

**“NEVER THINK WAR IS NOT
A CRIME. IT IS THE BIGGEST
CRIME AGAINST
CHILDREN.”**

**Submission of the Children’s
Advisory Team of Child Rights
Connect**

**for the report of the UN High
Commissioner for Human Rights
on the rights of the child and
violations of the human rights
of children in armed conflict**

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**This report was exclusively written by child advisors;
therefore, it does not necessarily reflect the views or
position of Child Rights Connect.**



1. INTRODUCTION

War is a terrible disaster that affects everyone — old people, adults, young people, and especially children. War destroys lives and futures, but children suffer the most. They are still in the early years of their lives when war takes away their rights, their safety, and their happiness. War brings violence and suffering, leaving deep scars on children’s minds and bodies.

The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 55/29 on the Rights of the child, decided to focus its 2026 annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child on the theme of the rights of the child and violations of the human rights of children in armed conflicts and invited the High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report on that issue. This submission written by the members of the Children’s Advisory Team of Child Rights Connect is a contribution to the report of the High Commissioner that will be presented at the 60th session of the Human Rights Council in September - October 2025.

[Child Rights Connect](#) is an independent, non-profit organisation founded in 1983 which is today one of the largest international child rights networks with more than 120 member and observer organisations. The organisation has its own [Children’s Advisory Team](#) (CAT) which is a global team of child human rights defenders supporting Child Rights Connect to shape and take forward activities on children’s rights. At the same time, the child advisors are empowered to amplify their voices at international level to fight for the cause they believe in. The current team, CAT 2025/26 consists of 19 child human rights defenders from 19 different countries covering all regions of the world.

The child advisors organised consultations and group discussions in their own community, school and local church as well as connected with children in their network covering different areas of their home countries, following the methodology proposed by the Office of the High Commissioner. Thanks to this mobilization, around 230 children contributed to this report whose voices were summarised by the child advisors.

2. WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST WAYS WAR HARMS CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, BOTH NOW AND IN THE FUTURE?

2.1. Growing up in **Afghanistan**, a country in which violence and conflict is a part of everyday life, bombards and explosions can take place anywhere, from mosques to churches, from educational centres and schools to shopping malls - it's highly possible to come out of home in the morning, but in the afternoon, your dead body arrives to your doorstep - I believe that one of the biggest ways war hurts children is by damaging their mental and emotional health. The sounds of bombs, gunfire, and explosions, as well as seeing dead bodies, blood, and the loss of family and friends, leave deep emotional wounds. Many children experience extreme fear, sadness, and stress that can last their whole lives.

Because of war, children may grow up feeling angry and hopeless. Some may develop negative thoughts and feelings of revenge. They struggle to see the world as a good place and may find it hard to trust others.

Another serious problem is the loss of education. During war, schools are often destroyed, and children are forced to stop learning. Even after the war ends, many schools remain in ruins, and families are too poor to send their children back to school. In some cases, children are forced to work to help their families survive, which keeps them away from education and leaves them without the skills they need for a better future.

War also puts children's lives in danger. Many are killed, while others suffer serious injuries or lose body parts due to explosions and gunfire.

2.2. Seeing hundreds of people being killed and considered a martyr to make a peaceful word for another's, giving their lives, dreams and future to save ours is that fair!! That's the reality in **Palestine**, in every second people, children and animals die to achieve peace. Peace which is also called a dream for every Palestinian from 1948.

War is the biggest crime in the world. It leaves a huge impact on children's mental health due to the traumatic events, causing anxiety, depression and the feeling of insecurity and instability. It's considered a children's rights violation because children are lacking the essentials to continue living, like the need for healthy food, clean water, clean place to live in

and they are lacking health care. Because of all the hospitals that got destroyed, the staff that had been killed and the lack of medicine, all of that led to a physical impact. Hundreds of children are having disabilities because of the indiscriminate bombings, for example in the Gaza war. More than 104,000 people have been injured so far in Israeli military attacks since October 2023. Current estimates indicate that a quarter of the injured need rehabilitation services, with more than 2,000 of them suffering from spinal cord and brain injuries, in addition to another 15,000 Israeli attacks that disabled them. How can a child continue his normal life routine without one of his arms, legs or having a big scare that will stay forever with him.

In wars homes, schools and beautiful places that have a special place in the hearts of children get destroyed and sometimes erased. These things leave an impact on the future, and it will take a long time to rebuild all these places. As a child seeing soldiers, explosions, martyrs, destroyed places everywhere I know it is not a healthy thing at all. It is something that will expose the child to live in a trauma. Even if it ends, children will be in a miserable situation getting into a post-war state which is the feeling of dread or helplessness that may coincide with panic, fear, fight, or an inability to sleep, walk, or talk.

Children in Gaza have stopped going to school because of the war. Even though the war has stopped, schools are destroyed and there are no teachers and staff. This leads to a situation when children stop getting education for the long term again. This is one of the main reasons why people become ignorant, causing a whole generation lacking an essential education. As a child witnessing the death of his parents leads to sowing the feeling of revenge inside his heart - the number of orphaned children in Gaza reached about 17,000. In wars there is another dangerous phenomenon: child recruitment, making them soldiers holding weapons, or making them human armour.

2.3. The very nature of childhood, with its inherited dependency and need for protection is fundamentally violated. In my country **Nigeria**, children are robbed of their innocence and their future. Children in north-east Nigeria continued to face heightened insecurity due to the presence of armed groups notably Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Bakura, which led to a significantly increase of grave violations compared with the previous reports.

The United Nations reports that overall, 2,519 grave violations were committed against 1,250 children from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023. Armed groups were responsible for most of the violations, remaining a significant security threat, in addition to triggering mass displacements.

The abduction of children (1,105) remained the most prevalent violation, especially in 2023 which recorded the highest number of children verified as having been abducted (859) since 2014; the recruitment and use (821) and sexual violence (439) followed.

“Children in Nigeria and particularly in the north-east are living in high insecurity due to the presence of armed groups. Children should never trade their hopes and dreams for fear and tears. I urged all armed groups and particularly JAS and ISWAP to release all children associated with them and to immediately end and prevent all grave violations against children. International humanitarian law applies to all parties to the conflict, and I call for its immediate respect and implementation” stated by Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

While verified killing and maiming of (135) children remain worrisome, it decreased compared to the previous reporting period. However, the increased use of improvised explosive devices by armed groups and the spread of its contamination is having disastrous impact for the communities, the children and the humanitarian agencies who face difficulties to operate.

Conflict devastates communities, leaving lasting scars. Homes are destroyed, families are displaced, and essential resources become scarce, hindering recovery for generations.

2.4. **Mexico**, a country renowned for its natural wealth and enormous cultural diversity, is also seen as a country experiencing daily armed conflicts, which have unfortunate consequences for the full development and well-being of children and adolescents. Children and adolescents participate in this culture of violence at a very young age or are forced through deception to continue it. This is a response to the complications they face, a direct link to what they call a "better quality of life," abandoning their dreams, opportunities, and families, and putting their lives at risk. In Mexico, it is alarming to know that there are at least 17,000 registered cases of missing children and adolescents, victims of recruitment, labour exploitation, and torture. We are vulnerable due to a lack of information and a lack of awareness that "Violence is not solved with more violence."

War seriously violates the rights of children and adolescents, affecting them in multiple ways both now and in the future. The physical impact is evident, as they are exposed to violence, suffering injuries or even death, but there is also profound emotional damage. Constant exposure to traumatic situations, such as the loss of loved ones, forced displacement, and separation from their families, generates psychological disorders that can accompany them for life. The scarcity of resources in conflict zones prevents these traumas from being adequately addressed, which exacerbates their suffering. Furthermore, war deprives children and adolescents of their right to education, as many schools are destroyed or closed, impeding their academic development and reducing their future opportunities. Lack of access to education not only affects their chances for a better future but also leaves them more vulnerable to exploitation and poverty. It also influences their personality and the way they interact with others, as they grow up in an environment of fear and insecurity, which can create difficulties in their interpersonal relationships and even perpetuate them.

War robs them of essential aspects of their childhood and adolescence, such as the freedom to play, speak, and live with others in a safe and healthy environment. The lack of access to adequate food and medical care impairs their physical well-being, putting their growth and development at risk. In many cases, they are also recruited or forced to participate in conflicts without taking into account that they are still minors, exposing them to danger.

Another worrying aspect is misinformation and the manipulation of reality. War is often romanticized or presented in a biased way, which prevents children from understanding its true nature and the devastating consequences it entails, impacting the way they view their future. They are often denied the right to know the truth, to express their opinions, or to participate in decisions that directly affect their lives. In the long term, the impact of war extends beyond the conflict itself, leaving scars that can affect an entire generation. Untreated trauma, lack of education, and limited opportunities perpetuate cycles of poverty and violence, preventing societies from moving toward peace and development. War represents the worst possible scenario for a child, robbing them not only of their present but also of their future, affecting their well-being, dignity, and rights.

3. WHAT MAKES IT SO DIFFICULT FOR CHILDREN TO STAY SAFE AND BE CARED FOR DURING A WAR?

War zones are dangerous, and children cannot be fully protected when bombs, bullets, and attacks are happening all around them and there is no such a safe place to stay in. Protecting children and adolescents during war is an extremely difficult task due to the collapse of security and support systems and the absence of effective protection and the focus on military and political priorities rather than on children make their safety and well-being one of the greatest victims of armed conflict. Most governments are in process of collapsing during conflict which leads to decreases in all the financial services and support, so it leads to the scarcity of resources and the lack of access to essential services such as health, education and food. Holding perpetrators of violence accountable is a major challenge. The complexities of modern conflicts and the lack of political will often allow those responsible to escape justice.

War destroys economies and resources, families struggle to provide children with food, clean water, shelter, clothes, healthcare, and even simple joys like playing and having fun. Another major obstacle is the difficulty of getting humanitarian aid into conflict zones, along with crossfire, constant attacks and the lack of safe transportation systems prevent aid from reaching those who need it most. Health, shelter and food services are often limited or inaccessible, leaving millions of children unattended at critical times. In addition, many of the resources that could be allocated to their protection and welfare are used for the purchase of weapons and the maintenance of armies, leaving the children and adolescents in the background.

Unfortunately, sometimes whole families are killed and other times half of them, so children stay without an adult taking care of them. In addition to the direct danger posed by bombing, many children are used as human shields, exposing them to extreme violence and robbing them of their childhood by being forced to participate in war. War also results in the forced displacement of thousands of families, which means that many children are left homeless, exposed to hunger, lack of access to clean water and disease. Separation from their families exacerbates their vulnerability, as many are left unprotected and at risk of exploitation, abuse or trafficking. They lose the opportunity to grow up in a safe environment and to develop their potential.

Another determining factor is the lack of awareness of adults about the impact that war has on children and adolescents. Often, their voices are not taken into account and their suffering is minimized, since, in the midst of violence and the struggle for power, children are not seen as a priority. Despite being one of the most vulnerable groups. Governments and parties involved in conflicts do not implement effective measures to ensure their safety, prioritizing other issues instead of seeking solutions.

War affects children's minds deeply, making it very hard to keep them happy and emotionally stable. It generates trauma from which it's hard to recover psychologically and it will stay with them forever. In a war, it is difficult to get health care, because hospitals are destroyed and the staff are being killed, so there's no possibility for children to be cured, treated and cared for.

4. HOW WELL ARE PROGRAMS KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE AND HELPING THOSE WHO'VE BEEN HURT? WHAT'S WORKING AND WHAT NEEDS FIXING?

Armed conflicts have had a devastating impact on children, leaving millions of girls and boys displaced, separated from their families, injured, or even recruited by armed groups. In the face of this crisis, various humanitarian programs have been designed to provide them with protection and support in their recovery. However, their effectiveness still faces significant challenges.

Over the years, organizations such as UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNHCR, and Save the Children have worked tirelessly to provide shelter, medical care, psychological support, and education to children affected by war. Field hospitals and mobile clinics have been developed in conflict zones to care for injured children. At the same time, psychological support strategies have been implemented to help children cope with the trauma of war, as prolonged exposure to violence can cause severe emotional disorders such as anxiety, depression, and stress.

Access to education has also been a priority within these programs, as war destroys schools and leaves millions of children without the opportunity to study. To counter this, temporary classrooms have been implemented in refugee camps and distance learning programs have been launched to guarantee the right to education, even in the midst of conflict. Furthermore,

tracing mechanisms have been strengthened to reunite children with their families, preventing them from becoming more vulnerable and unprotected.

Despite these advances, child protection programs still face critical challenges that limit their effectiveness. One of the main problems is the difficulty in accessing remote communities or those controlled by armed groups, which prevents aid from reaching those most in need. Insecurity and a lack of infrastructure hamper humanitarian organizations' access, making it urgent to establish safe corridors that allow for the delivery of assistance without putting those seeking to provide aid at risk.

Another major obstacle is the inequality in aid distribution. In some conflicts, it has been reported that the care provided by certain agencies is not completely neutral, favouring certain groups while neglecting others. To avoid these disparities, it is essential that organizations act with complete impartiality and transparency, respecting human rights principles.

The lack of continuity in programs also represents a significant problem. In many countries, child protection initiatives depend on the political will of the governments during their term in office. This means that when administrations change, these programs can lose funding or be abandoned altogether, weakening the progress already made and leaving children and adolescents behind as a priority. It is essential to establish international agreements that guarantee the long-term sustainability of these programs, ensuring that children in conflict zones are not left unprotected.

Furthermore, while emergency education has been an effective solution, greater investment is still needed in the training and social reintegration of children affected by war. It is not enough to guarantee access to basic education; it is necessary to create programs that allow them to develop technical skills and access future job opportunities.

Mental health is another aspect that requires more in-depth attention. Although some programs have incorporated psychological assistance, resources for this purpose remain insufficient. Many children who have experienced trauma require long-term emotional support, so investment is needed in the training of professionals specializing in child mental health and in the creation of psychosocial care centres.

Another key factor that can improve humanitarian response is the construction of strategic shelter centres that can be automatically activated in crisis situations. These spaces should be equipped with basic supplies, trained staff, and a clear plan of action to provide immediate protection to children without discrimination.

While aid programs have proven vital for protecting children in conflict zones, many areas still need to be strengthened. Equitable distribution of resources, ensuring access to essential services in all affected regions, and strengthening prevention and immediate response strategies are key to improving aid effectiveness.

The impact of war on children is catastrophic, but with greater investment, better coordination, and a genuine will to change, it is possible to offer these children a safer and more hopeful future. Protecting children in war contexts should not be seen as an option, but as an inescapable global responsibility. Only with a comprehensive and sustainable approach can we ensure that no child is left unprotected.

5. HOW CAN CHILDREN RECOVER FROM WAR? WHAT CARE AND SUPPORT DO THEY NEED?

When a war ends, the children who lived through it face many difficulties in trying to heal and rebuild their lives. They need help in every way — physically, mentally, and emotionally — to recover from the terrible experiences they have been through. Many children suffer from serious mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression, and they struggle to manage their emotions. That is why providing long-term psychological support is extremely important. As one child advisor of ours expressed, "As children, we need to stay in a safe place to recover mentally from the instability we felt." Trained professionals like psychologists and therapists play a key role in helping children to process their traumatic experiences, recognizing that each child has a unique way of living and expressing their pain and healing from these invisible wounds.

Education is also one of the most important parts of recovery. War often disrupts schooling, leaving children with an uncertain future. Without education, they have fewer opportunities to grow and build a better life. That is why schools must be protected as safe zones, where

children can learn without fear. As one child advisor of ours emphasizes, "Making sure schools are safe zones, and that education continues during conflict is extremely important." Special programs, like accelerated learning, can help children catch up on missed education, giving them hope and a sense of normalcy in their lives.

Another important factor in recovery is rebuilding communities and homes. War leaves behind destroyed buildings, broken families, and painful memories. Children and their families need a safe place to live, where they do not have to see destruction every day. One child advisor described the reality in Gaza, saying, "Wherever you walk or visit, all you see is destroyed buildings—so rebuilding and trying to restore everything as it was helping a lot in the recovery process." Living in an environment full of destruction only makes it harder for children to move forward. That is why governments, organizations, and decision-makers must work together to rebuild homes, schools, and cities so that children can grow up in a peaceful and healthy place.

Family reunification is another crucial part of healing. Many children are separated from their parents or loved ones during war, leaving them feeling lost and alone. Bringing families back together helps them regain emotional stability and a sense of belonging. Along with this, humanitarian organizations and international aid programs must provide financial support to help in rebuilding efforts, education, and medical care.

Finally, one of the biggest challenges children face after war is the loss of their dreams and future plans. Many young students work hard in school, hoping to build a better future, but war can take everything away in an instant. As one child advisor of ours explained, "Many people after war realize the loss they will suffer from, like the children who worked and put effort into building their future, like students in Gaza who are in their senior year. Suddenly, a war comes, and everything they worked on disappears." This loss is devastating, and it is why rebuilding opportunities for these children is so important.

Ultimately, children deserve to live in a world free from war and destruction. The international community must focus on peace, not conflict. The recovery of children after war cannot be the responsibility of one person alone. Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and local communities must work together to provide comprehensive support to these children. A powerful plea from my fellow child advisor

reminds us of what truly matters: "As a Palestinian child, I call on every country supporting war to stop—many lives are being lost. It's time for peace, for a rich life where all children can live in safety." The world must come together to protect and support children, ensuring they grow up in a world full of hope, opportunity, and security, rather than one filled with pain and suffering.

6. CONCLUSION

War has a terrible impact on children, affecting their emotions, education, and physical health. Helping them recover requires the effort of governments, organizations, and communities. Programs that support children must be made stronger and more accessible so that no child is left behind. By investing in their recovery, we can give them a chance to rebuild their lives and create a better future for themselves and the world.