



# Child Recruitment in Yemen: Challenges facing the United Nation Mechanisms



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Cover picture: Houthi fighters in the capital of Yemen, Sanaa, mobilizing fighters to battlefronts in the war against pro-government forces in several Yemeni cities (Mohammed Huwais/AFP).

## **List of abbreviations**

Al-Houthis (Houthis militia)

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

International Criminal Court (ICC)

Islamic State Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

Least Developed Countries (LDCs)

Monitoring and reporting mechanisms (MRM)

United Nations (UN)

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

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# Child recruitment in Yemen:

## Challenges facing the United Nations Mechanisms

### I. Introduction

1. The “Organisation Internationale pour les Pays les Moins Avancés” (OIPMA) - The International Organization for the Least Developed Countries (IOLDCs) focuses, among other issues, on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in the crisis-affected Least Developed Countries (LDCs), including Yemen.

The present report focuses on the challenges facing the United Nations (UN) Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms (MRM) and UN decision-making bodies on the recruitment of children in Yemen, under the relevant Security Council resolutions<sup>1</sup>.

In this regard, this report highlights the deficiencies of the UN MRM, which has been unable to adequately monitor the escalating operations, both in terms of size and scope, on the recruitment and use of children in the conflict.

Moreover, the report aims to assist the concerned UN bodies in fulfilling their role in holding into account those responsible for the recruitment and use of children in the armed conflict of Yemen.

2. The present report has compared several UN reports based on the information given by the MRM, with reports and information transmitted by many multi-level NGOs as well as local, regional and international media on

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<sup>1</sup> Resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), No. 1379 (2000), No. 1460 (2003), No. 1539 (2004), No. 1612 (2005), No. 1882 (2009), No. 1998 (2011), No. 2068 (2012), No. 2143 (2014), No. 2140 (2014) No. 2225 (2015) and No. 2427 (2018).

child recruitment in Yemen. The comparison led to conclude that the UN reports are far to express the real violations against children in the conflict. This report identifies the reasons impeding an accurate and precise report by the MRM, which was not due to an inability to access to the conflict areas, as stated by the MRM experts.

3. The report has been based on individual case studies<sup>2</sup> of children as victims and witnesses, illustrating the severity of conditions in which children are recruited, documented by a network of multi-level organizations and press.

## **II. Background**

4. The MRM established by Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) is an UN-led process involving a wide range of stakeholders, including the United Nations Security Council, national Governments, various UN departments and agencies and international and local non-governmental organizations. This is an important "added value" requirement for the MRM.
5. The purpose of the MRM is to provide a systematic collection of accurate, timely, objective and reliable information on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict.
6. Monitoring and reporting should be used to obtain information from the country task force on monitoring and reporting, acting also as a protection monitoring network, comprising UN agencies concerned and child protection partners.
7. The protection of children has been firmly present on the agenda of the UN concerned bodies since the establishment of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in

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<sup>2</sup>Full individual case studies are available contacting the organization.

1996 by the United Nations General Assembly. Since then, member states have been trying to support the protection of children in armed conflict. However, child recruitment in Yemen has escalated, without effective measures taken in this regard.

8. Since 1999 to 2018, the UN Security Council adopted several resolutions on children in armed conflict. These affirmed that the protection of children affected by armed conflict is an important aspect of any comprehensive strategy for conflict resolution and peacekeeping, stressing the importance of a broad-based prevention strategy, starting with the address of the root causes of the armed conflict to promote the long-term protection of children.
9. The Security Council's responses to the armed conflict on children and the long-term implications for lasting peace, security and development are found in resolutions 1261 (1999) and 1314 200 0, No. 1379 of 2000, No. 1460 of 2003, No. 1539 of 2004, No. 1612 of 2005, No. 1882 of 2009, No. 1998 of 2011, No. 2068 of 2012, No. 2143 of 2014, No. 2225 of 2015 and lastly, resolution No. 2427 adopted on 9 July 2018, which stressed that the United Nations MRM should address the 6 violations identified in Security Council resolutions, primarily the crime of recruiting children under the age of 18 and the accountability of those undertaking these activities.
10. Among the resolutions mentioned above it was established a working group on Children and Armed Conflict with a mandate to follow-up and control the implementation of the MRM.  
Likewise, the above resolutions identified the concerned UN organs bearing the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the UN follow-up, integration, coordination and monitoring mechanisms and for engaging in dialogue with the parties to the conflict regarding children in armed conflict.

11. The phenomenon of recruiting children is a common feature of all terrorist groups, usually establishing training camps for this purpose. This phenomenon began with Al-Qaida and Ansar al-Shariah. Later, it began to be used by ISIS and the Houthis in Yemen. Likewise, the Islah party (the Muslim Brotherhood) also practices child recruitment in Yemen, using the camps of the Yemeni government forces currently under the power of the Islah Party which dominates the decision-making in the Yemeni government.
12. The crime of recruiting and using children in armed conflict has been of utmost importance for the Security Council. However, the UN Secretary-General's annual reports to the Security Council on child recruitment in Yemen did not raise the need of a response to the Security Council. This was due to the lack of accurate and adequate information provided by the MRM regarding the escalation of child recruitment in Yemen, in particular, by the Houthis.
13. Regarding Yemen, IOLDCs recalls the resolution No. 2140 of 2014 which specifically asked the Houthis (hereafter Houthi militia) to stop child recruitment in Yemen.
14. According to reports from local, regional and international organizations, at least 18,000 but up to 25,000 children in Yemen have been recruited. However, the UN MRM has stated in their communications that individual cases do not exceed hundreds (at best), and ignored further information and sources showing the magnification and seriousness of this phenomenon, which could help reducing its escalation and final cessation.
15. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has included the Houthi militia, the Government forces and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula for the second time in the annual "list of shame" for gross violations of children during the

armed conflict. However, the methods of the Al-Qaida and the Houthis militias have evolved from indoctrinating school students, brainwashing and obliging them to be devoted by the spirit of hostility, violence, hatred and love for fighting. They have convinced them about their duty to fight against Israel and America, as the shortest route to paradise. Some of the sentences used are “*Death to Israel*”, “*Death to America*”, “*Fuck the Jews*”, “*Victory for Islam*” and so on.

### **III. The Yemeni government**

16. Yemen has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The last reports of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Yemen did not stress child recruitment and their use in armed conflict, although this is a historical gross violation-taking place in Yemen.

17. In 2014, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF launched the "Children, not Soldiers" campaign to reach a global consensus to not use child soldiers in the conflict. At the time of the launch, the countries involved in the campaign were: Afghanistan, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen. The campaign ended with the release of thousands of child soldiers and their reintegration with the assistance of UNICEF, peacekeeping missions and political missions.

However, due to the conflict and without an effective government, the plan of action was not implemented in Yemen.

A report by the Yemeni Ministry of Human Rights confirmed that policies, strategies and plans to prevent the recruitment of children, including the strategy to combat child recruitment, had been frozen due to the ongoing war. UNICEF is currently seeking to update the 2014 Action Plan for the Protection of Children in Armed Conflict.

18. During the days 7, 8 and 9 July 2018, the Joint Technical Committee composed by the Government of Yemen and the United Nations held their first meeting to activate the plan of action signed between the Government of Yemen and the United Nations in 2014 on the prevention of the recruitment of children.
  
19. At the opening session of the joint technical committee between the Government of Yemen and the United Nations on 6 November 2018, the Minister of Human Rights of Yemen, the Minister of Social Affairs and the Minister of Labour of Yemen, confirmed that remedies for this phenomenon should be taken through the development of projects to address child recruitment by the armed forces. In particular, the Minister of Human Rights of Yemen recognised the recruitment of children by the government of Yemen and affirmed that *“the phenomenon of child recruitment is a danger to the present and future of Yemen”*, stressing that *“this phenomenon, if not addressed and solved, would have implications for the high rates of violence in society”*.
  
20. On 18 December 2018, the Ministry of Human Rights in Yemen signed a roadmap with UNICEF to stop the recruitment of children. However, the only 1,467 child soldiers recognised by UNICEF recruited by the government of Yemen during the year 2017 declared by UNICEF, highlights the failure of the MRM in observing child recruitment on the ground.  
It is difficult to consider that the road map will be effectively implemented as there are still thousands of hidden numbers of children recruited by Islah party under the umbrella of the government specially in Marib, Taiz, Shabwa, and Hadramout.
  
21. In his report to both, the Security Council and to the General Assembly (A/72/865-S/ 2018/465) of 16 May 2018 on children and armed conflict, the Secretary-General of the United Nations stressed the importance of

revitalizing and updating the plan of action with the Government of Yemen to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Yemeni Armed Forces.

22. In her report to the 39<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, the High Commissioner for Human Rights pointed out sources claiming that pro-government forces recruited particularly vulnerable children in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Marib. Children were used to fighting in the front lines in Shabwa and Hodeidah.
23. At the time of the writing of this report, it has been not possible to get an exact number of children recruited by the Yemeni armed forces, which is an issue that requires stronger research and obviously, an effective address by UN bodies.

#### **IV. The Houthi militia**

24. Although the pledge made by Al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi militia to stop child recruitment in Yemen during his meeting with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in November 2012, child recruitment has rather escalated. Previous international reports pointed out that the recruitment by the Houthi militias was about 9,000 children in the years following the pledge.
25. While the total number of children being recruited and used in the conflict by the Houthis is estimated to be over 25,000, a Houthi senior leader admitted earlier this year, to the Associated Press that 18,000 children have been recruited by the Houthis since 2014. The person did not reveal his name to the Associated Press. Moreover, according to local residents, the militia goes door-to-door telling the progenitors of children that they have to either hand over their children or pay them a compensation for the war effort that the militia does.

26. The evidences collected by observers during the reporting period indicated a significant increase in the recruitment and use of children by Houthi militias over the past 3 years. Delegates from IOLDCs in Yemen, have stated that recruitment has become more systematic in recent years. Likewise, in section VI, the report outlines the numbers gathered by other NGOs.

27. In Yemen, children have been attracted by the Houthis to an intensive ideological extremist program of three weeks to one-month duration. Then, they are sent to a training camp to attend a military training course for another month on the use of weapons, mines and explosive devices. Afterwards, they are sent to the battlefield.

28. Some former child soldiers told the Associated Press that they joined the rebels willingly because of their economic promises or the chance to take up arms.

Others, however, described it as being taken from their schools or forced to join the Houthis in exchange for the release of a family member being in custody. For instance, Saleh, a 13-year-old child told to the Associated Press *“the Houthis came and asked me and my father to join them in the front-line. My father rejected and then I heard the bullets and saw my father falling down dead”*:

29. Mr. Khaled Bahah (who had previously been removed from his post as vice president and prime minister because of his contradictory opinion to the President Hadi) wrote an article titled "Children of Yemen: between the school bag and the Kalashnikov". In this, he said *"My memory still recreates that scene of that innocent -referring to a 14-years-old child- among a group of child soldiers alongside the Houthi militias which surrounded my house in Sana'a during 2015, who respond to my question "why are you here?": "because we are struggling for God's sake"*.

Mr. Bahah also noted *“I was shocked by the report submitted by the United Nations on June 2016 as the authors of the report did not outline that the Houthi militias recruited thousands of Yemeni children and used them in the battlefield”*.

30. Houthi militias have forced and threatened many Yemeni families from villages and areas they control to send children between the ages of 10 to 17 years to the battlefields. They have also recruited children from Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps and orphans living in orphanages.

31. In some cases, children are dragged to the front lines without their parents' awareness. In other cases, they are recruited from poor families who accept, in exchange, financial remuneration to survive. Many poor families send their children to the front lines for the price of \$150 a month. Moreover, in one case, a family exchanged his child to the Houthis for a gas cooker.

32. In the last two years, it has started an open and compulsory recruitment campaign for children. Recruitment centres have opened 52 training camps with thousands of unemployed adolescents, children and young people.

33. It is important to outline that there were large numbers of primary school children in the recruitment lines. The forced recruitment campaign was deployed in the areas of Saada, Sana'a, Mahweet, Hodeidah, Tihama, Hajjah and Dhamar. It has been found that the Houthi militia carried out forced recruitment of children from the age of 10 in all centres within the area of their control.

34. The Yemeni NGO (Sah Human Rights) reported that the Houthis used more than 1,500 schools as prisons and military barracks. As part of the compulsory recruitment campaign, schools under the control of the Houthis are used to mobilize students, especially in the regions of Mahweet,

Hodeidah, Tihama and Dhamar, and send them to the camps established in these regions in preparation for sending them to the fronts.

35. The controlled part of Dhamar ranked first in terms of child recruitment killed on different fronts. The militias recruited 724 children under the age of 15, and most of the children killed were from this controlled area, followed by Saada, Amran, Hajjah, Hodeidah and Al-Mahweet. Solely in the territory of Al-Mahweet, 114 out of 243 children were recruited through the establishment of training courses, Sah Human Rights added.

36. In reports analysed by IOLDCs, the so-called Minister of Youth and Sports of the Houthi militia, Mr. Hassan Zeid, acknowledged that the Houthis had interrupted the education of children and mobilized both students and teachers to go to the front lines. In his words, "*They will constitute hundreds of thousands of soldiers to win the battle*".

37. The Houthi militia continues to recruit children and engage them in combat, by abducting them from orphanages and schools, and pressuring families and guardians to send their children to the battlefield.

## V. Al-Qaida and ISIS

38. More than 50 schools and religious institutes are affiliated with the Islah Party, for instance, Al-Zaydani Institute, the Ma'abar Institute, the Damar Institute and the Marib Institute are used as brainwashing centres to pave the way for Al-Qaida, ISIS and Ansar al-Shariah in Yemen turning the youth and children into suicide fighters in Aden.
39. As a result of the campaign launched since 2017 by the counter-terrorism sector and the Security Belt belonging to the Southern Transitional Council together with the United Arab Emirates forces, ISIS and Al-Qaida have been eliminated from the region and consequently, child recruitment has decreased.
40. Nowadays, the Islah party is taking advantage of vulnerable people living in poverty and children who do not have access to proper education in order to coerce them to participate in suicide missions and active shooting. The more extremist leaders of the Islah Party are linked to Al-Qaida which has established recruitment camps in Marib, Abyan and Shabwa.
41. The recruitment operations happen also in Lahj, especially in the Directorate of Tuben and several districts of Abyan governorate. Then, children are sent to Marib and Albaida where al-Qaida and ISIS' camps are based and funded by the Islah Party publicly, including the involvement and direct intervention by radical leaders of Islah party. The activities include financing, planning, sheltering or execution of terrorist operations.
42. According to local NGOS communications, a number of those who carried out the suicide attacks in Aden were students of the institutes and religious schools affiliated with the Islah Party and Al-Iman University, which is affiliated with Sheikh Al-Zindani, internationally classified as a terrorist, in part

due to his involvement in the recruitment of hundreds of children in Aden, sent through Turkey, to Syria and Iraq.

43. In a report from the Centre for Security studies of Yemen of 17 November 2018, it was stated that several members of the Islah Party arrived at Aden and started recruiting children and sending them to the training camps in Marib. The recruiters were promising the children an attractive salary to engage the minors. Some children found themselves in cars that were stopped in checkpoints controlled by the Security Belt, which released them. Some others, when they arrived to Marib and realized that the promises were all a lie, managed to escape.
44. A witness, whose child was kidnapped by the Islah party members for war purposes, investigated the recruitment of his son thanks to his position as a colonel at the military college. After finding the responsible for the recruitment, he demanded the immediate release of his child threatening the recruiter to undertake measures against him otherwise. As a result, the child was finally released.
45. According to received information in October 2018, security forces and checkpoints detained dozens of southern children and young people being transferred to al-Abr area and Shabwa governorate. The aim was to transfer them from al-Abr to Marib camps in order to train them and then be sent to Al-Qaida camps.
46. In 2018, hundreds of prisoners, including adolescent minors, were released from one prison in Aden as pressured by the Islah Party. As a result, the temporary stability period finished, with a sudden increase of terrorist attacks in which also the mentioned adolescents were involved.

47. Hadramout News stated on 6 January of 2019 that the first military zone in Hadramout has brought many children from the northern regions to this area. The results from the investigations with terrorist cells stated that some years ago, a son of one of the leaders of the Islah Party, Salah Malahm Batis, also a member of the Presidential Advisory Council of the President of Yemen, influenced the minor to join al-Qaida, becoming a field commander at seventeen years old.

## **VI. Fact-findings of IOLDCs**

48. In this section, the number provided by NGOs may vary according to the availability of access to information. It is important to bear in mind, that the aim of the report is not to conclude an exact number, as this is an unfeasible task provided the ongoing conflict. However, the report aims to outline that in any case, the current data gathered by NGOs and press expresses dramatically higher numbers on child recruitment in Yemen in comparison to the MRM report.

49. In its report on the recruitment of children in Yemen, the SAH Human Rights Organization reported that the recruitment of children aged between 10 and 17 years old among the Houthis reached approximately 15,000 cases according to witnesses and observations documented in camps, war correspondents and schools.

The tasks given to the children ranged from taking part in hostilities, guarding and changing checkpoints, cooking food, and delivering water and luggage. From 2015 until 2017, the recorded death of children amounted to 1,002, with 3,334 children injured. 420 were victims of landmines explosions from which 179 resulted in death and 241 were disfigured or permanently disabled.

It also pointed out that the total number of child death during the period from 1 February 2017 to 1 February 2018 reached 351 children and 561 injured.

50. The Wethak Foundation in Yemen also confirmed in a press conference that it documented the recruitment of about 25,000 children, mostly from Sana'a, Dhamar, Amran, Mahweet and Hajja.

51. Rusd, a local NGO of Yemen reported that the number of children recruited by the Houthi militia is at least 25,000.

52. A wide range of media reports also dealt with the situation of children fighting in the ranks of the Houthi militia. For its part, the Washington Post reported on the suffering of Yemeni children under the age of 18 in the ranks of the Houthis, estimating at about 25,000 people.

Moreover, as stated earlier, the Houthi senior leader admitted to the Associated Press that the Houthis have brought 18,000 child soldiers to their army since 2014.

On December 2018, local and international media published a report from the Associated Press, refuting the figures, statements and reports of the United Nations.

It highlighted that the Houthi militias forcibly took children from their homes and pushed them to fight in the front lines against the government forces. It added that, certainly, around 18,000 children, some of whom under the age of 10 years, were forced to participate in the war in Yemen for nearly 4 years, which severely contrast the number provided by the UN experts on 2,721 children recruited.

The agency quoted child soldiers saying that they had agreed to join the Houthis after receiving promises of money, while others stated they had been forcibly removed from their homes and schools or exchanged for the release of their detained relatives.

The agency also published a summary of her delegate's meetings with several children recruited by the Houthis. For instance, Riyadh, a 13-year-old child stated, *"I served in the mountainous region of Sarwar and more than half of the fighters were children"*.

53. During the period of the war, many widespread Middle Eastern satellite channels, as well as newspapers and social media, revealed frightening numbers concerning the Houthis forces on child recruitment in Yemen, supported by interviews and comments with a handful of children who were subjected to recruitment by Houthi militias, both as witnesses and victims. In the attached links it can be found the videos containing the information above mentioned, translated in English<sup>3</sup>.

54. According to the Arab Parliament, the Houthi militias are the largest group based on child recruitment. The recruitment of children by the Houthi militia is 72% of the total recruitment of children in Yemen, equivalent to 8 times the recruitment of children by Al-Qaida. It was documented that the Houthis recruited 200 children just from the Sana'a orphanage.

55. Many reports of local NGO point out that Houthi militia also uses children as human shields, to plant mines and explosive devices. They are being forced to eat hallucinogenic pills and drugs, as well as using them as human shields.

56. At the International Conference on the Protection of Children in Paris 2017, France condemned the recruitment of children by the Houthis.

Likewise, Amnesty International accused the Houthi militia of recruiting children under the age of 15 and engaging them in combat in flagrant violation with international law.

In the same event, Human Rights Watch also documented the recruitment, use and training of children as soldiers by the Houthi forces in May 2015.

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<sup>3</sup> Akhbar Alaan Channel (خيار الآن) <<https://www.youtube.com/embed/KFjNwY5pCpQ?rel=0>>  
Alarabiya Channel (قناة لعربية) <<https://www.youtube.com/embed/eX4e9cDi63Y?rel=0>>  
Abu Dhabi live TV (قناة بوظبي) <<https://www.youtube.com/embed/ILIMUjetttoU?rel=0>>  
Alarabiya Channel (قناة لعربية) <<https://www.youtube.com/embed/XW0PpUzkyk?rel=0>>  
Alghad TV (قناة الغد) <[https://www.youtube.com/embed/kQ855\\_gSrAk?rel=0](https://www.youtube.com/embed/kQ855_gSrAk?rel=0)>

57. Another disturbing fact is the denial of humanitarian access as a method of warfare. Children in areas controlled by Houthi militias have been denied access to life-saving support, according to the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other stakeholder's reports.
58. Save the Children also stated that 85,000 children in Yemen under the age of five had died from severe hunger since the outbreak of war in early 2015. The NGO stated, based on UN data, that approximately 84,700 children, suffering from malnutrition, may have died between April 2015 and October 2018. It added that more than 50,000 children in Yemen were expected to die by the end of the year 2018 as a result of the diseases and hunger caused by the war in the country.
59. 7,000,000 people are on the verge of famine in the country, which is in the grip of the biggest outbreak of cholera in modern history. Approximately 130 Yemeni children die every day and approximately 400,000 children needed to be treated from malnutrition on 2018.

## VII. Comparison with the United Nations reports

60. Being given the details and information on child recruitment in Yemen, the following paragraphs compares this data with the one stated in the UN MRM reports, outlining the difference in quantity of children recruited in Yemen.

In this regard, the words used by Ms. Virginia Gamba (Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) in a briefing on her report to the Security Council highly expressed the situation of children in armed conflict globally, which indeed equally applies to Yemen.

Ms. Gamba stressed *“We are all to blame. We have the tools and resources to better protect children, even in situations of armed conflict; but we have failed to do so. [...] The international community must act today to end the impact of conflict on children wherever possible, to prevent their future participation and to help affected children recover from violent conflict. [...] Let us now work to remind future generations of what we have done to better protect children affected by armed conflict rather than what we have failed to do”*.

61. The words stated above highly describe the lack of effective measures taken regarding child recruitment in Yemen. In particular, the report submitted by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2018, A/HRC/40/49, failed to indicate the escalation on child recruitment in Yemen, that was earlier recognized by the Houthis.

62. According to the Secretary-General report of 2018, the UN has verified the recruitment and use of 842 boys, the youngest of whom has not yet reached the age of 11. Among these cases, 534 (nearly two thirds) were attributed to the Houthis, 142 to the Security Belt forces and 105 to the Yemeni armed forces.

Most children are aged between 15 and 17. Other parties include 50 children recruited by the pro-government popular resistance and 1 by al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula.

Abyan Governorate was the largest accounting for 156 children. According to its report, of the Secretary-General, restrictions on access to areas where Al-Qaida is present in the Arabian Peninsula made impossible to verify the cases attributed to the group.

The UN has also verified the abduction of 1 boy by the Houthis in Shabwa province.

According to the report, 13 boys were taken and deprived of their freedom by the Houthis. The Security Belt forces did the same with 5 boys, while the Popular Resistance did so with 1 boy.

The report referred to the use of children mainly as guardians of checkpoints and government buildings, patrols, water fetches, carrying food and equipment to military locations; 76 children were used directly as combatants. 31 boys were killed, and 14 others were mutilated. Reports indicate that Houthis use financial payments as incentives for the association of children with the group.

63. In the report of the United Nations High Commissioner, briefed at the Human Rights Council 39<sup>th</sup> session in September 2018, the panel of the groups of experts stated that they received important information indicating that the Government and the forces supported by the Coalition forces and the Houthi forces had recruited children into armed forces or groups and used them to participate actively in the hostilities.

In most cases, children were between 11 and 17 years of age, but there were persistent reports of recruitment or use of children as young as 8 years old. The group found reliable information on the use of children in many of the provinces affected by the conflict.

Witnesses and interviewees confirmed that in some areas, the Houthi forces forcibly recruited children in schools, hospitals and door to door. Elsewhere,

the Houthi forces appeal for patriotism and financial incentives to attract children in their recruitment.

The Houthi forces use children in combat, at checkpoints and to plant explosive devices (Hereafter IEDs), and there were credible allegations that government forces and coalition forces arrested children who were fighting with the Houthi forces and used them to exchange prisoners.

64. The Panel of Experts on Yemen (established by the Security Council) stated in a letter on January 2018 to the President of the Security Council, that they identified 2 individuals who had recruited a total of 5 children on behalf of the Houthi forces.

In a previous letter from January 2017 to the President of the Security Council, the same group of experts referred to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict by Al-Qaida and armed groups associated with the legitimate Government, giving a total number of 175 children recruited.

The Saudi-led coalition provided this group with a list of 52 children recruited by the Houthis, who were rescued by the coalition and handed over to the legitimate government of Yemen and transferred to Marib.

65. On 20<sup>th</sup> November 2018, UNICEF said in a statement on the occasion of World Children's Day that at least 6,000 children were killed or seriously injured by the fighting that caused the collapse of basic services including water and health care.

Likewise, UNICEF has reported that 140 children were recruited from 26 March to 24 April 2015, and that the rate of recruitment by Houthi militias has reached between 120 and 150 children per month for the past 3 years.

66. Given the information from different NGOs as well as press, in comparison to the data provided at the UN level, it is of utmost importance to conclude with the next statement:

On December 2018, the Associated Press, published a report refuting the figures, statements and reports of the United Nations. It highlighted that the Houthi militias forcibly took children from their homes and pushed them to fight in the front lines against the government forces. It added that, certainly, around 18,000 children, some of whom under the age of 10 years, were forced to participate in the war in Yemen for nearly 4 years, which severely contrast the number provided by the UN experts on 2,721 children recruited.

## VIII. Conclusions

67. Oppositely to all UN figures, Associated Press circulated data and reports on 19 December 2018, based on interviews with one of the Houthi leader and 19 children recruited, showing that the number of children recruited by the Houthis is approximately about 18,000. This proved data, based on official recognition by the Houthis leader, is dramatically higher when compared to the UN estimation of 2,721 children recruited.

68. In Yemen, there is a historical and ongoing spread of extremism, instigating to hate and intolerance. Since decades, it has been included in the school's curriculum this extremist ideology. Moreover, before the war, this ideology was spread in mosques, TV channels and public events, brainwashing vulnerable children and young people.

69. The Houthi militias recruit children and school students to subject them to an intensive extremist ideological program for a period of three weeks to a month. During this, they disseminate on children the spirit of hostility, violence and hatred with sentences and slogans like "*God is the greatest death for America*", "*death to Israel*", "*victory for Islam*" and "*Fuck the Jews*". They convince them that fighting is the shortest route to paradise. If they die, most of the time because they are simply not ready to fight, the dead bodies of children are returned with their pictures with the description of "martyrs" on it to their families.

70. In the areas controlled by the Yemeni Government (formally), from decades a fertile environment has been formed to attract, mobilize and brainwash children in the name of religion by the Islah Party (in practice Muslim Brotherhood), Al-Qaida and ISIS in Yemen.

71. Radical leaders of the Islah Party, including those internationally classified as terrorists, have attracted and recruited children on behalf of Al-Qaida provided its strategic relationships with the Yemeni army in Marib, Shabwa, Abyan, Tuez and Hadramout. Children are brainwashed and trained on the use of weapons and they are used in suicide missions against the Southern Transitional Council and the United Arab Emirates personnel, which handles the delivery of humanitarian and logistical assistance in Aden and Cadres.

72. Through an active campaign, the United Arab Emirates and the Southern Transitional Council have tried to eliminate Al-Qaida and ISIS terrorist groups in the southern region which would decrease the number of child recruitment in Yemen.

However, these terrorist groups have found a way to hide and keep recruiting children through their alliance with the radical leaders of Islah Party.

73. Abdul-Malik, the Houthi leader, promised in a meeting with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in November 2012, to stop child recruitment. However, reports from many organizations indicate that child recruitment by Houthis has escalated in Yemen, in particular in recent years. For this reason, IOLDCs believes that these aftermaths need to be faced by the Security Council, according to its mandate, to stop child recruitment in Yemen and hold into account the perpetrators, according to international humanitarian law and international human rights law to protect children in armed conflict.

Otherwise, the resolutions on children in armed conflict of the Security Council would remain without meaning.

74. Having considered the reports based on MRM reports, IOLDCs has concluded that the efforts made by the UN in addressing child recruitment in Yemen have not really reflected the words of the Secretary-General to “*take the necessary preventive and protective measures*”.

According to the latest report presented at both the General Assembly and the Security Council, it has not been documented the real numbers of child soldiers in Yemen.

In accordance with the UN internal regulations, the UN Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict and the

coordinators of UN agencies residing in Yemen, bear responsibility for the accuracy of the information contained in the reports.

75. Several Security Council resolutions have emphasized the role of the Security Council on the protection of children in armed conflict as a critical strategic necessity.

Moreover, the phenomenon of child recruitment in armed conflict has been recognized as an important aspect of any comprehensive conflict resolution strategy and mediation. Yet, in this regard, neither concrete measures against child recruitment in Yemen nor an ICC referral have been taken.

76. The Security Council have called the parties to the conflict and the Special Envoys of the Secretary-General to include child protection provisions in all peace negotiations and agreements, ceasefire monitoring and agreements, including the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups.

However, in the current negotiations between the Houthis and the legitimate authority in Yemen, these features have not been taken into consideration nor implemented.

77. Despite the adoption of the Security Council resolution 2140 (2014) on Yemen, calling the Houthi militia to stop the use and recruitment of children and to allow the MRM to enter to the territory safely, no action towards this has happened yet.

78. Although the plan of action signed by the Government of Yemen and UNICEF in 2014 to stop and prevent child recruitment, including their release, its implementation has not taken place yet.

79. According to the information provided in the 2018 reports of both the expert groups appointed by the Security Council and the Human Rights Council on child recruitment, the documents do not reflect accurate and precise information, lacking in credibility.

80. The increasing child recruitment by the Houthis in Yemen requires an MRM which ensures that the information is obtained in a manner consistent with the humanitarian principles of the United Nations.

81. Provided the Security Council resolution 1612 on children and armed conflict, its paragraph 2 (a) requires the MRM *“to collect and provide timely, objective, accurate and reliable information on the recruitment and use of child soldiers in violation of applicable international law and on other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict”*.

The MRM reported to the working group without fully complying with the requirements of paragraph 2 (a) stated above. Moreover, the information was inaccurate and imprecise.

Because of not providing accurate information, it has been hindered a potential referral to the ICC on the gross violations committed against children in Yemen.

82. Considering the report to be presented to the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the human Rights Council by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN for Children and Armed Conflict Ms. Virginia Gamba, IOLDCs reaffirms that children in armed conflict in Yemen are still not given the consideration they should, including their release and future prevention on recruitment.
83. IOLDCs concludes that mechanisms to prevent and stop child recruitment exist. It believes that its implementation can save thousands of children in Yemen from all 6 violations they suffer during armed conflict. IOLDCs stresses the need for an improved and responsible enforcement of the MRM as the way towards the release of more than 18,000 children, as recognized by the Houthis to the Associated Press, and their reintegration in Yemen.
84. The MRM has been proved to work well in countries such as South-Sudan where many children have been released lately. However, IOLDCs is extremely concerned about the fact that the same type of mechanisms has not complied fully with its mandate in Yemen. For that reason, IOLDCs, urges the need to unify the way in which the MRM works globally, including the acceptance of multi-level and multi-stakeholder actors who can provide the MRM with accurate and precise information.
85. IOLDCs is extremely concerned about the fact that, even though is within the same UN system, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, has not really given meaning to both Article 1 and 2 of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, ratified by Yemen.
86. Regarding the activities of UNICEF in Yemen, IOLDCs believes that the latter has a special responsibility for the effective implementation of the MRM

at all levels as a key factor in the Children and Armed Conflict agenda. It has a global mandate to work for the protection of children and provide national task forces with technical direction and support. IOLDCs believes that UNICEF contribution is vital to develop the necessary work tools in Yemen regarding child recruitment, especially with regards to the increased recruitment of children by the Houthis.

87. Reports from neutral and impartial organizations are to provide accurate and credible information to the MRM when the latter is unable to collect it from its own means. Likewise, the Associated Press has an important role to play in providing relevant data and resources of information. This was earlier suggested in a letter from the H.E Olof Skoog, ambassador of Sweden (member of the Security Council) and Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, to the President of the UN Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict on 12 December 2018.

## **IX. Recommendations**

88. IOLDCs recommends the Security Council to take into consideration the present report. The organization requests the Security Council to hold a special session on child recruitment in Yemen.
89. IOLDCs urges the Security Council to refer the issue of child recruitment in Yemen to the ICC, considering that this constitutes a war crime under international humanitarian law, which has been supported by many Security Council resolutions on children in armed conflict.
90. IOLDCs recommends the Security Council Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict to review existing reliable and accurate information for further measures regarding children recruitment in Yemen.
91. The Organization calls the Prosecutor of the ICC to investigate the information contained in this report, as conferred by Article 15 (1) of the Rome Statute, to ensure the end of child recruitment and hold into account those responsible for that war crime in Yemen.
92. IOLDCs calls upon the Human Rights Council to adopt a resolution requesting the Panel of Experts to focus on child recruitment in Yemen and to submit accurate and reliable information. The resolution should put pressure in the release of children, mainly recruited by the Houthis.
93. IOLDCs recommends the UN Secretary-General that strengthening the MRM should be a major priority for the UN. Children's lives depend on it. The Organization urges him to review and scrutinize the tasks assigned to the MRM, providing them with specialized advisers in the protection of children recruited in armed conflict.

94. The Organization recommends that the Executive Office of the Secretary-General verifies the reports submitted on child recruitment in Yemen and the information provided on them.
95. The organization requests the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to visit Yemen as soon as possible to conduct a direct assessment of the recruitment of children in areas controlled by the Houthis.
96. IOLDCs requests the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to Yemen to include the issue of child recruitment at the heart of peace negotiations, ceasefire agreements and peace agreements, as stated in several Security Council resolutions on children in armed conflict referred above in this report.
97. IOLDCs calls upon the High Commissioner for Human Rights to take the necessary measures to stop child recruitment in Yemen, by strengthening the role of their field offices.
98. IOLDCs recommends the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to take appropriate measures to ensure the implementation of both Article 1 and 2 of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, ratified by Yemen.
99. The Organization recommends UNICEF Executive Director to give meaning to the latest plan of action signed with the Yemeni Government. This could include regular country visits inspecting the child recruitment situation in order to follow-up this phenomenon and to monitor the numbers of children recruited and released after the entry into force of the action plan.
100. IOLDCs urges UNICEF to cooperate with entities such as King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid and the Emirates Red Crescent in order to

contribute with positive inputs in the rehabilitation and reintegration of children in Yemen.

101. The Organization calls upon the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking, to organize a country visit to Yemen in order to study the situation and formulate recommendations to prevent and/or combat trafficking of children with the purpose of making them child soldier.

102. IOLDCs urges to all the UN bodies with a mandate on children in armed conflict to take into consideration the recommendations given by H.E Olof Skoog, ambassador of Sweden (member of the Security Council) and chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in his letter sent to the President of the UN Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict on 12 December 2018.