



INTERNATIONAL
**YEAR OF
YOUTH**
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OUR YEAR OUR VOICE

Dialogue and Mutual Understanding

Fact Sheet: Armed Conflict

- In armed conflicts, girls and women are disproportionately targeted but boys and men are also sexually violated
- For the last two decades, the United Nations has been at the forefront of efforts to protect children and youth in armed conflict.
- The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict coordinates the UN family efforts.
- The UN Security Council is actively engaged in efforts to protect children in armed conflicts by placing the issue on the international peace and security agenda.
- In early 2010, the signing of an action plan with the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist resulted in the discharge of about 2,000 minors.
- In June 2010, the Security Council released a statement expressing its readiness to impose targeted measures against persistent violators recruiting, sexually abusing, maiming and killing children and youth in war.

Today, grave violations are taking place against children and youth in over twenty war-affected countries. As primary victims of armed conflict, young people experience many forms of suffering. They are killed, maimed, orphaned, abducted, deprived of education and health care, and left with deep emotional and physical scars. While girls and women are disproportionately targeted, boys and men are also sexually violated in conflict situations.

Children and youth are uniquely vulnerable to involuntary military recruitment. Hundreds of thousands are associated with armed forces, including those of non-State actors. Young people's participation in conflict has serious implications for their physical and emotional well-being. Further, the changing nature of conflict directly impacts children as war tactics include their use as suicide bombers, and systematic attacks are waged on schools. Counter-terrorism strategies can result in collateral damage, including youth casualties.

Children and youth suffer from other consequences of conflict such as poverty, unemployment, low educational attainment, poor governance and the disintegration of families and communities. Rehabilitation and reintegration is particularly critical for children and youth formerly associated with armed groups in order to break cycles of violence and to find a new existence after a life of conflict and distress. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes should build on individuals' strengths, especially their resilience. Children and youth should be consulted in the process, with specific issues, including the needs of girls, explicitly addressed.

United Nations, Youth and Armed Conflict

Since the 1990 World Summit for Children, the United Nations has increasingly sought to draw international attention to the plight of children affected by armed conflict. In 1996, an expert appointed by the Secretary-General, Graça Machel, submitted a report to the General Assembly depicting the terrible reality of children in war. The groundbreaking report drew global attention and led to the adoption of resolution 51/77 recommending the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.





Today, Radhika Coomaraswamy serves as the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. In this capacity, she speaks as a moral voice and an independent advocate to build awareness and give prominence to the rights and protection of boys and girls affected by armed conflict.

Systematic engagement with Member States is an essential aspect of her work. She uses various frameworks, such as the General Assembly, the Security Council, regional organizations, bilateral contacts and field visits to garner political will from the international community to effectively protect war-affected children and youth.

As the issue of children and armed conflict cuts across various UN mandates, the Special Representative works closely with other UN agencies and programmes to develop and implement the children and armed conflict agenda. UNICEF remains a key operational partner, designing projects that assist in the release, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations has also expanded significantly the incorporation of children's issues in their work.

During the International Year of Youth, the Special Representative of the Secretary General will mobilize youth as a priority to raise awareness of the plight of child soldiers. She will also continue to garner support for its "Zero under Eighteen" campaign, which aims to achieve universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict by 2012.

Through advocacy efforts by the Office of the Special Representative and its partners, the Security Council has become systematically engaged in the issue of children and armed conflict, which has been progressively placed on the international peace and security agenda.

Progress

Collaborative efforts of the international community over the last ten years have resulted in tangible results for the children and armed conflict agenda, such as increased global awareness of the issue; strengthening of international norms and standards; and deployment of Child Protection Advisors in UN peacekeeping and political missions.

Victims of war are convincing and powerful advocates for child rights. The Network for Young People Affected by War, a non-governmental organization comprised of former child soldiers and witnesses of war, is a tremendous asset for advancing the children and armed conflict agenda. Former child soldiers have presented their stories of detention and alienation to the Security Council, giving faces and names to the issue.

In 2005, the Security Council adopted resolution 1612, one of the greatest advancements in protecting children. The resolution formalized the existing monitoring and reporting practice, established a collection mechanism for timely and reliable information on violations committed against children and led to the systematic listing in the annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council of the parties to conflict that recruit or use child soldiers.

In 2009, the Security Council adopted resolution 1882, which expanded the listing criteria to include maiming and killing children as well as using sexual violence against them. The listing exercise – or "naming and shaming" as it is commonly referred to – is a powerful measure that has led to signing action plans with various parties to conflict and the release of child soldiers. For example, in early 2010, the signing of an action plan with the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist resulted in the discharge of about 2,000 minors.

Another major breakthrough occurred in June 2010 when the Security Council released a statement expressing its readiness to impose targeted measures against persistent violators recruiting, sexually abusing, maiming and killing children in war. These measures include imposing asset freezing, arms embargoes and travel restrictions.





Important precedents are being set in the fight to end impunity for crimes committed against children and youth. The most prominent developments involve the International Criminal Court trial of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The accused is alleged to be the founder and leader of *Union des Patriotes Congolais* and *Forces patriotiques pour la libération du Congo*. Charges include conscription and enlistment of children under the age of 15 and the use of children for active participation in hostilities.

The way forward

The following key recommendations, contained in the Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review, serve as future guidelines to protect children and youth in situations of war:

Securing universal compliance with international norms and standards — The international community should strive for universal adherence to international standards that protect children from the adverse effects of war.

End impunity for violations against children — Member States must ensure systematic and timely investigation and prosecution of crimes against children and youth in the context of armed conflict and provide assistance to victims.

Strengthening the monitoring and reporting mechanism — Member States, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations must continue to enhance the existing common framework to timely collect information on violations against children and youth.

Promote justice for children — Member States need to uphold international standards on juvenile justice with detention used only as a last resort and a guarantee that detained juveniles be separated from detained adults.

Support inclusive reintegration strategies — Stakeholders should ensure that release and reintegration strategies are in line with the Paris Commitments and Principles. Strategies should ensure long-term sustainability and community-based approaches, with emphasis on education and employment.

Integrate children's rights in peacemaking, peacebuilding and preventive actions — All peacemaking and peacebuilding processes should be child-sensitive, including specific provisions in peace agreements.

Increase the participation of and support for children and youth — The participation of children and youth in the child rights agenda is one of the key recommendations in the Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review.

For further information

- www.un.org/children/conflict
- www.un.org/children/conflict/machel/english
- www.zerounder18.com
- www.facebook.com/zerounder18
- www.flickr.com/photos/childrenandarmedconflict

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