



**COALITION TO STOP THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS**



**LEBANON**

**The vulnerability of children to involvement in  
armed conflict**

**October 2007**

**Coalition to Stop the Use  
of Child Soldiers  
9 Marshalsea Road  
4th Floor  
London SE1 1EP  
United Kingdom**

**Tel: +44 (0) 20 7367 4110  
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7367 4129**

**[info@child-soldiers.org](mailto:info@child-soldiers.org)**

**Front cover photo: © Permanent Peace Movement, 2007. Children in Ein el-Hilweh refugee camp, near Saida.**

**The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers unites national, regional and international organizations and Coalitions in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. Its Steering Committee members are Amnesty International, Defence for Children International, Human Rights Watch, International Federation Terre des Hommes, International Save the Children Alliance, Jesuit Refugee Service, and the Quaker United Nations Office-Geneva.**

**[www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org)**

## Introduction

Political violence has sharply escalated recently in Lebanon. A prominent parliamentarian, Antoine Ghanem, and at least six others were killed on 19 September 2007 in a car bomb attack in a series of political assassinations in Beirut for which no group has claimed responsibility.<sup>1</sup> Government troops and the Fatah al-Islam armed group fought in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp for over three months until the army took control of the camp on 2 September 2007. At least 300 people, including an unknown number of civilians, had died in and around the camp as a result of the fighting.<sup>2</sup> Six peacekeepers of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) were killed by a car bomb in southern Lebanon in June 2007; no group claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>3</sup>

Internally, the polarization of Lebanese society around its political parties, which are divided along religious and communal lines, is mounting. Lebanese democracy, based on a delicate distribution of powers and institutions among communities, is increasingly fragile, with parties shifting their allegiances and publicly denouncing one another.

Externally, Lebanon continues to be drawn into the region's multiple conflicts. Israel and Hezbollah continue to pose a threat to each other and to stability in the country following a 33-day war in 2006. Syria continues to have an influence on Lebanese politics, which the Lebanese political parties acknowledge openly, despite its withdrawal of troops in 2006.

This briefing paper describes how the current crisis in Lebanon may increase the vulnerability of children to being used in the context of escalating political violence and makes a number of recommendations, which, if implemented, could help to better protect children there. The paper was prepared following a field visit to Lebanon in April 2007, during which Coalition staff visited Beirut and the Palestinian refugee camps of Shatila, Mar Elias and Burj el-Barajneh. The Coalition met numerous local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UN staff, children, families, Lebanese authorities and political parties.

This briefing paper aims to support the national campaign for the ratification and implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (Optional Protocol) by Lebanon, launched by the Lebanese independent NGO, Permanent Peace Movement (PPM), with which the Coalition collaborates. The Protocol establishes that "States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take part in hostilities".<sup>4</sup> The Protocol also states that "States Parties shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces".<sup>5</sup> In relation to armed groups, the Protocol establishes that "Armed groups that are distinct from the

---

<sup>1</sup> Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2007/34, 20 September 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Jazeera, "Clean-up under way at Nahr al-Bared", [www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net), accessed on 3 September 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Jazeera, "Lebanon blast kills Unifil soldiers", [www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net), accessed on 11 July 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. (Optional Protocol) Art. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Optional Protocol., *op.cit.* Art. 2.

armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years.<sup>6</sup>

The campaign, launched by Permanent Peace Movement in March 2007, targets all sectors of Lebanese society, including community groups, political parties, the media, NGOs and other national stakeholders. It aims to raise awareness of the importance of protecting all children in Lebanon from violence and build a consensus around the need to ratify and implement the Optional Protocol as the most effective international legal instrument to stop and prevent the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Permanent Peace Movement has recently created a network of Lebanese organizations to raise awareness of the involvement of children in armed conflict in Lebanon and the need to put in place effective protection and prevention measures. PPM has also initiated the creation of the Middle East Network on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

## Background

Lebanon experienced a civil war between 1975 and 1989 which involved all the religious communities in the country. During the conflict, tensions between Christian and Muslim communities were exacerbated by the intervention of regional powers including Israel, Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Syrian troops entered the country at the beginning of the civil war. Israel also invaded Lebanon in 1978 and again in 1982, before it withdrew and declared a “security zone” in the south.

Hezbollah (Party of God), a Shiite armed political group, participated in the civil war from 1982, with its main declared objective being to end the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon. Since then it has maintained a low intensity conflict with Israel and has emerged as one of the main political parties in parliament.

Lebanon has a history of child soldier use. Militias from all parties to the conflict used children extensively during the civil war. Children as young as 12 were used by some of the groups, including by the Israel-backed Christian South Lebanon Army (SLA), and by the Shiite groups Amal and Hezbollah.<sup>7</sup> It was estimated in 1990 that one per cent of Lebanese children were involved in the conflict.<sup>8</sup>

Since the end of the civil war, both Hezbollah and Palestinian armed political groups within Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon have continued to use children in non-combat roles.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Optional Protocol, *op.cit.* Art. 4.1.

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch: *Israel/Lebanon: Persona Non Grata: The Expulsion of Civilians from Israeli-Occupied Lebanon*, July 1999. For more information on the use of children by the SLA during the civil war, please refer to the Coalition’s case study on: [www.child-soldiers.org/childsoldiers/armedgroups](http://www.child-soldiers.org/childsoldiers/armedgroups).

<sup>8</sup> Mona Macksoud, *Lebanese Children and War*, UNICEF Conference on Peace Building and Development of Lebanon, April 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Coalition interviews with child protection agencies, Beirut, April 2007. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2004*. Available on [www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org).

Until July 2006, the country remained relatively stable, maintaining a fragile balance of powers among Christian sects, Sunni Muslims, Shiite Muslims, Druzes and other communities. Government structures are divided between the various groups in a complex power-sharing system.<sup>10</sup>

The 14 February 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, a Sunni Muslim leader of the opposition against the Syrian presence in Lebanon, resulted in a sharp escalation of political tensions. Numerous sources suggested that the Syrian regime and its allies in Lebanon might have been involved in the assassination. In May 2007, the UN Security Council approved a resolution creating an international criminal court to try those suspected of Hariri's assassination.<sup>11</sup> As a result of mounting internal and international pressure and UN Resolution 1559,<sup>12</sup> the last 14,000 Syrian troops present in Lebanon withdrew in April 2005. Resolution 1559 also demanded the disarmament of all armed factions, including Hezbollah and other militias linked to it. To date, however, none of them have done so.

The assassination of former prime minister Hariri polarized political parties into two main opposing coalitions: the 14 March Alliance in government, mostly formed of anti-Syrian groups along with Christian, Druze and Sunni Muslim political groups, led by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora;<sup>13</sup> and the Resistance and Development Block, mostly formed of pro-Syrian Shiite groups, including Hezbollah, Amal and the Syrian Nationalist Party (al-Hizb al-Quami al-Ijtima'i al-Suri). There is a third alliance, which backs General Aoun, officially secular but predominantly composed of Christians.

Since Hariri's assassination, political debate has hardened considerably. For example, the Resistance and Development Block has repeatedly staged street demonstrations calling for the resignation of the government and the installation of a government of national unity.

On 12 July 2006, Hezbollah abducted two Israeli soldiers and killed a further eight. Israel responded by launching air strikes across Lebanon on a range of military and civilian targets including houses, roads, bridges and factories. The armed conflict lasted 33 days. Following the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1701,<sup>14</sup> a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon came into effect on 14 August 2006. The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was enhanced after the 2006 crisis to monitor the

---

<sup>10</sup> BBC News. "Country Profile: Lebanon", [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), accessed on 26 March 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Resolution 1757 adopted by the Security Council at its 5685th meeting, on 30 May 2007.

<sup>12</sup> UNSC Resolution 1559. With this resolution, the Security Council declared support for free and fair presidential elections in Lebanon and called for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon, SC 8181, 2 September 2004, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).

<sup>13</sup> The 14 March Alliance includes the Future Movement (Tayyar Al Mustaqbal), officially secular but mainly Sunni Muslim; the Progressive Socialist Party (Hizb al Taqadummi al-Ishtiraki), officially secular but mainly Druze; the Lebanese Forces (officially secular but mainly Maronite Christian); and the Qornet Shewan Gathering (mainly Maronite Christian).

<sup>14</sup> UNSC Press Release, "Security Council calls for end of hostilities between Hezbollah, Israel, unanimously adopting Resolution 1701 (2006). Permanent Ceasefire to Be Based on Creation Of Buffer Zone Free of Armed Personnel Other than UN, Lebanese Forces", UNSC SC/8808, 11 August 2006. [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).

cessation of hostilities and support Lebanese armed forces as they deployed throughout southern Lebanon.<sup>15</sup>

In May and June 2007, a radical Sunni armed group, Fatah al-Islam, which the government claims has links to Syrian intelligence and Al Qaeda, clashed with Lebanese armed forces, who accused the group of bombing two buses in a Christian area close to Beirut in February 2007.<sup>16</sup> Fatah al-Islam was based in the Palestinian refugee camp Nahr al Bared, northern Lebanon.<sup>17</sup>

## **Vulnerable children in Lebanon**

The nature of the internal political crisis, involving all communities in Lebanon, is rapidly expanding to the social sphere and affecting all aspects of life including children's lives. Clashes between communities have led to street violence and tensions in schools and universities, and, on at least one occasion, have resulted in several deaths.<sup>18</sup>

Many local sources have indicated that Lebanese children are exposed to a mounting environment of political hatred and polarization of Lebanese society along community and religious lines. According to child protection agencies, this environment of confrontation is already having an effect on the behaviour of children, both within their families and at school. There have been cases of children who have changed schools where the majority of students belonged to a different community for fear of being bullied or ostracized.<sup>19</sup>

## **Children and the 2006 war**

The July-August 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war resulted in the destruction of essential infrastructure, the killing of civilians and the internal displacement of nearly a million people, many of whom have since returned to their devastated homes. Akkar, the Beqa'a Valley, and the Southern Beirut suburbs were the most affected areas.<sup>20</sup> These areas are mostly controlled by Hezbollah.

The use and persistent presence of cluster bombs and other unexploded ordnance left behind by the Israeli troops represent a major threat, particularly in southern Lebanon, with as many as one million unexploded cluster sub-munitions in 592 strike locations.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> UNIFIL was originally created in 1978 to confirm Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security, and help the Government of Lebanon regain its effective authority in the area.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Jazeera on line, "Lebanon: Syrians admit bus bombing", 13 March 2007. [www.english.aljazeera.net](http://www.english.aljazeera.net).

<sup>17</sup> Fatah al-Islam split from Fatah al-Intifada (a Syrian-backed Palestinian group) in November 2007. The Palestinian factions and organizations in the refugee camps have repeatedly distanced themselves from Fatah al-Islam.

<sup>18</sup> In January 2007, street clashes between Sunni and Shiite political factions at Beirut's Arab University of Beirut ended with four people killed and a curfew imposed by the Lebanese army, BBC News, 25 January 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Coalition meetings with child protection agency representatives in Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF, *Lebanon: critical issues for children* [www.unicef.org/](http://www.unicef.org/), accessed on 11 May 2007.

<sup>21</sup> UNICEF, *Humanitarian Action Report*, 2007.

Following her visit to Lebanon in April 2007, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, highlighted the extent of the destruction caused by the Israel-Hezbollah conflict and the extremely harsh situation of Palestinian children in Lebanon. She added, "All parties should respect international humanitarian law with regard to the protection of children and ensure that schools are zones of peace".<sup>22</sup>

### **Recommendations**

- *The Lebanese authorities should continue to provide psychosocial support for children affected by the Israel-Hezbollah conflict.*
- *The international donor community should support existing efforts by the authorities, UN agencies and NGOs in the field and increase financial support for the reconstruction of the areas affected by the war.*

### **Use of children by Lebanese armed groups and political parties**

#### ***Political parties and armed groups in Lebanon***

Some children in Lebanon undergo military training by the youth (scout) wings run by most political parties; some are involved in armed groups including Amal, the Syrian Nationalist Party and Hezbollah, although secrecy around these youth wings and their activities make it extremely difficult to evaluate the extent of the involvement.

Hezbollah used child soldiers as young as 10 prior to 2001.<sup>23</sup> There was no recorded use of under-18s by Hezbollah during the 2006 armed conflict although there are reports of military training provided to children associated with Hezbollah through the al-Mahdi brigades, a social group comprised of children under 15.<sup>24</sup> Hezbollah has reportedly contributed to restoring the livelihoods of families affected by armed conflict and helped thousands of children to pursue their education.<sup>25</sup> However, the group does not have at present a stated child protection policy. Other armed groups, including Amal, Fatah al-Islam and the Palestinian factions do not have a stated child protection policy.

In an interview with the Coalition in 2004, Ghaleb Abou-Zeinab a member of the political bureau of Hezbollah claimed that Hezbollah had never trained or used children as soldiers, not even during the Israeli occupation; he said that the display of children in military parades is "just to show the enemy the next generation that is going to replace the warriors killed by the enemy".<sup>26</sup> The Coalition has noted that children have not been paraded in military uniforms by Hezbollah since 2005.

---

<sup>22</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, "Lebanon: All parties agree to protect children affected by armed conflict". OSRG/070412-22. 12 April 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report*, 2001. [www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org).

<sup>24</sup> Coalition interview with confidential source in Beirut, producing audiovisual evidence. April 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Arabnews: "Hezbollah Entwined in Lebanon's Social Fabric". 12 August 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Coalition interview with Ghaleb Abou-Zeinab, member of Hezbollah, Beirut, November 2004. The *Child Soldiers Global Report* 2001 indicated, however, the use of child soldiers as young as 10 by Hezbollah prior to 2001.

Amal, another Shiite political group with an armed wing, is also said to train children militarily. The group reportedly participated to some extent in the 2006 Israel-Lebanon Conflict, although there are no reports of children being used by the group in combat roles.<sup>27</sup>

### **Recommendations**

- *All political parties should commit publicly to ending the military training of children, and allow youth wings to be monitored by the authorities.*
- *Armed groups in Lebanon should stop training children militarily and should make public their commitment to end this practice.*

### **Palestinian children in Lebanon**

There are approximately 409,000 Palestine refugees registered with the UN Works and Relief Agency (UNRWA) in Lebanon, although not all of them are in the country.<sup>28</sup> Some 215,000 (53 per cent) live within the boundaries of 12 official refugee camps, with the rest living in unofficial or informal settlements scattered throughout Lebanon.<sup>29</sup>

UNRWA estimates that approximately 29 per cent of the registered Palestine refugees using UNRWA's basic services are under 18.<sup>30</sup> Most Palestinian children in Lebanon live in conditions of extreme poverty in overcrowded camps with no space for leisure and recreation.<sup>31</sup> The level of education received by most Palestinian children is poor and the percentage of early dropouts from school is high, mainly due to lack of resources to go on to higher education. There is a lack of vocational training alternatives for children and, once out of school, Palestinians face limited work opportunities.

Foreigners in Lebanon do not have the right to work in about 50 jobs, trades and independent professions.<sup>32</sup> For other occupations (mostly unskilled and manual labour), foreigners must have a work permit. Palestinian refugees have limited access to work permits and even after obtaining one, are unable to benefit from the Lebanese social security system. The right to social security depends on "reciprocity of treatment" - namely reciprocal agreements between Lebanon and other states whereby nationals of both countries are allowed to benefit from social security assistance in the other country. Palestinians in Lebanon who do not have Lebanese nationality do not benefit from these

---

<sup>27</sup> Coalition interview with confidential source, April 2007.

<sup>28</sup> "Under UNRWA's operational definition, Palestine refugees are persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict [...] UNRWA's definition of a refugee also covers the descendants of persons who became refugees in 1948". UNRWA's web site, [www.un.org/unrwa/refugees](http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees) consulted on 2 July 2007.

<sup>29</sup> UNRWA provides essential humanitarian needs to the Palestinian population in the form of basic education, primary health care, relief to the most deprived people and social services, Coalition interview with UNRWA, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>30</sup> UNRWA records are based on voluntary reporting by the refugees themselves and accordingly are indicative rather than conclusive of the number of Palestinian refugees in the country.

<sup>31</sup> Coalition meeting with UNRWA field officer in Shatilla Palestinian refugee camp, April 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Labour, Ministerial Decision No. 621/1, 15 December 1995.



agreements since the Palestinian Authority is not a recognized state for the purposes of right to reciprocity with Lebanon.<sup>33</sup>

In June 2005, the Minister of Labour announced in a ministerial memorandum that Palestinian refugees born in Lebanon and officially registered at the Lebanese Ministry of Interior could work legally in manual and clerical jobs previously unavailable to them; the ban on Palestinians seeking professional employment remained in place.<sup>34</sup>

In June 2006, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about the large number of Palestinian children who do not hold identity documents and about the difficulties Palestinian children have in obtaining Lebanese nationality.<sup>35</sup> This is largely due to the fact that citizenship is transmitted solely through a child's father, which can result in statelessness, for example, among children born to Lebanese mothers and refugee fathers.<sup>36</sup> Palestinian children born in Lebanon but not holding identity papers cannot take the Lebanese exam (*Brevet*) which leads to an intermediate education certificate, closing the door to further education.<sup>37</sup>

Palestinian children in Lebanon face limited prospects of ever being able to exercise their right to return to the Palestinian Occupied Territory. Moreover, the restrictions on their becoming Lebanese citizens perpetuate their status as refugees.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Education for Palestinian children***

The primary education system in the Palestinian refugee camps is managed by UNRWA. The education situation is worse than in the rest of Lebanon. According to the Lebanese government, the drop out rate among Palestinian children is 39 per cent, ten times higher than for Lebanese students.<sup>39</sup>

Antisocial behaviour in refugee camp schools, including bullying and abuse of teachers, is increasing, and a large number of students attempt to join the labour market before the end of their compulsory free education for a number of reasons. These include poverty in the family, the difficulty of the curriculum (compared to Lebanese schools) and the lack of opportunity to go to university (primarily because of lack of resources to pay for it and secondly because, as noted, most jobs for university graduates are effectively denied to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon).<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Palestinian Human Rights Organization, Advocacy Practicum for NGOs representing Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, June 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of Labour Memorandum (No. 67/1), June 2005.

<sup>35</sup> According to studies conducted by NGOs, there are between 3,000 and 5,000 Palestinians without legal residence status in Lebanon. Many came in the 1970s and are among the most deprived people in the community.

<sup>36</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 44 of the Convention. Concluding observations: Lebanon. CRC/C/LBN/CO/3, 8 June 2006.

<sup>37</sup> Coalition interview with UNRWA representative, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Coalition meeting with Palestinian NGO in Mar Elias refugee camp, April 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Third Periodic Report of Lebanon on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, *op.cit.* p.127.

<sup>40</sup> Coalition interview with Palestinian vocational training organizations in Burj el-Barajneh refugee camp, April 2007.

Palestinian children also suffer corporal punishment at school and at home (which also occurs in Lebanese schools). Both UNRWA and the international child protection NGO, Save the Children Sweden, are carrying out campaigns to stop this practice in Palestinian refugee camps.<sup>41</sup>

The scarcity of extracurricular activities provided by UNRWA, and the limited number of sports and leisure facilities due to lack of space and resources, also contribute to high drop out levels. This situation is exacerbated by poor health conditions in the camps, which affects the morale and motivation of students, as well as undermining their performance.<sup>42</sup>

Vocational training is provided by both UNRWA and Palestinian NGOs. However, the demand is not fully met by these institutions, which often also have to respond to the needs of children who drop out early from school. Many children do not find training and vocational courses that suit their skills and find it difficult to obtain a job after these courses.<sup>43</sup>

According to child protection agencies working with Palestinian children in Lebanon, dropping out of school early and lack of vocational training are factors that significantly increase children's vulnerability to involvement in armed groups in Lebanon.<sup>44</sup>

### **Recommendations**

- *The Lebanese authorities should increase their support for Palestinian children to gain access to higher education outside the refugee camps.*
- *The Lebanese authorities should provide Palestinian children with access to recreational facilities and further educational opportunities.*
- *The international donor community should increase the support it provides to UNRWA and Palestinian and international NGOs providing health services and poverty alleviation programs in the camps as well as psychosocial support for Palestinian children.*
- *The international donor community should support vocational training programs for Palestinian children, as well as programs to facilitate access to higher education, and continue support for UNRWA work in identifying gaps in the labour market suitable for Palestinian skills.*

### **Palestinian factions and security in the Palestinian refugee camps**

There are over 18 armed factions in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, some of whom are also found in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Fatah, Popular Front for the

---

<sup>41</sup> Coalition interview with UNRWA representative, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Coalition interview with Palestinian vocational training organization in Burj el-Barajneh refugee camp, April 2007

<sup>43</sup> Coalition interview with Palestinian vocational training organizations in Burj el-Barajneh refugee camp, April 2007

<sup>44</sup> Coalition interview with child protection agencies, Beirut, April 2007.

Liberation of Palestine, Hamas). Others were created during the Cold War with support from different States (mostly Iran, Libya, Syria, and the USSR) and still exist.<sup>45</sup>

There are reports of use of children by Palestinian armed factions and groups in the Palestinian refugee camps.<sup>46</sup> Children have been used by some of the factions in some of the Palestinian camps, during internal clashes among factions, mainly to harass or intimidate members of other groups.<sup>47</sup> After autumn 2006, these clashes increased in some refugee camps, mirroring the factional fighting between Fatah and Hamas in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The emergence of Fatah al-Islam resulted in clashes between this group and Fatah in Nahr al-Bared camp, in northern Lebanon in early 2007.<sup>48</sup>

According to reports, military training is currently provided by some of the Palestinian factions to children as young as 10. Palestinian militias linked to Fatah as well as Asbar Al Ansar Islam, a Sunni radical group, carried out military training of under 18s in Ain Helweh, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, in April 2007.<sup>49</sup>

Palestinian factions are reportedly rallying themselves behind the different political actors in Lebanon; some of them support the coalition government and others support the Hezbollah-led coalition.<sup>50</sup>

The proliferation of small arms in Palestinian camps, including in schools, heightens the risk of violence in the camps.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Fatah al-Islam***

Fatah al-Islam have been arming themselves at least since the beginning of 2007 and have targeted youths in Palestinian refugee camps in the north, on occasion offering money to join the group.<sup>52</sup> There are reports that children as young as 12 were involved in the fighting against the Lebanese army in May 2007, although more research is necessary to confirm these allegations.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Recommendations***

- *All Palestinian factions and armed groups in the Palestinian refugee camps should stop using children for military purposes and in military training and should commit to the implementation of verifiable measures to prevent such practices*

---

<sup>45</sup> Coalition interview with UNRWA field staff in refugee camp, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Coalition interview with confidential sources in Palestinian refugee camps. Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Coalition interview with international child protection organization. Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>48</sup> Coalition interview with UNRWA representative, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>49</sup> Coalition interview with confidential source, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Coalition interview with Palestinian Human Rights organizations in Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>51</sup> Coalition interview with a Palestinian non-governmental organization, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Coalition interview with UNRWA representative, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Coalition interview with confidential source in Beirut, producing audiovisual evidence, May 2007 and email exchange with confidential source, June 2007.

- *The international community should support NGOs' efforts to stop the proliferation of small arms in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.*

## **The need for an integrated child protection policy**

Although there is no recorded use of under-18s by the Lebanese armed forces or the internal security forces, the Lebanese authorities have not prioritized strategies to prevent children from involvement in armed conflict.

At present the government does not have an integrated child protection policy encompassing child protection legislation; educational policies; measures to end discrimination based on religious background; provision of psychosocial support for children affected by armed conflict; child rights and child protection training for government and military personnel; or other aspects of child protection.

The Higher Council for Child Rights, an agency of the Ministry of Social Affairs comprised of government representatives, civil society and international child protection organizations, has developed a comprehensive strategy on child protection in Lebanon, where prevention of involvement in armed conflict is a priority. However, the plan has not received sufficient financial backing from the government or donors.<sup>54</sup> The armed forces and other security forces do not receive specific training on child rights or child protection.<sup>55</sup>

In general, Lebanese civil society, including the media, Lebanese NGOs and child protection organizations and agencies, has not prioritized prevention of children's involvement in armed violence. Permanent Peace Movement's campaign aims to raise awareness among these organizations and stakeholders on the importance of this issue.

## **Recommendations**

- *The Lebanese authorities should develop an integrated plan and policies for the prevention of children's involvement in armed conflict, to be implemented by all relevant ministries and organizations in accordance with the Paris Commitments and Principles.<sup>56</sup>*
- *The Ministries of Interior, Social affairs and Defence should coordinate to create a child protection unit within the security and armed forces to implement an effective child protection policy in these forces.*
- *The Lebanese government should work closely with local and international NGOs and UNICEF to provide child rights training for Lebanese forces in the field, especially those deployed with UNMIL in southern Lebanon.*

<sup>54</sup> Coalition interview with General Secretary of Higher Council for Childhood, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Coalition interview with head of Orientation, Lebanese Armed Forces, April 2007.

<sup>56</sup> The Paris Commitments on the protection of children unlawfully recruited or used by armed forces or armed groups and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups, were endorsed by 58 governments at a meeting in Paris in February 2007, [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org).

- *National and international NGOs and child protection agencies such as UNICEF, should integrate specific measures for child protection from armed conflict into wider child protection programs, including in the areas of training, research, advocacy, and awareness raising among communities.*
- *International NGOs and UN agencies should engage with existing civil society initiatives and support local NGOs in their efforts to prevent the future involvement of children in armed conflict in Lebanon.*
- *The international community should support efforts by the Lebanese authorities and organizations to implement an integrated plan for the prevention of children's involvement in armed conflict through financial support and expertise.*

### **A legal framework that falls short of protecting children against their involvement in armed conflict**

Compulsory military service, abolished by government decree on 4 February 2005, came into force in February 2007, with the support of all political parties.<sup>57</sup> There are no under 18s in the Lebanese armed forces. Voluntary recruitment into the Lebanese armed forces is only allowed for over 18s.

However, the action of the government and its security forces in monitoring compliance with the law and stopping the recruitment of children in armed groups is limited in areas under the control of Hezbollah in the south, and more especially inside the Palestinian refugee camps, where *de facto*, it is the Palestinian factions, often armed, who have effective control.

Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and the International Labour Organization Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour in 2001.<sup>58</sup> However, it has not ratified either the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (Optional Protocol) or the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>59</sup> The statute establishes a permanent court to try persons charged with committing war crimes (including recruitment and use of under-15s in hostilities), crimes against humanity, and genocide.<sup>60</sup>

The ratification of the Optional Protocol is a crucial step in acknowledging the importance of preventing children from involvement in armed conflict. After five years of

---

<sup>57</sup> Law N665 (4 February 2005), Lebanese Armed Forces website. [www.lebarmy.gov.lb](http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb).

<sup>58</sup> Lebanon ratified ILO 182 on 11 September 2001. This convention considers forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict as one of the worst forms of child labour (Article 3) and states that "Each member which ratifies this Convention shall take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the works forms of child labour" (Article 1).

<sup>59</sup> Lebanon signed the Optional Protocol on 11 February 2002.

<sup>60</sup> In its definition of war crimes the statute includes "conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities" (Article 8(2)(b)(xxvi)); and in the case of an internal armed conflict, "conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities" (Article 8(2)(e)(vii)).

discussion, the Lebanese parliament has yet to ratify this widely ratified international treaty. This failure was attributed in the past to Hezbollah's unwillingness to support the ratification. However, after the visit of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for children and armed conflict in April 2007, both Prime Minister Siniora and MP Mohamed Raad, on behalf of Hezbollah, made a public commitment to ratify the Optional Protocol.<sup>61</sup>

The current focus of political parties on political battles rather than on legislative reform, particularly human rights legislation, has contributed significantly to the delay in ratifying the Optional Protocol. This situation is further exacerbated by the difficulties parliament faces in meeting since its speaker, Nahib Berri (leader of the political group Amal), ordered the closure of the plenary, alleging "absence of quorum".<sup>62</sup> However, parliamentary commissions, including the Child Rights Committee, do meet regularly.

The Child Soldiers Coalition supports the campaign for the ratification of the Optional Protocol by Lebanon organized by the Lebanese NGO Permanent Peace Movement (PPM). PPM's campaign works to build a consensus among all main stakeholders in Lebanon on the importance of ratifying and implementing the Optional Protocol. The campaign focuses on civil society, including children and their families, educators, the media, and especially political leaders and parliamentarians. It calls on them to endorse this ratification from a child rights point of view, which puts children's interest first and sets aside political divisions.<sup>63</sup>

Lebanon has not endorsed the *Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups*, which reaffirms existing international standards relating to the protection of children from involvement in armed conflict. The Paris Commitments were endorsed by 58 states at a meeting organized by the French Government and UNICEF in February 2007.<sup>64</sup> Lebanese legislation contains no provision criminalizing the recruitment of child soldiers.

### **Recommendations:**

- *All political parties should express commitment to ratifying the Optional Protocol in order to strengthen protection for all children in Lebanon from involvement in armed conflict, setting 18 years as the age for all forms of military recruitment.*
- *The government should present its proposal for ratification of the Optional Protocol to the parliamentary Committee on Child Rights for debate and presentation for vote.*

---

<sup>61</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, "Lebanon: All parties agree to protect children affected by armed conflict", OSRG/070412-22, 12 April 2007.

<sup>62</sup> The parliament has not convened since March 2007. Mr Berri claimed that he would not convene parliament as long as there was no government of national unity, as demanded by the opposition. Financial Times, "Lebanese parliament fails to convene", 20 March 2007.

<sup>63</sup> For more information on the OP ratification campaign in Lebanon, please refer to Permanent Peace Movement.

<sup>64</sup> For further information on the Paris Commitments and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, visit [www.unicef.org/protection](http://www.unicef.org/protection).

- *Once the Optional Protocol is ratified, the Lebanese authorities should make provision for its full implementation. Political parties should be involved in the drawing up of such provisions and in monitoring their effective implementation; the international donor community should support implementation efforts.*
- *Political parties should continue to work to reach consensus on the ratification of the ICC which would allow the court to prosecute alleged child recruiters in Lebanon.*
- *Lebanon should endorse the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups.*
- *Lebanon should reform the criminal code in order to criminalize the recruitment or use of any children under 18 years by armed forces or groups.*

### **The education system**

There are three types of education in Lebanon: public, semi-public (normally run by NGOs with government subsidies) and private (which include religious schools - Christian or Muslim - normally open to children of all religions who can afford private education).<sup>65</sup> The curriculum is the same in all three systems, but extracurricular activities for the most part take place in the private sector. There are child rights modules, although not at all levels, in all types of education; they are mostly based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and taught by NGOs. Child rights modules are taught in the last year of each educational cycle.<sup>66</sup>

Law No.686/98, passed in 1998, provides for compulsory and free education until the age of 12. However, failure to issue implementation decrees meant that as of April 2007, the law had still not come into force.<sup>67</sup> In addition, the effective absence of free education from the age of 12 leads to a high number of children dropping out of secondary school early. The government has admitted that this number is increasing.<sup>68</sup>

The minimum age of employment is 14 and children without means between 12 and 14 years of age cannot study or work. In reality, many children enter the informal labour market before they turn 14. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed its concern about this gap, recommending that the government “expedite its plans to erase the gap between the school-leaving age and the minimum age for employment by adopting the bill to raise the age of compulsory education to 15 years and the bill

---

<sup>65</sup> According to the Lebanese government, 39 per cent of children are in public schools, 48.5 per cent in private paying schools and 12.6 per cent in semi-public schools. Third Periodic Report of Lebanon on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/129/Add.7, p. 88, 25 October 2005.

<sup>66</sup> Coalition interview with Higher Council for Child Rights, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>67</sup> Coalition interview with Higher Council for Child Rights, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>68</sup> Third Periodic Report of Lebanon on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, *op.cit.* p.96. The government does not provide figures for the total number of children who have dropped out of school, but as an example, it reports that 731 out of each 1000 students drop out from school in Akkar district in 2000-2001.

amending the Labour Code to bring it into line with ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182”.<sup>69</sup>

Corporal punishment is lawful in schools under article 186 of the Criminal Code. However, a 2001 memorandum from the Minister of Education prohibits staff from “inflicting corporal punishment, insulting, verbally humiliating, and attacking the honour of their students”. This memorandum applies only to public schools. Private schools are governed by their own internal regulations.<sup>70</sup> The Committee on the Rights of the Child has noted: “The Committee is concerned that violence used as a means of discipline in the home and at school is culturally and legally acceptable in the State party [Lebanon]”.<sup>71</sup>

### **Recommendations**

- *The Lebanese authorities should enact the decree to bring Law No.686/98 into force and commit resources to ensuring that there is free education until the age of 12.*
- *They should develop vocational and educational alternatives to fill the gap between 12 and 14 years before children can legally enter the labour market and fulfil the commitment to extend the length of compulsory and free education to the age of 15.*
- *They should ensure that child rights training programs, based on the CRC and including information on the Optional Protocol, are taught to all year groups in school. Teachers should be provided with specific training on the CRC and the Optional Protocol and, in cooperation with the international community, increase the capacity of Lebanese organizations to deliver such training.*
- *Political parties should sign a manifesto for children to be taught tolerance (according to article 29 of the CRC), in curricular and extracurricular activities.*
- *UNRWA should provide teachers with appropriate training on human and child rights, and facilitate access by NGOs and other civil society organizations that provide child rights education to the education system in the refugee camps.*
- *UNRWA should include in its campaign against corporal punishment principles of children’s rights against recruitment and use in armed violence.*

---

<sup>69</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 44 of the Convention. Concluding observations: Lebanon. CRC/C/LBN/CO/3. 8 June 2006. ILO Convention 138 regards to the minimum age that an individual can enter employment.

<sup>70</sup> Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment of Children, *Country report: Lebanon*, updated June 2006, [www.endcorporalpunishment.org/](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/).

<sup>71</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 44 of the Convention. Concluding observations: Lebanon. CRC/C/LBN/CO/3. 8 June 2006CRC/C/LEB/CO/3, paras. 41 and 42 (a and b)).



## **The international community and child protection in Lebanon**

As noted earlier, after the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, the UNIFIL peacekeeping force in Lebanon was strengthened. UNIFIL personnel have been trained in child rights.<sup>72</sup>

However, there is no child protection unit within UNIFIL, although the civil affairs unit works with UNICEF to raise awareness of child rights and protection among their military personnel.<sup>73</sup> The absence of a dedicated unit is striking considering that UNIFIL operates in the south of the country, where thousands of children have been affected by years of clashes between Hezbollah and the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and are at risk of being used by armed groups in the area.

The UN Secretary-General included the Lebanon-Israel conflict in his latest report to the United Nations Security Council, highlighting the suffering of Lebanese and Israeli children as a result of the conflict.<sup>74</sup>

The European Union (EU) is working actively with the Lebanese authorities within its European Neighbourhood Policy integrating human rights into the EU's action plan on Lebanon.<sup>75</sup> In 2007, for the first time, children in armed conflict were integrated into the action plan adopted by the government of Lebanon and the EU.<sup>76</sup> The EU delegation is actively supporting the campaign for the ratification and implementation of the Optional Protocol by Lebanon.

### **Recommendations**

- *The UN should create a child protection unit within UNIFIL, the peacekeeping force in Lebanon.*
- *The office of the Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General for children and armed conflict should continue to monitor the situation of children in Lebanon. The situation should continue to be included in the Secretary-General's reports to the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict.*
- *The EU should continue its support to the Lebanese authorities and civil society for the prevention of the involvement of children in armed conflict, without excluding any actor in Lebanon.*

---

<sup>72</sup> Coalition interview with UNICEF child protection personnel, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>73</sup> Coalition interview with UNICEF child protection personnel, Beirut, April 2007.

<sup>74</sup> Report of the Secretary General to the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict. 26 October 2006.

<sup>75</sup> The European Neighbourhood Policy aims at "increased stability; security and prosperity for the EU and its neighbours and it will build on a mutual commitment to common values, including democracy, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights". Council of the European Union, External Relations, Conclusions, Brussels, 13-14 December 2004, p.9.

<sup>76</sup> Coalition interview with EU Delegation in Beirut, April 2007.

## **Conclusion**

An environment of growing resentment between communities, political indoctrination of the youth wings of most political parties and in some cases, military training, is increasing the potential for children to become involved in armed conflict.

In addition, living conditions for children, especially in the war-affected areas of the south and among Palestinian children in refugee camps, are particularly harsh. The education system contains little provision for child rights to be taught in schools and, in the case of Palestinian children, discrimination in the labour market and low family incomes have led to a high rate of early drop outs from school. Some Palestinian children are involved with armed groups in some refugee camps, especially in the north, and are taking part in internal violence. Information on the extent of this problem is extremely difficult to obtain due to the closed nature of the camps.

Most international and national agencies and NGOs acknowledge the potential for children in Lebanon to become involved in future armed conflict. It is therefore important that the government, political parties, civil society organizations and child protection organizations develop and implement coordinated strategies to prevent such involvement. These protective strategies should be integrated into existing child protection programs.

## Annex: summary of recommendations

### To the Lebanese authorities:

- *Endorse the Paris Commitments on the protection of children from recruitment or use by armed forces and armed groups, and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups, and develop an integrated plan and policies for the prevention of children's involvement in armed conflict, to be implemented by all relevant ministries and organizations in accordance with the Paris Commitments and Principles.*
- *Provide psychosocial support for children affected by the Israel-Hezbollah war.*
- *Reform the criminal code in order to criminalize the recruitment or use of any child below the age of 18 by armed forces or groups.*
- *Increase support to enable Palestinian children to gain access to higher education outside the refugee camps and develop educational opportunities and recreational facilities.*
- *Create a child protection unit within the security forces and armed forces to implement an effective child protection policy in these forces.*
- *Work closely with local and international NGOs and UNICEF to provide child rights training for Lebanese armed forces, especially those deployed with UNIFIL in southern Lebanon.*
- *Present the proposal for ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict to the parliamentary Committee of Child Rights for debate and presentation for vote. Once ratified, make provision for its full implementation; involve political parties in drawing up such provisions and monitor their effective implementation.*
- *Enact the decree to bring Law No.686/98 into force and commit resources to ensuring free education until the age of 12.*
- *Develop vocational and educational alternatives to fill the gap between 12 and 14 years before children can legally enter the labour market and fulfil the commitment to extend the length of compulsory and free education to the age of 15.*
- *Ensure that child rights training programs, based on the CRC and including information on the Optional Protocol, are taught to all year groups in school.*
- *Provide teachers with specific training on the CRC and the Optional Protocol and, in cooperation with the international community, increase the capacity of Lebanese organizations to deliver such training.*

**To political parties:**

- *Commit publicly to cease military training of children and allow youth wings to be monitored by the authorities.*
- *Express commitment to ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and set 18 years as the minimum age for all forms of military recruitment in order to strengthen the protection of all children in Lebanon.*
- *Continue to work to reach consensus on the ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which would allow the court to prosecute alleged child recruiters in Lebanon.*
- *Sign a manifesto for children to be taught tolerance (in accordance with article 29 of the CRC), in curricular and extracurricular activities.*

**To armed groups:**

- *Armed groups in Lebanon should stop training children militarily and should make public their commitment to end this practice.*
- *All Palestinian factions in the camps and Fatah al-Islam should stop using children for military purposes and in military training and should commit to the implementation of verifiable measures to prevent such practices.*

**To the international donor community:**

- *Support vocational training programs for Palestinian children, as well as programs to facilitate access to higher education and continue support for UNRWA work in identifying gaps in the labour market suitable for Palestinian skills.*
- *Support existing efforts by the authorities, UN agencies and NGOs in the field and increase financial support for the reconstruction of the areas affected by the war.*
- *Increase the support it provides to UNRWA and Palestinian and international NGOs providing health services and poverty alleviation programs in the camps as well as psychosocial support for Palestinian children.*
- *Support NGO's efforts to stop the proliferation of small arms in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.*
- *Support efforts by Lebanese authorities and organizations to implement an integrated plan for the prevention of children's involvement in armed conflict through financial support and expertise.*

**To national and international NGOs and international child protection agencies:**

- *Integrate specific measures for child protection from armed conflict into wider child protection programs, including in the areas of training, research, advocacy, and awareness raising in communities.*
- *Engage with existing civil society initiatives and support local NGOs in their efforts to prevent the future participation of children in armed conflict in Lebanon.*

**To the UN and EU:**

- *UNRWA should provide teachers with appropriate training on human and child rights, and facilitate access by NGOs and other civil society organizations that provide child rights education to the education system in the refugee camps.*
- *UNRWA should include in its campaign against corporal punishment principles of children's rights to protection from recruitment and use in armed violence.*
- *The UN should create a child protection unit within UNIFIL.*
- *The Office of the Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General for children and armed conflict should continue to monitor the situation of children in Lebanon. The situation should continue to be included in the Secretary-General's reports to the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict.*
- *The EU should continue to support the Lebanese authorities and civil society in preventing the involvement of children in armed conflict, without excluding any actor.*



**COALITION TO STOP THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS**

[www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org)

---