



ORGANIZATION

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children
and Armed Conflict, United States of America
pledges to

**Promote the universal ratification and
implementation of the OPAC and the
implementation of ILO Convention No. 182**

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Description:

The recruitment and use of girls and boys in armed conflict are two of the most egregious violations of children's rights and international humanitarian law. They have been identified and condemned by the United Nations Security Council as one of the six grave violations against children in times of war.

The link between child labour and the recruitment and use of children is clear. Children victims of recruitment and use by armed forces and groups can indeed be forced not only to engage in combat but also to work as lookouts, porters, cooks, or used for sexual purposes. Such link is also clearly defined in Article 3(a) of the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which recognizes forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict as one of the worst forms of child labour.

Both girls and boys are recruited and used by armed forces and groups, and each can suffer specific consequences unique to their gender and place in society. Regardless of how they are recruited and of their roles, children associated with armed forces or groups are victims whose participation in conflict bears serious implications for their physical and emotional well-being.

Boys and girls living amidst hostilities need our support: we must amplify their voices, advocate for their protection and prevent violations from happening in the first place.

The Office of the Special Representative will advocate for the international community to act to protect (<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/act-to-protect-children-affected-by-armed-conflict/>) children affected by conflict. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) and ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour provides the necessary legal framework to end and prevent violations against children, especially the recruitment and use of child soldiers. These represent two tangible ways to translate commitments into actions.

Implementation plan:

The Children and Armed Conflict mandate are equipped with a robust set of tools to end and prevent grave violations against children.

The recruitment and use of children are regularly monitored through the UN-led monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children and can trigger the listing of an armed group or armed force in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. During 2019, 7,747 children were verified as having been recruited and used, the vast majority of cases attributable to non-State actors.

Another available tool is the so-called Action Plans between the United Nations and those parties who are listed as having recruited and used children in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. Further, sustained advocacy efforts by the OSRSG-CAAC and partners on the ground around those tools have led to the release of almost 40,000 children since 2018.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000 and entered into force on 12 February 2002 (since then marking the International Day to End the Use of Child Soldiers), is a key tool to protect children from recruitment and use in hostilities. Within the past 20 years, OPAC has contributed to releasing more than 160,000 boys and girls from armed forces and armed groups and preventing the recruitment and use of millions of children.

The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict participates regularly in different high-level events, addresses the UN Security Council, and engages bilaterally with the Member States and parties to the conflict. Her voice is a strong amplifier of boys and girls affected by armed conflict and in need of protection. She will thus use these opportunities to advocate to end the recruitment and use of children, to specifically call for the Member States to ratify and implement the Optional Protocol, and to implement the ILO Convention No. 182, in at least 25 related speeches and bilateral interventions with the Member States.

The Office of the Special Representative will also continue its engagement and strengthen its partnerships with governments, international organizations, civil society organizations, and academia as well as increase its cooperation with ILO and as a Member of the Alliance 8.7.

Impact:

As of mid-2021, 170 countries have ratified the OPAC. There are 17 countries that have neither signed nor ratified the Optional Protocol and 10 countries that have signed but are yet to ratify it. By ratifying the OPAC, Member States commit vis-à-vis the international community to put in place the necessary legal framework to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children.

Ratification is, however, just the first step. By ensuring the implementation of the OPAC and Convention No. 182, Member States ensure that necessary preventive and corrective measures entailed in the Conventions are in place and are carried out by all the relevant national stakeholders. This includes the criminalization of the recruitment and use of children through national legislation; the creation of child protection units within the structures of armed forces and groups; the conduction of systematic screenings of troops to identify and release children; the establishment of measures to assess the age of new recruits in countries where birth registration is not universal; and the development of reintegration programs to help boys and girls recover from the trauma of war.

The Office of the Special Representative can encourage and guide the Member States in taking these actions, sharing lessons learned and best practices, and following up on the implementation.

Overall, by ratifying the OPAC and ensuring its implementation as well as the implementation of Convention No.182, the international community will get closer to reaching SDG Target 8.7.