



# Paris Principles and Commitments on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups

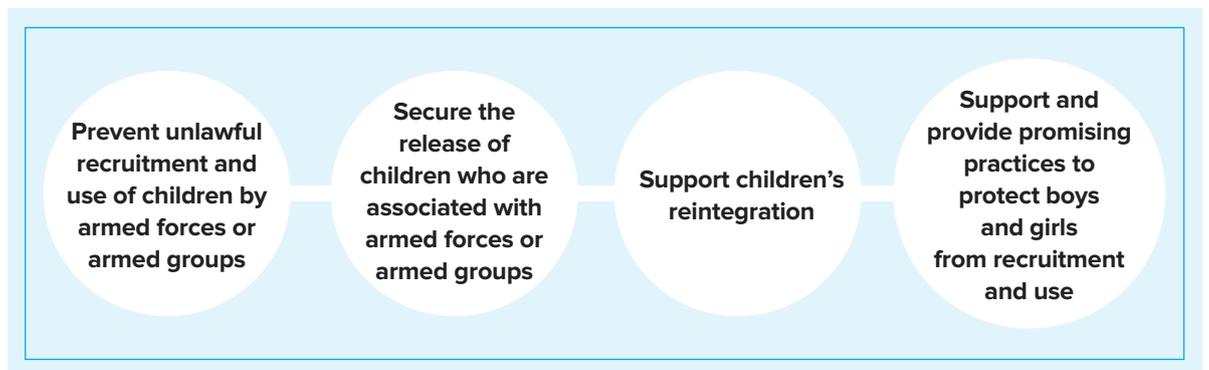
## Frequently Asked Questions: Paris Principles and Commitments

1

### What are the Paris Principles and Commitments on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups?

The *Paris Principles and Commitments on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups* were adopted in 2007 to combat the

unlawful recruitment and use of boys and girls by armed forces or armed groups. Their specific objectives are to:



The *Paris Commitments* are a set of political commitments and, in endorsing them, Member States agree to uphold and support implementation of the Paris Principles, to put in place measures to prevent recruitment and use of children, and to support the release, reintegration and recovery of all children who have been recruited and used by armed forces or armed groups. The Commitments recall, reaffirm and support the implementation of existing international law governing the protection of children from recruitment or use in armed conflict. They principally complement legal and political instruments and mechanisms already in place, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, the African

Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Statute of the International Criminal Court, International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 182, United Nations Security Council Resolutions that call for an end to the unlawful recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, and the Cape Town Principles.

The *Paris Principles*, as distinct from the Paris Commitments, set out ways in which boys and girls can be protected from recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups and have their rights respected, upheld and fulfilled. They also detail essential actions to support the safe release and reintegration of all boys and girls from armed forces or armed groups.

## 2

### How do the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles complement other commitments?

The Paris Principles and Commitments complement a number of other commitments intended to protect children in situations of armed conflict.

The Safe School Declaration, for example, calls for schools and places of education to be protected from military use or attack in conflict, and for children and teachers to be able to freely and safely access education and be protected.

The Vancouver Principles focus on child protection during peacekeeping operations,

including all stages of a conflict cycle. The 17 principles provide guidance relevant to the context of peacekeeping: to prioritize and operationalize prevention of recruitment and use of children, and to support their safe release and handover to child protection actors.

Though complementary in their child protection purposes, States need not have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration or Vancouver Principles to endorse the Paris Commitments.

## 3

### What led to the adoption of the Paris Principles and Commitments?

The Paris Principles and Commitments were adopted in 2007 at the 'Free Children from War' conference organized by the French Government and UNICEF. The conference considered progress made in and recommendations from the implementation of the 'Cape Town Principles and Best Practice on the prevention of recruitment of children into the armed forces and on demobilization and social reintegration of child

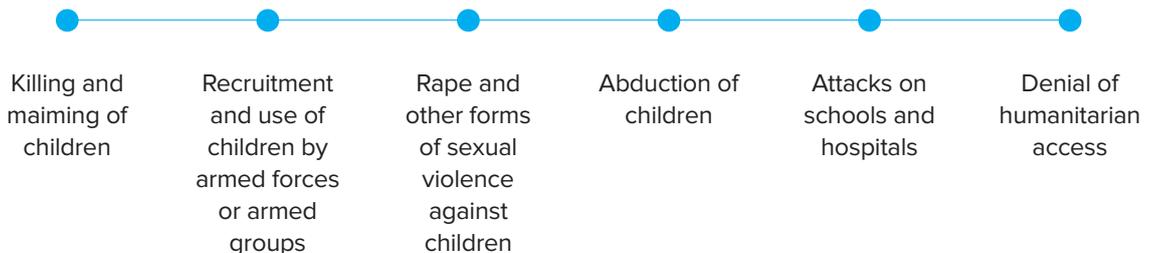
soldiers in Africa', adopted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at a conference in Cape Town in 1997. The review process was led by UNICEF and drew on a wealth of experience gained by United Nations field staff, NGOs and other practitioners in this field. Recognizing the importance of ensuring the protection of children from recruitment and use, as of February 2021, 112 States have endorsed the Paris Principles and Commitments.

## 4

### What is the current situation facing children in conflict and children associated with armed forces or armed groups?

An estimated 420 million children – nearly one fifth of children worldwide – are living in a conflict zone. In its resolutions, the United Nations Security Council has identified six grave violations against children in

situations of armed conflict. These resolutions form the basis of the Council's architecture in protecting children during war. The six grave violations identified by the United Nations Security Council are:



These grave violations have been defined on the basis of their shocking nature and their documented severe impact on children's well-being, and are grounded in international law.

Between 2005 and 2020, the United Nations verified 77,000 children to have been recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups, but actual numbers are likely much higher. Boys and girls as young as 6 years old are being recruited and used, not only for active fighting, but also for support roles such as cooks, porters and guards, for laying mines and spying. Boys and girls are also exploited and used for sexual purposes and coerced to become human bombs. Children who are not used directly in hostilities but are used by armed forces or

armed groups in other roles are highly vulnerable to other violations of their rights and of exposure to significant and repeated violence, exploitation and abuse that can cause physical, developmental, psychological or other harm.

The unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups is a violation of international humanitarian and human rights law and an international crime. The Paris Commitments and Principles are a non-binding practical tool that aims to address this violation by identifying and implementing durable solutions to combat the recruitment and use of children. Their purpose is both to foster greater programmatic coherence and to support and promote good practice (Paris Principle 1.9).

## 5

### What is the impact of the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups on children, their communities and society?

Grave violations of children's fundamental human rights cause long-term physical, developmental, psychological and other harm. While every child's story is different, children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups face many immediate and lifelong challenges. In addition to potential physical, developmental and psychological harm, many have missed out on years of education, severely compromising their futures and limiting their potential contributions to society. Social reintegration can be difficult, as many of the children may have lost ties to family and community.

Although many formerly associated children have been supported by release and reintegration into

civilian life interventions designed to assist them, others have returned home on their own, often facing an uncertain future and a further fight for acceptance from their family and community. Girls in particular, and any children they may have, are likely to be stigmatized or rejected by their community if it is known that they have been used by armed forces or armed groups. Reintegration and recovery may also be delayed and further hampered by detention for actual or alleged association with armed groups.

Despite their experiences, children are resilient and can contribute constructively to recovery and reconciliation efforts if given appropriate support and encouragement.

## 6

### What does endorsement of the Paris Principles and Commitments on children associated with armed forces or armed groups mean for a State?

#### States that are signatory to the Paris Commitments commit to:

Establish procedures and safeguards for recruitment by armed forces that screen out children or that otherwise comply with applicable international law

Take measures, including legal and administrative measures, to prevent armed groups within their jurisdiction from recruiting and using children

Support and facilitate the release of children associated with armed forces or armed groups at all times and without any preconditions

Investigate and prosecute individuals believed or alleged to have engaged in recruitment and use of children

Support monitoring and reporting of violations against children

Cooperate with the implementation of measures taken by the United Nations Security Council against parties to armed conflict that unlawfully recruit or use children

Support and take all necessary measures, including development and implementation of standard operating procedures for handover of children and of security sector training, and to treat children who are recruited or used by armed forces or groups including those who are deprived of their liberty in accordance international humanitarian and human rights law and with special consideration for their status as children.

Treat children who have been unlawfully recruited or used by armed forces or armed groups, and who are accused of crimes against international law, first and foremost as victims and in accordance with international standards for juvenile justice and to seek alternatives to judicial proceedings wherever appropriate, using detention as a last resort

Establish processes that assist children who cross borders to escape unlawful recruitment and use by armed forces or groups to effectively exercise their right to seek asylum

Advocate for and seek the inclusion of minimum standards to end all recruitment and use, and to include the registration, release and treatment of children in all peace agreements with parties that have unlawfully recruited or used children

**“In signing the Commitments, States also declare that they will make every effort to uphold and apply the Paris Principles, which involves the identification and implementation of durable solutions to combat the unlawful use and recruitment of child soldiers in conflicts.”**

– Paris Commitments, 2007

**The Principles define an effective framework for taking action on the ground, including operational directives and best practices for helping the affected States and international donors. This includes:**

- Conducting information campaigns for armed forces or groups
- Supporting alternatives to child association, such as education and vocational training
- Preventing family separation
- Supporting conflict reduction in local communities
- Criminalizing child recruitment in domestic law
- Raising community awareness of the factors that increase the risk of children becoming associated with armed forces or armed groups
- Raising awareness of differentiated risks and needs of children based on gender analysis
- Planning release processes that are as quick as possible
- Adopting an inclusive approach and prioritizing family reunion
- Providing support to enable full reintegration of children into civilian life

## 7

### What are the advantages for States of endorsing the Paris Principles and Commitments?

Endorsing the Paris Principles and Commitments is a clear signifier of a State's recognition of children's rights nationally and internationally, and its commitment to children's rights on a global stage, and places a State in a growing community (112 Member States as of June 2021) taking leadership on this critical issue across the world.

Endorsing the Principles and Commitments contributes to creating and strengthening a global moral obligation on the acceptable treatment of children in situations of armed conflict by both state parties and non-state actors. This contributes to creating a safer, more secure and stable environment for States, local communities and children affected by armed conflict.

The Principles and Commitments provide clear and simple guidance on how to implement existing obligations in international law governing

child recruitment (drawing on decades of sector good practice) and support the implementation of Security Council Resolutions on Children and Armed Conflict. They are intended to be pragmatic and a useful guide for government decision makers and practitioners.

In taking steps to curb the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups, States are committing to providing children with meaningful alternatives to joining an armed actor. Children's increased access to education also increases their chances of productively contributing to their local communities and the wider state.

Critically, by providing these opportunities and promoting acceptance, the Commitments and Principles also contribute to social cohesion and addressing underlying drivers of conflict.

## 8

### What is the process for a State to endorse the Paris Principles and Commitments on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups?

States interested in endorsing the Paris Principles and Commitments can approach the Government of France in New York (at the United Nations), in Paris or at embassies around the world to indicate their interest. Endorsements should be made in

writing as a Note Verbale to be transmitted to New York or Paris.

It is important to note that the Paris Principles are only as strong as their implementation.

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## How can non-state actors engage with the Paris Principles and Commitments on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups?

Non-state armed groups have legal obligations under international law that protect children from recruitment and use. It is therefore important for non-state actors to review and adhere to the Paris Principles. Engagement with the United Nations in this regard should be encouraged. Although non-state actors cannot endorse the Commitments, a clear demonstration of a commitment to end recruitment and use

of children can be through the development of action plans, Geneva Call's Deeds of Commitment or other similar documents with the United Nations or other actors, as well as taking actions and establishing processes (e.g., age assessment processes) through which children are prevented from associating with the armed group, and are safely released and enabled to sustainably reintegrate.

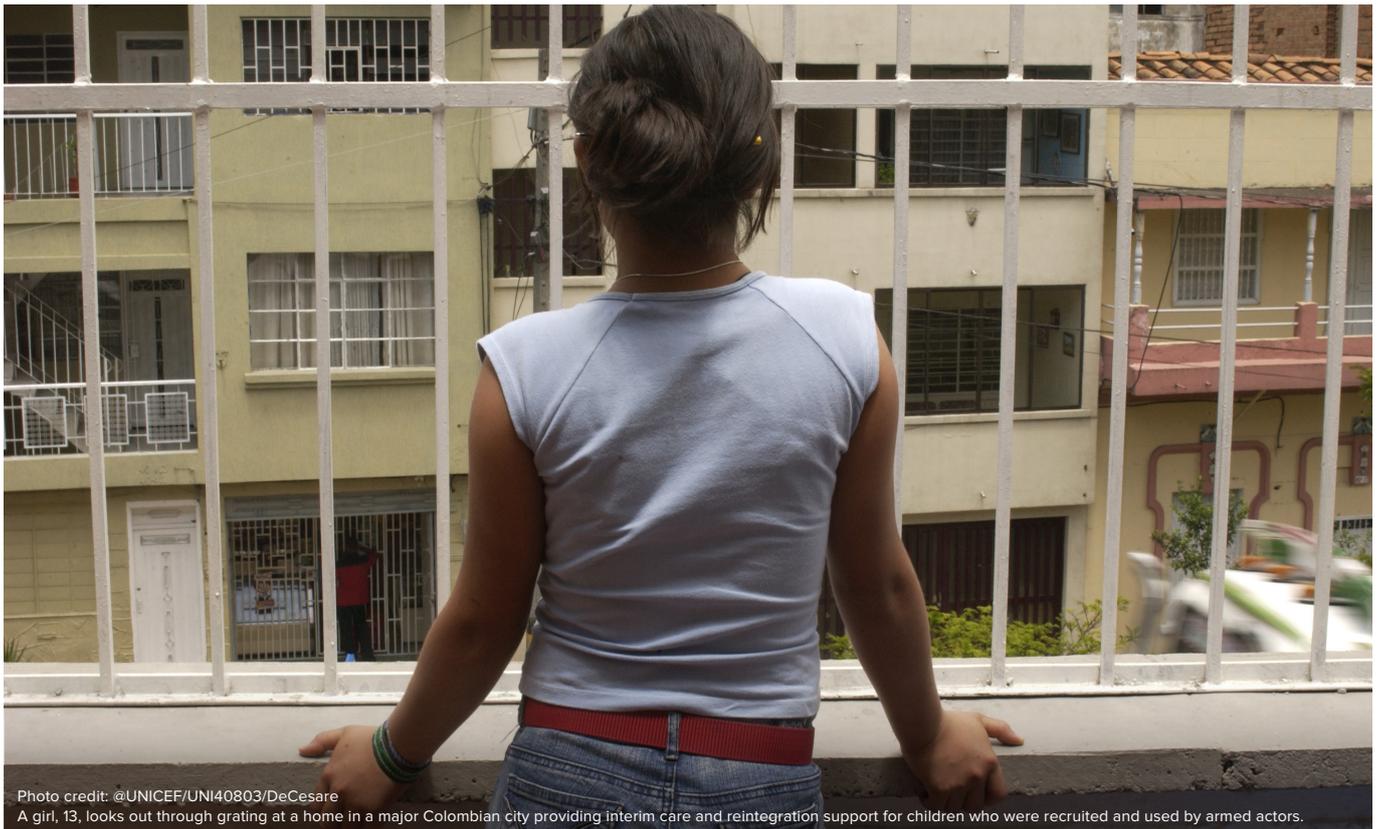


Photo credit: @UNICEF/UNI40803/DeCesare

A girl, 13, looks out through grating at a home in a major Colombian city providing interim care and reintegration support for children who were recruited and used by armed actors.

\*The Paris Principles Steering Group is an inter-agency group dedicated to enabling and supporting the endorsement and implementation of the Paris Principles and Commitments.



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

