



Children's Rights in Conflict Zones

27 March 2025 | 15:00 to 16:00 | Room XXV Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Report on IEPF Side Events Key Messages and Recommendations to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations

As the outcome of the side event organized during the 58th Session of the HRC

Official Report

Summary of the side event:



On 27 March 2025, the International Eurasia Press Fund (IEPF), in partnership with the International Institute for Rights and Development (IRDG), organized a high-level side event titled "**Children's Rights in Conflict Zones**" during the 58th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. The event served as a critical platform for discussing the urgent need to strengthen protection mechanisms for children affected by armed conflicts.

The side event was attended by **40 participants**, including diplomats, UN officials, human rights advocates, and subject-matter experts from various countries. Discussions focused on the legal, humanitarian, and policy-driven approaches necessary to safeguard children's rights in war-affected regions. Key topics included the impact of armed conflicts on children, existing international legal frameworks, and the role of international organizations in mitigating harm and ensuring accountability.

The event underscored the necessity of enhanced global cooperation, policy reforms, and actionable strategies to address the vulnerabilities faced by children in conflict zones such as in Ukraine, Gaza-Palestine, Sudan, Karabakh-Azerbaijan and elsewhere. Participants emphasized the importance of integrating child protection measures into international peacebuilding efforts, reinforcing the obligations of states under international law, and amplifying the voices of affected children in decision-making processes.

The event concluded with an official statement for stronger collaboration among governments, civil society organizations, and international institutions to ensure comprehensive and sustainable solutions for the protection and well-being of children in conflict zones.

About the organizing organization:

The International Eurasia Press Fund (IEPF) was established in 1992 with over 30 years of experience working in conflict-affected regions. It has a General Consultative status with the UN ECOSOC. IEPF implements various projects in Media and Civil Society development, Refugees and IDP issues, Community development, Peacemaking actions and Conflict Resolutions, and Education. As a civil society organization, IEPF facilitates dialogue, fostering discussions and advocating for urgent humanitarian issues.

The International Institute for Rights and Development is a neutral and impartial Swiss-based international organization concentrating on shaping policies and providing technical assistance in developing countries; promoting social justice, conflict mediation, and rights which have been neglected. IRDG is in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UN ECOSOC) since 2018.

Statement by the IEPF president:

Summary of the Speech Delivered by the IEPF President Mr. Umud Mirzayev at the Side Event on “Children’s Rights in Conflict Zones”



During the side event organized by the International Eurasia Press Fund (IEPF) at the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council, the IEPF president addressed the urgent need to protect “children living in conflict zones”.

The speech highlighted that “over 473 million children” currently reside in conflict-affected regions, including Syria, Gaza, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Yemen, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The devastating impact of war on children was emphasized through examples from the ‘First Karabakh War’, where hundreds of children lost their lives, and 693 schools, 855 kindergartens, and 695 medical facilities were destroyed. Additionally, between 1988 and 1989, ethnic cleansing led to the

deportation of over 300,000 Azerbaijanis, including tens of thousands of children. The Second Karabakh War (2020) also resulted in the deaths of more than 10 Azerbaijani children, with nearly 50 others injured due to attacks on civilian areas.

Mr. Umud Mirzayev called for urgent action to defend children's rights and emphasized that peace remains the most effective solution to ending these tragedies. The speech concluded on a hopeful note, highlighting that a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia is within reach and expressing optimism for the restoration of peace in Gaza and Ukraine.

Objective of the side event:

The side event highlighted violations of children's rights in conflict zones, including forced displacement, child soldier recruitment, sexual exploitation, and restricted access to education and healthcare.

Over the course of one hour, participants emphasized the need for stronger international legal protections and accountability measures to prevent crimes against children in conflict situations. The discussions underscored the urgency of reinforcing global efforts to safeguard children's rights and ensure justice for those affected by war and violence.



Speakers -Short Biographies:

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN CONFLICT ZONES
MEET THE SPEAKERS

 Nidal Salim INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT (IRDG)	 Umud Mirzayev PRESIDENT OF INTERNATIONAL EURASIA PRESS FUND	 Dr. Anna Lachowska CHAIRPERSON INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY COUNCIL, GENEVA.
 Prof. Caitlin Procter PROFESSOR IN MIGRATION STUDIES AT THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE IN FLORENCE, AND A MARIE CURIE RESEARCH FELLOW AT THE GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE.	 Dr. Blerim Mustafa EXPERT ON POST-COLD WAR SELF-DETERMINATION, MENTOR AT THE GENEVA SCHOOL OF DIPLOMACY AND MEMBER OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH NETWORK	 Simon Hills TECHNICAL SPECIALIST FOR THE ILO'S FUNDAMENTALS BRANCH, AS WELL AS CO-CHAIR OF THE ACPHA'S

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Umud Mirzayev: is a writer, journalist, and the founder and president of the International Eurasia Press Fund (IEPF), an organization that has been operating for over 30 years. IEPF holds General Consultative Status with ECOSOC and has organized numerous events focused on peace and conflict resolution.

Dr. Nidal Salim: is a Swiss-Palestinian citizen based in Geneva. He is the director and founder of the Global Institute for Water, Environment, and Health, which he established in 2007. He collaborates with various research institutes, universities, and international organizations, including the Middle East Peace Process, Water Working Group, EXACT, the World Health

Organization (WHO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and many others.

Dr. Caitlin Procter: is a professor of migration studies at the European University Institute in Florence and a Marie Curie Research Fellow at the Geneva Graduate Institute. Her research focuses on children and youth in conflict and forced displacement contexts in the Middle East and North Africa. She regularly advises humanitarian organizations, including UNRWA, UNHCR, UNICEF, and Save the Children. Her work has also been featured in international media outlets such as the BBC, Le Monde, The Washington Post, and France 24.

Simon Hills: is a Technical Specialist for the ILO's Fundamentals branch and co-chair of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action's (ACPHA) Child Labour Task Force. With over 15 years of experience in humanitarian and development settings, he has worked in Peru, Somalia, Cambodia, Lebanon, and the Philippines.

Dr. Blerim Mustafa: an international civil servant and an expert on post-Cold War self-determination. He serves as a mentor at the Geneva School of Diplomacy and is a member of the Global South Network, an interdisciplinary academic forum based in the UK.

Anna Lachowska: is the Chairperson of the Disability Council International in Geneva, Switzerland. She has traveled from Indonesia to participate in this event. Anna has extensive experience addressing procedural challenges in prosecuting the deportation of children in the conflict in Ukraine.

Key messages:

Impact of Conflict on Children: Panelists highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive measures to protect children in conflict zones and mitigate the long-term impact on their well-being and future development.

Statements by Panelists:

Mr. Umud Mirzayev: Mr. Mirzayev drew attention to the specific case of Azerbaijani children affected by the First and Second Karabakh Wars. He highlighted the destruction of hundreds of schools, kindergartens, and medical facilities, as well as the lasting trauma faced by those displaced or killed. He emphasized that addressing these injustices requires transforming concern into action and reaffirmed that sustainable peace is the most effective means to protect children's rights.

Dr. Nidal Salim: Dr. Salim issued a powerful call for immediate international action to stop the killing and suffering of children in Gaza, where more than 2,000 children have reportedly died. He stressed that current global mechanisms have failed due to political double standards, underlining that protecting children is not just a legal duty but a moral imperative. He urged the establishment of enforceable mechanisms beyond political rhetoric.

Mr. Simon Hills: Mr. Hills highlighted that the recruitment of children into armed conflict constitutes one of the worst forms of child labour under ILO Convention No. 182—the first ILO convention to receive universal ratification. He stressed that protecting children in conflict requires both emergency protection and long-term strategies, including investment in education, social protection, post-conflict rehabilitation, and the strengthening of social dialogue to foster lasting peace.

Ms. Melissa Park, Executive Director, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN): Ms. Park raised the alarm on the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons to children, who are especially vulnerable to ionizing radiation, blast injuries, and psychological trauma. She

shared a touching personal experience linking children in Gaza with the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, emphasizing the interconnectedness of militarization, genocide, and nuclear warfare. She called for centering children's voices in global disarmament and peace efforts.

Dr. Blerim Mustafa: Dr. Mustafa presented a global overview of conflict zones, highlighting the suffering of children in Gaza, Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Karabakh region. He called for strengthened legal frameworks, accountability for war crimes, the prohibition of arms exports to violators, and increased investment in education, rehabilitation, and transitional justice mechanisms to support long-term peace and child welfare.

Ms. Anna Lachowska: Ms. Lachowska focused on the deep impact of the war in Ukraine on vulnerable children, particularly those with disabilities, those in institutional care, and those in occupied territories. She detailed the collapse of state care systems, the psychological toll of displacement and neglect, and the challenges faced by children with disabilities during active bombardments. She urged coordinated international action to restore children's rights, ensure their protection, and deliver comprehensive medical and psychological support.



Recommendation:

As a civil society organization, we strongly urge the international community to take immediate, coordinated, and sustained action to protect children affected by armed conflict. This includes guaranteeing their access to education, healthcare, and a safe environment; ensuring accountability for violations of children's rights; preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers; and providing dedicated support to displaced and traumatized children.

We further call for a strengthened role of civil society in peacebuilding processes, particularly in advocating for the rights and recognition of all war-affected children, including those in Syria, Gaza, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Yemen, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The international community must also prioritize de-escalation, demilitarization, and comprehensive peacebuilding initiatives, while enhancing the presence and responsiveness of UN agencies and international organizations in collaboration with state actors.

To ensure lasting protection, we advocate for the enforcement of international legal frameworks that safeguard children, increased support for rehabilitation and educational programs, the promotion of peace education and conflict resolution skills, and the facilitation of cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. These efforts must be part of a broader, unwavering global commitment to ending war and upholding the fundamental rights of every child.