INTRODUCTION

Children and youth represent the majority of the population in most countries affected by armed conflicts and are thus excessively affected by war. The result of this varies - they are recruited as child soldiers, are killed and maimed, deprived of education and health care, and separated from their families. According to the UN, children and youth are especially vulnerable to conflict, through the indirect impact of a weaker state and social system, loss of parents or caretakers, and often even as participants in armies. In addition, the UN further states that violent conflicts, along with HIV/AIDS, are giving rise to a massive generation of orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition, it has been suggested that large youth cohorts, so-called 'youth bulges', make countries more unstable in general, and thus more susceptible to armed conflict (Urdal 2004). Despite this, some of the reasons put forward as to youth participation in conflict are multi-dimensional — they lack economic opportunities, political voice and a sense of belonging or connection to their communities. Often the only way young people can imagine changing their predicament is through violence (Mercy-Corp 2004)

Children and youth also suffer from other consequences of conflict such as poverty, unemployment, poor governance and the disintegration of families and communities. Rehabilitation and reintegration is particularly critical for children and youth formerly associated with armed groups in order to break cycles of violence and to find a new existence after a life of conflict and distress(UNDESA 2003)

Youth at Risk

Caught between childhood and full adulthood, youth are often even more underserved than children. Even as they struggle with their own identity, they watch the social fabric collapse around them. From a conflict perspective, idleness and especially a sense of lack of future prospects related to unemployment and limited education opportunities, represent not only social problems, but may further turn youth into prone recruits to rebel armies and violent movements. Sexual violence is increasingly a characteristic of conflict with detrimental long-term psychological effects on children and youth.

Preventing violent conflict is imperative for development. While wars and violent confrontations are not new, the scale of violence perpetrated against civilians and the complexity of the emergencies occurring in the past couple of decades are unprecedented. Youth are often a targeted group during conflict. Young people's participation in armed hostilities is facilitated through the trade of small arms and light weapons. The dearth of opportunities in their communities often leads them to gravitate towards violent conflict and acts of terrorism. Many are successfully mobilized through the ideologies of war. As victims and witnesses, they cannot help but be affected by the grim realities surrounding them (United Nations 2003)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of collecting all important data and information required to be processed for establishment of this report content, secondary data collection is chosen to gather all available information regarding youth and armed conflict. Different sources from different websites were used to extract and gather all information regarding youth and armed conflict. A similar method was also used to gather all responses from the various stakeholders. The sources were carefully chosen in order to ensure the quality of the content, relevance, and ease of comprehension. The main reason for choosing secondary data collection method is based on a fact that varieties of sources are largely available in the internet.

FACT SHEETS

- In armed conflicts, girls and women are disproportionately targeted but boys and men are also sexually violated

- For the last two decades, the United Nations has been at the forefront of efforts to protect children and youth in armed conflict.

- The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict coordinates the UN family efforts.

- The UN Security Council is actively engaged in efforts to protect children in armed conflicts by placing the issue on the international peace and security agenda.

- In early 2010, the signing of an action plan with the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist resulted in the discharge of about 2,000 minors.

- In June 2010, the Security Council released a statement expressing its readiness to impose targeted measures against persistent violators recruiting, sexually abusing, maiming and killing children and youth in war.

- It's been stated that Over 40% of out-of-school children and youth live in conflict-affected countries with over 60% of the population in many conflict-affected countries aged under 25.

- Majority of the youth involved in Armed conflict usually join the military involuntary while those at the end of the gun are usually killed, maimed, orphaned, abducted and deprived of education.

- Armed conflicts usually result not only in the loss of lives but also the destruction of infrastructure which was either a work place or a home for others increasing unemployment and poverty among the youth.

- These conflicts are often triggered by issues of identity, ethnicity, religion and competition for resources, particularly oil and mineral wealth.

RESPONSES FROM VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

During armed conflict, civilians often pay a heavy price. They may face daily threats of violence and death as they find themselves inadvertently caught up in the middle of a conflict. Despite being protected under international humanitarian and human rights law, civilians continue to be the victims of violence and are sometimes deliberately targeted by belligerents. These deliberate attacks can include campaigns of sexual violence or deliberate killings to instil fear and coerce compliance from the local population.

In addition to these direct attacks, civilians also need protection from the consequences of conflict such as being forced to move from their homes and thus losing ownership of land and property. Some may find temporary, but often only relative safety in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees, but the less fortunate may simply have to fend for themselves in inhospitable terrain. In recent years, their access to humanitarian assistance has been increasingly restricted by bureaucratic constraints, intense hostilities or violent attacks against humanitarian personnel and assets. Individual states, the UN, regional organisations and humanitarian agencies including Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) all play important roles in protecting civilians, whether through political and legal action, military activities or humanitarian action. However, international efforts to protect civilians in conflict can often be insufficient, inconsistent or ineffective.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

Protection of civilians in armed conflict matters from a legal perspective, because the UK has specific obligations concerning the protection of civilians in situations where it is involved in military action. International humanitarian law (IHL) provides that civilians shall enjoy general protection from the effects of armed conflict, protects civilians from being the object of attack, and prohibits attacks that are indiscriminate. The UK is a strong supporter of the standards set

out in international human rights and humanitarian law and of international criminal law tribunals, including the International Criminal Court.

UK Government Strategy on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 3 The protection of civilians in armed conflict can contribute towards managing and reducing the direct impact of conflict on affected populations. For example, it can help ensure that armed groups are less inclined to target civilians; that they are less likely to use civilian populations to achieve their military objectives; and that civilians have access to humanitarian assistance. The UK has a number of different roles in promoting and protecting civilians in armed conflict, including:

➢ As a member of international organisations, and as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.
➢ As a party to IHL treaties.
➢ As a donor to intergovernmental organisations and other humanitarian actors operating in situations of armed conflict.
➢ As a provider of international military forces, including peacekeepers, and sometimes as a party to an ongoing conflict.
➢ Training foreign military, civilian and police peacekeepers

PRIVATE SECTOR RESPONSES

In the aftermath of conflict, the private sector's role can extend beyond its narrow impact in providing jobs and generating income. The private sector can lift some burden from government and help lend legitimacy to the state. The private sector can deliver tangible dividends to the wider population through investments that not only create jobs but also provide basic and new services, introduce innovative approaches to development, and generate tax revenues for reconstruction efforts. To help the private sector meet these challenges, build peace and secure development, it is important to understand more clearly the interrelationships it can have to politics, security, institutions and development.

There are many instances of the private sector playing a key role in building and sustaining peace after a period of conflict. Businesses can make strong strategic partners in

peacebuilding efforts, they can participate directly in peace negotiations or talks to prevent conflict, and they can engage indirectly by undertaking activities to influence the negotiations. South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Northern Ireland offer illustrations of the positive contributions the private sector can make to peace processes.

• In South Africa, businesses helped the country transition from the apartheid days to a multiracial state. For example, Consolidated Goldfields organized and financed meetings between the African National Congress and the Afrikaners leadership during the final years of the apartheid regime. This dialogue was widely credited with laying the groundwork for the eventual negotiations that brought end to apartheid.

• In Sri Lanka, a group of local trade associations sponsored a public campaign to mobilize citizens to speak out on the importance of peace in 2001.

• In Northern Ireland, the Confederation of Business Industry advocated for the peace process, highlighting the benefits of a peace dividend. CBI and a number of other business associations formed the ―Group of Seven‖ to encourage a settlement to the conflict by using media and public campaigns at critical points in the peace process.

Throughout, they also interacted directly with all the parties to the conflict.19 The private sector and economic considerations more generally are rarely taken into account during the development of peace treaties.20 Although there is no single best way to engage the private sector in the peace process, the engagement itself— either by informal means or by means of a formal parallel track focused on private sector-led economic development—is critical. Without this, the private sector could become a deterrent to peace, rather than a key partner in the peace process.

The private sector can also help address some of the key security issues in fragile and conflict-affected countries through the provision of jobs to unemployed youths and former combatants, either related to national disarmament, demobilization and resettlement initiatives or over the course of a normal business trajectory. But the relationship between security, justice, and the private sector is complicated. In the absence of basic security and legal transparency—for example, unclear property rights—businesses are reluctant to make the long-term investments

that spur economic growth and generate the jobs so desperately needed in these challenging contexts.

NGO RESPONSES

International organisations and their agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have mandates to remind states and other parties to conflicts of their obligations to respect and protect civilians, and to support them in meeting these obligations. The UN Emergency Relief Co-ordinator (ERC) promotes the protection of civilians in armed conflict and reports to the UN Security Council on this issue.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) supports the ERC in his role and supports protection activities on the ground by helping the Humanitarian Coordinator and Country Team to plan and coordinate humanitarian protection programmes. NGOs also play a crucial role. Human rights NGOs usually focus on advocacy, monitoring and reporting violations of the law, and assisting victims to seek redress; while humanitarian NGOs, seeking to ensure that the basic needs of the civilian population are met, aim to reduce the population's exposure to threats to its safety

Since the 1990 World Summit for Children, the United Nations has increasingly sought to draw international attention to the plight of children affected by armed conflict. In 1996, an expert appointed by the Secretary-General, Graça Machel, submitted a report to the General Assembly depicting the terrible reality of children in war. The groundbreaking report drew global attention and led to the adoption of resolution 51/77 recommending the SecretaryGeneral to appoint a Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. In armed conflicts, girls and women are disproportionately targeted but boys and men are also sexually violated z For the last two decades, the United Nations has been at the forefront of efforts to protect children and youth in armed conflict.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict coordinates the UN family efforts. The UN Security Council is actively engaged in efforts to protect children in armed conflicts by placing the issue on the international peace and security agenda. In early 2010, the signing of an action plan with the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist resulted in the discharge of about 2,000 minors. In June 2010, the Security Council released a statement expressing its readiness to impose targeted measures against persistent violators recruiting, sexually abusing, maiming and killing children and youth in war.

Today, Radhika Coomaraswamy serves as the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. In this capacity, she speaks as a moral voice and an independent advocate to build awareness and give prominence to the rights and protection of boys and girls affected by armed conflict. Systematic engagement with Member States is an essential aspect of her work. She uses various frameworks, such as the General Assembly, the Security Council, regional organizations, bilateral contacts and field visits to garner political will from the international community to effectively protect war-affected children and youth.   As the issue of children and armed conflict cuts across various UN mandates, the Special Representative works closely with other UN agencies and programmes to develop and implement the children and armed conflict agenda. UNICEF remains a key operational partner, designing projects that assist in the release, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers.

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations has also expanded significantly the incorporation of children's issues in their work. During the International Year of Youth, the Special Representative of the Secretary General will mobilize youth as a priority to raise awareness of the plight of child soldiers. She will also continue to garner support for its "Zero under Eighteen" campaign, which aims to achieve universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict by 2012. Through advocacy efforts by the Office of the Special Representative and its partners, the Security Council has become systematically engaged in the issue of children and armed conflict, which has been progressively placed on the international peace and security agenda.

YOUTH RESPONSES

Young people are already involved in their communities to constructively and inclusively address conflict. The generational divide that exists in all communities necessitates the inclusion of youth to reflect the dynamism of society and the issues it faces. Youth offer a number of key attributes to positively and effectively engage with conflict.

❖ Young people are open to change. Young people have a greater potential of having inclusive, compassionate and dialogic worldviews while adults often have set dogmatic discourses.

❖ Young people are knowledgeable about their peers' realities. Young people know the needs that exist among peers based on their own experience and close contact with others

Today almost half of the world's population (48%) is under the age of 24. Of these, more than one billion are defined as youth, being between the ages of 15-24. This is the largest youth population the world has ever known. Developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), have predominantly young populations. Large shares of the world's young people live in a fragile and conflict-affected state or in a country where levels of criminal violence are very high. A young population offers an opportunity for innovation, development and economic growth, but today's young people are confronted with violence and armed conflict.

Unfortunately, a dichotomous viewpoint of youth as either perpetrators or victims of violence is very common. UNOY argues for an alternative viewpoint: one in which youth are recognised as positive agents of change and as advocates for peace. The positive role that youth play in building peace and transforming conflict must be recognised. This recognition needs to take into account the interrelationship between social justice, sustainable development, human rights and peace as pervasive in the daily lives of the world's youth. As stakeholders and leaders, the inclusion of young people in peacebuilding processes ensures a relevant, representative and active category of society is equipped to positively contribute to peace and security.

Limited economic, social and political opportunities are strong contributing factors driving youth to participate in armed conflict. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that this does not reflect the majority of the youth population, and that many young people in conflict and post-conflict countries are working for peace. Only a minority of young people turn to violence in any context.3 Young people can be protected from violent conflict by offering them a possibility to shape their futures through participation in issues that concern them, including peace and security, and the provision of quality educational and livelihood opportunities. Additionally, young people's resilience to social and political pressures pulling them towards violent actions needs to be supported.

MEDIA RESPONSES

Information is power and insight can impact on public discourse. This way, perceptions can be changed by access to media. Different types of media are utilised globally to distribute knowledge and idealistically, free mass media is a tool of and signpost for democracy. Freedom of expression is not only the core of a healthy media but also a fundamental human right and vital for a democratic structure. It stands for freedom of speech, the right to information and the representation of different opinions in a heterogeneous society. In any culture of prevention, effective and democratic media are an essential part and indispensable for societies trying to make a transition towards peace and democracy.

Lack of information can, at any stage of a conflict, make people desperate, restless and easy to manipulate. The ability to make informed decisions strengthens societies and fosters economic growth, democratic structures and the positive outlook on the future. For this very reason, the United Nations Millennium Declaration stressed the need "to ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information"

In case of a crisis or a conflict, the international media can attract worldwide attention. The mass media is a pervasive part of daily life especially in industrialised countries and thus able to shine a light on conflicts anywhere in the world. Since most armed conflicts these days have governmental and not territorial reasons; the parties are often concerned with making sure

that the majority of people are on "their" side, which bears a lot of potential for misrepresenting facts and trying to seize control over the distribution of information. For this very reason the intervention of unbiased and free global media is important not only for the world public but also for the people directly affected. The number of conflicts, however, that gets international attention is small; therefore local media is vital in this context

A measure of peace-building can be enhanced peace journalism. Peace journalists try to uncover the causes behind a conflict and true goals of all participants while making sure to humanise all victims of the conflict. The journalists don't try to exploit the loss and suffering but make sure that the reporting is balanced and also demonstrate how easily news can be manipulated. Part of the ethical guidelines for this kind of reporting is to bring out people that use peaceful measures and speak out against war and violence and document the suffering and loss on all sides. Possible solutions and trying to prevent further escalation of the conflict are at the centre of peace journalism as well. A suggested framework used by peace-building media can employ different strategies such as (1) Conflict-sensitive and peace journalism; (2) Peace-promoting entertainment media; (3) Media regulation to prevent incitement of violence, but also (4) Peace-promoting citizen media

CONCLUSION

Today, the world is home to the largest youth population that has ever existed, 1.2 billion youth make up for 18% of the world's population. Despite this, armed conflict is one of the most critical challenges that young people are faced with today. They bear the brunt of conflict, not only because of the direct violence against them but also because of their unique vulnerability to both voluntary and involuntary military recruitment. These assertions have led to a dichotomous viewpoint of youth as either causal or recipient agents. However, a third viewpoint: one in which the youth population is recognized as being agents for peace can be argued.

Youth, in fact, are at the frontlines of peace building and are taking on active role to build peace and prevent outbreaks of violence across the globe. A successful peace building process must be transformative and create space for a wider set of actors — including, but not limited to,

representatives of women, young people— to participate in public decision - making on all aspects of post-conflict governance and recovery(United Network of Young Peacebuilders 2010)."

RESPONSES OF WORLD ASSEMBLY OF YOUTH

WAY will take necessary actions to eradicate abuse exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against young people. Encourage all members to promote the rule of law at their countries and ensure equal access to justice for all. Create awareness programmes, conferences, and publications on dangers faced by young people in conflict zone areas. Ensure that youth and youth leaders play their role to avoid being coerced in conflicts.

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