



Forum:	Committee of the Right of the Child
Question of:	Engaging in a dialogue with nations that use child soldiers
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Position:	Main Chair

I. Description of the Issue

Child soldiers are children used by military organizations, including government forces, rebel groups, and paramilitary organizations. There is a wide range of definitions, however the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines all children under the age of 15 (later set to 18) who are directly taking part in the hostilities as child soldiers. The definition of The Cape Town Principles is even wider. It includes roles such as cooks, messengers, prostitutes, spies or fighters.

Many child soldiers are forcibly recruited through abduction, coercion, or threats. However, some children are lured into these roles with promises of money, protection, or drugs. Additionally, some children volunteer due to misinformation or a desire to escape poverty and hardship. These children are targeted because they are easier to manipulate, require fewer resources, and are less likely to question orders.

Surviving child soldiers often suffer from severe psychological issues, such as PTSD, depression and anxiety which can lead to substance abuse, violent behavior or suicidality. Reintegrating these children into society poses significant challenges, as they require extensive psychological support, education, and rehabilitation to overcome their traumatic experiences.

Engaging in an effective dialogue with nations that utilize child soldiers involves addressing the root causes of child recruitment, such as poverty, lack of education, and political instability. It also requires advocacy for the enforcement of international laws prohibiting the use of child soldiers, promoting the demobilization and reintegration of affected children, and ensuring accountability for those who exploit children in conflicts.



II. Definition of Key Terms

Child soldiers

Boys or girls under the age of 18 used by any military organization and being used in a variety of fields which not only include fighters but also supportive roles such as cooks, spies, sex slaves or messengers.

Government forces

Government forces refer to the official military and paramilitary organizations that are established, funded, and controlled by a recognized national government. These forces are responsible for the defense and security of a country both internally and externally.

Rebel groups

Rebel groups are organized factions that oppose and seek to overthrow an established government or authority. They often use armed force to achieve their objectives, which can range from seeking greater autonomy or independence to completely replacing the existing government.

Paramilitary organizations

Paramilitary organizations are semi-militarized groups that operate similarly to a country's official military forces but are not part of the formal armed forces.

PTSD

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is being developed after one experiences shocking, scary, or dangerous events. PTSD is characterized by intense, disturbing thoughts and feelings related to the traumatic experience that persist long after the event has ended.

Depression

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, depression is a mood disorder, which causes severe symptoms that affect how a person feels, thinks, and handles daily activities such as sleeping, eating, or working.



Suicidality

Suicidality refers to the risk of suicide or the spectrum of thoughts, plans, and behaviors associated with suicide.

III. Background Information

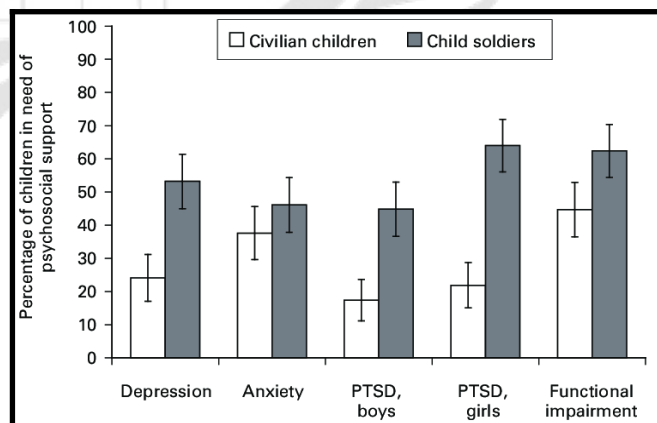
Socially, child soldiers often come from regions plagued by extreme poverty, lack of education, and broken social structures. Many children in conflict zones have limited access to education, making them more prone to joining armed groups that promise a sense of purpose or survival. Wars and conflicts frequently lead to the displacement or death of family members, leaving children orphaned or without a support system. In some regions, the use of child soldiers has become normalized due to long-lasting conflict, further establishing this practice.

Politically, the use of child soldiers is often tied to instability and governance issues. Fragile states with weak governance structures are unable to enforce laws against the recruitment of child soldiers. Non-state actors, such as rebel groups and terrorist organizations, exploit children, seeing them as easily manipulated resources. In addition, governments or factions within a conflict may resort to using child soldiers to bolster their ranks when adult recruitment fails.

Economically, hardship is a significant driver behind the recruitment of child soldiers.

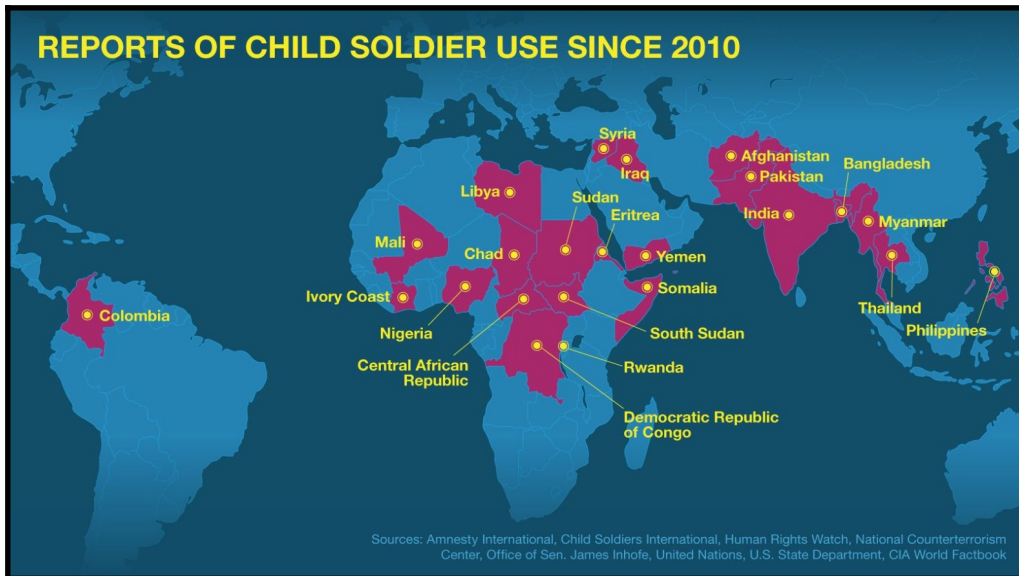
Desperate economic conditions can push families to offer their children to armed groups in exchange for financial or material benefits. Conflicts over resources, such as minerals, oil, or land, often exacerbate the use of child soldiers as parties fight for control.

The societal impact of using child soldiers is devastating. Children involved in armed conflict suffer severe psychological trauma, leading to long-term mental health issues.

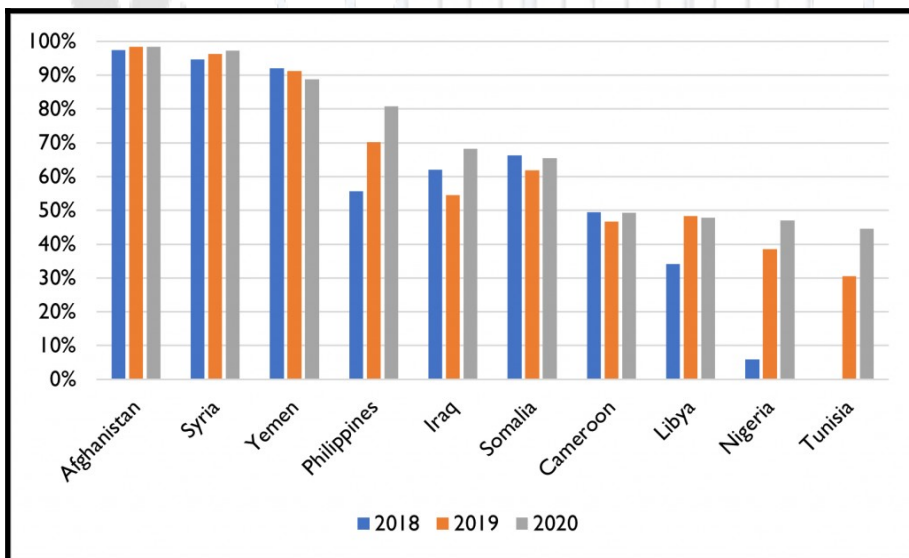




The issue is particularly acute in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, where countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Somalia have high incidences of child soldiers due to ongoing conflicts. In the Middle East, countries such as Syria and Yemen witness the recruitment of children by both state and non-state actors. In South Asia, countries like Myanmar and Afghanistan have seen the use of child soldiers by various insurgent groups.



Top ten countries based on the highest proportion of children vulnerable to recruitment:





IV. Major Countries Involved

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Home to multiple armed groups that have historically recruited child soldiers.

Myanmar

The Myanmar military and various ethnic armed groups have used child soldiers.

Somalia

Al-Shabaab and other militias are known for recruiting children.

South Sudan

Numerous factions within the ongoing civil conflict have used child soldiers.

V. Timeline of Events

When	What
1989	Adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
2000	Adoption of the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict.
2002	Establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) with jurisdiction over war crimes, including the recruitment of child soldiers.
2014	The DRC government signed a UN action plan to end the recruitment of child soldiers.
2021	South Sudan's government recommitted to ending the use of child soldiers.



VI. Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The UN works directly with countries that recruit child soldiers to develop and implement Action Plans. These tailored agreements outline concrete steps the nation must take to eradicate this practice.

Action plans typically focus on:

- I. **Legal Measures:** Making child recruitment a crime and prosecuting offenders.
- II. **Demobilization:** Releasing children currently forced into service.
- III. **Prevention:** Training armed forces to avoid child recruitment and establish child protection specialists within their ranks.
- IV. **Reintegration:** Providing vital support programs to help former child soldiers reintegrate back into society.

Additionally, the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, launched in 2014 by the UN and UNICEF, aimed to create a global movement against child soldiery, through dialogue and awareness campaigns. The campaign also pressured nations to work with the UN on Action Plans to end child soldiery within their own armies.

Previous attempts to address this issue have involved a combination of diplomatic efforts, international legal frameworks, advocacy, and on-the-ground interventions aimed at both prevention and rehabilitation. Despite these efforts, the use of child soldiers persists in various conflict zones, highlighting the need for continuous and more effective strategies.

One of the earliest and most significant international legal frameworks addressing the use of child soldiers is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989, and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC), adopted in 2000. These set 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in military recruitment. While many nations have ratified these treaties, the enforcement has been inconsistent, and the reality on the ground often diverges from the commitments made on paper.



Diplomatic efforts have also played a crucial role. The United Nations Security Council has passed several resolutions, such as Resolution 1261 in 1999, which condemned the use of child soldiers and called for their demobilization and reintegration. These actions have increased international pressure on offending nations, but challenges remain in ensuring compliance and accountability.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been at the forefront of advocacy and direct intervention. Organizations like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Save the Children have conducted extensive research, raised awareness, and lobbied for stronger international action. Their efforts have been instrumental in bringing the issue to the global stage and in supporting rehabilitation programs for former child soldiers.

Direct interventions have focused on demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programs. These programs aim to provide former child soldiers with education, vocational training, and psychological support to help them reintegrate into society. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has been a key player in these efforts, working in collaboration with local governments and NGOs to implement DDR programs in countries like Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan. While these programs have had successes, they often face funding constraints, security challenges, and cultural barriers that hinder their effectiveness.

In addition to these efforts, there have been attempts to engage directly with the governments and armed groups that use child soldiers. This engagement has often been fraught with difficulties, as these organizations may be reluctant to change their practices or acknowledge their use of child soldiers. However, dialogue and negotiation have sometimes led to commitments to stop recruitment and release child soldiers, as seen in peace agreements in countries like Colombia and the Philippines.

Despite the amount of efforts, the use of child soldiers remains a persistent issue, underlining the need for sustained and enhanced international cooperation, stronger enforcement of international laws, and increased support for rehabilitation and reintegration programs.



VII. Possible Solutions

Firstly, there's an urgent need to enforce existing international laws and establish new ones to hold accountable those who recruit and deploy child soldiers. Strengthening legal frameworks ensures that perpetrators face consequences for their actions, scaring off future recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts. Additionally, increasing funding and support for rehabilitation and reintegration programs is crucial. These initiatives provide essential psychosocial support, education, and vocational training to help former child soldiers recover and successfully reintegrate into society.

Moreover, addressing the root causes of child recruitment is of great importance. By providing education and economic opportunities to children in conflict zones, we can soften the factors driving their involvement in armed groups. Diplomatic engagement with governments and armed factions is also essential. Through dialogue and negotiation, diplomatic channels can advocate for the termination of child recruitment and the release of children currently enlisted. By implementing these comprehensive measures, we can work towards ending the harrowing practice of child soldiering and ensuring a brighter future for children affected by conflict.

VIII. Questions Delegates Should Consider During Research

- What are the primary factors driving the recruitment of child soldiers in different regions?
- How can international organizations more effectively support rehabilitation and reintegration programs?
- What measures can be taken to ensure that nations comply with international laws prohibiting the use of child soldiers?
- How can local communities be empowered to prevent the recruitment of children by armed groups?

X. Useful Links and Sources

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/12/child-soldiers-worldwide>

<https://www.hrw.org/topic/childrens-rights/children-and-armed-conflict>

<https://theirworld.org/resources/child-soldiers/>

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

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



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<https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2015/02/4-10-child-soldiers-girls/>

<https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/child-soldiers>

<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/tools-for-action/opac/>

