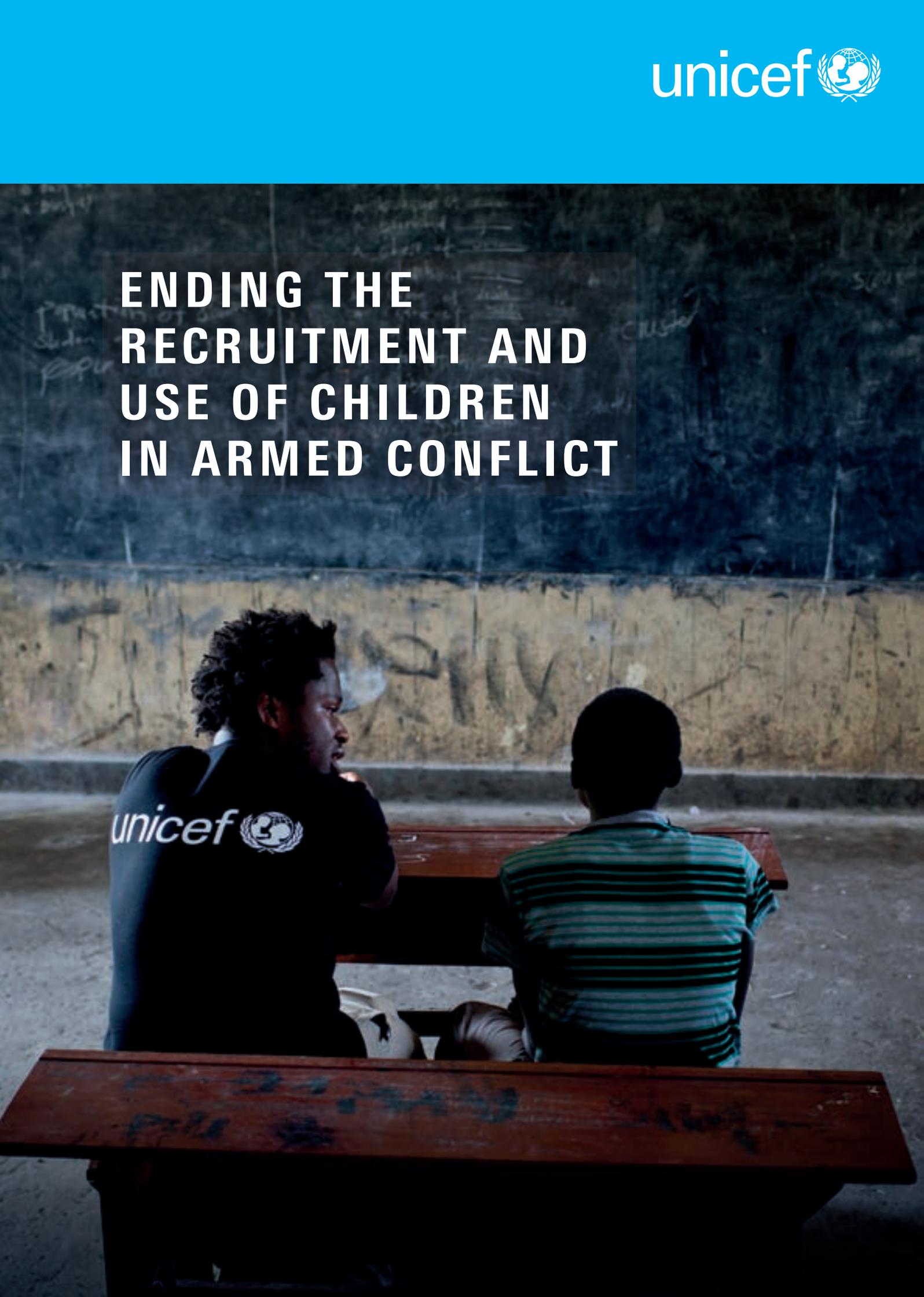


# ENDING THE RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

unicef 

A photograph showing a UNICEF staff member, seen from the side, sitting on a wooden bench and talking to a young boy. The staff member is wearing a dark t-shirt with the UNICEF logo. The boy is wearing a striped shirt and is seen from the back. They are in a classroom setting with a chalkboard in the background. The lighting is dim, and the overall tone is serious.

## INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago, international humanitarian advocate Graça Machel released her ground breaking *Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*. It became a *cri de coeur*, drawing the attention of governments, child protection agencies and civil society.<sup>1</sup> The former First Lady of Mozambique and South Africa compelled States to confront the fact that children were being used as weapons of war, and the phrase 'child soldiers' became a rallying call for action.

The international community called for an end to the outrage and recommended actions to protect children from recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups. Almost a generation later, this report sets out areas where important progress has been made towards ending the recruitment and use of children in conflict, including through the *Children, Not Soldiers* campaign, and makes recommendations for action by governments.

Despite considerable progress, however, tens of thousands of children – boys and girls under the age of 18<sup>2</sup> – are still estimated to be recruited and used in conflicts worldwide. As many as 16,000 children in South Sudan alone have been recruited and used by armed forces and groups since the start of the conflict in December 2013,<sup>3</sup> and all parties to the current conflict on the ground in Yemen have engaged in widespread recruitment of children.<sup>4</sup> As long as these grave violations continue, the international community has not honoured its promise to end, once and for all, the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

Children are used for various functions by armed forces and groups, including but not limited to fighters, cooks, porters, messengers and spies, or they are subjected to sexual exploitation.<sup>5</sup>

Some children are abducted or forcibly recruited, while others are driven to join by poverty, by circumstances of political or social exclusion, or the desire to seek revenge for violence committed against them or their families. In all cases the conscription of children for military purposes and their use by armed forces or groups is a grave violation of their rights.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000) requires States to ensure that children under age 18 are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces. Additionally, it requires them to raise the minimum age for voluntary recruitment to above age 15. It also forbids anyone under 18 to participate in hostilities. States are also required to take all feasible measures to prevent recruitment and use of individuals under the age of 18 by non-State armed groups.<sup>6</sup> And yet, despite the clear directives of this legal instrument, and the fact that some 176 countries have either ratified or signed it, the recruitment and use of child soldiers continues.

In adopting the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, governments around the world agreed to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers and fulfil the provisions of the Optional Protocol. Specifically, Target 8.7 compels States to take immediate and effective measures to “secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.”<sup>7</sup> Adding to these clear mandates for change are no fewer than 11 United Nations Security Council resolutions aimed at preventing and ending grave child rights violations in armed conflict. In addition this year, the international community will come together at the first ever World Humanitarian Summit with a focus on the safety and protection of civilians.

With the legal frameworks set and moral imperatives clear, it is now time to turn goals and promises into action. With political will mustered and international support provided, 2016 could be the pivotal year for making urgently needed progress.



A boy received shelter, care and training at a Unicef-supported centre for former child soldiers in N'Djamena, capital of Chad.

## RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

*"I was armed with a gun. At the time, nothing affected me because I was taking drugs. I wasn't thinking straight. Even if you were scared you couldn't leave [the group]"*.

Isma\*, a 14-year-old girl who joined an armed group in the Central African Republic

### **Children continue to be recruited and abducted by armed forces and groups**

Currently seven government armed forces are listed in the Secretary-General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict for recruitment and use of children. However, 49 armed groups are listed for that grave violation.

Child recruitment is occurring through forced recruitment, including abduction, as well as through the use of new means such as social media for recruitment. Some contemporary armed groups are known to employ recruitment strategies that specifically target children. In his 2015 report on children and armed conflict, the United Nations Secretary-General indicates that 49 of the 57 parties to armed conflict that are listed as perpetrators of violations against children are non-State armed groups.<sup>8</sup> For example, in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, the proliferation of armed groups and the military advances by ISIL have made children even more vulnerable to recruitment. Children as young as age 12 are undergoing military training as well as being used as informants and guards at checkpoints and other strategic locations.<sup>9</sup> Armed groups in other conflicts are also abducting children, including groups in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan.<sup>10</sup>

Over the past decade, the number of extremely violent conflicts almost doubled.<sup>11</sup> Globally, the rise in high intensity conflicts has hit children hard. One United Nations report described egregious violations against children. Some children, for example were "forced to witness or take part in beheadings, immolations and summary executions. They were also indoctrinated, recruited and forced to be suicide bombers or human shields. Girls were subjected to additional abuses, including sexual slavery, abduction and forced marriage...Such brutal tactics had severe repercussions on children, which will have lasting effects for generations to come".<sup>12</sup>

The progress being made with government armies towards ending the recruitment and use of children is harder to achieve with non-State armed groups.

Further, serious security considerations impact the ability of child protection actors and agencies to engage with some non-State armed groups.

However, agreements have been reached with several non-State armed groups that have led to the prevention of child recruitment and to the release of child soldiers. These non-State groups include the Cobra Faction in South Sudan, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines, and several armed groups in Myanmar. Such agreements show that concerted action can end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts.

### **Children allegedly associated with armed groups are detained and treated as security threats, deprived of their rights and protections**

A large number of children alleged to be associated with armed groups are being arrested and detained, deprived of their liberty and treated as security threats. Instead of being viewed as threats and deprived of their rights, children who are vulnerable to recruitment by armed forces and groups should be supported in their release and reintegration. Detention can have a profound and negative impact on children's long-term physical, emotional and cognitive development. In Afghanistan, for example, some children who were alleged to be associated with armed groups and detained in correction centres have been found to experience deep depression. Many need psychosocial support, including those who suffer further violence in the centres, such as sexual abuse.<sup>13</sup>

Information about the situation of such child detainees is often difficult to obtain. In one example, in Somalia, more than 75 children alleged to have been associated with the non-State armed group Al-Shabaab were detained at a government 'Rehabilitation Centre' for a few years. Many of the children were placed together with adult detainees and prevented from contacting their families.<sup>14</sup> Humanitarian access was denied until August 2014. In September 2015, following multilateral negotiations, 79 children were handed over to UNICEF and its implementing partners. They were subsequently reunited with their families or provided with interim care, while also benefiting from the community-based socio-economic reintegration programme.

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States have agreed that children may be detained

only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest period necessary.<sup>15</sup> International humanitarian law requires that children deprived of liberty must be afforded special protection and treatment in keeping with their age. In particular, they must be held separate from adults, except in those cases when an entire family is detained as a unit. The pronouncement or execution of a death sentence against a person aged under 18 is also prohibited.<sup>16</sup>

International standards on the administration of juvenile justice, as well as the protections contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, must be applied to all children, without exception, including children detained under national security and/or

terrorism legislation. Efforts are urgently needed to strengthen the protection of children at risk. Such efforts should ensure that these children are treated according to international standards for children in conflict with the law. Every opportunity should be explored to secure their release and reintegration.

## STEPS TO END THE RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT



Some of the 163 children released by the militia run to the transit centre in Batangafo, Central African Republic. UNICEF helped facilitate the handover.

In 2014 and 2015, grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict have increased<sup>17</sup> – with children targeted for killing, maiming, torture, abduction, sexual violence and exploitation, as well as underage recruitment and use in armed conflict. Schools and hospitals and related personnel have been attacked and threatened, and humanitarian access has been denied.

However, at the same time, a number of successes have been achieved in the face of extremely difficult circumstances. More progress is needed in the following three areas:

1. Preventing recruitment and use of children
2. Promoting release of children, and supporting appropriate community-based reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, including during armed conflict
3. Strengthening peacebuilding,<sup>18</sup> reconciliation and transitional justice for children

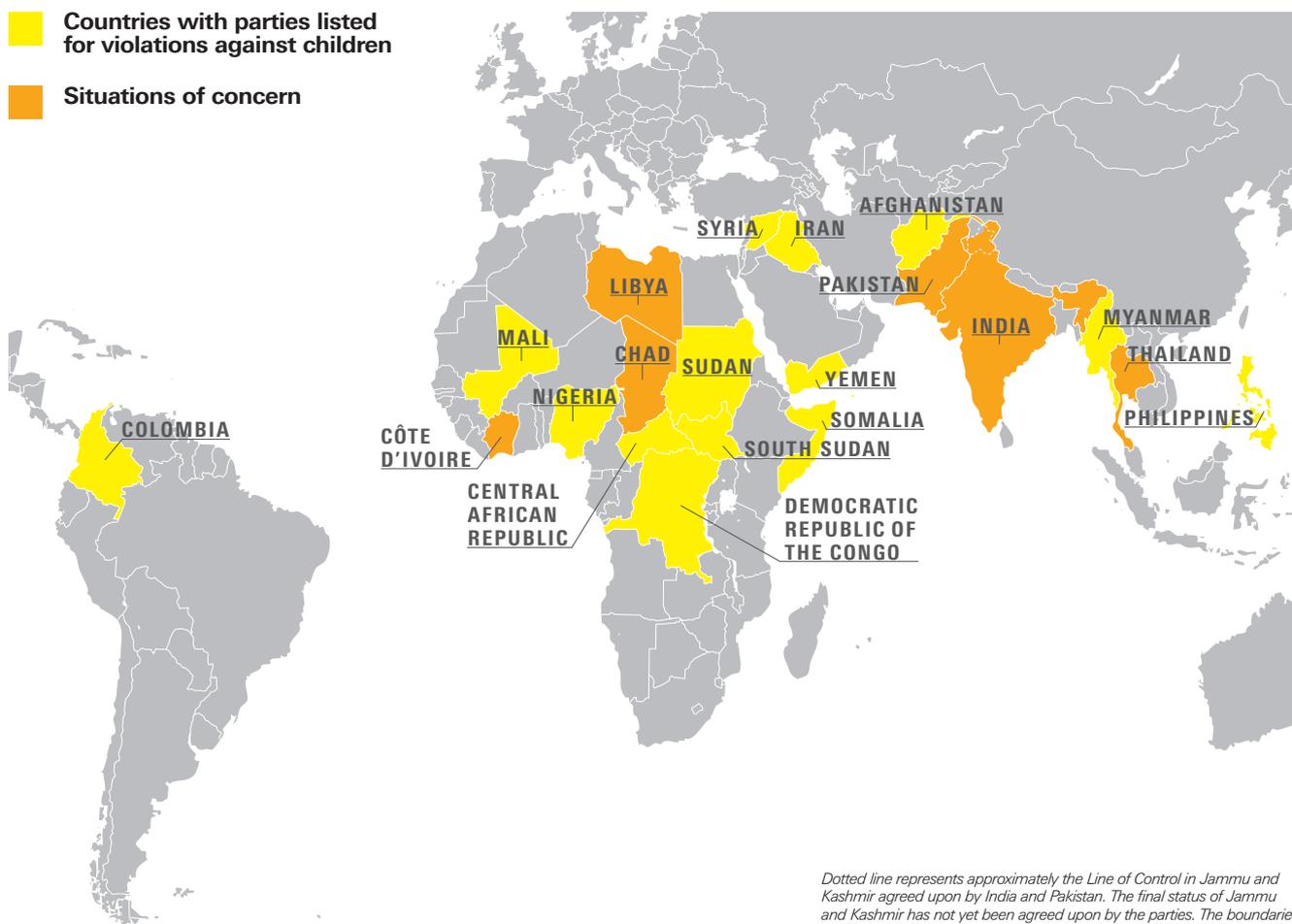
The international campaign *Children, Not Soldiers* has introduced new commitment and momentum towards the goal of ending the recruitment and use of children by government armed forces. The campaign was launched in March 2014 by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF.<sup>19</sup> The campaign focuses on the seven government security forces currently listed for child recruitment and use in the Annexes of the Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict: Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen. All of these States have committed to ending and preventing child recruitment in their armed forces, and six have signed Action Plans to achieve this. The Government of Sudan is currently negotiating an Action Plan to end and prevent child recruitment.

In September 2015, the Secretary-General announced that States repeatedly listed in his annual reports on children and armed conflict for engaging in grave violations against children and for conflict-related sexual violence will no longer be accepted for participation in UN peacekeeping operations.<sup>20</sup>

# COUNTRIES WHERE CHILDREN ARE AT RISK OF RECRUITMENT

**Countries with parties listed for violations against children**

**Situations of concern**



*Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.*

Afghanistan	Central African Republic	Chad	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Myanmar	Philippines	Somalia	South Sudan
The government signed an action plan in January 2011 and road map in August 2014 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. The Afghan Parliament passed laws criminalizing child recruitment and use, and a Presidential Decree was signed in February 2015.	Over 2,800 children were released in 2014, including 646 girls. In May 2015, leaders of armed groups signed an agreement to release all children and to immediately end any new child recruitment. More than 600 children have subsequently been released.	In July 2014, the national army was delisted from the Secretary-General's annex of parties to conflict that recruit children because it had fully implemented its action plan.	The President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo named a Presidential Adviser in charge of addressing sexual violence and child recruitment in July 2014, and has created technical working groups to implement the action plan in all provinces affected by conflict.	Since the signing of an action plan in June 2012, nearly 700 children have been released from the armed forces.	In the Philippines, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front have taken tangible steps towards full implementation of the Action Plan to prevent and end the recruitment and use of under-18s, including the issuance of a directive towards this end and community-based awareness-raising prevention campaigns.	Somalia has put in place mechanisms for the handover to the UN of children found in the ranks of its army and has established a child protection unit in its armed forces.	As part of a local peace agreement, Cobra Faction (a non-State armed group) released 1,755 children.

**Source:** Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (2015).

Note: Countries highlighted in yellow have parties that are listed for violations against children by the Secretary-General in his annual report on children and armed conflict. Countries highlighted in orange have situations of concern. There are other countries not marked on the map, for example in the Americas and in Europe, where children are recruited for military service.

## ACTION: THE WORK OF UNICEF

UNICEF is helping to secure the release of child soldiers from armed forces and armed groups and reintegrate them into their societies, while working with other vulnerable children in their communities. UNICEF is also working with partners to build the resilience of families and communities, and to strengthen the ability of children and young people to resist the influence and recruitment efforts of armed forces and armed groups.

In 2015, UNICEF secured the release of more than 10,000 children from armed forces or groups, and helped to reintegrate 8,000 children by working to:

- Negotiate with armed forces and armed groups for the release of children
- Provide support for gender-specific community-based socio-economic rehabilitation and reintegration of children, both girls and boys, released or escaped from armed forces or armed groups, to include formal or informal education and vocational training
- Conduct family tracing and reunification, with family mediation and follow-up
- Promote national legislation that prohibits and criminalizes recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups
- Promote effective monitoring and reporting of recruitment and use of children
- Safeguard the rights of child victims and witnesses associated with armed forces and armed groups

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### I. Prevent recruitment and use of children

*“We cannot wait for peace to help children caught in the midst of war. Investing in ways to keep children away from the frontlines, including through education and economic support, is absolutely critical to their future and the future of their societies.”*

UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Yoka Brandt

#### 1. Invest in building communities that are resilient against child recruitment

Children are more likely to be recruited if they are separated from their families, displaced from their homes, living in war zones or have limited access to education, with few alternatives in life. There are children who are forced to join armed forces or groups; and children who decide, sometimes due to community pressure, to join for a variety of reasons. But many children join armed forces and groups as the only way to guarantee daily food and survival. Investing in building the resilience of communities where children are at risk of recruitment is important and less costly in human and financial terms than dealing with the consequences of recruitment and use. Investment in education is key to preventing recruitment. When long-term funding is made available to specific programmes focused on resilience, such as education and livelihoods support, the ability of communities to better protect their children, and reduce the risks of recruitment, can be greatly increased.

#### 2. Schools must be safe spaces

Educating every child is essential to prevent child recruitment and use. However, schools can also be used by armed forces or groups to recruit children and even train them. For this reason, it is vital that schools are safe spaces where children are protected from recruitment.

Over the past decade, in at least 26 countries experiencing armed conflict, armed forces and groups have used schools and universities for military purposes (such as bases, barracks, firing positions, armouries, and detention centres).<sup>21</sup> In fact, military use of schools occurs in the majority of conflict-affected countries.<sup>22</sup> Even if armed forces or groups are not using schools for recruitment or training, their presence in conflict-affected areas can lead parents to remove their children from school in order to protect them from underage recruitment. This is why UNICEF advocates for governments to implement the Guidelines on Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict<sup>23</sup> and to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.<sup>24</sup>

#### 3. Provide universal birth registration

One of the most important tools for preventing child recruitment is universal birth registration, which makes it possible to assess the age of potential recruits. Particular attention is needed to register the birth of children who are refugees, internally displaced, or members of minority or marginalized

groups, as these children are more vulnerable than others to underage recruitment.

#### 4. Promote legislation to prevent child recruitment and train military and security forces in child rights and child protection

Making the recruitment of children by armed forces and groups a criminal offence is dependent on governments enacting adequate/appropriate legislation – a step that UNICEF strongly advocates. Governments should include awareness of such laws in the training and practice of their own military forces.

Another opportunity to promote the protection of children at risk of recruitment and use is the promotion of child protection measures in security-sector reform processes such that these measures are incorporated in military doctrine, Rules of Engagement, Standard Operating Procedures and education, and other training.

This focus is also crucial for peacekeeping forces, as is the inclusion of child protection in the peacekeeping operations' mandates, and raising awareness about children's rights in the forces' training and manuals. Progress in this area would build on the 2013 agreement made between the African Union Commission and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to mainstream child protection considerations and build capacity for child protection in the Commission's peacekeeping missions.<sup>25</sup>

#### 5. Monitor and report child recruitment and use

In 2005, the United Nations Security Council established the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations of children's rights (resolution 1612) in an attempt to end impunity for those who commit grave violations against children in armed conflicts. Among the six grave violations is the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups. Under this mechanism, UN-led Country Task Forces monitor, verify and report on grave violations against children in order to promote accountability by perpetrators and to prevent future violations. Parties to conflict that are found to engage in systematic grave violations against children may be listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict.

As part of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, UNICEF, together with other UN actors, and civil society partners, liaises with government forces and armed groups perpetrating grave violations against children to develop Action Plans to end and prevent these violations. Each Action Plan – developed jointly between the UN and the armed force or group – outlines concrete, time-bound steps that, when implemented fully, would lead to compliance with international law. It is essential that Action Plans are fully supported politically and financially so that commitments can be quickly translated into results for children. To date, 23 listed parties<sup>26</sup> have signed action plans, including 11 government forces and 12 non-State armed groups. Of those, 9 parties have fully complied with their action plan and have subsequently been de-listed from the annexes of the annual report on children and armed conflict.<sup>27</sup>

### CASE STUDY: HUDA AND THE WEAPON OF EDUCATION

Huda\*, a former soldier from Syria, has experienced violence and tragedy that most of us can't even imagine. She is just 15 years old.

Her brother Tareq joined a rebel group. One night he was captured while sleeping at home.

"We have not heard anything about him since the day he was taken. It has been three years."

Several months after his disappearance, Huda and her family heard rumours that Tareq was going to be executed. "That was the day I decided to join the revolution and not to leave until my brother was free."

Huda vividly remembers the night she first saw combat. "I was very scared. I was given a Kalashnikov and we got ready for battle."

\*Name changed to protect identity

Almost Huda's entire group fell in battle. "Only one survived, Radi, and he lost his sight."

In January 2014 Huda was shot in the arm. She was unable to get treatment because

of the damage to health facilities. Huda and her mother fled Syria and are now living as refugees. Huda now receives treatment but is still in pain. "I cannot move my arm. I cannot straighten it."

Huda also struggles from the psychological effects of the conflict, and she is trying to rekindle a sense of hope and purpose in her life through education.



## II. Promote the release of children and support appropriate community-based reintegration programmes for former child soldiers

UNICEF advocates that every opportunity be taken to secure the release of children from armed forces and armed groups. Peace negotiations and agreements can provide key opportunities for progress, but as recruitment and use of children is a grave child rights violation, action should be taken sooner wherever possible, even where ceasefires or peace process do not yet exist.

Once a child has been released or has escaped from an armed force or armed group, the child requires all the support that she or he needs to reintegrate into the community. If that does not happen, then there is a serious risk of the child being re-recruited. Successful reintegration programmes are long term and take into account the individual child's needs.

### CASE STUDY: JAMAL AND THE COBRA FACTION, SOUTH SUDAN



When fighting broke out in South Sudan in December 2013, Jamal's\* community was riven by violence and he wanted to protect himself and his family. Against his mother's pleas, he volunteered to join the South Sudan Democratic Movement/

Army (SSDM/A) Cobra Faction and was given a gun on the spot, spending the next two years working as a cook, cleaner and combatant. He was just 12 years old. Since he was separated from his family for so long, Jamal's mother thought he was dead. After a peace agreement was signed by the Government of South Sudan and the SSDM/A on 25 July 2014, the release of children was secured, and Jamal was released and reunited with his mother and the rest of his family. Jamal is now attending a UNICEF-supported school and is receiving psychological and social care to help him reintegrate into the community. Such support is helping children like Jamal to prepare for future livelihoods, for example by providing goats, sheep and chickens, as well as vocational training in areas such as dairy farming, baking, leather tanning and solar technology.

\*Name changed to protect identity

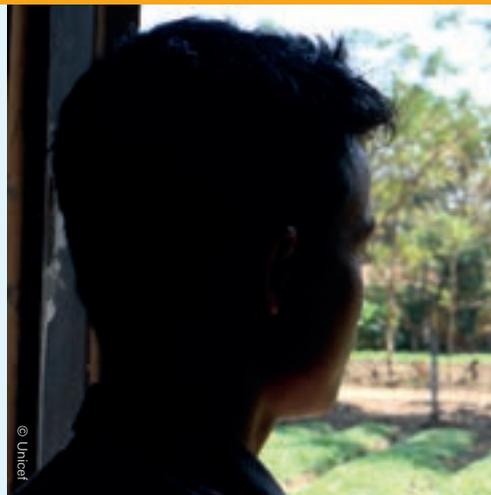
When providing support to children released from armed groups, it is important also to provide support to other vulnerable children in the broader community to promote inclusion and avoid stigmatizing the children who were associated with armed forces or armed groups. Broad inclusion is particularly important for girls, who may have 'self-demobilized', bypassing formal or informal release programmes and therefore failing to receive assistance and services. Girls who are recruited face particular difficulties in their return to their families and communities. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo it has been reported that when children are released or escape from armed groups, girls often stay behind. Girls may fear the stigma of their former association with armed forces or armed groups. This is especially true when they are survivors of rape and may have given birth to children as a result of their former association.<sup>28</sup>

Long-term funding of reintegration programmes, though necessary, is often not available. In 2015, an evaluation of the UNICEF reintegration programme for former child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo found that the success of the programme was diminished by the lack of sufficient financial resources. Though the first phase of the programme was successful, there was not enough funding to cover the entire reintegration phase over three to four years. Funding shortfalls in the Central African Republic and in South Sudan are currently threatening the release and reintegration programmes for children that are essential to prevent re-recruitment and to help those children become active and productive members of their communities.

## CASE STUDY: MYO KO AND THE MYANMAR NATIONAL ARMY

Myo Ko\* never participated in direct hostilities between the Army and armed groups in Myanmar, but his duties included chopping bamboo to build military encampments in areas riddled with landmines. Then in June 2012, the Myanmar Government signed an action plan with the United Nations to prevent the recruitment and use of children in the armed forces, with UNICEF helping to release any child recruited under age 18. A hotline was established for people to report the recruitment of children under 18, together with billboards, posters and stickers featured around the country. The message reached Myo Ko, who was released by his battalion commander. Now, Myo Ko is a shopkeeper, with UNICEF and local partners providing business training, grants and psychological support to help children who were recruited to be reaccepted into their communities. Business is good and Myo Ko is enjoying his new life. But sometimes he thinks about the children who still remain in the army. "There are still children in the military. Some joined because of poverty and some were forcibly recruited, and they want to come home just like me."

\*Name changed to protect identity



"I felt very afraid. I worried that I would become disabled, but I had to do this duty."

### III. Strengthen peacebuilding, reconciliation and transitional justice for children

In the aftermath of war or conflict, when institutions, infrastructure, and communities are damaged or destroyed, the recovery and rebuilding of society needs to be prioritised. The rights of children affected by armed conflict can be protected and promoted through peace building processes, especially when there are holistic approaches to reconciliation and transitional justice.

For children who have survived and/or participated in atrocities, this is not just about creating alternatives to prosecution; rather it is about complementing criminal justice with other accountability measures. Transitional justice should therefore encompass action to examine violations against children and prosecute those responsible. It should also provide remedial services for victims and a guarantee — to the extent possible — that crimes will not be repeated. In adopting a holistic approach, governments should also take into account factors that may have contributed to abuse and consider a range of mechanisms for promoting justice. For example, while judicial measures offer legal recourse, truth commissions or local reconciliation processes can create a space for public dialogue. These processes are not mutually exclusive but complementary.

As children are among the primary victims of war, it is important to recognize that they should be

encouraged to engage in these restorative processes. Acknowledging the crimes that children have suffered and the offences children may have committed can promote their best interests. To this end, UNICEF advocates for governments to ensure that any judicial proceedings involving children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups are conducted within a framework of restorative justice that supports children's physical, psychological, and social rehabilitation. In addition, non-judicial accountability processes should also support children's rehabilitation and help to ensure opportunities for reintegration into productive civilian life.

Young people suffer directly in conflict, yet their participation in peacebuilding has been frequently overlooked and the significance of their involvement only recently acknowledged. The Security Council has called on States to ensure that the protection, welfare and rights of children are taken into account during peace negotiations and afterward during the consolidation of peace. This requires creating safe spaces through which young people may share their experiences with each other and with adults and inform decision-making. This also requires governments to support youth networks and organizations, and establish channels through which children and young people may engage with leaders and decision-makers in the peacebuilding process.

# SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS

## I. Prevent recruitment and use of children

### *For all Governments:*

- Implement Sustainable Development Goal 8.7.
- Ensure that the minimum age of recruitment to their armed forces is 18; establish systematic recruitment procedures that ensure that no child under the age of 18 is recruited into their armed forces; make the recruitment of children by armed groups a criminal offence.
- Ensure universal implementation of birth registration by 2030, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16.9, and establish/institutionalize age-assessment systems.

- Integrate child protection into training and military curricula, and military doctrine, Rules of Engagement, and Standard Operating Procedures.
- Endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and implement the Guidelines on Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

### *For Donor Governments:*

- Provide political and long-term financial support for community-based programmes, including education, that strengthen the resilience of at-risk communities and children, and for the last year of the Children Not Soldiers Campaign.

## II. Promote the release of children and support appropriate gender-specific and community-based reintegration programmes for former child soldiers

### *For all Governments:*

- Release children already in the ranks of the national security forces or who are otherwise associated with those forces
- Incorporate into all relevant peace agreements clear provisions for the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups.
- Ensure that children recruited and used by armed forces and groups receive immediate, adequate and appropriate reintegration support once released.

### *For Donor Governments:*

- Provide consistent and long-term funding for holistic family and gender-specific community-based socio-economic reintegration programmes for children affected by armed conflict, including healthcare, psychosocial support, education, vocational training and other services to support their return to families and communities.

## III. Strengthen peacebuilding, reconciliation and transitional justice for children

### *For all Governments:*

- Strengthen national justice systems, to ensure that suspected perpetrators of grave violations of children's rights - such as the recruitment or use of children - are brought to justice.
- Ensure the protection of child soldiers from retribution, summary execution, arbitrary detention, torture, and other punitive measures, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, international law and international juvenile justice standards. This should apply even where children are alleged to be perpetrators of abuses; alternatives to detention should be sought and promoted, and

any sentence imposed should be focused on the child's rehabilitation.

- Establish channels that enable children to safely bring their perspectives and ideas directly to national leaders, governments, and other adults engaged in post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.
- Create spaces for both established and emerging youth organizations to meet, share experiences, network, and support each other in their work of monitoring and advocating to protect children in situations of armed conflict.

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**Right now, millions of children are in danger. They're facing violence, disease, hunger, and the chaos of war and disaster. Together, we have the power to change that. With your help, we'll do whatever it takes until every child is safe.**

Tens of thousands of children are estimated to be recruited and used in conflicts worldwide.

As long as these grave violations continue, the international community has not honoured its promise to end, once and for all, the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

**Unicef needs you to help our work to end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts.**

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Cover image

Unicef Advocate for Children Affected by War Ishmael Beah talks to a child formerly associated with an armed group, who worked as both a cook and a fighter and who saw three of his friends killed in battle, at a school supported by UNICEF in Pibor, South Sudan.

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