



GENERAL ASSEMBLY 3

SEZMUN II. HRD SYMPOSIUM

Maintaining Global Security and Justice in Today's World

AGENDA ITEM: CHILD SOLDIERS IN PROLONGED CONFLICTS IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES

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Dear Delegates of the SOCHUM committee,

It is my utmost pleasure and honour to welcome each and every one of you to SEZMUN'25. I am thrilled to accompany you on this journey of negotiation, cooperation, and intellectual growth. My name is Hazal Çakar and I am honored to be your committee chair at SEZMUN'25 in the Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM).

The Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) aims to produce peaceful solutions to social, humanitarian, and cultural problems around the world. It examines human rights issues, listens to experts, and works with other UN agencies to create decisions that influence practices in member countries.

In this year's SOCHUM committee as we discuss critical global issues, our primary agenda will focus on child soldiers in prolonged conflicts in third world countries.

I am looking forward to seeing you all and engaging in a delightful session.

Sincerely,

Hazal Çakar

Dear Delegates of the SOCHUM committee,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM). My name is Defne Gökden, and I am truly honored to serve as your co-chair for this year's SEZMUN conference.

Our agenda, "child soldiers in prolonged conflicts in third world countries," is a very meaningful and sensitive topic. Around the world, many children are still being forced into armed conflicts, losing their chance at education, safety, and a normal childhood. In our committee, we will work together to find practical and creative solutions to end this issue and to protect children's rights everywhere.

I encourage you to speak confidently, listen to one another, and collaborate to create strong resolutions. Remember, MUN is not only about debate but it's also about understanding, respect, and teamwork.

I am very excited to meet you all and to hear your ideas during our sessions.

Best regards,

Defne Gökden

Introduction to the Agenda

Throughout history, children in conflict zones in underdeveloped regions have been systematically exploited in roles such as combatants, cooks, porters, messengers, and spies. Between 2005 and 2022, more than 105,000 children were verified to be forcefully used as child soldiers by parties to conflict, although the experts believe the actual number of cases is much higher. This ongoing violation of their rights not only undermines their psychological well-being but also severely disrupts their access to education and long-term development. The normalization of such practices reflects broader systemic failures and demands urgent attention from the international community.

Definition of Key Terms

- *Child Soldier*: Any person under the age of 18 who is used by armed forces or groups in any capacity.
- *Prolonged Conflict*: Long-term, often unresolved wars or violent struggles.
- *UNICEF*: UNICEF stands for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. It is a United Nations agency responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children around the world.
- *Department of Peace Operations (DPO)*: The Department of Peace Operations (DPO) is a department of the United Nations charged with the planning, preparation, management, and direction of UN peacekeeping operations.
- *Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict*: The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC) is a part of the United Nations system that focuses on protecting the rights of children affected by armed conflict.
- *International Criminal Court (ICC)*: The International Criminal Court is a permanent international court established to investigate and prosecute individuals for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community, including genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression.

What Is a Child Soldier?



According to the Paris Principles (2007), a child soldier is defined as “any person below 18 years of age who is or has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity.” This includes not only fighters, but also cooks, porters, messengers, spies, and children subjected to sexual exploitation.

Children are used because they are vulnerable, easy to manipulate, and often seen as expendable by armed groups. In many cases, children are abducted from schools or villages.

Historical Background

The use of children in war has existed for centuries, the modern day reality where children are systematically forced, and used in violent conflicts, has become far more common in the 20th and 21st centuries, especially in regions suffering from long-term instability and fragile governments.

During the 20th century, especially in the aftermath of World War II and during the Cold War, the emergence of irregular militias, insurgent groups, and civil wars in the Global South led to a dramatic rise in the use of child soldiers. Conflicts in countries such as Uganda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sri Lanka, and Colombia witnessed the widespread abduction and forced conscription of children, often under brutal conditions. In these contexts, children were used not only as combatants but also as porters, spies, sex slaves, and suicide bombers.

The usage of children in prolonged conflicts is often driven by a mix of factors, including poverty, displacement, lack of education, and the breakdown of family structures. Armed groups exploit these vulnerabilities to strengthen their ranks, often using drugs, and threats to maintain control over child recruits.

Historical Background

Key UN Milestones and Legal Frameworks:

1989 – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the most universally accepted human rights instrument, ratified by every country in the world except two. The Convention incorporates the full range of human rights - civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights - of children into one single document. The Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989 and entered into force in September 1990. The Convention outlines in 41 articles the human rights to be respected and protected for every child under the age of eighteen years.

1996 – Machel Report: In her ground-breaking report presented to the General Assembly, Graça Machel, a former Minister of Education of Mozambique, highlighted the disproportionate impact of war on children and identified them as the primary victims of armed conflict. The report led to the adoption of the General Assembly's Resolution 51/77 which created the mandate and recommended that the Secretary-General appoint a Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children. The resolution also requested that the Special Representative prepare reports on the situation of children affected by armed conflict to be presented to the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council.

Historical Background

2000 – Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC): This protocol raises the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities to 18 and prohibits compulsory recruitment under that age. It has since been ratified by over 170 states.

2005 – UN Security Council Resolution 1612: This resolution established the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations against children in armed conflict. It focuses on six grave violations, including recruitment and use of child soldiers.

UN Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict: Since 2002, the Secretary-General has submitted annual reports to the Security Council listing state and non-state actors that recruit and use children. These are often referred to as the "List of Shame."

Action Plans: Armed forces and groups listed in the Secretary-General's reports are required to sign Action Plans with the UN to end and prevent child recruitment. Many countries and groups have implemented these plans successfully and have been delisted.

Historical Background

Ongoing UN Operations and Advocacy:

The UN, through its agencies such as UNICEF, Department of Peace Operations (DPO), and Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, continues to:

1. Reintegrate former child soldiers through rehabilitation programs.
2. Advocate for universal ratification and implementation of OPAC.
3. Promote accountability and justice through the International Criminal Court (ICC), which considers the recruitment of children under 15 as a war crime.

Despite these efforts, the use of child soldiers persists in various regions today, including in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. The continued use of children in warfare reflects not only ongoing conflict but also a failure to uphold international norms and protect the most vulnerable from exploitation.

Children's Combat and Support Roles

In many conflicts children take direct part in combat. However, their role is not limited to fighting. Many girls and boys are also used in support functions that also entail great risk and hardship.

Their tasks can vary, from combatants to cooks, spies, messengers and even sex slaves. Moreover, the use of children for acts of terror, including as suicide bombers, has emerged as a phenomenon of modern warfare. Each year, the UN receives reports of children as young as 8 or 9 years old associated with armed groups.

No matter their role, child associated with parties to conflict are exposed to acute levels of violence – as witnesses, direct victims and as forced participants. Some are injured and have to live with disabilities for the rest of their lives.

Girls are also recruited and used by armed forces and groups. They have vulnerabilities unique to their gender and place in society and suffer specific consequences including, but not limited to, rape and sexual violence, pregnancy and pregnancy-related complications, stigma and rejection by families and communities.

Children's Combat and Support Roles

Cooks: Child soldiers are not always used in combat; many are forced into support roles such as cooking and domestic work. In Sierra Leone, during its civil war, children conscripted by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) were made to cook, fetch water, clean weapons, and serve food to adult fighters. Similarly, in the Central African Republic, both boys and girls were used to perform labor-intensive cooking and cleaning duties in militia camps. These children often worked from sunrise to sunset, were underfed themselves, and were beaten if they made mistakes or disobeyed.

Spies: Because of their age and perceived innocence, children are also used as spies by many armed groups. In Somalia, the militant group Al-Shabaab employed young boys to observe enemy troop movements, gather intelligence in towns, and report suspicious activities. The children were often threatened with death if they failed to deliver accurate information. In Afghanistan, the Taliban have similarly used children to infiltrate areas controlled by government forces or foreign troops. In ISIS-controlled regions of Iraq, young boys were manipulated into spying on civilians, especially those suspected of disobedience, leading to punishments or executions based on their reports.

Children's Combat and Support Roles

Combatants: One of the most recognized forms of child exploitation in warfare is their use as combatants. In South Sudan, thousands of boys, some as young as 12, were forcibly recruited by both government forces and rebel militias. They were given minimal training and sent directly to fight in brutal battles. Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), groups like the Mai-Mai militias and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have used boys between the ages of 11 and 17 as fighters. Many of these children were given drugs to reduce fear and make them more aggressive in combat. In Colombia, the FARC guerrillas also recruited children from rural areas, training them to use rifles and plant explosives, often under threats or false promises.

Messengers: Children are also frequently used as messengers in war zones, where they carry supplies or written messages between camps and commanders. In Myanmar, both the national army (Tatmadaw) and ethnic armed groups used children to transport ammunition and deliver orders across dangerous territories. These routes often passed through active conflict zones filled with landmines and ambush threats. In Uganda, the LRA forced abducted children to serve as runners between jungle camps, making them travel barefoot for days without rest or food, and punishing them severely if they failed their missions.

Children's Combat and Support Roles

Sex slaves: One of the most horrifying forms of abuse is the use of girl (and sometimes boys) as sex slaves. In Nigeria, the terrorist group Boko Haram abducted hundreds of girls, including the well-known Chibok schoolgirls, and forced them into marriage with fighters. These girls were subjected to repeated sexual abuse, rape, and forced pregnancy. Survivors often return home with children and face community rejection and lifelong trauma. Similarly, during the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, teenage girls were taken by soldiers and kept in camps where they were raped repeatedly. These survivors often suffer not only from physical injuries and untreated infections but also from stigma and isolation in their villages.

The Biological and Psychological Effects of Child Soldiering on Children

The Psychological Effects of Child Labour on Children:

Children involved in forced labour are often exposed to harmful conditions that affect their mental, emotional, and social development. These harmful conditions (called psychosocial hazards) include long hours, heavy workloads, unsafe environments, verbal and physical abuse, and social isolation. Over time, these experiences can lead to serious impacts such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, learning difficulties, and problems forming healthy relationships.

Children are more vulnerable to these risks than adults because they are still growing and developing. When forced to work, they may miss out on education, be separated from their families, or live in constant fear, all of which interfere with their ability to grow up in a healthy, secure environment. Girls often face additional risks, including sexual violence, exploitation, and social stigma.

These experiences affect multiple areas of a child's life. Their sense of safety, access to basic needs, connection to family or community, and chances at education or a future livelihood may all be disrupted. In many cases, the psychological effects are long-lasting and can carry into adulthood, limiting their well-being and opportunities.

The Biological and Psychological Effects of Child Soldiering on Children

The Biological Effects of Child Labour on Children:

Children involved in forced hazardous labor, suffer with serious health risks, as they are exposed to dangerous conditions during key stages of their physical and mental development. Hazardous work environments place extreme strain on the child's growing body, leading to a range of short-term and long-term health effects.

Because children's bodies and immune systems are still developing, they are significantly more vulnerable than adults to injury, illness, and toxic exposure.

Children who work in extreme temperatures or loud environments often experience sensory damage, heat exhaustion, or hearing loss. On top of that, the emotional strain caused by abuse, isolation, or fear can lead to physical symptoms like chronic headaches, stomach pain, and fatigue, further harming their overall health.

The timing of exposure is critical: many of the diseases and disorders caused by hazardous work do not appear until adulthood, when they are often more severe and less treatable. Neurological damage from chemical exposure, reproductive health issues from early hormonal disruption, and reduced mental function from long hours and stress are all consequences that may not be fully visible until it is too late to reverse them.

Questions to be Addressed by the Committee

1. What effective measures could be deployed in order to prevent children from being the victims of usage as child soldiers?
2. What measures could be taken to ensure the education of child soldiers?
3. What measure could be taken to ensure the psychological security of child soldiers?
4. What measures could be taken to ensure the physical health of the child soldiers?
5. What measures could be taken to ensure the security of child soldiers?

Resources

- <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers/>
- https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/access-education-and-reintegration-key-support-children-armed-conflicts_en
- <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/International%20Security/310512summary.pdf>
- <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/global-coalition-for-reintegration-of-child-soldiers/>
- <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2025/05/statement-by-the-special-representative-of-the-secretary-general-for-children-and-armed-conflict-on-humanitarian-access-imperatives-in-gaza/>
- <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/virtual-library/press-release-archive/ hghgh>
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Resources

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- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children_in_the_military?.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children_in_the_military?)