Forum:	Special Conference (SPC)
Question of:	Addressing the issue of youth exploitation by terrorist and violent
extremist groups	
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# Introduction

Globally, children are severely affected by terrorist and violent extremist groups. Young boys and girls have unwillingly become a vital component for many terrorist groups, taking on essential roles in advancing their groups' missions. These roles range widely from cooks, cleaners, wives, and servants to armed fighters<sup>1</sup>. However, the main issue with the exploitation of youth is how these children enter into the violent extremist groups and how terrorist groups mobilize youth to their advantage. The agenda poses several connection points to the theme of "Bonds of Unity". Young children from all over the world are influenced by the extensive youth exploitation by armed groups; at least 58 extremist groups in 15 different countries have used children for irrational purposes <sup>2</sup>. Youth recruitment among armed groups is not a new phenomenon but still continues to lack attention and prevention efforts. Therefore, it leaves an opportunity for nations to come together to address the vulnerability of youth to terrorism.

Youth become vulnerable to terrorist recruitment for a multitude of reasons. This includes geographic proximity, exposure to extremist propaganda, unstable economic status, and social or political marginalization<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, because of their young age, children's psychological malleability inescapably contributes to the cause of the issue. Firstly, proximity to terrorism can become a serious risk factor in terms of both voluntary and forced recruitment. An example of this is Boko Haram's frequent mass kidnappings. These life-threatening attacks have driven youth in surrounding countries such as Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon to join armed vigilante groups to protect themselves from unexpected recruitment. Adding on, social and political marginalization plays a significant role in the increase in vulnerability of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Darden, Jessica. Tackling Terrorists' Exploitation of Youth. 2019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Over. "Over 50 Terrorist Groups Recruiting, Using Children for Terrorism, despite War Crime: Report." ANI News, 27 Nov. 2021,

www.aninews.in/news/world/us/over-50-terrorist-groups-recruiting-using-children-for-terrorism-despite-war-crime-r eport20211127164222/. Accessed 8 July 2022.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Darden, 2019

youth to terrorism. As young people feel a sense of exclusion from their community, terrorist groups can easily appeal to the youth by positioning themselves as an alternative community that promises a sense of belonging and a voice.<sup>4</sup> This method of recruitment hinders children from making rational decisions that will prevent them from facing the reality of terrorism.

Involvement of youth in terrorism indubitably causes major problems to emerge for both the young children and the international community. Once associated with a terrorist group, the child is subjected to dangerous activities, physical violence, psychological violence, and a lack of fundamental human rights. Often, girls are forced to play subordinate roles such as being cooks, porters, and informants. However, it has already been confirmed that these girls are frequently exposed to forced marriage and sexual servitude<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, boys are exposed to life-threatening operations by directly participating in terrorist acts.

Furthermore, the methods used to recruit these children are often through outright violence such as mass kidnappings and abductions. In the process of forced recruitment, children are susceptible to death and violent abuse. For instance, in Somalia, the militant group called Al Shabaab utilized intimidation, detention, and violence to mass recruit thousands of young people<sup>6</sup>. But youth exploitation in terrorism does not only negatively affect the individuals involved. The direct participation of young women and boys in terrorist groups poses significant security threats to securing international peace and stability. If countries fail to counter violent extremism, the children will evolve to become terrorist group militants and therefore will become a threat to securing international peace.

Considering the severity of the issue, it is without a doubt that the United Nations has made numerous efforts to alleviate the problem of youth exploitation. Specifically, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) has worked to find practical and innovative ways to raise awareness and address concerns related to protecting youth from terrorism. One of the efforts made is the Youth Engagement and Empowerment Programme. According to the UNOCT, the programme's aim is to "empower and enable young people to contribute meaningfully towards the United Nation's global, regional efforts, to prevent and counter violent extremism, while adding value to international efforts to strengthen the resilience of youth to fight violent extremism and terrorism."<sup>7</sup>. Initiatives such as the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Darden, 2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "No Place for Children." 2012. Human Rights Watch. February 20, 2012.

https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/02/20/no-place-children/child-recruitment-forced-marriage-and-attacks-schools-so malia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Darden, 2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> "UNOCT LMS: All Courses." 2022. Unoct-Connectandlearn.org. 2022.

https://learn.unoct-connectandlearn.org/course/index.php?categoryid = 34.

United Nations Youth Strategy and the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism have been brought upon to urge Member States to empower youth and integrate them into safe decision-making processes.

Although the exploitation of children by armed groups has a long history, the involvement of children in terrorism and violent extremist groups has become a recent phenomenon. The earliest mention of adolescents being used by armed groups in the Civil War in 1864 when a fight occurred between the Confederate Army and a unit of 247 Virginia Military Institute cadets<sup>8</sup>. However, during this period of time, children were never an integral part of the military. But with the increasing exploitation of children by terrorist and extremist groups, finding children on the battlefield has not become a rarity. Between 2005 and 2020, it has been verified that more than 93,000 children have already been used by armed groups to fight alongside them in conflicts<sup>9</sup>. Hence, the recruitment of children by violent extremist groups has gone through significant developments over the past few years to evolve into the current unfavorable status quo.

Consequently, youth exploitation in terrorism poses critical threats to both the international community and specific nations. For instance, Nigeria has been deeply influenced by the Boko Haram group as the group realized the strategic benefits that women and children could have in accomplishing their goals and mission<sup>10</sup>. Boko Haram has already committed several mass kidnappings in schools in Nigeria, kidnapping them for purposes that violate the rights of children. As a result, thousands of children have become internally displaced in their own countries or have been forced to cross national borders. As a result, their access to everyday essentials has diminished, including education and proper nourishment. Not only have these attacks influenced the victims and their families, but it has also created pressing challenges for the government. With pressure coming from the public and the media, the government cannot neglect these problems. Although affected nations are lacking economic development, they are obliged to give in to demands and negotiate with the terrorist groups to bring the child victims back.

<sup>9</sup> "Children Recruited by Armed Forces or Armed Groups." 2020. Unicef.org. 2020.

https://www.unicef.org/protection/children-recruited-by-armed-forces.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Singer, Peter W. 2006. "Young Soldiers Used in Conflicts around the World." Brookings. Brookings. June 12, 2006. https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/young-soldiers-used-in-conflicts-around-the-world/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> "Nigeria." 2021. United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime. 2021.

https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/justice-and-prison-reform/global-programme-to-end-violence-against-children/strive/nigeria.html.

# **Definition of Key Terms**

# Exploitation

Exploitation refers to the act of taking advantage of an individual or a group to benefit oneself. Contextually, it points to the use of children in work or other activities for the benefit of terrorist groups and to the detriment of children's mental health, physical health, development, and education. Types of exploitation includes, but is not limited to, forced labor, slavery, commission of crime, or sexual exploitation.

### Radicalisation

Radicalisation is the process of causing someone to start believing a radical and extreme view. Often, individuals will adopt a radical position on political issues and begin to participate in terrorist acts. They are often motivated by ideologies, prejudices against certain groups, and political beliefs.

### Marginalization

Marginalization, treatment of a group or person as unimportant and insignificant, is when groups and communities feel exclusion, discrimination, and not valued due to factors such as unequal power relationships across many dimensions. Children - especially those born into poverty or deficient social networks - are vulnerable to marginalization, playing a great role in terrorist recruitment. By addressing themselves as an alternative community that will ensure youth an opportunity to share their voice and feel a sense of belonging, terrorist groups are able to recruit young people, magnifying the vulnerability of youth in terrorist recruitment<sup>11</sup>.

# Recruitment

Recruitment is the conscription of young children into any type of armed group, armed force, violent extremist group, or terrorist group. Recruitment can be both voluntary and forced; forced recruitment includes being trafficked, kidnapped, duped, and many more while voluntary recruitment can occur due to the appeal of being able to possess a group-based identity.

## **Counter-terrorism**

This term refers to the act of preventing and disrupting terrorist acts to weaken their networks. In order to combat and eliminate terrorism, a combination of government strategies, military tactics, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Darden, 2019

techniques are incorporated. Counter-terrorism is necessary to prevent further youth recruitment and exploitation and is an activity that the UN has conducted to mitigate the situation of children in terrorism.

## Social inclusion

Social inclusion is the act of allowing individuals to feel accepted, included, and valued in a community or society. Often, children are marginalized and voluntarily join terrorist or extremist groups due to the lack of social inclusion. These groups take advantage of children struggling with social inclusion by positioning themselves as a new community that will provide feelings of inclusion and support in finding their identity.

# Violent extremism

Violent extremism points to the actions of individuals or groups that utilize violence to attain and reach their political, ideological, and religious goals. It is when a person or a group believes that acts that produce feelings of fear and terror are justified to meet their goals<sup>12</sup>. As children are recruited into violent extremist groups, they are working towards supporting and achieving these goals set by the group.

# **Community policing**

This term refers to a strategy of policing that is conducted with the collaboration between the police and the community. The strategy aims to develop relationships with the community while preventing and solving public safety issues including crime, physical safety, public security, and social disorder. Community policing is a strategy that needs to be reinforced by nations influenced by youth exploitation in terrorism to diminish youth recruitment by extremist groups. Strengthening this form of strategy will allow law enforcement agencies to recognize the community's vulnerability to targeted terrorist recruitment and implement prevention measures.

## Digital divide

The digital divide is defined as the gap between individuals, demographics, and regions that have access to digital devices, and those that do not. Having access to digital devices means having access to modern information, external communication, and the internet. As countries that do not have access become increasingly isolated and impoverished, it becomes an ideal breeding ground for terrorism<sup>13</sup>. By all means, this consequence does not only apply to children. Digital use is one of the main sources of

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Australian Government, "What Is Violent Extremism? - Living Safe Together," What is violent extremism?, accessed July 23, 2022, https://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/Documents/what-is-violent-extremism.PDF, 1.
 <sup>13</sup> Peter K Yu, "Terrorism and the Global Digital Divide," Findlaw, February 11, 2002,

https://supreme.findlaw.com/legal-commentary/terrorism-and-the-global-digital-divide.html.

gaining information; it alerts digital users on international affairs and many other essential knowledge. Thus, a lack of awareness on the issue leaves more opportunities for children to be recruited by terrorist groups.

# **Timeline of Key Events**

# 2001 - Ongoing - Afghanistan War

The Taliban have used children for various purposes since the beginning of the conflict in Afghanistan. Their exploitation of children on the battlefield has detained and tortured an innumerable number of young boys and girls. Through deception, threats, and the promise of money, the Taliban recruit children as suicide bombers, and fighters, and to detonate and plant explosives. The Taliban indoctrinated boys as young as 6, relying on Islamic religious schools to train these boys to become fighters by the age of 13. The Afghanistan conflict has been shed light on in recent years by the media and the international community. Therefore, it provides an opportunity for the international community to take steps in ending the exploitation of children<sup>14</sup>.

# April 14, 2014 - Nigeria Chibok abductions

On 14 April 2014, the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram attacked a government secondary boarding school in Chibok, Borno state. 276 female students (aged 16 to 18) were kidnapped by the Boko Haram militants but 57 of the girls were able to escape within a few hours of their kidnapping by jumping off the truck tand hiding in the bushes. On various occasions, the Chibok schoolgirls have been able to return to their homes by managing to escape, being rescued by the Nigerian Armed Forces, or being freed following negotiations between Boko Haram and the government. However, as of now, 113 girls are still unaccounted for. It is claimed that the remaining Chibok schoolgirls are still being held by Boko Haram but some may have died. This event is a prominent event that displays the severe issue of terrorist groups recruiting vulnerable youth<sup>15</sup>. The story of the Chibok kidnapping that captured the world's attention with the Twitter hashtag "Bring Back Our Girls"<sup>16</sup> narrates the forced recruitment of vulnerable female teenagers through methods of outright violence. Boko Haram's main objective for employing mass kidnappings is not only to exploit the children to advance their group's mission but also to effectively earn

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> "This Is Our Opportunity to End the Taliban's Use of Child Soldiers." 2021. Human Rights Watch. September 20, 2021. https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/20/our-opportunity-end-talibans-use-child-soldiers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> News, BBC. 2017. "Nigeria Chibok Abductions: What We Know." BBC News. BBC News. May 8, 2017. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32299943.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> "What the Kidnapped Nigerian Schoolgirls Have to Tell Us." 2021. NPR.org. March 3, 2021. https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/03/03/972623049/what-the-kidnapped-nigerian-schoolgirls-have-to -tell-us.

money by taking advantage of the media. The widespread media coverage inevitably puts pressure on the federal and state governments to release the teen victims by negotiating and giving in to demands, regardless of the cost<sup>17</sup>. Hence, this event is the epitome of the extensive use of specifically young women in terrorism.

### August 03, 2014 - August 15, 2014 - The August 2014 ISIS attack on Sinjar

On August 3, 2014, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISIS) attacked the Yazidi minority in Sinjar. This violent campaign was later deemed a genocide by the United Nations<sup>18</sup>. Men and boys were executed; women and girls were kidnapped, enslaved, and forced to work; young boys were separated from their families and were put into ISIS training camps<sup>19</sup>. Of the 6,800 Yazidis abducted by ISIS, children under the age of 14 make up over one-third. This genocide ultimately reveals the way youth was exploited by the ISIS. While ISIS executed the majority of men and women past childbearing age, they forced the surviving young girls to undergo labor in fighters' houses. The surviving boys were given Muslim names, indoctrinated, and then sent to ISIS training camps and were trained to fight<sup>20</sup>.

# 2015 - Ongoing - United Nations Global Programme to End Violence Against Children (ENDVAC)

The ENDVAC program, launched by the UNODC, is a global program with the aim of providing support for Member States in addressing violence against children. This global programme works with key partners from both the UN and representatives of organizations and networks including The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization. Some of the publications made by the ENDVAC programme include: Introductory Booklet on the Elimination of Violence against Children, an INSPIRE Indicator Guidance and Results Framework, and an INSPIRE Handbook for implementing the seven strategies for ending violence against children<sup>21</sup>. The seven strategies include: implementation and enforcement of laws, norms and values, safe environments, parent and caregiver support, income and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Philip Obaji Jr. 2021. "Why Boko Haram Targets Nigerian Schools." Foreign Policy. Foreign Policy. March 23, 2021.

https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/23/boko-haram-nigeria-kidnappings-school-children/#:~:text=Boko%20Haram% 20and%20its%20affiliates,the%20victims%20at%20any%20cost.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Abouzeid, Rania. 2018. "POLICY BRIEF WHEN the WEAPONS FALL SILENT: RECONCILIATION in SINJAR after ISIS."

https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/when\_the\_weapons\_fall\_silent\_reconciliation\_in\_sinjar\_after\_isisFINAL.pdf. <sup>19</sup> London School, "A Demographic Documenation of Isis s Attack on the Yazidi Village of Kocho," A demographic documenation of ISIS's attack on the Yazidi village of Kocho, accessed July 23, 2022,

https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/report/a-demographic-documentation-of-i siss-attack-on-the-yazidi-village-of-kocho/Cetorelli\_Demographic\_documentation\_ISIS\_attack.pdf, 7. <sup>20</sup> London Schoo, "A Demographic" f, 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> "Global Programme to End Violence against Children\_overview." 2021. United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime. 2021.

https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/justice-and-prison-reform/global-programme-to-end-violence-against-children\_ove rview.html.

economic strengthening, response and support services, and education and life skills<sup>22</sup>. By having access to these resources published by the UNODC, member nations can more effectively protect children from exploitation by terrorist groups.

### April 07, 2016 - April 08, 2016 - Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism

The Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism - The Way Forward is a conference co-hosted by Switzerland and the United Nations that took place at the United Nations Office at Geneva. This conference aimed to provide an opportunity for member nations to build support for the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and share their experiences and opinions of the issue<sup>23</sup>. Through this conference, the international community was able to recognize the exigency of violent extremism, and understanding the extreme threats posed by terrorist groups. The Geneva Conference has given nations a chance to discuss efforts to maintain the peace and security of communities, promoting the essential respect for human rights and humanitarian aid; these efforts are vital in preventing further youth exploitation in terrorism.

# February 19, 2018 - Dapchi schoolgirls kidnapping

Nigeria faced another mass kidnapping by the Boko Haram terrorist group on February 19, 2018. Boko Haram abducted 110 girls from a school located in Dapchi - the girls were aged from 11 years old to 19 years old. On the day of kidnapping, five schoolgirls were killed. However, in March 2018, all girls were released by Boko Haram except for a girl named Leah Sharibu. The reason for this exception is that she refused to renounce her Christian faith and convert to Islam. This mass kidnapping planned by Boko Haram reflects the lack of prevention methods and the incapability of the government to prevent these situations from occurring. Despite the controversial event of the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping, Boko Haram continues to forcefully indoctrinate young girls for their advantage. Thus, it significantly presents the complexity of the issue of child involvement in terrorism and contributes to raising awareness for other nations.

# December 15, 2021 - December 16, 2021 - International Conference on the Roles of Women and Children in Terrorism

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> World Health Organization. 2016. INSPIRE : Seven Strategies for Ending Violence against Children. Swizterland: World Health Organization (Who.

https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/inspire-seven-strategies-for-ending-violence-against-children.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> "Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism (7-8 April) | Office of Counter-Terrorism." 2018. Un.org. 2018. https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/events/geneva-conference-preventing-violent-extremism-7-8-april.

The Council of Europe Committee on Counter-Terrorism (CDCT) held an International Conference on the Roles of Women and Children in Terrorism in collaboration with the Gender Equality Commission (GEC), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (CDENF). The objective of this conference was to discuss the involvement of women and children in terrorism with high-level representatives such as parliamentarians, policymakers, and representatives from international organizations. Participants addressed the roles of women and children in terrorist organizations and the challenges they face in their reintegration into societies. To add on, measures that can be taken by the Council of Europe member states were talked through to find methods to repatriate children recruited by terrorist groups. This conference provided an opportunity for experts from various fields to consider and debate their perspectives and personal experiences related to the issue, helping to make progress in alleviating the problem of youth exploitation by terrorist and extremist groups.

# **Position of Key Member Nations and Other Bodies**

## Nigeria

Currently, Nigeria is one of the most influenced nations with regard to forced recruitment of children and the exploitation of youth by terrorist and violent extremist groups. The ongoing battle between Nigeria and the Boko Haram Islamic terrorist group has continued to pose threats for Nigeria's stability. One of the terrorist attacks conducted by Boko Haram is the April 2014 kidnapping where more than 200 schoolgirls were kidnapped and exploited by the Boko Haram group. After this event, there were other similar events where Nigeria was attacked through the same method<sup>24</sup>. This shows the government's inability to contain Boko Haram's indiscriminate attacks on civilians. However, Nigeria has and continues to make progress in protecting citizens (especially young children) from Boko Haram. With assistance from neighboring countries such as Chad and Niger, the Nigerian military has succeeded in pushing out Boko Haram out of a few provinces. Nonetheless, Boko Haram continues to retain control over Nigeria. Through methods, Nigeria must continue to contain the situation with Boko Haram to ensure the safety of the youth in Nigeria.

## **United States**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> "Conflict with Boko Haram in Nigeria | Global Conflict Tracker." 2015. Global Conflict Tracker. 2015. https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/boko-haram-nigeria.

America's fear of both international and domestic terrorism continues to increase with the rise of terrorist recruitment and radicalization. The country is afraid that terrorist groups are seeking to radicalize and recruit America's citizens through means such as, but not limited to, social media and other online platforms. This places their citizens at a path of danger and violent extremism at a dangerously fast speed. To add on, after the devastating 9/11 attack, America acknowleges the serious threats posed by foreign terrorist groups. Therefore, the United States has tackled the issue of countering terrorism through several ways. For example, after the 9/11 attack, the U.S Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created for the purpose of detecting, protecting, and preventing the threats brought upon by foreign terrorist groups. DHS has been very active since it was first founded, establishing relationships with private sector partners and increasing communication between the Federal Government<sup>25</sup>. The DHS has published a *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*. This Strategic Framework not only address countering terrorism, but it also addresses targeted violence which relates back to the agenda of terrorist groups targeting young children. Hence, it can be suggested that America seeks to provide active support and help for the international community in addressing the problem of youth in terrorism.

#### Somalia

Similar to Nigeria, Somalia is also one of the countries that is affected by terrorist groups and their violation of human rights. In 2017, a terrorist organization named al-Shabaab utilized inhumane methods such as torture, intimidation, and detention to recruit an estimated 1770 children. Influenced by these terrorist attacks, Somalia has made accomplishments to protect their citizens from terrorist group attacks. Recently, officers of the Committee on the Rights of the Child have praised Somalia for their efforts. Somalia's transparency in their reports and their efforts to improve political governance to consolidate peace was commended by the committee. However, Somalia recognizes the importance of implementing more notable strategies to put a stop to mass recruitment of children by extremist groups.

### **United Nations Counter-Terrorism Center (UNCCT)**

The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Center (UNCCT) coordinates all UN approaches to counter terrorism and violent extremism. For member states, the committee provides technical assistance and capacity building support on a global scale. Since April 2022, UNCCT has managed to implement 80

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Department of Homeland Security. 2019. "DEPARTMENT of HOMELAND SECURITY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK for COUNTERING TERRORISM and TARGETED VIOLENCE."

 $https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920\_plcy\_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targete d-violence.pdf.$ 

projects and 40 capacity building programmes<sup>26</sup>. In total, they have been able to benefit 71 Member States by training individuals and organizing workshops to raise more awareness, making a significant contribution in addressing the issue of youth exploitation by violent extremist groups.

# **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)**

The ICRC works to help people influenced by conflict and war by providing humanitarian protection<sup>27</sup>. In the 74th UN General Assembly, the ICRC made a statement and drew attention to the worrying trend of children increasingly being associated with terrorism and violent extremist groups. The committee highlighted their concerns and called for Member States to implement three key standards. The standards include: "the principle of the best interest of the child", "the right of all children not to be separated from their parents against their will, unless authorities determine this necessary, subject to certain procedures", and "the obligation to reintegrate children who have participated in an armed conflict"<sup>28</sup>. It is evident that the ICRC is committed to entitling children that have been recruited by terrorist groups their rights and prediction and hopes for member nations to cooperate and implement their three key standards.

### Afghanistan

Thousands of Afghan children are forced to enroll in terrorist groups with Afghanistan being under the Taliban regime<sup>29</sup>. These children are taught the Taliban ideology, trained, and sent to war. Afghanistan has made a few efforts in the past years to mitigate the situation and protect the rights of the children. In 2011, the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations signed an agreement to prevent the recruitment of Afghans under the age of 18 into the national armed forces<sup>30</sup>. Although this is not directly addressing the issue of preventing youth recruitment by terrorist groups, it represents the government's first step in ending the era of child soldiers.

## Germany

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> "What We Do | Office of Counter-Terrorism." 2018. Un.org. 2018.

https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/what-we-do.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> "Who We Are." 2014. International Committee of the Red Cross. July 28, 2014.

https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are#:~:text=The%20ICRC%20is%20an%20independent,its%20implementation%20in%20national%20law.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> the. 2019. "Children, No Matter Their Association, Are Entitled to Rights and Protections as Children." International Committee of the Red Cross. October 11, 2019.

https://www.icrc.org/en/document/unga74-3c-protection-of-children.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> "Children of Afghanistan - Humanium." 2019. Humanium. April 3, 2019.

https://www.humanium.org/en/afghanistan/#:~:text=Child%20soldiers,and%20finally%20sent%20to%20war. <sup>30</sup> "Afghanistan Signs Pact with UN to Prevent Recruitment of Child Soldiers." 2011. UN News. January 30, 2011. https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/01/365572-afghanistan-signs-pact-un-prevent-recruitment-child-soldiers

An armed group in Mozambique - Al-Sunna wa Jama'a (ASWJ) - has become an extreme threat for the human rights situation in Mozambique. Most importantly, children are exposed to forced recruitment by the ASWJ as they continue to kidnap and exploit children by using small boys as soldiers in their fights<sup>31</sup>. To address the growing concern, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) and Germany have partnered together to launch a coordinated response. The aim for this partnership is for three main objectives: "to strengthen Mozambique's capacity, to prevent further escalation of violence, and to strengthen the national criminal justice response to overcome this threat". Germany's response towards terrorism indicates the country's willingness to support less developed nations in combatting the terrorist attacks.

# **Suggested Solutions**

Violent extremism and terrorism has an influence on every society across the world. However, young people are most vulnerable and at risk by being affected by terrorist recruitment. Due to the complexity of the issue, there is no single solution that can tackle all aspects of the problem. Both international efforts and nation-based approaches are essential in addressing the agenda.

Considering the widespread exposure of children to terrorist recruitment and exploitation, soft power such as education can be an effective strategy to prevent further youth involvement in violent extremism. Radicalisation plays a critical role in the success of convincing children in voluntarily participating in terrorist acts.<sup>32</sup> However, this can be averted through relevant and equitable education.<sup>33</sup> Afflicted nations can be encouraged to adopt sector-wide initiatives to ensure that institutional commitment is secured. Such initiatives can include developing distinct policies that help to prevent voluntary recruitment caused by radicalisation through educational methods. Effective educational activities can include the in-service training on violent extremism, teaching students about the cause and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> "World Report 2022: Rights Trends in Mozambique." 2021. Human Rights Watch. December 22, 2021. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/mozambique.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Darden, 2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> "PDF.js Viewer." 2022. Unesco.org. 2022.

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/documentViewer.xhtml?v=2.1.196&id=p::usmarcdef\_0000247764&file=/in/rest/annot ationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach\_import\_03351462-7788-4631-ba6d-e3bd278a8449%3F\_%3D 247764eng.pdf&locale=en&multi=true&ark=/ark:/48223/pf0000247764/PDF/247764eng.pdf#559\_17\_Proventing% 20violent\_E\_int-final.indd%3A.5071%3A147.

drivers of this phenomenon. Furthermore, mainstreaming content from key carrier subjects is crucial in exposing children to relevant education. These key carrier subjects can include social studies, history and civics education. The success of this initiative relies heavily on the capacity of the school staff and educators. Hence, it is paramount that these educators teaching the young children fully understand and are aware of the topics that will be explored. As violent extremism is connected to very complex issues, the teachers and educators should feel emotionally prepared to carry out these educational activities. This can be ensured through peer-to-peer exchanges, targeted capacity-building activities, and so on. Considering that nations most influenced by youth exploitation in terrorism are mainly LEDCs, they can seek support from NGOs such as the Child Rights International Network (CRIN) or Save the Children.

However, without doubt, implementing educational systems within member states is not sufficient to address the ongoing world crisis of youth exploitation by terrorist and violent extremist groups. For an effective solution, it is important to focus on the nation's specific challenges that they face with terrorism. Hence, promoting the act of developing or adopting National Action Plans (NAP) for all member nations can lead to a success in mitigating the issue of youth recruitment by terrorist groups. NAPs are crucial in providing nations with a sequence of actions to implement the UN's Guiding Principles; the Guiding Principles are composed of three pillars: protect, respect, and remedy<sup>34</sup>. The UN has already released a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE) in 2015, encouraging nations to develop their own (NAP) specifically to combat violent extremism<sup>35</sup>. Countries such as Somalia, Burkina Faso, and Switzerland have developed NAPs that strive to enforce the role of women in communities and social groups<sup>36</sup>. To date, there are still only a handful of nations that have implemented such NAPs. Thus, proposing new approaches to encourage nations to develop NAPs and work towards the Guiding Principles can be a pertinent solution to addressing the issue of youth exploitation by terrorist groups. However, the UN and other committed nations must work towards motivating nations to implement the NAPs through incentives such as ensuring diplomatic efforts or financial aid and support.

Exploitation of youth in terrorism and violent extremist groups is a relatively old phenomenon. Nevertheless, it has only recently begun to be recognized by nations and the international community. Therefore, it is inevitable that many nations lack knowledge on the extremity of the crisis due to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Hood, Melody. 2016. "» What Are National Action Plans and Why Do They Matter?" Inclusivesecurity.org. 2016. https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/2016/08/10/national-action-plan-matter/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> "Fall 2017 a Brief on Policy and Practice to Inform National Strategies for Preventing Violent Extremism and Promoting Sustainable Peace National Action Plans on Preventing Violent Extremism NATIONAL ACTION PLANS on PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM 2." n.d.

https://www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/GSX-2017-PVE-NAPs-Analysis-1.pdf. <sup>36</sup> ICAN, "National Action Plans"

absence of experiencing youth recruitment by violent extremist groups. To make effective international efforts in combating the issue, communication and interaction between member states plays a critical role. Hence, encouraging the formation of a conference that focuses on the discussion of implementing immediate measures to safely and effectively protect children from exploitation by terrorist and violent extremist groups can provide opportunities for member states to share their thoughts and recommendations on the subject. These conferences can be both independent or work in conjunction with the UN. In these conferences, representatives of the nations should be able to express their concerns and this opportunity may allow member states to find other member states with a similar concern; it can guide them into alleviating the concerns together and build cooperation and collaboration.

To add on, many countries still lack clear criteria that weighs an individual's vulnerability to terrorist recruitment<sup>37</sup>. There is not a sufficient set of standards that allows a country to assess their citizens' vulnerability to radicalization and recruitment by violent extremist groups. The United Nations should put pressure on the governments of nations that are greatly influenced by youth exploitation in terrorism such as Nigeria and Somalia to begin creating a clearer criteria. Without a criteria, it is difficult to analyze and deduce which nations are faced with the most threats by terrorist groups. Therefore, certain countries cannot be prioritized over others when giving financial aid, humanitarian aid, and other means of support. Furthermore, it is important that governments of nations acknowledge the gravity of the issue within their country. Through the establishment of a clear criteria, countries can be informed of which social group, age group, gender, race, and other factors are most vulnerable to radicalization and terrorist recruitment. With this knowledge, governments can approximate and target specific social groups and create measures ahead of time to effectively tackle unpredicted terrorist attacks.

Another constructive method to alleviate the issue of youth exploitation in terrorism is to strengthen community policing within nations. Building a trust between civilians and the police department can bring significant benefits in several ways<sup>38</sup>. Firstly, with more interaction and connection to the civilians, police officers can help to identify young individuals that are currently struggling with radicalization, in the process of embracing an ideology, and other signs of vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist groups. Adding on, as law enforcement agencies are able to maintain the trusting relationship between the community, they are able to prevent terrorist attacks, crimes, and violence on targeted individuals. This is due to the fact that police departments will be able to collect and gather relevant real-time data on specific communities. With this advantage, law enforcement members can work

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Darden, 2019

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup>"The Importance of Community Policing in Preventing Terrorism." 2020. National Institute of Justice. 2020. https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/importance-community-policing-preventing-terrorism.

towards developing strategies, and even policies for the prevention of youth involvement in terrorism<sup>39</sup>. A way to encourage the strengthening of community policing is to request for the creation of a program. For instance, the Boston Police Department, United Somali Youth, and the North American Family Institute collaborated and developed a Youth and Police Initiative Plus (YPIP) Program<sup>40</sup>. The objective of this program was to establish trustful relationships between the youth and the police department. This will aid in increasing resilience to radicalization for young Somali youth living in Boston. The creation of additional programs with similar goals will help to bring youth and the law enforcement together, reinforcing community policing within member nations.

The solutions suggested only partially address the agenda. Many aspects of the problem such as reintegration into society and bolstering social inclusion among young children should also be tackled to effectively prevent further youth recruitment by violent extremist groups. This global issue can be approached from mutiple perspectives and solutions will vary depending on the nation and their vulnerability to terrorism. Children are increasingly at risk of exploitation by terrorist groups, yet there is not enough attention on the growing issue. Member nations should strive to collaborate together to protect young people from terrorist recruitment to maintain the safety of individuals and the international community.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> NIJ, "The Importance of Community Policing in Preventing Terrorism"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Straub, 2020

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