



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **UN: New Report Shows 2024 Was the Worst Year Ever for Children Living in Armed Conflicts**

*For the Second Consecutive Year, UN Secretary-General Releases Record-Breaking Number of Grave Violations Against Children in War in 2024*

New York, June 20, 2025 – For the second year in a row, the United Nations has reported the highest ever number of grave violations against children in armed conflicts. This comes against a backdrop of dramatic budget cuts, including for child protection actors, and an increasing disregard for international law and protection standards.

On June 19, the Secretary-General released his latest Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, detailing 41,370 grave violations verified by UN monitors in 26 armed conflict situations, from January 1 to December 31, 2024. Of these, 36,221 were committed in 2024, while 5,149 occurred in previous years but were verified in 2024. This number represents a staggering 25 percent increase compared to 2023 – which had previously represented the highest number of grave violations ever recorded.

“The evidence is clear – when parties to conflict ignore, willfully misinterpret, or blatantly violate international law and protection standards with impunity, children will pay the price,” said Bethany Ellis, Director of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. “These figures represent real children whose lives have been violently torn from them, whose schools have been bombed, and who have been left without access to lifesaving humanitarian aid. We must reverse this downward spiral now.”

The report highlighted a “persistent and blatant pattern of grave violations and a lack of respect of the special protections afforded to children.” Explosive ordnance and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas continued to take a relentless toll on children. The number of children killed and maimed in 2024 reached 11,967. Incidents of humanitarian access being denied to children rose by 52 percent. For the third straight year, government forces were the main perpetrators of killing and maiming children, denial of humanitarian access, and attacks against schools and hospitals.

Verified cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children also rose by 35 percent, including a sharp increase in gang rape – highlighting the systematic use of sexual violence as a tactic of war. Stigma, fear of reprisals, lack of trust in or access to justice systems all contribute to sexual violence remaining among the most underreported grave violations against children. Haiti, Nigeria, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

Central African Republic, and Ethiopia saw the biggest increases in sexual violence against children in 2024.

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained the situation with the highest number of verified grave violations in 2024, with a total of 8,554. The UN verified the killing or maiming of 2,917 Palestinian children and 15 Israeli children in 2024, and two Israeli children and 1,637 Palestinian children killed and 1,147 Palestinian children maimed between October and December 2023. The reported killing of an additional 4,470 Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip in 2024 is pending verification. Israeli armed and security forces were found responsible for 7,188 of the total violations, including the use of 27 children as human shields, 473 attacks against schools and hospitals, and 5,091 denials of humanitarian access for children. Last year, in a [long overdue](#) decision, the Secretary-General finally included Israeli armed and security forces and Palestinian armed groups in his “list of shame” for the first time. Israeli armed and security forces, Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s Al-Quds Brigades, and Hamas’ Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades and affiliated factions all remain listed this year.

Violations against children also rose sharply in Lebanon, Mozambique, Haiti, Ethiopia, and Ukraine. The Democratic Republic of the Congo remained the situation with the second-highest overall number of grave violations, followed by Somalia, Nigeria, and Haiti. In Haiti, the UN documented nearly a fivefold increase in grave violations, leading the Secretary-General to add the Viv Ansanm coalition to the listed annex of perpetrators. Armed groups were also newly listed in Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sudan.

Some warring parties evaded listing this year despite being found responsible for hundreds of violations. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, armed groups Chini ya Tuna and Mouvement national congolais each recruited nearly 300 children, yet were not listed. Israeli armed forces were not listed for grave violations committed in Lebanon – despite the UN attributing 541 child casualties and 32 attacks on schools and hospitals to these forces.

Civil society groups have [repeatedly called](#) on Secretary-General Guterres to include all parties responsible for child rights violations in the annexes of his annual report, applying the same standards to all perpetrators. The Secretary-General’s annual report and its annexed list have served as a unique and largely effective tool for identifying perpetrators and pressuring them to end violations and protect children in times of war. The report’s impact and credibility rely largely on the application of the same standards to all parties across all armed conflicts.

The Secretary-General also indicated that Pakistan, the Philippines, and Iraq will not be included in future reports. While no warring parties had been listed in the annexes for violations against children in Pakistan, the removal of Iraq and the Philippines is unprecedented as the Secretary-General simultaneously delisted the armed groups in

those contexts from the annexes – offering no explanation or even acknowledgement of these delistings. In Iraq, Da’esh had been listed for all five “trigger” grave violations, while three armed groups in the Philippines had been listed for recruiting and using children. Citing measures adopted by the respective governments and the level of violations as the reasons for his decision, Guterres does not address the armed groups who were the primary perpetrators of these grave violations against children. The removal of Iraq from the report is particularly concerning given the continuing plight of the 531 children who were still detained for actual or alleged association with armed groups at the end of 2024.

While the numbers of grave violations vividly illustrate the devastating toll of intensifying armed conflicts on children, anxiety is already growing for the impact of global funding cuts on UN monitoring efforts, child protection systems, and the work of essential civil society partners. The situation is raising alarms about a possible drop off in the availability of critical data on grave violations in the coming years – making understanding the impact of war on children, holding perpetrators accountable, responding to harms, and allocating resources appropriately much more challenging.

**For more information, please contact:**

Bethany Ellis, Director, Watchlist – [bethanye@watchlist.org](mailto:bethanye@watchlist.org), +1 401 339 4483

**See also:**

- [Open Letter from 21 Nongovernmental Organizations \(NGOs\) to the UN Secretary-General Calling for a Credible, Evidence-based List of Perpetrators, May 28, 2025](#)
- [“A Credible List”: Recommendations for the Secretary-General’s 2025 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, April 2025](#)

*Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a New York-based coalition of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that seeks to end violations against children in armed conflict and guarantee their rights. For more information, please visit: <https://watchlist.org/>.*