



Greetings Delegates,

Welcome to UCIMUN's 32nd annual conference! My name is Jacob Endelman, and I am very excited to return as a Director for UCIMUN. My MUN journey began about 7 years ago as a high school freshman delegate. Since then, not only have I traveled around the country to debate and work with some of our generation's brightest, but I have also had the opportunity to be Assistant Director and Director for UCIMUN's General Assembly in past years. Here at UCI, MUN really is a great club with even better people, so it's my promise to you all that the conference staff, including myself, will work our hardest to deliver an excellent experience.

I am in my Senior year majoring in Political Science and minoring in Sociology. It's my hope that my Anteatr education and UCIMUN experience will prepare me well for a career in law. Apart from academics, I love to travel (especially along the Mexican coast), work and volunteer on political campaigns, engage in community service as an Eagle Scout, and go on lots of summer hikes.

Our first committee topic (*Children of the Israel-Palestine, Ukraine, and Sudan Conflicts*) will cover one of the great global humanitarian issues of our time: the displacement of children from their homes and families as a result of armed conflict. No child is born evil nor violent, so they should not be held physically nor emotionally responsible for violence's evil. But with explosives destroying homes, parents being drawn into battle, and important childhood institutions being demolished in the crossfire, children are suffering. Our second topic (*Child Soldiers in Armed Militias*) will focus on one specific threat many children across the globe face: being recruited or coerced into joining armed militias. Seeing as this tends to happen during times of heightened armed conflict, these child soldiers are exposed to death, violence, loss, and disturbance, negatively impacting their physical, social, and emotional development. Sadly, as more violence ensues, there will be a greater need for more soldiers, and certain militias and even terrorist organizations see children as a great source, making this topic extremely pressing and time-sensitive.

In these topic synopses, I will be extensive and fair with educating on the topics. However, each of you has been assigned a unique country with its own history and involvement in both topic areas. Therefore, I highly recommend doing your own research to best prepare you for engaging with others through debate, conversation, and, most importantly, fruitful collaboration. I am thrilled to meet you all and learn more about your positions, but, until then, please reach out should you have questions or concerns. See you at UCIMUN 2024!

Sincerely,

Jacob Endelman

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Disclaimer:

These topic synopses were originally drafted before the current iteration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For this reason, explicit mention of the Israel-Hamas War is not necessarily present in these synopses. With that being said, delegates are allowed, and encouraged, to expand their research to the present, and to come prepared to the conference with up-to-date information. Since we are focusing on the children as UNICEF, the exact happenings of the war aren't as important as are the effects upon the youths, which are similar to what has been occurring in the region for decades. Therefore, while you may have more contemporary sources and information to present during the conference, please bear in mind that there is a long history of children suffering in this conflict beyond the current war. So, the information here, while not nearly all-encompassing, should serve as a good guide.

A final, and more important, note is that because of this recent outbreak of hostilities, we request that you are all-the-more respectful and courteous during the conference. As Model United Nations delegates and conference staff, we all have a duty to promote inclusivity of ideas. Remember, too, that delegates in our committee will have unique perspectives and values, so there will be no tolerance for vitriol. I fully understand that this is an emotionally-charged political, religious, and cultural issue with so many layers of complexity, but you must follow your country's policy positions without letting personal feelings intervene. Thank you for your understanding.



## **Topic A: Children of the Israel-Palestine, Ukraine, and Sudan Conflicts**

### **Introduction**

The initial topic for this UNICEF committee focuses on three present armed conflicts. While they differ in causes, effects, history, etc., they share very similar impacts. Namely, they impact the global community's children in a multitude of harmful ways. For the purposes of this committee, we are focusing on how these specific armed conflicts destroy children's lives as they know it. The main process in which occurs is through the displacement of children. Whether this takes the shape of child refugees, the loss of parents, or actual demolition of safe places like homes and schools, children in all of these conflicts face some degree of physical placement uncertainty.

This displacement comes with many implications. For example, when homes are indiscriminately destroyed during armed conflict, children have one less avenue of obtaining a vital source of mere survival and development in food. In fact, this scenario has played out millions of times in Sudan, with an estimated "3 million Sudanese children...suffering from acute malnutrition" (Kinzli).

This is but one example of how physical displacement from the home due to the impacts of armed conflict can significantly harm children. When we think of the other aforementioned sources of child displacement (fleeing/refugee, loss of guardians, destruction of homes and schools), we can begin to imagine the wide variety and grand scale of negative impacts, way beyond just lack of nutrition, that our global community's children are facing in Israel-Palestine,



Ukraine, and Sudan.

But how far-reaching and significant is the problem of child displacement during armed conflict, beyond Sudan? Well, in July, 2022, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilza Brands Kehris reported to her colleagues that approximately 17% of children across the globe live in conflict zones as of 2021, resulting in 36.5 million displaced children. Two million of these children were child refugees from the Ukraine conflict (Kehris).

Not only are these figures staggering and unsettling to swallow, but they also fly in the face of the United Nations and UNICEF, and their commitments to human rights. For example, in 1990, the Convention on the Rights of the Child came into effect. In it, there are four guiding principles. For the sake of this topic, one of these principles is “the right to life, survival and development.”

So, when governments and armed militias use indiscriminate violence to attempt to conquer or destroy their opponent, children suffer. They get captured in the crossfire, and, if lucky, survive. But this survival oftentimes exposes children to a whole new host of problems: what to eat, what to drink, how to sleep, how to find shelter, etc. As developing individuals, children are not well-prepared for handling such challenges, making child displacement as a result of armed conflict a critical and massive threat.

## Description

Armed conflict brings with it a whole range of difficult situations for people to live with. Depending on the specific situation, these difficulties can be manageable, but often they are not.



For example, although the previously introduced Geneva Conventions forbid the targeting of civilian infrastructure during armed conflict so as to protect innocent lives, this reality is not often met. For instance, Brown University's Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs has found that since 9/11, approximately 4.6 million innocent civilians have died from the U.S.'s War on Terror. Of course, death is the ultimate extreme when it comes to how civilians interact with armed conflicts, but it is indicative of how Geneva Convention rules and regulations are not always met, at the expense of civilians.

One group of civilians that are especially susceptible to the whims of battle are children. In special need of food, parental care, shelter, and medicine, children are uniquely put in danger during armed conflicts where civilians are hurt. For example, the study mentioned in the previous paragraph also estimated that 7.6 million children (ages 5 and under) are suffering from acute malnutrition due to the War on Terror.

One of the most disturbing implications for civilian children around armed conflicts is the prospect of being displaced, or forcibly moved/relocated from one location, often home, to another. As the International Committee of the Red Cross puts it, displaced children "can lose their independence, be or feel unsafe, lack access to essential services and be at heightened risk of...violence." These scary displacement realities have terrible developmental, physical, and psycho-social consequences for children all around the globe. Let's take a look at some harrowing examples from present-day armed conflicts, where children have become displaced due to loss of parents (orphans), fleeing as refugees, destruction of shelter, loss of protective and developmental institutions such as schools, and more.



### *Israel-Palestine*

The armed Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most well-documented struggles in recent memory, particularly because of indiscriminate violence that brutally affects civilians of all ages. However, as previously explained, children have unique needs and experiences, often meaning that wartime is especially negative for this age group.

Since 1948, Arabs and Israelis have staked claim to the land presently recognized by the UN and other major states as Israel. Israelis point to the fact that Israel is the ancestral and Biblical homeland of the Jewish people, and the fact that Israel provides refuge from centuries of religious persecution, to argue their existence in Israel (American Jewish Committee). On the other hand, Arabs had occupied the land of Israel in the interim between Biblical times and World War II, giving them cultural, historical, and religious claims to the land, too. On top of this, Arabs claim they were unjustly expelled from Israel post-WWII, when Israel was formally established as a safe-haven and home for about 140,000 Jewish refugees of the Holocaust, plus other Jews seeking asylum from all parts of the world (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). Today, certain Arabs have formed a Palestinian identity, saying that they deserve the land to be returned to them. This has caused decades of seemingly relentless fighting, and civilians, including children, have continually been caught in the crossfire, losing shelters, resources such as food and water, and lives. Indeed, between 1967 and 2021, approximately 6,000 Palestinian children had their homes demolished (Al Jazeera). As it stands, the major belligerents are the State of Israel on one side, and the Palestinian National Authority and Palestinian Liberation Organization on the other. Importantly, the Palestinian cause is also



backed, especially militarily, by the terrorist groups known as Hamas and Fatah.

What does all this mean for the children? Psychotherapist and professor Laurel Holliday put eloquently in her 1999 book *Children of Israel/Palestine* that “Israeli and Palestinian children grow up feeling that they are destined for conflict with their neighbors.” It’s worth noting that, according to UCI Social Sciences professor and psychologist Dr. Alfonso Valdez, no child is born violent nor evil. Because of this, Holliday’s quote should be alarming—it demonstrates that children in this region are raised in a psychologically maladaptive environment, feeling that their goal in life is to hurt and displace the other. Indeed, the whole reason for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be viewed as trying to displace the other side so yours may occupy the territory.

One of the primary causes of child displacement in this conflict stems from Israeli citizen expulsion and occupation of Palestinian homes. In 2013, during one such settlement dispute, it was measured that 50% (424) of the displaced occupants were children, who now faced the reality of having “to seek out somewhere new to live,” which is often unaffordable, or to “seek refuge in camps...[with] poor conditions (Ballard Brief).

As previously mentioned, children can become displaced through being orphaned. The most common means of orphaned children in the context of armed conflict is the death or debilitating injury of parents, leaving the child on their own or as the provider for the family. The Institute for Middle East Understanding reports that “as many as 1500 [Palestinian] children...have been orphaned by Israeli attacks that killed their parents.”

Another means of displacement that becomes commonplace during armed conflict is the



loss of protective agencies, such as schools. Not only are schools vital to the social and academic development of children for obvious reasons, but schools are also widely believed to be safe places for children to exist and learn. However, the Institute for Middle East Understanding also estimates that as of 2014, 244 schools, including kindergartens, were destroyed by Israeli forces, 25 of them beyond repair. This means that for at least some Palestinian children, they have experienced loss of shelter, parents, and academics. All of these things severely hinder development in all areas of life, leaving 80% of Palestinian children in Gaza “dependent on humanitarian assistance.”

### *Ukraine*

The Ukrainian crisis is another very well-documented armed struggle that places many civilians and children in harm’s way. The current iteration of the Russo-Ukrainian War has lasted about 9.5 years at the time of this writing, with the primary belligerents being Ukraine on one side and Russia on the other. This conflict is deeply rooted in historical geopolitical affairs, but it is especially focused on the forced annexation of certain regions. These regions stand out for Russian President Vladimir Putin because they contain Russian separatists, who desire to be Russian citizens again, and land that was previously controlled by the USSR and/or Russia. In recent times, this has led to the forced annexation of Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk. In the present day, there has been a full scale invasion of Ukraine. While the extent of Russia and Putin’s goals remain largely unclear or at least cryptic, the vast majority of the world views Putin as the aggressor in this conflict. Whatever the history is, there has been tons of fighting and casualties, particularly since the Russian military buildup around Ukraine began in early 2021.





What does this conflict mean for the children? In terms of displacement, UNICEF's website, in July, 2023, reported that "nearly two thirds of [Ukrainian] children have been forced to flee their homes...increasing their exposure to abuse, abduction, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking." Here, we see that the displacement of children from their homes is very threatening—it opens them up to serious and scary experiences that children deserve protection from.

Similarly to displacement from the education system in Israel-Palestine, Ukrainian children have also been forcibly removed from the classroom, thus halting academic and brain development. For instance, as of early 2023, UNICEF estimates that hundreds of schools "have been damaged or destroyed by bombing or shelling." In order to right this wrong, several displaced families opt to become refugees, fleeing from Ukraine to a host country where they can, theoretically, resume normal and safe life. However,  $\frac{2}{3}$  of refugee children are "not currently enrolled in national education systems in their host countries." This stark figure suggests that for children, the effects of displacement and the interruption of daily life leaves long-lasting impacts that aren't easily solved by physical relocation alone.

Ramon Antonio Vargas, weekend editor at The Guardian, wrote an article in February, 2023, that further explains sources of child displacement in this conflict. Vladimir Putin has publicly acknowledged that he views many Ukrainian citizens as true Russians, by history, culture, and blood. As such, one such practice the invading Russians have employed is the forced orphanage of Ukrainian children. Vargas reports that this statistic stands at about 6,000 children being "forced into camps and facilities across Russia" without parental consent. Moreover,



105,000 minors have been forced to leave their homes and to orphanages due to the fighting and loss of parents.

### *Sudan*

Of the three conflicts explored here, the Sudanese conflict is the newest, though there is a long history leading up to the present day issues. Beginning in late 2018, revolutionary sentiment began spurring across Sudan, originally in the form of peaceful protest and rallies. These democratic revolutionaries wanted to oust the oppressive Sudanese President and military leader, Omar al-Bashir. Al-Bashir has had a long history of brutalizing civilians. Indeed, a political strategy of his was to bolster his relationship with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) by relying on them to attack civilians to maintain order during a regional civil war in the south. In the west (Darfur), al-Bashir weaponized local militias (collectively known as the Janjaweed, led by Hemeti) and ordered them to wipe out civilians participating in rebellions against their lack of governmental representation and poor quality of life. Indeed, in this region especially, civilian displacement became one of al-Bashir's primary goals. After protests reached the capital city Khartoum, Hemeti, now in control of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, SAF commander-in-chief, led a coup and removed al-Bashir from power. Over time, despite democratic intervention from democratic nations, al-Burhan and Hemeti did not hand over control of Sudan to civilians, maintaining the military government. Eventually, al-Burhan became the de facto leader. At the end of 2020, both men, spurred by Western pressure, signed an agreement with protestors that would ensure the Sudanese government would become a civilian government by April, 2023. However, this deal required that the RSF be absorbed into the SAF,



making Hemeti subordinate to al-Burhan in as little as 2 years (al-Burhan's wish) or as much as 10 years (Hemeti's wish). As a result of the disagreement, a rift emerged between the men. Today, both figures have stationed military personnel backing either one of them across Sudan, with both sides attacking the other, leaving civilians either dead or forced to flee.

With such a violent history with few glimpses of democratic hope and even fewer prospects for safety and a sufficient quality of life, what has the Sudan conflict meant for the children?

As of June, 2023, UNICEF estimates that over 1 million Sudanese minors have been displaced. Unfortunately, these are the 'lucky ones.' Indeed, "at least 330 children have been killed and more than 1,900 others wounded" (VOA Africa).

A cause of displacement for Sudanese children is the lack of humanitarian resources. Indeed, the same UNICEF report revealed that "hundreds of thousands of children [are] at risk of dehydration, diarrhea, and malnutrition" due to the "looting of humanitarian supplies and facilities." CNN International Executive Producer Ingrid Formanek says that these unhealthy conditions in Sudan for children have caused 2.8 million Sudanese citizens to become displaced through fleeing as refugees.

Sudanese children, just like Israeli, Palestinian, and Ukrainian children, have also been displaced into orphanages and surviving on their own because of the loss of parents. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs approximates that "380,000 children have been forced to flee their homes" due to separation from their parents, making "daily life...a struggle" for children like 15-year-old John Mawien. Mahwien additionally



reported that since becoming an orphan, he's experienced worse eating and sleeping habits, plus increased anxiety. Not only are these psychological pitfalls normal for recently-orphaned children, but as Dr. Muhammad Mughal, Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, found in his study, these psychosocial effects of being an orphan last for the "long-term," making these individuals "inclined to withdraw and self-isolate." In this way, the effects of orphanage displacement via loss of parents are something that Mahwien and millions of other displaced children will have to contend with for long periods in their lives.

Displaced Sudanese children are also struggling in the academic department, as well. Indeed, as of December, 2022, "more than 7 million girls and boys" in Sudan were out of school because of armed militias attacking their school infrastructure (Education Cannot Wait). Losing out on educational opportunities so young can have drastically detrimental effects on children living in conflict zones. For instance, when schools are destroyed in conflict zones so that children can no longer safely attend, they lose out on nutrition, social activities, and the tutelage and protection of teachers. As Dr. Ruben Gentry, Professor of Special Education at Jackson State University, puts it, "schools close, teachers flee or are recruited into the military," making children "easier targets for recruitment as child soldiers or exploitation as cheap labor" (11). Aside from lack of academic development due to academic displacement, children also face increased exposure to the harsh realities of war, all of which they are ill-prepared and undeserving to have to handle.

Despite the aforementioned conflicts occurring in different geopolitical arenas and for



various reasons with unique histories, child displacement remains “one of the greatest humanitarian challenges of our time” (ICRC). With hindered social and academic development, loss of familial ties and love, and exposure to further dangerous conditions, child displacement, no matter the cause (loss of parents, loss of protective institutions, fleeing, etc.) is a matter worthy of international care.

## **Bloc Positions**

### **Asian-Pacific Bloc**

In this region, millions of people are currently displaced for various reasons, but all relating to violence and armed conflict. One recent specific cause of displacement is the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan in August, 2021. Because of this hostile takeover, hundreds of thousands of people have fled to nearby Pakistan and Iran, only to be met with “climate emergencies and natural disasters” (UNHRC). Moreover, the many Rohingya peoples have fled persecution in Bangladesh and Myanmar, undertaking dangerous journeys through the sea.

Because of the crises in this region regarding displaced people, the UNHRC has been heavily involved in helping refugees adjust to their new lives. For instance, with the help of UNHRC interventions, such as protection services and aided relocation, “all Central Asian countries [have] reduced their numbers of stateless persons.”

Despite this positive trend, the situation for children remains dire: as of 2021, in the Afghan situation alone, 48% of refugees and asylum seekers were children, and 58% of IDPs were children.



### **Eastern European Bloc**

As described throughout this synopsis, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has been the primary source of child displacement in Eastern Europe in recent times. With millions of people fleeing Ukraine, and an estimated half of them children, UNHCR has stepped up its efforts to help refugees and asylum seekers. Some of these services include: “protection counselling and support in accessing education, health care, assistance for specific needs” (UNHCR). Another unique challenge all European countries face regarding child displacement is the fact that many refugees fleeing Middle Eastern and African states choose to relocate in Europe, including in the Eastern European bloc. However, resources in Eastern European countries are especially strained right now due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, meaning that the institutions and infrastructure in place can not adequately support IDPs (including from across Europe) and refugees from abroad.

### **Western European & North American Bloc**

Since the 1991 Convention on the Rights of the Child has been widely adopted in North American and Western European countries, certain states in this region champion themselves as being fully committed to assisting refugee children. In North America, for instance, certain states have been recognized by UNICEF “as leader[s] in efforts to protect the rights of migrant and displaced people, especially children.”

Western European countries, like their Eastern European counterparts, deal with an ever-increasing influx of refugees and asylum seekers from places such as the Middle East and Africa. Now, these refugees also include Ukrainians.



While this bloc is generally heralded for its lack of violence-driven child displacement and protection of displaced people, only time will tell if the institutions and infrastructure in place can truly support migrants and refugees from across the world.

## Committee Goals

This committee takes three of the most politically prominent conflicts of recent memory, and connects them with one of the most pressing humanitarian crises of recent memory. Moreover, these issues are current. Because of this, the topic is very sensitive to many. Therefore, while dreaming up unique collaborations and solutions is still the name of the game for this committee, we must remember to respect cultural sensitivities. With that being said, children are displaced, killed, and ousted from their safe institutions as we speak. So, this committee must solve this challenge in a timely and respectful manner. During the course of this committee, delegates should develop deeper understanding, sympathy, and desire to help for three conflicts that, for most delegates, have little impact on their home country. However, delegates should also look beyond these three conflicts and begin to question some of the root causes of child displacement, not just treat the effects. In addition, delegates should question the limits of humanitarian law as it exists so far in preventing child displacement. Finally, to be ultimately successful and fulfilled, delegates must look beyond Israel-Palestine, Sudan, and Russia-Ukraine. To do this, as a committee, we must challenge our global counterparts to never accept or commit harm to children in any form under any circumstances.

## Research Questions

1. Why are things like stability, love, parental connection, and protection especially vital for



youths?

2. How do armed conflicts threaten those necessities mentioned above in terms of displacement?
3. What are some common manifestations of child displacement?
4. Is it the international community's role to protect children living in various states? In other words, should one country be concerned about helping displaced children from a different country? Why or why not?
5. In what ways can the international community provide support for displaced children abroad without disrespecting state sovereignty?
6. What physiological, psychological, and social problems do displaced youths face?
7. How do the children of the three described conflicts relate to each other in their suffering/displacement, and how do they differ? In other words, do the kids need the same interventions from the international community, or might certain children from one region have different needs than children from another?

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## **Topic B: Child Soldiers in Armed Militias**

### **Introduction**

On August 12, 1949, following World War II and its massive loss of human life (both amongst military personnel and civilians), the Geneva Conventions were signed into law. This series of protocols and treaties establishes rights, protections, and humanitarian treatment for civilians and other non-combatants during armed conflict/war. After the initial treaties comprising the Geneva Conventions were established, additions were made. One such addition was the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions. Noting that children have unique needs and capabilities, this additional protocol ensured that children are met with “special protection” and consideration under humanitarian law. A specific law introduced to protect this is that no child under 15 years old would be allowed to partake in the hostilities of armed conflict and war. Notably, the protocol remains intact even if the child was recruited and gives ‘consent.’ The notion here is that a child cannot give legal consent, and thus is unable to agree to the terms of military service. However, when we take a glance at the world landscape today, we see critical and dangerous disregard for these rules, exposing tons of children to violence and death. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that we find ways to enhance the Geneva Conventions and ensure the following of its 1977 Additional Protocols. In this way, children’s lives are saved, their innocence and development are protected, and we can hold armed militias accountable for their breaking of well-established international humanitarian law.

According to Collins Dictionary, a militia can be thought of as “an organization that operates like an army but whose members are not professional soldiers.” This introduces a few



key distinctions that are critical for this committee. An armed militia is not the same as a legitimate military unit. For example, the United States Army is not a militia—it is a legitimate fighting force composed of full-time and professionally-trained soldiers, who only act on the official behalf of the United States government. This is how state’s militaries work; that is, the United States Army is solely an example I am using here, but it is representative of how all legitimate state militaries and their branches operate. On the other hand, militias, while sometimes legitimate, such as during more localized crises where the federal government will approve the formation of a militia unit, are usually extralegal and composed of civilians. Under international law, these groups are permitted to exist and operate in the private realm, but if they become armed and enter the public sphere, this is illegal.

Because of this legal distinction, official state militaries are most often well-regulated and have sufficient oversight to ensure that children are not recruited nor coerced into service. However, during times of conflict, especially things like civil war or internal clan disputes, there is very little oversight, and children get used for military service. Notably, the aforementioned Geneva Conventions are applicable to all fighting units, whether an official state military or an armed militia (International Humanitarian Law Databases). So, it is in direct violation of international humanitarian law when children “as young as 8 years old” serve in armed militia and paramilitary units (Human Rights Watch). Not only are these younglings just performing military action, but they are also oftentimes associated with terrorist organizations. Such militias and organizations use these children for “sexual slavery,” or they might be abducted, detained, or killed.



A present example stems from the Israel-Palestine conflict. Dr. Seth J. Franzman, acting News Editor and Senior Middle East Correspondent and analyst for The Jerusalem Post, notes that the terrorist group Hamas “hold[s]...annual summer camps to recruit child soldiers,” with about 50,000 registering as of July 2017. Since 2017, fighting and killing in Israel has only intensified, meaning that child soldiers are being used everyday “as scouts, cooks, porters, guards, messengers,” fighters, and for sexual pleasure.

In order to uphold well-established convention and humanitarian law, children must escape this cycle of violence. It is dangerous for their development, their psyches, and their physical well-being. On top of this, the use of child soldiers is blatant disrespect for the United Nations generally and UNICEF in particular, which is why we need to address this issue promptly and seriously.

## Description

For the context of our committee, armed militias consist of non-professional fighters who are citizens of a given region that raise arms to either wage new battles or to engage in existing hostilities. Importantly, an armed militia is not an official state military unit. For many states, the exception to this rule is when the federal government calls a militia into order during a state of emergency. This is the case in the United States. Nonetheless, state militaries consist of full-time and classically trained soldiers who only conduct official military business for their home state. In contrast, militias are often made up of individuals fighting for a similar cause (whether it be



cultural, religious, nationalistic, etc.) without express state consent. For this reason, armed militias have the potential to be void of sufficient oversight procedures.

Before discussing the ramifications of this, it's important to understand why militias form. Associate Director and Associate Fellow of the Transnational Threats Project Catrina Doxsee identifies militias as typically being extremely ideological. As a result, citizens who join militias have the potential to be swayed by conspiracy theories and political sensationalism. A prime example of this is the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, carried out by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, who were “inspired by pro-militia” sentiments. These pro-militia sentiments, not unique to McVeigh nor Nichols, typically involve a sense of heroism or a call to action. In tandem with weapons supplies and deeply rooted conspiracy theories and/or nationalistic sentiment, this is why “militias are typically built around preparation for an existential violent threat.” For many militia members, the best way to fight a violent threat is to meet that threat with their own brand of violence.

Militia violence is not only unique because of the sensationalistic and ideological motivations behind it, but also because it has the potential to impact innocent civilians. Not only do the Geneva Conventions (which, to this day, is the leading body of wartime international law) expressly forbid military and militia violence against civilians in general (without discrimination), but it also forbids violence against civilians on the basis of “race, nationality, religion or political opinion” (Article 13). Militias, though, are often spurred to violence with this sort of discrimination as a goal. For instance, militias such as the Proud Boys discriminated their violence on the basis of political opinion when they “participated in the January 6, 2021, attack



on the U.S. Capitol,” where Vice President Mike Pence had his life threatened, police officers were brutalized, and Capitol building infrastructure demolished (Doxsee). This acceptance, and even expectation, of violence amongst members of armed militias make these groups so dangerous that they are often categorized alongside widely-recognized terrorist organizations, such as ISIS. ISIS, as just one example, uses violent action to alleviate a supposed religious-cultural threat to Islamic survival, and uses discrimination in who they target with their violence. Therefore, for the sake of this committee, terrorist organizations are armed militias taken to their ideological extreme, and to their ultimate end.

Therefore, because armed militias are prone to violence and hateful rhetoric, members of these groups lead very dangerous and threatening lives. While adults can assume the legal and physical repercussions of such a lifestyle, children cannot.

### ***International Humanitarian Law on Child Soldiers***

While the Introduction section explains the Geneva Conventions’ protections against the use of child soldiers in general, there are some more specifics worth mentioning. In Article 77 of Additional Protocol I, protections for children against being used in armed hostilities are enshrined. This includes participation in militias. Specifically, Article 77 prohibits children under age 15 from “tak[ing] a direct part in hostilities,” and prohibits armed units, whether state militaries or militias, “from recruiting them into their armed forces.” This Article is so significant in the world of humanitarian law that the International Criminal Court has defined violations of this law “as a war crime” (OSRSG-CAAC).

Since these protocols, however, other international humanitarian law groups have further





defined this illegal act. In fact, subsequent legislation has expanded the prohibitions.

While Article 77 places the age limit at 15 and only expressly forbids recruitment and use in direct combat, the Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict 2007 (now ratified by over 100 states) says that any person under 18 cannot be “recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity.”

In support of this is the General Assembly’s 2000 Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. This protocol, adopted by 173 states, mentions that “armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a country should not...recruit or use in hostilities anyone under 18.”

Presently, the law seems very clear for the usage and recruitment of children for any purposes in any armed group. Yet, as will now be explained, violations of this clear-cut international humanitarian law have become all too frequent and disturbing.

### ***The Use of Child Soldiers in Armed Militias***

Despite clear international humanitarian law establishing, for many decades now, the usage and recruitment by armed groups of child soldiers as war crimes, violations in the present day can be found. While the actual number of violations probably amounts to hundreds of thousands, only 65,081 children have been verified “to have been recruited or used by armed forces and groups” (Save the Children). But with “149 million children...liv[ing] in high-intensity conflict zones,” millions of youths are placed at risk of recruitment, battlefield usage, sexual exploitation, unfair labor practices, and, ultimately, death. To better grasp what the usage of child soldiers in armed militias looks like, it’s necessary to examine some relevant case



studies.

Boko Haram is an Islamic militant organization, primarily located in Nigeria, but also in Niger, Chad, Mali, and Cameroon. Motivated by an ideology based in Islamic fundamentalism, anti-Westernism, and anti-Shi'ism, Boko Haram was, during the mid-2010s, the deadliest armed militia and terrorist organization in the world, according to journalist Tim Hume. To accomplish its goals and satisfy its ideologies, Boko Haram relies heavily on child soldiers. One such example comes from Guirvidig, Cameroon, where in a letter from the President of the UN Human Rights Council to the President of Nigeria, it is revealed that 84 “boys, aged between 7 and 15, were apprehended by the security forces in December 2014” after they discovered them in a training camp. Not only were these children part of a long lineage of Boko Haram child soldiers exposed to the battlefield, but they were also apparently suffering from starvation. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath, only 30 of the 84 boys were permitted to return home in sufficient health.

The Taliban is a militant political movement that features many localized armed militias throughout Afghanistan. In operation since 1994, the Taliban relies on religiously indoctrinated students to spread the ideologies of Islamic fundamentalism and Islamic nationalism. Like Boko Haram and unfortunately many other armed militias, this ideological and extremely violent group recruits, trains, and uses children to serve their needs. Jo Becker, who serves as the Human Rights Watch’s Advocacy Director of the Children’s Rights Division, wrote in her September, 2021, article that the Taliban “use[s] children as fighters, to plant and detonate improvised explosive devices..., and as suicide bombers.” Furthermore, the Taliban has been found to prepare children for these tasks beginning at age 6; Becker reports that it starts off as



indoctrination around age 6, but escalates to “learn[ing] to use firearms” around age 13, and escalates still to battlefield fighting from ages 13-17.

The United States of America is home to one of oldest and most notorious hate groups and militias in the world. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) is a right-wing terrorist and white supremacist organization and, at times, an armed militia. The KKK rejects all religious activity besides that of Protestantism, and it directs its violence towards Jews, African Americans, Muslims, and others. While the KKK is mostly known for its involvement in legitimate government institutions, it has a very violent history, too. While the notion of children as ‘soldiers’ in a group like the KKK isn’t as widespread, KKK members use very similar youth recruitment and education tactics to that of the aforementioned terrorist militias. Moreover, unlike Boko Haram and the Taliban, which are embroiled in warfare, the KKK does not necessarily wage war in the same manner. For instance, their violence is much more targeted/local and usually results in fewer casualties. Nonetheless, weaponized and discriminate violence is common amongst Klansmen, and their infatuation with Christianity and white pride ideologies (and the supposed threat of African American culture and non-Christian religions) allow them to be categorized as armed militia members.

Primarily located in the U.S., the KKK has been around since 1865, where the first chapter was established in Pulaski, TN. Since then, KKK numbers have risen to the millions between the world wars, but have declined to roughly 6,500 members in the present. Despite the decline in numbers, the KKK has done an excellent job at maintaining its existence for over 150 years at this point. One of the principle ways of doing so is their unique catering towards,



recruitment of, and usage of children.

The KKK has 3 primary auxiliary units that cater to children: Ku Klux Kiddies, Tri-K-Klub, and Junior Ku Klux Klan, collectively known as KKK Kid Klans. The first recorded KKK Kid Klans event was in 1924, where 50 KKK members baptized 10 children, making them vow to uphold “segregation, bigotry, and the violent suppression of anyone who was not a white Protestant” (Blakemore). The educational upbringing of KKK children was instrumental in the maintenance of the group. By having these virtues and ideologies ingrained in them from young ages, children were exposed to the expectations of violence and hatred. To reinforce these goals, KKK Kid Klans children would participate in parades, summer camps, and picnics, where they learned all about American nationalism and traditional gender roles.

While there is little evidence that kids were directly involved in KKK violence, KKK Kid Klans kids would grow up to partake in brutality. For instance, in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, AL, in September, 1963, local KKK members, indoctrinated by their ideological backgrounds and education in white supremacy, killed four African-American girls attending church. The method of the killing was placing dynamite sticks under the place of worship (Anna Julia Cooper Center). In this way, though the KKK is not solely a violent group, their radicalization of children to believe bigoted conspiracy theories ultimately leads to targeted violence.

### ***Reasons and Methods for Recruiting and Using Child Soldiers***

In order to obtain children for the sexual exploitation, violence, and labor as outlined



above, armed militias must use certain recruitment and subordination techniques. Using the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's "Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System," we can discover some reasons and mechanisms used to gain this youth manpower.

One reason child soldiers are recruited is to boost worldwide visibility on the group. As explained, armed militias are usually motivated by extreme ideological concerns, so, in general, they want the world to fear them in order to concede to their demands. In order to rile up international attention, groups, such as Boko Haram aim to display their "power and ruthlessness" (10). For instance, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has published 254 events featuring "children engaged in acts of violence or being exposed and normalized to violence" (10). By invoking public shock and outrage in this way, armed militias can garner the acknowledgement they crave.

Armed militias might also recruit children as a means of simply expanding their manpower. This is especially true in places where armed militias lack community support. Without a steady influx of adult soldiers, armed militias feel forced to "expand their power base" by turning to children (10).

Third, children are recruited because they are the future. If armed militias want to continue to exist for extended periods of time (which they do), they adopt strategies like the aforementioned KKK Kid Klans, where impressionable youths are indoctrinated young, particularly because they are "more easily intimidated and far easier to control" than adults (11). If this is successfully accomplished, youths grow up not only partaking in hostilities, but



believing in the cause themselves, thus perpetuating the tradition of violence.

With these goals in mind, how do armed militias obtain child soldiers? One method is through brute force. Whether it's being "kidnapped, abducted, coerced through threats, or purchased from traffickers," brute force is one of the most commonplace strategies employed. After all, children are literally smaller than their adult abductors, making the physical altercation easily winnable for the militia member.

Another tactic is economic enticement, a form of propaganda. Aside from promising youths that they are doing the right thing by fighting the perceived enemy, militias often make unwarranted economic promises as a form of enticement. For instance, Becker recalls an incident where a 15-year-old Taliban member told UN investigators his recruitment story. In it, the boy explains how he was promised "paradise and 'huge rewards'" should he "detonate explosives against Afghan police." This leads to another tactic: fearmongering. This same boy told UN investigators that he refused his task. As a consequence, "the commander threatened to kill the boy and his parents." Thus, when it comes to fear mongering, armed militias use violence to promote violence.

Finally (but not extensively), armed militias can recruit via the use of schools. Aside from promoting their own education standards once they submit to membership, youths can be indoctrinated and build identity with the armed group while they are in their own school. This is sort of like a courting process. This tactic is especially effective in areas where "certain terrorist and violent extremist groups enjoy territorial control over specific areas" (12).

Despite being in clear violation of all facets of international humanitarian law, child



soldiers are used, abused, forced into labor, kidnapped, indoctrinated, sexually exploited, exposed to unimaginable violence, and killed, anyways. Militia groups, as time progresses, use increasingly refined and sophisticated methods to obtain this ‘childpower,’ making the use of children in armed militia a time-sensitive and extremely pertinent issue.

## **Bloc Positions**

### **Asian-Pacific Bloc**

Asian-Pacific countries have a rich history of the use of child soldiers in armed militias, especially in recent times where warring factions have emerged across the Asian continent. In fact, as certain terrorist organizations have gained influence in this region, they further rely on children to perpetuate the philosophies and beliefs that give birth to such groups in the first place.

Something somewhat unique of this region, though, is that child soldiers have been found in official state militaries in numbers disproportionate to the rest of the world. English professor Jayendrina Singha Ray reports that of the “more than 20 countries” that utilize child soldiers, approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of them are Asian-Pacific states (The Borgen Project).

### **African Bloc**

African nations, even more so than Asian-Pacific states, rely heavily on the use of child soldiers. Indeed, journalist Lenin Ndebele reports that “40% of the world’s child soldiers” are spread across “seven African countries” (news24). Given that Africa is home to under 20% of the world’s population, this screams disproportionality and much too high of a reliance on child soldiers.



One of the particularly gruesome ways African child soldiers are used, aside from recruitment into the battlefield, are as sexual slaves/helpers. For this reason, African child soldiers face a unique host of psychological issues; the United States Department of Justice's website claims that kids used as sexual slaves tend to deal with "depression, self-hatred, and feelings of hopelessness" far more than their counterparts who are not used in those ways.

### **Eastern European Bloc**

Most European countries shy away from the usage of child soldiers. Across all of Europe, in fact, there has been a steady trend of recruiting adults only; the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict reported in 2016 that no armed groups, either, were known to be using child soldiers (Child Soldiers International).

Despite this good news, there have been notable exceptions, particularly recently. With the proliferation and expansion of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, for instance, "Russian-led forces and armed groups backed by the Russian government have recruited and used child soldiers" since its 2014 inception.

### **Latin American & Caribbean Bloc**

Latin America is another region where the usage of child soldiers has been concentrated, especially during the 20th and 21st centuries. States in this bloc that have been found to use child soldiers in a significant capacity include: Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Haiti, and Paraguay. Usually, these states, similarly to Asian-Pacific states, even recruit children into the official state armed forces. For other states in this region, compulsory registration (influenced by





regional fighting amongst warring factions plus civil war) beginning as a minor almost certainly means at least some are drafted still as youths. Sadly, this leads some to estimate that certain countries' militaries are comprised of roughly 40% minors.

### **Western European and North American Bloc**

As previously mentioned, European states typically are not found to use child soldiers, whether in official state military units or in various armed factions.

Similarly, North American states rarely use child soldiers. However, exceptions and nuances exist. For instance, the Canadian and United States militaries perform outreach events, commonly directed at youths in high school. In both countries, too, minors are permitted to sign up for service, with the caveat of requiring parental consent.

As mentioned above, though, miscellaneous groups unrepresentative of their home state and its values, such as the Ku Klux Klan, have been found to recruit and rely on children for various tasks, both armed and unarmed.

### **Committee Goals**

UNICEF is unequivocally committed to ensuring and protecting the rights of children all around the globe. One of these most fundamental rights, as we must acknowledge, is the right to life. When children are recruited into armed militias, they, without being legally able to give consent, are exposed to unimaginable fighting, destruction, and death. For this reason, this is a particularly heavy and multifaceted issue. Aside from the physical dangers associated with membership in an armed militia, psychological problems run rampant, especially because as



minors, their brains are not fully developed and able to cope. Therefore, this committee needs to find ways not only to eliminate the reliance on child soldiers, but also to save and help those children who have already been exposed and traumatized. This committee is not just about punishment for groups that are clearly violating international law by using minors in hostilities (though this may be important, but falls more under the domain of other UN committees), but more so about finding collaborative and thoughtful means of supporting the children.

### Research Questions

1. Why are children prime targets for militaries and armed militias in terms of recruitment and usage? Are some children more attractive recruits than others? If so, why?
2. Though there are many, what are some of the most pressing consequences of children being used in armed militias?
3. How is the usage of children in armed militias a violation of the law? Moreover, why do groups and states use child soldiers even though they are aware of its criminality?
4. Why are children (versus adults) uniquely affected by armed combat, physically, emotionally, and psychologically?
5. What potential issues stand in the way of children who might want to escape armed service? Or, do they not want to escape (and if this is the case, why not)?
6. What are the successes and shortcomings of international efforts so far to combat this issue?
7. How can the international community collaborate to resolve the specific issue of official state militaries using children without disrespecting state sovereignty?



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