



# **SJA MUN III**

2025. 09.27 - 2025.09.28

## **United Nations Human Rights Council**

Addressing the Use of Child Soldiers in the Yemen Civil War

Last updated on June 21, 2025

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# Letter from the Chairs

Minseo (Chloe) Cho | Head Chair | [mseocho27@kis.ac](mailto:mseocho27@kis.ac)

Esteemed delegates, I am Chloe Cho from Korea International School Jeju and it is with immense pleasure that I say this. As always, it is our great pleasure to welcome you to our committee and kick off an intense weekend filled with vigorous debating, collaborative diplomacy, along with morally sound resolutions. As your experienced chair team, you will be accompanied by a Deputy and Associate chair who will help you navigate through negotiations and crafting comprehensive solutions with other delegates that encapsulate multifaceted approaches. This year's UNHRC agenda is, "Addressing the use of Child Soldiers in the Yemen Civil War." The Yemen conflict is one of the worst humanitarian crises today, and the rampant use of underage soldiers by different militia groups has taken the rights and futures of countless children hostage. Innocent children are either forced or subtly tricked into joining these death cults, and not only face violence, but also utter exploitation and immense suffering. As delegates, it is your responsibility to ensure holistic and feasible rehabilitation and reintegration of the affected children.

As chairs of the conference, our role goes beyond just facilitating; we actively help you navigate through each step and provide recommendations. In case you have any inquiries or require help during your preparation for the conference, kindly contact us. We hope to create unforgettable memories and make meaningful friendships together.

See you in September!

Yunseong Kim | Deputy Chair | [yskim29@kis.ac](mailto:yskim29@kis.ac)

Hello, this is Yunseong Kim from Korea International School, Jeju Campus who will be serving as your deputy chair for the UNHRC committee. Having participated in MUN conferences for 3 years, this serves to be my third chairing experience after 9 or so delegate experiences. I hope that this conference will prove to be an induction into the MUN world for newcomers and a wholesome experience for more experienced delegates.

YoonJi Kim | Associate Chair | [s22290644@sjajeju.kr](mailto:s22290644@sjajeju.kr)

Greetings delegates, my name is YoonJi Kim, a rising freshman from St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju who will be serving as your associate chair for the conference. Since it's my first time chairing an offline conference, I might be a little nervous or make mistakes, but I'll try my very best to support everyone throughout the sessions. I'm truly excited to meet all of you guys and witness passionate debates with innovative solutions. Whether you are an experienced or first-time delegate, I hope SJA MUN III will be a meaningful and memorable experience to you. Can't wait to meet you and see you at the conference!

## Committee Introduction

Founded in 2006, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is the UN's committee dedicated to promote and protect global human rights. With 47 member states, the committee deliberates human rights violations, encourages global dialogues, and ensures the protection of freedom and rights for all individuals. Through various actions, including Universal Regular Review (URR), special rapporteur system, and investigation committee, the UNHRC monitors human rights status worldwide and proposes improvement measures.

The committee has actively worked to combat complex human rights issues for decades by adopting countless resolutions, conducting investigations, and operating missions. For the purpose of providing more detailed information and recommendations to the international community, the special rapporteurs of the committee and independent experts monitor and report on specific issues or national situations.

In addition, the committee has been in firm stance against discrimination based on race, gender, and religion, enforced disappearance, and arbitrary detention. UNHRC, as a support organization to victims of human rights violations, is closely working with other agencies under the UN, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the International Criminal Court (ICC). In conclusion, the UNHRC seeks to play an active role in protecting the rights of people, especially the victims of human rights violations.

## Agenda Introduction

One of the most important, disturbing human rights issues arising from the continuing Yemen Civil War is the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Since the war began in 2014, there have been numerous reports by the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations that documented rampant child recruitment and use by both armed forces and non-state actors alike.

The reports detail the use of children by the Houthis, pro-government militia, as well as local militias, as young as ten years old to perform active combat roles, as well as roles as guards, informants, spies, porters, or logistical support. In many cases, they were forcibly conscripted by one of the fighting factions. Still, in other cases, children joined fighting groups because they had few options following years of war and poverty. Even fewer options once they were out of school for years, or forced to join for the promise of a stipend for themselves and their family.

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen has been portrayed and reported as one of the worst humanitarian crises occurring in the world today. The crises that have already built upon years and multiple crises combine to create a setting that can result in child soldiers being especially vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. With more than 11 million children in need of humanitarian assistance, without viable alternative systems for their survival (including access to school, stable accommodations, and basic services), solvency is in urgent need.

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), as the primary machinery for internationally protecting and promoting human rights, can take measures to address this crisis by developing coherent and effective multilateral action. Delegates must consider the immediate human rights issue as well as the longer-term protections, the ways that will protect children from armed conflict and stop the perpetuation of breaches. There must be a comprehensive and coordinated international response that protects the basic rights of children who find themselves in the existing and ongoing violence of the Yemen Civil War.

# Key Terms

## **Child Soldiers**

People under the age of eighteen, known as child soldiers, are enlisted or utilized in a variety of capacities by armed forces or organizations. They can be used as messengers, porters, cooks, fighters, or for sex.

## **The Northern Yemeni Movement**

The northern Yemeni movement known as the Houthi Rebels (Ansar Allah) is led by Zaydi Shia. They are the biggest recruiter of child soldiers in Yemen and a leading armed group in the civil war.

## **Militants**

Militants that support the internationally recognized Yemeni government make up the Pro-Government Forces. Children have also been used by some of these militias.

## **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**

UPR is responsible for reviewing each UN member state's human rights record and making recommendations.

## **Special Rapporteurs**

The UNHRC appoints independent human rights specialists known as special rapporteurs to keep tabs on and report on either country-specific circumstances or thematic human rights issues.

## **Demobilization**

The official discharge of child soldiers from armed groups and their reintegration into society

## **Reintegration**

The process of helping former child soldiers reintegrate into society by offering them social, educational, and psychological support.

## **Enforced Recruitment**

The term "enforced recruitment" refers to the practice of coercing, threatening, or abducting children, in particular, to join armed groups against their will.

## **Ideological Indoctrination**

Instilling ideological views in children in order to legitimize or normalize their involvement in armed conflict.

**Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC)**

OPAC is an international pact that forbids the compelled enlistment of minors under the age of eighteen in the military.

**The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM)**

A UN mechanism that addresses grave abuses of children during armed conflicts.

**Safe Zones**

Safe zones are areas inside conflict zones that have been designated to offer both safe access and protection from violence.

**ANSAs (Armed Non-State Actors)**

ANSAs are armed combatants in conflict who are not affiliated with any formal government.

**Psychosocial Trauma**

The emotional and psychological harm caused by traumatic or upsetting events, like war or forced conscription

**Educational Displacement**

When education is disrupted or stops because of armed conflict or displacement

**Rehabilitation Programs**

Initiatives designed to assist child soldiers in their physical and mental recovery and reintegration into society.

# Historical Background

In 2007, Yemen ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (OPAC), function of which is to prohibit the recruitment of children under the age of 18 as hostilities in order to reduce the recruitment of child soldiers. In addition, the Yemeni government pledged in 2014 to stop the utilization of child soldiers through an agreement with the United Nations on an action plan. However, continuous violent and disorderly conditions, the collapse of central power, and inefficient surveillance systems has led to the suspension of implementation.

Beginning in 2014, the Yemen civil war has turned out to be one of the most complicated wars. The war had initially emerged when the Houthi rebels had taken over the capital city of the country, Sanaa, and driven the legitimate government of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi out. The conflict then escalated into a regional one with the entry of the Houthi rebels as part of their Iranian alliance against a Saudi alliance to protect the Yemeni government. In all the turmoil, serious human rights violations have occurred, the worst of which is the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

The causation of child soldiers varies. Children are often recruited through coercion or deception, while some children are promised money or social benefits, or are kidnapped from homes, schools, orphanages, and etc. The Houthis have been committing brainwashing before sending them to the front lines through educational and religious centers. Human Rights Watch stated that many of these children are at high risk of death or serious injury from being put into combat with minimal training. The psychological effects of these experiences often persist for years and affect children's ability to reintegrate into society.

The use of child soldiers in Yemen is a direct violation of international humanitarian and human rights law. Children have been exploited by various armed groups, especially Houthi rebels, and also the pro-government forces and organizations endorsed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. According to the United Nations Secretary-General's 2022 Child and Armed Conflict Report, more than 3,500 child soldier recruitment cases were identified from 2015 to 2021, more than two-thirds of which were attributed to the Houthi military. The majority of these children were used in active combat roles, while others had to serve as guards and watchmen of weapons and supplies.



## Current State of Affairs

Still, one of the most troubling aspects of the Yemen Civil War is the use of child soldiers. After the massive escalation of the conflict in 2015, tens of thousands of children have been drafted forcibly to various armed factions. The main perpetrators mostly include the Houthi rebels (Also known as the Ansar Allah), extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda, and the pro-government activists.

Attributing the recurrent reports from International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations, children are involved in active combat as well as roles such as spies, guards, and in some worse cases, as human shields. Furthermore, the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) reported approximately 3500 cases of child drafting between 2015 and 2023. Still, figures are estimated to be higher due to underreporting and a lack of access within crucial conflict zones.

Structural issues such as a lack of access to education and socioeconomic collapse have only worsened the situation at hand. As more than 2 million children are facing systematic barriers, families are also pressured to send children towards groups like the Houthi rebels, as it is a guaranteed method of gaining money and/or protection. Insofar as these structural issues aren't solved, the normalization of violence, as well as ideological indoctrination, will continuously make recruitment recurring.

Despite ceaseless condemnation from the international community, coupled with drawn-out diplomatic efforts, the use of child soldiers remains prevalent. UNHRC and various non-profit organizations have continuously constructed programs aimed at demobilization, but these efforts have been beaten down by aspects such as a lack of funding.

As of today, even while the major conflict has entered a degree of de-escalation, child soldiers still strive to exist, which further brings to light necessary solutions such as global collaboration and the ending of structural issues.

## Stances of Parties

### **Azerbaijan**

Azerbaijan supports the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the UN Security Council and Human Rights Council, and has expressed concern over the threat to the education, health, and safety of children during the conflict. However, there are not many specific comments or criticisms that refer to one special party on the issue of the Yemen civil war and child soldiers, and remain neutral toward the Houthi rebels and Saudi Arabia's coalition. This shows Azerbaijan has the general principles of international humanitarian law, but remains cautious of regional conflicts.

### **Bahrain**

As the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen civil war, Bahrain is continuing to justify its activities in the international community, including the United Nations. Bahrain mentioned that the country is evaluating civilian damage through an investigative organization such as the JIAT (Joint Case Assessment Team) and is gradually enforcing standards to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers. However, some international human rights organizations still raise the possibility of damage to children and civilians during coalition strikes and military operations, and are in the position that clearer accountability is needed for Bahrain.

### **Belgium**

Belgium has prioritized the UN's "Children in Armed Conflict (CACC)" and has been vocal about the issues of child rights violations in various conflict zones, including Yemen. In 2020, Belgium led a resolution on the child rights violations in Yemen while serving as the chair of the Security Council's CACC Working Group, which urged the parties to the conflict to stop the child conscription. Belgium also provides financial support to UNICEF's "Monitoring Reporting Mechanism (MCM)" and contributes to the investigation and reporting of child soldier issues at the global level. Diplomatically, the country shows a position to balance legal responsibility and humanitarian approaches.

### **Canada**

Canada, the leading country that enacted the Vancouver Principles in 2017, has been organizing child protection experts in UN peacekeeping operations and institutionalizing the ban on the use of child soldiers. In a recently released 2025 statement, it clearly stated that it supports child protection obligations in all conflict zones, stating that more than 8,600 cases of child conscription have been identified as of UN reporting in 2023 alone. The remarks on Yemen's civil war did not name a specific party, but consistently emphasized the policy stance that children should be protected throughout the armed conflict.

## **Chile**

Chile, an active country in protecting children's rights, has strongly opposed any acts that violate the rights of children in armed conflicts. Chile has repeatedly voted in favor of the resolutions regarding child rights and violations in the Human Rights Council and the Security Council and has also signed the Safe Schools Declaration, which declares the protection of educational institutions in the rise of armed conflict. A direct statement towards the Yemen civil war is not clearly shown, but Chile supports the UN's comprehensive child protection framework and has a strong stance towards the issue.

## **Colombia**

Colombia is a great example of sharing its experiences in the civil war and usage of child soldiers in the international community. Colombia signed a peace treaty and made efforts to liberate children, secure safety, education, and reintegrate society after the history of armed group FARC mobilizing children during the past civil war. Colombia has consistently emphasized the need for international cooperation, along with preparing legal and social mechanisms to separate children from armed conflict.

## **El Salvador**

Even though El Salvador has utilized child soldiers in its past civil war, the nation didn't make any official statements and positions about the issue of child soldiers during Yemen's civil war. However, El Salvador has participated in international discussions on the issue of child soldiers and stated that mobilizing children in armed conflict is a clear violation of human rights. As a country that has signed numerous international conventions against the recruitment of children in war El Salvador focuses on protecting children in war.

## **Ethiopia**

Ethiopia is deeply aware of the risk of using child soldiers by armed groups while experiencing civil war and terrorist threats. Nevertheless, Ethiopia continues to support compliance with international norms and implementation of action plans related to child protection while within the United Nations. Ethiopia has seriously looked at the problem of children being exploited by suicide bombs or assistants and has emphasized the need for the international community to devote more resources to the liberation and protection of children.

## **France**

France is one of the most active and clear countries on the issue of child soldiers. It strongly condemns the mobilization of children by non-state militias such as Houthi rebels in Yemen's civil war as a violation of international human rights and humanitarian law, and repeatedly emphasizes the principle that children should not be at the forefront of war. As a member of Paris Principles, France has led the establishment and implementation of an international code of conduct for the protection of children, and supports the expansion of the development of Child Protection Advisers in the UN.

**Germany**

Germany takes the issue of child soldiers very seriously and strongly criticizes the use of children in combat by all armed groups. Germany supports international standards such as Safe Schools Declaration, Paris Principles, and Vancouver Principles to address this issue and stresses the need to help send children back into society and get an education. Germany is also closely working with UN organizations and international NGOs such as UNICEF to strengthen support for rehabilitation and psychological recovery of affected children.

**Iran**

Iran has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Optional Protocol, but has not stated that it will comply with the protocol to the extent that it does not conflict with its own Islamic law. There are also concerns that these conditions will lead to a failure to not totally comply with international standards. Therefore, several human rights organizations believe that Iran should be more transparent when it comes to child rights and implement relevant international norms. In addition, Iran has not yet taken a clear stance on the issue of child soldiers in Yemen.

Jordan

Kuwait

Morocco

Netherlands

North Korea

Pakistan

Qatar

Russia

Saudi Arabia

Sweden

UAE

United Kingdom

United States of America

Yemen

# Possible Solutions

## **1. Make international monitoring mechanisms stronger and more effective**

The very first, and likely to be the most practical solution, is to improve and broaden the UN's current Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to incorporate ground access in conflict areas and collaborations with regional NGOs. Greater opportunities for monitoring violations by the UNHRC committee can be created by raising funds through international donor support and thereby augmenting the increased transparency in recruitment practices. The UN may exert more pressure on offenders through the enactment of targeted sanctions and public awareness campaigns, as well as through the employment of international accountability mechanisms for justice, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC). Stronger law enforcement punishes persons engaged in recruitment, thereby discouraging further offenses of this kind.

## **2. Implement Community-Based Education and Economic Relief Programs**

Another practical approach involves adopting community-based educational and economic relief initiatives in the vulnerable areas. As poverty and the lack of educational facilities remain major considerations in child recruitment, tackling the root social-economic issues stands crucial. These days, international assistance might be channelized toward rebuilding local schools, training teachers, and providing stipends to needy families who are willing to keep children in school. However, these programs will need to be designed with the cooperation of local leaders and humanitarian organizations for utmost cultural appropriateness and long-term sustainability. Educating and providing income alternatives to families greatly reduces the attractiveness or the need for sending children to armed groups.

## **3. Support programs for the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers**

The process to dismantle ongoing violence needs attention toward former child soldiers' rehabilitation through both therapeutic community activities and vocational education, alongside psychological support. The UNHRC, together with international donors, should provide relevant funding to local organizations and NGOs that currently operate in Yemen for program expansion. Mental health services and legal safeguards must accompany family reunification support during the rehabilitation process. These programs function as rehabilitation tools that help former combatants recover their mental health.

## Questions to Consider

What are the reasons children are drawn into the war in Yemen?

How does the UNHRC enforce international law on reluctant states or non-states?

What is the relationship between poverty and ignorance in recruiting children into soldiering?

What mechanisms could the international community support to allow for monitoring and accountability in Yemen's most isolated areas?

How can former child soldiers be best rehabilitated and reintegrated?

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