



**THE WAR**

**ON CHILDREN**

Time to end grave violations against children in conflict.



Save the Children

# CONTENTS

Foreword . . . . .	3
--------------------	---

## PART 1

1.1 Definitions Used in this Report . . . . .	4
1.2 Executive Summary . . . . .	7
1.3 Introduction . . . . .	8
1.4 Methodology . . . . .	12

## PART 2: MAPPING 20 YEARS OF GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN CONFLICT . . . . . 13

2.1 Conflict Trends . . . . .	15
2.2 Trends in Grave Violations . . . . .	18
1. Killing and maiming . . . . .	20
2. Children associated with armed forces and groups . . . . .	22
3. Sexual violence . . . . .	24
4. Abduction . . . . .	26
5. Attacks on schools and hospitals . . . . .	28
6. Denial of humanitarian access . . . . .	30

## PART 3: WHY ARE CHILDREN INCREASINGLY HARMED BY CONFLICT? . . . . . 33

3.1 Recommendations: What can be done to protect children from the horrors of war? . . . . .	38
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

---

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This report was written by Mariam Kirolos, Caroline Anning, Gunvor Knag Fylkesnes and James Denselow from Save the Children, with Mariam additionally providing in-depth analysis of 20 years of UN Children and Armed Conflict reports.

We would like to thank the research team from the Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO) for their background report “Children and Armed Conflict: What Existing Data Can Tell Us”. The research team members, led by Gudrun Østby, are Karim Bahgat, Kendra Dupuy, Siri Aas Rustad, Håvard Strand and Tore Wig.

We are grateful to colleagues from across Save the Children for comments and inputs that have helped improve and enrich the report, as well as colleagues who produced case studies for this report.

Graphs: Nyhetsgrafikk  
Design: Amund Lie Nitter

© Save the Children  
International 2018

*This publication is copyright, but may be reproduced by any method without fee or prior permission for teaching purposes, but not for resale.*

*For copying in any other circumstances, prior written permission must be obtained from the publisher, and a fee may be payable.*

# FOREWORD

*“All wars, whether just or unjust, disastrous or victorious, are waged against the child.”*

EGLANTYNE JEBB

The founder of Save the Children uttered these unforgettable words almost one hundred years ago and they remain true to this day. She was standing up for children who were starving in Germany and Austria because of a blockade imposed by the Allies in the aftermath of the First World War. The courage of Eglantyne, to challenge powerful governments including her own in the United Kingdom, started a global movement for protecting children in conflict.

Now, more than at any time in the last two decades, we need to find that same strength to stop the suffering of children affected by war. Our report reveals that one in six children live in conflict zones – and those 357 million live at risk of grave violations. The number of children verified by the UN as killed or maimed has risen drastically in the last 10 years. Reports of life-saving aid such as food, water and medicine being blocked are up more than 1,500 percent since 2010. Attacks on what should, by any law or civilized standard, be safe places for children – such as schools and hospitals – are also becoming a new normal in conflicts, with reported incidents having roughly doubled in the last decade.

Save the Children is particularly concerned about the fates of those children living in what are ranked as the most dangerous conflict-affected countries: Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia top this list, with the Middle East and Africa being the worst regions for children threatened by war.

Yet violent conflict can occur in any region, and we see new and disturbing situations emerging every year. The recent horrors

inflicted on Rohingya children in Myanmar, almost 400,000 of whom have fled to Bangladesh for the relative safety of refugee camps, is a case in point. I have met some of these children and Save the Children has told their stories to the world while we work to help them recover. These children have seen and experienced things no child ever should: their homes burnt, their families killed and their innocence stolen.

It is time to end the ‘War on Children’ for good. Everyone with the power to make a difference must ask and answer the same question Eglantyne Jebb did, almost a century ago: what can we do to save children from the scourge of war? This report proposes four areas for concerted action: investment in preventing children from being put at risk; upholding of international laws and standards; intensified action to hold violators to account; and an increased effort to rebuild the lives of children shattered by conflict. For each area, we are proposing practical recommendations that states and non-state actors can act on to ensure that children are protected.

We face a stark choice. Will we stand by while more children die at their school desks and in their hospital beds, are denied the life-saving assistance they need to survive or are recruited into armed groups? Or will we fulfil the promise to the next generation, set forth in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and build a better world where all children can live, learn and thrive in peace?

**Helle Thorning-Schmidt**  
CEO of Save the Children  
International



# 1.1 DEFINITIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

This report uses the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)<sup>1</sup> definitions of conflict. The UCDP is the world's foremost provider of data on organized violence, and its Georeferenced Event Dataset and other datasets inform this research.

**Conflict/ armed conflict:** when armed force is used by an organized actor against another organized actor, or against civilians, resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year. The definition includes three types of conflict:

- **State-based conflict** takes place between two states (inter-state conflict), or between one state and one or more rebel groups (civil conflict).
- **Non-state conflict** is fought between two organized, armed actors, of which neither is the government of a state.
- **One-sided violence** is perpetrated by an organized armed group, either a state's military forces or an armed group, against civilians.

**Conflict incidents/ events:** conflicts usually consist of several conflict events – a conflict event is defined as a lethal incident, either a violent clash between two armed groups or an attack on civilians by a group/groups, at a given time and place.

**Conflict zone/ area impacted by conflict:** areas within 50km from where one or more conflict incidents takes place in a given year, within the borders of a country.

**Battle-related deaths:** the use of armed force between warring parties in a conflict, be it state-based or non-state, resulting in deaths. We use the term to include both combatant and civilian deaths, unless otherwise specified.

**Children living in conflict-affected areas/ conflict-affected children:** the children that reside within conflict zones, areas within a distance of 50km or less from where conflict incidents are occurring.

**Children:** we use the definition from the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines children as 'individuals under the age of eighteen years'.

**The six grave violations are:** killing and maiming, recruitment and use of children, sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.

*Children in Syria are living in one of the most dangerous conflict-affected countries in the world. ►*

PHOTO: KHALIL ASHAWI/SAVE THE CHILDREN







## 1.2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report identifies concerning trends for the safety and wellbeing of children living in areas impacted by conflict, through analysis of the United Nations Annual Reports of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) and new research by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO).<sup>2</sup> The research utilizes figures that are published, independently verified and credible, but one of the key findings of the data mapping process is that there is a significant and worrying gap in child-specific data in conflicts.

Although all warring parties are obliged to protect children, in conflicts around the world heinous attacks are committed against children on a daily basis, for which the perpetrators are not being held to account. What is more, many of these violations are increasing, driven by brutal conflicts like the war in Syria. There is an urgent need for action to end what is too often a war on children.

The key findings of the report are:

- The number of children living in a conflict zone has increased by more than 75 percent from the early 1990s when it was around 200 million, to more than 357 million children in 2016 – around 1 in 6 of the world's children. 165 million of these children are affected by high intensity conflicts. Children living in such conflict-impacted areas often lack access to school and health facilities, and are more exposed to violence.
- While the majority of the world's conflict-affected children live in Asia, the Middle East is where children are most likely to live in a conflict zone. In 2016, about 2 in 5 children in this region were living within 50km of a conflict event in their country, and children in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and other warzones in the region are at high risk of all six grave violations. Africa is second, with 1 in 5 children affected by conflict.
- Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia are at the top of our ranking of the 10 most dangerous conflict-affected countries to be a child in 2016, the latest year for which comprehensive data is available. This is assessed based on factors including rates of the six grave violations and share of children living in conflict in that country.
- By many metrics, children are more at risk in conflict now than at any time in the last 20 years.

There are significant limitations and variations in data collection across conflict contexts, but some of the trends are clear: for example, there has been an escalation in the number of UN-verified cases of killing and maiming of children, with an increase of nearly 300 percent since 2010. The number of incidents of denial of humanitarian access has also risen 15-fold in the same period, and there has been a growing trend of abductions.

- We also see, despite improved international legal and normative standards to protect children, that increasingly brutal tactics are being utilized – including the use of children as suicide bombers, direct targeting of schools and hospitals and the widespread use of indiscriminate weapons like cluster munitions, barrel bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).
- The psychological impact of toxic stress on children living in conflict zones is profound and can lead to a vicious cycle of conflict, in which the next generation struggles to rebuild peaceful societies following the trauma of violence.
- The nature of modern conflict is changing, and it is changing in a way that often protects soldiers more than civilians. This report explains an increase in reported grave violations against children mainly due to the crisis of compliance, lack of monitoring and reporting, increase in urban warfare and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas as well as increased conflict intensity, duration and complexity.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that states, militaries and all actors with influence over the lives of children in conflict commit to take practical action on four key themes:

- **Preventing children being put at risk**
- **Upholding international laws and standards**
- **Holding violators to account**
- **Rebuilding shattered lives**

The specific policy recommendations under these themes are set out in section 3.1. The findings of this report are stark, and the message is clear – we need to take concerted, collective action to turn back the tide of brutality and indifference and better protect children in conflict.

## 1.3 INTRODUCTION

There are approximately 350 million children living in areas affected by conflict today, according to new research carried out by the Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO) for this report.

Many of these children have been subjected to unimaginable suffering. They are not just caught in the crossfire or treated by combatants as expendable collateral damage, but often deliberately and systematically targeted. They are killed, maimed, and raped. They are bombed in their schools and in their homes. They are abducted, tortured, and recruited by armed groups to fight and to work as porters, cooks and sex slaves.

Children also suffer the indirect consequences of conflict. Children living in conflict-affected settings are less likely to be in school or have access to basic sanitation and clean water, and more likely to die in childhood due to under-nutrition and a lack of medical care, including vaccinations. Recent studies have shown high levels of toxic stress\* in children who have lived in or fled from war zones, which can have a lifelong impact on their mental health and development. Around the world, untold millions of childhoods have been torn apart by conflict-related violence.

In 1996, following a series of brutal and indiscriminate wars, Mozambique's first post-independence education minister Graça Machel wrote a ground-breaking UN report<sup>3</sup> which forcefully set out the need to better protect children in conflict. She was building on a century of work which had put in place an architecture of international laws and norms, particularly in the aftermath of

World War 2, to safeguard civilians and civilian infrastructure, including the Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Following Machel's report the UN Secretary General appointed a Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), and in 2005 the UN Security Council mandated a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM)\*\* which would help to track violations. United Nations Annual Reports of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict (UN CAAC reports) are now released by the Secretary-General, using the MRM to assess the situation for children in conflicts through six 'grave violations': killing and maiming; recruitment and use of children; abduction; sexual violence; attacks on schools and hospitals; and denial of humanitarian access.

This report looks primarily at the situation for children in conflict during the two decades since the Machel report was released, through the lens of the six grave violations. It comes at a time when the nature of war is changing in ways that risk putting civilians ever more in the line of fire.

As the world becomes more urban, so does the theatre of war. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), "hostilities in armed conflicts increasingly take place in population centres."<sup>4</sup> Today, children's homes, schools and playgrounds have become battlefields across many countries from Syria to Afghanistan. We are also seeing a greater fragmentation of actors, as conventional wars between states give way to protracted, frequently asymmetric, conflicts waged by multiple

\* Toxic stress response can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent and/or prolonged adversity – such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship – without adequate adult support. – Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child

\*\* The **MRM** was created in 2005, by Security Council Resolution 1612. At the global level, the MRM is overseen by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC), in close cooperation with UNICEF and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. At country level, the MRM is overseen by Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR). The CTFMRs are co-chaired by the representative of UNICEF and the highest UN representative in the country. By collecting timely, objective, accurate and reliable information on violations and abuses committed against children by parties to armed conflict, the MRM provides the UN Security Council with an evidence base to hold perpetrators accountable. It also helps actors on the ground advocate for and plan adequate protection and response measures and programmes. Parties to conflict who are listed for grave violations should sign Action Plans – these are agreed with the UN with a view to complete a series of time-bound, concrete activities to halt and prevent violations and to take remedial action. Successful completion of an Action Plan leads to de-listing. For more information, see <http://www.mrmtools.org/mrm/>





*Children, like this Rohingya girl in Bangladesh, are incredibly resilient. With the right support they can recover from their experiences, but this becomes less likely when communities and services are crippled by conflict.*

PHOTO: GMB AKASH/PANOS PICTURES/SAVE THE CHILDREN

*Children, like this boy in Somalia, have the right to survive, learn and be safe. The long-term impact effect of conflict is devastating. Urgent action is needed.*

PHOTO: HEDINN HALLDORSSON/SAVE THE CHILDREN

groups. The international norms and laws that govern conflict are needed more than ever, but have rarely come under such concerted strain in so many simultaneous crises.

All the indicators suggest that, left unchecked, these trends in warfare will continue – and the evidence from the last two decades shows that it is children who will pay the heaviest price.

The comprehensive mapping of the main available data on children living in areas of conflict by Save the Children and PRIO in this report demonstrates that the number of children living in conflict is increasing, while the legal and normative protections afforded to them are increasingly disregarded.

Analysis of 20 years of UN CAAC reports shows there has been notable progress, including on tackling some of the deadliest weapons that kill and maim children – landmines and cluster bombs – and the release of more than 115,000 children associated with armed forces and groups since 2000<sup>5</sup>. In addition to the creation of the MRM, the establishment of the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups in 2007<sup>\*\*\*</sup>, development of the Safe Schools Declaration in 2015<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> and the introduction of the *Vancouver Principles* on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in 2017<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> have contributed to the implementation of existing standards to protect children.

But overall, the annual data shows a marked trend in increasing reported grave violations, including the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction, and denial of humanitarian assistance, particularly in the last five years. For sexual violence, data collection is often so poor due to the stigma and under-reporting in many contexts that it is hard to draw accurate trends, but it is clear that this issue remains. Some of this is down to the development of the mandate and improved reporting, but the overall picture is clear – the conduct of hostilities in conflicts around the world and elsewhere is putting more children at greater risk than we have seen for decades. Egregious attacks in 2017 demonstrated that this trend is continuing – the killing of more than 300 people in a single bombing in Mogadishu, Somalia; the reported deaths of nearly 70 children in a bus bombing as they escaped a besieged town in Syria; the displacement of almost 400,000 Rohingya children, fleeing abuse and death in Myanmar, to name but a few.

Unless urgent action is taken, the long-term impact of this will be devastating. We will lose many more children to armed violence in the years to come, and millions will



suffer lifelong physical and psychological trauma and disabilities. Children are incredibly resilient and with the right support can recover from their experiences, but this becomes less likely when communities and services are crippled by conflict. This report is therefore a call to action for the international community to push back against this crisis of non-compliance, to ensure respect for international laws and norms and to do more to protect the world's children – our children – from the horrors of armed conflict. There is both a moral and a strategic imperative to take action now. If we do nothing, we risk backsliding into a world of unchecked barbarity that will have far-reaching consequences for future generations.



\*\*\* **The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups**, developed in 2007, consolidate global humanitarian knowledge and experience in working to prevent recruitment, protect children, support their release from armed forces or armed groups and reintegrate them into civilian life.

\*\*\* **The Safe Schools Declaration**, developed in 2015, provides states the opportunity to express broad political support for the protection and continuation of education in armed conflict, and is the instrument for states to endorse and commit to implement the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*. To date, 72 states have signed the declaration. Source: Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack

\*\*\*\* **The Vancouver Principles**, a comprehensive set of pledges that includes political commitments by Member States to enhance the training, planning and conduct of their own forces as they relate to the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Building upon the existing framework on child protection – most notably the Paris Principles – the Vancouver Principles take a practical approach to ending child soldiers, specifically with regard to identifying warning signs and taking early action to end recruitment.

## 1.4 METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a desk review of the best available data on children in conflict, looking at the period between 1989 and today with a focus on the two decades between 1996 and 2016. Currently, 2016 is the most recent year for which verified data is widely available, but the research also takes into account credible data from conflicts in 2017 where appropriate, including reports from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Building on Save the Children's extensive experience as a humanitarian agency in many of the major conflicts of the last 20 years, and on PRIO's expertise as an internationally renowned research institute, the report draws on the existing literature to identify trends in the situation for children in conflict.

The research utilizes figures that are published, independently verified and credible. However, one of the key findings of the data mapping process is that there is a significant and worrying gap in child-specific and sex-disaggregated data, as well as data on children with disabilities in conflicts.

For example, there is currently no comprehensive, reliable data on child casualties in conflicts around the world. Authoritative sources of conflict and fatality data, such as the Uppsala Conflict Data programme and the Armed Conflict and Events Data project do not provide any information on the age-distribution of those killed in conflict. We cannot say with any accuracy how many children or adults were killed in conflict-related incidents in Syria, Central African Republic, Yemen or South Sudan and many other countries last year, which means countless children are dying unnoticed and unidentified by the international community, and their killers are not being held to account. Likewise, we know that there is significant under-reporting in many contexts of all the grave violations, in particular sexual violence.

As such, this report does not offer definitive new numbers on grave violations against children in conflict – rather, it provides an overview of what we do know and looks for trends in the most reliable data available. PRIO has also carried out new data mapping which provides fresh figures on the numbers and geographical spread of children living in conflict zones.

The findings in 'War on Children' are based on two main sources:

1. New data from research conducted by PRIO<sup>6</sup> over the past year, mapping existing conflict datasets against population and health data and drawing new statistics and trend analysis from the results. The core dataset used to map conflict patterns in this report is the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's Georeferenced Event Dataset (UCDP GED). A conflict event is defined as a lethal incident, either a violent clash between two armed groups or an attack on civilians by a group/groups. The UCDP dataset provides the geographical location, timing, and intensity of each such event globally, covering the years 1989–2016. To estimate the number of children living in conflict areas, and populations more generally, PRIO cross-referenced the conflict data with population data from Gridded Population of the World (GPW) v3<sup>7</sup> and from the UN (2017)<sup>8</sup>. PRIO also used additional research on children associated with armed forces and groups (Haer and Böhmelt, 2016)<sup>9</sup>, which covers the period 1989 to 2011, and the latest data on the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) research<sup>10</sup> which covers 1989–2009, to provide additional context on those specific violations.
2. Analysis by Save the Children of all the United Nations Annual Reports of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict (UN CAAC) spanning the 1998–2016 period, MRM reports from 2005–2016 and relevant other sources of secondary data and research, including UNICEF and ICRC reports. The CAAC and MRM data has covered 32 different conflict situations overall, seven of which are not included in this report – Liberia, Haiti, Georgia, India, Thailand, Northern Ireland and the Russian Federation – for various reasons, including that there were no numbers in the documents or because these countries were only mentioned briefly in the reports. The MRM data inevitably only paints a partial picture due to access restrictions, security threats and limited resources, which means not all cases can be reported or verified and are therefore not included in the report. Although the numbers on verified violations are likely to only be the tip of the iceberg, the trends are measurable and reflect the reality that we see in conflict zones today.

The analysis and recommendations in this report are also informed by case studies with children and their families in conflict-affected countries, and interviews with upwards of 40 experts, including former senior military officials, strategists and historians, legal experts and humanitarians.

*This report provides an overview of what we know and looks for trends in the most reliable data available.*

PHOTO: AHMAD BAROUDI/SAVE THE CHILDREN

**PART 2**

**MAPPING 20 YEARS  
OF GRAVE VIOLATIONS  
AGAINST CHILDREN  
IN CONFLICT**

*PRIO has calculated the number of children living in conflict zones for each year between 1990 and 2016.*

PHOTO: AMER AL SHAMI / SAVE THE CHILDREN



This chapter sets out the overall trends for children in conflict, including global trends in warfare which have affected civilians and a new analysis of the number and geographical spread of children living in conflict zones. It then breaks down the available data on the six grave violations: killing and maiming, recruitment or use of children, sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.

## 2.1 CONFLICT TRENDS

Today's conflicts are increasingly being fought in populated civilian areas under the control of proliferating numbers of non-state armed groups. A recent World Bank - UN study<sup>11</sup> showed how there was an average of eight armed groups in a civil war in the 1950s. By 2010, the figure had jumped to 14. In Syria in 2014, by contrast, the study showed there were more than 1,000 armed groups.

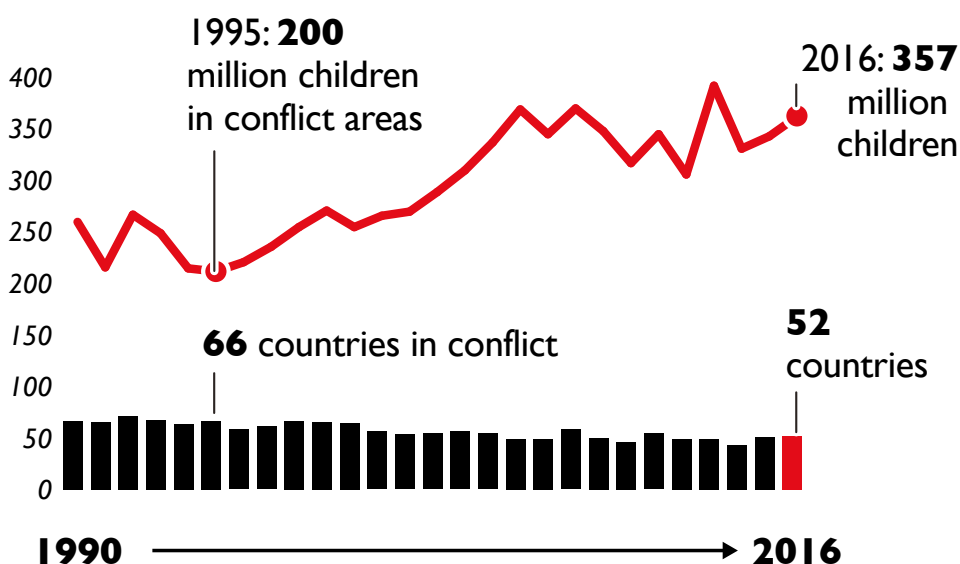
Conflicts today are also often protracted, which leads to the erosion of governance structures, market economies and essential service provision. Protracted crises also have a knock-on effect on displacement — 65.6 million people around the world have been forced from their homes today<sup>12</sup> and a refugee spends an average of 17 years of his or her life in exile.

The data, illustrated in figure A, shows a downward trend in the number of countries affected by armed

conflict (defined as having at least 25 battle-related deaths in a year) since the end of the Cold War in 1991. However, this has been followed by an increase after 2011. In 2016, 52 countries had at least one instance of armed conflict.

In addition to the increase in the number of countries experiencing conflict, we see a significant rise in the number of children living close to conflict events during the period studied. Using an innovative new methodology which maps incidents of conflict and determines the child population living within a 50km range of that event, PRIO has calculated the number of children living in conflict zones for each year between 1990 and 2016.

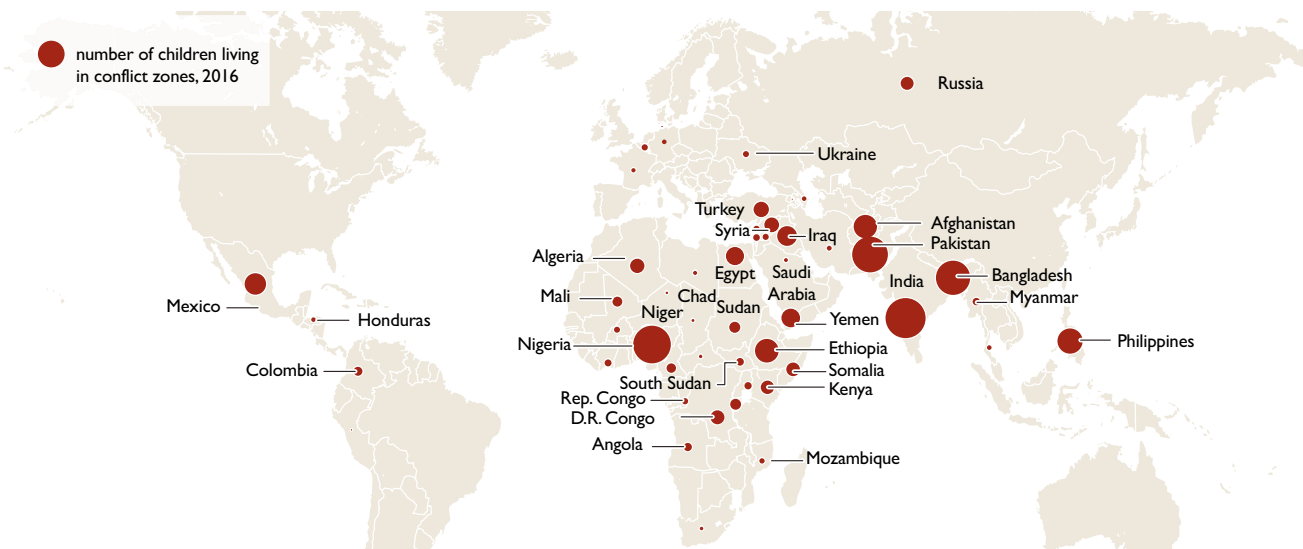
It found that the number of children living in a conflict zone has increased by more than 75 percent from the early 1990s when it was around 200 million, to more than 357 million children in 2016 – around 1 in 6



**FIGURE A: CHILDREN AND COUNTRIES IN CONFLICT**

The chart shows the number of children living in conflict zones, and number of countries in conflict between 1990 and 2016.

Data source: UCDP GED dataset (Sundberg and Melander, 2013; Croicu and Sundberg, 2017), Gridded Population of the World (GPW) v3 (CIESIN, 2005) and World Population Prospects (UN, 2017).



**FIGURE B: CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT ZONES**

The size of the red circles symbolizes the number of children living in conflict zones. An interactive version is available at <https://goo.gl/4Jhx9Q>

Data sources used: UCDP GED dataset (Sundberg and Melander, 2013; Croicu and Sundberg, 2017) Gridded Population of the World (GPW) v3 (CIESIN, 2005) and World Population Prospects (UN, 2017).

children.\* Given the ongoing conflicts across the Middle East and Africa in 2017 and explosion of violence in Myanmar, we expect that this number has not decreased in the last year.

The period between 2000 and 2005 shows a steep increase in children living in conflict zones, mainly due to fighting arising in populated areas. Even where the overall number of countries experiencing conflict has slightly decreased, as shown in figure A, the number of children affected has risen – exposing more children to the damaging primary and secondary impacts of conflict.

To provide a more nuanced overview of the geographical spread of conflict-affected children, the map in figure B shows the number of children living in areas impacted by conflict in each country in 2016.

Although we see an increase in the number of children affected with the spread of conflict in densely populated and large states, a regional breakdown reveals significant differences in the share of children affected by conflict. As figure C shows, although Asia has the largest overall number of children living close to violence, the relative share of the child population which lives within a conflict zone is far higher in both the Middle East and Africa.

In the Middle East, 39 percent of children (2 in 5) were living within 50 km of a conflict incident in 2016 – 42 million children in total. In Africa, 21 percent, or more than 1 in every 5 children, lives in an area impacted by conflict. For Asia, Europe and the Americas, the corresponding shares were 14 percent, 7 percent and 6 percent respectively. More research needs to be done into the potential long-term impact on the political, social and economic development of the Middle East and Africa regions from having such a significant number of children – the next generation of leaders, workers and parents – exposed to the devastating effects of conflict\*\*.

The three western European countries appearing on the map (Belgium, France and Germany) suffered from one-sided violence, i.e. terrorism. It is worth noting that the number of affected children living in these countries represents only approximately 0.68 percent of the total number of children living in areas impacted by conflict worldwide.

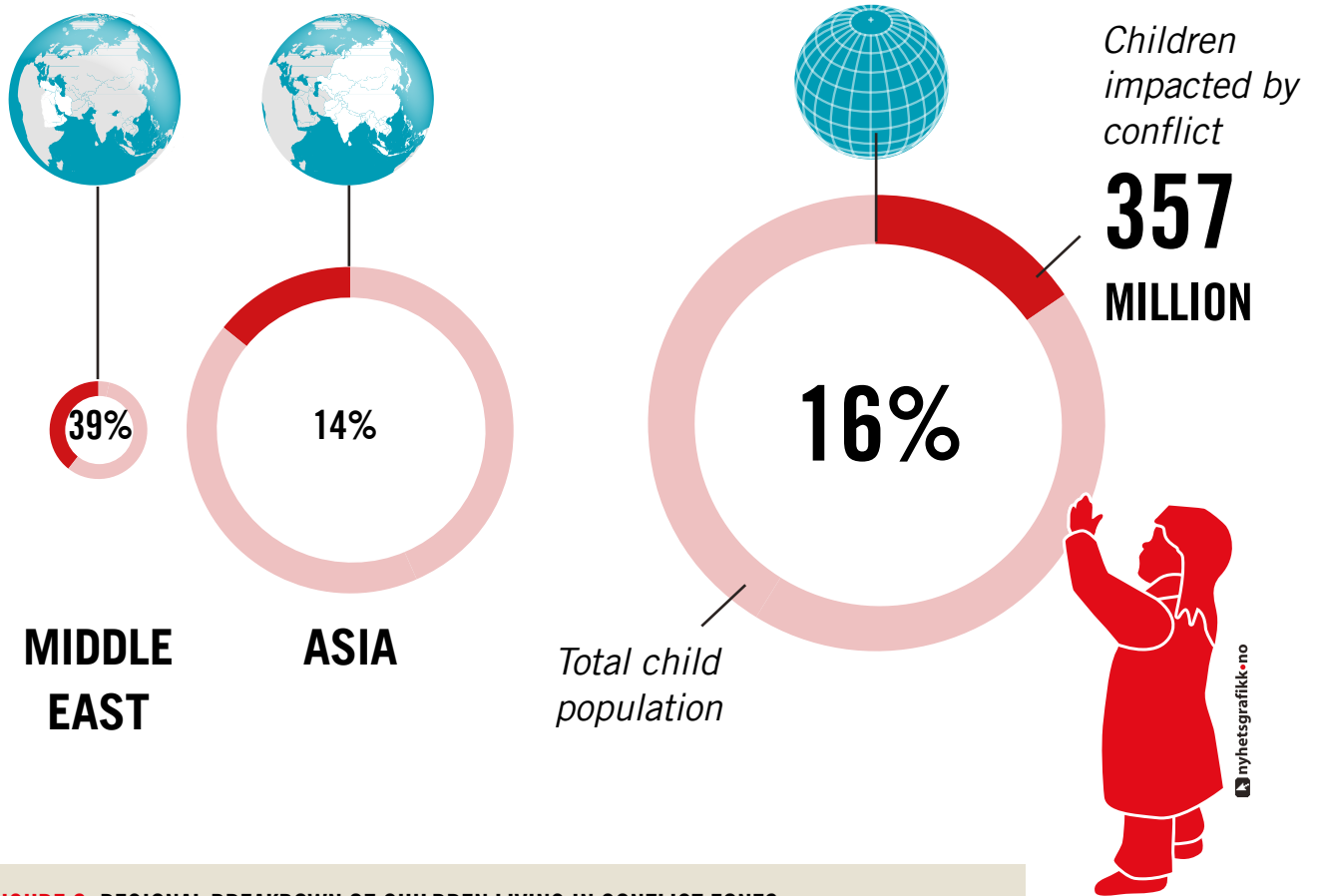
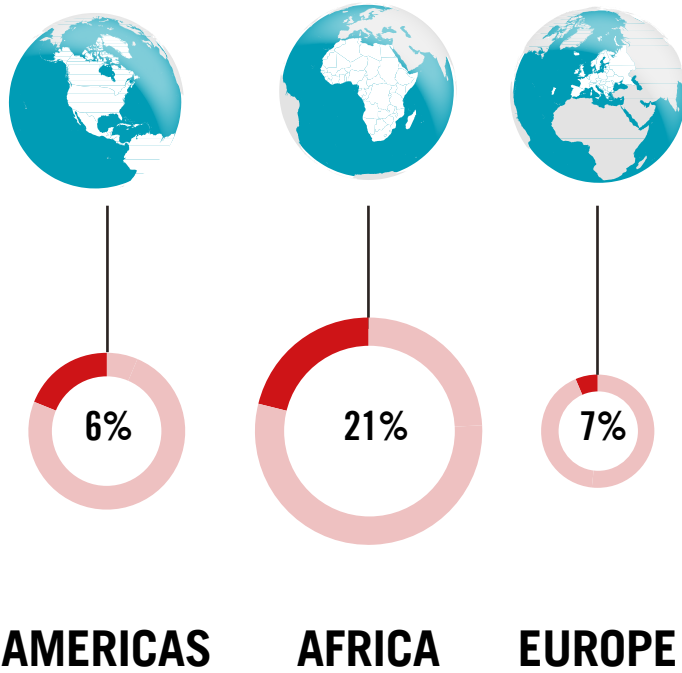
It is important to note that the 357 million children living close to conflict incidents does not encompass the larger number of children in need of humanitarian assistance as a result of conflict, including many of the estimated 28 million children displaced by conflict in 2016<sup>13</sup>.

\* Since 1990, the global child population has increased by 12 percent, while the number of children living in conflict zones has increased by 78 percent.

\*\* A good example of this is “The Costs of War Project” – a team of 35 scholars, legal experts, human rights practitioners and physicians, which began its work in 2011.



# 1 in 6 children were living in conflict areas in 2016



**FIGURE C: REGIONAL BREAKDOWN OF CHILDREN LIVING IN CONFLICT ZONES**  
 Data sources used: UCDP GED dataset (Sundberg and Melander, 2013; Croicu and Sundberg, 2017)  
 Gridded Population of the World (GPW) v3 (CIESIN, 2005) and World Population Prospects (UN, 2017).

## 2.2 TRENDS IN GRAVE VIOLATIONS

Drawing definitive trends from the annual UN CAAC reports is challenging. Tracking of some violations started in later years than others, and increases in reported incidents can be partly attributed to better systems for monitoring and reporting. Decreases could be down to under-reporting in specific contexts or access challenges for verifying incidents.

However, despite the limitations, given the significant gaps in available child-specific data, the MRM and CAAC reports are some of the best indicators we have to assess the situation for children in conflict. The rest of this chapter therefore uses these sources, as well as supporting research including academic reports on sexual violence and child recruitment and global trends in conflict deaths, to map the available data on grave violations and analyze trends. Where the CAAC reports use varying methodology or terminology, this report uses the lowest reported and verified number to avoid any potential inaccuracy or exaggeration.

According to PRIO's research and Save the Children's analysis of the MRM and the CAAC reports, the recent level of violations of children's rights in conflict is higher than any time over the past two decades. Figure D sets out a ranking of the worst conflict-affected countries to be a child in 2016 (the most recent year for which comprehensive data is available) based on nine indicators: the prevalence of each of the six grave violations, conflict intensity (measured by the number of casualties), total child population living in conflict zones and the share of children living in conflict zones.<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

That Syria comes out on top is not surprising – the war there is protracted, fought by a complex patchwork of non-state and state armed actors, and has been marked by a lack of respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) by all parties to the conflict. The situation in Syria is the single largest contributing factor to many of the worsening global trends in children and armed conflict we see in this report. This is devastating for the children of Syria and the surrounding countries, but is also likely to have a further contagion effect without concerted action – the war has undermined the effectiveness of international laws and institutions and set new lows for the modern era in the conduct of hostilities, including the targeting of medical facilities, use of chemical weapons and siege tactics against civilians.

Afghanistan, at number two, highlights the dangers of protracted conflicts for children. Although the war has now gone on for almost 17 long years, the situation

has not necessarily improved for those children born into conflict – 2016 saw the highest number of verified child casualties with 3,512 children killed or maimed, an increase of 24 percent compared to the previous year.<sup>14</sup> UNICEF<sup>15</sup> reported that almost 700 children were killed in the first nine months of 2017 alone. But steps can and have been taken to address this. We have previously seen in Afghanistan that when the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) changed their tactics in the late 2000s, the number of civilian casualties went down, and at the end of 2017 Afghanistan's Ministry of Defence signed a new Child Protection Policy<sup>16</sup> designed to shield children from the effects of armed conflict.

Somalia being in the top three reflects high numbers of recorded and verified incidents of killing and maiming, sexual violence and recruitment and use of children by armed groups and forces. The long-running armed insurgency has been marked by exploitation of vulnerable children and loss of civilian life, exacerbating existing poverty and fragility. A recent report by the UN Human Rights Office and the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia documented nearly 5,000 civilian deaths and injuries from 1 January 2016 to 14 October 2017, the majority of which were attributed to armed non-state actors. The reports' authors found that "parties to the conflict are simply not doing enough to shield civilians from the violence."<sup>17</sup>

One of the findings from a study of the annual CAAC reports is that violence often behaves like an epidemic, sharing the same characteristics of clustering, spread and transmission. We see 'copycatting' of new tactics, such as the increasing use of children to carry out suicide attacks. This was observed during the Second Palestinian Intifada between 2000–2005 and in Iraq in 2005<sup>18</sup>, and has escalated since and been exported and used in other conflicts, especially by networked organizations, across Afghanistan, Pakistan, Colombia, Somalia and Nigeria.

Overall, figure D demonstrates that children in the Middle East and Africa are bearing the brunt of the world's most brutal conflicts, with only Afghanistan represented outside those regions. If this analysis took into account 2017 data, Myanmar would likely make the list as a result of the recent escalation in the Rohingya crisis and reports of widespread atrocities, a reminder of how unpredictable conflict can be. We now turn to a look at what the research tells us about the trends of each of the six grave violations.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Some states or areas with smaller populations, such as the Occupied Palestinian Territory, may be under-represented in this formulation.



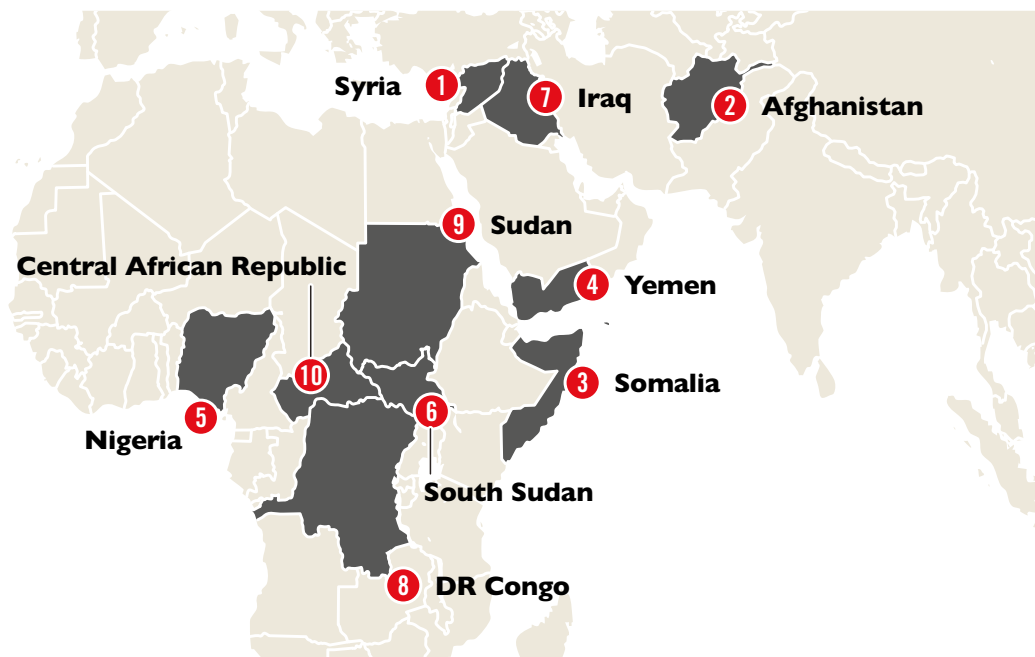
In addition to the increase in the number of countries experiencing conflict, we see a significant rise in the number of children living close to conflict events, such as this girl in DRC.

PHOTO: KATE HOLT/SAVE THE CHILDREN

**FIGURE D: MOST DANGEROUS COUNTRIES FOR CHILDREN IN CONFLICT, 2016**

1. Syria
2. Afghanistan
3. Somalia
4. Yemen
5. Nigeria
6. South Sudan
7. Iraq
8. DRC
9. Sudan
10. CAR

Data sources: UCDP GED dataset (Sundberg and Melander, 2013; Croicu and Sundberg, 2017) Gridded Population of the World (GPW) v3 (CIESIN, 2005) and World Population Prospects (UN, 2017), and SRS-CAAC.



# 1. KILLING AND MAIMING

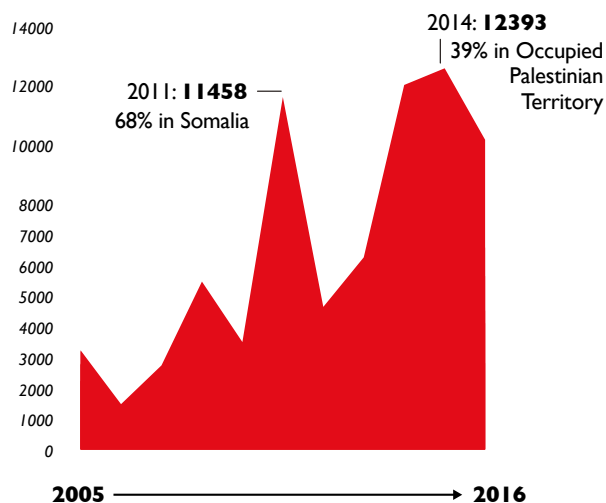
Figure E shows the number of verified incidents of children killed or maimed, as reported in the annual CAAC reports from 2005 – when they started tracking this violation – through 2016. Although this only provides a snapshot of the reported and verified incidents, the data shows a worrying increase in the reporting period.

Between 2005 and 2016, at a minimum 73,023 children have been killed and/or maimed across 25 conflicts.\* In 2016 alone, at least 10,068 children were killed or maimed in conflict. These verified cases are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the actual numbers killed or injured; actual figures are not available due to access restrictions and lack of resources to gather additional information.

We have seen that both new and old weapons are being used to kill and maim children – there has been an increased use of drones and improvised explosive devices in the last two decades, but landmines\*\*, cluster munitions\*\*\* and even machetes\*\*\*\* have also had a resurgence in more recent years. In some instances, the CAAC reports show that children are being intentionally targeted, including to inflict maximum emotional damage on a community or to wipe out the next generation of a particular ethnic or religious group.<sup>19</sup>

Killing and maiming records the direct casualties as a result of conflict – the children killed when an airstrike hits their school, shot by a sniper crossing the street or injured in an IED explosion. Chapter three of this report looks in more detail at why children are more vulnerable to the impact of explosions and trauma injuries. It should also be remembered that often, many more deaths or life-long health problems in children are caused by the secondary effects of conflict: disease, acute malnutrition and psychological stress and trauma.

To put child casualties in the context of overall global ‘battle deaths’\*\*\*\*, the trend is that the share of civilian deaths has been fairly stable since 1989 with the



**FIGURE E: KILLING AND MAIMING OF CHILDREN**

The graph shows the number of verified cases from the annual reports of the UN Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict. The actual numbers are likely to be higher.

exceptions of Rwanda (1994) and DRC (1996). PRIO’s research reveals that in 2016 about 1 in 5 battle-related deaths was a civilian. Figure F also shows that a large and growing share of the battle-related deaths are unknown (shown in red), i.e. for which it is not possible to categorize the deaths. This is particularly the case for the ongoing Syrian war, where the UN stopped counting casualties in 2014. Given that we know that wars are increasingly being fought in civilian locations, with widespread use of explosive weapons in populated areas, it is likely that a large share of the unknown deaths are civilian deaths.

Using a different methodology, the Small Arms Survey (SAS) identified at least 99,000 conflict-related deaths in 2016. This number was down from 2015 but more than twice as many as in 2004 (42,000)<sup>20</sup>.

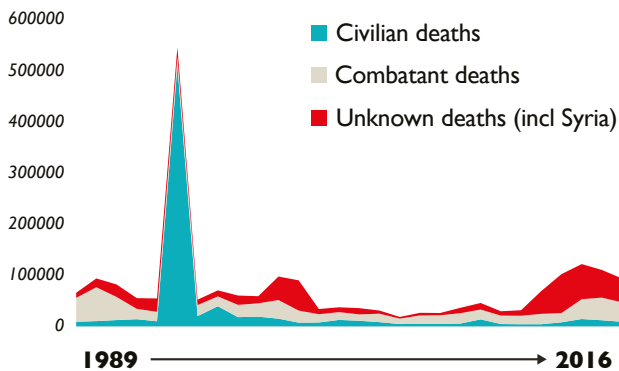
\* These include Afghanistan, Burundi, CAR, Chad, Colombia, Cote d’Ivoire, DRC, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Pakistan, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Uganda and Yemen.

\*\* **Landmine Monitor 2017** recorded 8,605 mine/explosive remnant of war (ERW) casualties in the previous year, which was a significant increase on 2015 and marked the highest ever recorded child casualties and most overall civilian casualties since 1999.

\*\*\* **Cluster Munition Monitor 2017** reported that in 2016, “casualties from cluster munitions doubled [on 2015] and civilians accounted for nearly all victims”. The Monitor identified at least 971 new cluster munition casualties globally in 2016, with 860 of these in Syria.

\*\*\*\* The 2013 CAAC report (p.15) recorded that between April and September 2012 in the DRC, Raïa Mutomboki killed and maimed children in their houses with machetes during a series of violent attacks against the civilian population in Masisi territory, North Kivu. The 2014 report (p.14) adds that on 11 December 2013, in an attack by ADF in Beni Territory, 11 children, including a two-month-old girl, were severely mutilated and killed with machetes.

\*\*\*\*\* Defined by PRIO as deaths directly resulting from the use of armed force between warring parties in a conflict, including both combatant and civilian deaths, unless otherwise specified.



**FIGURE F: BATTLE RELATED DEATHS 1989–2016**

Data source: UCDP GED dataset (Sundberg and Melander, 2013; Croicu and Sundberg, 2017)

**DEFINITION: KILLING AND MAIMING**

- **Killing:** Any action in the context of the armed conflict that results in the death of one or more children.
- **Maiming:** Any action that causes a serious, permanent, disabling injury, scarring or mutilation to a child.
- Killing and injuring of children as a result of direct targeting and also indirect actions, including: crossfire, landmines, cluster munitions, improvised explosive devices or other indiscriminate explosive devices.
- Killing or injuring can take place in the context of military operations, house demolitions, search-and-arrest campaigns or suicide attacks. Torture can also be reported under this category.



**REEM’S STORY**

Reem\* is a 13-year-old from Yemen:

“An airstrike hit my village when I was at home doing my homework. Suddenly part of the ceiling fell, and the bomb came through a hole in the ceiling and exploded in the room. I could not breathe because of gas and smoke. I was injured in my thigh, head and back, and most of my family members were injured too.

**“ I was injured in my thigh, head and back, and most of my family members were injured too.**

“I walked to the hospital while I was bleeding. The doctor gave me medicine for one month only, and asked us to go back home because there was no space. They asked us to pay money to provide us with a room in the hospital which we didn’t have. So, I left.

“When I arrived home I could not see any of the damage because of the darkness. I went to bed but I could not sleep because of the pain in my body. The next morning, I saw shrapnel everywhere in the walls and furniture.

“Since that airstrike, I don’t go to school and I feel worried about missing a year of education. Our life before was wonderful – but the war and airstrikes make me feel sad and scared. I still feel the pain in my thigh and back and I wish the war would stop.”

\* Not her real name

## 2. CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES AND GROUPS

In the last 20 years, tens of thousands of boys and girls have been recruited into state forces and non-state armed groups worldwide to serve in a variety of roles such as combatants, messengers, porters, or domestic servants. According to the annual UN CAAC reports, there were at least 49,640 verified cases of boys and girls recruited and used by armed forces and groups from 2005 to 2016\*.

According to the Roos van der Haer study looking at the period 1989–2010<sup>21</sup>, roughly 80 percent of all state-based conflicts\*\* in the 1989–2010 period included at least one armed group or armed forces that used children.

Between the late 1990s and the early 2000s the world witnessed a proliferation of light and inexpensive weapons – in her 1996 report, Graça Machel wrote that commanders wanted to “exploit the fearlessness in kids”<sup>22</sup> who could wield these weapons, leading to the establishment of youth wings in militias and armies, from paramilitaries in Northern Ireland to the *Kadogos* (little ones) in DRC. A soldier from Myanmar quoted in the Machel report recalls: “There were a lot of boys rushing into the field, screaming like banshees. It seemed like they were immortal, or impervious, or something, because we shot at them but they just kept coming.”<sup>23</sup> In more recent years, there have been cases of children – both boys and girls – being used to carry out suicide attacks, in some cases even without the knowledge that they are going to their deaths.

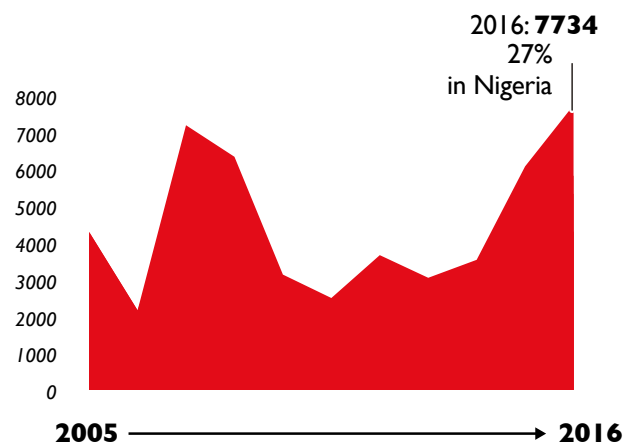
From the mid-2000s onwards, the annual UN CAAC reports show that children continued to be recruited within the ranks of non-state armed groups and national armed forces, including the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC).

The UN verified almost 8,000 new cases of child recruitment in 2016.<sup>24</sup> Nigeria topped the list of reported and verified cases of children associated with armed forces and groups in 2016, with more than 2,000. The CAAC report also shows that verified incidents of the recruitment and use of children documented in Somalia and the

Syrian Arab Republic more than doubled compared with 2015. A recent report published by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documents a 269 percent increase in the number of children recruited in Somalia between 2015 (903 cases) to 2017 (3,335)<sup>25</sup>.

Analysis of the CAAC reports on child recruitment showed that it is a larger problem in protracted conflicts. Troops are needed to replace the adult fighters killed or injured in the early stages of the fighting, and the collapse of economic opportunity and household incomes associated with conflict pushes adolescents and children into the arms of armed groups or militaries, who may offer the best or only salary in the area.

Boys and girls, some as young as eight years old, are being forced to fight, carry supplies and perform other frontline and support roles. Recruited children are rou-



**FIGURE G: RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN**

The graph shows the number of verified cases from the annual reports of the UN Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict. The actual numbers are likely to be higher.

\* We know little about the worldwide extent of child soldiers in armed conflicts. It is very hard to state precise estimates of the number of children recruited to armed forces and groups as this is not reported systematically. Furthermore, since the data relies on active reporting (rather than checking for reports in a pre-defined list of cases) it is hard to assess whether the resulting data reflects trends in reporting, or actual trends in the use of child soldiers.

\*\* State-based conflict takes place between two states (inter-state conflict), or between one state and one or more rebel groups (civil conflict).

tinely subjected to physical and mental violence by adult combatants and some have been ordered to kill or commit other acts of violence. Girls are often vulnerable and left with no choice but to become the wives or girlfriends of soldiers or fighters in order to gain protection, while both girls and boys are raped and sexually exploited. Others are used as spies, to carry military equipment or supplies, such as water and food, or to serve as cooks or domestic servants. Association with armed groups brings many risks, including death.

Children with disabilities are not exempt. The CAAC reports indicate that Al-Qaeda operated a youth wing in Iraq for children under 14 called “Birds of Paradise”. The group targeted vulnerable children, such as orphans, street children, and the mentally disabled to carry out suicide attacks against government forces and civilian targets.

Being recruited or used by an armed group can have a life-long impact on children, for those that survive the experience. They often miss out on years of education and socialization within their communities – their formative years and childhoods are taken away from them. The traumatic aspect of the brutality they have witnessed, experienced, or been forced to mete out themselves can have a profound psychological effect well in to adulthood. Those who do make it back into their communities may be stigmatized or shunned, creating challenges with recovery and reintegration.

#### **DEFINITION: RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN**

- **Recruitment:** Refers to compulsory, forced or voluntary conscription or enlistment of children into any kind of armed force or armed group(s) under the age stipulated in the international treaties applicable to the armed force or armed group in question.
- **Use of children:** Refers to the use of children by armed forces or armed groups in any capacity, including, but not limited to, children, both boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, collaborators and sex slaves. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.



## KABALA'S STORY

17-year-old Kabala\*, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, lost both his parents at an early age, and only had his grandparents to care for him. When conflict broke out in the Kasai region in August 2016, he was recruited by friends to join the local armed group. With the promises of a good salary and rewards, Kabala joined the group so he could pay for school.

*“They used to take younger children because they had less guilt,” Kabala said.*

Drugged and under the influence of alcohol, Kabala was sent to the front-lines with only sticks, being told he was invincible.

*“We attacked many soldiers. We killed many of them. I was joyful killing them. I was transformed into another spirit to fight. I couldn't feel that killing was bad. I was numb. It was all a lie. I saw my friends dying.”*

After seeing his friends die and being shot in the foot, Kabala managed to return to his home. Though physically safe, Kabala struggles to escape from his memories.

*“I feel that I've lost my childhood. This experience affected my mind. I dream of bad things, of what had happened. Images of the fight. I keep going, on and on. Keep fighting. Killing. Being defeated.”*

Kabala still desires, more than ever, to go back to school and become a lawyer so he can defend other children who have been recruited by armed groups.

**“ I feel that I've lost my childhood. This experience affected my mind.”**

\* Not his real name

### 3. SEXUAL VIOLENCE\*

Rape and sexual assault is a hugely under-reported facet of conflict, as in fact it is outside of conflict settings. Sexual violence against both adults and children has been used as a tactic of war across all continents, from Afghanistan to Syria to Colombia to Myanmar and the Central African Republic. The trends and numbers identified here are likely to be a significant underestimate of the reality.

The Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC)<sup>26</sup> database, which includes rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation/abortion, sexual mutilation and sexual torture, shows that globally roughly 35 percent of conflicts involved some forms of sexual violence against children between 1989 and 2009 – but the real numbers are likely to be much higher.

According to the SVAC database, recorded incidents of sexual violence against children in conflict increased sharply from 1989 to the mid-2000s, declining thereafter. These numbers likely reflect an increase in both incidence and reporting of sexual violence, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo in this period. In 2003 alone, over 250 women and girls in the South Kivu area of the DRC required surgical intervention to repair injuries caused by rape, a horrifying statistic.

More recent data from the CAAC reports, which started recording verified incidents of sexual violence in 2005, shows at least 17,515 reported and confirmed cases of sexual violence against girls and boys perpetrated between 2005 and 2016 in a sample of conflict-affected countries.\*\* In his latest report, the UN Secretary-General identified 856 cases for 2016, with more than a third of these cases reported in Somalia.<sup>27</sup> As figure H shows, there was a sharp decrease in the reporting and verification of sexual violations from 2009 and onwards. This is not necessarily due to significant decrease in actual numbers of sexual violations, but rather unusually high awareness and documentation of the large scale of mass-sexual violations happening in DRC at that time. The conflict in DRC accounted for 72 percent of the verified sexual violations against children in 2007–2008.

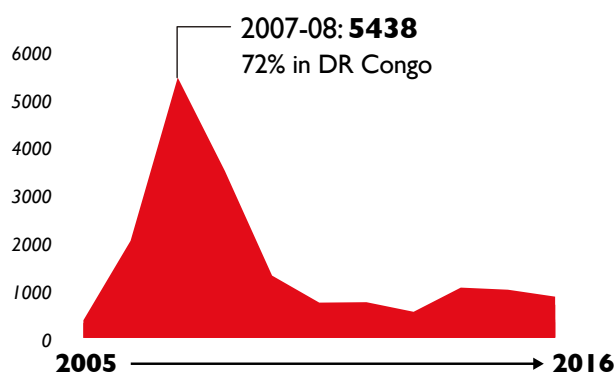
Although comparisons are of limited use considering the levels of under-reporting according to the SVAC data, Asia and Africa are the regions with the highest occurrence of conflict-years involving sexual violence against children in conflict, at 50 percent and 46 percent,

respectively. The Middle East follows with 38 percent of conflicts, while the Americas (35 percent) and Europe (13 percent) are least prone.

Sexual violations are usually significantly under-reported due to the stigma associated with it. The UN CAAC reports indicate that in the late 1990s until the early 2000s, rape was used as means of ethnic cleansing, including in Burundi, Chad and Sudan, continuing a trend that was seen in Lebanon and the Balkans, among other places. Women and children in refugee and IDP camps are particularly vulnerable, especially to abductions for sexual exploitation and slavery.

Sometimes, the stigma of sexual violence is used by armed forces and groups as a weapon as much as the act itself – the 2013 CAAC-report cites Syrian government forces reportedly abducting women and girls in groups and releasing them a few days later to their communities, intentionally exposing them as victims of rape.

Reports point to a likely correlation between sexual violence and other grave violations. In the 2013 study “Explaining rape during civil war: Cross-national evidence (1980–2009),”<sup>28</sup> the researcher found that armed actors which recruit children by force are more



**FIGURE H: SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

The graph shows the number of verified cases from the annual reports of the UN Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict. The actual numbers are likely to be higher.

\* The report follows the definition of sexual violence advanced by the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) database, which includes rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization/abortion, sexual mutilation and sexual torture.

\*\* These include Afghanistan, Burundi, CAR, Chad, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Uganda and Yemen.



likely to use sexual violence, as are groups that rely on abduction.

It should also be noted that while women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, many boys are not exempt from the suffering. The majority of cases reported in Afghanistan, for example, relate to boys.<sup>29</sup> This may be due to under-reporting of attacks on girls, but is also attributable to the prevalence of the Bacha Baazi practice, where boys are used for sexual exploitation and slavery, usually by men in power. Recent reports have also highlighted the suffering and targeting of girls from minority communities for sexual violence, such as Yezidi, Turkmen, Shabak and Christian girls by the Islamic State group in Syria and Iraq.

The impact of sexual violence on children is catastrophic – physically, psychologically and socially.

Children who have been victims of sexual violence are often left with serious physical injuries, which can be particularly severe because their growing bodies are not yet fully developed. Damage to children’s reproductive systems can leave them incontinent, infertile and condemned to a lifetime of bleeding and pain. They are at high risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including syphilis, gonorrhoea and HIV. Girls who become pregnant can suffer life-threatening complications during childbirth, will often be forced to drop out of school and can face social exclusion and stigmatisation. Their chances for further education, livelihoods and marriage may be severely diminished or completely eliminated, leaving them vulnerable to further exploitation.

#### DEFINITION: RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- A violent act of a sexual nature to a child. This encompasses rape, other sexual violence, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced marriage/ pregnancy or enforced sterilization.
- Sexual violence: any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or acts to traffic a child’s sexuality. Sexual violence takes many forms, including rape, sexual slavery and/or trafficking, forced pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and/or abuse and forced abortion.
- Rape/attempted rape: an act of non-consensual sexual intercourse. This can include the invasion of any part of the body with a sexual organ and/ or the invasion of the genital or anal opening with any object or body part. Any penetration is considered rape. Efforts to rape someone, which do not result in penetration, are considered attempted rape.



## SHADIBABIRAN’S STORY

16-year-old Shadibabiran\* from Myanmar

*“The military came to our village. They started firing at people and my mother was shot in the ankle. Then they asked all of the adolescent girls to stand up and asked us where our parents were. I told them that my father died 15 years ago.*

*They didn’t believe me and then some soldiers took me and two other girls into a house. They hit me in the face with a gun, kicked me in my chest and stamped on my arms and legs.*

*Then I was raped by three soldiers. They raped me for about two hours and at some stage I fainted.*

*They broke one of my ribs when they kicked me in the chest. It was very painful and I could hardly breathe. I still have difficulty breathing, but I haven’t been to a doctor, as I feel too ashamed.”*

**“ They hit me in the face with a gun, kicked me in my chest and stamped on my arms and legs. Then I was raped.**

\*Not her real name

## 4. ABDUCTION

Abduction or seizing of children during conflict can take many forms – children are taken for forced conscription, domestic servitude and sexual exploitation, or kidnapped for ransom or revenge.

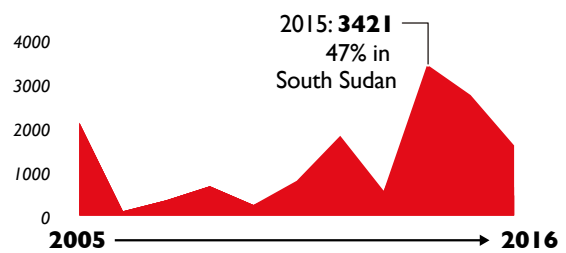
The CAAC reports show that between 2005 and 2016, there have been at least 14,327 verified cases of children who have suffered this violation, with cases reaching a peak in 2015 when at least 3,421 children were reported to have been abducted, with the highest number from South Sudan. Additionally, many girls from the Yazidi sect were kidnapped by the ISIL in Iraq and kept by fighters as slaves. These numbers are likely to only be a small indication of the real total, in part because abduction often overlaps with other violations – particularly child recruitment and sexual violence.

The United Nations Annual Reports of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict from the mid-to-late 2000s show a rise in cases of abductions for a number of reasons, including forced labour (Myanmar), sectarian conflict (Iraq), intimidation, pressure for the release or exchange of detainees (Taliban in Afghanistan) and for recruitment or retaliation (Colombia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka).

The reports indicate a surge in the number of cases of children abducted by armed non-state actors or national armed forces for sexual slavery, including thousands of children kidnapped by the Lord's Resistance Army in the central African region, SPLA in South Sudan, Al-Shabab in Somalia and the ISIL in Syria and Iraq. This supports PRIO's findings that groups which recruit by force are particularly liable to use both child soldiers and sexual violence, and a wider trend for child abductions being used to terrorize and target particular ethnic groups or religious communities.

According to the 2015 CAAC report, "the abduction of children had primarily been a precursor to other violations, such as killing and maiming, recruitment and use, or sexual violence. In many instances, abducted children were also arbitrarily detained by Governments and armed groups."

Abduction and the sometimes horrific ill-treatment children suffer when they are being held captive or in



**FIGURE 1: ABDUCTION OF CHILDREN**

The graph shows the number of verified cases from the annual reports of the UN Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict. The actual numbers are likely to be higher.

detention, from gang rape to being forced to kill other children, has a devastating impact on victims and their families. Often, the children that do make it back home are returning to communities which have been destroyed by conflict, or are still in the grip of war, with little in the way of psychosocial support to help them recover from their physical and emotional wounds. Many children who are abducted during conflict will never make it home at all.

### DEFINITION: ABDUCTION

- The unlawful removal, seizure, capture, apprehension, taking or enforced disappearance of a child either temporarily or permanently for the purpose of any form of exploitation of the child.
- This includes, but is not limited to, recruitment in armed forces or groups, participation in hostilities, sexual exploitation or abuse, forced labour, hostage-taking and indoctrination.
- If a child is recruited by force by an armed force or group, this is considered as two separate violations – abduction and recruitment.



## HALIMA'S STORY

Halima\* is a 16-year-old girl from Nigeria:

*"I was captured when I was 13. They tied my mother to a tree and eventually shot her. When they had killed everyone else they told me to come with them. I resisted so they threatened me with a gun. They told me I would get married to one of them. I told them I never would after they had killed my family. They told me I had no choice. I was married two days later. I didn't even know who he was. I didn't even see him during the ceremony.*

*"Sometimes my husband and I would talk, and I would say 'I will escape', but he said, 'you never will'. I was completely isolated the whole time. Sometimes I would go a whole week without food. Eventually I became pregnant. When I was 8 months pregnant, the news came that my husband had been killed in the fighting.*

*"The first day I set eyes on other people was the day I was rescued. I heard the sounds of war and I knew it was the military. They gave me bread and water and took me away. I still think about my time with the insurgents a lot. When I see men approach, I get scared, and when I hear loud noises, I'm afraid people are coming for me again. I hope my children get an education and they are protected from ever experiencing the things that happened to me."*

**“ They tied my mother to a tree and eventually shot her. When they had killed everyone else they told me to come with them.**

\*Not her real name

## 5. ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS

Attacks on schools and health facilities are fast becoming the new normal in today's conflicts. Children living in conflict zones are increasingly vulnerable at their school desks and in their hospital beds, both of which should be protected safe spaces.

According to the annual CAAC reports, which started recording attacks on schools and hospitals in a limited way in 2005, at least 15,375 attacks on schools and hospitals occurred from 2005–2016. That represents a 100 percent increase in just over a decade, but is also likely to be a significant underestimate due to the limited UN-verification of these incidents – as is explained below, schools and hospitals are being hit on a near-daily basis in conflicts today.

In an Arria formula meeting on the issue of attacks on schools in October last year, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba said that 2017 had been among the worst years for attacks on schools.<sup>30</sup> This is also demonstrated in Save the Children's documentation of attacks on schools in 2017, with at least 2,000 attacks in Yemen and Democratic Republic of the Congo alone – reflecting a more than 400 percent increase since 2005.

We are seeing the systematic targeting of schools in a number of recent conflicts. In "Education Under Attack 2014", the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attacks (GCPEA) documented attacks on education in at least 70 countries between 2009 and 2012, with Colombia, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sudan being the worst affected.<sup>31</sup> More recently, a Save the Children study in the Occupied Palestinian Territory found 256 education-related violations in 2016, affecting 29,230 children – up from 190 violations the year before.<sup>32</sup>

The types of attacks carried out globally vary from burning or bombing of schools and occupying school facilities, to planting landmines and looting. There have also been multiple cases of assassination of principals, teachers and officials as well as threats to students. More recent GCPEA research has shown that a series of attack on schools has occurred in 28 countries experiencing armed conflict and insecurity between 2013 and 2017.

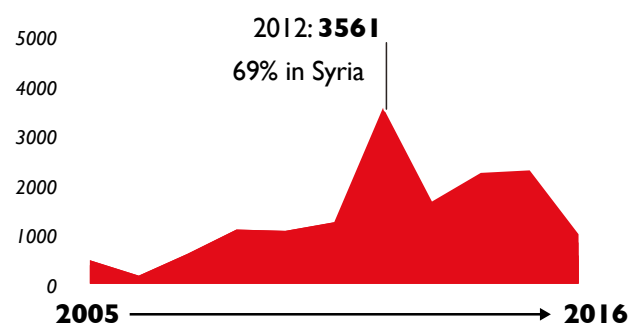
Schools have also increasingly been used as military bases, detention centres and missile launch sites. GCPEA research shows that, between 2013 and 2017, armed forces and armed groups used schools and universities for military purposes in at least 29 countries around

the world. The annual UN CAAC reports document multiple incidents of education facilities being used for child recruitment and indoctrination. For example, on 9 December 2015, ISIL tortured and killed a female teacher in Ninawa, Iraq, for refusing to use their curriculum – incidents which have become almost common-place in some conflicts.

In recent years, schools and students have been attacked to prevent girls from attending and to interrupt female education – we see this in Yemen, Pakistan, Nigeria and elsewhere. A notable case was the kidnapping of 276 girls from a school in Chibok, Nigeria by insurgents in 2014.

Reported attacks on healthcare have also been increasing, in direct contravention of the Geneva Conventions which designate civilian medical facilities and personnel, including hospitals, clinics and ambulances, as protected spaces.

According to the Safeguarding Health Coalition 2016 report "Impunity Must End"<sup>33</sup>, attacks on, or interference with, health care institutions occurred in at least 23 countries in conflict or experiencing political unrest around the world. According to a 2016 Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations Syrian Hospitals report, there have been 1,004 attacks on Syrian medical facilities since 2011.<sup>34</sup>



**FIGURE J: ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS**

The graph shows the number of verified cases from the annual reports of the UN Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict. The actual numbers are likely to be higher.

A joint report on Yemen by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and Save the Children<sup>35</sup> found that in Yemen, between March 2015 and March 2017, there were more than 160 attacks against medical facilities and personnel, contributing to a crisis in the country's health system and the rapid spread of a major cholera epidemic.

Direct or indirect violence and threats against schools and health facilities have a devastating impact on children. Around the world, 27 million children are out of school due to conflict<sup>36</sup> – either because they have been displaced and do not have access to school, their schools have been damaged or destroyed, their teachers have fled or their parents are too afraid to send them because of the risk of attack. The interruption of education has a long-term impact on children's futures and the socio-economic recovery of a country.

Attacks on health facilities mean the injured and sick are sometimes too afraid to go to a doctor, and we see more women dying in labour at home in conflict zones because they cannot get to a health facility. In many cases, they are right to be afraid – in 2016, airstrikes on a Save the Children-supported maternity hospital in Idlib, North-West Syria, severed the legs of a woman who was in labour and sent incubators holding premature babies crashing to the floor. The destruction of medical infrastructure has a lasting impact on a country's health system and allows the spread of communicable diseases and resurgence of illnesses normally kept at bay by vaccinations in peace-time, such as polio and diphtheria.

#### **DEFINITION: ATTACKS AGAINST SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS**

- Attacks include the targeting of schools or medical facilities that cause the total or partial destruction of such facilities. Other interferences to the normal operation of the facility may also be reported, such as the occupation, shelling, targeting for propaganda of, or otherwise causing harm to schools or medical facilities or their personnel.
- Note: A 'school' denotes a recognizable education facility or learning site. Education facilities and learning sites must be recognized and known by the community as a learning space and marked by visible boundaries. 'Medical facilities' are places where the sick and wounded are collected and/or provided with health-care services.



## BASMA'S STORY

Basma\* is an 8-year-old girl from Syria:

*"I am from a town near Damascus city; my home was there and my school too. I really loved my school back home, it was pretty, my teacher loved me and I had a lot of friends. I was in class when my school was hit. We ran out of the school right away and I went back home, but I later found out that many children had been injured. I have never seen my school or my friends again; I miss them a lot.*

*"We moved to different places and began to rent a house in a new town.*

*I never once stopped going to school but in this new town my school was hit, and this time 20 children died.*

*"After this, my family decided to move further to the north because at the time it was safer. But the first school we went to was so bad, and the teachers used to hit us even for little things like if I forgot my homework. The teachers used to leave us most of the time alone in the class doing nothing. I hated it.*

*"Now I am in this new school and I feel much better. I love the drawings and the colours on the walls. I love the English teacher the most, he is so kind and he teaches us so well."*

\* Not her real name

**“ I have never seen my school or my friends again; I miss them a lot**

## 6. DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

The denial of humanitarian access and besieging of civilian populations has become all too familiar in today's conflicts. Even as this report was being finalized, an armed group attacked Save the Children's offices in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Four aid workers were tragically killed, leaving young families behind and forcing life-saving programmes to be temporarily suspended – a timely and devastating reminder of the risks humanitarians and the communities they support face every day in conflict zones around the world.

Analysis of the annual CAAC reports for this research shows that the denial of humanitarian access in conflict has increased 1,500 percent since 2010, and barely featured in the early years of the report. The violation entails blocking the free passage or timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to persons in need, as well as deliberate attacks against humanitarian workers. Figure K shows a particular increase in the last five years, where South Sudan the highest prevalence of verified cases of denial of humanitarian access, apart from 2013 where 64 percent of the verified cases occurred in OPT.

The most recent annual report indicated at least 1,014 incidents of denial of humanitarian access and aid in 2016 alone. The reports do not state how many children were impacted by this, but we know for example that last year there were more than 250,000 children living under siege in Syria who were routinely denied humanitarian access.<sup>37</sup>

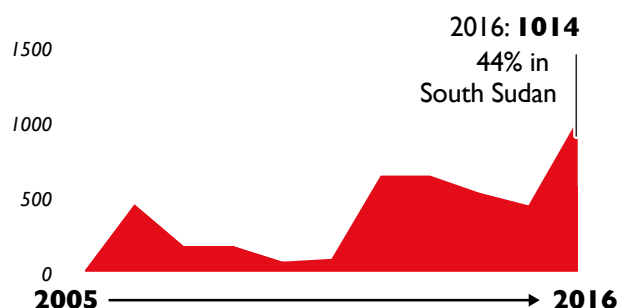
Currently, this is the only grave violation against children that cannot be used as a trigger for the listing of a party to conflict in the annexes of the United Nations CAAC reports. But that should not minimize the severity of this issue – denial of humanitarian access can amount to collective punishment of a civilian population, and often leads to the deaths of more children from hunger and disease than the direct impact of the violence itself.

Since the late 2000s in particular, we have witnessed the growth of extremist groups who have blocked access for aid agencies into the territories they control and state forces denying life-saving aid to millions of their

own people, while all parties have increasingly targeted humanitarian workers. In the last decade, we have seen whole cities and governorates become no-go areas, including at some points Aleppo and Raqqa in Syria, Mosul and Fallujah in Iraq and parts of Somalia and Afghanistan. The children in those areas have paid a heavy price. This period was also marked by increased hijackings of humanitarian convoys globally, and a growing trend of the targeting, attacking, abducting and killing of humanitarian workers.

Siege tactics and starvation tactics are also increasingly being used as a weapon of war against civilians, to try to force an armed group or whole community to surrender. We have seen this trend most notably in Syria, where the UN recently spent weeks trying to persuade the government to allow life-threateningly sick children out of an opposition-held district for medical treatment, but also in Gaza, Sudan and elsewhere.

In Yemen, all sides have impeded humanitarian access, and the country's wealthy neighbour Saudi Arabia recently imposed a total blockade of humanitarian and commercial goods going to starving civilians, reportedly



**FIGURE K: DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS**

The graph shows the number of verified cases from the annual reports of the UN Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict. The actual numbers are likely to be higher.

to prevent weapons smuggling. Vaccines needed to treat a deadly diphtheria outbreak – 90 percent of the casualties of which are children – were denied entry and food supplies were turned back from ports, amid the world’s worst humanitarian crisis where 8.4 million people are on the brink of starvation.

In his 2017 CAAC report, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres described denial of humanitarian access as “a deeply troubling issue that compounds the direct impact of hostilities and has devastating consequences for children, particularly in their formative stages.” The increasing denial of humanitarian access – and the international community’s apparent inability or unwillingness to stop it – is a worrying trend which speaks to the growing lack of respect for the principles of International Humanitarian Law and its distinction between civilians and warring parties.

#### DEFINITION: DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

- The intentional deprivation of, or impediment to the passage, of humanitarian assistance indispensable to children’s survival, by the parties to the conflict, including wilfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions; and significant impediments to the ability of humanitarian or other relevant actors to access and assist affected children, in situations of armed conflict.
- The denial should be considered in terms of children’s access to assistance as well as humanitarian agencies’ ability to access vulnerable populations, including children. This is the only grave violation against children that is not currently a trigger for listing in the annexes of the annual report of the CAAC report.



## TAREQ’S STORY

Tareq\* is a 14-year-old student from Gaza, and he has already lived through three conflicts.

A rocket hit his home during the last conflict. Luckily, his family managed to evacuate beforehand, but they lost all of their possessions. Tareq’s cousin’s family was not so lucky though. They took shelter in a school that was bombed by the Israeli military and none of them survived.

Since April 2017, electricity and water supply has been reduced to between 2-4 hours a day and sometimes no electricity and water at all. The little water that is available when electricity comes on is completely unsafe to drink, as 96 percent of the groundwater is considered unfit for human consumption.

Tareq is the sole breadwinner for his family since his father injured his knee. “*The electricity crisis and the fact that I have to work is affecting my school performance,*” Tareq said. “*My academic level was good before I started working a year ago, but it has worsened since. Work is tiring and because of the power cuts, there is no light to study. I usually go to sleep once it gets dark and go to school the next day without having done my homework.*”

\*Not his real name

“ *The electricity crisis and the fact that I have to work is affecting my school performance.* ”



*Recent years have seen an increasing trend toward warfare in towns and cities, with civilian streets and homes becoming battlefields.*

PHOTO: AMER AL SHAMI / SAVE THE CHILDREN



A photograph showing the aftermath of a conflict. In the foreground, there is a large pile of dark, charred rubble. In the background, the remains of a building are visible, with white walls that are heavily damaged and crumbling. A window frame is partially visible, and the overall scene is one of devastation.

**PART 3**

**WHY ARE CHILDREN  
INCREASINGLY HARMED  
BY CONFLICT?**

This report documents a worrying trend of increased brutality against children in conflict over the last two decades. This chapter sets out the drivers for these trends, and calls for the international community to put strategies in place to address them.

## INCREASE IN URBAN WARFARE AND USE OF EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS IN POPULATED AREAS

Recent years have seen an increasing trend toward warfare in towns and cities, with civilian streets and homes becoming battlefields. Rapid urbanization means conflicts are often fought in densely populated areas, with an estimated 50 million people currently suffering the effects of urban warfare.\* The direction of travel is clear; only 30 percent of the world's population lived in cities in 1950, a figure that rose to 54 percent in 2014 and is projected to rise to 66 percent by 2050.<sup>38</sup>

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas – a tactic we see used widely in Syria, Iraq and Yemen today – has a terrible impact on children. We see an increasing trend in civilian casualties as a result of the use of these weapons<sup>39</sup> – between 2011 and 2016 UK-based NGO Action on Armed Violence recorded an almost 48 percent rise in civilian deaths and injuries around the world as a result of explosive violence.<sup>40</sup> According to some estimates, when explosive weapons are used in populated areas like towns and cities, 92 percent of the deaths and injuries are civilians, compared to 34 percent when these are used in other areas.<sup>41</sup>

These weapons range from artillery and air-dropped weapons to 'improvised explosive devices' (IEDs), the latter of which were responsible for 46 percent of civilian casualties in 2016 and were used almost exclu-

sively by armed non-state actors. The wide area effect of such weapons tends to be a result of the substantial blast and fragmentation radius from a large explosive content, and the inaccuracy of delivery or the use of multiple warheads.<sup>42</sup>

Children are particularly at risk from the impact of these weapons – epidemiological studies<sup>43</sup> demonstrate that penetrating injuries (e.g. from shrapnel) to the face, head, neck, upper limb and trunk affect 80 percent of child patients, markedly higher than the 31 percent in adults.<sup>44</sup> Explosive weapons with a wide-area effect also inflict significant damage on vital infrastructure in urban areas, including schools, hospitals and water and electricity networks.

As well as killing and injuring them, explosive weapons are denying children access to healthcare and education and ruining their futures. The findings from Save the Children's report on the conflict in Syria – Invisible Wounds – showed that 84% of adults and almost all children believe ongoing bombing and shelling is the number one cause of psychological stress in children's daily lives<sup>45</sup>. Children left with disabilities and affected by mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) issues are often vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and less able to contribute economically to their communities.

\* The ICRC recognized this issue with a yearlong series looking into 'War in Cities'.



*As well as killing and injuring them, explosive weapons are denying children access to healthcare and education and ruining their futures.*

PHOTO: AHMAD BAROUDI/  
SAVE THE CHILDREN

## CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DURATION

PRIO's research shows clearly that the more intense a conflict is (in terms of battle-related deaths), the longer the conflict lasts and the more actors that are involved, the greater the risk for children to be exposed to violations.<sup>46</sup>

When there are more warring parties or when a conflict is internationalized, the level of competition between actors is higher and the chance of being held to account is lower, leading to a 'race to the bottom' where all sides engage in increasingly brutal actions. Where combatants rely on support from foreign sponsors, conflicts are potentially extended by the war-chests of their external backers and groups or forces are not as accountable to the local populations. They are therefore incentivized to use collective violence and terror to pacify them; children are easy targets in this context – vulnerable, obedient and easy to manipulate.

The longer a conflict goes on, the more chance there is of legal, economic and social orders collapsing and the numbers of groups fighting proliferating, which also raises the likelihood of negative behaviour by warring parties. The data demonstrates that certain grave violations tend to trend together, particularly use of child soldiers and sexual violence.<sup>47</sup>

There are a number of ongoing events that fit the description – Afghanistan, Syria, DRC and South Sudan, for example, all involve many actors, reports of sexual violence against children and child soldier use, and large death tolls. Action must be taken at a much earlier stage to stop conflicts getting to this point and address grave violations against children at the start, to stop the egregious crimes set out in this report becoming the 'new norm' in that context.

There is a question over whether this is a trend that is worsening – do conflicts today last longer compared to previous years? The UN Secretary General has said recently that they are – in a Security Council meeting in December 2017 he said: "the number of armed conflicts has declined over the long-term, but in the Middle East and parts of Africa, conflicts have surged. Conflicts are becoming more intractable. They are longer – more than 20 years on average – meaning that the people they displace are spending ever increasing amounts of time away from their homes and communities."<sup>48</sup>

Figure L shows the number of new conflicts and average duration of state-based conflict by year. Looking at the average duration of state-based conflict, there is defi-



**FIGURE L: INCREASE IN THE DURATION OF CONFLICT 1990–2016**

The figure shows the duration of state based conflicts only. Data source: UCDP GED dataset (Sundberg and Melander, 2013; Croicu and Sundberg, 2017)

nately an increase in the last decades compared to the 1950s. Looking at the last years, the 1990s state-based conflicts had an average of 7.8 years duration, compared to a slight increase in the last 10 years with an average of 9.7 years duration. We see a decrease of duration of conflicts between 2011 and 2015, only to then see an increase again from 2015 to 2016.

As previously mentioned, there has been a sharp increase reported in the number of non-state armed groups operating in conflicts over the last two decades.<sup>49</sup> This poses a number of unique challenges and potential additional threats to children.

Non-state armed groups often do not operate under the same level of command and control structures as state-controlled military forces. They can multiply and fragment rapidly, as we have seen in Syria and elsewhere. This makes it extremely difficult to identify, monitor and report on violations committed by them. They are not signatories to IHL conventions and treaties and are unlikely to have received training in this area, although they have obligations under IHL and may be bound under customary international law. The Geneva Call organization in particular has done admirable work in training armed non-state actors and getting 63 groups to sign "Deeds of Commitment", but in practice it is extremely difficult for governments or international bodies to exert diplomatic pressure on non-state armed groups to comply with IHL.

*Warring parties are not in any systematic or transparent way tracking the civilian harm caused by their actions.* ▶

PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

## LACK OF MONITORING

One of the most concerning aspects of this research has been mapping out the huge gaps that exist on disaggregated child-specific data in conflict, as well as wider data on sexual violence and civilian casualties. Warring parties are not in any systematic or transparent way tracking the civilian harm caused by their actions, from schools and hospitals hit to the number of children killed and maimed. Even when an actor is monitoring casualties, as the US-led anti-ISIL Coalition in Iraq and Syria does, their figures may be a significant underestimate.

In January 2018, Airwars – a not-for-profit organization that tracks casualties from the international air war in Iraq, Syria and Libya – reported<sup>50</sup> that non-combatant deaths from Coalition air and artillery strikes had risen by more than 200 percent in 2017 to at least 6,102 estimated civilians killed. This contrasts sharply with the Coalition's overall estimate that it killed or injured 93 civilians last year. Whatever the accurate figure is, the huge disparity makes clear that even the best-resourced militaries are not investing fully in civilian harm tracking. Dr. Afzhal Ashraf, a former Senior Officer with the UK Royal Air Force, told Save the Children that: "the accuracy of our weapons has outpaced the accuracy of intelligence."

At the same time as warring parties are failing to monitor their own behaviour, independent inspection mechanisms for monitoring, reporting and verifying grave violations and civilian casualties are continually prevented from doing their work in conflict zones by armed forces and groups.

As a result, an unknown number of grave violations against children are hidden, taking place in the shadows of war. This makes it challenging to address problems before they become entrenched, and even harder to hold perpetrators to account. Monitoring acts as a deterrent to committing future crimes for warring parties who fear being held to account. The office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF do extremely important work in documenting grave violations, through the MRM, but urgently need more resources, as well as improved and unfettered access for monitoring and reporting teams.



## CRISIS OF COMPLIANCE

In parallel with the failure to properly monitor the harm caused to children, we are also seeing a damning failure to hold warring parties to account for violations of the laws and norms created to protect civilians in conflict.

After a period of increased international collaboration after the end of the Cold War that benefited civilians in conflict, we appear to be in an era of retreat from cooperation into isolationism. The UN Security Council, sometimes paralyzed by internal disagreements and perceived national self-interest, has failed to take sufficient action to protect the children of Syria, Yemen, South Sudan and elsewhere – at times prioritizing geopolitical point-scoring over children's lives.



Deadly and indiscriminate weapons which the international community made significant progress in tackling in the 1990s and 2000s, particularly the use of landmines, cluster munitions and chemical weapons, are making a return in today's conflicts, seemingly without consequences for the perpetrators. Governments are helping to fuel violence by sending weapons rather than peacekeepers. In Yemen, where the conflict has created the world's biggest humanitarian crisis and dozens of schools and hospitals have been bombed, the US, UK, Norway and others continue to sell high-grade weapons and military equipment to the Saudi-led Coalition, while Iran, Russia and other states funnel arms that fuel wars in Syria and elsewhere.

The lack of respect for the rules and norms of the international system and paralysis of cooperation is fuelling grave violations against children. The mechanisms to protect civilians exist on local, national, regional and international levels, having been painstakingly developed and agreed by the global community in the decades since WWII – but they are not being used properly, and are in fact being undermined by a focus on supposed realpolitik and national self-interest.

# 3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS: WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM THE HORRORS OF WAR?

There are at least 350 million children living in areas affected by conflict in the world today. The failure to protect many of them is one of the defining issues of our time, and needs to be urgently addressed. Continued violations against children will have far-reaching consequences for future generations, as they try to pick up the pieces of today's wars.

This report proposes a practical, actionable “axis for action” comprised of four components:

- Preventing children being put at risk
- Upholding international laws and standards
- Holding violators to account
- Rebuilding shattered lives

We ask states and other influential actors to renew their commitment to the children and armed conflict agenda by acknowledging the findings of this report and adopting the specific policy recommendations below in order to prevent children being put at risk, uphold international law and standards for children in conflict, hold violators to account, and rebuild shattered lives.

## PREVENTING CHILDREN BEING PUT AT RISK

It may be an obvious statement to make, but too easily forgotten: the most effective way to protect children from the horror of war, is to prevent wars from happening. According to the Global Peace Index 2017, every \$1 invested in peacebuilding can lead to a \$16 decline in the cost of armed conflict. Systematically addressing the underlying drivers and enablers of conflict – such as breakdown of the rule of law, corruption, climate change, inequality, discrimination and lack of respect for basic rights – is vital to prevent children being put at risk.

One important aspect of prevention is mitigation at country, regional and international level. The vital work that the UN Department of Political Affairs does in this regard should be strengthened and supported with additional capacity in child protection expertise. Funding and training to civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations working to facilitate dialogue and address tension at local levels should be strengthened and supported to include children's participation and voices.

When violence does break out and peacekeeping forces are deployed, they should be fully trained in child protection – and include a sufficiently resourced unit of child protection advisers. Systematic studies of the effects of peacekeepers find that they reduce the overall levels of violence in civil war<sup>51</sup> and prevent conflict from spreading<sup>52</sup> by decreasing the mobility of armed actors<sup>53</sup>, but as set out earlier, where they are not properly trained peacekeepers can be part of the problem. Warring parties should also be trained in child rights issues and their legal obligations under IHL – both state and non-state armed forces.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- All countries must strengthen the link between the MRM, and operational assessments and programmes of humanitarian partners to ensure a response to the needs of children whose rights have been violated.
- All countries must deploy child protection experts into the UN, African Union, European Union, NATO and other regional organizations' forces.
- Donors should fulfil their commitments in the World Humanitarian Summit Grand Bargain agreement for multi-year funding for protracted crises to allow flexible programming to address the underlying causes of conflict.
- Donors should significantly increase investment in peacekeeping and youth-focused conflict prevention initiatives, building a generation of peacebuilders, with a major investment in capacity-building on the concepts, approaches and skills needed to build peace.
- Governments should increase the level of resources invested in peacebuilding, for example to the US\$27 per capita recommended by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP).
- Militaries must train national forces on International Humanitarian Law, human rights law and refugee law and deploy disciplined security forces that are well-trained on the rights of children.
- All military forces and police should ensure they are provide specialized child-focused pre- and post-deployment training, including capacity to prevent and monitor violations against children.

*Continued violations against children will have far-reaching consequences for future generations, as they try to pick up the pieces of today's wars.*

PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN



## UPHOLDING INTERNATIONAL LAWS AND STANDARDS

States and armed actors must adapt to the changing nature of conflict and mitigate its increasing harm to children. The marked increase between 2005 and 2016 in verified killing and maiming of children makes it clear that an urgent rethink is required as to the conduct of hostilities.

States should adopt robust and up-to-date 'Protection of Civilians' strategies and should ensure that their forces, as well as those operating under the mandate of UN peacekeeping operations, have dedicated child protection officers and advisers in peacekeeping and political missions.

Armed forces and groups should avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas.

States should also be implementing existing mechanisms to protect children in conflict, including the Geneva Conventions, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and championing political commitments such as the Safe School Declaration (SSD), Paris Commitments and Principles, and Vancouver Principles. The SSD contains a number of commitments aimed at strengthening the prevention of, and response to, attacks on education during armed conflict, including by reducing the military use of education infrastructure.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- All states and armed actors should abide by their commitments or obligations under International Humanitarian Law.
- All states should endorse and implement the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles.
- All states should endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration.
- Non-state armed actors should sign and implement the 'Geneva Call' Deed of Commitment for the protection of children from the effects of armed conflict.
- All states and armed actors should avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in order to limit the harm they cause to civilians.

## HOLDING VIOLATORS TO ACCOUNT

This report highlights the limitations of data on violations against children in conflict. More effective monitoring is urgently needed to better understand how conflict affects children, to act as a deterrent on further abuses and to ensure accountability.

States and armed actors should commit to systematically tracking harm to civilians in current and future conflicts. There should also be far more support given at the international and field level to the work of the MRM and SRSG CAAC, including exploring innovative new technologies to enable fuller reporting and verification of violations.

Governments should investigate and prosecute perpetrators of grave violations against children, including the individuals in the chain of command that are responsible for violations. Children caught up in conflict violations must be first and foremost treated as victims, not perpetrators. The donor community should support national justice systems in conflict and post-conflict situations, including by providing resources and technical capacity and by implementing juvenile justice standards and principles.

There is a need for stronger political will and pressure to ensure that International Criminal Court (ICC), international tribunals, commissions of inquiry and other mechanisms focus on crimes against children. More research needs to be done to analyze why there have been very few proceedings to consider suspected violations of IHL and human rights law against children in armed conflict, and why this issue rarely receives attention in the work of Commissions of Inquiry.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- States and armed actors should commit to systematically tracking harm to civilians in current and future conflicts, including disaggregating casualties by age and sex and attacks on civilian infrastructure.
- UN member states must strengthen the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) by investing in the identification and verification of cases, including through the application of technological innovations to improve reporting and verification.
- Alongside other obligations, governments must assess arms sales to parties to conflict against whether that party has been listed for grave violations against children in the annual CAAC reports.
- States must demonstrate political will and invest resources in ensuring that international, regional, and national justice systems address violations of children's rights in conflict, including by strengthening collaboration with the ICC and other judicial bodies, such as ad hoc tribunals and independent special courts.





Children that experience trauma have received insufficient attention. These children are walking through the shattered remains of Eastern Ghouta, Syria.

PHOTO: AMER AL SHAMI / SAVE THE CHILDREN

## REBUILDING SHATTERED LIVES

Rebuilding shattered lives is key for the future of the affected children themselves, as well as our common future. One area that has received insufficient attention is the impact of trauma experienced by children. In 2017, Save the Children published a series of reports documenting the debilitating long-term effects of war-related psychological distress and trauma on children in Syria and Iraq. The failure to protect children in conflict from its worst effects fuels the cycle of violence, as a recent report published by the African Union demonstrated<sup>54</sup>. It is vital that we demonstrate accountability to children and communities affected by conflict.

Though it is challenging to put an end to conflicts, UN member states do have the ability to scale up the humanitarian assistance offered to children suffering the direct and indirect impacts of conflict. The right interventions can support children and their families' resilience against the worst effects of conflict and help them to recover fully. Save the Children is committed to doing this on a global scale and has seen relatively simple interventions – like getting children back into school – have a significant impact.

The international community should therefore urgently invest in protection programmes and in an integrated approach towards mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) for children affected by war, including the specific needs of children with disabilities. This includes recruiting local and deployable social workers and mental health professionals and building the capacity of those in most frequent contact with children including teachers, social workers and community health workers.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Donors should scale up investment in and support to programmes that protect children in conflict including those formerly associated with armed forces and groups, such as sustainable reintegration, psycho-social support, child protection case management, education and training, family strengthening and support, and community-based child protection mechanisms.
- Donors should invest in the training and recruiting of social workers and mental health professionals in conflict-affected countries to address the specific child protection, mental health and psychosocial needs of children in those countries.
- International financial institutions should consider methodologies to pool funding for compensation and rehabilitation of children affected by conflict, including appropriating seized or sanctioned funds.
- Donors should increase investment in protection, mental health and psychosocial services, and education in emergencies – currently less than 5 percent of humanitarian funding is on these sectors.

# ENDNOTES

- 1 Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University: <http://pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/>
- 2 Bahgat, Karim, Kendra Dupuy, Gudrun Østby, Siri Aas Rustad, Håvard Strand & Tore Wig (2017) "Children and Armed Conflict: What Existing Data Can Tell Us." (PRIO, 2018). Background report for Save the Children's Global Flagship Report on Children in armed conflict, 'Protecting children in war'
- 3 Michel, Graça (1996) "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: Report of the expert of the Secretary-General": [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)
- 4 International Committee of the Red Cross (2016) "ICRC Q&A on the issue of explosive weapons in populated areas": <https://www.icrc.org/en/international-review/article/icrc-qa-issue-explosive-weapons-populated-areas>
- 5 United Nations (2016) "Children's Rights Violations during Armed Conflicts on Rise despite National Action Plans to End Abuse, Security Council Told in Day-long Debate": <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12470.doc.htm>
- 6 See the Annex Document - Bahgat, Karim, Kendra Dupuy, Gudrun Østby, Siri Aas Rustad, Håvard Strand & Tore Wig (2017) "Children and Armed Conflict: What Existing Data Can Tell Us." (PRIO, 2018). Background report for Save the Children's Global Flagship Report on Children in armed conflict, 'Protecting children in war'
- 7 CIESIN (Center for International Earth Science Information Network) (2005) Gridded Population of the World, Version 3 (GPWv3): Population Count Grid and Future Estimates. Palisades, NY: NASA Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center (SEDAC): <http://sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/data/collection/gpw-v3/sets/browse>
- 8 United Nations (2017) World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision. New York, NY: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division: <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/>
- 9 Haer, Roos, and Tobias Böhmelt (2016) The impact of child soldiers on rebel groups fighting capacities. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 33(2): 153-173 AND Haer, Roos, and Tobias Böhmelt (2016) Child soldiers as time bombs? Adolescents' participation in rebel groups and the recurrence of armed conflict. *European Journal of International Relations* 22(2): 408-436
- 10 Cohen, Dara Kay, and Ragnhild Nordås (2014) Sexual violence in armed conflict: Introducing the SVAC dataset, 1989–2009. *Journal of Peace Research* 51(3): 418-428.
- 11 United Nations & World Bank (2017) "Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict"
- 12 UNHCR, "Figures at a Glance": <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html>
- 13 UNICEF (2016): "Nearly 50 million children "uprooted" worldwide" [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_92725.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_92725.html)
- 14 UNSG Children and Armed Conflict Report (2017) p.4: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/821&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/821&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)
- 15 UNICEF (2017): "Children under attack at shocking scale in conflicts around the world": [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_102357.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_102357.html)
- 16 Afghanistan Times (2017): "Specific policy to protect children enforced: MoD" <http://afghanistantimes.af/specific-policy-to-protect-children-enforced-mod/>
- 17 OHCHR (2017): "Somalia conflict exacting terrible toll on civilians – UN report Al Shabaab responsible for most civilian casualties" <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22520&LangID=E>
- 18 UNSG Children and Armed Conflict Report (2006) p. 10: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/61/529&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/61/529&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)
- 19 Save the Children (2017) "Horrors I Will Never Forget": [http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/HORRORS\\_I\\_WILL\\_NEVER\\_FORGET.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/HORRORS_I_WILL_NEVER_FORGET.PDF)
- 20 Small Arms Survey (2017): "Global Violent Deaths": <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/U-Reports/SAS-Report-GVD2017.pdf>
- 21 Haer, Roos, and Tobias Böhmelt (2016) The impact of child soldiers on rebel groups fighting capacities. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 33(2): 153-173 AND Haer, Roos, and Tobias Böhmelt (2016) Child soldiers as time bombs? Adolescents' participation in rebel groups and the recurrence of armed conflict. *European Journal of International Relations* 22(2): 408-436
- 22 Machel, Graça (1996) "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: Report of the expert of the Secretary-General" p. 19: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 UNSG (2017) "Children and Armed Conflict Report": [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/821&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/821&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)
- 25 UNSOM (2017) "Protection of Civilians: Building the Foundation for Peace, Security and Human Rights in Somalia": <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Report-ProtectionofCivilians.pdf>
- 26 Cohen, Dara Kay, and Ragnhild Nordås (2014) Sexual violence in armed conflict: Introducing the SVAC dataset, 1989–2009. *Journal of Peace Research* 51(3): 418-428.
- 27 UNSG (2017) "Children and Armed Conflict Report" p.21: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/821&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/821&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)
- 28 Cohen, Dara Kay (2013) Explaining rape during civil war: Cross-national evidence (1980–2009) *American Political Science Review* 107(3): 461-477.
- 29 UNSG (2012) "Children and Armed Conflict Report" p. 3-4: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/66/782&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/66/782&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)  
UNSG (2013) "Children and Armed Conflict Report" p. 9: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/845&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/845&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)

- UNSG (2014) “Children and Armed Conflict Report” p. 6-7: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/845&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/845&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)
- UNSG (2015) “Children in Armed Conflict Report” p. 6: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/926&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/926&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)
- UNSG (2016) “Children in Armed Conflict Report” p. 6: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/836&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/836&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC)
- 30 Deutsche Welle (2017) “UN: 2017 may be record year for attacks on schools”: <http://www.dw.com/en/un-2017-may-be-record-year-for-attacks-on-schools/a-40949342>
- 31 Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (2014) “Education Under Attack”: [http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua\\_2014\\_full\\_0.pdf](http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2014_full_0.pdf)
- 32 ‘Save the Children, Norwegian Refugee Council, Action Against Hunger USA (2018): “At least 61 schools in the West Bank and East Jerusalem at risk as attacks on education rise” <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/least-61-schools-west-bank-and-east-jerusalem-risk-attacks>
- 33 Safeguarding Health in Conflict (2017) “Impunity Must End: Attacks on Health in 23 Countries in Conflict in 2016”: <https://www.safeguardinghealth.org/sites/shcc/files/SHCC2017final.pdf>
- 34 Union of Medical Care and Relief Organization (2017) “Medical Point Attacked and Destroyed in Aleppo”: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/uossm-medical-point-attacked-and-destroyed-aleppo>
- 35 Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict & Save the Children (2017): “Every Day Things Are Getting Worse: The Impact on Children of Attacks on Health Care in Yemen”: <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/every-day-things-are-getting-worse-impact-children-attacks-health-care-yemen-enar>
- 36 UNICEF (2017): “27 million children out of school in conflict zones” [https://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_100857.html](https://www.unicef.org/media/media_100857.html)
- 37 Save the Children (2016): “Childhood Under Siege”: <http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/CHILDHOOD%20UNDER%20SEIGE%20REPORT-%20EMBARGOED%20UNTIL%207PM%20EST%20MARCH%208-SM.PDF>
- 38 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2014): “World Urbanization Prospects”: <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2014-Highlights.pdf>
- 39 Action on Armed Violence (2018): “First 11 Months of 2017 sees 42% Increase in Civilian Deaths from Explosive Weapons Compared to 2016”: <https://aoav.org.uk/2018/2017-set-worst-year-civilian-fatalities-since-aoav-records-began/>
- 40 Action on Armed Violence: “Explosive Violence Monitor”: <https://aoav.org.uk/explosiveviolence/>
- 41 Action on Armed Violence (2015): “Explosive States: Explosive Violence in Populated Areas in 2014”: <https://aoav.org.uk/2015/explosive-states-explosive-violence-populated-areas-2014/>
- 42 PAX (2016): “Areas of harm - Understanding explosive weapons with wide area effects”: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/areas-harm-understanding-explosive-weapons-wide-area-effects>
- 43 Quintana DA, Jordan FB, Tuggle DW, Mantor PC, Tunell WP. The spectrum of pediatric injuries after a bomb blast. *J Pediatr Surg.* 1997;32(2):307–11.
- 44 Bendinelli C. Effects of land mines and unexploded ordnance on the pediatric population and comparison with adults in rural Cambodia. *World J Surg.* 2009;33(5):1070–4
- 45 Save the Children (2017): “Invisible Wounds” p. 1: <http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/INVISIBLE%20WOUNDS%20FINAL%20020317.PDF>
- 46 Bahgat, Karim, Kendra Dupuy, Gudrun Østby, Siri Aas Rustad, Håvard Strand & Tore Wig (2017) “Children and Armed Conflict: What Existing Data Can Tell Us.” (PRIO, 2018). Background report for Save the Children’s Global Flagship Report on Children in armed conflict, ‘Protecting children in war’
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 United Nations (2017) “Secretary-General’s remarks at open debate of the Security Council on Addressing complex contemporary challenges to international peace and security” [as delivered]: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-12-20/secretary-generals-remarks-open-debate-security-council-%E2%80%9Caddressing>
- 49 Briscoe, Ivan (2013): “Non-conventional armed violence and non-state actors: challenges for mediation and humanitarian action”: <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Non-conventional%20armed%20violence%20and%20non-state%20actors,%20challenges%20for%20mediation%20and%20humanitarian%20action.pdf> (NOREF)
- 50 Hopkins, Alex (2018): “Airwars annual assessment 2017: civilians paid a high price for major Coalition gains”: <https://airwars.org/news/airwars-annual-assessment>
- 51 Hultman, Lisa, Jacob Kathman, and Megan Shannon (2014): “Beyond keeping peace: United Nations effectiveness in the midst of fighting”: *American Political Science Review* 108(4): 737-753.
- 52 Beardsley, Kyle, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch (2015): “Peacekeeping as conflict containment”: *International Studies Review* 17(1): 67-89.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 African Committee of Expert on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (2017): “Continental Study on the Impact of Armed Conflicts on Children”: <http://www.acerwc.org/study-children-and-armed-conflicts/>



# #ENDWARONCHILDREN



**Save the Children**

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. In more than 120 countries around the world, we work every day to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. When crisis strikes, and children are most vulnerable, we are always among the first to respond and the last to leave. We ensure children's unique needs are met and their voices are heard. We deliver lasting results for millions of children, including those hardest to reach.

We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

**Save the Children**

501 Kings Highway East  
Suite 400  
Fairfield, CT 06825

899 North Capitol Street, NE  
Suite 900  
Washington, DC 20002

1-800-728-3843

[www.SavetheChildren.org/waronchildhood](http://www.SavetheChildren.org/waronchildhood)

Cover illustration:  
Tomas Drefvelin