to the bodies and minds of child soldiers. Children leaving armed groups that force drug use may have a difficult time overcoming drug addiction and withdrawal.

All child soldiers are vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation by others in the armed group. The risks are usually much higher for girls. Sexually abused children are at high risk of

contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Girls are at risk of unwanted pregnancies. These pregnancies can be very dangerous for the girls, who are often malnourished, physically immature, and living in unsanitary conditions.

In addition to the physical vulnerabilities they face, child soldiers' social and psychological development is often damaged by their experience in the armed group. Children are routinely exposed to terrible acts of violence and brutality. They are often brutalized themselves as part of an indoctrination process. They may also be encouraged or forced to brutalize others — beating or killing adversaries, those seen as 'traitors,' and sometimes even members of their own family or community. This is intended to erode children's desire to escape and return home, as well as to form a bond with other members of the armed group.

Due to this initiation and their subsequent experiences, child soldiers will often feel deeply alienated from their families or communities. Some child soldiers are seized from their communities when they are very young and serve so long in an armed group that they lose all recollection of what a family is and how it functions. Many children lose their sense of identity outside the armed group and its violent value system. In addition, child soldiers are deprived of many of the opportunities that their non-soldier peers may have: normal family life, normal developmental experiences, and educational opportunities. These deprivations and the other traumas that child soldiers suffer can be manifested in a range of ways, including nightmares, withdrawal from others, and outbursts of anger and aggression.

Despite the extreme trauma they have faced, however, child soldiers who survive their experience are remarkably resilient. Many seek simply to restart their lives and put their past behind them. In order to survive, child soldiers have often developed ingenious coping skills and gained strong leadership experience. With targeted reintegration and rehabilitation support, many child soldiers can reconnect with their family loyalties and their religious, traditional, and moral values after leaving the forces. They can begin their lives anew.

One significant factor influencing children's well-being and capacity to recover is what they have done — and what has been done to them. Children's age at time of recruitment also influences their ability to readjust to civilian life. Another key factor, noted in SC's experience in Mozambique, is the duration of children's stay in an armed group. Those that stayed less than six months seemed quite capable of returning home and readopting traditional values. Their initial aggressive behavior and distrust of adults subsided in time. Children who had stayed for more than a year seemed to see themselves not as victims but as members of the forces. They had a much more difficult time transitioning and reintegrating.

An additional factor is the type of support that children receive in their process of reintegration. Although no long-term studies have been conducted on rehabilitation programs for child soldiers, anecdotal information from Mozambique indicates that those who took part in SC programs and were supported during their reintegration process have been able to maintain relationships as adults, marry, and hold jobs more effectively than those who attempted to reintegrate without support. Developing targeted programs to support child soldiers is often challenging, but is essential to their future well-being and the future of the post-conflict society.

The consequences for children associated with armed forces or armed groups

The involvement of children in conflict exposes them to extreme and unacceptable threats to their health and well being and violates their rights.

- Boys and girls are deprived of growing up with their families and the opportunity to develop physically and emotionally in a familiar or protective environment.
- In combat, many children are killed, severely injured or permanently disabled; they may be forced to witness or participate in atrocities.
- In many contexts, children, mainly girls, associated with armed forces or groups are subjected to sexual and gender based violence and may contract sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS.
- Girls may also become pregnant or give birth during their time with armed forces or armed groups.
- Children whose families are displaced are at greater risk of remaining separated from their families and communities once released.
- Children may also be stigmatized or rejected by their families or communities. Girls face particular difficulties reintegrating, particularly if they return with children or pregnant. Despite their experiences these children usually see themselves as strong and hard working. They are resilient and able to do well in life if they are given appropriate help, support and encouragement.

7.5. Regions and Countries with Child Soldiers

Child recruitment is occurring through forced recruitment, including abduction, as well as through the use of new means such as social media for recruitment. Some contemporary armed groups are known to employ recruitment strategies that specifically target children. In his 2015 report on children and armed conflict, the United Nations Secretary-General indicates that 49 of the 57 parties to armed conflict that are listed as perpetrators of violations against children are non-State armed groups. For example, in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, the proliferation of armed groups and the military advances by ISIL have made children even more vulnerable to recruitment. Children as young as age 12 are undergoing military training as well as being used as informants and guards at checkpoints and other strategic locations.

Forming one of the six grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflicts, recruitment and use of children has been one of the highest violations recorded globally throughout 2021 according to UN reports. Of the four countries globally where the highest number of recruitment and use of children by parties to conflicts were verified in 2021, three were African countries – the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali and Somalia. In the DRC, despite some progress being achieved in the fight against recruitment of child soldiers, particularly within the national army (the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC)) which has now been removed from the UN blacklist of armies that recruit and/or use children, armed non-State actors continue to widely recruit child soldiers. Recent reports indicate for instance that over 470 children were recruited by armed groups in South Kivu province, over the course of 2021. Out of these children, 50 have reportedly been killed while 169 are believed to have suffered sexual violence. In the DRC, of the six grave violations of children's rights in armed conflicts – recruitment and use; killing and maiming; sexual violence; abduction; attacks against schools and hospitals; and denial of humanitarian

access – recruitment and use and abduction of children, committed in conjunction, are the most common violations.

In Mali, various reports indicate a dramatic increase in the recruitment and use of children in hostilities. During the first half of 2022, a significant increase of 57% was recorded by the UN in grave violations against children as compared to the previous year. Of these, recruitment and use of children constituted the highest number of verified violations – of the 396 grave violations recorded during the period, 149 were cases of recruitment and use of children in hostilities. Further attesting to the increasing vulnerability of children to recruitment, there has been increasing incidents of attacks or direct threats against schools in Mali, perpetrated by jihadist groups. Not only have these incidents had devastating impact on maintaining children's education in affected areas, they are also indicative of a more worrying trend of targeting children by groups that aim to advance and spread extremist ideologies.

In Somalia, recruitment and use of 1,716 children was documented by the UN in 2021. The 6th report of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia further elaborates that of the 8,042 grave violations against 6,501 children committed in the country between October 2019 and September 2021, 2,852 have been recruitment and use of children. This large percentage makes this violation one of the most prevalent ones perpetrated in Somalia. While both government and non-State actors have been implicated for the recruitment and use of children in hostilities, Al-Shabaab is the major perpetrator so far. UN reports show that while almost all abductions of children are committed by Al-Shabaab, 80% of the abductions are perpetrated for the purpose of recruitment and use of the children.

While DRC, Mali and Somalia simply exemplify the highest rate of acts of recruitment and use of children reported during 2021 and 2022, the issue remains prevalent across the continent affecting children caught in conflict situations in various African States. For instance, parties to the conflict in northern Ethiopia have extended accusations against each other for the recruitment and use of minors most of which are allegedly forcibly conscripted. Central African Republic (CAR) also experienced a spike in the rate of forced conscription of children, following the flare up of violence in the country following contestations over the December 2020 elections. In early 2021 alone, recruitment of over 3,000 child soldiers was recorded by the UN, some having been conscripted from sites sheltering communities displaced due to the violence. In Mozambique, Islamic State (ISIS) affiliated armed groups have been accused of kidnapping thousands of children as young as 12 years old and using them to fight against government forces. In South Sudan, since the outbreak of the civil war in 2013, sources indicate that over 19,000 children have been recruited to be used as child soldiers. It is believed that both government forces, opposition groups and allied militias still continue to recruit and use child soldiers in direct hostilities as well as supportive roles.

Armed groups in other conflicts are also abducting children, including groups in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan. Over the past decade, the number of extremely violent conflicts almost doubled. Globally, the rise in high intensity conflicts has hit children hard. One United Nations report described egregious violations against children. Some children, for example were “forced to witness or take part in beheadings, immolations and summary executions. They were also indoctrinated, recruited and forced to be suicide bombers or human shields. Girls were subjected to additional abuses, including sexual slavery, abduction and forced marriage... Such brutal tactics had severe repercussions on children, which will have lasting effects for generations to come”.

The progress being made with government armies towards ending the recruitment and use of children is harder to achieve with non-State armed groups. Further, serious security considerations impact the ability of child protection actors and agencies to engage with some non-State armed groups.

However, agreements have been reached with several non-State armed groups that have led to the prevention of child recruitment and to the release of child soldiers. These non-State groups include the Cobra Faction in South Sudan, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines, and several armed groups in Myanmar. Such agreements show that concerted action can end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts. Children allegedly associated with armed groups are detained and treated as security threats, deprived of their rights and protections.

A large number of children alleged to be associated with armed groups are being arrested and detained, deprived of their liberty and treated as security threats. Instead of being viewed as threats and deprived of their rights, children who are vulnerable to recruitment by armed forces and groups should be supported in their release and reintegration. Detention can have a profound and negative impact on children's long-term physical, emotional and cognitive development. In Afghanistan, for example, some children who were alleged to be associated with armed groups and detained in correction centres have been found to experience deep depression. Many need psychosocial support, including those who suffer further violence in the centres, such as sexual abuse.

Information about the situation of such child detainees is often difficult to obtain. In one example, in Somalia, more than 75 children alleged to have been associated with the non-State armed group Al-Shabaab were detained at a government 'Rehabilitation Centre' for a few years. Many of the children were placed together with adult detainees and prevented from contacting their families. Humanitarian access was denied until August 2014. In September 2015, following multilateral negotiations, 79 children were handed over to UNICEF and its implementing partners. They were subsequently reunited with their families or provided with interim care, while also benefiting from the community-based socio-economic reintegration programme.

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States have agreed that children may be detained only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest period necessary. International humanitarian law requires that children deprived of liberty must be afforded special protection and treatment in keeping with their age. In particular, they must be held separate from adults, except in those cases when an entire family is detained as a unit. The pronouncement or execution of a death sentence against a person aged under 18 is also prohibited. International standards on the administration of juvenile justice, as well as the protections contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, must be applied to all children, without exception, including children detained under national security and/or terrorism legislation. Efforts are urgently needed to strengthen the protection of children at risk. Such efforts should ensure that these children are treated according to international standards for children in conflict with the law. Every opportunity should be explored to secure their release and reintegration.

8. Legal and Policy Framework

8.1. International Legal and Policy Framework

International law definitively bans the recruitment of children under 15 years old and prohibits their direct participation in any armed groups, whether government armies or opposition groups. In 2000, the UN adopted a new protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that raises the international legal age of recruitment to eighteen.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most comprehensive and widely ratified human rights treaty in existence. Although it defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 and sets out provisions for the protection and care of children affected by armed conflict, it somewhat incongruously puts the age of legal recruitment and participation in armed conflict at 15.3. Formally, the CRC is only legally binding on governments, but it can also be used to advocate with armed opposition groups.

The Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict addresses the age discrepancy in the CRC by explicitly establishing 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in armed conflict. It also requires all State Parties to make it a criminal offense for non-governmental armed groups to recruit anyone under 18. While governments must not conscript children under 18 into the armed forces, they may recruit persons between the age of 16 and 18 with a series of established safeguards ensuring that such recruitment is genuinely voluntary, that it is done with the informed consent of the minor's parents or legal guardians, that recruits are fully informed of the duties involved in military service, that proof of age is established, and that soldiers are not deployed before the age of 18.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child defines a child as anyone under the age of 18. The Charter precludes the recruitment of children and their participation in armed conflict. It further requires State Parties to protect civilians and ensure respect for all rules of international humanitarian law applicable to children in all armed conflict, including internal conflict.

The 1977 Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions set the legal age of recruitment at 15 and require special protection and treatment for children in armed conflict. Importantly, the protocols also apply to all parties to a conflict; Additional Protocol I relates to international armed conflicts and Additional Protocol II relates to non-international or internal conflicts within States.

The Statute of the International Criminal Court lists the use of child combatants younger than 15 as a war crime. The court has jurisdiction over both international armed conflicts and those internal conflicts that meet certain criteria.

Although not a legal document, the Cape Town Principles represent an important consensus among major international NGOs and UNICEF and offer useful guidance in developing policy and programs that protect and support child soldiers. In addition to defining key terms, the principles provide a comprehensive overview of appropriate action related to the prevention of recruitment, demobilization, and reintegration of child soldiers.

8.2. National Legal and Policy Framework

At the domestic level, it is important for SC program designers and managers to understand how international legal instruments relating to child soldiers have been incorporated into national legislation and policies. Even when appropriate policies have been adopted, governments often fail to enact these policies effectively. An examination of laws and policies relevant to child soldiers must be accompanied by a careful assessment of the status of enforcement and the level of popular knowledge of the policies. In many national contexts, it may be necessary for SC staff to engage in advocacy efforts to protect child soldiers by calling for introduction of new laws, changes in existing laws, or improved implementation of existing laws. The international instruments described above can serve as useful tools for these advocacy efforts, particularly if the program country government has signed and/or ratified any of the instruments.

Until the 1999 Lomé Peace Accords for Sierra Leone, no international peace agreement had recognized the participation of child soldiers or incorporated their needs in national demobilization plans. Without explicit mention of child soldiers, their specific needs will not be addressed during disarmament and demobilization, and reintegration may prove even more difficult. It is important for SC staff to advocate for explicit recognition of and provision for child soldiers when peace agreements and demobilization plans are being drawn up.

Increased official recognition of the participation of children in conflicts has led to active debate recently around the legal status of child soldiers upon demobilization. The general trend appears to be to hold young people more accountable and include them in the jurisdiction of post-conflict tribunals. However, many NGOs that work directly with child soldiers have advocated that it is in children's best interest to keep child soldiers out of post-conflict legal proceedings.

8.3. Policy Implications for the Prevention of the Recruitment of Child Soldiers Before Conflicts

It is critically important to create, implement and evaluate national policy frameworks and plans for the prevention of the recruitment of child soldiers in fragile states that appear to be

moving toward violence. Usually, many signs and warnings of potential unrest can be discerned in such nations. For many years, some development specialists that work with fragile states have called for policies such as the ones outlined below; however, they have not been successful in developing them because international agencies want to support “sustainable development nations.” Also such policies have been viewed as “development” policies rather than as “violence prevention” policies. Given the escalation of guerrilla movements, community wars, the worldwide reach of terrorists and the increasing conscription of children as armed combatants, it is imperative that past approaches be reconsidered. The neglect of human rights and development agendas in fragile states must be reassessed. New policies should be developed to prevent specific, highpriority socio-economic situations that can enable and even promote the recruitment of child soldiers.

Research Implications

Greatly increased research is urgently required on the early childhoods of child soldiers during pre-conflict period. Both quantitative and qualitative studies should be undertaken. These studies should include parenting behaviors, child health, nutritional and developmental status, accessibility and use of basic services, exposure to traumatic domestic, community or inter-generational violence, preschool experiences (if any), and children’s school histories and achievement. Research should also be undertaken regarding the types, contents and methods of informal, non-formal and formal education received (or not received) by child soldiers before and during their participation in violence. These data should be studied in relation to prevailing types of child soldier recruitment and the degree of security provided children in communities, IDP and refugee camps, schools and play areas. Study results should be used to tailor national policies to fit the socio-cultural and economic realities of children affected by war, with a special focus on those who are enticed or abducted into armed groups. In addition, case studies should be conducted on integrated early childhood development programs and their results in violence zones where children have been conscripted into armed groups with the intention of discovering whether or not such programs are successful in curtailing conflict and conscription. For example, a case study on a preschool program in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ambon, Indonesia describes a compelling approach that reduced violence and intolerance in children and at familial, community and inter-religious group levels. Once policies are in place for preventing the recruitment of child soldiers in precursor situations, policy evaluations should be undertaken to assess their effectiveness and revise the strategies and programs used in order to improve their impacts.

8.4. Policy Implications during Conflicts

As noted before, many international specialists continue to believe that during conflicts it is close to impossible to develop policies or policy guidelines to deal with human rights and development issues. In most conflict situations, either formal or informal policies could be developed to guide warring parties in some places or phases of a conflict. Because conflict phases can present different types of problems and opportunities for planning and implementing policies, guidelines and activities, it is important to carefully assess each country situation. Special attention should be given to inter-institutional coordination in all aspects of policy development and application during conflicts. Coordination between NGOs and with governments has been neglected and often rejected as an option in many conflicts.

The competition for contracts from international organizations has exacerbated this situation. To develop and implement effective policies and policy guidelines, coordination systems will be essential.

Research implications

It is essential that rapid mapping exercises and assessments be undertaken regarding the provision and quality of basic and integrated services given during conflicts, with an eye to evaluating service impact on the prevention of the recruitment of child soldiers and to identifying un-served high-risk populations. Data gleaned through the development of systems for monitoring the recruitment and status of child soldiers should be analyzed carefully, with the goal of helping nations prevent further recruitment and building protective policies that are increasingly effective over time. Situation analyses on child soldier recruitment will be essential as well as studies on shorter and longer-term policy results. Studies on the short- and long-term results of programs for demobilized child soldiers are urgently needed with a special focus on the reasons for recidivism. In addition to assessing the reasons why some child soldiers return to conflicts, become bandits, join youth gangs, work in illicit trades or become international mercenaries, it will be important to identify why and how some of them reintegrate well. Ultimately, a combination of ethnographic research, comparative case studies, statistical analyses, and evaluation research projects will be needed to inform future policy planning activities to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers.

9. Conclusion

Nearly 1 in 5 children globally live in areas affected by conflict — at great risk to their health, safety and well-being.

In conflict zones, children are more likely than adults to be killed or maimed by explosive weapons. They often lose access to essential services as hospitals, schools and other critical infrastructure are destroyed. They risk becoming separated from parents and caregivers, abducted from their homes, subjected to sexual violence. And they risk being recruited by armed groups.

Every year, thousands of children are recruited and used in armed conflicts across the world. They are often referred to as child soldiers, but the term does not fully capture the many forms of exploitation and abuse these boys and girls suffer. Warring parties use children not only as fighters, but also as scouts, cooks, porters, guards or messengers. Many, especially girls, are also subjected to sexual violence.

The recruitment of children by armed forces and armed groups is a grave violation of children's rights under international law.

Children become part of an armed force or group for various reasons. Some are abducted, threatened, coerced or manipulated to do so. Others are driven by poverty, compelled to generate income for their families. Still others see it as necessary for survival.

Whatever the child's reason, and no matter the level of involvement, the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups is a child rights violation, with incalculable affects on their physical and mental well-being.

Children who have been recruited or used by armed groups not only risk direct exposure to violence, injury and death; they also risk future rejection by their families and communities. The stigma of their association, combined with the physical and psychological trauma of what they experienced, makes their return even more difficult.

These children require support, and so do their communities.

UNICEF has long advocated for ending the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups as part of a broader call to action to protect children in conflict and to prevent and end grave violations against them.

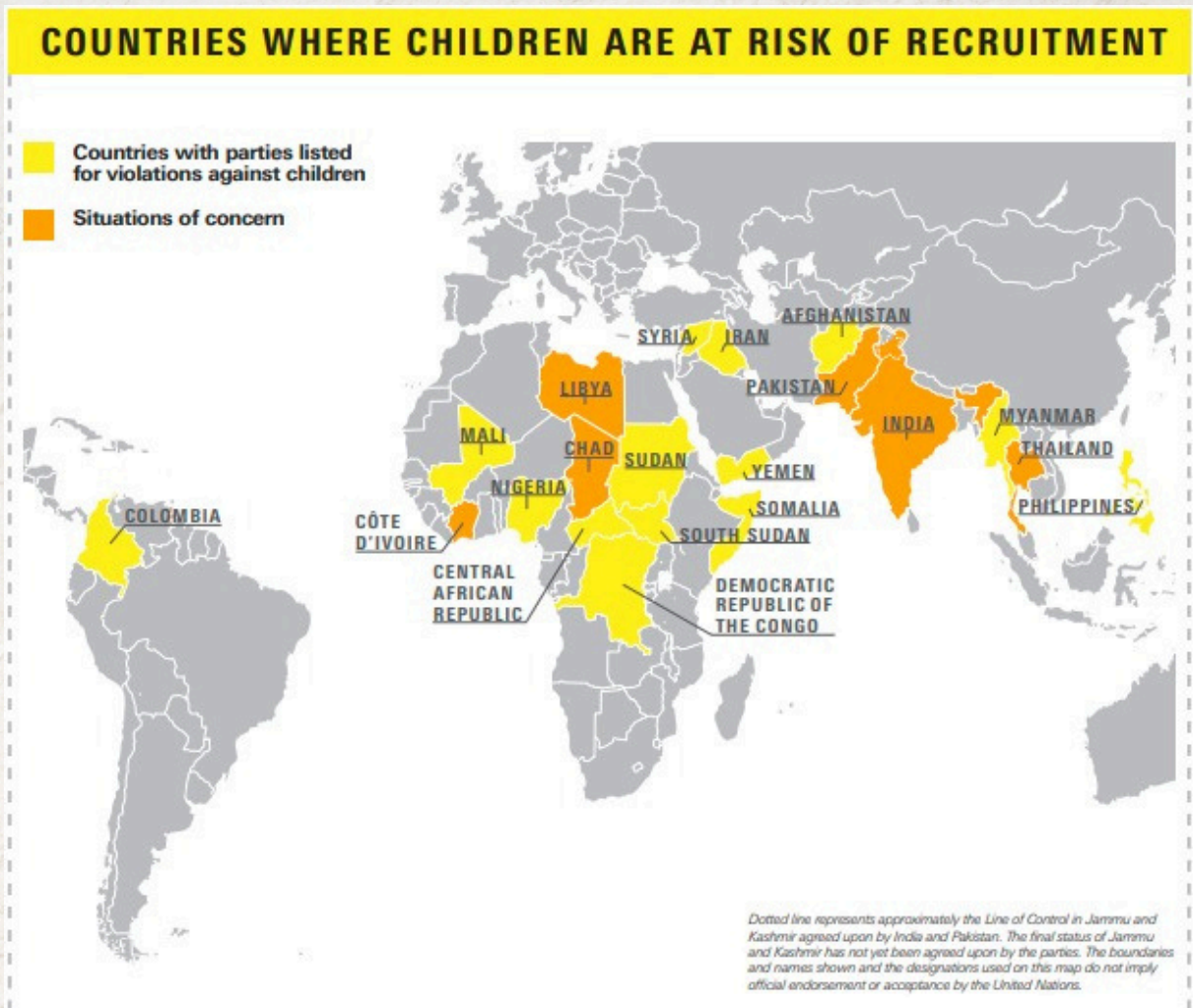
For children who are released from armed groups, UNICEF programs help support their reintegration into their communities.

UNICEF partners with governments, community groups and others to address the drivers of child recruitment and stop violations before they occur. Emergency response interventions regularly include protective services that help avoid conscription, reunite unaccompanied and separated children with parents and caregivers, and provide safe spaces for learning and other services.

UNICEF also supports the release and reintegration of children who exit armed groups each year and helps them rebuild their lives, providing:

- a safe place to live upon release
- community-based services for case management, family tracing and reunification
- access to mental health and psychosocial support, educational support and vocational opportunities
- specialized support to survivors of gender-based violence

While conflicts rage on in so many parts of the world, UNICEF continues to reach millions of children caught in these crises with health care, nutrition, education and other life-sustaining support and protection, while continuing to advocate to the global community to do more to end grave violations against children and better protect their futures. Despite all these UNICEF efforts, child soldiers are still being recruited in some places, and ongoing policies and agreements cannot maintain their dominance. For this, new policies, sanctions, practices and ideas are needed.



Source: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (2015). Note: Countries highlighted in yellow have parties that are listed for violations against children by the Secretary-General in his annual report on children and armed conflict. Countries highlighted in orange have situations of concern. There are other countries not marked on the map, for example in the Americas and in Europe, where children are recruited for military service.

10. Questions To Be Answered

- 1) Should sanctions be imposed on countries or gangs that recruit child soldiers? If so, how?
- 2) How can states prevent the recruitment of child soldiers?
- 3) Should states develop new policies to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers? If so, how?
- 4) How can the recruitment of child soldiers be prevented during the conflict?
- 5) The socioeconomic status, inflation rates and living conditions of the countries that recruit child soldiers are similar to each other and are generally in need. Should the other states support these countries? How?

11. Bibliography and Further Reading

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