



Office of the Special Representative
of the Secretary-General for
**CHILDREN AND
ARMED CONFLICT**

Developments in Afghanistan

The information below is based on the 2011 report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council (A/65/820-S/2011/250) issued on 23 April 2011. More information is available in the report.

The recruitment and use of children by anti-government elements, including the Taliban and its various factions, Haqqani network, Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Tora Bora Front, Latif Mansur Network and Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia, was observed throughout the country in 2010. Children were used by them to carry out suicide attacks, plant explosives and transport munitions. The country task forces on monitoring and reporting verified 23 incidents of recruitment and use of children by armed groups. Half of these incidents were reported from provinces near the border with Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. All recruited children are male, between the ages of 9 and 17, and most of them were recruited in southern and western regions.

There have been continued reports of cross-border recruitment and use of children by armed opposition groups, including the Taliban, from both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Many have been forced to carry explosives across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, often without their knowledge, while others have received more advanced training in weapons. One boy, aged 15 years, recounted that he was kidnapped by the Taliban at the age of 13 and taken to Pakistan, near the Turham border, where he was kept in captivity, among other Afghan children, for almost two years and received training in the use of weaponry. The boy was told that anyone who tried to escape would be killed. He was forced to join a Taliban fighting group and participated in armed clashes in Khyber, Kharkhano and other locations before escaping during an attack. He managed to find his way to Kabul, where he was arrested by the Afghan National Security Forces. He is currently serving a prison sentence in Kabul Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre for threatening national security.

The Government's policy is to not recruit children under 18 into the national security forces, and efforts are made to identify and remove children during the recruitment process. However, children continue to be found in the ranks of the Afghan National Police. This was especially true for local recruitment in rural district police stations and conflict-affected areas, where there were consistent reports of children associated with Afghan National Police units at checkpoints and police stations, including as drivers, messengers and tea boys. Insufficient age-verification procedures, extremely low levels of birth registration, opportunities to manipulate age in national identity documents, and the current recruitment drive within the Afghan National Police have led to such underage recruitment.

Sixty-six incidents of detention of children for crimes relating to national security and alleged association with armed groups were verified and documented. Children were often detained with adults in police custody and some reported abuse and mistreatment. The Afghan National Security Forces detained 62 children, while 3 children were arrested and detained by the international military forces. According to ISAF, there are an additional 300 detainees between the ages of 16 and 18 held in the detention facility in Parwan (formerly known as Bagram). This has yet to be verified and followed up by the country task forces on monitoring and reporting. A request has been made to ISAF for access to these children.

A total of 1,396 children were killed or maimed (486 killed and 910 maimed) in 2010. This is a 35 per cent rise compared to 2009, mainly owing to an increase in indiscriminate methods of warfare and asymmetric attacks by armed groups all around the country. The majority of incidents occurred in the southern and eastern regions. Seventy-two per cent of child casualties were attributed to armed groups, including the Taliban, the Haqqani network, and Hizb-e-Islami and their respective factions. Improvised explosive devices, suicide attacks, and rocket and mortar shelling were the main causes of death and injury to children by these groups. Of grave concern is the killing of children by the Taliban on the suspicion that they were spies, or for being allegedly associated with or supporting the international military forces. One such case in Helmand Province and another case in Ghazni Province have been reported. Pro-Government forces (the Afghan National Security Forces supported by the international military forces) were responsible for 21 per cent of all child casualties in 2010, mainly caused by air strikes, artillery and operations conducted during night raids. Cross-fire accounted for the remaining 7 per cent of child casualties, for which it was impossible to determine

which party was responsible. Furthermore, explosive remnants of war and landmines, left over from the preceding decades of conflict, continued to cause loss of lives and injury to children, mostly boys between 8 and 14 years old in the south and central regions.

Reports were received of sexual violence committed against children by members of the Afghan National Security Forces with no or limited follow-up by the authorities. Moreover, there continued to be reports of boys being sexually abused and exploited by armed forces and groups, including the practice of baccha baazi (dancing boys). Such incidents and their context continue to be difficult to document, but efforts are being made to further investigate.

Eight incidents of abduction of children by armed groups, including the Taliban, were verified in 2010. Children were abducted for various reasons, to intimidate families perceived as pro-Government or to pressure an exchange or release of individuals detained by the authorities. Dozens of additional reports of abduction of children were received during the reporting period, but information on the perpetrators and their motives has been difficult to obtain.

A total of 197 education-related incidents throughout the country were verified. Incidents affecting education included direct attacks against schools, collateral damage, killing and injury of students and education personnel, threats and intimidations, and forced school closures. These incidents were mostly perpetrated by armed groups (86 per cent); 30 per cent of the incidents were carried out in September 2010, the month of the Parliamentary elections, when half of the polling stations were located in schools. Of the 47 verified incidents affecting health delivery, 33 were attributed to armed groups and 14 to pro-Government forces. Incidents included the abduction of medical staff, the looting of medical supplies, improvised explosive device attacks, collateral damage and intimidation. The highest incident levels were recorded in the north-eastern, eastern and northern regions. The occupation of schools and health facilities by pro-Government forces is a concern, including five verified incidents of school occupation by the international military forces in 2010.

Humanitarian access continued to be seriously affected by widespread insecurity, especially in the south and south-east of the country in 2010. Significantly increased levels of insecurity in these areas, as well as the northern, north-eastern and north-western regions, also hindered the capability of aid agencies to assess needs, assist vulnerable populations and monitor provision of assistance. Armed opposition groups were responsible for the majority of incidents, including the abduction of humanitarian personnel, intimidation, the looting of humanitarian aid, and armed attacks against the convoys and staff of humanitarian organizations. Abduction by armed opposition groups remained the most common violation (74 persons abducted in 30 separate cases). In a majority of instances, those abducted were released on the intervention of community elders and religious leaders.

In January 2010, President Karzai outlined a peace and reintegration programme aimed at promoting peace through dialogue with armed opposition groups. In the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme 2010 document of July 2010, however, no specific reference was made, nor resources or responsibilities allocated, for the particular needs of children directly affected by armed conflict.

Information on progress made by parties to conflict on dialogue and action plans to halt the recruitment and use of children, patterns of killing and maiming of children or rape and other forms of sexual violence against children in armed conflict

On 30 January 2011, the action plan for the prevention of underage recruitment into the Afghan National Security Forces was signed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Zalmay Rassoul, and my Special Representative for Afghanistan, and witnessed by my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. In the action plan, the Government of Afghanistan committed itself to preventing underage recruitment in the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police, including the Afghan Local Police, and the National Directorate of Security. In addition, the Government committed itself to addressing issues of sexual violence against children by its security forces, and of killing and maiming in contravention of international humanitarian law. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict also met with high-level stakeholders and obtained commitments from the Ulema Shura (Council of Clerics), the High Peace Council, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), donors and human rights actors to redouble their efforts in support of the action plan.

As steps towards the development of the action plan, the Ministry of Interior issued an executive order on 24 April 2010 prohibiting children from being recruited or used within ANP, requiring children found in ANP ranks to be separated within 30 days; and calling for investigations and disciplinary action against those found to be in violation of this order. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) undertook its first

unannounced verification visit to the Afghan National Police recruitment and training centre in Kunduz City, Kunduz Province, in May 2010, and noted that the executive order was clearly posted on the walls of the centre, and trainers and new recruits were fully aware of its contents. Further, a Government steering committee on children and armed conflict, consisting of eight Deputy Ministers, the Director of the National Directorate of Security and the Presidential Adviser on Health and Education, was launched on 18 July 2010. The steering committee approved the action plan and established a technical working group, comprising focal points from relevant ministries and the United Nations to ensure its implementation.

While there are no ongoing discussions on action plans with armed groups, dialogue held at the community level in order to carry out protection activities has proven partially successful. Dialogue with armed groups on the recruitment and use of children is impeded by the current situation and the fragmentation within these groups. Additionally, given their ties with those groups engaging in criminal activities, it is often difficult to determine the identification and accountability of these groups for grave violations against children in conflict.

Parties in Afghanistan

1. Afghan National Police *
2. Haqqani network *,†
3. Hezb-i-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar *,†
4. Jamat Sunat al-Dawa Salafia *
5. Latif Mansur Network *
6. Taliban forces *,†
7. Tora Bora Front *

** Parties that recruit and use children.*

† Parties that kill and maim children.