



REINFORCEMENT TRAINING PACKAGE ON CHILD PROTECTION FOR THE UNITED NATIONS MILITARY





Module 1, Lesson 1

CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT



Learning Objectives

- **Define** “child” and **explain** why children are most at risk during armed conflict
- **Describe** the relationship between children and armed conflict, and protection of civilians
- **Summarize** the changing nature of conflict and its impact on children
- **Describe** the six grave violations
- **Explain** gender concerns and the vulnerabilities that boys and girls face



Who is a Child?

Article I of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states:

“A child means every human being
below the age of 18 years...”

For all United Nations peacekeeping personnel,
a child is any person under the age of 18 years



Film: A Child's Fate

Child Protection and Peacekeeping



Children are Vulnerable

- What threats do children face during armed conflict?
- Why are children more at risk than adults during armed conflict?



The Nature of Armed Conflict is Changing

Internal
armed conflict

Regional
conflict



Ethnic and
sectarian
violence

Number of
armed groups
has increased

Proliferation
of weapons

Rape and
violence as
tools of war

Civilians are
targeted

Civilian and
child
casualties



The Devastating Impact of Conflict on Children



PEACE & SECURITY CONCERNS

- Six grave violations
- Trafficking
- Illegal detention
- Torture and war crimes
- Human rights violations



HUMANITARIAN & DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS

- Lack of food, water, shelter
- Displacement, separation, trauma
- Loss of education, training, livelihood
- Loss of opportunity



The Six Grave Violations Against Children

- **Killing and maiming**
- **Recruitment and use**
- **Rape and other forms of sexual violence**
- **Abduction**
- **Attacks on schools or hospitals**
- **Denial of humanitarian access**



Dealing with the Six Grave Violations

- Security Council resolution 1612 (2005)
- The grave violations are against international law
- Reports of violations are sent to the Security Council
- **United Nations peacekeepers contribute to reporting on these violations**



Killing and Maiming

Any action that results in the death of or serious injury to one or more children, including:



- Shelling
- Crossfire
- Cluster munitions
- Landmines
- Unexploded ordnances (UXOs)
- Suicide bombs
- Torture



Recruitment and Use

A child associated with an armed force or group (sometimes referred to as a “child soldier”) refers to any person below the age of 18 years who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to:



- Fighters
- Cooks
- Porters
- Messengers
- Spies
- For sexual purposes



Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence

Any violent act of a sexual nature committed against a boy or girl under the age of 18 years, including:



- Rape
- Sexual slavery
- Forced prostitution
- Forced pregnancy
- Enforced abortion

Girls are especially vulnerable to sexual violence during armed conflict



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, including:

- Recruitment
- Taking children hostage
- Retaliation/Intimidation
- Enforced disappearance
- Sexual purposes
- Forced labour
- Other



Attacks on Schools or Hospitals

- Physical attacks and threats on buildings (targeted/ indiscriminate)
- Attacks or threats against school children
- Attacks or threats on personnel, doctors, nurses or teachers (including killing, maiming, harassment, coercion, abduction)
- Looting and wanton destruction of buildings
- Military use of schools and hospitals



Denial of Humanitarian Access

Blocking free passage or timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to persons in need, (including children):



- Attacks against humanitarian workers
- Attacks against humanitarian facilities and assets
- Looting of humanitarian aid
- Denial of access for service delivery
- Restricting movement of humanitarian personnel/supplies



Deprivation of Liberty for Actual or Alleged Association with Armed Forces or Armed Groups

Any form of detention/imprisonment/placement of a child in a public or private custodial setting, from which this child is not permitted to leave at will, by order of any judicial, administrative or other public authority on the basis of the child's:

- Actual or alleged association with an armed group, or a group designated as terrorist
- Actual or alleged association of family members
- On national security grounds



Gender Considerations in Child Protection

- The experiences of girls and boys in armed forces and groups differ, including methods of recruitment, identification, and reintegration
- Tasks assigned to girls and boys can differ based on their distinct gender roles within their societies
- Women and girls face a higher risk of rape and other forms of sexual violence during armed conflict



Case Study: Gender

- Testimonies from a girl and boy
- Consider some of the factors that can increase the risk of a child being recruited by armed forces/groups during armed conflict
- Reflect on the differences in the experiences of girls and boys associated with armed forces/groups



Testimony of a Boy

Emile was recruited into an armed group when he was 15 years old

“I am the oldest of three children. Our father died, and our mother has been working in the fields to help our family get by. One day, when I was 15, I was coming home from school with my friends who lived in the same village as me, and as we were crossing a fruit plantation, I heard someone calling my name. I stopped to see who it was, and a boy, who was about 10 years old, suddenly appeared, coming out of the plantation. He kept me amused by telling me nonsensical stories and asking strange questions. I told my friends to go home, saying that I would follow them. A few minutes later, four armed men appeared and forced me to go with them, knocking me about and striking me with a whip. That is how I found myself recruited into an armed group.

During my time with the armed group, I was brainwashed with their ideology and received training in military intelligence, armed robbery, weapons, livestock theft and intimidation methods for robbing people on the road or in the fields, or abducting them. I started as a cook, was promoted to bodyguard of the camp commander and was eventually made responsible for leading operations on a national road. Sometimes, I was sent with other children to support joint operations with other armed groups. There were times when I cried, especially when I thought about my mother and my two brothers, but I couldn't leave the bush because all the paths out were watched by members of the armed group. One day, during an operation to steal livestock, I took an opportunity to lay down my weapon and my military shirt. I left them on the roadside and reported to MONUSCO.”

Testimony from *International Committee of the Red Cross: Testimonies of Former Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (IRRC No.911), 2019*



Testimony of a Girl

Lucie was recruited by an armed group when she was 11 years old. She is now 16 years old

“Five years ago, I joined an armed group in the eastern part of the DRC. I was no longer studying. One day, armed men came into my aunt’s shop where I worked. They drank all we had and then asked me to go with them to their base so that they could pay me. I asked two of my friends to accompany me. When we got there, they locked us up for two days. The armed group was preparing to fight and told us that we could choose between becoming soldiers and dying. We had no choice but to become soldiers. When night came, fighting broke out, and we fought all night. One of my friends who had come with me was killed. I was very angry and decided to stay with the group to avenge my friend.

One day, we were engaged in a clash with another armed group in the bush; we had run out of ammunition. Some members of our group had been captured. Twelve children, including me, decided to try to escape to the nearest village. However, we were intercepted by another group. We were beaten and locked up at this armed group’s camp and then quickly incorporated into its ranks. I continued to take part in fighting with this new armed group.

It wasn’t easy being a girl in an armed group. Sometimes the boys protected us from the violence meted out by the adults, but the commanders took advantage of night patrols to sleep with the girls. They intimidated us, and if you refused to sleep with them, they would kill you and then go back to the camp and say you had been killed in the fighting. One day, when my commander sent me into the town to find food, I took the opportunity and escaped again. I went to the government forces. I was ready to leave the armed group and join the regular army, but they said that I was not old enough. I was transferred to a transit and orientation centre to be demobilized.”

Testimony from *International Committee of the Red Cross: Testimonies of Former Child Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (IRRC No.911), 2019*



Takeaways

- A child is anyone under the age of 18 years
- Children face specific risks during armed conflict
- The nature of conflict has changed and severely affects children
- There are six (categories of) grave violations against children
- Protection needs of boys and girls may differ



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Questions

