

Input for the UPR Working Group Session on Syrian Arab Republic
Office of the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict
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Background

In the five years since March 2011, children have paid heavy price during the conflict in Syria. A vast number of the six grave violations against children have been committed by all parties to the conflict.

In the 2015 annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, the following parties to the conflict are listed for committing grave violations against children:

- Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamia (recruitment and use of children; killing and maiming of children);
- Free Syrian Army (FSA) - affiliated groups (recruitment and use of children);
- Government forces, including the National Defence Forces and the Shabbiha militia (killing and maiming of children; rape and other forms of sexual violence; attacks on schools and hospitals);
- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (recruitment and use of children; killing and maiming of children; rape and other forms of sexual violence; attacks on schools and hospitals);
- al-Nusra Front (Jhabat Al-Nusra) (recruitment and use of children; killing and maiming of children);
- People Protection Units (YPG) (recruitment and use of children).

The United Nations has verified large numbers of cases of **recruitment and use of children** in hostilities by parties to the conflict. Most documented cases involved armed groups including Ahrar al-Sham al-Islami, Free Syrian army (FSA) and affiliated groups, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), al-Nusra Front (Jhabat Al-Nusra), and People Protection Units (YPG), but there were some instances of children used by pro-Government armed groups, including the National Defence Forces and the Popular Committees. Armed groups using tactics of extreme violence, such as al-Nusra Front and ISIL, have systematically recruited, trained and used children. ISIL has used education for the purposes of indoctrination and recruitment of children. The majority of children recruited by armed groups were aged between 14 and 17, and a significant number of them were used in combat roles. Children have reportedly been used as human shields, and have also been used to commit suicide attacks and as executioners. The trend in Syria is that mainly boys are victims of recruitment and use, apart from the YPJ, which recruits and uses girls in combat roles. An increasing number of children have been killed and maimed due to their association with armed groups, including while participating in combat, at checkpoints, and while engaged in forced labour.

Children have been **detained** by Government forces for their alleged association with armed opposition groups. There are widespread reports and verified cases of torture and ill-treatment in detention, including being repeatedly beaten and maintained in stress positions. Several cases of detention of children may amount to enforced disappearances. Pro-government groups have deprived children of their liberty for

alleged association with opposition groups. There were also cases of ISIL depriving children of liberty due to association with other parties to conflict.

Since the beginning of the conflict, thousands of children have been **killed and maimed**. Indiscriminate attacks by both Government forces and armed groups have led to a high number of child casualties. The use of barrel bombs by Government forces on civilian neighborhoods, worship places, markets, schools, IDP camps and hospitals has resulted in huge numbers of children killed or severely injured (amputated limbs, loss of hearing or sight, brain and spine damage, paralysis). Children also continued to be killed and injured by explosive remnants of war.

Cases of **sexual violence** against girls and boys were reported in Government-controlled detention facilities. Acts of sexual violence were also perpetrated by armed groups with a significant number of cases committed by armed groups who use tactics of extreme violence. In areas controlled by ISIL, girls reportedly continued to be vulnerable to early and forced marriage to fighters, while Yezidi girls captured in Iraq continued to be trafficked and used as sex slaves.

Attacks on schools have resulted in the destruction and damage of educational facilities and killing and injury of students and teachers. Since the start of the conflict, over 6,500 schools have been destroyed, partially damaged, used as IDP shelters, or are otherwise inaccessible. Numerous heavy airstrikes, including barrel bombs, on schools by Government forces have been documented over the reporting period. Incidents of attacks on schools by armed groups have also been documented.

Medical facilities in Syria have regularly been the target of direct or indirect attacks, and hundreds have been partially or fully damaged, with an even larger number functioning only partially or not at all due to shortage of staff or equipment, or their use for other purposes.

The **abduction** of children has become an increasingly prevalent feature of the Syrian conflict, mainly at the hands of armed groups using tactics of extreme violence, in particular ISIL.

Parties to the conflict, in particular the Government, ISIL, ANF and armed opposition groups, have used siege and starvation as a tactic of war. Water cuts have also been used as a weapon of war.

Recommendations

- Welcome the establishment of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Child Protection and of an expert level group of Government and United Nations officials to strengthen engagement on the protection of children. Encourage the Committee to meet on a regular basis and develop an action plan to end and prevent grave violations and strengthen the protection of children.
- Welcome the adoption in June 2014 of Legislative Decree 22, which grants an amnesty for children associated with armed groups and the Government commitment to diverting those children to rehabilitation programs and urges for the implementation of the Decree.

- Highly concerned by the disproportionate use of force through airstrikes on civilian areas, call on the Government to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of children during military operations in line with international humanitarian law.
- Note with concern that children continue to be recruited by armed groups and remain detained by government authorities for alleged association with those groups and call upon the Government to develop programs to prevent the recruitment of children by armed groups, and facilitate their reintegration and rehabilitation; to treat these children as victims and explore alternatives to detention and prosecution; and to ensure that children are treated in line with international juvenile justice standards.
- Express concerns regarding reports of sexual violence committed against children by Government forces as well as by pro-Government groups, and request the Government to prosecute and hold accountable perpetrators of sexual violence committed against children, and provide adequate physical and psychological treatment and counselling to the victims, as well as reparations.
- Call on the Government to allow unfettered and independent access for the monitoring and verification of grave violations against children.