

ZISMUN

Zurich International School MUN



Dear Delegates,

We are looking forward to welcoming you into the committee of the Human Rights Council of ZISMUNN 2026! As your chairs, we are thrilled to have you in our committee and for the opportunity to hear each of your perspectives on important global issues. We look forward to seeing the energy, creativity, and passion that you will bring to this committee.

As delegates, you are not only representing the country you have been given, but also demonstrating the mindset of the Model United Nations. We encourage you to enter each session with an open mind, ready to listen to different perspectives, a goal to find a common ground with other delegates, and be motivated for debate.

In this committee, we value critical thinking, cooperation, diplomacy, and more. It is vital to us as chairs to not only create a room with passionate delegates but also to maintain a respectful environment, seeing as these are sensitive topics, and each delegation has its own view on such discussions.

We cannot wait to see you soon and what you bring to the table. Remember, above all else, debate is at the heart of what we do, but diplomacy is the foundation upon which MUN thrives.

Warm regards,
Your chairs
Lara and William

Safeguarding the Rights of Children in Armed Conflict

General Overview of the Situation:

Armed conflicts affect the lives of millions of children globally, making them one of the most vulnerable demographic groups in modern warfare. According to the ‘Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict’, in 2024, “the highest number of grave violations against children in armed conflict since the inception of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate almost 30 years ago was verified in 2024. This marks a 25% increase compared to 2023 and the third consecutive year with alarming figures.” ¹ These violations of human rights not only scar individuals but also hinder post-conflict recovery and the development of countries.

The UN’s Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate established six grave violations: recruitment and use of child soldiers, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access. The UN verified in 2024 a staggering 41,370 grave violations, marking a 25% surge from the previous year and the highest figure since monitoring began. This escalation reflects intensified conflicts in regions like the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia.

The CAAC agenda operates through the ‘Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC), country task forces, and security council mechanisms. Annual reports starting from 1996 strive for a solution to these inhumane practices. Although there has been success, like how since the year 2000, more than 115,000 children have been released as a result of action plans and the collective efforts of child protection actors², challenges continue, such as underreporting, denial of humanitarian needs, and further violations.

Key Definitions:

Child:

Any person under 18 years of age, as defined in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

¹

<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2025/06/22495-haunting-cries-children-affected-by-conflict-endured-an-unconscionable-number-of-grave-violations-in-2024/>

²

https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/WEB-EN_Children-and-Armed-Conflict-Office-Brochure-web.pdf

Child associated with an armed force or group (CAAFAG):

Any person under 18 recruited or used by an armed force or group in any capacity, including children used for fighting, labor (e.g., porters, cooks, messengers, spies), sexual exploitation, or marriage; not limited to combatants.

Child soldier:

A subset of CAAFAG; under the 1997 Cape Town Principles, any child under 18 who is part of any regular or irregular armed force/group, used in hostilities, support roles, or sexual slavery.

Killing and maiming:

Intentional or indiscriminate attacks causing death or serious injury leading to permanent disability (e.g., amputations, blindness)

Rape and other forms of sexual violence:

Acts including rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced marriage, and sexual harassment against children.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) protections:

Children qualify as protected civilians unless directly participating in hostilities; prohibit targeting conscription under 15 (Geneva Conventions), and mandate special respect.

Historical Situation:

The involvement of children in warfare can be seen since the First World War, where 250,000 underage British soldiers were enlisting, with many having died at the Somme. In World War 2, we can see the use of child soldiers with Hitler's Youth battalions and Soviet conscripts, with children as young as the age of 12³.

Before the official realization of these unethical acts, there have been many nations at war that exploited children in the acts of war. In Africa, Liberia's 1989-2003 civil wars involved 10,000+ child soldiers under Charles Taylor, fueled by diamonds and AK-47s. Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) amputated children's limbs to terrorize communities. Asia's Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) deployed 95,000 Iranian child "martyrs" in human waves.⁴

Global outrage and recognition sparked in the 1990s amid the Rwandan Genocide, which included 300,000 child victims, and Yugoslavia's ethnic cleansing wars (1991-2001). Graça Machel's seminal 1996 UN report—"Impact of Armed Conflict on Children"—exposed

³ <https://www.historyextra.com/period/first-world-war/yugoslavia's-war/how-children-used-warfare-fighting-child-soldiers/>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_children_in_the_military

realities, recommending a dedicated Security Council agenda. This birthed Resolution 1314 (2000), demanding disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs.⁵

Resolution 1539 (2004) created a monitoring mechanism, which was followed by another resolution, 1612 (2005), which established the working group. Historical milestones include the 1997 Cape Town Principles (NGO-driven) and the 2007 Paris Commitments, and demobilizing thousands in Colombia and Côte d'Ivoire.

Current Situation:

As of 2025-2026, grave violations reached record highs: 41,370 verified in 2024, with partial 2025 data showing continued escalation. Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territory topped lists with 8,554 violations (mostly Israeli forces killing/maiming), followed by Burkina Faso (Jihadist recruitment), Myanmar (Tatmadaw conscription), Somalia (Al-Shabaab abductions), Sudan (RSF sexual violence), Ukraine (Russian filtration/deportations), Haiti (gang rapes), and Syria.

In 2024, the highest number of abuses were in the Israel/Palestine conflict, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Nigeria, and Haiti. In the Israel and Palestine conflict, there were 8,554 violations documented, with nearly 85% committed by the Israeli forces, including having killed, maimed, and starved Palestinian children in Gaza, and they are still responsible for many ongoing war crimes, such as crimes against humanity and genocide⁶.

Non-state actors dominate recruitment (70% of cases), but state forces like Myanmar's military violate OPAC. Emerging threats: cyber-recruitment via TikTok in Sahel conflicts, climate-exacerbated resource wars displacing children. Humanitarian access denials worsened 40% in 2024, starving Yemen and Syria's youth. COVID-19 and economic shocks compounded vulnerabilities, with 250 million children needing protection services.

Key Treaties/Agreements:

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989):

Core UN human rights treaty for all persons under 18, covering civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Article 38 obliges states to respect International Humanitarian Law protecting children in armed conflict, avoid recruiting under-15s, and ensure special protection and care during war. Article 39 requires states to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of child victims of conflict, torture, neglect, or exploitation.

Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC, 2000):

An additional treaty to the CRC focused specifically on the recruitment and use of children in hostilities. Bans compulsory conscription of anyone under 18 into national armed forces and

⁵ <https://www.unssc.org/courses/children-and-armed-conflict-primer>

⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/20/violations-soar-against-children-in-armed-conflict>

requires states to take all feasible measures to prevent under-18s from taking direct part in hostilities. Allows voluntary recruitment from 16 in limited conditions (age verification, parental consent, fully informed decision), but completely prohibits non-state armed groups from recruiting or using under-18s “under any circumstances.” Requires states to demobilize child soldiers and support their rehabilitation and reintegration through education, health care, and psychosocial support.

Geneva Conventions (1949) and Additional Protocols (1977):

Core international humanitarian law treaties regulate conduct in war and protect those not taking part in hostilities. Children are protected as civilians; parties must not target them and must provide care, including education and family reunification where possible. Additional Protocol I (international conflicts) and Protocol II (non-international conflicts) oblige parties to refrain from recruiting children under 15 or allowing them to take part in hostilities, and to prioritize older children if recruitment of 15-18-year-olds occurs.

ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999):

Defines “forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict” as one of the worst forms of child labour. Requires states to prohibit and eliminate such recruitment as a matter of urgency, and to provide assistance for the removal and rehabilitation of affected children

UN Security Council Children and Armed Conflict Resolutions

A series of binding Security Council resolutions that create the political and operational framework for the CAAC agenda. The key resolutions include: **1261 (1999)**: First resolution on children and armed conflict; it recognizes the issue as a peace and security matter and calls for protection in peacekeeping mandates. **1539 (2004)** and **1612 (2005)**: establishing the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and the Security Council Working Group to systematically gather data and follow up on violations. The **1882 (2009)**, **1998 (2011)**, **2143 (2014)**, **2427 (2018)**, and **2601 (2021)** resolutions are to expand the list of grave violations (e.g., attacks on schools/hospitals), to reinforce accountability, and to integrate child protection into peace processes. Some recent resolutions (e.g., 2764 and others) aim to strengthen child protection in UN peace operations and encourage sanctions against persistent violators.

Paris Principles and Paris Commitments (2007)

A Non-binding political commitment and detailed guidelines on how states, UN agencies, and NGOs should deal with “children associated with armed forces or armed groups.” As well as to clarify that these children should be treated primarily as victims, not criminals, and set practical standards for prevention, identification, release, interim care, and long-term reintegration (education, livelihoods, community acceptance).

Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (2017)

Political commitment by troop-contributing countries to make child protection a central part of UN peacekeeping. It also includes practical measures such as specialized training for peacekeepers, risk assessments, and procedures to prevent and respond to child soldier recruitment in missions.

Key Country Positions:

Switzerland

A strong diplomatic advocate for CAAC, which integrates child protection into humanitarian diplomacy and peace processes. Switzerland also supports the CAAC agenda financially and politically, backs action plans and reintegration programs, and promotes accountability for grave violations in forums such as the Human Rights Council.

European Union (EU)

The EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict require the mainstreaming of CAAC into EU foreign policy, development, and security actions. France has chaired the Security Council Working Group on CAAC and is a key sponsor of CAAC resolutions, Paris Principles, and Safe Schools; Germany and others push for strong monitoring, sanctions on listed perpetrators, and robust DDR funding.

United States

They are a major funder of UNICEF and DDR programmes, and support listing and monitoring mechanisms in principle. They are criticized for security assistance to forces implicated in violations (e.g., in Yemen or Israel/OPT) and for selective use of sanctions/waivers under its Child Soldiers Prevention Act, which some argue undermines consistency.

United Kingdom, Canada, Nordic countries

Generally strong supporters of the CAAC agenda, Safe Schools Declaration, and Vancouver Principles, pushing for child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions. They provide technical and financial support to monitoring, reporting, and survivor-focused reintegration programmes in conflict zones.

Possible Solutions:

There are many possible solutions to this topic, so here is a brief mention of what some of them could be. It is encouraged that you further look into these possibilities, to strengthen your goal and understanding.

Some ways of finding a solution can consist of: strengthening UN Action Plans and monitoring, integrating child protection into peace processes, and peacekeeping, using targeted UN sanctions against commanders and political leaders responsible for recruitment, encouraging referrals to the International Criminal Court (ICC) or specialised tribunals, and

developing child-friendly justice systems, Demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DDR), protecting schools, hospitals, and humanitarian access points, and lastly finding root causes and recruitment drivers to further prevent child involvement.

Further Readings:

Children and Armed Conflict by Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), OHCHR (UN) website,
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/children/children-and-armed-conflict>
Children and Armed Conflict (official thematic site), <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org>
Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict (Press Conference, 2025) by Virginia Gamba,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIGz-4lSw8A>
Paris Principles and Commitments on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Explanatory Note & FAQ),
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/paris-principles-and-commitments-on-children-associated-with-armed-forces-or-armed-groups/>

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