



Forum: Third Committee of the General Assembly (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Issues)

Question of: Improving the situation of children regarding physical and psychological abuse in the context of child soldiers

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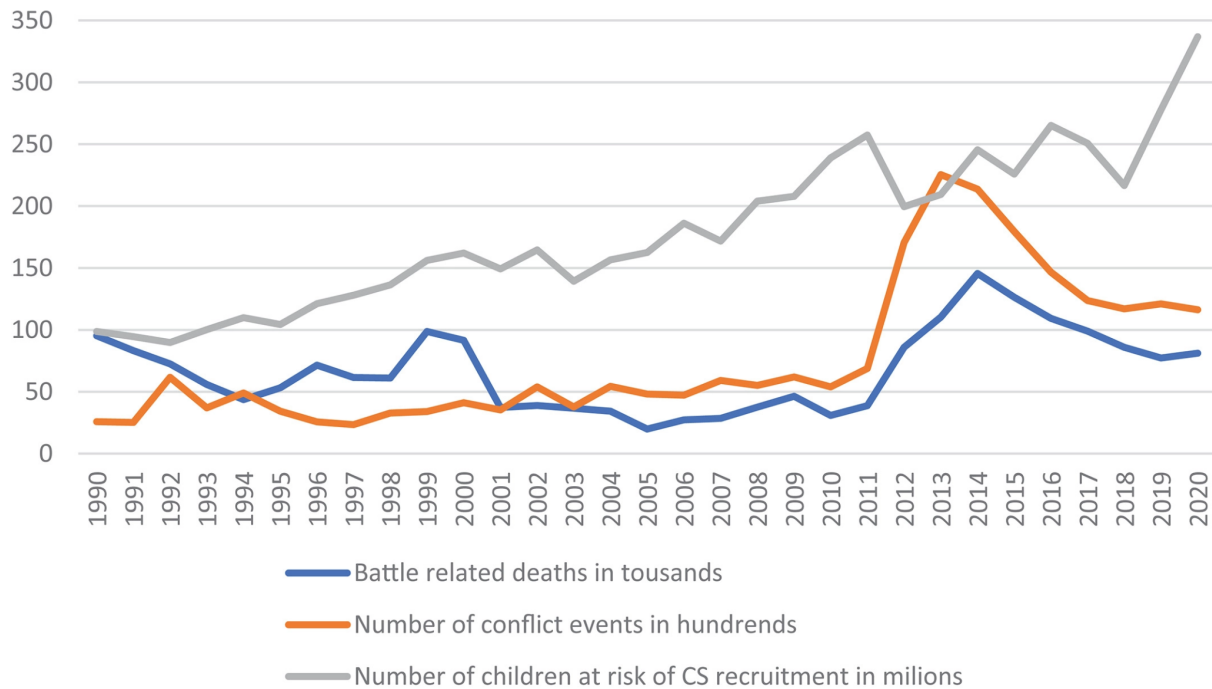
I. Description of the Issue

The recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups is a grave violation of child rights and international humanitarian law, as stated by UNICEF. It is an issue of great concern as thousands of children are being recruited and used in armed conflicts worldwide. While over 93,000 cases were verified between 2005 and 2020, the actual number is believed to be much higher.¹

According to the United Nations, approximately 250 million girls and boys reside in areas affected by armed conflict. Despite bearing the least responsibility for the outbreak of violent conflict, children are disproportionately exposed to violence and exploitation in war zones. Child soldiers, among other war-affected children, are more likely to experience severe psychological consequences, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression, hostility, sadness, diminished self-confidence, and an inability to cope with daily life.

Children find themselves becoming part of armed forces or groups due to various reasons. Some are abducted, threatened, coerced, or manipulated by armed actors. Others are driven by poverty, forced to generate income for their families. Some associate themselves with these groups for survival or to protect their communities. However, regardless of their involvement, the recruitment and use of children by armed forces still is a severe violation of child rights and international humanitarian laws.

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/protection/children-recruited-by-armed-forces>



Children at risk of being recruited for armed conflict, 1990-2020, by Gudrun Østby, Siri Aas Rustad, Roos Haer, and Andrew Arasmith, first published: 15 July 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12609>

II. Definition of Key Terms

- **Child Soldiers** are children (meaning they are under 18) recruited or used by armed forces or groups, subject to exploitation and abuse in armed conflicts.
- **Physical Abuse** includes violence, harm, or injury inflicted on child soldiers, including punishment, torture, sexual assault, forced labor or endangering their well-being.
- **Psychological Abuse** describes emotional or mental harm on child soldiers, involving threats, humiliation, indoctrination, forced violence participation, traumatic events, causing lasting negative effects on mental health.
- **Child Rights** are fundamental entitlements recognized by international law, including the right to life, protection, education, healthcare, and participation.
- The **International Humanitarian Law** is a legal framework regulating armed conflicts, protecting civilians and prohibiting child recruitment and use



- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** is a psychological disorder resulting from trauma exposure, common in child soldiers, causing distress, impairment, and symptoms like intrusive thoughts and nightmares.
- **Rehabilitation and Reintegration** are terms explaining the comprehensive support for child soldiers to recover and reintegrate, including healthcare, education, vocational training, and family reunification.
- **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)** are independent organizations focusing on humanitarian efforts, supporting child soldiers through direct assistance, advocacy, and awareness-raising.
- **Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR)** refers to the post-conflict process of disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating former combatants, including child soldiers, into society to prevent re-recruitment.
- **Best Interests of the Child** is a principle guiding decisions, prioritizing child well-being and rights in policies and actions.

III. Background Information

The forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict is considered one of the worst forms of child labor, alongside abuses such as trafficking for sexual exploitation, according to the U.N. International Labour Organization (ILO).

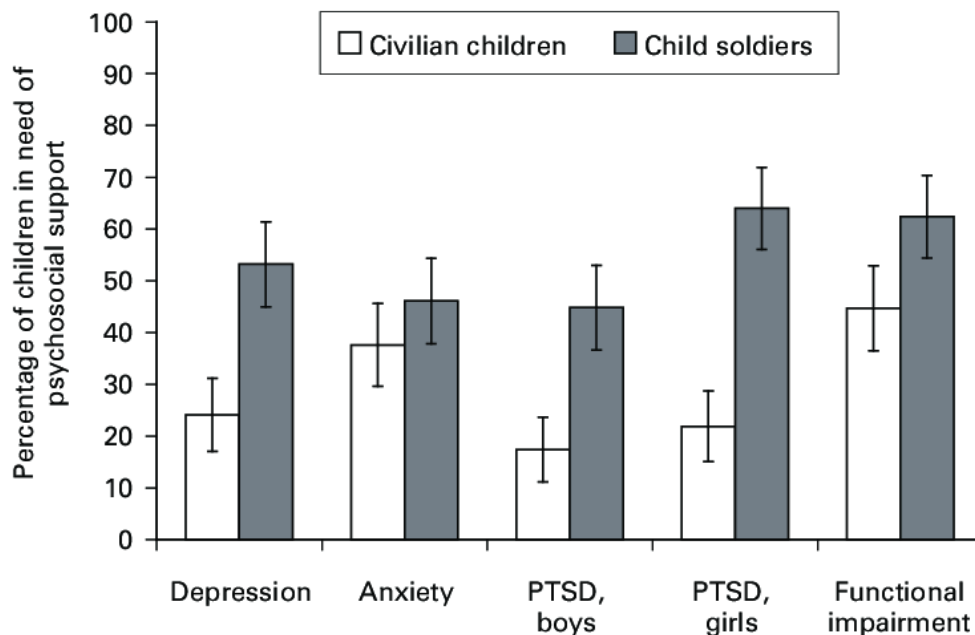
Child soldiers can be as young as six years old and can be involved in direct combat roles or supporting roles such as being forced to become cooks, cleaners, porters, intelligence gatherers and spies, wives, sex slaves, or used in acts of terror. Tens of thousands of children are estimated to be recruited and used by armed groups, with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen currently having the largest number of child soldiers.

Children who are involved in armed conflicts often suffer from the cumulative effects of traumatic stress and exposure to life-threatening events. Furthermore they may also have experienced abuse, such as torture or rape, witnessing family members being tortured or injured, and separation from family.



Symptoms of bereaved trauma in children can include unpredictable emotions, intrusive thoughts and flashbacks, strained relationships, nightmares and difficulty sleeping, physical symptoms, such as headaches or nausea. Children who have experienced complex trauma may additionally have difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing emotions and may experience significant depression, anxiety, or anger.

Addressing the issue of child soldiers requires international collaboration, including raising awareness, enforcing legal frameworks, supporting affected communities, and advocating for the rights and protection of children in conflict zones.



Proportion of child soldiers and civilian children meeting criteria for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and functional impairment. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Data from Kohrt et al (2008). The data is no longer up-to-date but is intended to show how child soldiers suffer from abuse.

IV. Major Countries and Organizations Involved

- **Colombia** has faced decades of armed conflict, leading to the recruitment and use of child soldiers by various armed groups. However, concerted efforts have been made to address the issue and protect the rights of children affected by the conflict.



- **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** has been heavily affected by the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Ongoing conflicts and the presence of numerous armed groups have resulted in the exploitation of children in combat and support roles.
- **Sierra Leone** has experienced a long history of conflict and the use of child soldiers. However, significant progress has been made in recent years to rehabilitate and reintegrate former child soldiers.
- **Somalia** has faced prolonged conflict and instability, leading to the recruitment and use of child soldiers by various armed groups. The complex political and security situation in the country poses significant obstacles to addressing the issue effectively.
- **Sri Lanka** has made notable strides in addressing the issue of child soldiers. Following a prolonged civil war, the Sri Lankan government successfully demobilized and reintegrated child soldiers into society through comprehensive rehabilitation programs.
- **Syria's** civil war has had devastating consequences for children, including their recruitment and exploitation as child soldiers. Multiple parties to the conflict, including non-state armed groups, have been implicated in the use of child soldiers.
- **Yemen**, the conflict there has created a grave situation for children, with reports of their recruitment and use by various parties involved in the conflict.

V. Timeline of Events

Recognizing the devastating impact of conflict on children, the UN has defined six grave violations of children's rights, which include the recruitment and use of children.

Event	Description
In 1997	The Cape Town Principles were the outcome of a symposium organized by UNICEF and the NGO Working Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child to propose strategies to prevent child recruitment, demobilize child soldiers and support their reintegration into society develop ²

² [The Paris principles - International Committee of the Red CrossInternational Committee of the Red Crosshttps://www.icrc.org > eng > assets > files > other](https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other)



In 2002	The enactment of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) clearly establishes that the recruitment and use of children in conflicts is a violation of international law.
In 2007	The Paris Principles aim to combat the unlawful recruitment or use of children by armed forces or armed groups. ³
In 2022	<p><u>Six grave violations of children's rights were defined by the UN:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Killing and maiming of children 2. Recruitment or use of children in armed forces and armed groups 3. Attacks on schools or hospitals 4. Rape or other grave sexual violence 5. Abduction of children 6. Denial of humanitarian access for children
In 2023	The mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was created to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict, raise awareness, promote information collection on the plight of children affected by war, and international cooperation to improve their protection. The Representative reports annually to the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, and raises the challenges faced by children at war with political bodies such as the UN Security Council, as well as relevant governments, to maintain a sense of urgency among key decision-makers to ensure safe political and diplomatic engagement. ⁴

³ [Paris principles and Paris commitments to protect children icrc.org](https://www.icrc.org/doc/resources/documents/misc/Paris_principles_and_Paris_commitments_to_protect_children.pdf)[https://www.icrc.org > doc > resources > documents > misc](https://www.icrc.org/doc/resources/documents/misc/)

⁴ <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/about/the-mandate/>



VI. Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Previous attempts have involved a focus on educating children in conflict zones. Efforts have been made to establish temporary learning spaces, offer catch-up classes, and rebuild schools damaged by conflict. Additionally, support has been provided to teachers operating in these volatile areas. Collaborative work with families and communities has been undertaken to equip them with the necessary resources and knowledge to support the education of children affected by armed conflicts. These initiatives aim to provide children with access to education, which plays a crucial role in their protection, empowerment, and long-term well-being.

VII. Possible Solutions

To combat the issue of child soldiers, it is crucial to collaborate with armed forces and groups to cease recruitment practices. Additionally, addressing underlying factors such as poverty, unemployment, and mistreatment is essential. Proposed solutions include immediate action through existing on-ground programs, mobilizing funds to meet urgent needs, and providing long-term support for children's recovery. Strengthening families and caregivers, expanding social support networks, and connecting them with economic and social assistance systems can greatly contribute to the protection and well-being of children affected by conflict.

VIII. How to Prepare as a Delegate

In order to discuss this issue, all delegates should recognize the urgency of protecting children from abuse and understand the gravity of the issue. Furthermore it is important to acknowledge the importance of safeguarding the rights and well-being of children affected by armed conflict.

The delegates need to be informed about their countries' current situation/status, including social, economic, and political aspects. More specifically, all delegations shall be aware of the influence they may or may not have on the issue, and need to know about initiatives and



laws established. Moreover, it is also important to take an accurate look at the position of other countries, since that will help in the debates. As a delegate, strive to always establish new and better solutions for your country, but above all for the world. If you are looking for specific information on your country, make sure your sources are valid and trustworthy, such as governmental websites and news articles. Furthermore ask yourself the following questions:

- How could the goal of improving the situation of children regarding physical and psychological abuse in the context of child soldiers be achieved?
- Who are key stakeholders involved, and how can they be integrated to address the issue effectively?
- What actions are already being taken? Are they effective?
- What international cooperation is there, and which countries are part of it? Who is responsible for enforcing States parties' legal obligations?
- How can a state be held accountable if it does not adhere to the rules and regulations?
- How can the UN support countries in addressing the needs of children affected by armed conflict?
- Which directives could we agree upon as representatives of our governments and as a committee? How can delegates collaborate to find consensus on effective strategies and approaches?

IX. UN (Declarations and) Resolutions

- **Resolution 2427 (2018)**, seeks to strengthen protections for children in armed conflict by specifically addressing their recruitment by non-state armed groups.

X. Useful Links

- United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>
- Child Soldiers International: <https://www.child-soldiers.org/>
- UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund): <https://www.unicef.org/>



- Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/>
- Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers: <https://www.child-soldiers.org/>
- International Criminal Court (ICC): <https://www.icc-cpi.int/>
- Save the Children UK:
https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/education-and-child-protection/war_on_children-web.pdf

XI. Sources

- "Child Soldiers: Facts and Foundations" - World Vision International:
<https://www.wvi.org/stories/child-protection/child-soldiers-facts-and-foundations>
- "Children recruited by armed forces or armed groups" - UNICEF:
<https://www.unicef.org/protection/children-recruited-by-armed-forces>
- "Child Recruitment and Use" - United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict:
<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/child-soldiers>
- "Children in Conflict: A Guide to the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict" - Amnesty International:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ior420011999en.pdf>

XII. Epilogue

To ensure comprehensive coverage of the forum's topics, each delegate is required to write at least **one draft resolution and a minimum of two, preferably three, position papers**.

These documents are crucial for meaningful discussions and effective problem-solving.

Please submit all draft resolutions and position papers by the **deadline of 09/13/23**. Late submissions will not be eligible for correction or considered for awards.



Speaking of awards, we will be recognizing the **best and most distinguished delegate**, as well as the **best first-timer** in the committee. These awards aim to acknowledge outstanding leadership and diplomatic skills. Strive for excellence and demonstrate your abilities in your role.

I am excited to read your position papers and witness your research and preparation. If you have any questions or if there are any uncertainties feel free to reach out to me. I wish you success in your preparations for the conference and am really excited to get to know all of you!

Kind regards,

Malina Willems

(President of the General Assembly)