

PROTECTING

CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

OSLO, NORWAY, 5-6 JUNE 2023

CONCEPT NOTE:

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT - Our Common Future

OSLO, NORWAY, 5 –6 JUNE 2023

An international conference co-hosted by
Norway, Save the Children, UNICEF, and the ICRC,
in partnership with the AU, OCHA and the OSRSG CAAC

Urgent need to protect children from the devastating consequences of armed conflict

The suffering of children affected by armed conflict is one of the most pressing political and humanitarian concerns today. Yet it remains one of the most neglected.

There are currently around one hundred armed conflicts in the world. They affect the lives and futures of children in dramatic ways. The nature of armed conflict is changing, often becoming protracted and fought in urban areas¹. Armed conflicts diminish the ability of families and communities to protect children at a time when they need it the most. Children have greater physical and psychological vulnerability and suffer disproportionately the consequences of modern warfare. For many children, their entire childhood is marred by violence, trauma, loss, separation, and fear. With every attack on homes, schools, hospitals, food and water systems, roads and other civilian objects, children's prospects for their future diminish.

The number of children living in conflict zones has almost doubled since 1990. Between 2005 and 2020, the UN verified more than 266,000 Grave Violations against children in armed conflict², and the number of violations has increased threefold since 2010. The impact spans generations and damages prospects for conflict-resolution, peace, reconciliation, and sustainable development. There is an urgent need to accelerate efforts to protect children and advance their rights. Children must be better protected.

Preventing and responding to violations against children

International law must be upheld. Prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts are critical.

Many conflicts remain unresolved and continue to take their toll on children and their families. At the same time, new conflicts are emerging, increasing violations and attacks against children. Against this backdrop, upholding international law designed to protect civilians, including children, is more important than ever.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and other human rights law, International Humanitarian Law, and Refugee Law all protect children affected by armed conflict. The international obligations are in place. Too often, they are not being incorporated into national law, policies, and practice, and/or are violated by parties to armed conflicts. Accountability for violations of these rules is still lacking

¹ ICRC, International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts (2019), p. 16.
https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/challenges-report_urbanization-of-armed-conflicts.pdf

² 2005, the Security Council established a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to systematically monitor, document and report on particular violations committed against children in situations of concern around the world. Since that time, six violations have been identified as those about which information should be gathered and reported to the Security Council on an Annual Basis. The six grave violations are: Killing and maiming of children; Recruitment or use of children as soldiers; Sexual violence against children; Abduction of children; Attacks against schools or hospitals; Denial of humanitarian access for children.

in many cases. In contrast, children who have been recruited or used in armed conflict are often treated and prosecuted as if they were adults, rather than first and foremost as victims of exploitation and abuse, and of violations of their rights. Far too often, children are deprived of their liberty for actual or alleged association with armed actors rather than given the care they need and reintegrated into society

As we grapple with the plight of children in armed conflict, we also need to operationalize effective prevention measures to stop violations before they occur. In post conflict situations the needs of children must not be forgotten, as they recover from the long-term impact of armed conflict.

States, international organisations, and civil society must redouble their efforts to enhance conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Children must be included and heard in these efforts.

Strengthening humanitarian action for children

The centrality of children and their protection in humanitarian responses must be established.

Physically, emotionally, and socially, armed conflict affects children differently from adults, and girls differently than boys. Children can make up 50% of populations affected by armed conflict. Humanitarian action tailored to respond to the distinct risks and needs of children is therefore crucial. Preventive and remedial child protection interventions are essential and save lives. They help protect children from harm and mitigate the impacts of conflict.

Despite their critical nature, these interventions are often not prioritised in immediate humanitarian responses, too often being established only after significant harm has occurred. Child protection is increasingly underfunded. Funding dropped to less than a quarter of the amount required in 2020 (24%), down from 42% funded in 2019.³ The scope and quality of interventions must be raised, and immediate, multi-year, sustainable funding for children and their protection in humanitarian action ensured.

The Oslo International Conference: Mobilising global political support and action for children in armed conflict

Norway, Save the Children, UNICEF, and the ICRC in partnership with a cross-regional group of states, the African Union, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict invite representatives of states, national armed forces, international organisations, civil society, and the humanitarian sector to an international conference in Oslo. The conference aims to increase awareness and understanding among decision makers on the protection challenges that children face. It will rally states, donors, international organisations, and the humanitarian community to let children's voices be heard, to promote child rights, and champion the protection of children in armed conflict.

We call for participants to:

- 1. Mobilise political commitment to protect children in armed conflict**
- 2. Secure actions to minimise the impact of armed conflict on children, prevent violations against children, enhance compliance with and ensure accountability for violations of international law**
- 3. Realise a fully funded, sustainable humanitarian response that is accountable to children**

The conference will produce a chair's summary and overview and follow up of commitments announced.

WELCOME TO OSLO!

³ Save the Children in partnership with The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, UNHCR and the Child Protection AoR, The Unprotected: Annual spotlight on child protection funding in humanitarian action – 2021 <https://alliancecpa.org/sites/default/files/technical/attachments/the-unprotected-single-final.pdf>