

CHAIR REPORT

Committee: Junior General Assembly 1 (JGA1)

Topic: The Issue of Child Soldiers

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Introduction

The issue of child soldiers is a profound global crisis at the intersection of armed conflict, human rights abuse, and development failure. It is not merely just a matter of “war” but a fundamental assault on childhood, it steals lives, shatters families and communities, and creates a legacy of trauma that will destabilize children, families, communities, and an entire country for decades. It’s a major violation of a child’s basic human right notably, Article 25 paragraph 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) stating “...childhood is entitled to special care and assistance.”

Children, some as young as eight years old, are mercilessly taken away from their families and forced to be on the battlefield to suffer its reality. According to the United Nations, tens of thousands of children, both boys and girls, are currently recruited and used by the government, rebel groups, and other armed groups in over a dozen countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and Myanmar.

Girls who become child soldiers suffer double the burden because in addition to the combat and support roles, many are subjected to sexual violence, forced marriage, and domestic servitude.

Key Term

Child soldier

Any person under the age of 18 who is recruited or used by any armed forces or groups in any capacity.

Recruitment and use of child soldiers

The act of recruiting, abducting, or otherwise the use of children under 18 by armed forces or armed groups in combat or support roles.

Combat roles

Role that directly participates in the battle ground like fighting, carrying weapons, attacking enemies, guarding positions, or participation in armed operations.

Support roles

A role in the battle field that does not directly participate in the fighting rather, the behind the scene role like carrying supplies, cooking, cleaning, being the messenger, transporting equipment or other tasks to support the military operation.

Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR)

Formally releasing children from being child soldiers, giving them protection and support, and protecting them to return safely to their families.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration

The process of helping children who were child soldiers recover from the physical and psychological harm, returning them to normal family and community life with education.

Background Information

Many regions have faced constant security challenges for decades, including civil wars, ethnic and sectarian violence, and repeated foreign intervention. Because of these challenges, this creates a rather dangerous security environment where armed forces, state and non-state, routinely prioritize military capacity and short-term survival rather than civilian protection, especially for children. Children have been recruited again and again due to weak governance, chronic poverty, and the increased availability of small arms.

Notably, the scale of child soldiers has expanded since the 1990s due to the prolonged internal conflicts, along with the evolving weapons that have made it easier to arm and deploy children. During the 2000s and 2010s, UN reports and investigations documented evidence of undeclared/unreported government forces and other armed

groups recruitment, causing international awareness and prompting Security Council actions. However, many organizations have expressed their concern that, despite the legal prohibition and actions, children are still continuously used in combat and support roles on the battlefield in at least a dozen countries most frequently in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Myanmar, and Sudan.

The recruitment and widespread use of child soldiers in some countries has devastating consequences for the children themselves, since they often suffer from severe mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. Physically, those coming back are left with permanent disabilities from injuries during combat, while girls face additional trauma of sexual violence and, in some instances, forced pregnancies. But this practice continues because children are easier to manipulate, more likely to follow orders without question, and cheaper than adults. However, in some countries, this process continues not by force but because of the limited education system, poverty, and starving families, making joining an armed group the only way to survive.

International efforts to stop child soldiers have worked poorly. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Paris Principles are agreements that clearly state that no one under 18 should be recruited or used in war. The International Criminal Court (ICC) treats the recruitment of child soldiers as a war crime. Action plans that were negotiated between the UN and some governments and armed groups have led to the release of thousands of children. However, the actions and agreements were weakened by political conflicts, shifting alliances, and a lack of monitoring, weakening the agreement and causing the rise again in recent years.

Major Countries and/or Organizations Involved

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The DRC has one of the most serious child soldier situations in the world where children are frequently abducted or forced to join the armed groups. The DRC has numerous armed groups operating in the eastern DRC. In the UN 2022–2024 reporting period 4,006 children were recruited and used.

The Federal Republic of Somalia

Somalia is home to an armed extremist group which is the most important organization named Al-Shabaab that has repeatedly recruited and abducted children. Between October 2021 and September 2024, the UN verified that 2,821 children were recruited and used. However, the Somali government has taken steps to prevent recruitment, making the UN remove the Somali National Army and Somali Police Force from its list for recruitment and use of children when progress was made.

Republic of South Sudan

South Sudan has experienced prolonged civil conflict and government and other armed forces have been associated with child recruitment. Children were used in the combat and support roles. However, the UN has repeatedly worked with the South Sudanese authorities and other armed groups to release the children and prevent future recruitment.

Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Myanmar is currently listed by the UN as the situations it monitors for violations against children. In 2025 Myanmar was one of the countries with the highest overall number of verified grave violations against children.

United Nations (UN)

The UN has actively monitored violations against children and negotiated with local government and armed groups to stop recruitment and release the child soldiers.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF helps children leave armed groups and provides protection while also reuniting them with their families and to recover.

Timeline of events

Year	Event	Description
1996	Graça Machel Report	The UN published a report showing how severely armed conflicts affect children which added child soldiers into the international agenda.
1997	UN Special Representative created	The UN appointed its special representative (Olara Otunnu) for children and armed conflict to focus on protecting children in wars.
1998	First Security Council	First debate on the topic of children and armed conflict in SC.
1999	UN Resolution 1261	The SC formally put the issue into its agenda and condemned the recruitment and use of children.
2000	Optional Protocol adopted	The UN adopted the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict to strengthen international protection against the recruitment and use of children.
2001	UN listing offenders	The SC asked the Sec-gen to identify and list armed forces and groups that recruit or use children.
2005	UN monitor system created	Security Council Resolution 1612 established a formal Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism to collect evidence about child recruitment.
2007	Paris Principles	r
Today	UN, UNICEF and other organizations continue the work	Children are still being recruited and used in war. So the UN and other organizations are still monitoring and negotiating releases of child soldiers

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- ***Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989:*** A treaty that establishes the fundamental rights and protections that every child is entitled to. Article 38 of the

CRC requires states to respect and uphold the humanitarian law and take measures to protect children from being involved in armed conflict. However the CRC originally prohibits the recruitment of children under the age of 15 causing insufficiency in protecting children whose age are 15–18.

- ***Graça Machel Report (1996):*** A major UN report titled “The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children” highlighted the devastating effects of armed conflict to children, particularly the recruitment and use of child soldiers calling for stronger legal protection, rehabilitation, education and the reintegration of children who are affected by wars.
- ***UN Security Council Resolution 1261 (1999):*** The resolution made the protection of children affected by armed conflicts a formal issue of international peace and security. It specifically condemns the recruitment and the use of child soldiers calling for the demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration of these children.
- ***Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000):*** A UN agreement designed to keep children under 18 away from armed conflicts requiring nations to prevent the recruitment, use of children under 18 in armed conflicts, and providing necessary support to children who are affected.
- ***UN Security Council Resolution 1539 (2004):*** Helped move the international efforts from condemning towards systematic monitoring, reporting, and accountability.
- ***The “Children, Not Soldiers” Campaign (2014):*** This joint campaign put pressure onto governments to stop recruitment, release children from armed forces, and help the former child soldiers rebuild their life.

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

Previous attempts to solve the issue of child soldiers were focused on international laws, monitoring recruitment, reintegration and the rehabilitation of child soldiers, the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict adopted by the UN in 2000, strengthen the protection for children against the use of children in armed conflicts and recruitment. While the Paris principles in 2007 provided practical guidelines on how

governments and countries can protect children associated with armed forces, prevent the use and recruitment of child soldiers and support their rehabilitation and reintegration.

However, challenges remain in the form of ongoing conflicts, weak governance, chronic poverty, and the increased availability of small arms. At the international level organizations such as the United Nations and UNICEF have been focused on monitoring violation, negotiation for the release of children, and providing necessary support (education, rehabilitation...).

Possible Solutions

The issue itself requires a long-term approach, which can be divided into 3 main areas: prevention, protection, and accountability. Stronger protection is required at both the national and international level. Governments should establish a national child protection task force to identify areas where children are at high risk before armed forces can exploit them. The UN should also strengthen its independent monitoring and reporting mechanism to document cases and publicly hold groups accountable. Countries should also impose targeted sanctions or legal action on armed groups that recruit and use child soldiers. Prevention-wise, governments and international organizations should invest in safe schools, registration, and financial assistance to vulnerable families... In the conflict areas, programs should provide them with vocational training, employment opportunities, and community-based youth programs. For those who are already affected by recruitment, governments should prioritize demobilization and reintegration, including confidential psychological care, education, family reunification, and protection from retaliation or re-recruitment. In terms of accountability, governments must ensure that those responsible for the recruitment and use of child soldiers. The national authorities should strengthen the investigation and prosecution commanders and other individuals who order, facilitate, and participate in the recruitment and use of child soldiers. International courts and organizations should support countries that lack the resources and legal capacity to conduct and strengthen the investigation and prosecution of those accountable for the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Additionally, armed groups that repeatedly recruit and use child soldiers should receive sanctions, travel bans, assets freeze, and restricted access to international funding. Accountability should focus on those who make the decisions to recruit children, while ensuring that children who were forcibly recruited are treated as victims not criminals.

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