

# Children's Security

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International humanitarian law has long recognised two groups of civilians—women and children—who deserve particular protection during times of armed conflict. The impact of war on children has been the subject of increasing attention by the United Nations (UN) and other international bodies, and most recently, a new focus has been placed on the specific needs and concerns of girls. It has also been increasingly recognised that children play a variety of roles in conflict—not only as victims, for example, but also as armed actors. An overall framework for addressing the needs and concerns of children and youth in times of armed conflict and post conflict reconstruction has not been comprehensively developed, although significant progress has been made in defining the many issues involved.

This chapter outlines these issues, addresses gender considerations for children in times of war and post conflict reconstruction, and describes the vital role that women play in their survival, protection and rehabilitation. The definition of a “child” or “youth” is itself an unresolved issue in many situations; for example, in parts of Africa a mother (no matter how young) is not considered to be a child regardless of her own age. For the purposes of this chapter, however, a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18; youth or adolescents refer to older children, generally above the age of 15.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. WHAT HAPPENS TO CHILDREN DURING WAR AND POST CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION?

### CHILDREN'S SECURITY DURING WAR

“War violates every right of a child—the right to life, the right to be with family and community, the right to health, the right to the development of personality, and the right to be nurtured and protected.”<sup>2</sup> For children who survive, war completely disrupts their structures of social support by undermining networks and connections between families and communities. In many cases, they are left abandoned or orphaned and face the difficulty of finding their own means of survival. In extreme cases, children experience profound trauma as a result of the violence surrounding them. A UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) survey in Rwanda following the genocide found that 80 percent of the children surveyed had lost family members and more than 33 percent witnessed their murder.<sup>3</sup>

Individuals, families and entire communities may be forced to flee their homes due to conflict or violence,

becoming refugees (crossing international borders) or internally displaced persons (IDPs). According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), children comprise 39 percent of refugees, and estimates place children at over half the total number of displaced people worldwide.<sup>4</sup> Displaced populations face physical risks such as landmines, attacks by various fighting forces and limited food and other resources, leaving children especially prone to malnourishment and illness. Children are also at risk of being separated from their parents, family members and other caregivers during their flight, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, sexual slavery and forced recruitment into the fighting forces. While refugees are given some protection and assistance, IDPs are often stranded within or near zones of conflict and do not receive even the basic protection given to refugees (see chapter on refugees and IDPs).

Children in communities are often coerced or forced to commit violent acts to gain protection, food, shelter or other resources for themselves or their family. Drug smuggling, grave digging and carrying

messages or equipment are activities forced upon children. In addition, war affects girls in different ways than boys. “The impact on girls is different because of their lower status before conflict begins; often powerless before and during conflict, girls are prone to be subjected to humiliation and abuse.”<sup>5</sup> Prostitution often increases during times of conflict, and the presence of a peacekeeping force may actually lead to the recruitment of prostitutes (see chapter on peace support operations). It has been documented that UN peacekeepers recruited young girls into prostitution during the UN Operation in **Mozambique**.<sup>6</sup> Sexual exploitation is devastating for children, leading to serious health issues including pregnancy and psychological trauma. Communities and families often ostracise the children of peacekeepers, also known as “UN children.”

Abductions of both boys and girls are a common occurrence during armed conflict and most often are part of a strategy to recruit child soldiers. Some are taken from their homes during raids; others may be pulled from their classroom or other public areas. In **Myanmar (Burma)**, for example, groups of children from 15 to 17 years old have been forcibly conscripted from the classroom.<sup>7</sup> Some are forced to abuse or kill members of their own family in the course of their abduction—both to provide them with no alternative to their participation in the armed group and to initiate them into violent acts.

Children are often targeted for conscription as combatants because they are seen as easily manipulated; in some cases, children have been drugged to ease them into fighting. Although children are forcibly recruited or abducted in most cases, some children may choose to become soldiers due to dire circumstances and few alternatives: “They may join for economic reasons, because their families are too poor to provide them with food and education. Children surrounded by war and chaos may come to associate armed groups with power and protection. Or they may be motivated in response to injustices suffered by their families and communities... If they are unable to attend school and have no opportunities for vocational training, soldiering may seem to be the only option.”<sup>8</sup> In some cases, family members may encourage their participation.

Whether through forced recruitment or by choice, girls and boys perpetrate violence while serving as

child soldiers in the rebel groups and as part of government forces. Though it is prohibited by international law for children under 18 to participate in armed hostilities,<sup>9</sup> it is estimated that 300,000 children are soldiers worldwide, with recruitment, for the most part, beginning at age 10.<sup>10</sup> In **Liberia**, for example, UNICEF estimates that 50–60 percent of fighters in the recent conflict were under the age of 18.<sup>11</sup> Children are often treated as adults once recruited or abducted; they participate in brutal induction ceremonies soon after recruitment. They have been perpetrators of some of the worst human rights abuses, including rape, looting and murder. In addition to participating in combat operations, child soldiers may serve as guards, lookouts, messengers, spies, porters, cooks and food gatherers. If they fail in their duties or are taken prisoner, severe abuse or death may result.

Once in the fighting forces, girl soldiers are disproportionately oppressed. They are often subjected to sexual violence or forced to become “wives.” In **Northern Uganda**, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has abducted thousands of girls. Many are “repeatedly raped, and many bear children in the harsh conditions of the bush or in LRA encampments with barely enough food to survive or no health care.”<sup>12</sup> Girls also work more hours than boys, have lower literacy rates and suffer from death and disease due to lack of reproductive healthcare. At the same time, girls take on leadership roles in some armed groups, commanding all-girl units, and are placed in charge of loot or of defending the camp while male combatants are on raids. Girls face particularly harsh circumstances upon their reintegration, disowned by their own families and excluded from official programmes for ex-combatants who do not recognise them as such. Many have young children of their own as a result of repeated sexual violence. Former girl soldiers are among the most vulnerable populations in the post conflict period.

### CHILDREN’S SECURITY IN THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

Children’s security concerns do not end with the cessation of armed conflict and the signing of peace agreements.

**Street Children:** A major side effect of war that occurs in nearly every post conflict state is a surge in crime

and other forms of violence. Due to the availability of small arms, as well as poverty and instability, many children become “street children,” often carrying arms and forming gangs—in some cases, a welcome option for children destitute and living in the streets of urban areas. In Bujumbura, **Burundi**, it is estimated that there are 5,000 street children, often accused of committing violent crimes, including rape.<sup>13</sup> Yet street children are often victims of post conflict violence as well. In fact, in **Ethiopia**, as child prostitution is on the rise (along with the rate of HIV infection), nearly half of young prostitutes said they had been raped before turning to the streets, with one third becoming pregnant as a result.<sup>14</sup>

**Landmines:** Another consequence of war is the existence of landmines and other unexploded ordnance, a particular hazard to children, who are a large percentage of landmine victims (see chapter on small arms, light weapons, and landmines). “Children in at least 68 countries live amid the contamination of more than 110 million landmines. Added to this number are millions of items of unexploded ordnance, bombs, shells, and grenades that failed to detonate on impact.”<sup>15</sup> There are more landmines on the African continent than elsewhere, although **Cambodia** and **Afghanistan** have very high numbers as well. In **Angola**, there are an estimated 10 million landmines and 70,000 amputees, including 8,000 children.<sup>16</sup>

**Trafficking and Labour Exploitation:** Children are at an increased risk of trafficking and labour exploitation during and following conflict. It is estimated that 800,000 people are trafficked internationally each year and millions more within their country’s borders.<sup>17</sup> Of all trafficking victims, the United States (US) Department of State reports that 80 percent are female and 50 percent are children.<sup>18</sup> Victims of trafficking may be sold into slavery or forced to work as prostitutes, child soldiers, domestic servants or labourers in sweatshops or quarries.

**Violence in the Home:** Following a conflict, children are also threatened within their homes, as there is usually a rise in domestic violence. Child abuse—physical and psychological—was listed as a top-five concern of children surveyed in **Northern Uganda**.<sup>19</sup> Children of raped women—often of mixed race or

ethnicity—are at particular risk of abuse by their own families and communities, which in some cases refuse to allow their daughter or sister to remain in their home, forcing her to fend for herself and her children. In other cases, mothers abuse or abandon their own children, who remind them of their attackers. In **Rwanda**, some mothers even named their children “little killers.”<sup>20</sup>

**Health:** The overall breakdown in established social values, limited access to reproductive health services, increased population movements and incidences of rape facilitate the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS during war (see chapter on HIV/AIDS.) An estimated 11.8 million young people (15–24) are living with HIV/AIDS, and 14 million children have been orphaned as a result of the disease.<sup>21</sup> Young women and girls are at greater risk of infection for a variety of reasons including:

- biological factors that physically put women at greater risk of contracting the disease;
- economic needs that compel women to engage in sexual activity for money or other resources; and
- cultural and social norms that encourage older men to engage in sexual activity with young girls and that allow even married men to remain sexually active with multiple partners. Women are often discouraged from taking preventative steps.

HIV/AIDS in particular has a devastating impact on children: “Because HIV/AIDS so often impoverishes and stigmatises the children it affects, and claims the lives of so many of their extended family, these children are at high risk of having to eke out livelihoods on the street or in other potentially dangerous situations.”<sup>22</sup> Parents or caretakers who die of AIDS may leave children with no one to look after them, forcing them to assume the responsibilities of the head of household and reducing prospects for education or vocational training. In **sub-Saharan Africa** alone, 12 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS.<sup>23</sup> In **Cambodia**, one in three children in AIDS-affected families had to provide care and take on major household work; most left school and went without basic necessities including food and clothing.<sup>24</sup> This has a tremendous impact on the political, economic and social future of these countries.

Armed conflict severely impairs the psychosocial health of children as well. In **Iran**, more than a decade after the end of the Iran-Iraq War, adults who were children during the war continue to suffer from stress and trauma. In addition, the loss of family members, breakdown of their support networks, the witnessing of severe forms of violence and involvement in abuses can have long-term effects on children and youth. These issues must be addressed in the post conflict period through, for example, the provision of psychosocial counselling, education and sports and arts programs that help rehabilitate and normalise life for children.

### CHILDREN'S ROLES IN POST CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION

Although children suffer tremendous abuse as a result of war, they are also often more resilient than adults in the aftermath. Many adapt to the post conflict environment and are motivated to pursue education and employment opportunities.

**Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR):** The existence of children in fighting forces was, until recently, unacknowledged internationally. Children have been historically left out of DDR programmes designed to disarm, demobilise and reintegrate combatants (see chapter on DDR). Governments, in particular, continue to deny that child soldiers are among their ranks. UNICEF, Save the Children and other organisations have begun programmes to address the needs of child ex-combatants, and it is increasingly recognised that DDR programmes should aim to improve the conditions and treatment of all children in a community—not only the child soldier.

The recognition of girls as child soldiers (usually as part of fighting forces, not government groups) has been an even more difficult issue to tackle. Despite the fact that humanitarian aid organisations work with female abductees, DDR programs implemented by governments and international organisations have rarely recognised women and girls as “combatants,” and thus they are ineligible to receive the benefits of a reintegration programme. In **Sierra Leone**, of the 137,865 in the fighting forces (rebels and government), 48,216 were child soldiers (17 years of age and younger). Of those, 12,056 were girls. As of

2003, only 6,181 boy soldiers had participated in DDR, and only 506 girls had gone through the process.<sup>25</sup> Various international NGOs have begun rehabilitation programmes specifically for girl ex-combatants to fill this gap. Save the Children, for example, worked intensively with families in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** to sensitise them to the needs of returning girl soldiers.

**Governance and Political Participation:** Although children are rarely considered in discussions of governance and political participation, their involvement is imperative (see chapter on governance). The World Bank points out, “An important, but yet under-utilized voice in helping to address some of these concerns [such as corruption, poverty, and abuse of power] is the role of youth.... [They] can be resilient, resourceful, and responsive, and there is a need to encourage and establish mechanisms in countries to involve youth in playing a role in addressing corruption and consequently improving governance in their countries.”<sup>26</sup>

The Oxfam-funded International Youth Parliament was formed in 2003 to bring together 300 youth each year from around the world to discuss issues ranging from conflict and HIV/AIDS to education.<sup>27</sup> Regional initiatives, including the African Youth Parliament and the European Youth Parliament, have also been developed in recent years.

On a national level, in **Rwanda**, following the genocide, the transitional government, recognising the severe effects of the civil war and genocide on youth, allocated special representation for youth in the local and national governing structures. There are two youth seats in the Rwandan Parliament and a Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport, which focuses on children’s concerns.<sup>28</sup> In **Kenya**, youth are elected by children in Nairobi Province to fill an 11-member youth cabinet with a mandate to raise awareness and advocate for the protection of children’s rights throughout the country.<sup>29</sup> In 2003, the **Republic of the Congo** launched the National Children’s Parliament, composed of 36 members and an executive council of four girls and one boy. The new initiative will “serve as an official body entrusted with promoting children’s rights...and with finding solutions to problems that affect children.”<sup>30</sup>

**Transitional Justice and Reconciliation:** Children's involvement in transitional justice and reconciliation in post conflict societies is imperative (see chapter on transitional justice and reconciliation). Mechanisms, whether in the form of truth commissions, special courts or grassroots initiatives, must take into consideration the needs and concerns of children and youth. Children, as victims and perpetrators, have important roles to play to ensure the sustainability of peace.

To date, no international court or tribunal has prosecuted anyone under the age of 18, and the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** prohibits itself from any prosecution of children. In national courts, however, children have been tried for atrocities committed during war. Some were mistreated while in custody, were imprisoned with adults or juvenile criminal offenders, or were given the death penalty. In **Colombia**, child soldiers from left-wing guerrilla groups have been incorporated into the armed forces or detained in military institutions. In 2001, in the **DRC**, civil society organisations advocated for setting aside the death penalty verdicts against six children and were successful, but for one who died in prison as a result of disease.<sup>31</sup>

At the national level, only one truth commission has addressed the special needs of children in its mandate, though most have included children in lists of victims and witnesses. In **Argentina**, the National Commission on Disappeared Persons was required to “determine the whereabouts of children removed from the care of their parents or guardians...and to intervene as appropriate in organisms and tribunals for the protection of minors.”<sup>32</sup> Its final report includes details of crimes against children and adolescents.

In local judicial processes, there are concerns that children do not have access to international judicial standards. In **Rwanda**, children over the age of 14 at the time of the genocide may be judged as part of the *gacaca*, a community-level, traditional justice mechanism. Yet, in this process, children will not have access to counsel and must represent themselves publicly before the community.

With regard to reconciliation efforts, special initiatives have been made to involve children in a variety of transitional justice mechanisms. In the **South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission**, special hearings and workshops were established for children to engage with the process. In many societies, traditional healing practices and rituals of reconciliation involve children. “Traditional cleansing and healing ceremonies for former child soldiers have been important means for some communities to recognize and assuage the guilt that child soldiers carry.... [They] are intended to provide a clean break from past atrocities.”<sup>33</sup>

**Education and Training:** In general, opportunities for education and vocational training for children and youth should be an essential component of reconstruction and development, particularly as war causes years of lost time in this area. According to the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, educational programs “provide them [children] with structure, purpose, skills for the future, integration within the community, identity, hope, and more.”<sup>34</sup> An estimated 27 million children and youth are without education in conflict zones.<sup>35</sup> Although boys and girls may equally access pre-primary and grade one, girls' enrollment drops at each successive level.<sup>36</sup> **UNICEF** has made girls' education a priority in its development planning, noting that, with education, women marry later, have fewer children, are more productive, are better paid in the workplace and have less chance of contracting HIV/AIDS.

Vocational training is particularly important for adolescents and older youth, many of whom entered the war as children but may now be adults. Training should be geared toward available jobs according to the needs of various communities. The European Union and UNHCR have funded a programme that offers apprenticeships to former **Afghan** refugee youth in 27 areas including mechanics, leatherwork, baking and electricity.<sup>37</sup> A programme for **Mozambican** refugees prioritised the most vulnerable groups, including women and youth, for training in farming, blacksmithing, pottery and bicycle repair, among other fields.

## Peace Education<sup>38</sup>

Peace education is a preventive and restorative tool for raising awareness about the causes and consequences of violence among children and adults. The goals of peace education include:

- developing attitudes of non-violence, justice, tolerance and respect for human rights;
- increasing knowledge of relevant subjects such as landmines and HIV/AIDS; and
- learning specific skills such as critical thinking, compromise and communication.

When taught in a classroom environment, activities might include story telling, self-expression, cross-cultural exchanges and active participation in discussions and groups.<sup>39</sup> Peace education can be taught using a variety of media and in many locations. UNHCR ran a programme in **Kenya**, for example, in refugee camps for adults and children. Search for Common Ground, a US-based NGO, broadcasts a children's television show in **Macedonia** that encourages conflict resolution and includes a wide range of youth.

## 2. WHO AND WHAT CAN PROMOTE CHILDREN'S SECURITY IN CONFLICT?

It is increasingly evident that the only way to ensure children's security is to take a holistic approach, involving a wide range of actors and resources and drawing from a solid base of international law and policies.

In 1994, Graça Machel was appointed by the UN Secretary General to submit a study on the impact of armed conflict on children.<sup>40</sup> Following the report's publication in 1996, the **Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict** was appointed. The SRSG has played a significant role in mainstreaming child protection issues into the UN system, including child protection mandates in peacekeeping missions for **Sierra Leone** and the **DRC**. Together with UNICEF, he has also played a key role in maintaining the issue of children and conflict on the UN's priority list, highlighting developments in regular reports and offering recommendations for action.

The success of these initiatives is evident in a number of ways. For example, the 2003 peace agreement in **Liberia** specifically calls for "special attention to the use of child combatants.... It shall, accordingly, mobilize resources...to address their special demobilization and reintegration needs."<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, the UN Secretary General assigned two child protection advisors and a gender advisor to work with his Special Representative

for Liberia. A detailed programme was developed for the estimated 21,000 child soldiers in the country with plans for separate camps for girls and special assistance that included psychosocial support and reproductive health (see chapter on reproductive health).<sup>42</sup> Yet its implementation has been delayed, reflecting the many challenges to providing services to children in conflict.

### CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

There are numerous international treaties that promote children's security. The following are among the most important:

1. **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** and the **Geneva Conventions** are the foundation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law (see the appendix for the UDHR full text). The UDHR specifically calls on the need for special care and protection for women and children in Article 25 (2): "Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance."<sup>43</sup> The Fourth Geneva Convention (1948) and the subsequent Protocols (1977) outline necessary protection of civilians during armed conflict, specifically addressing children as follows:<sup>44</sup>

- Parties to a conflict must respect children, provide them with any care or aid they require and protect them from any form of indecent assault. (Protocol I, Art. 77, Sec. 1)

- Children under 15 must not participate in hostilities and must not be recruited into the armed forces. (Protocol I, Art. 77, Sec. 2; Protocol II, Art. 4, Sec. 3C)
  - Those children who do participate in hostilities do not lose their protections under the Geneva Conventions. (Protocol II, Art. 4, Sec. 3d)
  - Children who have committed an offence related to the armed conflict before their 18th birthday cannot be subject to the death penalty. (Protocol I, Art. 77, Sec. 5)
  - If arrested, detained or interned, children must be held in separate quarters from adults, unless they are with their families. (Protocol I, Art. 77, Sec. 4)
  - Warring parties must try to make local agreements to allow the removal of children from besieged or encircled areas. (Convention IV, Art. 17)
  - Warring parties must allow the free passage of medicine, food and clothing intended for children under 15. (Convention IV, Art. 23)
  - Warring parties, to the extent possible, must ensure that orphans or lost children are not left alone and that they are cared for according to the religious and cultural traditions to which they are accustomed. (Convention IV, Art. 24)
2. The **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** and its Optional Protocols are the most important international legal instruments to date for ensuring children's security. Entering into force in 1990, the CRC recognises children's rights as human rights and has been ratified by 192 states, more than any other treaty (only two countries are not signatories—the United States and the Sudan). The Convention binds states to protect the social, cultural, economic, and political rights of children. Its four guiding principles are non-discrimination (Article 2), best interests of the child (Article 3), survival and development (Article 6) and participation (Article 12). It includes special protection measures to address children affected by armed conflict (Article 38, 39).<sup>45</sup>
  3. The **CRC Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict**, which was adopted on 25 May 2000 by consensus of the UN General Assembly, raised the age for participation in armed conflict from 15 to 18 years and established a ban on compulsory recruitment below the age of 18.<sup>46</sup> The second CRC **Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography**, also adopted in May 2000, prohibits the sale, sexual exploitation and forced labour of children. Although both documents entered into force in 2002, far fewer countries have ratified the optional protocols than the initial CRC.<sup>47</sup>
  4. The 1995 **Beijing Platform for Action**, adopted at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, makes specific reference to advancing the rights and concerns of the “girl child.”
  5. The **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court** includes provisions against the conscripting of children under the age of 15. Article 8 specifically defines conscripting or using children in international or internal conflicts as a “war crime.” In addition, the ICC statute gives itself no jurisdiction for children under the age of 18. Together, these advances enable prosecution of the recruiter, rather than the child, before the ICC. Cases are brought before the court by a government that is party to the treaty, by the ICC's prosecutor or by the Security Council.
- The first prosecution of child recruiters under international law was under way at the time of this publication. The Special Court of **Sierra Leone** is prosecuting members of the pro-government militias on war crime charges of “child recruitment.”<sup>49</sup>
6. Since 1999, the **UN Security Council** has passed four resolutions on children and conflict, all of which are international law:
    - **Resolution 1261** (1999) reiterated the importance of protecting children during armed conflict, condemned their use as soldiers and encouraged programmes to facilitate their disarmament and reintegration.
    - **Resolution 1314** (2000) urged children's inclusion in official peacebuilding processes, noted the special needs and vulnerabilities of girls and provided examples of regional initiatives to protect children.

- **Resolution 1379** (2001) noted the need to protect children during peacekeeping operations, expressed the importance of ending sexual violence and exploitation of women and girls and requested that UN bodies and external agencies direct resources to these issues.
- **Resolution 1460** (2003) noted that the recruitment of child soldiers is now a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and recognised the need to prevent the sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children by peacekeepers and humanitarian workers through training and punishment.

### INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

Although a number of UN agencies address children's issues in the scope of their work, UNICEF is the primary UN branch involved in children's security. UNICEF outlines eight elements of a protective environment for children:<sup>50</sup>

1. attitudes, traditions, customs, behaviour and practices that protect children from abuse;
2. governmental commitment to fulfilling protection rights;
3. open discussion and engagement with child protection issues;
4. protective legislation and enforcement;
5. the capacity to protect among those around children;
6. children's life skills, knowledge and participation in their own protection;
7. monitoring and reporting; and
8. services for recovery and reintegration.

In its advocacy role, UNICEF promotes the ratification and implementation of treaties to protect children, and monitors and reports on violations of these agreements. UNICEF recently partnered with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations to develop training materials so that peacekeepers are fully aware of children's rights, specifically the right

not to be victimised by sexual violence. In its programmatic role, UNICEF funds and conducts programmes as varied as family reunification, drug abuse treatment, peace education and landmine awareness. In **Afghanistan**, UNICEF is working in partnership with local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to demobilise child combatants and to reintegrate them with sensitisation and psychosocial programmes, including formal education and skills training.

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** has adopted various tools for child protection. The most prominent among these is the **Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention** (Convention 182, 1999), which applies to all children under the age of 18 and aims to eliminate the most brutal forms of child labour, including child soldiering, prostitution and slavery. The ILO has field offices around the world that offer a variety of programmes for children and adults. For example, in the conflict zones in **Colombia**, the ILO is conducting a project for child victims of sexual violence.

The **Committee on the Rights of the Child** (established by the CRC) is the key entity that monitors compliance of states that are parties to the Convention by evaluating the country reports required by the CRC. The committee has also developed new standards of protection and pressed governments for specific reforms.<sup>51</sup> The advocacy and watchdog role of NGOs is necessary to the work of the Committee, as each review process for country reports begins with working group meetings during which NGOs can highlight specific areas of concern regarding the government under review.

**Multilateral development agencies**, such as the World Bank, also contribute to post conflict reconstruction efforts. **The World Bank**, in particular, aims to incorporate child protection and development into its programmes. It runs projects specifically for children that address girls' education, adolescent reproductive health, child labour, immunisation, nutrition and safety.

**Donor countries** and their respective bilateral development agencies (e.g. the US Agency for International Development, the British Department for International Development, and the Canadian International Development Agency) play a key role in

programme development. For example, the Canadians set aside CAD\$122 million for child protection for the years 2001–06.<sup>52</sup> Their programmes address child labour, children affected by armed conflict, street children and child victims of sexual exploitation, among other priorities.

There are a variety of international NGOs that focus specifically on the protection of children during armed conflict. CARE International, Save the Children, the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children and others have combined to create the **Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict**.<sup>53</sup>

Programmes by NGOs range from advocacy in the international arena to funding and implementing projects to assist children and families in war-torn countries. On an international level, the NGO **International Tribunal for Children’s Rights** conducts inquiries into violations of children’s rights, holds public hearings on the issues and proposes practical solutions. One set of hearings was dedicated to war-affected children.<sup>54</sup> In contrast, **Save the Children** works on the ground in a variety of conflict areas conducting reunification and rehabilitation projects; in 2004, the organisation was working in **Liberia** to fill the gaps in DDR benefits for children, operating interim care facilities and supporting skills training and apprenticeship initiatives.

### REGIONAL INITIATIVES

There are also regional policies aimed at strengthening children’s rights and security. In 1998, the **European Parliament** passed Resolution B4-1078 on child soldiers. It rejects the use of child soldiers, urges countries to adopt the CRC, and calls on the European Commission to direct resources to children in DDR programmes.<sup>55</sup> In addition, the **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe** devoted a paragraph in its 1999 Summit Declaration to its commitment to children’s rights during times of conflict.<sup>56</sup>

**The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (“the Charter”)** entered into force in November 1999.<sup>57</sup> It requires its state parties to take “all necessary measures to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostilities and refrain, in particular, from recruiting any child.” The Charter also established a Committee on the Rights and

Welfare of the Child to ensure application of its principles.

The **Inter-American Children’s Institute**, an organ of the **Organization of American States (OAS)**, works for children’s rights in the Western Hemisphere. In 2000, the OAS General Assembly passed Resolution 1709 on **Children and Armed Conflict**, calling upon member states to ratify the CRC, to respect international humanitarian laws that protect children and to support DDR programmes for children.<sup>58</sup>

Also in 2000, representatives of government and civil society groups issued the **Kathmandu Declaration on the Use of Children as Soldiers** at the Asia-Pacific Conference.<sup>59</sup> The declaration calls on Asia-Pacific states, other armed actors and civil society to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Government and civil society representatives from Middle East and North Africa issued a similar declaration in 2001. The **Amman Declaration on the Use of Child Soldiers** calls on governments and armed groups to end the recruitment and use of children under 18, specifically referencing girls, and to provide for the reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers.<sup>60</sup>

### NATIONAL ACTORS

According to the CRC, the state is obligated to protect children “from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.”<sup>61</sup> The CRC has provided a framework model for national governments to mainstream children’s protection in laws and constitutions. Article 28 of **South Africa’s** Constitution, adopted in 1996, outlines specific rights of the child. Many countries have also appointed special representatives to focus specifically on children.

Parliamentarians can help mainstream issues of child protection into their national and regional legislation. In **Algeria**, a minimum age for recruitment was defined in the National Service Act as 19 years old. In **Kenya**, the 2001 Children’s Act was passed by Parliament to protect children from violence, trafficking and other forms of abuse. In addition to creating laws, parliamentarians can ensure that funding and resources are allocated specifically for child protection. **Chile’s** parliament is considering a budget law to increase funding for child protection by 25 percent.<sup>62</sup>

### CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE COMMUNITY

Civil society organisations—including women’s groups, student organisations, churches, human rights groups and others—are often the first to document cases of the abuse of children’s rights and are well-placed to bring these matters to the attention of governments and the international community.

National and local NGOs may launch advocacy campaigns for the adoption of international legal standards for the protection of children, as well as measures within the national system. In **Cambodia**, for example, several groups formed the NGO Committee on the Rights of the Child for Cambodia, which works to monitor and implement the CRC in Cambodia. NGOs may also organise sensitisation programmes in their communities to engage people on issues of child protection. In **Rwanda**, HAGURUKA, a women’s human rights group, conducts training to teach Rwandans about existing laws and the importance of child protection.

In other cases, NGOs formulate programmes to implement children’s security and protection initiatives. Some of these projects directly prevent the recruitment of children into armed groups. In **Nepal**, the Institute of Human Rights Communication conducts the Children and Zones of Peace campaign, seeking a pledge from the government, political parties and armed opposition not to recruit children; it has been successful with all but the insurgents. In **Cambodia**, religious leaders have engaged with the local community to openly discuss AIDS, mobilise resources for AIDS-affected families and provide vocational training to AIDS orphans.<sup>63</sup>

In some cases, international NGOs coordinate with local groups to promote the rights of children. Save the Children began Community Child Protection Networks in villages in the **DRC**, which engaged local authorities (civil administration and traditional chiefs), religious leaders, representatives of service sectors (health, education, sports and culture), NGOs and associations, as well as children themselves to respond to alleged child abuse, raise awareness of children’s rights and prioritise the needs and interests of the community for development projects. Activities of the networks have included direct negotiations with authorities and armed groups to prevent recruitment and re-recruitment of child soldiers.<sup>66</sup>

Parents, extended family members, and guardians “can be the single most important factor in determining whether or not a child is protected.”<sup>67</sup> Some family members have organised to protect children. The “Go-Go Grannies” in **South Africa’s** Alexandria township support each other while raising their grandchildren orphaned by AIDS.<sup>68</sup>

Although parents and family members can be a source of protection, they also can be a source of insecurity in a child’s life due to domestic violence, exploitation or other forms of abuse.

Children, as the primary stakeholders, have an important role to play in their own security and future. Yet often they are neither consulted nor included in decisions related to their welfare. Increasingly, organisations are involving youth in designing and implementing programmes for children. In the course of their work, the **Women’s**

### The NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

This organisation convened in the early 1980s to advocate for, and provide input into the CRC. Since the CRC’s adoption by the UN General Assembly, the NGO Group has continued to promote, monitor and advocate for the implementation of the Convention. The membership of the NGO group includes human rights groups, women’s organisations, trade unions, religious charities and others. Subgroups have formed to work on themes including sexual exploitation, displacement and armed conflict.

A core project of the NGO Group is the Liaison Unit, which creates tools<sup>64</sup> and provides training to enhance NGO advocacy on these issues and assists them in accessing the working groups of the Committee of the Rights of the Child to provide input into country reports.<sup>65</sup>

**Commission for Refugee Women and Children** has engaged youth as researchers in the field, designing their own questionnaires and methods for soliciting information from fellow youth. UNICEF also funds programmes at the local level in **Nepal** through which schoolchildren advocate for children's rights as outlined in the CRC. In an innovative programme in **Zambia**, youth are trained as caregivers of people affected by AIDS; they assist with cleaning, nursing care and counselling. Interestingly, "contrary to early concerns that youth would only do tasks according to expected gender roles...male and female caregivers provided similar care-giving services, including counselling and housework."<sup>69</sup> In addition, youth themselves became increasingly aware of the risks of contracting AIDS and took appropriate preventative measures for themselves.

### 3. HOW DO WOMEN PROVIDE SECURITY FOR CHILDREN?

Regardless of the conflict or culture, children are primarily cared for by women, particularly in situations in which families have broken up and communities have dispersed. Even in the most dire conditions, such as in refugee and IDP camps, women are the primary source of basic security for children, caring for them, providing water, food, shelter, medication and where possible, encouraging their education and general well-being. This basic role is often taken for granted and thus not supported.

In cases where women have participated in peace negotiations, they have often focused on the needs of their communities and the future for their children. In **Guatemala**, for example, the participation of women in the formal peace process led to a national health program for women and girls and a programme to reunite families and locate children and orphans, among other initiatives.

Beyond the peace process itself, women are at the forefront of advocating and changing policies that affect children at the national level. Women parliamentarians often draft new laws and propose programmes and policies that contribute to children's security. For example, in 2004, all 14 women senators (out of a total of 100 senators) in the US Congress introduced a bill that would authorise

federal funding for programmes to protect and promote women and children's rights in **Iraq**.<sup>70</sup> In **South Africa**, women parliamentarians have influenced efforts to frame safety and security in terms of human security, prioritising education, for example, over the needs of the military.

As decision-makers in government, women have also historically sought to address the issue of children's rights and protection. A woman directing the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs in **Rwanda** instituted a national programme to care for the nearly 500,000 orphans following the genocide.<sup>71</sup> This unique project was successful; Rwandan women, regardless of ethnicity, accepted foster children into their homes.

Women in **civil society** are also catalysts for change. During conflict, women often organise themselves through widows' and mothers' associations to advocate for the end of war and to influence the peace process. They are able to draw on their "moral authority" as mothers to impact public opinion and decision-making on issues of war and peace.<sup>72</sup> In **Russia**, women have formed the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia with offices in 300 cities throughout the country to seek news of missing soldiers, accurately document the casualties and costs of war and nationally advocate to end war and forced military service.<sup>73</sup> In addition, women may reach across the conflict divide to other mothers. In **Sri Lanka**, mothers of missing soldiers and youth from the north and south have participated in a woman-led reconciliation process and dialogue, seeking a solution to the ongoing civil war. During war, women have also creatively provided forms of stability for their families. In **Colombia**, women in conflict zones informally arranged with the various fighting forces for safe passage of food and medicine for their families.

When children are marginalised in the post conflict environment, women are most often the actors that address their needs. Internationally, women's groups advocate for the ratification of the CRC and monitor its implementation. MADRE, for example, is a women's organisation based in New York that partners with women's groups on the ground, providing information and training to promote children's rights. At the national level, women's

## Abduction, Escape and Return<sup>74</sup>

A mother in **Uganda**, Angelina Atyam, made international news through her campaign for the release of thousands of child abductees by the Lord's Resistance Army, including her own 14-year-old daughter, taken from a boarding school with 138 other girls in 1996. Ms. Atyam, co-founder of the Concerned Parents Association, was offered the return of her daughter if she would stop speaking out against the abductions—a deal she refused. According to news sources, after eight years in captivity, her daughter escaped in 2004 along with two of her own children, conceived with a rebel commander.

organisations, such as the Women's Resource Centre in the **Caucasus**, lobby governments to address the needs of children recovering from armed conflict. Other groups may broadcast the mandate of international instruments for children's rights throughout their country; the Centre pour la Promotion des Droits de l'Enfant et de la Femme in the **DRC**, for example, has as its main mission the translation of the CRC into local languages.

Women also work to fill gaps in official programmes to address the needs and concerns of children. In **Sierra Leone**, the Women's Progressive Movement works to find abducted children, provide financial and medical assistance and facilitate their adoption, as necessary. The Afghan Women's Resource Center provides education and training for women and girl refugees in **Pakistan**, monitors protection issues for refugee women and children, and prepares reports for use internationally in advocacy efforts.

As individuals, too, women are at the forefront of care for children following conflict. Given the gendered nature of violent conflict, women heads-of-household become the norm in many post war societies. The care and reintegration of children naturally fall to women. In addition, they are often the nurses, teachers, community leaders and social welfare workers who address the physical and psychosocial trauma that children experience during conflict.

### 4. TAKING STRATEGIC ACTION: WHAT CAN WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS DO?

1. Develop and conduct training for government forces on the rights of children during war, including international law on the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Raise awareness among traditional leaders, parents and family members to prevent the recruitment of children into government or opposition forces.
2. Encourage public awareness, acknowledgement and acceptance of the trauma experienced by children and others during war through special forums, traditional healing mechanisms or memorials.
3. Start sensitisation campaigns to inform the community about the importance of children's security, including the rights of children, the return of child soldiers, the trauma children have experienced and the specific needs and concerns of girls.
4. Conduct surveys to assess the needs of children in the community, involving children directly in the process.
5. Identify relevant international, regional and national laws for children's rights and protection. Advocate nationally for the ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and regional mechanisms to promote children's security. Insist on enforcement of laws related to children's security, holding those in violation of these rights accountable for their crimes.
6. Work with donors and the national government to assist children's post conflict recovery. Advocate for reintegration and reconstruction programmes that address the needs of the community as a whole, including children, rather than just individuals.

- Raise awareness at the national and local level of the needs of child abductees and returnees, especially girls, so that they are included in official reintegration, resettlement and rehabilitation programmes.
  - Establish housing centres for children during war and for street children to provide access to food, shelter, healthcare, education and vocational training so that girls, in particular, have alternatives to prostitution, crime or joining an armed group.
  - Begin programmes to care for orphans and facilitate their placement in homes and adoption.
  - Sensitise children and youth to the dangers of landmines and unexploded ordnance.
7. Ensure that children and youth, especially girls, are directly involved in reintegration and reconstruction programs for children.
  8. Work with women's groups, social workers, religious leaders, teachers and nurses to provide rehabilitation assistance to child victims of conflict, specifically addressing psychosocial trauma. Reach out to teenage mothers, in particular, providing childcare to allow them to complete education and skills training.
  9. Advocate for specific mechanisms to include children in transitional justice processes. Coordinate with the international community to ensure the prosecution of recruiters of child soldiers.
  10. Work with the national government and donors to begin peace education campaigns to promote children's rehabilitation and long-term security.
    - Utilise the media to broadcast radio and television messages that provide local models and examples of efforts to promote non-violent conflict resolution.
    - Conduct training in schools; encourage the integration of peace education throughout the curriculum.
    - Develop context-specific methods to reach out to children, and include drama, sports, arts and recreation.
  11. Work with the national government to encourage the participation of children and youth in decision-making and governance through youth parliaments, specific positions in political parties and community leadership posts.

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## ACRONYMS

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
LRA	Lord’s Resistance Army
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

## ENDNOTES

1. There is no standard definition of adolescents or youth. It varies by culture and society and can be defined by chronology or age, as well as functionally, such as when a child transitions to an adult. See *Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict* by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children for a more detailed discussion at <<http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/adol2.pdf>>.
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