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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement submitted by Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1 February 2026]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Children and Armed Conflicts

Armed conflict continues to impose catastrophic and enduring harm on children worldwide. Verified UN data demonstrate that violations against children are not only persistent but escalating, reflecting the normalization of warfare in civilian spaces. According to the UN Children and Armed Conflict agenda, 2024 marked the third consecutive year of record-high grave violations against children, underscoring a systemic failure to protect children from the conduct of hostilities.(1)

In 2024 alone, the UN verified 41,370 grave violations affecting 22,495 children, representing a 25% increase compared to 2023.(1,2) The most prevalent violation was killing and maiming, affecting 11,967 children, largely due to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.(1) Other verified violations included 7,402 cases of recruitment and use, 7,906 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, and a 44% increase in attacks on schools and hospitals.(1,2) Notably, 3,137 children were subjected to multiple grave violations, demonstrating the cumulative nature of harm in modern conflicts.(1) Unfortunately this pattern has been repeated in 2025, as follows:

Islamic Republic of Iran

In June 2025 Israel unilaterally and unlawfully launched airstrikes against Iran which resulted in escalating violence against children. Although limited in duration, the hostilities had immediate consequences for civilians due to the use of explosive weapons in populated urban areas. Israeli airstrikes struck residential neighborhoods in Tehran and other cities, damaging apartment buildings and civilian infrastructure so children were among those killed and injured when homes collapsed or were struck by blast fragmentation.

According to data from the Iranian Emergency Organization, 215 Iranian children and teenagers were injured, and 47 were martyred during the 12-day war against Iran. (6)

The experience of Iranian children mirrors a global pattern identified by the UN: children are most likely to be killed or injured by explosive weapons used in civilian environments.(1) Night-time air raids forced families to flee their homes, resulting in sudden displacement. Schools closed due to security concerns, interrupting education and removing critical protective environments. Health facilities faced additional strain as civilian casualties increased.

The aftermath of hostilities further exposed children to danger. The UN notes that explosive remnants of war disproportionately affect children, who are more likely to encounter unexploded ordnance due to curiosity and lack of risk awareness. Iranian children therefore faced both immediate harm and longer-term threats to safety and well-being.

Gaza

The situation of children in Gaza represents one of the most severe manifestations of the trends identified by UN monitoring mechanisms. The UN verified that the Occupied Palestinian Territory recorded one of the highest numbers of grave violations against children globally in 2024, with 8,554 verified violations.(1) Children in Gaza have been killed and maimed in large numbers, primarily due to intensive bombardment in densely populated areas.

From October 7, 2023, to February 2026, based on official UNICEF statistics, over 64,000 children in Gaza have been killed or injured and an additional over 100 children killed since the early October 2025 ceasefire. Thousands of children have undergone amputations, with estimates of over 1,000 children losing one or both legs in the first months alone, and daily rates exceeding 10 amputations early in the conflict according to the United Nations. Additionally, nearly all children in Gaza—over 1 million—have experienced psychological trauma, requiring mental health and psychosocial support, with widespread reports of post-

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), developmental regression, and profound intergenerational harm. (4,5)

Children have been killed in their homes, shelters, and while fleeing with their families. Attacks on civilian infrastructure have had devastating consequences. The UN confirmed a 44% increase in attacks on schools and hospitals, including in Gaza, resulting in the destruction or closure of facilities essential for children's survival and recovery.(1,2) For children, the loss of schools and hospitals has meant not only physical danger but the collapse of education, healthcare, and psychosocial support systems.

Denial of humanitarian access has further compounded suffering. In 2024, the UN verified 7,906 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, with Gaza among the most severely affected contexts.(1) Restrictions on food, water, fuel, and medical supplies contributed directly to malnutrition, disease, and preventable deaths. The UN affirms that denial of humanitarian access constitutes a grave violation against children.(3)

Africa

Across Africa, children continue to experience protracted and often under-reported armed conflicts. UN data identify the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Nigeria among the situations with the highest numbers of grave violations against children.(1) In these contexts, children are killed or maimed during military operations, abducted from homes and schools, forcibly recruited by armed groups, or subjected to sexual violence.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, children are repeatedly displaced by fighting and village attacks, growing up without stable access to education or healthcare. In Somalia and Nigeria, armed groups abduct children and use them in combat and support roles.

In Sudan, ongoing conflict has killed children in residential areas and displaced families on a massive scale, with children dying from starvation in areas later classified as famine zones.(1)

Broader Global Patterns

Across regions, children are harmed not incidentally, but predictably. Government forces were identified by the UN as the main perpetrators of killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access, while non-State armed groups were responsible for most child recruitment cases. Girls were increasingly affected, with 7,320 girls subjected to grave violations in 2024, including recruitment and sexual violence.(1)

Recommendations

Children in armed conflict are not statistics. They are infants killed in collapsing homes, students buried beneath school rubble, and displaced children growing up amid fear and deprivation. Without urgent and principled action, these violations will continue unchecked. In light of these verified findings, the Human Rights Council should:

1. Condemn the killing and maiming of children, particularly through the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.
2. Mandate independent, child-sensitive investigations into incidents resulting in child casualties and attacks on civilian infrastructure.
3. Ensure safe, timely, and unimpeded humanitarian access for all conflict-affected children and reaffirm that denial of aid constitutes a grave violation.
4. Strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms, ensuring age- and gender-disaggregated data across all conflict situations.

5. Prioritize long-term psychosocial recovery and education for conflict-affected children.
6. Address impunity consistently, ensuring accountability for grave violations regardless of perpetrator identity.
7. Urgently address double standards in international responses by committing to equal application of humanitarian law, regardless of geopolitical alliances, to protect children in all contexts.
8. Urge the Secretary-General to include Israel in the list of parties that commit grave violations against children in situations of armed conflicts.

References:

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