

Input for the UPR Working Group Session on the Republic of Yemen
Office of the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict
July 2018

Background

In the four years since the beginning of the conflict in Yemen, children have been exposed to immense suffering and continue to be severely affected by the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the country. A vast number of the six grave violations against children¹ have been committed by all parties to the conflict and in 2017, the United Nations verified 2,438 grave violations in Yemen.

The **killing and maiming** of children remained the most prevalent violation, with 1,316 child casualties verified by the United Nations during 2017². The majority of the incidents were a result of airstrikes attributed to the Coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen and ground fighting by the Houthis and affiliated forces. Casualties are increasingly being reported as a result of close proximity of military objectives to civilians and civilian infrastructures, including schools and hospitals. Landmines and unexploded ordnances are constant threats to the safety of children in Yemen.

Recruitment and use of children by various parties to conflict has been increasing exponentially, despite the challenges in accessing areas for monitoring and reporting purposes. In 2017, the United Nations verified 842 cases of the recruitment and use of boys as young as eleven years old³. The vast majority of verified cases were attributed to the Houthis and affiliated forces. Other parties involved in the recruitment and use of children include the Yemeni Armed Forces, pro-government Popular Resistance, Security Belt Forces, and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. Children were mainly used to guard checkpoints and buildings, patrol areas fetching water and bringing food and equipment to military positions; 76 children were used as combatants.

Twenty-three children have been **detained** by Government forces and armed groups for their alleged association with opposing parties throughout 2017. The situation of children deprived of their liberty is of deep concern and difficult to monitor. In the previous year, precisely in June 2016, the Coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen released 52 children reportedly associated with parties to conflict. The children were handed over to the Government of Yemen and some were reunified with their families.

Cases of **sexual violence** against children are not being reported in Yemen and this is believed to be a result of the stigma associated with this violation, rather than the confirmation that children in Yemen are not subject to rape and other forms of sexual violence. Girls below 18 are often exposed to forced marriage, and the increasing number of girls married before reaching age of majority in Yemen is reported to be a negative coping mechanism directly linked to the conflict.

Attacks on schools and hospitals have resulted in the destruction and damage of facilities and killing and injury of children, teachers, and medical personnel. These incidents resulted in the complete or partial destruction of the facilities. Airstrikes and ground shelling were the leading

¹ Ref. Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005)

² Data from SG annual report on Children and armed conflict published in June 2018 (*S/2018/465*)

³ Idem.

causes of destruction. It has to be noted that there was a significant decrease in attacks on schools and hospitals attributed to the coalition.

The **abduction** of children is decreasingly being reported in Yemen, although available data show that children are mainly abducted for the purpose of recruitment and use by armed groups.

Denial of humanitarian access has been a feature of the conflict in Yemen throughout the years. It has resulted in a progressive deteriorating situation for children and other vulnerable civilians affected by the conflict, being denied access to life-saving services, including food and medicines. Children have died because of lack of access to basic humanitarian assistance, impeded in multiple occasions by the closure of seaports and airports through which supplies could reach people in need in Yemen.

Recommendations

- Recalling that the Government of Yemen is a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, urge the Government to take immediate action to update and revitalize its existing Action Plan with the UN to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by its government forces, reaffirming the commitments enshrined in the action plan signed with the United Nations in 2014.
- Express deep concern over the reports of the recruitment and use of children by parties to conflict and by their deprivation of liberty for their alleged association with opposing parties. Call on all parties to immediately release children currently and engage with the United Nations to facilitate their rehabilitation and reintegration into the community. Recall the obligations of the Government of Yemen and all other parties to conflict under international human rights and humanitarian law to treat primarily as victims, with the best interests of the child and international juvenile justice standards as guiding principles. Call upon the Government to ensure accountability for cases of ill-treatment and torture of children in detention.
- Welcome the endorsement of the Government of Yemen of the Safe Schools Declaration in October 2017 highlighting its commitment to prevent the use of schools for military purposes as well as attacks against them.
- Call on all international actors supporting parties to conflict in Yemen to abide by their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, particularly with regards to the principles of proportionality and distinction within their military operations.
- Deeply concerned by the indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas, particularly through airstrikes, call all parties to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of children during military operations in line with international human rights and humanitarian law.
- Call on the Government and other parties to the conflict to allow unimpeded and independent access for humanitarian aid to be able to reach people in need of humanitarian assistance in Yemen, in particular the most vulnerable and hard to reach communities.