

GUIDELINES HRC



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Presentation of the Committee : Human Rights Council (HRC)

Established in 2006 by the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council (HRC) is an intergovernmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them. It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. It meets at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).

For that the Council gets help from groups of experts called Advisory Committees. Sometimes, it also works with other experts who know a lot about a right or a country during "Special Procedures".

All countries at the United Nations take part in the work of the HRC. But there are only 47 countries making decisions in the Council. These Member States are elected directly and individually by a majority of the 193 states of the UN General Assembly. Elections take place every year. Seats are equitably distributed among the five UN regional groups, with one-third of the members renewed each year. Each member serves a three-year term. Membership is limited to two consecutive terms.

The Council provides a multilateral forum to address human rights violations and country situations. It responds to human rights emergencies and makes recommendations on how to better implement human rights on the ground.

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Topic 1 : How to Protect Civilian Populations from Violations of Human Rights during Armed Conflicts ?

The Protection of Civilians under International Humanitarian Law

After World War II, the international community concluded that civilians had been the main victims of the conflict : mass exterminations, deportations, bombing of cities, etc.

In 1949, the **Geneva Conventions** were signed. They form the basis of international humanitarian law (IHL). The Geneva Convention (IV), in particular, deals with the protection of civilians in times of war. It stipulates that, in the context of an international conflict, civilians must be protected in all circumstances and are entitled to ***“respect for their persons, their honor, their family rights, their religious convictions and practices, and their manners and customs.”*** Article 32 of Convention IV stipulates : “ The High Contracting Parties specifically agree that each of them is prohibited from taking any measure of such a character as to cause the physical suffering or extermination of protected persons in their hands. This prohibition applies not only to murder, torture, corporal punishment, mutilation and medical or scientific experiments not necessitated by the medical treatment of a protected person, but also to any other measures of brutality whether applied by civilian or military agents.”

Almost all states are parties to the Geneva Conventions, which are universally applicable. In the event of an international armed conflict i.e a dispute between two or more states involving the use of armed force the conventions apply.

Principal Human Rights Violations during Conflicts

A. Indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks

Parties to the conflict must distinguish between **civilians** and **combatants**, and between **civilian objects** and **military objects**. Everything feasible, including the choices in methods and means of operational tactics, must be done to verify that the potential targets are military and not civilian, and the presumption must be that persons and objects are civilian in case of doubt.

Further to the principle of distinction, IHL prohibits **indiscriminate attacks** which are not directed at a specific military objective, employ a method or means of combat which cannot be directed at a specific military objective or employ a method or means

The requirement to select means and methods of warfare that minimize or avoid civilian harm appears to have been systematically violated in **Israel's bombing campaign** (Jabalia Refugee Camp on 31 October). The use of GBU-31s and GBU-39s in densely populated areas – including a regular market in a refugee camp in the middle of the day, in the middle of densely populated residential neighbourhoods – makes the severe destruction and high numbers killed and injured entirely foreseeable, especially as their effect and impact on civilians and civilian objects has been demonstrated on a daily basis.

Blast at Jabalia refugee camp



B. Children as Victims

In 2023, an estimated **460 million children lived in conflict zones** (UNICEF Humanitarian Action For Children 2024 Overview). Resulting humanitarian crises pose a major challenge to fulfilling children's rights, exposing them to killings, abuse, forced recruitment by armed groups, family separation, missed years of education, and forced displacement, among other forms of violence.

Thousands of children are recruited and used in armed conflicts across the world. Between 2005 and 2022, **more than 105,000 children** were verified as recruited and used by parties to conflict, although the actual number of cases is believed to be much higher. Warring parties use children not only as fighters, but as scouts, cooks, porters, guards, messengers and more.

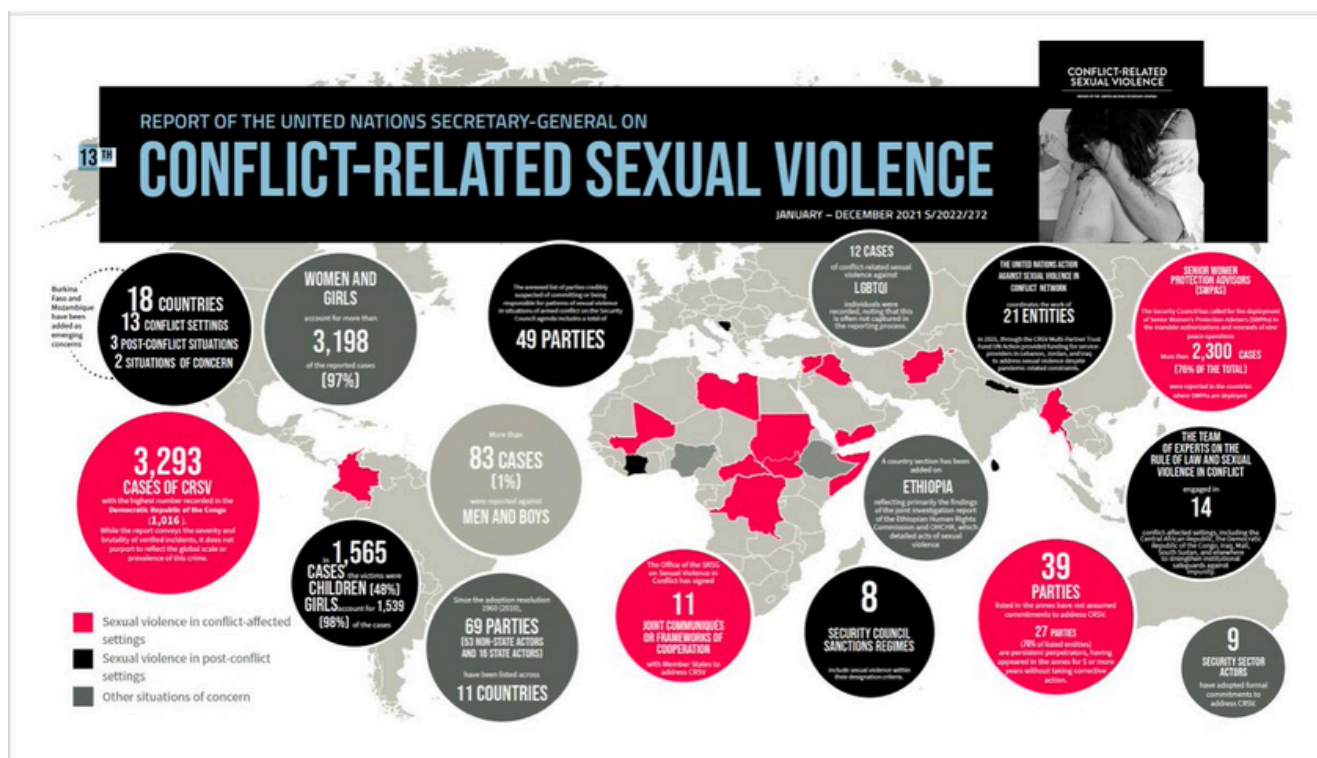
More than a decade of conflict in Syria have left deep scars on children. The report shows that during the platform from 1 October 2022 to 31 December 2024, the United Nations verified 3,343 grave violations against 3,209 children, who were mostly affected by recruiting and use and killing and maiming, the two most prevalent violations.



C. Gender-based Violence

Conflicts can result in higher levels of gender-based violence against women and girls such as **arbitrary killing, torture, sexual violence and forced marriage**. Targeting them is often included as a tactic of war.

In a report, the United Nations Secretary-General describes a historic regression in women's rights in conflicts. **Sexual violence has risen by nearly 90% in two years**, and more than 675 million women live in close proximity to deadly clashes. Documented cases of conflict-related sexual violence have increased by 87% in two years. In **Haiti**, more than two-thirds of reported violence is sexual. In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, which has become one of the global epicentres of such violence, 38,000 cases were reported in North Kivu alone in the first few months of the year, following the M23 rebel offensive in the area.



The report also refers to '**reproductive violence**' to describe the deliberate destruction of maternity wards and the blocking of access to healthcare, noting that such acts may constitute genocide when they are aimed at preventing births within a specific group. In Gaza, thousands of births take place 'amidst the rubble, without anaesthesia, postpartum care or water'.

Gender-based violence also spikes in post-conflict societies, due to the general breakdown of the rule of law, the availability of small arms, the breakdown of social and family structures and the "normalization" of gender-based violence.

D. Obstruction of Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian organizations have the right to provide humanitarian aid to states without this being considered interference in the internal affairs of the states concerned.

Deliberately obstructing the delivery of humanitarian aid essential to the survival of the civilian population has been deemed a violation of international humanitarian law, justifying legal proceedings against those responsible for such obstruction.

On Thursday 1 January, Israel confirmed its ban on access to the Gaza Strip for **37 major international organisations**, which it accuses of failing to provide it with a list of their employees' names, in accordance with new regulations. These NGOs include major global players in the sector, such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the Norwegian Refugee Council, Care, World Vision and Oxfam.

These regulations raise fears of further delays in the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian territory, which has been devastated by two years of war and where the majority of inhabitants are in urgent need of housing, healthcare and food security.

Key Players

Several actors play an essential role in protecting civilian populations during armed conflicts.

International organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), work to promote peace, enforce international humanitarian law, and provide protection and assistance to civilians affected by war.

Humanitarian NGOs, including Médecins Sans Frontières and the Red Cross, deliver emergency aid such as medical care, food, and shelter, often in very dangerous conditions.

Journalists and observers help by reporting on human rights violations and raising international awareness, which can put pressure on governments and armed groups to respect civilians.

Finally, **international courts and tribunals**, like the International Criminal Court, seek to hold individuals accountable for war crimes and crimes against humanity, helping to fight impunity and promote justice.

Key questions

- Is your country involved in a particular conflict ?
- Has your country ever spoken out in favour of protecting human rights?
- Has your country ever denounced behaviour that violates human rights or war crimes?
- Has your country been accused of human rights violations during conflicts?
- Has your country ratified the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols?
- Does your country support international investigations into war crimes?

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Topic 2: Eradicating Modern Slavery: A Human Rights Perspective

Introduction

The Slavery Convention adopted in 1926 defines slavery as a status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.

The slave trade includes all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery, all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him.

The History of Slavery

Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that **'No one shall be held in slavery or servitude: slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms'**.

Slavery was the first human rights issue to arouse wide international concern.

Slavery is a practice that has been observed **since ancient civilisations**. Those in **Mesopotamia, India** and **China** employed slaves either for domestic tasks or for large-scale construction or agricultural work. The **Egyptians** used crowds of slaves to build their palaces and royal monuments. In **ancient Greece**, the number of slaves varied according to the pace of wars and labour needs. The entire Athenian economy was based on slavery (crafts, mining, domestic work, etc.).

In the **Roman Empire**, slavery grew to encompass nearly 40% of the population. The living conditions of slaves were even more difficult than in Greece. Roman masters had the legal right of life and death over their slaves.

It was with the **development of colonies** in the mid-15th century and the increased need for labour that the major European powers soon established a horrific system : the slave trade. From 1450 to 1869, more than 11 million Africans were deported in appalling conditions conducive to death and disease.

Denmark was the first European country to abolish the slave trade in 1792, closely followed by England (1807) and the United States (1808). In France, slavery was not abolished until the revolution of 1848 and the birth of the Second Republic. The decree was drafted by Victor Schoëlcher on 27 April 1848.

The abolition of slavery was a long struggle that theoretically ended in **1980**, when the last slave-owning country (Mauritania) officially put an end to this scourge. But other forms of slavery are emerging today.

Contemporary Forms of Slavery

Contemporary forms of slavery often involve hidden populations, some of whom perform illicit work. Slavery often occurs in isolated areas and access can be challenged or compromised when workers are involved in illegal activities, when they are geographically isolated, or when they work in violent or politically unstable countries or regions.

The majority of those who suffer are the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised social groups in society. Fear, ignorance of one's rights and the need to survive do not encourage them to speak out.

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A. Forced Labour

According to the International Labour Organization, forced or compulsory labour is all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily.

The forced labour of **Uyghurs** affects many sectors of the economy, beyond textiles and agriculture: the vast region of Xinjiang is rich in natural resources. While 20% of the world's cotton comes from this region, forced labour by Uyghurs is also found in other sectors such as photovoltaics and the mining of metals and minerals such as aluminium and gold. Since 2017, Beijing has launched a programme of mass detention of Uyghurs, the Muslim minority. **An estimated one million people** are being detained and forced to work in tomato fields and food processing factories, amongst other places.



In 2025, France was shocked by a scandal involving the exploitation of West African migrant workers during the grape harvest in **Champagne**. Housed in appalling conditions and forced to work up to thirteen hours a day, these workers were treated as disposable labour. In July 2025, several recruiters were convicted of human trafficking and forced labour. This historic decision revealed the abuses of an industry linked to prestigious luxury brands.

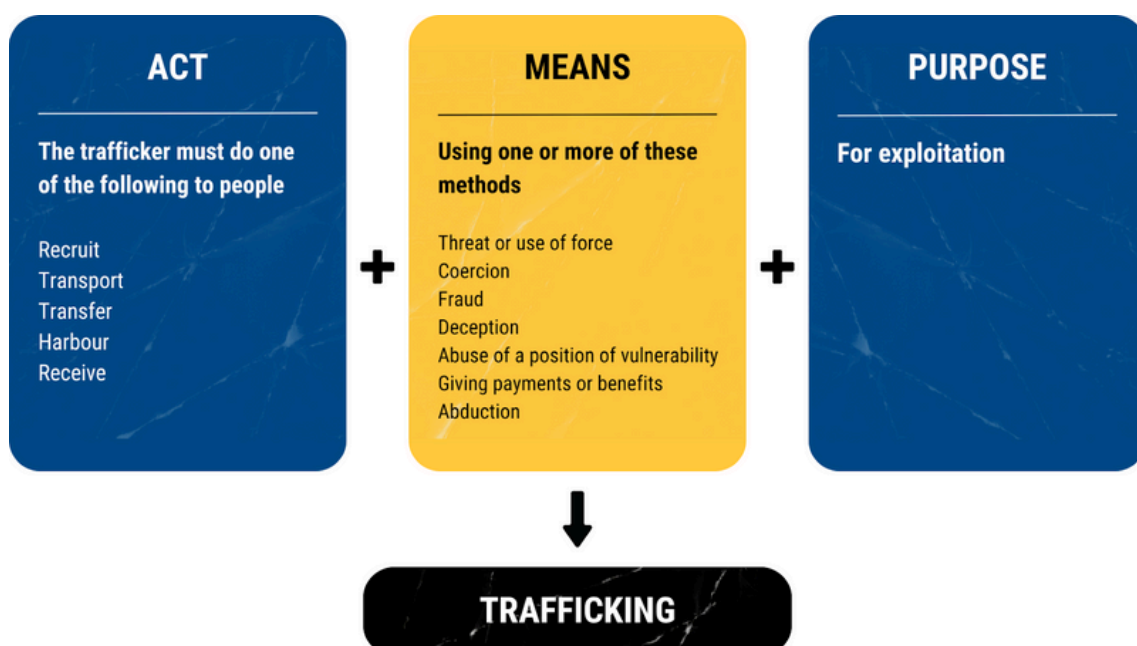
B. Trafficking in Human beings

Human trafficking takes place in every region of the world: Human beings are sold, bought and traded much like objects. Victims of trafficking end up in the hands of traffickers because they are being deceived, being forced or abducted. It is the **recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit.**

Human trafficking and smuggling are two different crimes. However, the two are related and often intertwined.

Human trafficking is **involuntary and victims** are exploited, whereas smuggling is voluntary, yet still bears life-threatening risks. A smuggling case can become human trafficking if the victims are exploited, for example by being held for ransom, or to pay off a smuggling debt through forced labour or sex work.

This consists of three core elements : **the act, the means, the purpose.** Physical and sexual abuse, blackmail, emotional manipulation, and the removal of official documents are used by traffickers to control their victims. Exploitation can take place in a victim's home country, during migration or in a foreign country.



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Human trafficking has many forms. These include exploitation in the sex, entertainment and hospitality industries, and as domestic workers or in forced marriages. Some victims are tricked or coerced into having their organs removed. Children are forced to serve as soldiers or to commit crimes for the benefit of the criminals.

In 2017, **Egyptian authorities** dismantled **an international network involved in organ trafficking**. This network took advantage of the extreme poverty of some Egyptians to buy their organs and sell them for large sums of money. Between 2009 and 2014, 3,000 migrants were killed in the **Sinai** after their vital organs were removed.

C. Child Labour

Child labour refers to **work that children are too young to perform or that can be hazardous**. Unlike activities that help children develop, child labour causes harm to child's health, safety or moral development. This includes anything that exposes children to physical, emotional or sexual abuse. It is work that occurs underground, underwater, at treacherous heights or in confined spaces - often with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools.

It remains a persistent problem in the world with **138 million children** engaged in child labour in 2024. Over a third of them are in hazardous work that directly endangers their health and safety. It is most prevalent in low-income countries, yet more than half of all child labour occurs in middle-income countries.

In Asia and the Pacific, child labour has trended downward but Sub-Saharan Africa continues to carry the heaviest burden. Most of it continues to occur in agriculture as part of family subsistence and on smallholder farms.



A child working at a mine in Madagascar

Technology and modern slavery

Exploiters constantly find new ways to exploit people. Technology is one of them. Today, traffickers use **online platforms and social media** to recruit and control victims. One urgent and fast-growing trend is the exploitation of children in cyberspace. Children are being targeted, coerced and abused online at a scale never seen before.

The victims can **easily be contacted** in the absence of physical and geographical limitations. Moreover social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp... are used by exploiters **to gain trust and access to information and recruit victims**. In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** facilitation of sexual slavery and forced marriage via Whatsapp has been reported.

Artificial intelligence is another threat. For example, ChatGPT and other AI-generated tools can be used to create misleading documents, including by impersonating trusted individuals, in order to lure victims into labour or sexual exploitation.

Key Players

Several actors play a central role in addressing modern slavery as a serious human rights violation:

- **Criminal networks and traffickers** are the primary perpetrators, exploiting vulnerable individuals through coercion, deception, and violence.
- **States and government institutions** are responsible for preventing trafficking, enforcing anti-slavery laws, and protecting victims.
- **International organizations**, such as the United Nations and the International Labour Organization, establish legal frameworks and coordinate global responses.
- Finally, **courts and judicial systems** seek to hold traffickers accountable, combat impunity, and uphold the fundamental rights of victims.

Key Questions

- Is modern slavery or human trafficking present in your country?
- What is your country's level of economic development, and how might it influence vulnerability to modern slavery?
- Does your country have laws to prevent and punish modern slavery?
- Does your country protect and support victims of modern slavery?
- Has your country ratified international agreements against human trafficking and does it prosecute traffickers effectively?





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