**FACT SHEET**

**Children and Armed Conflict**

Children are the primary victims of armed conflict. Their suffering bears many faces, in the midst of armed conflict and its aftermath. Children are killed or maimed, made orphans, abducted, deprived of education and health care, and left with deep emotional scars and trauma.

Children are uniquely vulnerable to military recruitment. Hundreds of thousands are associated with armed forces and non-State armed groups. Child soldiers are victims, whose participation in conflict bears serious implications for their physical and emotional well-being.

The widespread and easy availability of small arms and light weapons in conflict continues to represent a major factor in enabling the recruitment and use of child soldiers. These weapons are cheap, light and simple to operate.

Rape and sexual violation of children is increasingly a characteristic of conflict. Such violence is often perpetrated against boys and girls in a rule of law vacuum.

Children are caught in the crossfire as victims of indiscriminate mortar shelling, aerial bombardments or suicide attacks. Systematic and deliberate attacks on schoolchildren, teachers and school buildings have escalated in certain conflicts.

The changing nature of conflict in certain parts of the world also impacts on children in different ways and raises increasing concerns: child suicide bombers, children in detention and children as victims of collateral damage.

The issue of rehabilitation and reintegration is critical for war-affected children to find a new existence after a life of violence, distress and alienation.

Today, there are 22 situations of concern in which grave child violations are taking place. These include Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, India, Iraq, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nepal, Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, Uganda and Yemen.
UN Response

Beginning with 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 1993, following a recommendation by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the General Assembly, Ms. Graça Machel of Mozambique was appointed by the Secretary-General to undertake a study on the impact of armed conflict on children. In 1996, following the submission of the report that depicted the terrible reality of children in war, the General Assembly adopted resolution 51/77, in which it recommended that the Secretary-General appoints a Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

From 1998 to 2005, Mr. Olara Otunnu served as the UN Under-Secretary General and Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. In April 2006 Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy took on this position.

In her role as a moral and independent voice for the protection of war-affected children, she:

- **proposes ideas** and approaches to Member States and partner organizations to enhance the protection of children in armed conflict;
- **advocates, builds awareness and gives prominence** to the rights of war-affected children;
- **undertakes diplomatic initiatives** to facilitate the work of operational actors on the ground.

The Office of the Special Representative is working in close collaboration with operational partners such as UNICEF that designs, develops and implements projects for the release of child soldiers and their rehabilitation and reintegration.

Progress

Collaborative efforts of the international community over the last ten years have resulted in tangible results for the children and armed conflict agenda.

Some of the major advances since the creation of the mandate of the Special Representative include:

- increased global awareness of the issue
- the strengthening of international norms and standards for the protection of children
- the deployment of Child Protection Advisors in UN peacekeeping and political missions.

Advocacy efforts by the Special Representative and its partners have also led to a systematic engagement of the Security Council and a progressive placing of the issue of children and armed conflict on the international peace and security agenda.

In 2005, following the adoption of the landmark Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) an unprecedented monitoring and reporting mechanism to better address violations committed against children in armed conflict was established. Its purpose is to gather timely and reliable information on these violations. Perpetrators may be held accountable on the basis of such information. The Security Council can also take direct actions against perpetrators such as travel bans, freezing of assets and a ban on export or supply of small arms and light weapons.
Important precedents are being set in the fight to end impunity for crimes against children. The most prominent developments include the arrest by the International Criminal Court of Germain Katanga, former leader of the Patriotic Resistance Force in Ituri (FRPI) and of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, founder and leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for the conscription and enlistment of children under the age of 15 and the use of children for active participation in hostilities.

Youth

The participation of children and youth in the child rights agenda is guaranteed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 12. The Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and her partners are striving for further involvement of youth in communication and advocacy efforts as well as in the development and implementation of programs for war-affected children.

Victims of war are the most convincing and powerful advocates for child rights. Meeting with war-affected children is therefore a key priority for Ms. Coomaraswamy during her field visits. She collects their testimonies of war and includes them in her official speeches. During her visit in Uganda in May 2010, she publicly called on the witnesses of war to make their voices heard in international fora like the International Criminal Court to end impunity of child rights violators. Former child soldiers are regularly invited to Security Council meetings presenting their childhood stories of detention and alienation.


The Network for Young People Affected by War (NYPAW) - an NGO made up of former child soldiers and witnesses of war which promotes and supports the rights of younger generations caught up in war has also been a tremendous asset for the empowerment of the children and armed conflict agenda. The Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict includes the network in most of her office’s advocacy initiatives.

The Special Representative will closely follow the youth activities surrounding the International Year of Youth 2010-2011. Reaching out and mobilising youth for the plight of child soldiers, will be a priority of the office’s advocacy strategy during this year. The office will seek particular support for its campaign “zero under eighteen” aimed at universal ratification of the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict by 2012 that guarantees a world free of children that are used as soldiers, spies, human shields and suicide bombers.

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