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### Introduction:

In today's contemporary world, the protection of children in armed conflict is one of the most critical humanitarian issues confronting the global community today. Children are often the most affected demographic in armed conflict, such as being exposed to recruitment as child soldiers, displacement, physical and psychological abuse, and deprivation of basic rights such as food,

education and healthcare. These violations have far-reaching implications for both individual children and societies.

The roots of the issues are primarily caused by political instability, economic inequality, and ethnic or religious tensions that often escalate into violent conflicts. This exposes children to displacement, loss of education, exploitation, health risks, psychological trauma, family disruption, and social fragmentation, gravely endangering their well-being. This issue is not confined to any single region but is a global challenge. Despite the adoption of various international frameworks and progress, the persistence of conflict zones worldwide continues to challenge these efforts.

### Key Terms:

#### **Children**

According to UNHCR "Every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, the majority is attained earlier." This definition is widely used in international law and provides the basis for identifying the population at risk in armed conflicts.

#### **Armed Conflict**

An international armed conflict occurs when military forces from at least two states engage in hostilities, regardless of acknowledges being in a state of war. Wars of national liberation are also considered as a form of armed conflict. Significantly impacting children physically and psychologically.

#### **Recruitment of Children**

The process of enlisting children into armed forces or groups with jobs like combatants, sexual exploitation, and support roles like cooking, messengers, and etc. Whether it's forcibly or voluntarily.

#### **Displacement**

When a community or individual is forced to flee their homes due to violence, persecution, or natural disaster.

## **Psychological Trauma**

Emotional and mental harm caused by witnessing or experiencing distressing events such as depression, anxiety, and other behavioral changes that require long-term support.

## **International Humanitarian Law (IHL)**

This is also known as the laws of war; it contains laws that seek to limit the effects of armed conflict on people and property emphasizing the protection of civilians.

## **Accountability**

Refers to the responsibility of States and non-state actor (NSA) (which is an individual or organization that isn't allied with nation state but has significant political influence) to adhere to international law and facing consequences for violation.

## **The Six Grave Violations Against Children in Armed Conflict**

The violation of children's rights that was created by the UN, include killing and maiming of children, recruitment or use of children as soldiers, sexual violence against children, attacks on schools or hospitals, abduction of children, and denial of humanitarian access.

## **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**

Individuals who are forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence, or disaster remain within the country's borders.

## **Refugees**

Individuals who flee their homes due to fear of persecution, war, or violence.

## **Migrants**

Individuals who moves from one place to another due to various reasons such economic incentives, higher education, and more opportunities.

## **Immigrants**

Individual who moves to another country with the intention of settling there permanently

### **Internally displaced person (IDPs)**

Individuals who are forced to flee their homes due to violence, conflict, and natural disasters but remain within their country's border.

### **Displacement**

Being forced to flee and leave one's home or residence due to conflict.

### **Non-State Armed Groups**

Independent groups that operate independently from state control, often engaged in armed conflict.

### **Humanitarian Corridors**

Safe passage established to allow civilians, including children, to escape conflict zones and to enable the delivery of essential humanitarian aid such as food, water, and medical supplies.

### **The Responsibility to Protect (R2P)**

A global political commitment endorsed by all United Nations member states in 2005, emphasizes that the international community has a duty to protect populations, including children, from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.

### **Post-Conflict Rehabilitation**

Efforts aimed at reintegrating and supporting children affected by conflict such as mental health support, education, and vocational training to help rebuild their lives and prevent cycles of violence.

### **Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS)**

Designated areas in conflict or disaster zones where children can safely play, learn, and receive psychological support. Often established by humanitarian organizations to mitigate the impact of conflict on children

## Background Information:

The protection of children in armed conflict has been a pressing issue for decades, caused by various factors during warfare. Armed conflicts expose children to a range of violations, including recruitment as child soldiers, physical and sexual violence, abductions, killing and maiming, attacks on school or hospital, denial of humanitarian access, and displacement. These challenges strip children of their rights to safety, education, and a stable upbringing, leaving long-lasting physical and psychological trauma.

The acknowledgement of this issue can be traced back to the adoption of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which established protections for civilians, including children, during wartime. Despite these measures, violations persist in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. The United Nations established the *Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM)* in 2005 to document six grave violations against children in conflict. However, the lack of accountability, and ongoing conflict dynamics hinder any progress of development and enforcement.

## Current Situation:

According to UNICEF, 2024 was the *worst year* on record for children in conflict. Today, child protection in armed conflict remains a global priority, requiring robust international cooperation and sustained commitment to uphold the rights and well-being of children in war zones.

In Yemen, the ongoing civil war has led to one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, significantly affecting children. Over the past decade, thousands of children have been killed or injured due to airstrikes, shelling, and landmines. UNICEF estimates that approximately 2.7 *million* children in Yemen are acutely malnourished, with many facing severe health and developmental challenges, but not only physical this could also affect them physiologically. This also disrupts education, with attacks on schools and widespread displacement leaving millions of children without access to learning facilities. Recruitment of child soldiers by armed groups remains a still critical issue, further endangering their lives, futures, and overall well-being of children.

Currently, In the Israeli Palestinian conflict, children have faced immense hardships, especially in Gaza and the West Bank with frequent escalations of violence, including airstrikes and military operations, have led to significant child casualties and injuries.

## Major Parties Involved:

### 1. United Nations (UN):

- a. The UN, particularly through its Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC), plays a central role in addressing child

protection in armed conflicts. It monitors and reports on violations, facilitates peace processes that prioritize child protection, and supports reintegration programs for child soldiers. Resolutions such as UNSC Resolution 2427 (2018) emphasize comprehensive child protection measures.

**2. United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF):**

- a. UNICEF provides humanitarian aid, including child-friendly spaces, psychological support, and educational initiatives in conflict zones. They also advocate for policy changes to safeguard children from recruitment and violence.

**3. Save the Children:**

- a. As a leading NGO, Save the Children addresses children’s needs in conflict zones, focusing on education, health, and protection. They have been instrumental in advocating for the Safe Schools Declaration and reintegration programs for former child soldiers.

**4. African Union (AU):**

- a. The AU has implemented regional child protection initiatives, particularly in areas heavily affected by armed conflicts, such as the DRC and South Sudan. The AU's involvement includes policy frameworks addressing child recruitment and reintegration.

**5. Non-State Armed Groups:**

- a. Groups like ISIS, Boko Haram, and various militias in the DRC have been primary violators of children’s rights in conflict. Efforts to engage these groups in peacebuilding and demobilization remain limited but critical

**Timeline of Relevant Events:**

<b>Geneva convention (1949)</b>	The Geneva Conventions, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention, established the legal framework for the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including children. It set out provisions to ensure the safety and well-being of children during war, specifically prohibiting their recruitment into armed forces and ensuring their protection from harm.
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<p><b>UN convention on the rights of children (UNHCR) (1998)</b></p>	<p>The UNCRC was adopted, marking a milestone in recognizing the civil, political, economic, social, rights of children. The convention outlined the obligations of states to protect children in armed conflict, specifically ensuring that children should not be recruited into hostilities and that their welfare should be a priority in any conflict situation.</p>
<p><b>Graça Machel Report (1996)</b></p>	<p>The UN Secretary-General commissioned the Graça Machel Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. This report highlighted the devastating effects of armed conflict on children, including recruitment into armed groups, child soldiering, and the use of children as instruments of war. It increased international attention and action on child protection in conflict zones.</p>
<p><b>Adoption of the Optional Protocol on Children and Armed Conflict (2000)</b></p>	<p>The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted, specifically targeting the involvement of children in armed conflict. It raised the minimum age of recruitment into national armed forces to 18 and placed legal obligations on states to prevent the use of children in armed conflicts.</p>
<p><b>Paris Principles on Child Soldiers (2007)</b></p>	<p>The Paris Principles, a set of guidelines aimed at preventing the recruitment of child soldiers, were introduced. They emphasized the need for coordinated international efforts to demobilize, rehabilitate, and reintegrate child soldiers back into society. The principles are a framework for protecting children from being coerced or exploited during conflicts.</p>
<p><b>Boko Haram Kidnaps Schoolgirls in Nigeria (2014)</b></p>	<p>In April 2014, the militant group Boko Haram kidnapped 276 schoolgirls from a boarding school in Chibok, Nigeria. This event caused global outrage, and the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls became a rallying cry for international efforts to secure the girls' release as many were forced into marriage, sexual slavery, or recruitment as fighters.</p>



<b>Safe Schools Declaration (2015)</b>	The Safe Schools Declaration was launched by the Norwegian Government, aiming to protect schools and universities from military use during armed conflicts. It also implements provision of education to displaced children and emphasized the importance of keeping education safe and accessible in conflict zones.
<b>Use of Child Soldiers in South Sudan (2017)</b>	In South Sudan, the ongoing civil war led to widespread recruitment of children by both government and rebel forces. In 2017, the UN reported that over <i>1,000 children</i> were recruited as soldiers, and many were subjected to sexual violence and forced labor.
<b>Rohingya Children in Myanmar (2018)</b>	During the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, children were subjected to violent attacks, including rape and killing, by military forces. Children were also recruited as soldiers by the Myanmar Army. Over <i>700,000</i> Rohingya people, including children, were displaced and forced to flee to neighboring Bangladesh.
<b>Child Casualties in Ukraine (2022)</b>	The ongoing war in Ukraine saw a significant rise in child casualties. According to the UNICEF, over <i>1,000</i> children were killed or injured in the first year of the conflict, with many children being subjected to forced displacement and psychological trauma. Educational institutions and healthcare facilities were also destroyed, leaving children without proper support.
<b>Palestine-Israel conflict (2024 present day)</b>	As of 2024, violence continues in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with child casualties on the rise. The UN has expressed grave concern over the continued targeting of civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, and the use of children in armed conflict. Israeli airstrikes and Palestinian militant rocket attacks have contributed to the ongoing harm to children in the region. UNICEF has called for greater protection of children caught in the conflict and has urged both sides to uphold their obligations under international law.

## Previous Attempts:

International treaties and protocols play addressing the protection of children in armed conflict. The Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, created in 2000 has been widely ratified, raising the minimum age for recruitment to 18 years. However, due to various challenges this enforcement remains a struggle among non-state armed groups.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has passed a resolutions, such as **Resolution 1612** in 2005, which established the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to document extreme violations against children, and **Resolution 2427** in 2018, which focuses on integrating child protection into peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes. Another example in regional initiatives, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, prioritize child protection by implementing measures to combat child recruitment and violence in conflict zones.

NGOs like UNICEF and Save the Children have also taken actions in large-scale reintegration programs for former child soldiers, working in tandem with local governments to provide education, psychosocial support, and livelihood opportunities. These efforts aim to mitigate the impact of armed conflict on children and help create long-term recovery and stability path for them.

## Possible Solutions:

*Diplomatic measures* should be prioritized to de-escalate conflicts and protect children. Bilateral negotiations should be initiated between conflicting parties, with a focus on safeguarding children. For more complex, multilateral conflicts, frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Optional Protocol on Children and Armed Conflict should guide peace talks. Meaning that they should prioritize on de-escalating the matter through bilateral or multilateral talks while respecting sovereign nation but still prioritizing child safety. Neutral mediators, such as the UN or the International Court of Justice (ICJ), can help ensure that discussions prioritize child protection and maintain impartiality.

Strengthening international legal frameworks is important. Countries should fully implement and adhere to international agreements designed to protect children in armed conflict. Violations of these laws, such as the recruitment of child soldiers or targeting children in conflict, should be met with sanctions and legal actions such as bans, freezing financial assets, diplomatic measures and economic sanctions. The International Criminal Court (ICC) should hold individuals

accountable for such crimes, sending a clear message that crimes against children will not go unpunished.

Furthermore, safeguarding education is vital for children in conflict zones. Governments and international organizations should implement the Safe Schools Declaration to protect schools from attacks and military use. This implementation involves the commitment to protect schools during armed conflicts and military use of the educational facility to ensure accountability attacks education. Alternative education options, such as mobile schools or online platforms, should be made available to children in areas where traditional schools are unsafe or destroyed by conflict, ensuring that education continues despite the instability.

Finally, increased international cooperation is needed to address child trafficking and displacement. Neighboring countries in conflict zones should collaborate to combat trafficking networks and provide protection for displaced children. Humanitarian organizations should be granted increased access to conflict areas to deliver critical support, including healthcare, food, and education, to ensure that children's rights are upheld even in the most challenging conditions. However, by granting humanitarian organizations increased access to conflict areas for support may challenge nation's sovereignty, it could be perceived as external interference in domestic affairs and raise concerns about the authority, accountability, legitimacy and political implications for operating within a country's borders.

### Suggested Readings:

Here are some useful reading that could help with researching the issue:

**1. United Nations – Children and Armed Conflict [\(link\)](#)**

It's UN's efforts to address the protection of children in armed conflict. It provides access to key reports, resolutions, and statements that can assist delegates in drafting evidencebased clauses for resolutions.

**2. UNICEF – Annual Reports on Child Protection [\(link\)](#)**

Detailed reports focusing on various aspects of child protection, including the impact of armed conflict.

**3. UNICEF – Child Protection Programs ([link](#))**

This page contains UNICEF's efforts to protect children worldwide, particularly in conflict zones. It outlines current programs and their success rates

**4. International Criminal Court – Child Protection and Justice ([link](#))**

The ICC's official website details its role in prosecuting crimes against children during armed conflicts.

**5. Child Soldiers International ([link](#))**

A reliable resource addressing the recruitment and use of child soldiers globally. Including research studies, advocacy tools, and recommendations that are relevant for the focus on the topic.

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