



Child Soldier Recruiter List

Why in News

The **US has added Pakistan and 14 other countries to a Child Soldier Recruiter List** that identifies foreign governments having government-supported armed groups that **recruit or use child soldiers**.

- **Child Soldier** refers to **any person below 18 years of age who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity**.
 - It **includes but is not limited to children, boys and girls** who are used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes (Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict 2007).

Key Points

▪ About Child Soldier Recruiter List:

- The US Child Soldiers Prevention Act -2008 (CSPA) requires the publication in the annual [Trafficking in Persons \(TIP\) report](#) a list of foreign governments that have recruited or used child soldiers.
- Some of the **countries which have been added to the list** are Pakistan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Yemen etc.
 - The [United Nations \(UN\)](#) verified that over 7,000 children had been recruited and used as soldiers in 2019 alone.
- The CSPA **prohibits the US government from providing military assistance**, including money, military education and training, or direct sales of military equipment, **to countries that recruit and use child soldiers**.

▪ Related Global Conventions:

- The **recruitment or use of children below the age of 15 as soldiers is prohibited** by both the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) and the **additional protocols to the Geneva Conventions**.
 - The **CRC** says childhood is separate from adulthood, and lasts until 18; it is a special, protected time, in which children must be allowed to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity.
 - The **Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols** form the core of international humanitarian law, which regulates the conduct of armed conflict and seeks to limit its effects. They protect people not taking part in hostilities and those who are no longer doing so.
- The **Optional Protocol to the CRC** on the involvement of children in armed conflict **further prohibits kids under the age 18** from being compulsorily recruited into state or non-state armed forces or **directly engaging in hostilities**.
 - Optional Protocols to human rights treaties are treaties in their own right, and are open to signature, accession or ratification by countries who are party to the main

treaty.

- Recruiting Child Soldiers is also considered a **war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)**.
- **Also, the United Nations** has identified the **recruitment and use of child soldiers** as among **six “grave violations”**. Other Five violations are:
 - Killing and maiming of children;
 - Sexual violence against children;
 - Abduction of children;
 - Attacks against schools or hospitals;
 - Denial of humanitarian access for children.

▪ **Issues with the CRC:**

- These treaties are **limited in scope and nature**, and they tend to be idealistic rather than practicable.
- The UN's mechanisms **only bind state** parties that ratify the treaties. It therefore has **no authority over countries** that are not parties to the convention or are non-state entities, such as rebel militias recruiting child soldiers.
- It also **relies on the signatories themselves** to implement its doctrines and prevent human rights abuses around the world.
 - Therefore, most of the responsibility in preventing such abuses lies with the individual countries themselves.
- While the UN views its treaties and conventions as binding on state parties, it has **no police power mechanism to enforce its decisions**.
- The CRC and its Optional Protocol are limited by the signatories' willingness to comply. Somalia, for example, is a **signatory but it hasn't ratified the convention**.

▪ **Indian Scenario:**

- Though not very common in India, child soldiers are seen among **non-state forces** such as **insurgent organizations in the NorthEast region** (mainly in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland) and militant factions in the Kashmir region.
- Also, they are hired in **maoist affected areas** of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra.
- Some global human rights organisations allege Indian security forces of using **children as spies and messengers**, although the Indian government denies this allegation.
- **National Cadet Corps (NCC)** which is run by the Ministry of Defence, **aims to motivate youth from age 13 to take up a career in the armed forces** (Army, Navy and Air Force) and Territorial Army.
 - They can not be equated with the child soldiers.
- **Steps Taken by Indian Government:**
 - India is **party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and acceded to Optional Protocol** in November 2005.
 - The **Constitution encompasses most rights included in the CRC as Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy**.
 - **Article 39 (f)** states that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.
 - The **Indian Penal Code criminalises the recruitment or use in hostilities of persons under-18 years** by state armed forces or non-state armed groups.
 - Adults of age over 18 years are recruited in the **Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF)**.

Way Forward

- International treaties and instruments, such as the CRC and its Optional Protocol are valuable and necessary tools to ensure betterment of children but these must be implemented by all parties in its true spirit.
- In 2014, **UNICEF** launched the campaign “**Children, Not Soldiers**” to bring about a global consensus that child soldiers should not be used in conflict.
 - More such campaigns (Global as well as National) are needed to generate momentum, political will and international support.
- Also, the **reintegration of former child soldiers** must be a strong focus of our collective efforts.

Source: IE

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