

<b>Forum:</b>	Security Council
<b>Issue:</b>	Situation of children affected by armed conflict
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## Introduction

In 2017, about 420 million children, 18% of all the world's children, live in conflict zones. Even more so, about 1/3 of the children living in these zones deal with more than 1000 battle-related deaths a year (Østby et al., 2018). And this number has dramatically risen by 74% over the last decade, according to UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore.

Children are collateral damage in the war, facing horrible realities including forced displacement, separation from family, trafficking, sexual abuse, and exploitation. As Fore said, "A generation of children is at risk. We must help them".

## Definition of Key Terms

### Armed Conflict

Armed conflict refers to the "armed force used by an organized actor against another organized actor, or against civilians, resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year" (Department of Peace and Conflict Research, n.d.).

### Conflict Zone

A conflict zone refers to an area of war of political instability where essential services such as housing, transportation, communication, sanitation, water and health, are affected or disrupted (Prasad, 2011).

### Human Trafficking

Human trafficking refers to the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act (What is Human Trafficking?, 2019).

## Child Soldier

A child soldier is a “child associated with an armed force or armed group”, referring to “any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies, or for sexual purposes” (Child Recruitment and Use, n.d.).

## Background Information

Figure 1 on the right shows the percentage of the population under the age of 18 living in armed conflict zones. The effects, both directly and indirectly, are associated with immediate and long-term trauma. Thousands of children are injured, killed, or maimed as a direct or indirect result of hostilities between parties with armed conflict, “involving aerial bombardment, excessive use of force, landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices and use of children as human shields” (Security Council Seeks to Strengthen Protections for Children in Armed Conflict, 2018). Children have become increasingly affected by the change in nature of war and rules of war. The more widespread combat zones, advancement in weaponry, lengthier wars, and availability and use of small arms have caused children to not only be affected because they live in these areas, even more so, they’ve become a part of armies themselves (Kadir et al. 2018) The “rules of war” have changed too. Schools and other educational facilities are now widely targeted. Children are attacked on their way to and from school. In other cases, these facilities are used by combatant forces, including government forces, as bases for combat and to recruit children. (Guha-Sapir D, 2018).

“The direct effects of conflict include death, physical and psychological trauma, and displacement. Indirect effects are related to a large number of factors, including inadequate and unsafe living conditions, environmental hazards, caregiver mental health, separation from family, displacement-related health risks, and the destruction of health, public health,

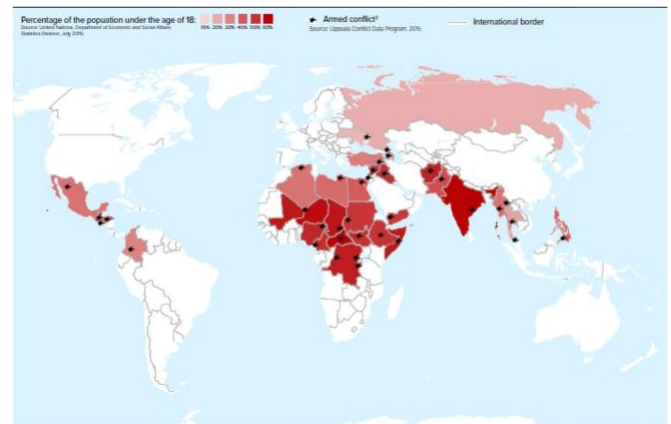


Figure 1: Children Living in Countries Affected by Armed Conflict (United Nations, 2015)

education, and economic infrastructure” (Kadir et al., 2018). In countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, war trauma most commonly for children takes the form of blast and bullet injuries, with high mortality rates attributable to both severity of injuries sustained and lack of adequate medical care (Borgman et al., 2012). Another effect is fatal toxicity exposure from chemical warfare, which, despite international law bannings, are reportedly still used against civilian populations as documented in 2018 (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, 2018). One last direct effect is the increase in prevalence of rape and sexual exploitation of children in armed conflicts. Children are unlikely to seek medical attention for potential sexually transmitted infections (STIs), gynecologic complications, pregnancy, and even infertility (Malemo Kalisya L et al., 2011). Due to stigma, boys that experience sexual assault are even less likely to report or confide in a professional for help (Humphreys G, 2009).

Due to word count limitations, for specific information on how conflict zones can cause environmental hazards and how armed parties target to damage health and public infrastructure, all in which can have negative mental and physical effects on children, visit:

1. <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/142/6/e20182586>
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4921424/>

## Key Issues

### Difficulties of Implementation of International Legal Standards

Child soldiers are present in the context of failed states, of internal conflicts, non-state actors, paramilitary organizations, organized crime, minorities and vulnerable groups, and/or mobile/displaced populations (Alexandre J. Vautravers, 2008). It is particularly difficult to establish dialogue and reach consensus with these armed groups.

At the same time, those who volunteer to attend for children in conflict zones, health workers, are increasingly becoming casualties of armed conflict. “In 2014, 603 health workers were killed and an additional 958 were injured in attacks in 32 countries” (World Health Organization, 2015).

### Extreme Poverty of Families

The difficulty of resolving children affected by armed conflict, in particular, is affected by the extreme poverty of some families. Their poverty causes forced and voluntary recruitment of children.

## Long-Term Reintegration

Above all, it is difficult to guarantee the long-term reintegration of children who have previously been associated with armed groups. Many children, as explained in the “mental and physical effects” section of the background information, are left with mental and physical symptoms such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These symptoms can often lead to erratic behavior, including sudden panic attacks and unstable emotional conditions. Children growing up to have experienced these conditions not only face more difficulties when finding jobs, they also often require special care. If the conflict persists, it’ll be even harder to reintegrate the children due to the country’s instability (Kadir et al., 2018).

## Longer Lasting Conflict/War

A longer lasting conflict/war is another reason for the complex situation of children affected in armed conflict. As the conflict is prolonged, armed groups and informal militia continue to multiply, which means for the recruitment and use of children by these armed groups to increase their battle forces.

## Lack of Accountability for Abuses/Violations

Conflicts often occur in areas such as South Sudan, Pakistan, Nigeria (Østby et al., 2018). Without a strong national accountability mechanism, it is almost impossible to bring those that are responsible to violations and abuse of children to justice and people that take part in such crimes are unlikely to show any signs of backing down or stopping.

# Major Parties Involved and their Views

## Child Soldiers International

Child Soldiers International is an NGO founded by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Save The Children. They are primarily focused on campaigning the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC). They are based in the UK, however their operation spans across countries such as Central African Republic, DR Congo, Afghanistan, etc.

## United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF is actively helping children in conflict zones to reintegrate into society through education, mental health assistance, and skill training. They frequently work with other NGOs to help children recover from physical and mental traumas and reintegrate into society.

## Democratic Republic of Congo

DR Congo has been using child soldiers on an unprecedented scale. In 2011 it has been estimated that 30,000 children were still involved with armed groups in DR Congo (Drumbel, 2012). Although the nation has signed OPAC, the involvement of children in armed conflicts in the DR Congo has not decreased. Due to political and economic instability, efforts in restricting children from participating the armed conflicts have been limited.

## Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

For a more detailed timeline, visit:

<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/about-us/mandate/history/>

<b>Date</b> <i>MM/DD/YY</i>	<b>Description of Event</b>
05/25/2000	The UN General Assembly adopts the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.
02/12/2002	The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict enters into force, and the day is delegated as the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers.
03/07/2014	Resolution 2143 was adopted by the UN Security Council, endorsing the “Children, Not Soldiers” campaign, in order to discourage and end the use of children in armed conflicts.

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

### Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC)

OPAC, also known as the Child Soldier treaty, is an international treaty where member states agree to a set of guidelines to stop the use of children in armed conflicts, hence protecting them from physical and psychological abuse. Although the majority of states have signed and ratified the treaty, as of July 2019, 17-member states have not signed or ratified OPAC, and 12 states signed but have not ratified the protocol. Due to these member states that have not ratified the protocol, the involvement of children in armed conflict are still prevalent in some of these states.

## Possible Solutions

### Enforcing minimum recruitment age

An essential step to avoid child soldiers is to establish and enforce a minimum recruitment age of 18 for all militant groups. Although this is a small step, its importance cannot be understated.

### Achieving political stability

Child soldiers are recruited due to armed conflicts between different political groups in a region. Therefore, achieving political stability is an important goal, as it would significantly decrease the participation of children in armed conflicts.

### Societal development

Societal development is essential, as this would remove joining an armed group as the only method for gaining income, education, and employment. There needs to be more economic opportunities for children that does not include the participation in armed groups. This explains the inverse trend of economic development and the use of child soldiers.

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