

Protecting the rights of children A GUIDE TO THE PROTECTION AND CARE OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

The objectives of this guide are both to provide assistance in documenting and monitoring violations of children's rights, and to stimulate ideas for concrete actions aimed at ensuring that the rights of children are complied with as specified in the relevant treaties (summary attached). These are suggestions, only, that point to relevant areas of concern. They are in no way exhaustive, nor are they necessarily applicable to every situation. Any assessment and consequent efforts to protect and care for children in situations of armed conflict will have to be tailored to specific situations.

Whenever possible, secure the support and permission of your organization to distribute this information, and work with the affected community and other concerned parties in an effort to develop protection and care measures, including reporting and monitoring. Families may be unable, or afraid to report deliberate targeting and abuse of children. However, women's groups, local leaders, religious leaders, teachers or health workers may well know the situation regarding rights violations through daily contacts with families. These issues should be routinely raised with these *key community people*. If possible, establish regular meetings, including UN agency staff, with a follow-up evaluation and proposed plan of action. Keep in mind that the source of sensitive information given in confidence must be respected at all times. In some situations, breaching that confidence may endanger people's lives.

GENERAL QUESTIONS to help measure the protection and care of children by concerned parties.

- Are copies of the International Treaties pertaining to children available to all concerned parties? Are refugee and displaced families being informed directly of their international human rights and specifically of the rights of their children?
- Are programs in place to ensure the education and training of all concerned with the protection and care of children, including culturally specific psychological and social rehabilitation?
- What is the course of action taken by displaced leaders, government officials, military personnel, warring or rebel parties, security personnel, other UN agencies and NGOs regarding special protection and care considerations for children?
- Are special accommodations or security arrangements needed for especially vulnerable groups of children or youths?

KEY ASSESSMENT AREAS to aid in documenting abuses, with suggestions for possible actions.

THIS CHECKLIST ACCOMPANIES THE INTERNATIONAL TREATIES SUMMARY AND IS FORMATTED TO FOLLOW THE SAME TEN AREAS.

LIFE/SURVIVAL

-Direct Threats

Documenting/Monitoring

✎ Have there been reports of children killed in attacks, being deliberately targeted, or caught in crossfire?

Have there been reports of children being abducted, disappearing, or being injured by landmines?

What measures has the community taken to monitor and report on these violations? Is this information systematically collected?

Possible Action

Forward this information to appropriate agency: your supervisor, local NGO, local relevant UN agencies.

Sensitize teachers on the need to monitor and report on cases where children are absent.

Carry out mine awareness campaigns in the community and include the topic in school curricula.

-Access to Essential Services

Documenting/Monitoring

Are hospitals or schools targeted for military activity?

Is access to life-sustaining services denied?

Is the destruction of supplies needed for medical care and treatment taking place?

Is access to basic supplies and services essential to survival (food, water) being denied or hindered?

Possible Action

Forward this information to appropriate agency: your supervisor, local NGO, local relevant UN agencies.

Meet with *key community people* to determine what effective steps might be taken.

Advocate for the relevant bodies (UN, governments) to try to negotiate "corridors of peace" with warring parties to allow life-sustaining activities for children to take place.

TORTURE/RAPE/SEXUAL EXPLOITATION/PHYSICAL & MENTAL ABUSE

Documenting/Monitoring

Are there categories of children (such as adolescents, or children in child-headed households) that are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse or exploitation?

Are there any reports of children being physically or mentally abused or exploited?

Are avenues available for confidentially reporting abuses?

Possible Action

Meet with *key community people* to discuss possible avenues of confidentially reporting cases of abuse and determine what effective steps might be taken to prevent further abuse or exploitation. This may include maintaining community patrols or physically altering the landscape to provide better protection.

Train community workers in responding to the needs of abused children. Train health workers in recognizing and referring cases of abuse.

Advocate for the training of peace-keeping forces in protective measures, including distribution of the International Treaties Summary.

DISAPPEARANCES/UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN/FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Documenting/Monitoring

Has there been systematic identification of unaccompanied children?

Is a tracing and reunification program in place?

Is there a monitoring mechanism of children in families other than their own, or in children's centers?

Are staff at medical facilities oriented to unaccompanied children's issues?

Possible Action

Obtain relevant guidelines on working with unaccompanied children (UNHCR/UNICEF Emergency Action Handbook).

Sensitize *key community people* to these issues.

Try to maintain separated children within families.

Work with other concerned individuals to develop a comprehensive unaccompanied children program, including tracing and reunification.

Ensure that medical facilities always take detailed addresses of adults who bring in children.

CHILDREN IN DETENTION

Documenting/Monitoring

Are there reports of any children being held in jails, prisons or long-term detention areas?

Is anyone designated to visit prisons systematically to determine if children are being detained, and to monitor their living conditions and the status of their cases?

Possible Action

Meet with *key community people* to learn local practices and views on the detention of children.

If no one is investigating this issue, contact relevant bodies (UN agency, local government, community leaders) and advocate for visits to places where children could possibly be held.

If you have information that children are abusively detained under harmful conditions and no one is willing to visit, contact *Amnesty International* or other human rights groups, through your organization.

CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH THE ARMED FORCES

-Prevention

Documenting/Monitoring

What is the legal age for recruitment into the armed forces?

Are there reports of underage children being abducted, or induced to join in armed conflict or military service?

Are there significant numbers of idle children and adolescents at risk of being recruited?

Possible Action

Discuss the issue with *key community people*.

If recruitment is a problem, carry out information campaigns aimed at adolescents and parents.

Where appropriate and feasible, appeal to the recruiting bodies to stop the practice, providing and discussing with them relevant international treaties.

Ensure that a variety of programs are available to children and adolescents, including health and other clubs, skills training, and other educational or recreational activities.

Help establish a positive role for adolescents in the community, by including them in house-building for elders, assisting as teacher's aides and in organizing activities for younger children.

-Demobilization/Reintegration

Documenting/Monitoring

What is the local community's view toward former child soldiers?

Are efforts being made for community reintegration of former child soldiers?

Are programs for non-formal education and skills training available for former child soldiers?

Are programs providing psychological and social assistance available to former child soldiers?

Possible Action

Ensure that the local community is included in efforts to reintegrate former child soldiers, before reintegration takes place.

Set-up focus group meetings with elders, women's groups, youth groups, and former child soldiers.

Monitor the return to ensure that former child soldiers are in appropriate school/training programs.

FORCED LABOR

Documenting/Monitoring

What is the local minimum age for legal employment?

Are there reports, or evidence of children being coerced into labor to work as porters, domestic servants, or in extreme circumstances, as sexual slaves, or as forced military recruits?

Possible Action

Ensure that all concerned parties are aware of the laws governing child labor.

Identify the appropriate agencies for reporting abuses, and report incidences of violations.

DISABLED

Documenting/Monitoring

Have the special needs of disabled children been determined?

Are therapeutic and remedial services available to all disabled children?

Possible Action

Work with health professionals to identify children with special needs.

Work with health and education professionals to provide training programs and physical assistance (prosthetics), as well as social reintegration programs for disabled children and youths.

REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

Documenting/Monitoring

Are those responsible for the protection and care of refugee or displaced families aware of the rights of children? Are refugee or displaced families aware of children's rights?

Possible Action

Conduct awareness raising meetings with *key community people* and other responsible parties (UN agency, government), and distribute relevant international treaty information.

Urge responsible parties to follow established guidelines on protection and care of refugee and displaced children, to ensure the implementation of international treaties and guidelines.

BASIC SERVICES

-Education

Documenting/Monitoring

Are schools or educational opportunities accessible to *all* children, regardless of their age or gender?

Are teachers available with the skills to accommodate children with special needs?

Possible Action

Meet with concerned parties in an effort to provide formal and non-formal educational opportunities for *all* children, with special attention to the needs of girls.

-Health

Documenting/Monitoring

Are appropriate health facilities available to all children, expectant mothers and nursing mothers?

Is access to health education, including reproductive health, available to those who are responsible for the care of children, and to the children themselves?

Possible Action

If health facilities and care are not accessible, meet with the responsible parties to work toward making health services available.

Work with other concerned parties to assist in establishing training for the community in health education.

TARGETED POPULATIONS/GENOCIDE

Documenting/Monitoring

Are there reports or evidence of threats to the personal security of children who might be targeted based on their race, sex, language, religion, nationality, ethnicity or any other status?

Possible Action

Report any and all such threats to children related to special targeting to appropriate UN, international, state or local organizations.