

WATERLOO CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

MODEL UNITED NATIONS



GENERAL ASSEMBLY

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN WAR ZONES

DECEMBER 17, 2025

Focus:

Students will address the deliberate targeting of children in war zones.

Background:

Ukraine accuses Russia of deliberately targeting a kindergarten during an intense Russian drone attack in the city of Kharkiv. Some reports indicate that 7 people were killed including 2 children. It was further reported that a second wave of drones attacked the same kindergarten building.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czjpe0193geo>

This follows on Russia's campaign to forcibly remove (kidnap) children from occupied territories in Ukraine and subjecting these children to "re-education". It is estimated that more than 19,000 children were illegally deported to Russia with only 1,236 children having been returned to Ukraine. <https://medicine.yale.edu/news-article/fact-sheet-russias-kidnapping-and-re-education-of-ukraines-children/>

The disturbing actions by Russia to be a deliberate attempt to target children, a practice condemned by the United Nations. Where once, attacks on children were considered accidental and child victims were considered collateral damage, it now appears that the waging of war on children as a strategic military operation has become normalized. Unfortunately, these attacks on children in war zones is not limited to the war in Ukraine but can be seen in a variety of theatres of war including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, the Israeli/Palestine conflict, Nigeria and Syria. And the systematic abuses of children include: kidnapping, murder, torture, illegal detainment, use of children as human shields, attacks on public institutions like schools, sexual exploitation and sexual slavery, and recruitment into military service.

In a study by UNICEF extending from 2005 to 2020, it was reported that

- a. 104,100 children were identified as killed or maimed in armed conflict
- b. 93,000 children were recruited in areas of conflict
- c. 25,700 children were raped or sexually exploited
- d. There were 13,900 attacks against schools and hospitals
- e. And there were 14,900 of the denial of humanitarian access for children since 2005

<https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/grave-violations-against-children-conflict>

Later, a United Nations report from 2024 found the following:

- a. There were 32,990 "grave violations" against 22,557 children
- b. 5,301 children were killed and an additional 6,348 were maimed in 2023, representing a 35% increase over previous years
- c. There were a verified number of 8,655 children recruited in armed conflict in 2023, 15% of whom were children
- d. 4,356 children were abducted

- e. There were a total of 1,650 attacks on schools and hospitals in 2023
- f. And 73 million children were out of school because of armed conflict
- g. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/sc-children-and-armed-conflict-260624/>

Finally, in a statement from the General Assembly which acknowledged the numbers presented in the finding by the United Nations report, grave violations increased by 21% and the number of killings and maiming of children increased by 35%. The areas affected included the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine. The conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory saw an increase in grave violations of 155%. The statement from the General Assembly concluded that “the changing nature, complexity, expansion and intensification of armed conflict, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, deliberate or indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including infrastructure, and the advent of new armed groups, alongside acute humanitarian emergencies and blatant disregard for international humanitarian law and severe violations of international human rights law, have led to alarming increases in grave violations”.

<https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/384>

And while there have been numerous resolutions passed in the United Nations condemning such actions, combatants in war zones seem to be deliberately ignoring international law. Two such resolutions, which are nearly identical in focus and intent were released in 2005 and 2018:

United Nations
Security Council
Resolution 1612 (2005)
26 July 2005
Protection of Children affected by armed conflict

[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1612\(2005\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1612(2005))

United Nations
Security Council
Resolution 2427 (2018)
9 July 2018

Protection of Children affected by armed conflict
[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2427\(2018\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2427(2018))

It is clear that despite a recognition by the United Nations that children in armed conflict zones need to be protected, little, outside of formal condemnation is being done. There already exists UN resolutions meant to protect children. These include:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child: 20 November 1989. General Assembly resolution 44/25
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. 25 May 2000. General Assembly resolution A/RES/54/263
<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/tools-for-action/optional-protocol/>

Security Council resolution 2712 (2023), 15 November 2023 which specifically demands the immediate release of child hostages to protect children especially in conflicts in areas like Gaza.
[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2712%20\(2023\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2712%20(2023))

One set of laws that would be applicable for targeted actions against children would be established international law that include war crimes and crimes against humanity. While children are not specifically singled out as victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity, they certainly fall under the definitions as established in international law. War crimes include any action which “include murder, torture, pillage, or intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population, humanitarian aid workers, religious and educational buildings and hospitals. The use of weapons not authorised by international conventions, such as chemical weapons or cluster munitions, can also be considered a war crime”. While crimes against humanity include “crimes committed as part of a widespread attack directed against any civilian population, such as murder, extermination, enslavement, torture, rape, or any form of sexual violence or sexual slavery.”

<https://unric.org/en/international-law-understanding-justice-in-times-of-war/>

However, it is readily apparent that resolutions and laws that have been accepted in the international community as vehicles to protect children in war zones have failed those children especially when combatants refuse to recognize or respect said resolutions and laws. It is also readily apparent that children in war zones have become effective targets in the eyes of combatants to achieve maximal leverage in their efforts to wage war.

Key Issues for Debate:

Considering the disturbing increase in grave violations against children in war zones and the continued refusal of combatants to adhere to established international law with regard to treatment of children in war zones, what should the United Nations do in order to better protect these children.

Key Topics for Debate:Discussion:

1. Defining grave violations against youth in war zones

- a. What specifically should define a grave violation against youth in war zones including:
 - i. Targeted killings
 - ii. Targeted acts of violence including rape, torture, maiming
 - iii. Targeted kidnapping
 - iv. Targeted illegal detainment
 - v. Targeted use of human shields
 - vi. Targeted denial of access to services including schools, medical treatment, food?
 - b. Should each violation be treated separately and addressed through separate sections of international law?
 - c. Should existing aspects of international law be amended to specifically address grave violations against youth in war zones?
 - d. Should there be a distinction between targeted actions and collateral actions?
- 2. Intervening in grave violations against youth in war zones**
- a. What actions should be taken to prevent, mitigate grave violations in war zones?
 - b. Should the UN consider , condemnation, economic sanctions, military intervention?
- 3. Enforcing accusations of grave violations against youth in war zones**
- a. What should be done to combatants who commit grave violations against youth in war zones? Should this include:
 - i. Economic reprisal, economic sanctions, judicial intervention
 - ii. If the response is judicial intervention, what are the punishments that should be administered to combatants who purposely target youth in war zones.

Points to consider:

1. What role should the General Assembly take in dealing with grave violations against youth in war zones?
2. Should the Security Council be involved in intervening? How should the likely veto by Russia in the Security Council be dealt with?
3. How should the International Court of Justice intervene, particularly with countries like Israel which do not recognize the authority of the ICJ or the United States which does not recognize the authority of the ICJ?

Specific Items For Your Country to Consider:

Delegates are expected to consider each of the following:

- a. Is your country involved in a military conflict?
- b. Is your country accused of grave violations against youth in war zones and what is their response to the accusations?
- c. Is your country involved with any country involved in military conflict?
- d. What role has your country played in protecting youth in war zones?

Resources:

BBC News

Children among victims in Russian strikes, hours after Trump-Putin talks shelved

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czjpe0193geo>

Fact Sheet: Russia's Kidnapping and Re-education of Ukraine's Children

<https://medicine.yale.edu/news-article/fact-sheet-russias-kidnapping-and-re-education-of-ukraines-children/>

Save the Children

Abduction of Children in Armed Conflict

<https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/abduction-capture-children-armed-conflict>

UNICEF

Staggering scale of grave violations against children in conflict revealed in new UNICEF analysis

<https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/grave-violations-against-children-conflict>

Human Rights Watch

Children Detained in War Zones, July 28, 2016

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/28/children-detained-war-zones>

UN Documents

United Nations, The Question of Palestine, 26, June 2024

Grave Violations against Children in Armed Conflict at Record High; Speakers in Day-Long Debate Explore Ways to Bolster Norms to Protect Them from Harm – Security Council's 9669th meeting (SC/15745)

CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/sc-children-and-armed-conflict-260624/>

United Nations, General Assembly

A/78/842-S/2024/384

Seventy-Eighth Session

Promotion and Protection of the rights of the child

<https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/384>

United Nations

Security Council

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