

CHILDREN and ARMED CONFLICT REPORT of the SECRETARY-GENERAL

ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY · 2018

TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS 2018

Children continue to be severely affected by armed conflict globally, with more than 24,000 grave violations against children verified in 2018

- A record number of more than **12,000 children were verified killed or maimed in 2018**, with highest numbers in Afghanistan (3,062), Syria (1,854) and Yemen (1,689).
- Out of more than **7,000 children recruited and used globally**, Somalia remained the country with the highest number of children suffering that violation (2,300) followed by Nigeria (1,947) and Syria (806).
- Nearly 2,500 children were verified as abducted in 2018, more than half of them in Somalia (1,609). **Abduction is often compounded by other violations** such as recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and sexual violence.
- Attacks on schools and hospitals decreased globally, but significantly intensified in **Afghanistan** (254) partly due to the 2018 October Parliamentary elections, and in **Syria** (225) where the highest number of attacks was verified since the beginning of the conflict. In addition, in **Mali, 827 schools were closed** as of December 2018, a sharp increase compared to 2017 (657), which prevented 244,000 children from access to education.
- **Schools and hospitals continued to be used for military purposes**, with a fourfold increase verified in Yemen. In South Sudan, 26 schools and 7 hospital were used by Government Security Forces and armed groups for military purposes. In Syria, 24 schools and 3 hospitals were used as ammunition storage, military base and detention facilities.
- In 2018, **933 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against boys and girls were verified in all 20 country situations**. Somalia and DRC persist as the situations with the highest verified figures.
- A total of **795 incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children** were verified, a significant decrease compared to 2017, the majority in Yemen (275), Mali (170) and CAR (120).
- The **deprivation of liberty of children for their alleged association to parties to conflict** remained an acute protection concerns over 2018. In Iraq, at least 902 children remained in detention on national security-related charged for their alleged association with armed groups, primarily ISIL. In Libya, serious concerns



regarding detention conditions for refugee and migrant children were reported.

- **The use of UXOs, IEDs, and antipersonnel mines has been the cause of a great number of deaths and many injuries** in most country situations while airstrikes by government forces and forces allied to governments have led to increased fatalities. Some 2,756 Palestinian children were injured and 59 killed in the context of the Great March of Return demonstrations.

Progress

- **Two new actions plans were signed in the Central African Republic** with the *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique* (June 2018) and the *Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique* (FPRC, June 2019), both operating under the ex-Seleka coalition, covering the four violations for which they are listed.
- The **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)** signed an Action Plan (June 2019) with the United Nations to end and prevent the Recruitment and use of children, the **first Action Plan with a listed party in Syria**.
- In **Yemen**, the Government recommitted to its 2014 Action Plan on recruitment and use of children with the UN by adopting a Road Map at the end of 2018. The Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United Nations in March 2019 to increase the protection of children during its military operations in Yemen; its roadmap is being finalized.
- In **Myanmar**, the Government formed an inter-ministerial committee to prevent all six grave violations and to support the current Action Plan on recruitment and use. The UN engaged with all but one listed armed groups and commitments are being sought and are close to signature.
- The Action Plan with the **Afghan National Police** resulted in the establishment of Child Protection Units in the recruitment centres of all 34 provinces to prevent the recruitment and use of children within their ranks. The Government took additional measures with the entry into force of the revised Penal Code explicitly criminalize the recruitment of children, including *bacha bazi* and falsification of *tazkeras*.
- In **Colombia**, Decree 1434 was issued, adopting a public policy guidance on prevention and recruitment and use, and sexual violence against children by armed groups.

20 Situations of Conflict with Parties Listed in 14 Countries

64 PARTIES TO CONFLICT LISTED FOR GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN

9 SECURITY FORCES

55 ARMED GROUPS

AT LEAST 13,600 NUMBER OF CHILD SOLDIERS RELEASED IN 2018 AND BENEFITING FROM REINTEGRATION SUPPORT

- The Government of **South Sudan** acceded to the **Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC)** in September 2018.
- **2,253 children were separated from armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**, 25 per cent of which separated on a voluntary basis following awareness raising and engagement by the United Nations. In **Nigeria**, the Action Plan with the CJTF led to the separation of 833 children in 2018. In the **Central African Republic**, dialogue with armed groups enable the separation of 785 children.
- **The Safe Schools Declaration** was endorsed by **Mali** in February 2018.
- The **Philippines** enacted the Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Bill into national law, and **Somalia** incorporated the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law.
- The Federal Government of **Somalia** elaborated a roadmap to expedite the implementation of the two Action Plans signed in 2012.
- Reduction of the intensity of conflict led to a **decrease in violations against children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Philippines and Iraq**.

Challenges

- In 2018, **verified cases of children killed and maimed reached record levels** since the creation of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) in 2005, with unprecedented number attributed to national and international forces and casualties caused by UXOs, IEDs and landmines.
- **Child casualties resulting from aerial operations significantly increased**. It remains imperative that all parties abide by the principals of distinction, proportionality and military necessity, in line with International Laws.

- Ongoing conflict and military operations, widespread insecurity, severe and persistent constraints on humanitarian access, staff reduction, threats and violence against humanitarian personnel and infrastructure **prevented child protection actors to provide support to victims of violations in several country situations.**
- **Rape and other forms of sexual violence remained significantly under-reported**, including when perpetrated against boys, due to stigma, involvement of powerful perpetrators and fears of retaliation, lack of services and concerns for survivors and witnesses' protection. Widespread impunity and lack of accountability also discourage children and witnesses from reporting the violation.

- **Ensuring a child-rights based response based on the best interest of the child should be prioritized** when working towards ending and preventing grave violations against children and providing reintegration support to those affected, including young mothers with children born of rape.
- **Thousands of children remain detained around the world for their actual or alleged association with armed groups.** In December 2018, 1,248 children from many nationalities were deprived of liberty in North-East Syria; 902 in Iraq, 418 in Nigeria; and 375 in Somalia. Children should be primarily treated as victims. Alternatives to detention should be prioritized whenever possible and detention should only be used as a last resort and for the shortest period of time.

Action Plans under implementation



AFGHANISTAN

Afghan National Police, including the Afghan Local Police
(Recruitment and use)



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique
(Recruitment and use, Killing and maiming, Rape and other forms of sexual violence, Attacks on schools and hospitals)



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
(Sexual violence)



MALI

Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, including the Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad
(Recruitment and use, Rape and other forms of sexual violence)



MYANMAR

Tatmadaw Army, including integrated border guard forces
(Recruitment and use)



NIGERIA

Civilian Joint Task Force
(Recruitment and use)



SOMALIA

Somali National Army
(Recruitment and use, Killing and maiming)



SOUTH SUDAN

Sudan People's Liberation Army
(Recruitment and use, Killing and maiming, Rape and other forms of sexual violence, Abductions)

Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition

(Recruitment and use, Killing and maiming)



SUDAN

Sudan Liberation Army/ Minni Minnawi
(Recruitment and use)

Justice and Equality Movement
(Recruitment and use)

Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N)
(Recruitment and use)



YEMEN

Government forces, including the Yemeni Armed forces
(Recruitment and use)

- ⦿ **The specific challenges facing children of Foreign Fighters (FF) should be taken into account** and States should take responsibility for their nationals, including their children, and ensure that no child is deprived of a nationality and that actions are taken with the best interest of the child as the primary consideration.

Developments and Concerns: Prevention, Reintegration and the best interest of the child

- ⦿ Children exposed to the highest levels of violence should not be further ostracized once released from armed groups and armed forces. **The best interest of the child should be the primary consideration**, allowing these children to be considered primarily as what they are: victims of a conflict.
- ⦿ **The prevention of grave violations against children is instrumental in building sustainable peace.** The development of national and regional prevention plans, in line with UN Security Council resolution 2427 (2018), would solidify gains and commitments into national instruments, thus ensuring the prevention of future violations.
- ⦿ **The provision of sustainable and predictable resources for reintegration programs addressing children released from armed groups and armed forces is crucial** element to move from cycles of conflict to a sustainable peace. Launched in 2018, the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers, co-chaired by OSRSG-CAAC and UNICEF, aims to further explore and address existing gaps and needs for the reintegration of all children affected by conflict.

The UN Security Council has Identified 5 Triggers for Listing Parties to Conflict:

RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN

UN Security Council Resolution 1379 (2001)

61 Parties to Conflict **7 State Actors**
..... **56 Non-State Actors**

KILLING AND MAIMING CHILDREN

UN Security Council Resolution 1882 (2009)

24 Parties to Conflict **5 State Actors**
..... **19 Non-State Actors**

RAPE AND OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

UN Security Council Resolution 1882 (2009)

20 Parties to Conflict **4 State Actors**
..... **16 Non-State Actors**

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS

UN Security Council Resolution 1998 (2011)

13 Parties to Conflict **2 State Actors**
..... **11 Non-State Actors**

ABDUCTION OF CHILDREN

UN Security Council Resolution 2225 (2015)

15 Parties to Conflict **1 State Actors**
..... **14 Non-State Actors**

Excerpts from the Secretary-General's Recommendations

- ⦿ I am deeply concerned by the scale and severity of the grave violations against children committed in 2018, notably the record high level of killing and maiming. I call upon all parties to immediately end and take all necessary measures to prevent such grave violations, including through ensuring mitigation measures and enhancing training on preventing the six grave violations, as well as ensuring strong accountability measures for perpetrators of crimes against children.
- ⦿ Detention remained an issue of concern and I reiterate that this measure should only be used as a last resort, for the shortest period of time, and that alternatives to detention should be prioritized whenever possible. Moreover, I urge Member States to treat children allegedly associated with armed forces or groups, including groups designated as terrorist by the UN, primarily as victims.
- ⦿ I enjoin the donor community to engage in a discussion to better address the funding gaps for the reintegration of children, thereby allowing child protection actors to react swiftly to the release of children and put in place long-term viable alternatives to military life, notably by placing a specific focus on girls, on psychosocial support and on education programmes and vocational training.
- ⦿ I call on Member States to engage closely with the UN to facilitate the return or relocation of foreign children and women actually or allegedly affiliated with groups designated as terrorist by the UN, and to ensure a coordinated response based on international law and on children's rights, bearing in mind their best interest.

READ THE ANNUAL REPORT: <https://www.undocs.org/s/2019/509> <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org>