

Forum: Special Conference (SPECON)

Issue: Ensuring the Rights of Children in conflicts

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INTRODUCTION

In a world where political disputes are capitalized upon, human suffering and human rights' violations become largely overlooked. Such was the case with approx. 470 million¹ children in the year 2022 alone, who fell victims to armed combat and violence. This extremely high number of children reside in active war zones.

Children's exposure to geopolitical conflicts continues to have an undeniably devastating impact worldwide. In 2024, 11,967 children were killed or maimed², 7,906 denied humanitarian access³, and 7,402 "recruited or used" in independent militias, sexual exploitation and human trafficking rings⁴. However, due to turbulent reporting conditions, these numbers are estimated to be significantly higher.

Children's fundamental human rights to life and safety as well as to education, proper housing, healthcare and freedom of speech are violated as nations crumble under the effects of combat and economic instability. The loss of family members and the constant exposure to casualties, mass bombings, oppression and missile strikes or strike warnings have a debilitating toll on their emotional and physical health. Countless children lose their homes, any familiarity of their surroundings, and are thereby pushed into the heights of poverty and displacement.

Moreover, minors are taken advantage of due to their vulnerability and radicalised. Thus, they become prone to turning towards extremism and gang violence as teenagers. Girls, in particular, are extremely vulnerable to becoming targets of human trafficking rings. They are enslaved, forced into marriages or become involved with sex work to survive. Even though boys are also

¹ Save the Children. "These 11 Countries in Conflict Are the Worst Places to Be a Child." Save the Children, 2023, www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/worst-conflict-affected-countries-to-be-a-child.

²Vinet, Fabienne. "22,495 Haunting Cries: Children Affected by Conflict Endured an Unconscionable Number of Grave Violations in 2024 – Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict." Un.org, 2024, childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2025/06/22495-haunting-cries-children-affected-by-conflict-endured-an-unconscionable-number-of-grave-violations-in-2024/.

³Vinet, Fabienne. "22,495 Haunting Cries: Children Affected by Conflict Endured an Unconscionable Number of Grave Violations in 2024 – Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict." Un.org, 2024, childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2025/06/22495-haunting-cries-children-affected-by-conflict-endured-an-unconscionable-number-of-grave-violations-in-2024/.

⁴Vinet, Fabienne. "22,495 Haunting Cries: Children Affected by Conflict Endured an Unconscionable Number of Grave Violations in 2024 – Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict." Un.org, 2024, childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2025/06/22495-haunting-cries-children-affected-by-conflict-endured-an-unconscionable-number-of-grave-violations-in-2024/.

affected by these issues, large gender gaps exist, enforcing misogynistic acts on the battlefield⁵. Some, like rape or certain acts of genital maiming, are considered war crimes attributing to genocide⁶.

In order to ensure children's rights in dire circumstances, a holistic picture of the issue should be taken into consideration. First, the preliminary causes of harm leading to these violations should be identified. Pathways towards humanitarian aid should then be established, with a focus on long term, maximum efficiency solutions that preserve minors's rights and dignity, even under extreme circumstances.

In an everchanging world, fundamental human rights are stipulated. However, setting human rights in stone without addressing newer situations in light of recent geopolitical tensions and harmful practices is a flaw society must not continue overlooking. While preexisting human rights definitions should be honoured, international law should consistently be amended to contain new rights, rights whose need has arisen due to practices such as these. The atrocities facing these children should be addressed, in specifics and without room for unpunished violations and legal loopholes.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Conflict-Affected/ High-Risk Regions

Conflict-Affected or High-Risk Regions are “identified by the presence of armed conflict, widespread violence or other risks of harm to people. Armed conflict may take a variety of forms, such as a conflict of international or non-international character, which may involve two or more states, or may consist of wars of liberation, or insurgencies, civil wars, etc. High-risk areas may include areas of political instability or repression, institutional weakness, insecurity, collapse of civil infrastructure and widespread violence. Such areas are often characterised by widespread human rights abuses and violations of national or international law.”⁷.

Humanitarian Aid

⁵ “New Study Outlines Importance of Gender for Children Caught up in Conflict.” UN News, 5 May 2022,

en.news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1117602. Accessed 4 Aug. 2025.

⁶ Marsden, Harriet, and The Week UK published. “Rape as a Weapon: Why War’s “Oldest, Most Silenced” Crime Is on the Rise.” Theweek, 12 Dec. 2023, theweek.com/defence/rape-as-a-weapon-why-wars-oldest-most-silenced-crime-is-on-the-rise.

⁷“Conflict Affected and High-Risk Areas (CAHRAs).” www.responsiblemineralsinitiative.org, www.responsiblemineralsinitiative.org/minerals-due-diligence/risk-management/conflict-affected-and-high-risk-areas/.

Humanitarian aid can be defined as “material or logistical assistance provided for humanitarian purposes, typically in response to humanitarian crises.”⁸ Its primary objectives include “sav(ing) lives, alleviat(ing) suffering and maintain(ing) human dignity.”⁹

Displacement

Displacement can be defined as “the situation in which people are forced to leave the place where they normally live”¹⁰. In this context, two types of displacement are prominent : Internal and foreign displacement. Internal displacement occurs within the borders of the displaced individual’s home nation, whereas foreign displacement is loosely defined as beyond border displacement. Displacement is brought about by life threatening conditions, usually in times of conflict, when fundamental human rights are discarded.

Fundamental Human Rights

“(T)he rights of any individual recognised by the International Declaration of Human Rights adopted on 10 December, 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly”¹¹ are loosely defined as fundamental human rights. Specifically, these rights are considered fundamental because they are necessary to sustain human life and to uphold the principles of humanitarian dignity.

Radicalism

Radicalism is “ in politics, the belief that there should be great or extreme social or political change”¹². While it can be argued that radicalism can be used to promote societal change, oftentimes radicals use illegal methods, even turning to violence, vandalism and arbitrary assault to reach their desired political outcomes. Radicalism is tied to extremism in the sense that radicals often support extremist ideologies and do not care for the morality and ethics behind their politically motivated actions, as long as they reach their political goals.

Extremism

Extremism can be defined as “the fact of someone having beliefs that most people think are unreasonable and unacceptable”¹³. In this context, extremist ideologies can be tied to extremist means of action.

Independent Militias

⁸“UNTERM.” [Unterm.un.org](https://unterm.un.org/unterm2/en/view/59171aec-7207-4d95-b851-7b7b6d7b27ea), unterm.un.org/unterm2/en/view/59171aec-7207-4d95-b851-7b7b6d7b27ea.

⁹“UNTERM.” [Unterm.un.org](https://unterm.un.org/unterm2/en/view/59171aec-7207-4d95-b851-7b7b6d7b27ea), unterm.un.org/unterm2/en/view/59171aec-7207-4d95-b851-7b7b6d7b27ea.

¹⁰ “DISPLACEMENT | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” [Dictionary.cambridge.org, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/displacement.](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/displacement)

¹¹ “Fundamental Human Rights Definition | Law Insider.” [Law Insider, 2023, www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/fundamental-human-rights.](https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/fundamental-human-rights)

¹² “Radical | Ideologist.” [Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019, www.britannica.com/topic/radical-ideologist.](https://www.britannica.com/topic/radical-ideologist)

¹³Cambridge Dictionary. “EXTREMISM | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” [Cambridge.org, 2019, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/extremism.](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/extremism)

The term militia can be best described as a “military organization of citizens with limited military training, which is available for emergency service, usually for local defense”¹⁴. Independent militias arise without the support of their members’ government and are self-funded and preserved, without the intervention of any influential governmental institution.

Maiming

The term maiming means to “mutilate, disfigure or wound seriously”¹⁵.

Torture

Torture is “the act of causing great physical or mental pain in order to persuade someone to do something or to give information, or to be cruel to a person or animal”¹⁶.

Forced Labour

According to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No.29), forced labour entails “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily”¹⁷.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Children' s Rights under International Law

In order to protect children’s rights, it is imperative to define them in accordance with international law. Multiple documents have been drafted by the UN, set to define those rights.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)¹⁸, which was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, outlines children's fundamental human rights. Among them are the rights to life (Art. 3 of the UDHR), to freedom from torture (Art. 5), freedom from slavery (Art. 4), equal recognition before the law (Art. 6), freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Art.18) and protection from arbitrary arrest (Art.9). Furthermore, the rights to nationality (Art. 15),to education (Art. 26), adequate living standards (Art.25), asylum (Art.14), family and protection of family life (Art. 16), freedom of expression (Art.19), rest and leisure (Art.24), and social security (Art.22) are vital to children’s emotional and physical health.

¹⁴The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. “Militia | Britannica.” Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019, www.britannica.com/topic/militia.

¹⁵“Maim Definition & Meaning | Britannica Dictionary.” @Britannica, 2025, www.britannica.com/dictionary/maim. Accessed 4 Aug. 2025.

¹⁶ ---. “TORTURE | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” Cambridge.org, 2019, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/torture.

¹⁷ ILO. “What Is Forced Labour? | International Labour Organization.” Www.ilo.org, 28 Jan. 2024, www.ilo.org/topics/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons/what-forced-labour.

¹⁸United Nations. “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” United Nations, 1948, www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) / Optional Protocol

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)¹⁹ delves deeper into the rights children are entitled to in times of political turbulence. As fundamental rights which apply during armed conflict, the UNCRC adds the right to name and identity (Art. 7), the freedom from arbitrary detention (Art. 37(b)), and, perhaps the most influential, the right to protection in armed conflict (Art.38). Additionally, its Optional Protocol serves as a reminder of children’s humanity and significance in today’s modernised society.

Geneva Convention (IV)

Additionally, the Geneva Conventions, a series of legally - binding international treaties contracted and ratified between 1864 and 1949, focus on human rights violations during war, which impact both soldiers and civilians exposed to the battlefield²⁰. Their additional protocols serve as a moral compass during conflicts. Under the Geneva Convention IV on civilians (Art.24) , all signatories must ensure children under the age of 15, who have been orphaned or separated from their families due to the detrimental effects of war, are not to be left to fend for themselves or to be recruited.²¹ Instead, their care, education and right to religious practices should be entrusted to caregivers originating from a similar cultural background. The parties involved in these conflicts have the duty to facilitate the reception of such children in neutral countries, where they can exercise their rights freely and receive a peaceful upbringing. Children under the age of 12 are obliged to wear identification discs.

In regards to identification practices, “personnel, material, units, transports and installations protected under the Geneva Conventions and the Protocol”²² are also entitled to a specific group of rights. These include the obligation to wear water resistant identification armbands bearing the red cross for religious personnel, as well as carry identity cards (Art. 39-40)²³. For children, parties are encouraged to create identity registers (Art. 24²⁴). Immediately after inception in refugee centers, family reunification should be of utmost priority. These regulations are implemented through national ID records, hospital or school information, and are enforced through individual governments, alongside strict compliance monitoring. However, the lack of universal identity coverage is an issue in countless Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs). It is estimated that “over 50 million children with registered births still lack birth certificates”²⁵, due to poverty, mass displacement and unstable conditions.

Moreover, under Art. 25 of the Convention, children are classified as protected persons during armed conflict. This entails their right to receive and send personal messages to and

¹⁹United Nations. “Convention on the Rights of the Child.” OHCHR, United Nations, 1989, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.

²⁰Shaw, Malcolm. “Geneva Conventions | 1864–1977.” Encyclopædia Britannica, 26 Dec. 2018, www.britannica.com/event/Geneva-Conventions.

²¹Icrc.org, 2025, ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-24.

²²Icrc.org, 2025, ihl-databases.icrc.org/assets/treaties/471-ATT2ERWE. Accessed 4 Aug. 2025.

²³Icrc.org, 2025, ihl-databases.icrc.org/assets/treaties/471-ATT2ERWE. Accessed 4 Aug. 2025.

²⁴Icrc.org, 2025, ihl-databases.icrc.org/assets/treaties/471-ATT2ERWE. Accessed 4 Aug. 2025.

²⁵“Birth Registration Increases, but 150 Million Children Still “Invisible.”” UN News, 11 Dec. 2024, news.un.org/en/story/2024/12/1158056 . Accessed 4 Aug. 2025.

from family members and other acquaintances, without the infringement of their privacy.²⁶ Article 50 stretches the importance of the creation of designated institutions for displaced, orphaned or lost children.²⁷

Geneva Conventions' Additional Protocol

The Geneva Conventions' Additional Protocols²⁸ state children should be treated with utmost respect and care during political altercations. They specifically underline that children under the age of 15 should not be recruited in any way. If necessity for military personnel arises, priority should be given to the oldest of children between the ages of 15-18, but this requires a thorough assessment of each respective nation's situation.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Finally, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) introduces the concept of 3 fundamental principles in International Humanitarian Law. The principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution are widely regarded as the key to the implementation of humanitarian law. Distinction means differentiating between civilians and combatants, proportionality not causing any more harm by attacking excessively or more than is necessary to achieve a desired political outcome, and precaution taking all possible measures to minimize humanitarian harm. This applies to children.

Children's Rights Violations

In times of armed conflict, individual reality shifts from everyday life to a challenge of survival. People are not viewed as individuals anymore, but rather as targets. This dehumanization leads to the absolute disregard of children's rights, which has deadly repercussions.

The Six Grave Violations²⁹ serve as a framework the UN abides by when it comes to fundamental human rights' violations in children during conflict.

²⁶ Icrc.org, 2025, ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-25. Accessed 4 Aug. 2025.

²⁷ Icrc.org, 2023, ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-50.

²⁸ Icrc.org, 2022, ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977/article-77.

²⁹ Tremblay, Stephanie. "The Six Grave Violations." United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict | to Promote and Protect the Rights of All Children Affected by Armed Conflict, childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/



Figure 1: List depicting the Six Grave Violations³⁰

The deliberate or accidental killing and maiming of children is considered the first violation of Six. “Killing” includes forcibly taking children’s lives, whether it be through targeted personal attacks, genocidal acts or mass killings, which are still considered war crimes when targeting civilians. “Maiming” means causing permanent and oftentimes irreversible damage to children’s bodies through landmines, gunshots, torture, bombings and airstrikes.

Additionally, the recruitment or use of children as soldiers includes forced military recruitment and is considered the second violation. This encompasses both forced military recruitment through abductions and violent threats and voluntary recruitment in order to defend their communities or due to war propaganda. High numbers in illiteracy, poverty and hunger lead to feelings of helplessness, which drive recruitment.

Sexual violence against children is considered the third offense. This is a broad category, but it can include children’s use as sex slaves, abduction and forced sexual labour, overreliance on sex work as the only way to support their community, and rape/sexual harassment. Rape can be a characteristic of genocide, as can genital maiming.

Abduction, as the fourth offense, includes kidnapping children from their families or abducting them in public in order to force them to perform specific acts or hold them for ransom. In general, abduction refers to leading an individual someplace without their consent, and through violent means such as threats.

Attacks against schools or hospitals are considered direct attacks to the students and patients, a high number of whom are children. In fact, according to the current United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, approx. 700 attacks targeted children in overhead attacks³¹. This high number represents the innocent children that are deprived of their right to life, but also education and healthcare.

³⁰ rjohnson@savethechildren.ca. “Save the Children Canada.” Save the Children Canada, 17 Jan. 2024, www.savethechildren.ca/what-are-the-six-grave-violations-against-children-in-times-of-conflict/. Accessed 4 Aug. 2025.

³¹“Violations Soar against Children in Armed Conflict.” Human Rights Watch, 20 June 2025, www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/20/violations-soar-against-children-in-armed-conflict.

Finally, denying children humanitarian access is the sixth and final grave violation. A government blocking access to humanitarian corridors, denying entrance to humanitarian aid workers or peacekeepers or not delivering received aid is defying the basic principles of humanitarian law.

The UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (UNMRM) can help monitor these violations, although its reports are not always accurate. Its stated purpose includes “providing for the systematic gathering of accurate, timely, objective and reliable information on six grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict.”³² However, due to turbulent reporting conditions, it has become increasingly difficult to produce detailed reports. The MRM is managed by UNICEF’s Task Force.

Present - Day Violations

Effects

The six grave violations have detrimental effects on children’s lives, impacting their mental and physical health, as well as their overall wellbeing. In some instances, children’s growth is influenced, causing different variations of abnormalities in their cognitive and motor functions.

Specifically, children facing conflict often exhibit slurred speech and difficulty concentrating. Their motor functions are either affected by past injuries or maiming, rendering some disabled or unable to exercise their freedom of movement. It is a devastating reality : Children’s mental health is brushed under the rug, but most children suffer from conditions like depression, anxiety or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, more commonly referred to as PTSD.

Alongside these conditions, girls face pregnancies inflicted by rape or other forms of sexual misconduct. Even if they do not fall pregnant, the toll this kind of violence takes on their physical health should not be undermined.

Child soldiers that face the battlefield at incredibly young ages are placed in the positions of veterans. Of course, mortality rates amongst them are extremely high. However, even those that survive carry battle scars, trauma and a constant state of restlessness. The war has a debilitating impact on adults. One can thus imagine what it does to children.

Case Studies

True Forced Marriage and Torture Experience

³²Tremblay, Stephanie. “Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations – Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.” United Nations, childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/tools-for-action/monitoring-and-reporting/.

Khady, a now 18-year old girl from Nigeria, had dreams of becoming a doctor and worked hard in school before her sister was abducted by an armed gang. Out of fear of having the same fate, Khady dropped out of school, got married and became pregnant with twins at just 15 years old. Her family was then abducted by an armed group, by whom her husband was killed. She was raped, tortured and married against her will. Khady ran away and received aid through UNICEF, but her family remains missing. She was effectively robbed of her childhood and stripped of countless of her rights as a human being. She experienced unimaginable loss and pain before reaching adulthood.³³

True Child Soldier Experience

Ishmael Beah, a present day renowned author, activist and Goodwill Ambassador, stated : “I had no desire to survive because I had lost everything. I thought I would become crazy...”³⁴. He was referring to his childhood, growing up as a child soldier during the civil war in Sierra Leone. Ismael was orphaned during the war at the age of 13. A few months later, he was recruited by the armed forces. Ishmael recalls possessing lots of arms and ammunition, but no medicine, food or healthcare. He also recalls being forced to commit violent acts and losing all his personal relationships. Looking back to when he was saved, Ishmael mentions a distinct memory of his saviours. “They put us in a car and told us we would become children again.”³⁵

Impact

Through these examples, the psychological impact conflict has throughout a child’s life with an emphasis on their transition into adulthood is evident. Conflict does not only bear physical repercussions : It is a deeply traumatising occurrence. Oftentimes, children give up their fundamental rights out of fear, like Khady had to pause her education. They have to endure hardship and bear arms alone, like Ishmael. Most notably, they are stripped of their humanity.

Genocidal Acts

The crime of genocide is characterised by the desire to wipe out a distinct race in whole or in part³⁶. Genocide is different from other war crimes because it requires direct contact between the offenders, usually combatants, and the victims/civilians. For example, genocide can be enforced through genital maiming, because the perpetrators express a desire to render

³³“Geneva Palais Briefing Note on Grave Violations against Children in West and Central Africa.” UNICEF UK, 2021, www.unicef.org/uk/press-releases/geneva-palais-briefing-note-on-grave-violations-against-children-in-west-and-central-africa/? Accessed 4 Aug. 2025.

³⁴ UNICEF. “A Long Journey: The Story of Ishmael Beah.” Www.unicef.org, UNICEF, 11 Nov. 2020, www.unicef.org/stories/long-journey-story-of-ishmael-beah.

³⁵UNICEF. “A Long Journey: The Story of Ishmael Beah.” Www.unicef.org, UNICEF, 11 Nov. 2020, www.unicef.org/stories/long-journey-story-of-ishmael-beah.

³⁶ ---. “Definitions of Genocide and Related Crimes | United Nations.” United Nations, 2025, www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/definition.

the women of a specific race infertile, so as to limit the existence of that race. Bombings differ from genocide because they do not target a specific group or intend to end its existence.³⁷

The crime of genocide is perhaps the most detrimental war crime. It not only expresses an inhumane desire to murder civilians, but enforces a monstrous ideology of wiping out a specific peoples, their culture, customs and unique ideas. Genocide is precisely detrimental because of the hate it spreads, going against core international law values like biodiversity, humane treatment and respect.

Children exposed to the crime of genocide face massive repercussions. All six grave violations are committed at once with the purpose of wiping out their ethnicity. Few survive without any physical scarring, and the ones who do face psychological consequences, caused by deeply ingrained trauma. In fact, a study conducted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) concluded that 10% of children exposed to the grave violations mentioned above are 98% likely to develop post traumatic conditions. This means that the more exposed children are during conflict, the more likely they are to be deeply traumatised into adulthood.³⁸

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Yemen

Yemen has been facing periods of instability, economic recession and countless humanitarian violations due to its complicated history. The current hyperactivity of an armed and religious group named the Houthis, which has gained international recognition for hijacking multiple commercial ships near the Red Sea,³⁹ has exemplified the humanitarian situation within the nation. The Houthis have made successful attempts at overthrowing the Yemeni government. Even though their governance is strongly opposed by multiple international powers, they influence a great portion of the country, and constantly engage in combat, placing the nation in a state of civil war.⁴⁰

More than seven years of war have left approximately 11 million children⁴¹ in need of humanitarian assistance, according to data presented by UNICEF in 2022. Thousands of children have been either killed, maimed or recruited during the ongoing conflict. Certain

³⁷United Nations. "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide." United Nations, 9 Dec. 1948, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-prevention-and-punishment-crime-genocide.

³⁸War Childhood Museum. "Impact of War on Children's Mental Health." War Childhood Museum, warchildhood.org/impact-of-war-on-childrens-mental-health/.

³⁹BBC. "Who Are the Houthi Rebels and Why Are They Attacking Red Sea Ships?" BBC, 15 Mar. 2024, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67614911.

⁴⁰HI. "7 Years after the Start of the Conflict in Yemen, the Humanitarian Situation Is Worse than Ever." 7 Years after the Start of the Conflict in Yemen, the Humanitarian Situation Is Worse than Ever, 23 Mar. 2022, www.hi-us.org/en/news/7-years-after-the-start-of-the-conflict-in-yemen-the-humanitarian-situation-is-worse-than-ever?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=Grant%20. Accessed 4 Aug. 2025.

⁴¹---. "Yemen Crisis." Unicef.org, UNICEF, 2023, www.unicef.org/emergencies/yemen-crisis.

research concluded that 66% ⁴²of the Yemeni population is in need of aid as a whole. Furthermore, evidence suggests the Houthis engage in the arbitrary detention of children, adults and even UN personnel⁴³. Children's living standard is undignified: They do not have access to proper resources, such as water and food. Instead, they are subject to traumatising situations, such as child recruitment, sexual abuse or the loss of family, while simultaneously not having any place they can call home.

Syria

The Syrian civil war is ongoing and began approx. 13 years ago. In the time frame of those 13 years, countless children have been subject to atrocities.

Nearly 2.7 million⁴⁴ children - refugees currently reside outside the nation. Due to the humanitarian violations present, one - third of children in Syria are reported to carry psychological scars, fatigue and exhibit psychosomatic symptoms⁴⁵. Nearly 13,000 children have been killed or subject to life threatening injuries since the start of the war ⁴⁶. Those who survive violent encounters are left with disabilities without prospects of care. Furthermore, a staggering percentage of deaths is caused by the encounter of landmines or bombs.

South Sudan

The situation in South Sudan is very complicated and dates back to the formation of Sudan after the colonial era. The rise of armed groups, gang violence, forced recruitment and poverty in the newly emerged nation has taken a drastic toll on children's safety and wellbeing. South Sudan has been involved in two civil wars, both of which had deadly effects on children's dignity.

South Sudan's future as an emerging nation and the youngest nation in the world was not guaranteed. In the present day, child recruitment is ongoing, education is limited, and poverty continues to flourish. Even



⁴² ---. "7 Years after the Start of the Conflict in Yemen, the Humanitarian Situation Is Worse than Ever." 7 Years after the Start of the Conflict in Yemen, the Humanitarian Situation Is Worse than Ever, 23 Mar. 2022, www.hi-us.org/en/news/7-years-after-the-start-of-the-conflict-in-yemen-the-humanitarian-situation-is-worse-than-ever?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=Grant%20.

⁴³ "World Report 2025: Rights Trends in Yemen." Human Rights Watch, 17 Dec. 2024, www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/yemen?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=16363698676&gbraid=0AAAArFXchLpDmd4Nbn5YChvMQVtXnJn&gclid=Cj0KCQjwhO3DBhDkARIsANxrhTrMIPcWLoFTb7YVfqqH3dP3niJrsVkrRcuajDXgnGra2a9UFodRwgaAjesEALw_wcB. Accessed 4 Aug. 2025.

⁴⁴"War in Syria: Children Still Suffering Profound Impacts | UNICEF USA." Www.unicefusa.org, www.unicefusa.org/stories/war-syria-children-still-suffering-profound-impacts.

⁴⁵"War in Syria: Children Still Suffering Profound Impacts | UNICEF USA." Www.unicefusa.org, www.unicefusa.org/stories/war-syria-children-still-suffering-profound-impacts.

⁴⁶"War in Syria: Children Still Suffering Profound Impacts | UNICEF USA." Www.unicefusa.org, www.unicefusa.org/stories/war-syria-children-still-suffering-profound-impacts.

though South Sudan has ratified the UNCRC, the situation within the nation is very unstable. About 16,000 children⁴⁷, mostly boys, have been recruited by the military since the start of the conflict.

Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has mainly affected the nation's civilian population, a large percentage of which includes children, and infrastructure.

The most prominent human rights violations in the country are mass abductions and killings. Evidence suggests Ukrainian children are kidnapped by Russian forces and sent to military camps outside their home nation⁴⁸. In fact, approximately 35,000 Ukrainian children are thought to be missing since the war effort began. Additionally, death, injury and family separation rates remain at an all time high. Vast distances of what used to be Ukrainian territory are now lined with landmines and other concealed explosives, which have and continue to injure a multitude of children and underage persons, rendering them disabled.

Afghanistan

The situation in Afghanistan is categorized by the systemic oppression of the Afghani population, especially that of women and girls. More than half the population⁴⁹ require humanitarian assistance due to the effects of combat and disease outbreaks.

Afghani children face high mortality rates, malnutrition, forced marriage and sexual violence on a daily basis. Afghanistan has the highest number of recorded terrorist attacks aimed at schools worldwide⁵⁰. These attacks are primarily directed at girls, due to the prominence of the misogynistic belief that women should not be involved in education, but rather comply with patriarchal expectations, enforced by the Taliban. Various armed groups recruit boys in extremely young ages, who often comply with their requirements due to deeply ingrained beliefs, a sense of responsibility over their families, the women of which are banned from employment, or a combination of both.

The United Nations (UN)

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)⁵¹ is a subsidiary organisation of the UN dedicated to "protecting and promoting"⁵² the rights of children and their dignity. It assumed operations on 11 December 1946 in New York in order to meet the needs of

⁴⁷Humanium. "Children of South Sudan - Humanium." Humanium, 2011, www.humanium.org/en/south-sudan/.

⁴⁸Kumar, Ruchi. "“Basically Impossible to Get Them Back”: Russia’s Mass Abduction of Ukrainian Children Is a War Crime, Say Experts." The Guardian, The Guardian, 27 June 2025, www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/27/russia-ukrainian-children-abduction-war-crime.

⁴⁹Unicef. "Children in Afghanistan." Wwww.unicef.org, 2021, www.unicef.org/afghanistan/children-afghanistan.

⁵⁰Humanium. "Children of Afghanistan - Humanium." Humanium, 2017, www.humanium.org/en/afghanistan/.

⁵¹ "UNICEF." Unicef.org, UNICEF, www.unicef.org/.

⁵²"UNICEF." Unicef.org, UNICEF, www.unicef.org/.

children in post - war Europe and China. UNICEF makes major contributions to children affected by conflict and geopolitical tensions. Specifically, it focuses on their health, education, safety and rights. UNICEF offers medical assistance, learning support, advocacy, child rescue missions, birth registration and emergency response, aiming to alleviate children' s suffering.

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary- General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAC)⁵³ focuses on advocating for children's suffering in conflict conditions and sensitising the public on the matter, as well as identifying policy making measures.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
11th December, 1946	Establishment of UNICEF
10th December, 1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by UNGA
12th August, 1949	Geneva Convention IV
20th November, 1989	Adoption of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
25th May, 2000	Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict
1st July, 2002	Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court - child recruitment becomes a war crime
9th July, 2011	South Sudan gains independence
15th March, 2011	Start of the Syrian Civil War
26th March, 2015	Yemeni Civil War Escalation

⁵³"UNICEF." Unicef.org, UNICEF, www.unicef.org/.

15th August, 2021	Taliban retake control of Afghanistan
October, 2022	Evidence of the abduction of 35,000 Ukrainian Children arises

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)⁵⁴ is a legally binding international treaty that defines the rights of those under the age of 18 years. It counts as the most ratified treaty of its kind⁵⁵, hinting at the severity and importance of preserving children's rights, honouring their dignity and alleviating suffering. The UNCRC was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 in order to recognise children's individual importance as "social, economic, political, civil and cultural actors"⁵⁶. UNICEF is named as a source of expertise in the document since it contributed significantly to its creation.

The UNCRC's impact on children affected by conflict worldwide was no less than fundamental. Due to its creation, millions of children's suffering has been recognised and put to an end. Furthermore, by ratifying it, nations expressed a desire to protect children's safety, a significant step in the sector of international security.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)⁵⁷ was drafted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10th December 1948 and ratified by all 193 Member States. It outlines fundamental human rights every human being is entitled to. The UDHR was adopted after the Second World War, in order to prevent the atrocities that took place amidst it. Today, the UDHR serves as a framework set to outline individual freedoms and liberties anyone is entitled to, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion or any other personal beliefs. Some of these include the right to life, the freedom of speech, right to education, the right to housing and healthcare.

⁵⁴"Convention on the Rights of the Child." OHCHR, United Nations, 1989, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.

⁵⁵"Convention on the Rights of the Child." OHCHR, United Nations, 1989, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.
chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R40484/R40484.25.pdf

⁵⁶"History of Child Rights." Unicef.org, www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/history-child-rights.

⁵⁷"Universal Declaration of Human Rights." United Nations, 1948, www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

Children, as human beings, are entitled to all rights mentioned in the UDHR. Even during conflict, conventions such as these shall not be disregarded when it comes to civilians and underage persons.

Geneva Conventions

The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols⁵⁸ are legally-binding documents that define war crimes. They are centered around legality in times of armed conflict, political altercations and war. They include the definitions of all war crimes, such as the crime to genocide.

War crimes are crimes in times of war, conflict or general clashes. They encompass crimes directed to civilians with malicious or non malicious intent, as well as the use of biochemical weapons and certain other explosives.

Roman Statute of the International Criminal Court (RSICC)

The Roman Statute of the International Criminal Court (RSICC)⁵⁹ classifies the use of child soldiers as a blatant war crime. It is key to tackling the issue due to this distinction, aiming towards the humane treatment of children during war.

Security Council Resolutions no. 1612+ no. 2427

The Security Council Resolutions no. 1612⁶⁰ and no. 2427 created the UN's Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and outlined the importance of child protection during armed conflict.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

There have been numerous previous attempts to solve children's rights' violations in the past, all of which were ultimately proven to be ineffective when confronted with conflict realities.

Third-party mediation

Intervention efforts through third party mediation have been tested. These ranged from negotiations between Member States with a UN representative present to direct efforts on the battlefield. Peacekeeping missions and humanitarian aid are great solutions to preserve

⁵⁸Cornell Law School. "Geneva Conventions and Their Additional Protocols." LII / Legal Information Institute, Legal Information Institute, 2017, www.law.cornell.edu/wex/geneva_conventions_and_their_additional_protocols.

⁵⁹Year: 2005), UN Security Council (60th. "Resolution 1612 (2005) /: Adopted by the Security Council at Its 5235th Meeting, on 26 July 2005." Digitallibrary.un.org, 26 July 2005, digitallibrary.un.org/record/554197?v=pdf.

⁶⁰Year: 2005), UN Security Council (60th. "Resolution 1612 (2005) /: Adopted by the Security Council at Its 5235th Meeting, on 26 July 2005." Digitallibrary.un.org, 26 July 2005, digitallibrary.un.org/record/554197?v=pdf.

children's health and overall wellbeing. However, they do not promote the long term honour of children's rights.

Child Soldier Disarmament and Reintegration Programs

Child Soldier Disarmament and Reintegration Programs were implemented in countless nations. These served as attempts for the reintegration of former child soldiers into society. However, they lacked the resources to ensure their correct rehabilitation, and focused more on the physical aspect rather than the mental. Thus, child soldiers left these programs rehabilitated physically, but not lifted from the mental burden they became exposed to during battles.

Educational Initiatives

Finally, education initiatives have been launched with the purpose of educating children residing in conflict zones. Much like the last example, this structure failed because educators were not properly equipped and sensitized to teach in conflict zones, and because they became targets amidst violent clashes. Different subsidiary bodies have tried setting up educational centers and schools in impoverished areas. These are often targeted through armed groups wishing to inflict harm on minors or even viewed as a threat by independent militia groups.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

In order to honour children's rights under all circumstances, even in conflict, nations must strengthen various existing strategies and successfully implement new ones to alleviate suffering.

Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian Aid can be defined as a form of aid set to alleviate human suffering. It includes delivering basic necessities, such as clean water, proper nutritional meals, shelter and healthcare services to people, in this case children, in urgent need. The delivery of humanitarian aid is a short term solution meant to ease the situation hurt, displaced and impoverished children face every day amidst violent clashes. In order to effectively distribute this aid through UN volunteers, personnel and designated military aid, humanitarian corridors should be strengthened between nations worldwide. Governments that attempt to block these corridors in any way need to be held accountable for committing a grave violation. Security has to be enhanced between the corridors, so as to not exacerbate the conflict. These pathways would have to be preserved through mutual, bilateral communication between nations.

Humanitarian Aid can also consist of psychosocial services offered to children in need. While this is a short term solution compared to rehabilitation facilities, it is an integral part of alleviating children's suffering. Psychosocial services include sessions with trained therapists and volunteer support.

Monitoring

Stronger treaty monitoring mechanisms consist of a variety of profound technological innovations set to enforce absolute compliance with treaties by all signatories. If they were introduced, these mechanisms would implement personalized evaluation in different conflict zones, through collecting data and examining children's quality of life. Using mechanisms instead of human reporters could prove to be beneficial : Machines are not affected by dangerous situations, and have proven to be more reliable witnesses. An example of such technologies could be drones.

However, in recent years, ethical concerns regarding the use of these mechanisms have been expressed on an international scale. Ethical implications around surveillance arise : How will these drones ensure personal information is protected? Is recording individuals, analysing their data and their features ethical, or could it lead to identity theft and other harmful practices in the age of Artificial Intelligence? Ultimately, privacy concerns regarding children's identity scanning have been voiced globally.

To ensure drone usage protects privacy, distinct usage frameworks and guidelines would have to be created, ensuring anonymity.

Rehabilitation

In order to ensure long term, positive effects on children's lives, their rehabilitation is of utmost importance. Different rehabilitation centers should be established : Centers for women and girls, where they can share their experiences, receive shelter and aid, psychological support and an education. Moreover, centers for child combatants that prioritise their psychological rehabilitation, offer them resources and educate them to persevere in the competitive employment market later on. Displaced children's homes, orphanages and other existing state institutions should be exemplified through funding and monitoring, to ensure their standards remain ethical and up to date with international law.

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