Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Ensuring the protection and support of children in armed conflicts

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Introduction

Children are involved in the armed conflicts in many ways: used as soldiers or bombs, recruited, sexually abused, kidnaped, killed and injured. Their schools are attacked and their access to humanitarian services is lost. They are not informed about indiscriminate bombings or attacks in their villages. They had, or currently are, bearing arms in ongoing conflicts. Most importantly, their access to human rights is denied.

Child labor, child abuse, child soldiers, and human trafficking are all areas of human rights abuse resulted from children in armed conflicts. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund, around 40 million children below the age of fifteen are suffering from abuse. Not only this, the International Labour Organization emphasized that 246 million children are involved in child labor. To put that in perspectives, one in every six children from age five to seventeen are affected by child labor. For instance, the majority of child soldiers are around the age of fifteen to eighteen. Some of the countries that are heavily involved in this issue are Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria as well as Yemen.

Throughout the decades, there have been many attempts to give rights to children in armed conflicts. Nations recognized that protecting and supporting children from the impacts of armed conflict is an essential task, as children are continuously violated and denied from the rights they held. Over the past decades, there has been a significant increase in recruiting children by armed groups. This causes humanitarian problems as children are used to carry arms and take part in the fight and these put them in great danger.

Many organizations are aiming to limit the impact of attacks on children in armed conflicts. Though even greater supports need to be made to ensure proper protection as well as the safety of children from danger and horrors of armed conflicts. Children are the future of this international community, though they are affected by ongoing conflicts. Therefore, killing or injuring children due to armed conflicts should be stopped immediately before we destroy our future.

Definition of Key Terms
Armed Conflict

Armed conflict is defined as a political conflict which involves one or more armed group seeking to gain control of other groups. Usually, around 1,000 people have been killed or injured during the conflict. The word political conflict is hard to define as current armed conflicts are in between political and criminal violence.

Children

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child may refer to a human being below the age eighteen. Children under the age eighteen don’t have the full legal function of adults. This is because children still in the process of development and they are considered incapable of handling the same rights as adults. This is why children don’t have voting rights as well as entering into contracts.

Human Rights

Human rights are rights acquired to all human being despite of sex, nationality, race, religion or any other condition. Some human rights are right to receive education, right to liberty, freedom from slavery, freedom of expression, and many more. All human being are authorized for these rights without discrimination.

International Human Rights Law

International Human Rights Law is the collection of law including customary international law, international human rights treaties, as well as legal form on human rights.

Background Information

The situation of ensuring the protection and support of children in armed conflict has become exponentially worse in these days. The number of children violated due to negative consequences caused by the conflicts has been increasing and it is mainly because of the lack of protection in armed regions. Although recently, there have been lots of groups/organizations established to play an important role when defending children in armed conflicts, these groups need help from more member states to coordinate their activities as well as improve their facilities. For instance, the Geneva Convention clearly provides medical aids or hospital needed during attacks in these conflict areas, these attacks happen frequently. Moreover, the attacks have destroyed the basic facilities needed for the children, especially schools and hospitals. Children in conflict zones--bearing in mind that they are inadequately educated--are not fully warned and have a lack of access to necessities such as proper medical care and proper
food. These consequences make children in armed conflicts impossible to get protection from attacks and express alarm in their daily lives.

**The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Adopted by all UN members, the Sustainable Development Goals are an international plan of 17 global goals to protect and build a better world by all countries by 2030. The UN hoped that with these fundamental goals, there will be positive changes to the lives of millions of people—including children in armed conflicts.

Everyday, children are killed, recruited and used as child soldiers, abducted for sexual violence and many more in countries such as Sudan and Syria. Violent actions in these areas are disrupting the lives of millions of children. Children are the invisible victims who play the vital role of almost half of the world’s population affected by armed conflicts. With the SDGs, UN is confident that member states will envision to build the peaceful, strong society for children affected by conflicts. UN believes below are the main goals that are related to the protection of children thus support children affected by armed conflicts.

*Education*

It is believed that ensuring quality education is the heart of building a strong society. With SDG Education, UN is reminding the world providing lifelong opportunities to receive education is especially important for children. This is because children who received education can participate in their countries development as they are taught to build a peaceful world. Also, promoting long sustainable learning opportunities for children ensure they can go back to their communities. Children in armed conflicts are interrupted from education so long that it is difficult or impossible to go back to regular school. If nations don’t work to find ways to promote children reintegration, give vocational training chances, and provide extensive resources, children may suffer and serve negative factor for the development of the nation.

*Peaceful Inclusive Societies and the End of All Forms of Violence Against and Torture of Children*

To prevent further children violations, securing accountability for violations against children is the best solution. Governments should bear the primary responsibility and ensure the justice for protecting children in armed. All measures should be taken to avoid harm to children.

*Decent Work for All and the Prohibition of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers*

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**
Afghanistan

192 attacks have occurred on schools. 927 children have been killed. 3,062 children casualties have happened during conflicts. The use of children remains a problem of concern. Main reasons being that the lack of security force from the Afghanistan local police and the use of children at police checkpoints make it difficult to ensure protection for the children. Thus, governments have not work in efforts to create and release facilities that minimize the killing of children, alarmed by the fact that Afghanistan recorded the highest number of children killed in 2018. Existing implementation by governments such as the National Policy on Civilian Casualty Prevention and Mitigation, the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects are seen as not that effective in measures to protect children from armed group.

Syria

The conflicts in Syria became serious throughout 2018. Despite security and restrictions, Syria records the highest number of children violations in the world. Due to conflicts, schools are destroyed and children rarely find a safe place to continue their education. Recently, an estimated number of 5,000 schools were damaged in Syria because of the conflicts. More than 60 percent of children in Syria does not have the opportunity to receive education. Major parties to conflict of recruiting and using children include Sudan liberation Army, Sudan People’s Liberation Movement North, and Pro-Goverment militias.

Yemen

Yemen faces the same issue with over 500 schools destroyed or damaged during conflicts. Thus, thousands of schools have closed due to security problems, taking away the education of millions of children. In 2014, the government of Yemen agreed an Action Plan with the UN to prevent Yemeni Armed Forces from recruiting children. Though in 2015, it was reported that there was an increase in violations against children and their basic rights to education and health were taken. This is because Houthis/Ansar Allah, Al-Qaida in the Arab Peninsula /Ansar al-Sharia, and Pro-Government militias are parties to conflict on children in armed conflicts.

The Special Representative of Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

The office of the Special Representative of Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict works as the leading UN supporter for the protection of children involved in armed conflicts. It was first established by the General Assembly in 1996 with the publication of the resolution (A/RES/51/77).

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, also known as the North Atlantic Alliance, is an intergovernmental military alliance among 29 countries since 2017. These 29 countries include Canada and United States, 26 nations in Europe, and Turkey. The purpose of the organization is for mutual defense when a nation gets external attacks.

NATO has been working on defending children in the armed conflicts of nations involved in the treaty. It believes that ensuring the protection of children from the attacks is both an essential task and an ethical imperative to eliminate the issue. As a wider international community, Nato had worked with the United Nations to create a policy called *Protection of Children in Armed Conflict The Way Forward*. The policy was created as a guidance to consolidate military service, education, medical service and training with UN Security Council Resolution 1612. This act was a success in Afghanistan, as the UN and other international communities collaborated to ensure support of children from the effects of armed conflicts.

**Geneva Convention**

Negotiated during World War II, the Geneva Convention is a set of international humanitarian rules to define and protect the basic rights of those civilians who are in and around the armed conflict. There are a number of changes in this agreement. The most recent edition has been agreed upon by more than 70 nations. Henry Dunant, a Genevan businessman, humanitarian and social activist, was shocked when he went to visit civilians after *Battle of Solferino*: lack of facilities, medical aids, weak defenses. To record this, he published a book: a book proposed with solutions. Later, the Red Cross was formed to work together with Henry to take action for his solutions.

The convention has listed several important solutions that can lessen the issue. In 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention, it mentioned children under the age 15 are prohibited from recruitment by armed groups. In 1989, the convention raised the minimum age limit to 18. By doing this, more children were under protection from voluntary recruitment. However, the age limit of 18 for recruitment is not recognized universally. In Africa, for instance, children under the age of 15 are still driven by their families and exploited in conflict areas. Still, the convention is working to provide general protection with special services that ensure their safety humanely in these regions.


The objective of Unicef is to protect children’s rights, save children's lives and to support children to achieve their goal. Children not only suffer from attacks in armed conflicts, but also suffer from poverty, malnutrition, violence, and disease. In 1946, Unicef was created to support and advocate for
children in these conditions. Unicef was established for the purpose of childcare after World War II. Though in 1953, it became a crucial member of the United Nations.

One of the important achievements Unicef had accomplished was when the organization used the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly in 1989. Unicef used the convention as a guide to launch a new children’s health program. There are few examples Unicef had fulfill to ensure the protection of children in armed conflicts. One example is that in Liberia, Unicef provided training courses and exercises to demobilized children to sustain living. Another example is that around 5,350 women and children affected by sexual violence associated with conflicts were provided with proper protection and assistance. Other than these two, Unicef is continually working on providing essential services to children who have been separated from families, those associated with weapons, those encountered by sexual violence as well as those disabled due to armed conflicts for recovery.

**Timeline of Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Four Geneva Conventions started the protection of children in armed conflicts.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The main purpose of the convention was to ensure children who are separated from their families are not left alone but instead are given education, maintenance, and religion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>The first debate of the UN Security Council on the issue of children and armed conflict.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>The first resolution (Security Council Resolution 1261) accepted by the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict. As the issue directly affects peace and human rights of the children, the Council also requested the Secretary-General to provide a report on the issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>The second resolution (Security Council Resolution 1314) further emphasizes the threats of peace and security of children in conflicts. Hence, the Secretary-General continued with the report. After close examination of the violations against children in armed regions, the UN adopted the <em>Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict</em> which aims to give protection for children under 18 from recruitment.</td>
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</table>
12 February 2002

The Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict came into force. This date is also known as International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Below are the lists of resolutions that focus on the violations faced by children in armed conflicts, the actions of spreading awareness, as well as relevant solutions provided by the UN hoping to solve the issue. The solutions described in the resolutions are previous attempts, including successes and failures, to solve the issue.

- General Assembly resolution on the creation of the UN Special Representative of Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 20 February 1997 (A/RES/51/77)
- Security Council resolution on supporting the Secretary-General on the practice of discussing standards and international norms with parties that have been involved in using children in armed conflicts to end this action, 30 January 2003 (S/RES/1460)
- Security Council resolution on requesting the practice of monitoring and reporting to the UN of any use of children in violations or recruitment. Thus, the resolution also stresses the creation of an action plan in case nations fail to meet the commitments, 22 April 2004 (S/RES/1539)
- Security Council resolution on ensuring protection against attacks on schools and hospitals under international law, 12 July 2011 (S/RES/1998)
- Security Council resolution on protecting the abduction of children in regards to children and armed conflict, 18 June 2015 (S/RES/2225)
- Security Council resolution on improving mechanisms to lessen violations committed against children in armed conflict, 9 July 2018 (S/RES/2427)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There have been a number of previous attempts done by governments, international communities, as well as organizations to ensure the protection of children in armed conflicts.

Recently, the UN has launched a campaign called Act to Protect Children Affected by Conflict to further raise awareness of the concerns regarding children in armed conflicts thus action to protect these children. When the campaign was launched, the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba stated, “[w]ith more children suffering horrific abuses in
war zones across the globe, we desperately need to reinvigorate our efforts to raise awareness."

(footnote) Although there are political and legal solutions that exist to ensure the protection of children in these conflicts, the adherence to commitment and principles is missing. The Act to Protect project emphasizes six main sectors, known as the six grave violations, where children are heavily impacted by conflict: “recruitment and use in conflict; killing and maiming in the course of hostilities; sexual violence and forced marriage; attacks against schools and hospitals; abduction; and denial of humanitarian access.” (footnote) The six grave violations are also the focus of organizations since preventing these will ensure the safety of the children. It is hoped that over the next three years, the campaign will effectively collaborate with the UN, civil society, and the international community to encourage actions that prevent and end child violations in armed regions.

In recent advances, UNICEF has also shown responsibility to raise awareness as well as to limit violations of children in conflicts in a number of ways. For instance, around 1.6 million children were protected from enrollment by armed forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Additionally, nearly 5,000 children involved in armed forces were brought back to their communities. UNICEF is also working to provide training courses such as agriculture, mechanics, business development and more as well as basics literacy to nearly 5,000 demobilized children in Liberia. It is believed that these essential skills and training will assist them to survive.

Most importantly, it should be noted that the Geneva Conventions (1949), their Additional Protocols (1977), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000) have all laid out principles and provisions to ensure protection of children in armed conflicts. Hence, these treaties, to some extent, had effectively solved the problem.

Possible Solutions.

While many organizations showed commitment to resolving the issue, there are additional solutions they may implement to further provide protection of the children in armed conflicts.

One method that can be taken is to improve the protection around public sectors. Member states should build a protective environment for children. Not only this, they should enforce laws that prohibit children under the age of 15 to recruit in armed conflicts. Although written in the Geneva Convention and other protocols, more than 20 countries are founded to use children at the age of 10 in wars or armed areas. This age is best known as the time where children develop their full abilities. Therefore, they should have the right to receive education in order to make ethical judgments. Hence, by receiving a
proper education, the number of issues with children in armed conflicts will decrease significantly as the violation rate will decrease.

Another solution that should be further emphasized is to encourage the international community to be fully aware of what is happening to children in armed conflicts. The United Nations Special Representative for the Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba mentioned: “With more children suffering horrific abuses in war zones across the globe, we desperately need to reinvigorate our efforts to raise awareness[...]to ensure action by parties to conflict to give children the protection they deserve.” When the public is informed about the situations through media, they know the situations faced by children growing up in countries affected by conflicts. The more public are aware of these circumstances, the more international parties would bear in mind and agree that all children under conflict areas must have proper protection. This will allow a greater number of organizations to provide services for child victims of armed attacks with advanced services as professionals will enter the field to support the children. With more attention from the public, the governments possibly will enforce laws consistently to lessen the issues. Therefore, the public should pay interest in a global campaign such as the Act to Protect Children Affected by Conflict, launched by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in order to strengthen international communities’ supports to generate more awareness to provide protection to children affected by conflicts.

Finally, it is hoped that specialized international laws and documents such as the International Human Rights Law, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Civil and Political Rights, will visualize the necessary rights and freedoms these children should have thus enforce the protection of children in many armed regions.

Bibliography


Appendix or Appendices

I. Published by the United Nation Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, the resource addresses legal sources, requirements and limitations, accountability, as well as application of international legal protection of human rights in armed conflict.

II. This link provides background information on the issue.

III. This link explains the background of protecting children during armed conflicts as well as provides specific solutions and examples of actions that are taken/should be taken.

IV. This link provides a list of the International Legal Foundation of the Six Grave Violations Against Children During Armed Conflict. It refers to specific convention or protocol with explanation.

V. The following is the list of SDGs: No Poverty
   1. Zero Hunger
   2. Good Health and Well-being
   3. Quality Education
   4. Gender Equality
   5. Clean Water and Sanitation
   6. Affordable and Clean Energy
   7. Decent Work and Economic Growth
   8. Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure
   9. Reducing Inequality
   10. Sustainable Cities and Communities
   11. Responsible Consumption and Production
   12. Climate Action
   13. Life Below Water
   14. Life On Land
   15. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
   16. Partnerships for the Goals

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs