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150th IPU Assembly

Tashkent, Uzbekistan (5–9 April 2025)

Open session of the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law

The role of parliaments in tackling the effects of armed conflict on children

Tuesday, 8 April 2025, 11:00–13:00
Concert Hall, Tashkent City Congress Centre

Concept note

Background

The number of armed conflicts has increased significantly in recent years, and children have been major victims of this violence. In 2024, there was a devastating escalation in the impact of armed conflict on children worldwide. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), [over 473 million children](#) – more than one in six globally – are living in conflict zones. A record 32,990 grave violations against children during armed conflict were verified by the United Nations in 2024, while over 47 million children had been displaced owing to conflict as of 2023.

Children experience the effects of armed conflict both immediately and in the long term. During an armed conflict, they risk being killed, maimed, abducted, displaced, separated from their families, sexually abused or even recruited by armed groups to participate in the hostilities. After a conflict has ended, children face trauma, physical impairments, psychological vulnerabilities caused by separation from family, educational disruption, abandonment that puts them in conflict with the law, and even stigma on account of their association with an “enemy” or “foreign” parent. It is crucial to protect children during armed conflict and to support them in mitigating the effects of conflict long after it ends, including by addressing the gaps incurred in their own personal development.

When it comes to protection, adherence to and effective implementation of key legal frameworks are at the heart of all efforts. The [Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977](#), the [Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989](#) and the [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict of 2000](#) are all central to the protection of children during situations of armed conflict. Ratifying or acceding to these instruments and implementing them domestically – such as by adopting legislation criminalizing violations and abuses against children, as well as by investing in child social protection, capacities and training – serves not only to protect children once armed conflict breaks out, but also to prevent and mitigate the impact of conflict on children in its aftermath. With regard to supporting children once conflict has ended, giving visibility and due consideration to the trauma of conflict, as well as to its visible and invisible consequences, is of utmost importance in order to minimize and address the long-term consequences of armed conflict for children. This includes, for instance, supporting the education of boys and girls who have been out of school due to conflict, building partnerships with civil society organizations engaged in identifying children separated from their families and in searching for surviving relatives, and involving children in peacebuilding and reconciliation policymaking that would take into account and support their best interest.

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Parliamentarians can play an essential role in promoting and pursuing these efforts, from fighting impunity by adopting laws that criminalize violence against children, to allocating budgets for child rehabilitation programmes and engaging their constituents to address the conflict-related stigma that affects children. By taking steps such as these, parliamentarians have the potential to make a real difference in bringing about change for affected children. Before the outbreak of conflict, they can build frameworks and preparedness, integrating the needs of children into these processes from the very beginning. During hostilities, they can pay particular attention to the situation of children, including their vulnerability and protection risks. And once the fighting has subsided, they can support post-conflict recovery, including by taking action to address trauma, reconciliation, and education and development gaps. In all, listening to children and providing a space for their contribution is essential – and parliamentarians should also be their voice.

This open session aims to discuss the role of parliaments in protecting children from the effects of armed conflict and supporting them to mitigate such effects. Parliamentarians will hear from experts about the main challenges faced by children during armed conflict and post-conflict situations, as well as the potential avenues to address these challenges. This session will also serve as a forum for parliamentarians from different countries to exchange best practices and proposed solutions around this topic.

Guiding questions

1. What actions can parliamentarians take to prevent violence and abuses against children – such as abduction, separation from family, sexual violence and child recruitment – during armed conflict?
2. How can parliamentarians contribute to the fight against impunity, and to accountability for grave violations and abuses against children during armed conflict?
3. What actions can parliamentarians take to address and mitigate the long-term effects of armed conflict on children, especially in the areas of education, physical and psychological health, and social integration?
4. How can parliaments better involve children in policymaking, including on conflict prevention, peacebuilding and reconciliation matters?
5. How can parliamentarians work with civil society and humanitarian organizations to assist children affected by armed conflict?

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Moderator: Mr. Angelo Farrugia, President of the IPU Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law, and Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta.

Keynote address: Personal account on the impact of armed conflict on children

Panellists:

- **Overview of the situation of children affected by armed conflict**
Mr. Fahad Ahmed, Legal Adviser, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
- **Protecting children's rights during armed conflict and its aftermath**
Ms. Sophie Kiladze, Vice-Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- **Personal account from a parliamentarian on assisting children affected by armed conflict**
Ms. Rejhana Dervišević, Member of the House of Representatives (Bosnia and Herzegovina) (TBC)
- **Repatriation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict: the experience of Uzbekistan**
Representative from the National Agency for Social Protection (Uzbekistan)

The presentations will be followed by a discussion with participants.