

Protect and Mitigate Harm to Children Impacted by Armed Conflict



[International Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health](#) started this petition

International Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health

International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Call for Action

Protect and Mitigate Harm to Children Impacted by Armed Conflict

https://www.change.org/p/protect-and-mitigate-harm-to-children-impacted-by-armed-conflict?cs_tk=Aqu37nYlOfOsDdJSJ2IAAXicyyvNyQEABF8BvHFUL4sj5yqA6gbgOqNiLyY%3D&utm_campaign=8a35d396a0db4ccda7cd2761438dd869&utm_content=initial_v0_2_0&utm_medium=email&utm_source=recruit_sign_digest&utm_term=cs

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The war in Ukraine, where some of the worst war crimes seen in Europe since WW2 are being committed, along with ongoing conflicts, in Yemen and elsewhere, are clarion calls to action to protect children in armed conflicts. It is difficult to express words. We call for immediate ceasefires to ensure protection of human life, the most fundamental value in the world. We call for the immediate stop to all arm transfers across borders and return of soldiers with their weapons to barracks in countries of origin. We weep for the people of Ukraine, Yemen, and all conflicts where children are attacked. We stand in support of our colleagues and other health care workers who treat children under terrifying conditions, risking life, or being put in jail. We call for the immediate establishment of a formalized *UN Humanitarian Response on Child Casualties in Armed Conflicts*.

International norms for the protection of children in armed conflicts have been violated by UN Security Council (UNSC) permanent members and member states of the UN for decades with impunity. This includes armed conflicts on nearly every continent. Tens of thousands of children have been killed and millions have been displaced.

Nearly all UN member states recognize the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), including its Optional Protocols. Yet, according to a Peace Research Institute Oslo report (2020), over two thirds of the world's children live in regions where there are armed conflicts. Approximately 450 million children live less than 50 km (about thirty miles) from actual fighting. There is an urgent need for an Optional Protocol to the CRC or other binding UN document for the protection of the needs and rights of children impacted by armed conflicts. The International Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health (ISSOP) issued a *Declaration for the Protection of Harm to Children in Armed Conflict* in 2019 that can serve as an initial framework for this action.

In the meantime, prevention and mitigation of harm to children in conflicts must be a global priority. The following are concrete actions that should be undertaken immediately by UN member states, in collaboration with WHO, NGOs, and other cross sectoral organizations.

Data Collection

Accurate and systematic reporting on child casualties and deaths is critically important to all responses.

- Reliable data reports should be an integral part of the UN interagency emergency response system. A UN Humanitarian Response on Child Casualties in Armed Conflicts should be established immediately as the responsible entity.
- At national levels, all countries with deployed armies or otherwise involved in armed conflicts, including the sale of arms, should provide annual civilian casualty reports that include numbers of children injured or killed by their actions and/or manufactured armament.

Acute and chronic health care for children injured in combat zones

The specialized care of children injured in armed conflicts is the responsibility of the UN and all states engaged directly or indirectly in the conflicts.

- Military combat hospitals should include appropriate provisions for care for children, such as proper personnel training and equipment.
- Children should have access to effective rescue, triage, emergency transportation, and competent and properly equipped medical services—in partnership with existing local and regional health care systems. These systems must be protected.
- Strategies for long-term rehabilitation, reintegration, and mental and behavioural healthcare should also be addressed.
- An independent and transparent international health research body should fund peer-reviewed research on care of children injured in austere environments. These studies should include epidemiological studies to examine immediate and long-term effects of armed conflicts on children, in collaboration with local and regional academic institutions.

Best interests

Disputes should always be resolved diplomatically. The best interests of children should be included in all dialog and discussions, and specified in all agreements.

- Military policies must emphasize protection of areas where children live and frequent—such as houses, schools, buses, marketplaces, hospitals and clinics, water wells, and places of worship.
- Military operations should follow robust, thorough, and transparent civilian harm mitigation practices that are continuously reviewed and revised. This should also include assistance and training of allied militaries and non-state armed groups to ensure the protection of children.
- Military conflict resolution strategies (deconfliction) between adversarial parties should prioritize the protection and best interests of children and young people, including voluntary evacuation and safe access to pediatric health care facilities.

Governance

Governments should enforce and enhance laws that ensure civilian harm mitigation provisions in armed conflicts.

- All member states and those that purchase arms from them should be required to comply with such laws.
- Policy makers should be accountable to ensure their policies follow such laws.
- The protection of children against harm in armed conflicts should be a priority of corporations that build and sell arms.
- Institutional, national, and global financial interests invested in arms industries should be held accountable to global standards and norms related to the protection and mitigation of harm to children.

In the meantime, a UN sponsored *Humanitarian Response on Child Casualties in Armed Conflicts* needs to be established. The UN and its member states pride themselves on valuing children and championing human rights. It is time that children harmed in armed conflicts are fully counted, and all prevention and mitigation strategies are implemented.

Reference

International Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health Position Statement. Beirut Declaration on Prohibition of Harm to Children in Armed Conflict. 23 January 2020.
<https://www.issop.org/cmdownloads/beirut-declaration-on-prohibition-of-harm-to-children-in-armed-conflict/>

This petition is an initiative of the International Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health (ISSOP). We intend to deliver the petition with individuals' names and degrees to UN agencies and other national and international public and private sector entities whose policies and actions affect the lives of children impacted by armed conflicts. The petition results may also be published in professional journals, lay press, or social media. No other personal information will be released.

Those that prepared this petition have no conflicts of interest to declare. Please feel free to contact us with any questions. Please share this petition with other colleagues. Thank-you.