

Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Domestic Law and Policy

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About Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (Watchlist) strives to end violations against children in armed conflicts and to guarantee their rights. As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national, and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflicts in order to influence key decision-makers and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children. Watchlist is a fiscally sponsored project of United Charitable, a US-based 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization.

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INTRODUCTION

As part of Watchlist’s “Bringing Multilateralism Back Home” project, this report examines domestic laws and policies in the Philippines relevant to protecting children during armed conflict. This analysis builds on an earlier Watchlist report that examined trends across 25 situations of concern on the United Nations’ (UN) children and armed conflict (CAAC) agenda, as well as Watchlist’s follow-up report presenting case studies of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Colombia, and Ukraine.¹

The Philippines has been a situation of concern since the Secretary-General published the first list, in 2002, of parties to armed conflict responsible for perpetrating grave violations against children during armed conflict.² Between 2002 and 2025 in the Philippines, the UN documented harms against children that included all of the six grave violations—those being recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and/or hospitals, abduction of children, and denial of humanitarian access for children—as well as incidents of detention of children and the military use of schools and/or hospitals. In his 2025 annual report on CAAC, the Secretary-General announced that the Philippines will not be included in his future

annual reports on CAAC, unless the conflict dynamics in the country shift, due to the comparatively low level of grave violations in the country and in light of preventive measures adopted by the Government of the Philippines.³ This decision followed a June 2025 agreement between the UN and the Philippine government on a road map for child protection.

In the context of the removal of the Philippines as a situation of concern from the Secretary-General’s future annual reports on CAAC, this report examines over two decades of Philippine government efforts to develop relevant law and policy. Notably, these efforts include the adoption in 2019 of “Republic Act No. 11188: An Act Providing for the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict and Providing Penalties for Violations Thereof”

¹ Rob Grace, “[Bringing Multilateralism Back Home: Integrating International Legal and Policy Instruments Relevant to the UN’s Children and Armed Conflict Agenda into Domestic Law](#),” Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, August 2025; and Rob Grace, “[Preventing and Addressing Grave Violations Against Children During Armed Conflict in Domestic Law: Lessons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Colombia, and Ukraine](#),” Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, November 2025.

² “[Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict](#),” S/2002/1299, November 26, 2002, para. 44. The listing mechanism initially focused solely on recruitment and use of children but now also encompasses killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and/or hospitals, and abduction of children. Denial of humanitarian access for children is the only grave violation that does not trigger listing in the Secretary-General’s reports.

³ “[Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General](#),” A/79/878-S/2025/247, June 17, 2025, para. 345.

(hereafter the CSAC Law).⁴ As this report will examine in depth, this law—among many others adopted in the country—comprehensively addresses harms that children in armed conflict face. Nevertheless, as this report will also discuss, key challenges persist for protecting children from harms related to armed conflict in the Philippines.

This report does not address policies and rules adopted by non-state armed groups (NSAGs) operating in the Philippines. New People’s Army (NPA), Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) have all been previously listed by the Secretary-General as responsible for recruitment and use of children during armed conflict. Although examining the conduct of NSAGs is necessary to understand the full picture of protecting children impacted by armed conflict, this report focuses specifically on presenting a case study of governmental legal and policy efforts.⁵

This report is based on an analysis of legal and policy documents in the Philippines, a desk review of relevant literature, and research interviews and consultations conducted with practitioners that have experience and/or expertise relevant to the CAAC agenda in the Philippines.⁶ After this introduction, Part I offers a brief historical overview of the implementation of the UN’s CAAC agenda in the Philippines. Part II discusses key domestic laws and policies in the Philippines relevant to protecting children during armed conflict. Part III presents persistent challenges. Part IV offers recommendations for further action by domestic and international stakeholders.

⁴ [“Republic Act No. 11188: An Act Providing for the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict and Providing Penalties for Violations Thereof,”](#) 2019.

⁵ For a case study of UN advocacy and engagement with the MILF, see [“Children in Armed Conflict: Philippines, Processes and Lessons Learned 2009-2017,”](#) UNICEF, 2019.

⁶ For a collection of domestic laws and policies in the Philippines relevant to CAAC, see [“Philippines,”](#) National Legal and Policy Documents, Watchlist Digital Library on Children and Armed Conflict.

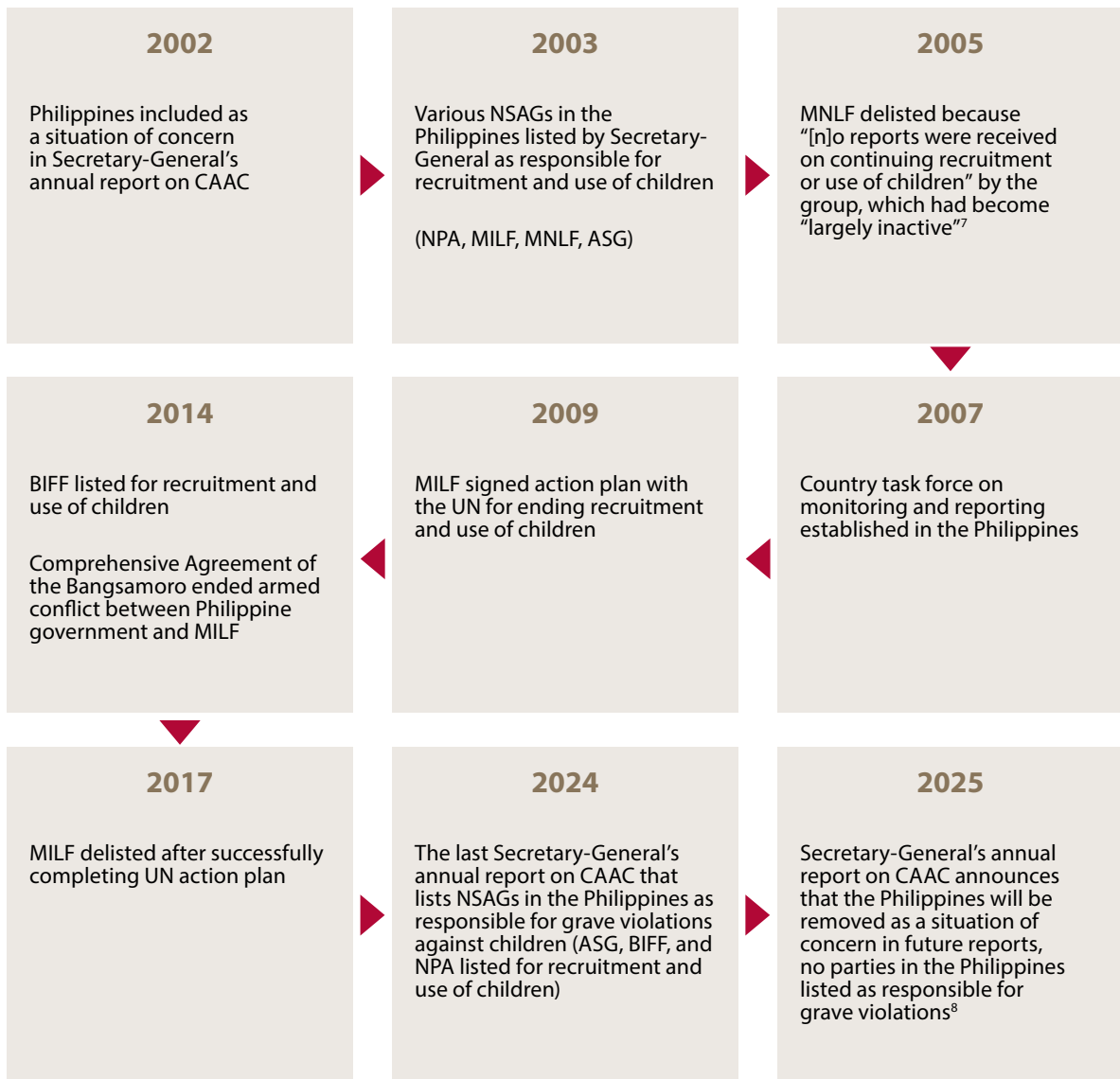
I. CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT IN THE PHILIPPINES: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

When the UN began its systematic engagement on protecting children impacted by armed conflict in the 1990s, children in the Philippines had suffered from several decades of armed conflict.

Since the 1960s, the Philippine government has battled the NPA, as well as various other NSAGs—first the MNLF, and then the MILF and ASG, which emerged as MNLF splinter groups—seeking independence or autonomy for the southern island of Mindanao. The Philippine government and the MILF forged a peace agreement in 2014 that created the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim

Mindanao (BARMM), but the conflict in Mindanao continues between the Philippine government and other NSAGs—notably ASG, BIFF, and Dawlah Islamiyah groups—and also entails intra-Moro violence between local clans. Notably, the MILF was delisted as a perpetrator of recruitment and use of children in 2017 after successfully completing a UN action plan. **[See Figure 1 on the following page.]**

Figure 1: Key Developments in Implementing the Children and Armed Conflict Agenda in the Philippines



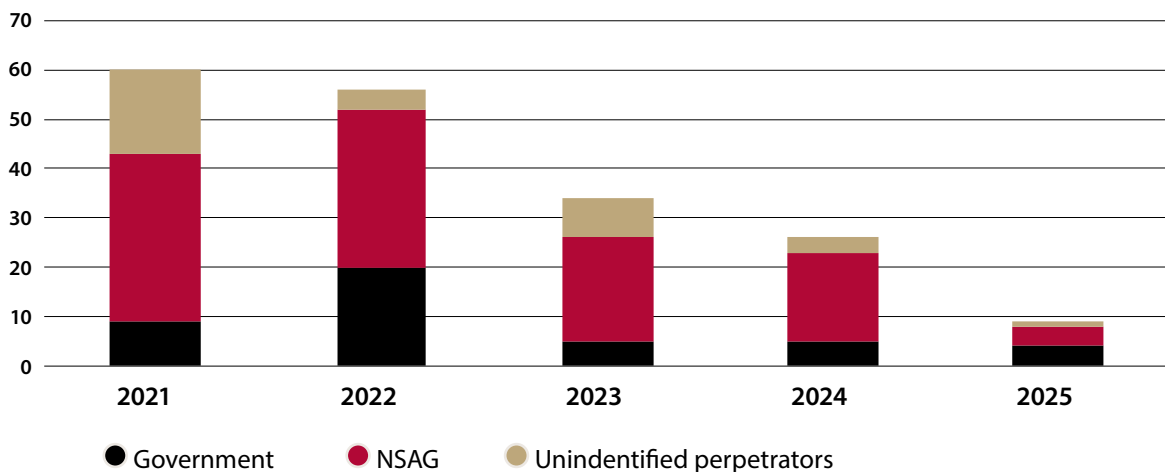
⁷ See "Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General," A/59/695-S/2005/72, February 9, 2005, para. 46. Additionally, ASG was not listed in the Secretary-General's annual report on CAAC in 2005 since the UN did not receive reports of recruitment and use for which ASG was responsible, but the group was relisted in the Secretary-General's annual report on CAAC in 2006.

⁸ However, in the report, the Secretary-General does "call upon the New People's Army to sign an action plan with the United Nations." See "Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General," A/79/878-S/2025/247, June 17, 2025, para. 328.

The UN has verified grave violations against children perpetrated by the Philippine military and civilian governmental security actors—notably, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP)—as well as numerous NSAGs.⁹ Over the past several years, leading up to the Secretary-General’s decision to remove the Philippines as a situation of concern from his future reports on CAAC, the level of verified grave violations has declined. [See Figure 2 below.]

However, the impact of armed conflict on communities, including children, endures in the Philippines. As of 2023, data gathered by the Philippine government and humanitarian organizations indicates that there were approximately 135,820 displaced persons in Mindanao, approximately 87,424 of whom were displaced due to armed conflict, 7,908 from “rido” (clan feuds), and 12,905 from crime and violence.¹⁰ Additionally, in Visayas and Luzon (northern and central areas of the country),

Figure 2: Grave Violations Against Children Verified by the UN in the Philippines (2021-2025)



Source: Secretary-General’s annual reports on CAAC from 2021-2025.

Caution is warranted when drawing conclusions about increases or decreases of grave violations from year to year because the UN’s ability to document and verify violations can fluctuate due to security and access constraints, as well as other factors.

⁹ According to the Secretary-General’s annual reports on CAAC between 2021-2025, the UN verified grave violations perpetrated by the AFP, the PNP, Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Units (an auxiliary force of the AFP), as well as attacks on schools “linked to ‘red tagging’ by the Government’s National Intelligence Coordinating Agency jointly with the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.” These reports also present data on verified grave violations perpetrated by the NPA, ASG, BIFF, Dawlah Islamiyah-Hassan Group, and Dawlah Islamiyah-Maute Group. See “[Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General](#),” A/75/873-S/2021/437, May 6, 2021, paras 264-270; “[Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General](#),” A/76/871-S/2022/493, June 23, 2022, paras 280-286; “[Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General](#),” A/77/895-S/2023/363, June 5, 2023, paras 299-306; “[Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General](#),” A/78/842-S/2024/384, June 3, 2024, paras 311-316; “[Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General](#),” A/79/878-S/2025/247, June 17, 2025, paras 322-325.

¹⁰ “[Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Report of the Secretary-General](#),” S/2024/626, September 23, 2024, para. 4.

sporadic clashes and continued military offensives against the NPA fuel protection issues and displacement, threatening the security of children and their families.

The Philippines is a State Party to many, although not all, of the main international treaties relevant to implementing the CAAC agenda, including:

- Geneva Conventions I-IV (1949)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions (1977)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)
- Convention Against Torture (1984)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989)
- Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (1997)
- International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999)
- Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000)
- Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) (2000)

The Philippines is also a signatory to the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA) and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. However, the Philippines has not signed the Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Safe Schools Declaration.

The Philippines was previously a State Party to the International Criminal Court (ICC), having signed the Rome Statute in 2000 before ratifying the treaty in 2011 and then withdrawing from the ICC in 2019. The ICC's jurisdiction in the Philippines encompasses the timespan during which the Philippines was a State Party to the Rome Statute, and an open ICC case remains ongoing as of this report's publication against former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte for alleged crimes against humanity perpetrated during the government's "war on drugs." Philippine authorities arrested Duterte and surrendered him to the ICC in 2025.¹¹

¹¹ "Republic of the Philippines," International Criminal Court.

II. KEY LAWS AND POLICIES

The Philippine Constitution, adopted in 1987, establishes a foundation of human rights on which the country’s legislative and policy framework for child protection builds.¹²

The Constitution “adopts the generally accepted principles of international law as part of the law of the land” and emphasizes that “[t]he State values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full

respect for human rights.”¹³ The Constitution also articulates rights and State obligations specific to children and youth. [See textbox below.]

Constitution of the Philippines: Provisions Specific to Children and Youth

Child-specific Rights and Protections

- “The State shall defend... [t]he right of children to assistance, including proper care and nutrition, and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation, and other conditions prejudicial to their development.” (Article XV, Section 3(2))

Healthcare

- “The State shall adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach to health development which shall endeavor to make essential goods, health and other social services available to all the people at affordable cost. **There shall be priority for the needs of the underprivileged sick, elderly, disabled, women, and children.** The State shall endeavor to provide free medical care to paupers.” (Article XIII, Section 11, emphasis added)

¹² Additionally, even before the adoption of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, earlier legislation already laid a child protection foundation. Notably, “[Presidential Degree No. 603: The Child and Youth Welfare Code](#),” issued in 1974, among other measures, created the Council for the Welfare of Children, which is the oversight agency for all concerns related to children.

¹³ “[Constitution of the Philippines](#),” Article II, Sections 2 and 11.

Constitution of the Philippines: Provisions Specific to Children and Youth

Education

- “The State shall give priority to education, science and technology, arts, culture, and sports to foster patriotism and nationalism, accelerate social progress, and promote total human liberation and development.” (Article II, Section 17)
- “The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all.” (Article XIV, Section 1)
- “The State shall... [e]stablish, maintain, and support a complete, adequate, and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society,” and “[e]stablish and maintain a system of free public education in the elementary and high school levels. Without limiting the natural right of parents to rear their children, elementary education is compulsory for all children of school age.” (Article XIV, Sections 1-2)¹⁴

Protection of Youth

- “The State recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and shall promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being. It shall inculcate in the youth patriotism and nationalism, and encourage their involvement in public and civic affairs.” (Article II, Section 13)

Additional non-child-specific human rights provisions in the Philippine Constitution are also relevant to protecting children during armed conflict. Specifically, the Constitution:

- enshrines the right to life;
- prohibits torture and cruel, degrading, or inhuman punishment;
- abolishes the death penalty (although grants Congress the ability to pass legislation reinstating it “for compelling reasons involving heinous crimes”);
- establishes limitations—including congressional control and Supreme Court oversight—on the President’s ability to institute martial law; and
- mandates the creation of the Commission on Human Rights responsible for investigating alleged violations of civil and political rights, promoting human rights via education and dissemination, and other activities.¹⁵

Even before the emergence of the UN’s Children and Armed Conflict agenda in the mid to late 1990s, the Philippines had enacted legislation specifically geared toward addressing harms and needs faced by children

¹⁴ See also *ibid.*, at Article XIV, Sections 3-5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, at Article III, Sections 1, 12, and 19; Article VII, Section 18; and Article XIII, Sections 17-18. The death penalty was reinstated in the Philippines in 1993 and then once again abolished in 2006. As of this report’s publication, the death penalty remains abolished in the Philippines. See “Philippines and the Death Penalty,” Parliamentarians for Global Action.

during armed conflict. “Republic Act No. 7610” of 1992 defined a child as any person under the age of eighteen and declared children as “Zones of Peace.”¹⁶ To “promote the goal of children as zones of peace,” the 1992 Philippine law:

- prohibited intentional targeting of children, recruitment of children by armed actors, and the military use of “[p]ublic infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and rural health units;”
- established that “[d]elivery of basic social services such as education, primary health and emergency relief services shall be kept unhampered;”
- required that children “be given priority during evacuation as a result of armed conflict;” and
- mandated a monitoring and reporting process for children impacted by armed conflict.¹⁷

However, the need to reform this law was a frequent point of advocacy in the Secretary-General’s subsequent country-specific reports on CAAC in the Philippines. In particular, the Secretary-General emphasized the need to treat children impacted by armed conflict as victims instead of perpetrators, focusing not on prosecution of children but rather reintegration.¹⁸

These advocacy efforts ultimately resulted in the adoption of the 2019 CSAC Law, which took several steps to address shortcomings of the 1992 law and comprehensively incorporated the UN’s CAAC agenda into the country’s domestic legal framework. **First**, similar to the 1992 law, the 2019 CSAC Law adopts a straight-eighteen approach, defining a child as anyone under the age of eighteen.¹⁹

Second, the law clarifies that children involved in armed conflict should be treated as victims, not perpetrators. Toward this end, the law declares that State policy shall be to “[c]onsider as paramount the best interests of children, and treat all children involved in, affected by or displaced by armed conflict as victims;” enshrines children’s “right to be treated as victims;” and requires the State, upon taking into custody a child involved in armed conflict, to transfer the child to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) within 24 hours.²⁰ The law also obliges the State to “institute policies, programs and services for the rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of children in situations of armed conflict.”²¹

¹⁶ “Republic Act No. 7610,” 1992, Sections 3(a) and 22. Additionally, the law’s definition of children also encompasses—in Section 3(a)—people older than eighteen who “are unable to fully take care of themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation or discrimination because of a physical or mental disability or condition.”

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, at Sections 22-26.

¹⁸ The 1992 law allowed children to be arrested for reasons related to armed conflict but elaborated rights for arrested children, including the right to be detained separately from adults. See *ibid.*, at Section 25. For the Secretary-General’s advocacy on this issue, see “[Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines](#),” S/2008/272, April 24, 2008, para. 67; “[Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines](#),” S/2010/36, January 21, 2010, para. 54; “[Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines](#),” S/2013/419, July 12, 2013, paras 40 and 56; “[Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines](#),” S/2017/294, April 5, 2017, paras 80-81; and “[Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines](#),” S/2020/777, August 4, 2020, para. 53.

¹⁹ “Republic Act No. 11188,” 2019, Chapter 1, Section 5(g). Additionally, as with the 1992 law, the definition of a child in the 2019 CSAC Law also encompasses a person who is eighteen “or older but who is unable to fully take care of one’s self; or protect one’s self from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation or discrimination; and unable to act with discernment because of physical or mental disability or condition.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, at Chapter I, Section 2(d); Chapter II, Section 7(c); and Chapter VII, Section 24. The law also states—in Chapter VII, Section 24(e)—“in cases where handover is not possible within the prescribed twenty-four (24)-hour period due to valid reasons and without the fault of the person having custody of the child, the handover shall be done within the next seventy-two (72) hours.”

²¹ *Ibid.*, at Chapter VII, Section 22.

Third, the law elaborates other rights of children in armed conflict, including the right to be protected from each of the six grave violations against children, and establishes State obligations to prevent grave

violations.²² The law criminalizes and establishes clear penalties for each grave violation and other violations against children.²³ [See textbox below.]

Acts Prohibited and Criminalized by the 2019 “Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Law”²⁴

- Killing and maiming of children
- Torture committed against children
- Rape of children and other forms of sexual violence
- Cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment committed against children
- Abduction of children
- Taking children as hostages or using them as human shields
- Recruitment, conscription, or enlistment of children into government forces and other armed groups
- Acts of gender-based violence against children
- Refusal or denial of humanitarian access or assistance to children
- Use or involvement of children involved in armed conflict in any capacity
- Attacks on schools, hospitals, places of worship, evacuation centers and settlements and other public places such as recreation parks, playgrounds, and malls (includes a prohibition on the military use of these civilian objects)
- Hamleting
- Food blockade
- Intentional delayed reporting of a child in custody
- False reporting of a child in custody
- False branding of children or labeling children as children involved in armed conflict
- Arrest, arbitrary detention, or unlawful prosecution of children allegedly associated with armed groups or government forces

²² *Ibid.*, at Chapters II-III.

²³ *Ibid.*, at Chapter IV.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Fourth, the law clarifies implementation responsibilities for various governmental bodies. For example, the law specifies that Family Courts have jurisdiction over crimes elaborated in the law; the Commission on Human Rights, the Department of Justice, the Philippine National Police, and other law enforcement agencies are responsible for designating prosecutors and investigators; and the Inter-Agency Committee on Children in Situations of Armed Conflict is responsible for a range of tasks that include developing guidelines and programs for how government agencies should handle children involved in armed conflict, conducting human rights training, and implementing a monitoring, reporting, and response system for grave violations against children.²⁵

Regarding criminal responsibility, the law clarifies that “[i]n no case shall the official capacity exempt a person from criminal responsibility or constitute a ground for reduction of sentence.”²⁶ The law also establishes the criminal responsibility of superiors in instances when a “superior either knew or, owing to the circumstances at the time, should have known that the subordinates were committing or were about to commit such crimes; or... failed to take all necessary, legitimate and reasonable measures to prevent or repress their commission or to submit the matter to the competent authorities for investigation and prosecution.”²⁷

Notably, the law imposes greater restrictions on parties to armed conflict during the conduct of hostilities than those enshrined in international humanitarian law (IHL). For example, IHL prohibits attacks intentionally directed against civilians (including children), attacks for which the expected incidental harm to civilians and civilian objects is excessive compared with the anticipated direct military advantage, and attacks for which all feasible precautions have not been taken. In contrast, the CSAC Law prohibits not only direct but also indirect killing and maiming of children, including killing and maiming that results from crossfire.²⁸ IHL also prohibits attacks intentionally directed against hospitals, schools, and other civilian objects, as long as they do not become legitimate military objectives. The CSAC Law prohibits attacks “on schools, hospitals, places of worship, evacuation centers and settlements, and other public places such as recreation parks, playgrounds, and malls” without specifying exceptions for instances when these civilian objects become legitimate military objectives.²⁹

Additional laws relevant to the UN’s Children and Armed Conflict agenda span many other areas of the domestic legal landscape in the Philippines, including international criminal law; labor protections; torture; trafficking; child justice; children’s access to emergency relief; and indigenous peoples’ rights. **[See textbox on the following page.]**

²⁵ *Ibid.*, at Chapter VI, Section 17 and Chapter VIII, Sections 25-26.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, at Chapter V, Section 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, at Chapter V, Section 14.

²⁸ For an analysis that diagnoses likely practical difficulties of implementing this particular provision, including possible unintended adverse effects for child protection, see Lance Ryan Villarose, “[Protecting the Child Who Bears Arms: How the Status of Zones of Peace for Children Under Philippine Act No. 11188 Distorts International Humanitarian Law](#),” *Asia Pacific Journal of International Humanitarian Law*, vol. 4 (2023).

²⁹ “Republic Act No. 11188,” 2019, Chapter IV, Section 9(b)(9).

Additional Domestic Laws in the Philippines Relevant to Protecting Children During Armed Conflict

International Criminal Law

“**Republic Act No. 9851**” (2009) criminalizes genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, incorporating provisions of the Rome Statute into domestic law; establishes that superiors can be criminally liable for ordering illegal acts and that “official capacity” does not exempt people from criminal responsibility.

Indigenous Peoples’ Rights

“**Republic Act No. 8371**” (1997) prohibits recruitment of indigenous cultural communities’ / indigenous peoples’ children into armed forces.

Labor Protection

“**Republic Act No. 9231**” (2003) prohibits the “worst forms of child labor,” which includes recruitment and use of children during armed conflict, as well as work that exposes children to sexual abuse.

Children’s Access to Emergency Relief and Protection

“**Republic Act No. 10821**” (2015) establishes State obligations for ensuring the protection of children’s rights—including access to essential services, such as healthcare, food, water, clothing, and sanitary and hygiene kits—during disasters and emergencies. The law also includes provisions to ensure the continuity of education during emergencies, including restrictions and conditions on the use of schools as evacuation centers.

Torture

“**Republic Act No. 9745**” (2009) prohibits and criminalizes torture, including against children.

Child Justice

“**Republic Act No. 9344**” (2006) establishes rights and protections for children in the context of legal proceedings, including a State obligation to protect the best interests of the child, prohibiting capital punishment and life sentences for children, and requiring that children brought into State custody be immediately transferred to the Social Welfare and Development Office or to an accredited NGO. This law also requires local government units who have not done so to establish and fund Local Councils for the Protection of Children (LCPCs).³⁰ The law increases the minimum age of criminal liability to fifteen (previously set at nine by the Revised Penal Code).³¹

Trafficking

“**Republic Act No. 9208**” (2003) prohibits trafficking of persons, including children. “**Republic Act No. 10364**” (2012) amends the 2003 law, including by expanding the scope of acts that constitute illegal trafficking in persons; prohibiting attempted trafficking, as well as serving as an accomplice or accessory to trafficking of persons; and mandating the creation of an anti-trafficking in persons central database.

Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence

“**Republic Act No. 8505**” (1998) mandates the government to create rape crisis centers in every province and city. “**Republic Act No. 9262**” (2004) provides protective measures and establishes penalties for violence against women and children inflicted by intimate partners. “**Republic Act No. 11648**” (2021) sets sixteen as the minimum age of sexual consent.³² “**Republic Act No. 11596**” (2021) prohibits child marriage.

³⁰ See “**Republic Act No. 4881**,” 1967, which had initially mandated the creation of LCPCs several decades earlier.

³¹ See “**Act No. 3815: The Revised Penal Code**,” 1930, Article 101. Additionally, after the adoption of “**Republic Act No. 9344**” in 2006, “**Republic Act No. 10630**,” 2013, Section 3 added further clarity, stating, “A child is deemed to be fifteen (15) years of age on the day of the fifteenth anniversary of his/her birthdate.”

³² Previously, “**Republic Act No. 8353**,” adopted in 1997, had set this age at twelve, which was one of the lowest in the world. Notably, “**Republic Act No. 11648**” (2021) includes a so-called “Romeo and Juliet” clause whereby sexual acts between someone under sixteen (yet over thirteen) and an individual three years older does not constitute statutory rape if the act is consensual, non-abusive, and non-exploitative.

The Philippine government has also instituted a wide range of policies and other implementation measures. Notably, the Philippine Development Plan for 2023–2038 incorporates considerations of child welfare, including for children impacted by armed conflict.³³ Additionally, in December 2024, Executive Order 79 created the MAKABATA program, mandated to be a “one-stop system for addressing and monitoring all issues and concerns of children in need of special protection.”³⁴

Turning to the security sector, the AFP’s Center for Law of Armed Conflict (formerly the Human Rights Office) has produced a handbook on human rights and IHL and has implemented a strategic plan for preventing and responding to grave violations against children.³⁵ The Department of Defence issued a circular in February 2016 that set 460 meters as the minimum safe distance between military patrols and schools and hospitals.³⁶ Additionally, the PNP has a child protection policy that requires that children be treated with respect and dignity and handled in accordance with the law, as well as guidelines and procedures on handling children in armed conflict.³⁷

Various other administrative departments across the government serve child protection functions and have adopted and implemented key policies, including:

- **Commission on Human Rights:** The Commission on Human Rights—created by the 1987 Constitution—includes a Child Rights Center that provides protective services and legal assistance to child victims. In 2021, the Commission on Human Rights published the “Protocols and Guidelines on Monitoring, Reporting and Responding to Cases of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict” to define its roles and responsibilities for training and deploying investigators of violations of the 2019 CSAC Law.³⁸
- **Department of Education:** In 2019, the Department of Education adopted the “National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Zone of Peace,” which outlines the overall strategy for ensuring the safety of learners and school personnel, the continuity of education in situations of armed conflict, and the contribution of schools and education in peacebuilding. This policy framework institutionalized conflict sensitivity, peacebuilding, and community engagement as means to prevent, mitigate, respond to, and recover from armed conflict.³⁹
- **Department of Labor and Employment:** Pursuant to its mandate to prevent child labor, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) in 2023 issued “Guidelines in the Implementation of DOLE Child Labor Prevention and Elimination

³³ “Philippine Development Plan 2023-2038,” Government of the Philippines.

³⁴ “Executive Order No. 79,” December 6, 2024.

³⁵ “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines,” S/2013/419, July 12, 2013, para. 5; and “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines,” S/2017/294, April 5, 2017, para. 56.

³⁶ As the Secretary-General has noted, this distance “is the effective range of the Armed Forces standard-issue long firearms. However, the circular also contains a number of concerning aspects, including its definition of schools, provisions on the direct delivery of social welfare services to child victims by the Armed Forces and references to the conduct of civil-military activities in schools.” See “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines,” S/2017/294, April 5, 2017, para. 57.

³⁷ “Guidelines and Procedures to Guarantee the Special Protection and Safety of Children While They are in the Custody of the Philippine National Police,” 2021; “Guidelines and Procedures in the Handling of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict (CSAC) by the Philippine National Police (PNP),” 2022.

³⁸ “Protocol and Guidelines on Monitoring, Reporting, and Responding to Cases of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict,” Child Rights Center, Commission on Human Rights, 2021.

³⁹ “National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Zones of Peace,” 2019.

Program” and institutionalized an inter-agency quick action mechanism to respond to the worst forms of child labor, especially cases that require the immediate removal of children from hazardous environments.⁴⁰

- **Department of Social Welfare and Development.** The child protection policy of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) focuses on protecting and offering psycho-social services for children who are endangered or threatened by circumstances that affect their survival and development.⁴¹ Agencies attached to the DSWD, such as the National Youth Commission (NYC) and the Council for Welfare of Children (CWC), are tasked with formulating policies and monitoring the implementation of laws, programs, and projects for children and youth. The CWC spearheaded the crafting of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR), as mandated by the 2019 CSAC Law. The IRR, which was approved in June 2019, tasks the DSWD with ensuring that all Local Social Welfare and Development Offices (LSWDOs) nationwide are trained and capable to manage cases of children in situations of armed conflict.⁴² The DSWD is also piloting an initiative called PEACE Project, which aims to protect children involved in armed conflict.⁴³
- **Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission.** The Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission is the main government human rights institution

in the BARMM. The “Children Ombud Guidelines of the Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission—Protection and Promotion of Children’s Rights in the Bangsamoro” articulates the Commission’s policies for addressing children’s human rights issues.⁴⁴

- **Ministry of Social Services and Development in the BARMM.** The Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) is a government agency in the BARMM that provides social protection and welfare services for vulnerable populations, including children. Notably, in November 2025, the BARMM launched the “Guideline on Protocols for Handling Children in Situations of Armed Conflict (CSAC),” an initiative led by the MSSD along with the Regional Sub-Committee for the Welfare of Children and the Regional Juvenile Justice and Welfare Committee.⁴⁵

Several acts of legislation relevant to protecting children during armed conflict have been passed by the Philippine House of Representatives, but as of this report’s publication, have not yet been enacted into law. These bills are:

- **“An Act Protecting the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons and Penalizing the Acts of Arbitrary Internal Displacement,”** which includes numerous provisions relevant to the protection of displaced children;

⁴⁰ The inter-agency task force is composed of law enforcement agencies, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the DOLE as the convener. See “[Guidelines in the Implementation of the DOLE Child Labor Prevention and Elimination Program](#),” 2023.

⁴¹ See “[Revised DSWD Protocol for Social Workers and Allied Professionals in Handling Children in Situations of Armed Conflict \(CSAC\)](#),” Memorandum No. 12, Department of Social Welfare and Development, 2025.

⁴² “[UNICEF Commends Philippines Government in Taking Next Step to Protect Children in Armed Conflict](#),” UNICEF Philippines, June 14, 2019.

⁴³ “[DSWD to Pilot PEACE Project for Children Involved in Armed Conflict](#),” Department of Social Welfare and Development, April 28, 2025.

⁴⁴ “[Children Ombud Guidelines of the Bangsamoro Human Rights Commission—Protection and Promotion of Children’s Rights in the Bangsamoro](#),” 2024.

⁴⁵ “[BARMM Strengthens Child Protection, Protocols for Handling Children in Armed Conflict, Formally Launched](#),” Ministry of Social Services and Development, November 3, 2025.

- ***“An Act Defining the Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Human Rights Defenders, Declaring State Responsibilities, and Instituting Effective Mechanisms for the Protection and Promotion of These Rights and Freedoms,”*** which aims to bolster protections for human rights defenders, including those advocating to uphold child rights; and
- ***“An Act Strengthening the Commission on Human Rights as a National Human Rights Institution,”*** intended to serve as the first formal charter for the Commission on Human Rights.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ See “House Bill No. 348: An Act Protecting the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons and Penalizing the Acts of Arbitrary Internal Displacement,” June 30, 2025; “House Bill No. 3935: An Act Defining the Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Human Rights Defenders, Declaring State Responsibilities, and Instituting Effective Mechanisms for the Protection and Promotion of these Rights and Freedoms,” August 20, 2025; and “House Bill No. 4835: An Act Strengthening the Commission on Human Rights as a National Human Rights Institution,” September 24, 2025.

III. ONGOING CHALLENGES

1) Detention and Treatment of Children Allegedly Associated with Armed Groups

Even after the adoption of the 2019 CSAC Law, concerns persist about detention and treatment of children allegedly associated with NSAGs. In his 2024 country-specific report on CAAC in the Philippines, the Secretary-General “call[ed] upon the Government to ensure that detained children are immediately handed over and referred to civilian facilities, instead of detention centres, in accordance with the law, and are provided with adequate reintegration and support services.”⁴⁷ Additionally, the Secretary-General stated, “I remain concerned by the Armed Forces’ process of ‘deradicalization’ for formerly associated children currently in their custody,” and he “call[ed] upon the Government to continue the implementation of Republic Act No. 11188, *inter alia*, by taking all necessary measures to prevent the extrajudicial killing, torture and abduction of children, to thoroughly investigate alleged cases of violations against children, including sexual violence, and to bring perpetrators to justice, including in cases involving the armed and security forces.”⁴⁸

The lack of appropriate transitional care facilities for children impacted by armed conflict is one significant contributing factor to the AFP detaining children. As the Commission on Human Rights has stated, the lack of such facilities “has led to instances—particularly in Mindanao—where children who are rescued or apprehended in the context of armed conflict are temporarily housed in military camps,” and additionally, “Such arrangements not only contravene the intent of RA 11188 but also place children at further risk of trauma and rights violations.”⁴⁹

2) Counterterrorism Law and Policy

Counterterrorism laws and policies in the Philippines present a wide range of risks to children in the Philippines. In 2020, the Government of the Philippines adopted the Anti-Terrorism Act, which human rights activists have criticized for creating a legal framework vulnerable to government abuse. Notably, the law does state, “There shall be due regard for the welfare of any suspects who are elderly, pregnant, persons with disability, women and children while they are under investigation, interrogation or detention.”⁵⁰ However, the law articulates a broad and ambiguous definition of terrorism, grants the government extensive surveillance powers, and allows the AFP and the PNP to detain suspects for

⁴⁷ “Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2024/626, September 23, 2024, para. 42.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, at paras 42 and 46.

⁴⁹ “Human Rights Advisory on Protecting the Rights of Children Affected in Situations of Armed Conflict (CSAC) CHR (VI) No. A2025-014,” Commission on Human Rights, September 9, 2025, p. 8. See also “Children are Zones of Peace: An Assessment of the Three-Year Implementation of Republic Act No. 11188 or the ‘Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act,’” Council for the Welfare of Children, 2023, pp. 104-106 and 121-124.

⁵⁰ “Republic Act No. 11479,” 2020, Section 51. Additionally, given that the term “interrogation” carries a connotation of coercion, pressure, or even intimidation to extract information, the security sector in the Philippines now prefers the term, “custodial briefing.”

twenty-four days without a warrant or charge.⁵¹ The government has used a counterterrorism rationale to justify acts against critics of the government, including via red-tagging, by which the government publicly identifies people as terrorists or terrorist supporters, putting them at risk of arrest, disappearance, killing, or harassment. The government has red-tagged human rights defenders, impacting child and youth activists.⁵² Additionally, the Secretary-General's annual report on CAAC in 2024 documented two attacks against schools "linked to 'red tagging' by the Government's National Intelligence Coordinating Agency jointly with the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict."⁵³

3) Psycho-social Services and Reintegration

Although the 2019 CSAC Law obliges the State to "institute policies, programs and services for the rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of children in situations of armed conflict," departments across the government in the Philippines lack the capacity to fulfill this obligation.⁵⁴ An evaluation of the implementation of the 2019 CSAC Law published by the CWC in 2023 states that "government agencies have protocols in place for rescue [of children in situations of armed conflict], but the continuum of care after that phase is not adequate."⁵⁵ The CWC evaluation discusses "gaps in the aspects of administration of specific programs, interventions, and services that will facilitate the normal development

of the child and his or her reintegration with his/her family and community," and moreover, finds that "post-reintegration interventions are needed to ensure that the child is sustainably cared for and protected after he or she is reunited with his or her family."⁵⁶ In a similar vein, in his country-specific report on CAAC in the Philippines from 2024, the Secretary-General "call[ed] upon the Government to ensure that reintegration programmes are sustainable and integrated into existing governmental systems, including in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, including safeguards to prevent the re-recruitment of children by armed groups."⁵⁷

4) Barriers to Monitoring and Reporting Grave Violations and Other Harms Against Children

Although the documented level of grave violations against children in the Philippines remains low, stakeholders working on child protection in the Philippines widely acknowledge that many cases remain undocumented. The UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, as the Secretary-General has noted, confronted "insecurity in and access to conflict affected areas, along with access restrictions imposed by parties to the conflict," and consequently, the reported data "does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in the Philippines."⁵⁸ Similar challenges impede the Philippine government's monitoring and reporting efforts that are mandated by the 2019 CSAC Law.

⁵¹ "I Turned My Fear into Courage' Red-tagging and State Violence Against Young Human Rights Defenders in the Philippines," Amnesty International, 2024, pp. 16-17.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ "Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General," A/78/842-S/2024/384, June 3, 2024, para. 315.

⁵⁴ "Republic Act No. 11188," 2019, Chapter VII, Section 22.

⁵⁵ "Children are Zones of Peace," p. 114.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ "Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Report of the Secretary-General," S/2024/626, September 23, 2024, para. 42.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, at para. 3.

As the Commission on Human Rights has reported, “[r]estrictions in accessing conflict-affected areas, threats posed by ongoing hostilities, and limitations imposed by armed groups have significantly delayed the validation and timely submission of reports,” and consequently, the Commission’s “quarterly reports may not reflect the actual number or severity of violations occurring on the ground.”⁵⁹ These information gaps, according to the Commission on Human Rights, “hinder responsive action and weaken the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms intended to protect children in conflict zones.”⁶⁰

5) Inter-agency Coordination, Sub-national Implementation, and Legal Harmonization

Child protection efforts in the Philippines—as noted in a report published by Situation of Children in the Philippines (a platform established by UNICEF and several Philippine government agencies)—constitute a “local hybrid government, nongovernment, and localized community-based child protection system.”⁶¹ However, more effective coordination efforts are necessary across different government agencies and levels. According to the Commission on Human Rights, there is a need to “[f]oster stronger collaboration among government agencies, local government units, civil society, and international partners to provide comprehensive support for”

children in situations of armed conflict.⁶² Toward this end, various municipalities have adopted resolutions and ordinances to implement the 2019 CSAC Law.⁶³ Additionally, LCPCs organized across the country at various governmental levels are mandated to advocate for and holistically address child protection issues. However, many of these LCPCs exhibit low levels of actual functionality.⁶⁴ Additionally, many provinces, cities, and municipalities have been unable to pass the Seal of Good Local Governance, an assessment for local government units that includes various criteria—such as social protection, peace and order, health compliance and responsiveness, sustainable education, and youth development—relevant to protecting children during armed conflict.⁶⁵

Also notable is the sometimes ambiguous interoperability between, on the one hand, national law, and on the other hand, regional laws (specifically, in the BARMM) and customary laws and practices of indigenous populations in the Philippines. The BARMM follows a two-track legal system encompassing the Philippine legal system for criminal matters and Shariah laws for personal and family affairs. Additionally, “Republic Act No. 8371” affirms the right of indigenous communities to practice their cultural customs and traditions, including implementing their own justice system with the right to resolve conflict in accordance with local customary

⁵⁹ “Human Rights Advisory,” p. 8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ “Child Protections Systems,” Situation of Children in the Philippines, 2023, p. 2.

⁶² “Human Rights Advisory,” p. 10.

⁶³ For example, see “Municipality of Palanan, Municipal Ordinance No. 2019-30 (An Ordinance Adopting the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict and Providing Penalties for Violations Thereof),” Philippines, 2019; and “Municipality of Paniqui, Resolution No. 049-s2021 (A Resolution Adopting Republic Act No. 11188, An Act for the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict),” Philippines, 2021.

⁶⁴ “Child Protections Systems,” p. 5.

⁶⁵ Another mechanism that monitors the functionality of LCPCs is the Child-Friendly Local Governance Audit, a mandatory audit system that measures and aims to improve the extent to which local governance centers children’s needs. See “Barangay Governance Performance Management System (BGPMS),” Department of the Interior and Local Government.

laws. This provision could conceivably be used as grounds for disputing jurisdiction to try cases related to children affected by situations of armed conflict.

6) Access to Education

Various factors continue to inhibit access to education in the Philippines. Schools in the country struggle with overcrowding, sub-optimal outcomes for students, lack of adequate teachers and resources, and inequitable student access to technology to facilitate digital learning.⁶⁶ Responding to high levels of children lacking access to education, the Government of the Philippines adopted “Republic Act 9155” in 2001, which mandated the State to incorporate into its basic education policy alternative learning programs for children and adult learners lacking access to the formal education system.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, armed conflict has continued to disrupt continuity of education, including in the BARMM, where in 2023, according to the Secretary-General, “in addition to population displacement caused by violent *rido*, or conflicts between armed groups over turf and land, conflict collectively affected hundreds of non-Moro Indigenous Peoples, resulting in the suspension of in-person classes and the deployment of soldiers to the streets so as to provide security for educational personnel reporting for work.”⁶⁸ In 2019, the Department of Education ordered the closure of 55 private schools operated by the Salugpongong Ta’ Tanu Igkanogon Community Learning Center in Davao Region in Mindanao.⁶⁹ Following the closure

of these schools, the Commission on Human Rights issued a statement emphasizing that the protections offered by the 2019 CSAC Law “should not come at the expense of their other rights, as such the right to education.”⁷⁰

7) Capacity Building and Awareness Raising

The Philippine government has undertaken extensive capacity building and awareness raising measures regarding the 2019 CSAC Law, as well as the child protection system in the country more broadly. These efforts have included sensitizing government personnel on international laws and standards relevant to child’s rights; developing curriculum on human rights and IHL for the AFP; and organizing a series of orientation sessions, as well as a social media campaign, geared toward building awareness of the 2019 CSAC Law among key government personnel and the broader public.⁷¹

Nevertheless, key gaps remain. The 2023 evaluation of the 2019 CSAC Law found that, “[w]hile there was a basic awareness of the CSAC Law, there were varying degrees of understanding about its provisions” across a wide spectrum of key stakeholders, including government personnel, the AFP, and social workers.⁷² Notably, the evaluation reported that only ten percent of PNP personnel had received training on the PNP’s child protection protocol, an outcome that may be driven in part by limited resources available

⁶⁶ “Why Every Filipino Child Deserves a Better Education,” World Vision.

⁶⁷ “Case Study: Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) as a Community-based Grassroots Form of Access to Basic Education,” UNESCO, December 6, 2023.

⁶⁸ “Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2024/626, September 23, 2024, para. 7.

⁶⁹ Filane Mikee Cervantes, “NPA’s Use of Salugpongong Schools Violate PH Laws, Int’l Norms,” Philippine News Agency, August 27, 2019.

⁷⁰ Antonio Montalvan II, “Why We Must Defend ‘Lumad’ Schools,” Philippine Daily Inquirer, October 14, 2019.

⁷¹ “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines,” S/2008/272, April 24, 2008, para. 61; “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines,” S/2017/294, April 5, 2017, para. 58; and “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines,” S/2022/569, July 21, 2022, paras 36 and 43-44.

⁷² “Children are Zones of Peace,” p. 121.

for dissemination and advocacy efforts.⁷³ On the lack of adequate capacity among social workers, the Commission on Human Rights has emphasized that the IRR for the 2019 CSAC Law includes a rule that “highlights the need for training social workers, military personnel, and other frontline service providers to handle CSAC cases with sensitivity and professionalism” but that the “current refusal of social workers to accept CSAC reflects a failure to fully implement the provision, leaving the AFP as the default custodian and exposing children to potential violation of their rights”⁷⁴

Additionally, the aforementioned challenges of sub-national implementation are fueled in large part by capacity shortfalls that include limited understanding of child protection and inadequate funds and resources at sub-national levels. This is an especially concerning gap given that local government units are at the forefront of implementing laws and delivering services to their constituents.

8) Birth Registration, Statelessness, and Child Protection for Foreign Nationals

The Philippines has an overall high birth registration rate—surpassing ninety percent—but this still leaves millions of Filipinos lacking birth registration.⁷⁵ Lacking birth registration can impede people’s access to education, healthcare, and other essential services and can leave children at risk of becoming stateless. Recent digital birth registration efforts led by the UN Refugee Agency in collaboration with UNICEF have taken steps toward addressing this problem, especially in the BARMM, where children have endured without birth registration, especially in the context of forced displacement.⁷⁶ There is also ambiguity among local child protection stakeholders about the extent to which domestic legal and policy frameworks protect children without Filipino birth registration, including foreign nationals. Although the 2019 CSAC Law defines children as any person under the age of eighteen, the law has been interpreted as applying only to Filipino nationals. As the Commission on Human Rights has stated, this interpretation “leaves frontline responders—such as the military, social workers, and child protection agencies—without clear directives on how to manage foreign [children impacted by armed conflict], especially in border areas where armed groups operate across national lines.”⁷⁷

⁷³ *Ibid.*, at 73.

⁷⁴ “Human Rights Advisory,” p. 9.

⁷⁵ “Registered Live Births in the Philippines, 2023,” Philippine Statistics Authority, December 20, 2024; Lanie Carillo, “3.7M Filipinos Without Birth Certificate: A Call for Universal Birth Registration,” World Vision.

⁷⁶ “Birth Certificates Inspire Hope and Belonging for More than 5,000 Individuals in Bangsamoro Region and Sulu,” UNICEF Philippines, June 3, 2025.

⁷⁷ “Human Rights Advisory,” p. 8.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Government of the Philippines, including government agencies and local government units, should:

- Endorse international political commitments relevant to protecting children during armed conflict, in particular, the Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Safe Schools Declaration;
- Continue to strengthen the domestic child protection legal framework in the Philippines, including by enacting legislation on protecting human rights defenders, protecting internally displaced persons, and adopting a charter for the Commission on Human Rights;
- Fully implement the child protection road map agreed upon by the UN and the Government of the Philippines in June 2025;
- Abide by international and domestic laws requiring that children—including children allegedly associated with groups designated as terrorist groups—be treated primarily as victims, including the requirement that detention of children must be a last resort option only undertaken for the shortest time possible and guided by the best interests of the child as a primary consideration and that children involved in armed conflict who have been taken into custody must be swiftly transferred to the Local Social Welfare Department Office, as required by the 2019 CSAC Law;
- Ensure adequate funding of policies, processes, and services relevant to protecting children during armed conflict across agencies at national and sub-national levels, including local government unit funding for LCPCs, with a particular focus on devoting sufficient resources to ensure timely, effective, age-appropriate, disability-sensitive and gender-sensitive protection services and comprehensive and sustainable reintegration and post-reintegration programs, including access to healthcare—including sexual and reproductive health services, mental health, and psychosocial support—education programs, and including safeguards to prevent the re-recruitment of children by armed groups;
- Strengthen coordination and partnership across government agencies at the national level, including by adopting agency-specific protocols and guidelines that clearly define roles and responsibilities of relevant government and non-government actors, focusing also on bolstering coordination between national agencies—including the Inter-Agency Committee on Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, the Commission on Human Rights, and the CWC—and local child protection mechanisms, including LCPCs;
- Ensure that the government’s monitoring and reporting mechanism for violations against children is adequately resourced and is able to rigorously document all cases comprehensively and accurately, consolidating data across agencies to track violations, interventions, and outcomes, and implementing verification processes to determine whether a reported case is in fact a child involved in armed conflict, and including safeguards that support the mechanism’s primary aim of protecting children in situations of armed conflict, preventing grave violations, and providing services for children impacted by armed conflict;

- Redouble efforts at capacity building and awareness raising regarding international and domestic child protection laws and norms for government and non-government stakeholders at national and sub-national levels, including the AFP, the PNP, social workers, and LCPCs, with a particular focus on orienting frontline child protection responders on the 2019 CSAC Law and its accompanying protocols, complemented by ongoing coaching and mentoring efforts, as well as awareness raising activities—including via social media—directed at the broader public;
- Promote continuity of education, especially for children impacted by conflict-induced forced displacement, in support of the State’s mandate to uphold children as “zones of peace,” including by strengthening the alternative learning system to better serve children from culturally diverse backgrounds who have been forcibly displaced due to armed conflict;
- Clarify for all government and non-government stakeholders how domestic child protection legal and policy frameworks in the Philippines apply to all children, including foreign nationals and Filipino children lacking birth registration, and continue to close gaps in this regard, including via enhanced birth registration efforts, especially digital birth registration; and
- Keep the UN and its Security Council Working Group on CAAC informed about ongoing efforts to implement its recommendations, as elaborated in its conclusions, and disseminate lessons learned and good practices.

Local non-government organizations and the private sector in the Philippines should:

- Create forums to share contextualized knowledge and resources among stakeholders within individual communities and also across different communities throughout the country, including children impacted by armed conflict in these processes, where possible and consistent with the best interests of the child, to contribute insights and recommendations for improving policies and services, with the aim of forging a community of practice geared toward harnessing and building on the wealth of experience in child protection in the Philippines.

UN stakeholders, including the Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, should:

- Continue to support ongoing child protection efforts in the Philippines, including by actively tracking developments in the country with an eye toward the possibility that a re-escalation of armed conflict and/or an increase in grave violations against children could once again warrant including the Philippines as a situation of concern in future Secretary-General annual reports on CAAC.

Donors should:

- Continue to provide resources to support child protection efforts in the Philippines, with a particular focus on supporting ongoing efforts to build national capacities for child protection and services; enhancing domestic monitoring and reporting efforts for grave violations and other harms against children impacted by armed conflict; ensuring access to education; and closing gaps in birth registration that can impede children’s access to education, healthcare, and other essential services.



Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

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