



War Child

www.warchild.org.uk

www.warchildholland.org

Sophie Bray-Watkins, Youth Advocacy and Participation Adviser: sophieb@warchild.org.uk

Chapeau

War Child is committed to addressing the urgent and complex challenges faced by children and youth affected by armed conflict. With a focus on international peace and security, Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC), reintegration, youth and future generations, and transforming global governance, War Child advocates for tangible actions, increased funding, and enhanced collaboration to protect and empower the most vulnerable victims of conflict. From addressing the six grave violations under CAAC to promoting meaningful youth participation, War Child's comprehensive approach emphasizes the critical need for international cooperation, comprehensive programming, long-term funding for reintegration, and removing barriers to ensure the voices of conflict-affected children and youth resonate in global governance.

Chapter II. International peace and security

Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC)

The establishment of the mandate of the Special Representative for CAAC aimed to encourage the gathering of data regarding the plight of children impacted by war (specifically six grave violations), heighten global consciousness about their situation, and promote international collaboration to strengthen their protection. The six violations being monitored and documented are: *killing and maiming of children, recruitment or use of children as soldiers, sexual violence against children, attacks against schools or hospitals, the denial of humanitarian access for children and abduction of children.*

War Child calls upon the UN to increase and reconfigure its support for the CAAC agenda:

- CAAC remains in need of higher prioritisation by States. Addressing these gaps requires:

- **Strengthened commitment and continued international cooperation** (governments can do this through dedicated policy statements and support at international forums).
- **Increased funding** that supports child protection work such as education and reintegration.
- **The development of a more comprehensive approach** (a focus and investment on prevention, early warning protection and support for children).
- **Enhancing mechanisms for monitoring and reporting** and support for international efforts to hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Collaboration with international organisations** that specialise in child protection and armed conflict to leverage expertise.

Reintegration

While child recruitment into armed forces and groups has a long history, the last decade has seen new trends and norms emerge. Numbers are increasing, with children ever more exploited to commit extreme violence. Children are used for fighting, as spies and for sexual purposes. Girls, too, are vulnerable to association with armed groups, and the repercussions of such involvement are severe. Their roles within these groups may vary, but the distinct nature of their participation exposes them more to the risk of sexual exploitation. In 2020 there were an estimated 337 million children (more than one in eight globally) living in conflict areas with known child recruitment¹. The magnitude of the problem emphasises the urgent need for global leadership to secure the future of millions of children.

War Child calls upon the UN to increase and reconfigure its support for the reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG):

- Reintegration programming is hugely underfunded. **There is a desperate need for multi-year, predictable, sustained funding for reintegration.** Responding to recruitment and successfully, and sustainably, reintegrating children and youth back into communities and families requires a holistic, social-ecological approach. This cannot be achieved with current funding models.
- Closely linked to this is also the need for **States to advocate against the criminalisation, detention and mistreatment of children who have been recruited.** The recruitment and use of a child is a grave violation of children's rights and there is currently a need to ensure that reintegration programmes are supported and barriers to reintegration are removed, which includes detention.
- Disincentivizing the use of children in armed conflicts requires comprehensive policies, recognising that some **identified drivers may necessitate long-term societal and economic changes which require long-term strategies and funding.**

¹¹ Østby, G., Rustad, S. A., Haer, R., & Arasmith, A. (2023). Children at risk of being recruited for armed conflict, 1990–2020. *Children & Society*, 37, 524–543. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12609>

- International collaboration is vital to bring to justice perpetrators of CAAFAG recruitment. For too long States and Armed Groups listed for this repeated grave violation have not been subject to prosecution under international law.

Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

Representation of Children and Youth Affected by Conflict in Decision-Making

There are an estimated 468² million children and 600 million youth³ living in fragile and conflict-affected countries and territories globally. That's one in six of all children⁴ and just under half of the global population of youth.⁵ Children and youth represent the largest number of people affected by armed violence in nearly all conflict situations. **While internationally there are increasing efforts to engage children and youth in decision-making, those affected by armed conflict continue to be woefully underrepresented.** Increased efforts to ensure the meaningful participation of young people in policymaking, accountability mechanisms, development programming and humanitarian responses are an excellent step forward, however, until young people affected by armed conflict are more meaningfully engaged, equitable representation and fair youth voice cannot be achieved.

Removal of Barriers to Participation

War Child calls upon the UN to view its youth engagement activity through the lens of conflict. This requires the below steps:

- As part of an effort to become more inclusive, **explicitly request in UN youth engagement opportunities that a percentage of places remain reserved for conflict affected youth.** This should be proportional to the number of young people affected, as outlined in the start of this section. **All UN supported youth participation initiatives, such as youth advisory boards, youth delegations, spokesperson opportunities and consultation activities, should review representation to ensure youth affected by conflict are part of these groups.**
- **Work harder to make opportunities accessible to youth affected by conflict.** Young people surviving in conflict zones, or who have been displaced because of conflict, will not be able to access opportunities in the same way as those living in peaceful, developing or developed areas or countries. They are likely to have limited access to electricity, the internet, and other forms of connectivity. Their education will have been disrupted, sometimes for very long

² Save the Children: <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/new-figures-millions-of-children-live-in-conflict-zones#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20approximately%20468%20million,lived%20in%20a%20conflict%20zone>.

³ UNDP Youth Strategy, 2014-2017, *Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future*: <https://www.undp.org/publications/undp-youth-strategy-2014-2017-empowered-youth-sustainable-future>

⁴ Save the Children: <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/new-figures-millions-of-children-live-in-conflict-zones#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20approximately%20468%20million,lived%20in%20a%20conflict%20zone>.

⁵ UN: *State of the World's Youth*: <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth#:~:text=Today%2C%20there%20are%201.2%20billion,cent%2C%20to%20nearly%201.3%20billion>.

periods of time, meaning they will not have always been able to reach high level of educational attainment. Young people will be experiencing significant strains to meet their own and their families' daily needs, meaning they are more likely to be engaged in long work hours, high level of domestic responsibility, labour, or the worst forms of labour. They will be facing security threats and oppression by armed groups, forces, or states. **Continuing with a 'business as usual' style of youth engagement approach will not facilitate their participation. Youth engagement opportunities need to be more flexible and meet youth 'where they are'.**

This should include:

- Longer lead in times that help facilitate reaching out to these harder to reach youth. This includes identification and recruitment of young people for opportunities (such as consultation and participation in research and reports, and for representation opportunities, such as joining advisory groups), for travel and visa arrangements for events, to undertake and engage in any required tasks / activities related to the work.
- Remove requirements for high level of educational attainment or for prioritizing youth who have achieved this. Look for relevant skills and experience that have been required outside of internships or formal work experience, for example, activism in their own communities.
- Remove requirements for specific language skills (e.g. fluent English) and provide translation support.
- Cover all costs associated with engagement, including travel, sustenance, visas, accommodation and any other direct cost that may act as a financial barrier to youth engagement.
- Utilize a wider variety of promotional platforms for opportunities and work with specialist I/NGO and youth organizations and teams. Advertise opportunities outside of UN networks, use local languages, work with external organizations and youth movements to cascade information in good time for engagement.
- Work with organizations that can offer intermediary support, including identifying youth, overseeing safeguarding needs, coaching and communications facilitation etc.
- More effort needs to be made to engage children and youth in *all pillars of the UN*, and especially within the Peace and Security Pillar, which currently lags behind others in terms of child and youth participation.⁶ For youth affected by armed conflict this is especially important.

⁶ Save the Children: *Together we decide, strengthening children's participation in UN processes*: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/Together-We-Decide-6th-pp.pdf/>