



Issue description

Committee: Security Council

Issue of: Protection of children in armed conflicts

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Introduction:

Millions of children around the world are exposed to violence and conflicts in their stages of growing up. Long-running conflicts such as the ones in Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, Central Africa Republic, DR Congo, Nigeria, and Iraq have been a major issue for decades now. There had been countless attempts to solve the issue of war, but none had yet succeeded. Children are the ones who are harmed by conflicts the most. They have to experience physical and mental harm, loss of their loved ones, violence, fear, exploitation and many more. Children have the right to be protected under all circumstances and should not be exposed to the list above. In conflict zones, it is impossible for families to provide their kids with a protective environment. Without a protective environment, children cannot develop into their full potential, therefore restricting their future. Children can also develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and have a higher chance for anxiety, depression and rebellious/aggressive behaviour. People in war torn areas also lack shelter, medical care, clothes, food and water, and warmth. These factors are the very base of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Children are often forgotten when it comes to unrests and war. It is crucial to start developing a solution to protect all children around the world from such tragedies and to maintain their innocents.

Definition of key terms:

- PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) "mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it"
- Child soldiers "children under the age of 18 who are recruited by a state or non-state armed group and used as fighters, cooks, suicide bombers, human shields, messengers, spies, or for sexual purposes."
- Maslow's hierarchy of needs "Motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid."



General overview:

During conflict, children and young people's rights are violated on a massive scale; their rights to be protected from violence, abuse and neglect, to live in dignity and be supported to develop to their full potential.

Effects of War on children:

According to a 2017 UNICEF report, not only was that year the “nightmare year” for children in war torn countries, but also the worst time in some of Africa's countries. Around 4.5 million people were displaced from their homes and families in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with around half of the number being children. The conflict originates from the refugee crisis and the remains of the Rwanda genocide in 1994, and around seventy armed groups around the eastern area of the country. The Saudi led coalition in Yemen is responsible for 19 attacks on schools and killing or wounding 670 children. Overall, around 5000 children have been killed or injured since the outbreak of the civil war. As a result of the fighting and destruction during the Iraqi Civil War, millions of civilians were displaced from their homes, lost their jobs and were stripped of many other assets key for financial security. Reflective of this situation is the disproportionality of unemployment rates in areas most affected by ISIS (21.6 percent) compared to the rest of the country (11.2 percent). Additionally, UNICEF released a report this year warning that one in four children in Iraq is in poverty and four million in need of assistance as a direct result of the war.

War affects children in all the ways it affects adults, but also in different ways. First, children are dependent on the care, empathy, and attention of adults who love them. Their attachments are frequently disrupted in times of war, due to the loss of parents, extreme preoccupation of parents in protecting and finding subsistence for the family, and emotional unavailability of depressed or distracted parents. Children are also constantly exposed to fear, resulting anxiety, depression which results in kids getting diagnosed with PTSD. Growing up in a protective environment is essential for children and young people to develop to their full potential. Some witness the death of loved ones. Some are forced to pull the trigger themselves. Communities are ripped apart and can no longer provide a secure environment for children. Adults are busy surviving; parents have little time for their children. They have to experience physical and mental harm, loss of their loved ones, violence, fear, exploitation and many more. As a consequence of conflict, children and young people can lose their confidence, their trust in others and their trust in the future. They often become anxious, depressed and withdrawn, or rebellious and aggressive. Elsewhere, children in countries including Myanmar, Yemen, Mali and Afghanistan continued to be exploited by parties to conflict as combatants, spies, domestic and sexual slaves in 2018. Also, millions of children are disabled by war, many of whom have grossly inadequate access to rehabilitation services. A child may have to wait up to 10 years before having a prosthetic limb fitted. Children who survive landmine blasts rarely receive prostheses that are able to keep up with the continued growth of their limbs.

Living Conditions:

Living conditions are also extremely serious. Due to the shortage of food, more than 200,000,000 children in Yemen suffer from malnutrition. The numbers are also very similar in Syria, Iraq and other countries under conflict. There is also lack of medical care, and shelter



due to the destroyed buildings and infrastructure. Lack of water has been a major issue throughout the Syrian civil war as 14.6 million people need access to clean water. All sides of the war have held water hostage, but it has left many civilians as collateral damage. Due to damaged infrastructure, there is severely limited running water, forcing Syrians to be almost entirely dependent on foreign aid. Access to clean water is a persistent problem for Nigerians as well. USAID reports that many Nigerians struggle with access to clean water, and this struggle remains a particularly dire situation in the northern part of the country in which only 30 percent of the population have access to safe drinking water.

Results gathered by the World Food Program reveal that 53 percent of Iraqi residents are vulnerable to food insecurity. Faring worse than national averages are Iraqis who have been internally displaced by the civil war. Results show that 66 percent of internally displaced people are susceptible to food insecurity. In a 2016 article done by Doctors Without Borders, many in the area were said to have been cut off from all humanitarian aid due to fighting between the Nigerian military and the militant group Boko Haram.

Education:

Children's schooling is also greatly affected by war. "School should not be a death trap" said Hannah Singer, the UNICEF representative in Syria reflecting upon the circumstances in the country. More than 1.7 million children can't go to schooling another 1.3 million are at the risk of dropping out. This is all due to the fact that children cannot walk safely to their schools or the schools have been destroyed, damaged or occupied by military forces. In two weeks, 9 children lost their lives going to school. Since the outbreak of the war in 2011, there has been 4000 such incidents. In DR Congo, 400 schools were attacked in the past years. Schools and playgrounds in conflict zones are damaged or taken over by armed groups. The ongoing conflict in Iraq has diminished education attendance. Since the end of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, Iraq has been in constant conflict. What emerged following that war was a civil war between Sunnis and Shias and a burst of jihadist insurgencies. This has ultimately interfered with education in Iraq. Attendance is low with 3.5 Iraqi children either not attending school regularly or not at all. Moreover, ISIS' presence in Iraq has damaged the Iraqi education system. Prior to being pushed out of its last Iraqi stronghold in Mosul, ISIS ran rampant in Iraq and created several consequences. On top of terrorizing Iraqi citizens, ISIS negatively influenced the Iraqi education system greatly. When ISIS had control in Iraq, they either closed schools and used them as safe houses or they took schools over completely and began teaching a curriculum of radicalization. Parents were forced to send children to these schools under the threat of death. This resulted in one out of every five schools being out of use. The Democratic Republic of Congo has made significant progress in the education sector. For instance, the completion rate at primary level has substantially increased from 29% in 2002 to 70% in 2014. Yet, it is still one of the countries with the largest number of out-of-school children.

It is estimated that 3.5 million or 26.7% of primary age children are out-of-school, of which 2.75 million live in rural areas. Furthermore, the sector is facing a wide range of challenges with regard to quality, governance and disparities.

Child Soldiers:

Millions of children can be found armed in war torn areas. António Guterres stated in his annual report in 2018, that there are currently 56 non-state and 7 state armed groups using child soldiers in 2017. The issue of exploitation of girls in Somalia has also been heard in the report. So far,



there has been over 21 000 verified grave violations against children. Violence continues to plague DR Congo with unrest in central Kasai and its eastern provinces having a devastating impact on civilians and leading to the recruitment of thousands of boys and girls by armed groups. This year has also seen Boko Haram persist with shocking levels of violence and children routinely targeted for use as ‘suicide bombers’ – 43 cases in Nigeria were recorded in the first six months of 2018. In South Sudan, 19,000 children have been forcibly placed into armed groups since 2013. In Iraq and Syria, around 700 children were reportedly killed in the year to September, while UNICEF reported numerous instances where young people came under sniper fire and were even used as human shields. The recruitment of children under the age of 18 by armed groups has been rising in Syria as the war continues. In 2016 alone, 851 children were recruited to be child soldiers in Syria. In that same year, 652 children died and 647 were maimed, and these numbers are rapidly rising. In January and February of 2018, 1,000 children were killed or injured in the Syrian conflict. Some of these child soldiers have been kidnapped by armed groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS). Others are young Arabs or Muslims from Europe who have been convinced by radical groups like ISIS to leave their homes and join the fight against the Syrian government. Many, however, are children in Syria or in refugee camps in neighbouring countries who have volunteered to become soldiers. The families targeted by recruiters are typically poor and recruiters have been known to promise to pay and clothe children for their enlistment. The U.N. verified 29 child soldiers in Syria associated with government forces. Although the government is not supposed to conscript child soldiers, they do sit anyway. Around 60 percent of the United Nation’s verified cases of child soldiers in Syria were associated with the Free Syrian Army. The Free Syrian Army is a rebel group formed by army deserters in Turkey. Several other armed groups across Syria have adopted their banner. A child interviewed by the Human Rights Watch stated that he joined the Free Syrian Army after he was previously tortured by the government forces. The children in Syria have little protection from the government against armed groups recruitment. Overall, the issue of child soldiers is still far from being resolved. During wars, events and actions are very chaotic, therefore it is extremely hard to keep children away from becoming soldiers.



Major Parties Involved:

Yemen

Iraq

Syria

Democratic Republic of the Congo

South Sudan

Central African Republic

Nigeria

These countries have been under long term conflict. Millions of children in these areas have been killed or wounded throughout the years. The unrests in these countries are far from being over, yet over the years there has been some improvement regarding the conditions.

Boko Haram

Jihadist organization who has been responsible for many attacks, murders and criminal acts

UNICEF

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. Took many actions to combat the issue. Launched campaigns and with the help of volunteers aided kids in war torn areas

Timeline of events:

- The Bosnian war 1992-1995
- The Global War on Terrorism 2001-2013
- War in Afghanistan 2001-2014
- Iraq War and Insurgency 2003-2011
- Syrian War 2011- today



Previous attempts to solve the issue:

In Syria 2016, UNICEF and its partners launched a back-to-learning campaign to reach 2.5 million children with school supplies and text books, including 200,000 children living under siege and in hard-to-reach areas. More than 1,200 UNICEF-supported young volunteers are going door-to-door to reach out-of-school children including through alternative learning opportunities. The results were that the number of children who could not go to school decreased from 2.1 million to 1.7 million.

In 2018, the UN aided in the release of more than 900 child soldiers in South Sudan and released 56 boys from the Syrian Democratic Forces. In Nigeria, the Nigerian Civil Joint Task Force (NCJTF) rescued over 833 children in October. Also, UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Welcomes New Security Council Resolution passed on 9 July 2018 which took another step towards combatting the issue.

There are also programmes such as War Child's programmes that support children and young people to regain their confidence and build positive relationships with their peers, families and wider communities.

Alleviating Syrian poverty could be a crucial step in reducing the number of child soldiers in Syria. This could be done by providing Syrians with humanitarian aid, like helping them get food and homes and jobs. Children will be less vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups if they and their families are living in more stable situations.

Possible solutions and approaches:

The delegates can look at:

- The origin of the conflicts in different countries
- Steps that could be taken to limit children's interaction with war
- Look at smaller parts of the issue such as the way the General Overview is sectioned and take smaller steps for a successful solution



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