



Committee: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Topic: Education and Protection of Youth Affected by

Armed Conflict

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Letter From the Chair

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to UNISMUNC VIII! My name is Alexandra Riva and I am looking forward to being your chair! I have been a part of UNIS MUN since 9th grade, and it has become a very important and influential part of my life. I am in many other different clubs at my school, and I love reading and science. In my free time, I love to play sports, hang out with friends and explore new places.

Sasha Liberman will be a dais member of the UNICEF committee. Sasha has been at UNIS for 13 years and joined MUN in her freshman year. She has lived in New York her entire life and is half Ukrainian and half Moldovan. She speaks Russian and English and has been learning Spanish in school for 10 years. In her spare time, she enjoys playing sports and eating food, her favorite being Ukrainian and Japanese food.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns at

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Best,

Alexandra Riva

Introduction to the Committee

UNICEF or the United Nations Children's Fund is a program devoted to the improvement of health, nutrition, education, and general welfare of children around the world. UNICEF was created in 1946 to provide relief for children in areas affected by World War II, but in 1950 the fund started providing help for programs that improve children's welfare. More particularly, children in less developed countries and emergency situations.

As said in UNICEF's mission statement, "UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential." UNICEF is one of the world's largest providers of vaccines and supports child health and nutrition, as well as many other issues. UNICEF has the power to influence decision-makers, and with many of their partners, they can turn innovative ideas into action. In 1965 UNICEF was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace.

Statement of the Issue

Around the world, armed conflicts continuously threaten the daily lives of youth, as one of the most basic rules of war, the protection of children goes unabated (UNICEF). As countries find themselves in the middle of wars of which they are unable to cease, countless generations of children are affected, unable to obtain a basic and fundamental right: the right to an education. This is mostly due to the fact that most institutions have been destroyed, along with the countless attacks on children and teachers in these areas; in 2020 there were 535 verified attacks on schools. Not only are children unable to obtain a stable education, but their futures are simultaneously completely erased.

History

Armed conflicts have been occurring for as long as anyone can remember. Today, armed conflicts continue to cause death, destruction, and displacement of thousands of people on a global scale. Named one of ten conflicts to watch in 2020 by the International Crisis Group, the conflict in Yemen has resulted in an estimated 100,000 deaths and has an estimated 24 million people in need of assistance. 2015 marked the beginning of the conflict in Yemen after the Houthi insurgents rose up against the government and took control of Yemen's capital, Sana'a, in 2015, an ongoing civil war between the insurgents and a coalition of Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) erupted (Council On Foreign Relations). Since then, Yemen has experienced the world's worst humanitarian crisis. This crisis has only been worsened over the past year, as the alliances formed in 2015 have fractured. While all of Yemen's civilians have been gravely affected by this conflict, the primary victims of the crisis are children. According to the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting on grave child violations, from March 2015 to March 2019, more than 7,522 children have been killed or permanently injured. Along with this, attacks on education infrastructure have had a terrible impact on the country's education system and millions of children's access to learning. With the damages and closures of schools across Yemen, children's threatened access to education has led to parents not being able to support their children. At the moment, around 2 million children remain out of school, and every day they become increasingly vulnerable to serious protection concerns (UNICEF). Through

the intervention of international organizations, such as UNICEF, secured funds have been allocated towards teachers and school-based staff in Yemen. This contribution is set as an effort to help approximately 135,000 teachers and school-based staff for about nine months, but there are still many questions as to how new funds should be allocated. The Yemen's Houthi rebels have also used and actively recruited thousands of children into their army, going against the wishes of the United Nations. These boys are reported to be as young as 10, many having not even gone through puberty. Houthi leaders claim that 10-12 year olds are in fact men and have a duty to serve their country. Their have also been programs in schools and mosques telling young boys that they should be serving their country and teaching them how to be soldiers. Parents have also been told that they either send in their young boys or they will no longer be sent food rations. The psychological damage of young boys being given weapons and being instructed to kill people is unimaginable. Most of these kids brain's are about half way to being fully developed and this extreme trauma will stunt these children forever. It can also leave them with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder effecting the course of their adult lives.

Relevant International Action

In 2019, the UN Children's Fund laid 3,758 backpacks out on the North Lawn in New York. The backpacks were arranged like headstones: one for each child killed in armed conflict in 2018 (Waezi and Scaffidi).

International deliberation on the topic of education and protection of youth affected by armed conflict has increased exponentially over the past decade. While a multitude of proposals were drafted throughout recent years, many failed to achieve their goals, or have yet to witness said proposals' outcomes. One of the earliest and most prominent organizations created specifically to advocate for children's aid and education during crises was the United Kingdom's Save the Children Fund, founded in 1919. In 2001, Save the Children introduced an initiative entitled "Schools as Zones of Peace" in Nepal in response to the Nepalese Civil War that took place between 1996 and 2006 (Save The Children). The project identifies secure learning environments for students during ongoing and recently-ceased armed conflicts. Partnered with school administration and local policymakers, the initiative aims to strengthen the quality of learning in conflict zone schools, and spread awareness of the students' plight in order to influence international policies (Project Guidance). By 2012, with the assistance of the Norwegian government, Zones of Peace expanded to successfully protect students in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Afghanistan, among other countries. Armed actors and those attempting to politically impose upon these zones were rejected not only by school administrators, but by entire communities who supported the initiative.

In 2010, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) funded the creation of and construction on 100 schools across the governorates of Erbil, Nineveh, Baghdad, and Basrah which had been severely affected by armed conflict. About 30,000 Out of School Children (OOSC) were able to enroll in these establishments (“Armed Conflict”). In the same year, Switzerland introduced the 2010 Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict by the Geneva Call (Martinez). It called upon state and non-state armed actors “to avoid using for military purposes schools or premises primarily used by children”. Similar to UNESCO’s approach, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Côte d’Ivoire funded 24 elementary schools for OOSC affected by conflict over political instability (“Armed Conflict”). The IRC enforced instructors to employ the IRC’s Healing Methodology which, in conjunction with fundamental academic lessons, supported traumatized students’ psychological well-being.

Another organization deeply involved with the protection of children in conflict zones is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 2012, after NATO leaders attended the Chicago Summit, NATO created its Military Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict which promoted UN Security Council Resolution 1612. NATO also appointed a Senior NATO Focal Point for Children and Armed Conflict to communicate and work in conjunction with the UN (“Topic: Human security”). In April 2016, NATO deployed its first Senior Children and Armed Conflict Adviser into Afghanistan as part of the Resolute Support Mission. These advisers ensure that child protection mandates

from UNICEF and other UN agencies are enforced and that the children's evolving needs are met.

A significant global effort to protect students in wartime was the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, passed in conjunction with the Draft Guidelines from the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, Switzerland on December 16, 2014 (Save The Children). While the initiative was spearheaded by Norway and Argentina, the guidelines apply globally. These guidelines were drafted by experts in fields from defense, military, legal, and education. The guidelines were then reviewed and revised by NATO, the European Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and delegates from 40 countries who were members of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA). The signatories' two main objectives were to reduce school's involvement in military efforts and ameliorate the consequences of armed conflict on students. On October 6, 2016, the GCPEA released a report entitled "What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use. (Downing)" The report called upon all heads of state to endorse the Lucens Guidelines and put forth seven recommendations as to how schools could be protected. These recommendations are as follows: "unarmed physical protection," "armed physical protection," "negotiations with armed groups not to attack or use schools," "early warning/alert systems to communicate attacks or threats of attack in real-time," "alternative delivery of education, often in coordination with community members or NGOs," "psychosocial support," and "comprehensive school-based safety and security plans." In 2015, Norway drafted another framework.

The Safe Schools Declaration, signed by over 100 countries, focuses on teaching students in conflict-sensitive zones the importance of collaboration among different ethnic groups, in hopes to promote respect and avoid future armed conflict (“Education under attack”).

Of all the aforementioned organizations, UNICEF has been most heavily involved in protecting children in armed conflict zones. In 2017, UNICEF’s Rapid Response Mechanism provided 1.3 million conflict-affected children in Iraq with sustenance (“Fighting for the rights of children in armed conflict”). In addition to these short-term solutions, UNICEF implemented solutions for the long-term including funding the rehabilitation of water and sanitation facilities in 558 schools in Syria which aided 384,000 students. At the 37th plenary meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UNICEF’s Executive Director, Henrietta H. Fore, invited all humanitarian organizations to “band together” to aid children around the world suffering from a lack of opportunities brought on by armed conflict.

In 2020, the UN’s focus falls to Yemeni children. Already, the UN has influenced Yemen’s government to preserve the rights of conflict-affected children through the Marib interim care center which functions to reconnect disrupted families (Vinet and Zannah). Yemen’s Armed Forces appointed 90 agents charged with protecting students. The UN has opened dialogue with Ansar Allah (Houthis) to formulate a plan to protect and offer aid to schools affected by conflict. In April, the UN passed a directive for the handover of detained children, 68 of which were released.

In 2022, the Houthi rebels signed an agreement that will prevent child recruitment and use of child soldiers in their armies. However, in past years similar agreements have been made and very soon after ignored. It is hard to tell if the Houthi will stick to the agreement this time around. Despite this progress, the UN and UNICEF face friction in multiple areas. Grave violations of children's rights are increasing, especially as more are being recruited into conflict by opposing parties. Tensions are growing between the Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council, a secessionist organization. To address the crisis, the UN has recommended that the government of Yemen develop a national protocol for the release of captured and detained children. The UN calls upon all member states involved to work to negotiate peace, integration, and humanitarianism in Yemen.

Analysis

Children have always been a factor in how war plays out. They find themselves in the midst of it with a number of issues arising. In developing countries, many are made into child soldiers, informants, and flag-bearers. They are taken out of schools, and they flee their countries. Some can't leave and are internally displaced. 12 million Yemeni children are in need of humanitarian aid. In Syria, 2.6 million have been moved from their homes forcibly. And another 2.9 million children in Syria are currently not receiving an education. The largest issue they have is the lack of education. UNICEF has funded multiple programs to install schools in current and former war-ridden countries like Afghanistan, Nepal, and Côte d'Ivoire. It is important to understand that the needs of children during war are very difficult and delicate to manage. Education in war-ridden countries are difficult due to safety issues, the number of children even attending school at the time, and other problematic affairs.

While UNICEF has dedicated much effort, time, and resources in many wars, they have not done enough in these wars. Their work has been short-term and irresolute, and not helpful in the long run. Violations of children's rights continue to happen in these countries, despite UNICEF's pledge to diminish or even eradicate that.

In Yemen, there has been a civil war since September 2014. The war has been called the "world's biggest humanitarian crisis," with an estimated 3.6 million refugees fleeing their homes. 2.5 million children are not in school. UNICEF has not made any significant strides into ameliorating the situation.

Another country that is currently experiencing a war is Afghanistan. Since 2001, conflict has raged within the country. According to UNICEF's official page, nine Afghan children are killed every day in the country. Despite having a presence in the country for more than 10 years, again, no significant strides have been made to ameliorate the situation for children who have fled, become refugees, or have been internally displaced.

Questions to consider

1. What are some ways in which UNICEF can support local schools?
2. How can the youth be incentivized to stay in school during these grueling times?
3. How can parents and families be aided to allow children to attend school?
4. What long-term policies can be put in place to aid refugees of these wars? What is UNICEF's role in these policies?
5. How can UNICEF support children in war-torn countries and aid with children going to school?
6. What role does education play in protecting children from conflicts?

Bloc Positions

Western Bloc

The Western Bloc has had conflicting opinions regarding the war in Yemen. The US was the country that originally sold weapons and intelligence to Saudi Arabia, which they used to start the initial attack against the Houthi. However, in more recent years and with the current president, Biden has been calling for peace. The US is no longer selling arms to Saudi Arabia due to the recent outcry by humanitarian organizations and the tragic, unprecedented living conditions of the Yemeni. Canada has also taken a mixed stance on the issue. On one hand, in March, Canada donated 69.9 million dollars to support Yemen, but Canada continues to supply Canadian-made arms and weaponry to Saudi Arabia. Mexico has not been very engaged in this issue but has taken the stance of working towards peace. While they may have opposing opinions on the war, the Western bloc is strongly opposed to youth participating in armed conflicts and often believe it is exploitative and leads to a number of traumas ranging from physical to mental. The UN has also identified Colombia to widely use children in conflicts.

Asia and Pacific Region Bloc

The Asia and Pacific Region Bloc has a number of different views on the conflict. The Government of Japan remains a partner in addressing humanitarian efforts in Yemen and has continued to support children and women affected by the conflict. Japan

has assisted with UNICEF's response in the areas of nutrition, health, water, sanitation, education, and child protection. The government of Japan has aided school rehabilitation for girls in Yemen and has helped cure 30,000 severely malnourished children, train 1,200 community health volunteers, ensure access to safe drinking water, give access to improved quality education for 5,000 school children, and improve the skills of 450 teachers and school supervisors. China has supported efforts to mitigate the conflict in Yemen and has supplied the country with humanitarian aid. However, China's position on the Yemen conflict is driven primarily by its interest in maintaining close strategic relations with Saudi Arabia. China voted in favor of Houthis to immediately withdraw forces from government institutions in Sanaa and abide by the GCC Initiative and National Dialogue outcomes. While the Australian Government has urged for the conflict parties to 'respect international humanitarian law [and] minimize civilian hardship', they made a number of military shipments to Saudi Arabia in 2016–17 and plans to increase arms sales to the UAE. New Zealand has provided \$3 million in humanitarian funding to Yemen as they hope to see a reduction in violence and support the work of the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Yemen to encourage a peaceful political solution to the conflict.

Various countries in this bloc use or have used youth in various armed conflicts. For example, in Afghanistan, throughout the war, boys under the age of 18 have served. Often times these boys have joined for employment, food, shelter, and protection. In Sri Lanka, a horrendous massacre at a military-run rehabilitation center paved way for the issue of former child soldiers to become more visible. In various countries in the region,

youth are employed not only as soldiers or combatants but in many other activities that also contain risks. For example, in Vietnam, children are used as messengers and intelligence for gathering information. On the other hand, countries such as China and Japan oppose the use of children in armed conflicts. In fact, in 2007, China released a statement saying “China opposes recruitment and use of child soldiers and other violations of the rights and interests of children in armed conflict. Similarly, Japan does not allow anyone under the age of 18 serve. However, the UN has only identified Afghanistan, Myanmar, and the Phillipeans to widley use children in conflict.

African and Middle East Block

Many countries in Africa, like South Africa, have been accused of selling weapons to Saudi Arabia, therefore taking sides against Yemen. Djibouti houses an important military base for Saudi Arabia. Egypt has supplied vessels to help blockade Yemen and further exacerbate the humanitarian crisis at hand. There have also been reports that Sudan, Egypt, Morocco, Djibouti, and Senegal have has representatives meeting with Saudi Arabia. East African immigrants have also been attacked, murdered, and detained by Saudi forces when immigrating to Yemen and other gulf countries. Overall African countries have either stood with the Saudis or have taken a more neutral stance. The Middle East, where this war is taking place, has had the leading role in this conflict. Saudi Arabia has been the country at the forefront in this conflict, but recently the UAE

has also become a major player. The UAE recently sent a militia to drive back the Houthis who had recently started to seize the province of Shawba. Missiles were then fired onto Abu Dhabi, which incited more violence between Yemen and the UAE. Israel has determined Yemen an “enemy state,” and there are little to no relations between the two countries. Iran has had a very limited role in the Yemen crisis, however, there is evidence that Iran has been economically and militarily supporting the Houthis. In 2017, Iran devised a 4-point plan for peace that they have declared was the only way that peace would occur. Overall, the Middle East has taken very diverging stances, but due to Saudi Arabia and the UAE's leading role in this conflict and overall power, these countries have tended to support Saudi Arabia and their efforts.

The Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Syria and Yemen are said to have the largest number of child soldiers. In fact, in 2015, Saudi Arabia paid thousands of soldiers from Sudan, 20 to 40 percent of which were children, to fight in Yemen. However, since then, Yemen's Houthi Rebels have agreed to no longer use children soldiers when fighting after using them for years. Of the countries in this bloc, the UN has identified 9 countries where children have been used as soldiers. These countries are the Central Africa Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.

EU Block

The EU block has been active in three main areas in Yemen: political support, humanitarian assistance, and development assistance. Since 2015 around €1 billion have been contributed to Yemen by the EU in these three areas. The EU politically consults with all stakeholders in Yemen with the goal of ending the war through the resumption of an inclusive political process. The EU provided €15 million for crisis-response activities. The EU has also backed efforts to facilitate the flow of commercial items and humanitarian aid into Yemen. In addition, the EU block has contributed €11 million to enhance law enforcement capacities on counterterrorism and €6 million to national and regional efforts on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism. Since 2015 the EU block has allocated a total of €648.38 million to support humanitarian aid. The EU has also provided €353.7 million in long-term assistance, such as strengthening the resilience of local communities in the face of crisis and addressing malnutrition, and supporting Yemen's health system. The EU bloc strongly opposes the use of child soldiers and promotes respect for international human rights standards and measures for the protection of children in armed conflicts.

Conclusion

Every day, the lives of youth are threatened by armed conflicts. Numerous children are affected by their country's placement in wars, some of which have no means to end. With this constant conflict, one of the children's most basic rights is stripped away. This is the right to an education. Although there have been countless attempts for proposals, few have become reality. There have been multiple organizations created, including the UK's Save the Children. This organization introduced an initiative that aimed to strengthen the quality of learning and spread awareness. Although today, the focus lies on Yemeni children. It is UNICEF's responsibility to address the matter and create an effective resolution that will improve the education and protection of youth globally.

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