Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Eliminating Abuse and Exploitation of Children in Religious, Commercial, and Military settings

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Introduction

Safety, health, and happiness are fundamental things that children in all environments deserve. Granting children basic human rights such as education, medical care, or a safe environment should be a priority for the global community. But in reality, millions of children under 18 suffer abuse from adults who profit from their exploitation. As exploitation comes in many forms, it is easily hidden through loopholes such as corrupted officials and vague laws. Some children are put in these environments from a young age, so they are unaware of how to report their abuse and receive help. Dealing with these issues is imperative, because without solutions, child abuse and exploitation will only become normalized on a larger scale. Without immediate, effective, and sustainable solutions, this issue will continue to grow into extremely dangerous environments for millions of children. Overall, child exploitation can be grouped into religious, commercial, and military exploitation.

Definition of Key Terms

Child abuse/maltreatment

Physical, sexual, or verbal abuse to a child, often legally below the age of 18, by adults such as family members, religious leaders, and gang members. Child neglect is also a form of abuse, as it leaves the child unprotected and with less access to proper resources.

Armed conflict

Resort to armed force between two or more states, or protracted armed confrontations occurring between governmental armed forces and the forces of one or more armed groups, or between such organized groups arising in the territory of a state which reaches a minimum level of intensity.

Reintegration

The process through which children associated with armed forces or armed groups transition into civil society and enteras civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

This term refers to a range of crimes and activities involving the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child for the financial benefit of any person or in exchange for anything of value (including monetary and non-monetary benefits) given or received by any person. It includes harmful acts such as sexual solicitation and prostitution of a child or adolescent and, in the Council of Europe Convention, covers situations where a child or another person is given or promised money or other form of remuneration, payment or consideration in return for the child engaging in sexual activity, even if the payment/remuneration is not made

Child trafficking

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Neglect

The failure of parents or carers to meet a child's physical and emotional needs when they have the means, knowledge, and access to services to do so. It could also refer to the failure to protect a child from exposure to danger, and failure to provide for the child's physical, emotional, health, and educational needs.

Unintentional abuse

As child abuse can happen in numerous ways, unintentional child abuse is a scheme of child maltreatment that is completed without realization. This can be seen in poor parenting, refusal to emotionally support child, and misplacement of anger on children

Intentional/physical abuse

Physical abuse is Intentional use of physical force against the child that results in – or has a high likelihood of resulting in – harm for the child's health, survival, development or dignity.

Background Information

Religious

Religious Child Maltreatment (RCM) is child abuse in religious settings. The abusers are often the parents of the victim, using their interpretation of religion as an excuse to abuse or neglect their children. Extremely conservative parents justify abuse as strict discipline, upholding religious traditions, or even glorifying abuse as "for the better good". Some parents also believe in faith healing, which opposes vaccination, medical treatment, or surgeries in favor of religious beliefs. For example, in the United States, child neglect is illegal, but withholding medical in the name of religion is legal because of religious freedom. Child exploitation also occurs when religious leaders abuse children, most often sexually. Even if the child reports the abuse to their parents or other adults, the abusers can easily prevent punishment since religious leaders are seen as righteous by followers, therefore discrediting the victim. Parents of such victims may also ignore the allegations to uphold their status in religious settings, prioritizing their honor over the safety of their children. Combatting RCM can be difficult, since the difference between traditional culture and abuse is debatable. However, it is important to remember that the goal is to condemn the abusers and extreme interpreters, rather than the religion itself.

Commercial

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), includes sex trafficking, prostitution, or pornography of children, the majority consisted of young girls. Children most vulnerable to exploitation are either homeless or live in orphanages and foster homes, since their caretakers offer no protection to them. The abuse is hard to detect, since abusers manipulate children's beliefs and hide evidence by ensuring connections to power. Children who are put in these environments often grow up accustomed to sexual exploitation, and once they become adults, they continue to depend on the dangerous sex industry, with no way of attaining education or a job to escape. The prevention of sexual exploitation must start with identifying vulnerable situations and intervening cases of abuse. Child protection services must be implemented for the long term, to provide vulnerable children protection from exploitation.

Militaristic

Child soldiers and other forms of military exploitation are common in war zones and unstable countries. Children are abducted or sold into militaristic groups from a young age, and are forced to learn how to fight, go on suicide missions, create weapons, or become sex slaves. The unethical actions can leave children extremely traumatized, having seen mass casualties and constant maltreatment. Reporting abuse is nearly impossible, because war is normalized in these environments. Abuse may also be overlooked in fear of damaging a soldiers reputation, since reporting sexual abuse or child labor results in the separation of duty. Similarly, military bases themselves conceal the abuse and exploitation, and external factors such as families of these children are oppressed with no way of reporting. As a result, children are

forced to be abused daily with no escape route. Over time, they accept their situations and war as natural, creating a cycle of abuse and violence.

Child abused by military soldier

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
February 23rd, 1923	Declaration of the Rights of the Child, an international document promoting child rights was claimed and it ensured a child's he right to life, the right to a name, the right to express his views in matters concerning the child, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to health care, the right to protection from economic and sexual exploitation etc.
November 20th, 1989	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was declared in 1989 to set out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children
May 25th, 2000	Optional Protocols to the CRC on Sex Trafficking, Armed Conflict, declared in 2000, addressed the growing problem of sex trafficking and specifically targeted sexual exploitation. It defined and prohibited the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography

Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Declaration of the Rights of the Child, published by the International Save the Children Union in Geneva, 23 February 1923 **(A/RES/14/1386)**
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed in New York City, 20 November 1989 (**A/RES/44/25)**
- Rights of the Child submitted by Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a nongovernmental organization in special consultative status, 14 February 2005 **(E/CN.4/2005/NGO/73)**
- Optional Protocols to the CRC on Sex Trafficking, Armed Conflict, 25 May 2000 (**A/RES/54/263)**
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (**No. 182**)
- Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto, 29 September 2003 (**A/RES/55/25**)

Possible Solutions

Provide children with education. Due to cultural and environmental factors, children are often unaware of the unethicality of exploitation in commercial, military, and religious ways. Child abuse and exploitation in these settings are often obscure, so children are unaware of maltreatment until they're in the situations themselves. Experiences of exploitation consume their time and interest by force, moving them further away from receiving access to proper education. Educational facilities and policies to ensure continuous attendance would allow children to develop skills in acknowledging immoral practices, thus taking action to avoid falling into dangerous situations. Education can also be provided to parents, who are often the perpetrators of child exploitation. Through education, parents can have direct and appropriate discipline to their children in making responsible decisions, as well as preventing future cases of parents using their children for a better financial state. Introducing education about child abuse and neglect into a nations educational system can be challenging, as information must be adjusted accordingly to most common forms of maltreatment in the nation, which is why it has not been done much in the past. However, if implemented correctly, education will be a long-term solution that will even benefit later generations.

Creating comprehensive legislation against child abuse and exploitation. In many countries today, legislation regarding child maltreatment has a tendency to gloss over obscure methods of abuse and exploitation, and comprises of loopholes that abusers can use to their advantage. Reviewing current laws in place and making them more comprehensive would effectively combat this issue. Creating tighter regulations would further outlaw the perpetrators of crime and make it easier to take punitive measures. Having each respective country specifically research areas of concern and amend their laws would help eliminate loopholes. In addition, legal actions should include tracking down markets for child trafficking and prostitution. Diminishing child markets can lessen motivation for perpetrators to continue, since there would

be no monetary benefit. However, reviewing laws is a time-consuming process, so governments prioritize more important issues.

Create rehabilitation and safety centers in areas vulnerable to child abuse and exploitation. These centers will give children the opportunity to recover from physical and mental damage from their abuse, as well as an education. Children can also have a safe place to flee their abusers, apart from their homes, since many homes are dysfunctional and provide no safety for their children. By providing a specific place, convincing the government of the facility's necessity, where children can be free from harm, child victims will be less likely to become homeless and more vulnerable to exploitation. It is likely that such centers have not been very common in the past because resources and funding are needed to install a stable center, and a lack of awareness prevents that. Since child maltreatment has become increasingly common recently, it would be logical to start creating rehabilitation and safety centers, either governmental or non-governmental, in order to prepare for the increase in child abuse rates. Therefore, these centers are long term solutions and deterrence factors on multiple levels of child exploitation.

Creating a reliable reporting system. Reporting systems have not been introduced to nations because of a lack of technology in the past, but with improving technology, many nations are fully capable of creating these systems. Victims of maltreatment are often too afraid of their perpetrator's retaliation to report their cases, so discovering ways to discreetly report incidents would lead to a higher level of transparency. Researchers would also be able to gather more accurate statistics, which helps in spreading awareness globally. Better data can also increase the interests of NGOs and other external bodies in recognizing and reducing unethical practices of government policies.

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