

Committee: Youth Assembly

Issue: Action Paper II on children in conflict areas

Student Officer: George Kantzis, Ioulia Sampani

Position: Head, Co-Head

Introduction

Conflicts have grave implications on children and their future, as they affect a lot of different sectors of their lives. As Grace Machel, a United Nations member, in 1996 said, “War violates every right of a child – the right to life, the right to be with family and nurtured and respected”. First of all, in conflict areas children witness or even experience violent acts, which can easily impinge on their psychology and can have long-term repercussions. Moreover, children are kidnapped and consequently recruited by armed groups or other terrorist and military organizations to execute diverse commands, including the placement of mines and explosives and the participation in combat. Furthermore, they are used for domestic labour and even for sexual slavery and sexual purposes to cover the needs of the adult soldiers. Thus, child soldiers are exploited or even humiliated publicly and experience traumatic savageries, which cannot be easily forgotten affecting both their future and their well-mental being. Additionally, during conflicts children are most times separated from their families and friends and are placed in perilous locations where they can get injured or even killed. Secondly, during wars children are deprived from valuable and necessary services, namely education and medical care. Children are restricted from education due to various problems, such as hazardous or inaccessible roads and the lack of teaching personnel. In addition, another major factor which highly contributes to the restriction of education in conflict-affected areas are the attacks or the bombardments of schools, which certainly prevent parents from sending their children to school lest them being killed. Last but not least, medical assistance and health care in war-torn areas is less efficient and is not provided to every citizen equally. Hence, children are the most



Figure 1. A Child Soldier holding missiles.

vulnerable victims in conflict areas as conflicts have vast effects on their future development.

Definition of Key-Terms

Conflict

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a conflict is “a prolonged armed struggle or a clash among two or more regions or states”.

Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child describes a child as “a human being under the age of eighteen, unless the age of majority is attained earlier under a state’s own domestic legislation”. The Convention also recognizes that a child “for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding”. Finally, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares, “childhood is entitled to special care and assistance”.

(Source: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>)

Child Soldier

According to the Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict 2007, a child soldier is “a child associated with an armed force or armed group”. The term “refers 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, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes.”

(Source: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/effects-of-conflict/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers/>)

The Six Grave Violations

The Six Grave Violations are six categories, which were first recognized by the United Nations Security Council in 2004. They mostly function as evidence of violations against children and aim to provide patronage to children in conflict areas. The second grave violation, namely the recruitment or use of children as soldiers, is of utmost importance to our topic and plays a significant role in the illegal use of children as soldiers in war-torn areas.

Background Information

The importance of the issue of children in conflict areas is vital to the society as a whole. It is estimated that 1 billion children live in war-torn areas, including 300 million children who are under the age of 5. According to the United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2013 there were 28,5 million children who have been restricted from education and another 11,2 to 13,7 million children who have been deported from their countries and separated from their families. These events have resulted in severe implications to all children

in those areas, as Motassem, a 16-year-old student in Syria, confesses: “I am in ninth grade but this war stopped me from graduating – I should have graduated and gone to high school, to start building my future but no... my future is destroyed”.



Figure 2. Child Refugees of Congo

Moreover, the number of children, who were refugees due to the conflicts in their

countries, is immense, as only in one year (2013) there have been 7 million children who have immigrated to different countries in order to find asylum and a better way of living. Additionally, there were 250.000 child soldiers in the same year (2013), who have been recruited by armed groups and other military organizations to complete injunctions and accomplish difficult tasks. Paula, a 15-years-old girl from Colombia, claims: “Mali Young people in the village are approached by guerrillas (la Guerra = esp. war) to recruit them. My cousin was tricked into going with them four months ago and I haven’t heard from her in a month”. Last but not least, it is also estimated that 3 out of 5 countries with the highest youth mortality rates in 2013 were conflict countries. Consequently, children in conflict areas do experience a lot of problems and difficult situations in their every-day lives, which are likely to have long-term repercussions on their psychology and severe consequences in their development and future.

Education and Schools in conflict areas

In accordance with the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and the “United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child” access to education is one of the main human rights that every human being must have. However, almost 40 million children are restricted from education due to severe conflicts in their countries. One



Figure 3. A Damged school in a conflict-affected region

of the principal reasons is that schools in conflict-affected states are damaged, burnt down, destroyed, attacked or even bombarded and thus considered improper to house students. For instance, according to The New York Times and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 68 attacks on schools were reported only in one year during the Syrian civil war and the casualties were dreadful as 160

children were killed and 343 more were injured. Moreover, a lot of families with children may immigrate and be displaced in refugee camps where access to education is highly limited. Another reason might be the fact that during conflicts a lot of families are separated and their children are recruited by armed forces and consequently made to work instead of attending school. Additionally, diseases and contagious illnesses such as ebola, malaria or diarrhea, which can be easily observed in conflict-affected countries due to the poor sanitation and medical healthcare, may contribute to the prohibition of education, as schools may close to hinder the further spread of such viruses and bacteria. Finally, teachers are highly likely to be killed or abducted and due to the lack of working personnel, schools are closed preventing children from acquiring valuable education. Yet, as Nelson Mandela once claimed



Figure 4. Dozens of children in one classroom – Inadequate Education Funding

“Education is the greatest weapon with which we can change the world - and it is particularly important in war-torn countries.” This means that education is vital for the continuation of the social and general development of each community in a conflict area, as education provides fundamental knowledge that can set the basis for a future development. Schools, especially in war-torn countries, can provide a shelter for children where they can develop their social skills and learn useful things which will certainly contribute to their survival in their community, since they can be taught how to handle drinkable water and how to avoid mines and explosives hidden underground.

Child Recruitment and Child Soldiers

It is estimated that in the last decade there were 2 million children in conflict areas who have been killed and another 6 million who have suffered from serious injuries and other medical problems. Furthermore, there were almost 10 million children who have been afflicted with psychological traumas and long-term psychological repercussions and about 1 million children who have lost their parents in conflict. These figures can be correlated with the recruitment of children by armed forces and military-terrorist organizations, since children are forced to take part in conflicts and fight alongside adult soldiers and



Figure 5. A frightened child during a conflict.



Figure 6. A Child Soldier

thus experience violent activities which can impinge on their future. Except fighting in combat, children are used to accomplish other similarly difficult tasks which involve serious risks and can lead to humiliation. These may include spying, serving as messengers and porters carrying heavy loads, such as injured or dead soldiers. Moreover, girls are used as sexual slaves and are consequently being raped witnessing immoral sexual acts. The United Nations Security Council acknowledging all these events has recognized “The Six Grave Violations” which include inter alia “killing and maiming children”, the “recruitment or use of children as soldiers”, “sexual violence against children” and the “abduction of children”. All these actions are considered to be illegal and therefore are stipulated as crimes by the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Further Audio-Visual Material

- VIDEO: “Children, Not Soldiers” → <https://youtu.be/cFH-JiLAsVw>
- VIDEO: “Child Soldiers” → <http://www.our-africa.org/sudan/history-politics>
- PHOTO ESSAY: “Childhood under threat” → <http://www.unicef.org/sowc05/english/conflictissue.html>
- VIDEO: “Panama: Children from conflict zones strive for peace” → <http://www.unicef.org/sowc05/english/conflictissue.html>

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Colombia

Colombia is an important example of a country where the rights of children are constantly being violated. There is a long-standing conflict in Colombia, which started in 1946 and continues until today. During this conflict children are being trained to take part in the war as soldiers and are forced to put their lives at risk. Furthermore, young and unprotected girls are being sexually abused by the guerillas of the Colombian army; a phenomenon that could cause them undesired health problems.

Afghanistan

One of the largest, if not the largest, armed conflicts is currently taking place in Afghanistan. One of the effects of this long war is the violation of the children's rights as lots of them are being killed each and every year. For example, in 2012, 1034 children were killed or seriously injured. In addition, the recruitment of children could be an effect of the conflict. Lots of children are separated from their family and are forced to participate in the conflict as soldiers. To conclude, a terrifying number of 5 million children cannot have access to education, which is one of the basic rights every child should have.

Syria

In Syria the main consequence of the current war that we can observe is that more than 1.6 million children are refugees putting children in danger of becoming ill, underfed or exploited. At the same time a great number of children is forced to quit school because of the abovementioned war. Last but not least, it is a matter of fact that many girls are forced to get married at a very low age.

Sudan and South Sudan

Regardless of the fact that the war between Sudan and South Sudan has come to an end, both countries are facing lots of violations concerning the children's rights. Most children are facing poverty and lack health insurance, while education is an unknown word to them. Moreover, many children, and girls beyond all, are being victims of sexual crime daily. Lastly, although the majority of the population of both countries is under the age of 18, their governments have not taken effective measures to combat the abovementioned violations.

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)



Figure 7. The logo of UNICEF

UNICEF is among the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that have helped the most to fight against those that constantly violate the rights of the children during armed conflicts. Through multiple conferences and discussions on the issue, organization of campaigns, whose main goal is to ensure the protection of children in conflict areas, cooperation with governments, national and international agencies, UNICEF is constantly trying to solve the issue. To give an example, one of the campaigns UNICEF has organized is the “Children, Not Soldiers” Campaign which took place in March 2014 and focused on preventing the children’s recruitment in the armed forces.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Following UNICEF, UNESCO is also a Non-Governmental Organization trying to face the problems and difficulties children have to deal with during armed conflicts. UNESCO has actively contributed to this long-lasting exertion of the whole world to combat this issue. First of all, UNESCO has played a vital role in providing children in need with the needed education as they organized an action called “UNESCO’s Program for the Education of Children in Need”. Furthermore, UNESCO has offered relief to suffering families by creating projects for children affected by war and other disasters. Since 1992, these projects have taken place in lots of countries in need, including Afghanistan, DR Congo, Sudan, Russia and Iraq.

Timeline of Events

| Date | Description of event |
|-------------------|--|
| December 10, 1948 | Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 |
| November 20, 1989 | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child |
| July 17, 1998 | Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court |
| March, 1999 | The Mine Ban Treaty |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| April 22, 2004 | United Nations Security Council Resolution 1539 |
| February 2007 | The Paris Principles. Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. |
| March 3, 2010 | UN General Assembly Resolution 64/146 |
| March, 2014 | Children, Not soldiers campaign |

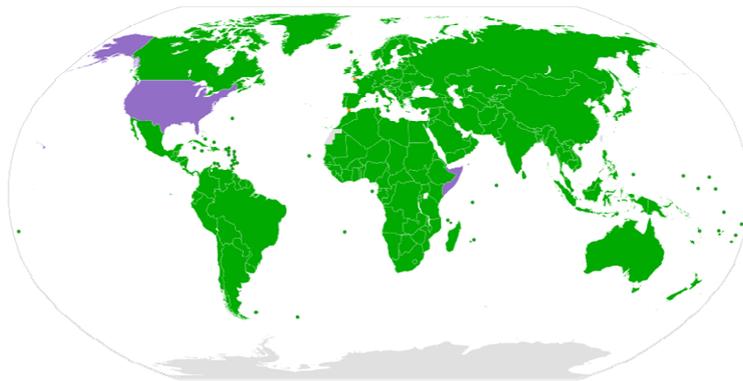
Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations in 1948. This Declaration ensures that all human beings without any discrimination have equal rights and should be treated equally. The Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrines the right to education and stipulates that every human being of every age is entitled to education (“Everyone has the right to education”). However, as it was already mentioned, 40 million children in conflict areas do not have access to education. This fact is a violation of their rights and the restriction of education may be a big blow to their future development.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child is a treaty consisting of 54 articles which was signed on 20 November 1989. The primary aim of this Convention is to preserve the rights of every child in each and every country. According to article 28, education must be promoted and must be accessible to every child. Primary Education must be free and secondary and higher education must be available to everyone. Moreover, article 38 prohibits the recruitment of children in military forces and outlaws the use of children as soldiers to fight in combat. (“Governments must not allow children to take part in war or join the armed forces”).



Parties to the convention

Only signed, but not ratified (United States, Somalia)

Non-signatory (Akrotiri and Dhekelia, Gibraltar, Guernsey, Tokelau)

Figure 8. Map of the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child

UN Security Council Resolution 1539 of 2004: The Six Grave Violations

The Security Council adopted the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1539 in 2004. The first and the second paragraph of the resolution recognize six categories of violations which are named “The Six Grave Violations”. They include the “killing or maiming of children”, the “recruitment or use of child soldiers”, “rape and other forms of sexual violence against children”, the abduction of children”, “the attacks against schools and hospitals”, and the “denial of humanitarian access to children”. These violations are considered to be illegal crimes. This resolution aims at the protection of children, especially in conflict areas, as most children in such areas suffer from almost all these categories and experience grave brutalities.



Figure 9. Afghan child greeting soldier

Children, Not Soldiers Campaign

The Campaign “Children, Not Soldiers” was launched in March 2014 by UNICEF and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Its main aim was to stop the recruitment of children in conflict areas by 2016. Since 2014, a lot of progress has been made, especially in South Sudan, Sudan, Afghanistan and the Democratic



Figure 10. Children

Republic of Congo (DRC) and the campaign has gained support from the UN, other NGOs and all the Member States.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The serious problems children are facing in war-torn areas can affect the whole world in the long term. Therefore, the international community had to make some steps towards finding a solution to this tragic situation innocent people, and especially children, were facing. To begin with, in 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed by the members of the United Nations, a declaration which among others recognizes the right of every human being to education. Moreover, some years later, on the 20th of September 1989 another big step was made by the United Nations, namely the creation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child. This convention had as a main goal to clarify each and every right of the children, focusing on banning the recruitment of children and on the right to education. Furthermore, lots of Non-Governmental Organizations are annoyed by the fact that this phenomenon still exists and do the best they can in order to solve it. Last but not least, several resolutions concerning the rights of the children have passed both in the United Nations Security Council and the General Assembly. For example the Security Council Resolution 1539, which recognizes the Sixth Grave Violations and the General Assembly Resolution 64/146 that refers generally to the rights of the children.



Figure 11. Young child-soldier

Possible Solutions

Taking into consideration all the abovementioned information, we can understand how crucial this issue is. It is a long-lasting problem that finally has to come to an end. A problem that could cause further humanitarian, economic and political problems to our planet. A problem that affects every last person standing on Earth. Therefore, the purpose of this year's action paper should be to find viable solutions that will preserve justice to all children living in war-torn areas. First of all it is of utmost importance to raise public awareness as there are hundreds and millions of people that have no information concerning the situation in those areas. This could be achieved by informing people through commercials, articles in newspapers and magazines, books and free information meetings, where experts will talk with people and inform them about the issue. Moreover, a new United Nations conference, concerning the rights of the children, should be organized so that all member states

can cooperate and find effective and long-term solutions to the topic. Furthermore, we have to urge all member states to create an international norm that strictly prohibits the recruitment of children and in case of a violation of this norm, the violating country should be punished. Finally, we have to give people the chance to actively participate in the saving of children with ways such as but not limited to, donation of money, adoption of children that are separated from their families and need care as well as providing them with medical equipment, clothes, food and toys.

Bibliography

"UNICEF - SOWC05." *UNICEF - SOWC05*. UNICEF, n.d. Web. 01 July 2015. <<http://www.unicef.org/sowc05/english/conflictissue.html>>.

"The Six Grave Violations | United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict." *United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict*. UNICEF, n.d. Web. 01 July 2015. <<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/effects-of-conflict/six-grave-violations/>>.

"UN Security Council Resolution 1539." *Watchlist*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 July 2015. <<http://watchlist.org/un-security-council-resolution-1539-of-2004-the-six-grave-violations/>>.

"Child Recruitment | United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict." *United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict*. United Nations, n.d. Web. 01 July 2015. <<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/effects-of-conflict/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers/>>.

"Children in Conflict: Child Soldiers." *Child Soldiers*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 July 2015. <<http://www.child-soldier.org/>>.

"ILO." *Child Labour and Armed Conflict (IPEC)*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 July 2015. <<http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/areas/Armedconflict/lang--en/index.htm>>.

"Almost 50 Million Children out of School in Conflict-affected Countries." *Save the Children UK*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 June 2015. <<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/2013-07/almost-50-million-children-out-school-conflict-affected-countries>>.

"Access to Education." *Access to Education*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 July 2015. <<http://www.warchild.org.uk/issues/access-education>>.

"Under the Radar: Ongoing Recruitment and Use of Children by the Myanmar Army." *Child Soldiers International*. Child Soldiers International, n.d. Web. 01 July 2015. <<http://www.child-soldiers.org/>>.

"ECHO Factsheet – Children in Conflict." *Humanitarian aid and civil protection*. European Commission, 2014. Web. 01 July 2015. <http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/thematic/children_conflict_en.pdf>.

Draft Committee. "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UDHR, Declaration of Human Rights, Human Rights Declaration, Human Rights Charter, The Un and Human Rights." *UN News Center*. UN, n.d. Web. 02 July 2015. <<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>>.

UNICEF.uk. "A Summary of the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child." *Unicef.org.uk*. UNICEF, n.d. Web. 2 July 2015. <http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_summary.pdf>.

UN. "Child Protection in UN Peacekeeping - 2014 Review." *Child Protection in UN Peacekeeping - 2014 Review*. UN, 2014. Web. 2 July 2015. <<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/150209cpnewsletterchanges.pdf>>.

Figure 1: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc05/english/conflictissue.html>

Figure 2: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2008/nov/12/congo-children>

Figure 3: <http://www.timesofisrael.com/civil-war-keeps-many-syrian-children-out-of-school/>

Figure 4: <http://euroscolacabrerapinto.blogspot.gr/2015/04/child-have-right-to-education-but-very.html>

Figure 5:

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/thematic/children_conflict_en.pdf

Figure 6: <http://www.child-soldier.org>

Figure 7:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f2/Convention_on_the_Rights_of_the_Child.svg

Figure 8:

<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/150209cpnewsletterchanges.pdf>

