

CENTRE FOR CHILD AND HUMAN RIGHTS, NLIU

EDITION III

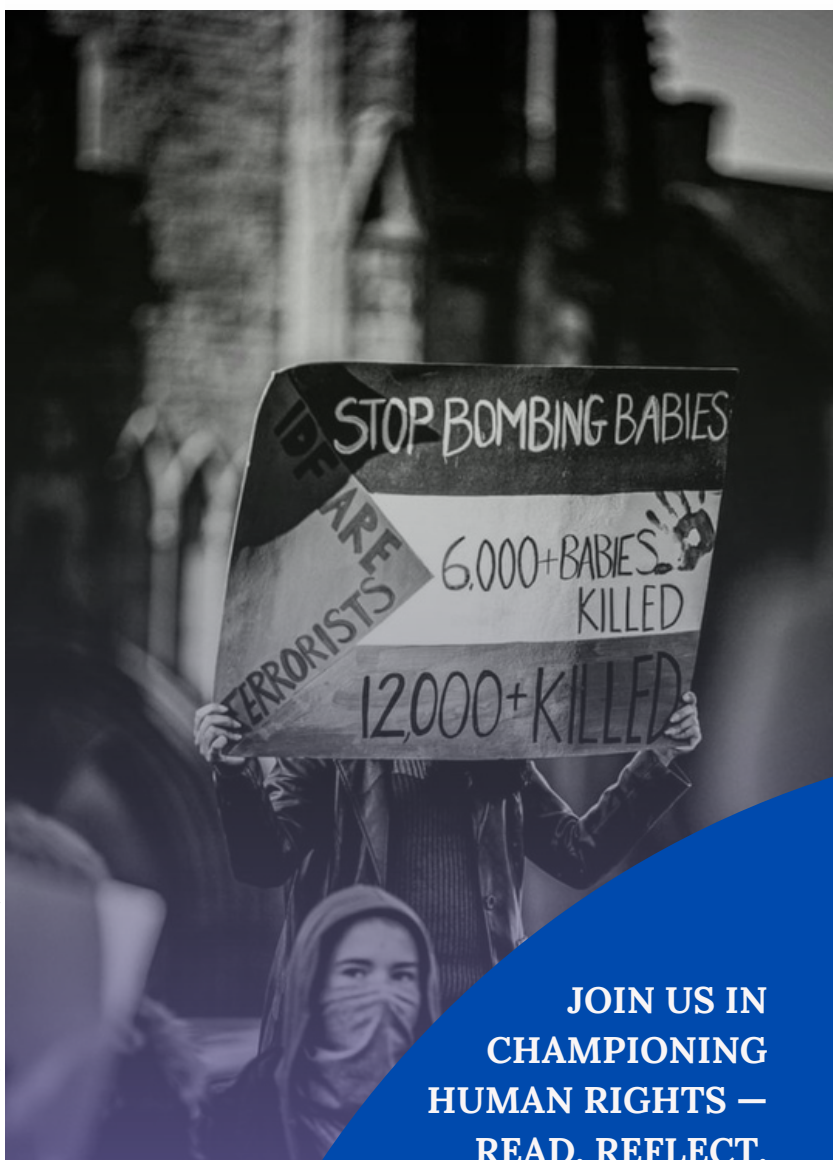
news letter.

Welcome to the third edition of the CCHR Newsletter, your monthly source for insights, updates, and action points from the Centre for Child and Human Rights.

FROM ROME TO REALITY: INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE AND THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

As conflicts rage on, so do the struggles of children caught in their crossfire of justice delayed, of voices rising from pain, and of systems striving to protect. This edition gathers stories, policies, and people who remind us that justice for children is not optional it is urgent, global, and long overdue

Image source : Pinterest "Free Palestine"



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“Justice is not only about bringing perpetrators to court. It’s about giving victims their voice back.”

- **Fatou Bensouda, former ICC Chief Prosecutor**

We celebrated International Criminal Justice day on 17th July. On this day in 1998, nations came together in Rome and signed the Rome Statute, which gave birth to the International Criminal Court (ICC) - the world’s first permanent court to try individuals for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and aggression. But that was just the beginning of the story. In 2010, the UN General Assembly officially declared July 17 as World Day for International Justice, thanks to the tireless efforts of global civil society led by the Coalition for the International Criminal Court. To remind the world that justice knows no borders and no one is above the law.



In the Central African Republic, where communities were once torn apart by brutal sectarian violence, a chapter of justice finally unfolded. Alfred Yekatom and Patrice-Edouard Ngaïssona are two commanders of the Anti-Balaka armed group were brought before the International Criminal Court for the horrific violence that swept through the nation in 2013–2014. On 24 July 2025, the ICC delivered a landmark judgment in the case of *The Prosecutor v. Alfred Yekatom and Patrice-Edouard Ngaïssona*, both were convicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, torture, persecution, and forced displacement, attacks on civilians and religious sites.



This ruling, delivered over a decade after the crimes, stands as a resounding affirmation of the ICC's commitment to justice, accountability, and victim rights.

The International Criminal Court, though often criticized for its slow pace, proved yet again why it matters. It gave voice to the silenced, recognized the wounds of forgotten victims, and held high-ranking perpetrators accountable on the world stage. It reaffirmed that no matter how long it takes, justice must prevail especially when domestic systems fail or are too weak to act independently. Through its rulings, the ICC continues to shape international standards on human rights and deepen the world's resolve against impunity.

Although India isn't a State Party to the Rome Statute, it still upholds the spirit of this global movement supporting rule of law, strengthening national accountability, and actively contributing to UN peacekeeping missions. Every year, this day is not just about legal systems but it's about hope, healing, and humanity. As future change-makers, it's a call for all of us to stay informed, raise awareness, and stand up for justice because where justice lives, peace begins.



Issued by ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan, this new policy builds upon the original 2016 framework. Its aim: to rectify the underrepresentation of children in ICC proceedings and embed a child sensitive, rights-based approach in all investigations and prosecutions.

It mandates the proactive inclusion of children's experiences in every case, ensuring that victims', survivors', and witnesses' voices are heard, as appropriate given age, consent, and best interests.

The policy explicitly recognises that all crimes under the Rome Statute—from war crimes to crimes against humanity—may be committed against or affect children, and is sensitive to intersectional realities such as gender, disability, ethnicity, and development stages. Institutional commitment is reinforced via training, recruitment, external partnerships, and monitoring to ensure real change in how children are engaged and protected in ICC processes **Its Implications on Child Rights, Legal**

Protection & Accountability. The ICC's Policy on Children adopts a progressive and comprehensive approach by recognising children as active rights holders rather than passive victims of crimes. It emphasises tailored engagement with child victims, survivors, and witnesses, acknowledging their evolving capacities and agency.

The policy also broadens the interpretation of crimes under the Rome Statute—such as forced transfer, rape, enlistment, or enslavement—by highlighting their impact on children, thereby enhancing the scope for accountability in child-specific harms. Rooted in developmental research and trauma-informed practices, the policy promotes a survivor-centered approach, ensuring that children's testimonies are obtained through safe, child-appropriate methods. To effectively implement these principles, the Office of the Prosecutor has committed to institutional reforms, including the recruitment of child rights specialists, building external partnerships, and monitoring execution, thus strengthening the justice system's capacity to address crimes against children.



While no ICC trial has yet been decided under the 2023 policy, there are relevant case situations where its principles are already shaping practice: The ICC's evolving focus on child justice is evident in several recent cases. Even before the formal adoption of the new policy, the Court included the unlawful deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children as part of its war-crimes indictments in March 2023, aligning with the policy's emphasis on crimes that uniquely affect children. In early 2024, the Court issued a landmark reparations order in the Dominic Ongwen case in Uganda, awarding €52 million to nearly 50,000 victims, including former child soldiers and children born of forced pregnancies—one of the largest reparations in ICC history. This demonstrates the ICC's growing commitment to child-victim justice and reparation. Similarly, in the Joseph Kony case, the ICC's decision in 2024 to hold its first-ever in absentia confirmation hearing involves charges of abducting and using child soldiers. Although this hearing predated the policy, it reflects the same child-centred accountability that the policy promotes.

The ICC's 2023 Policy on Children strengthens justice by protecting children's rights, ensuring their safe participation in trials, and holding perpetrators accountable through child-specific charges, trauma-informed investigations, and victim-centred reparations.



“The rights of every child, everywhere, must be protected—especially when the world around them collapses into conflict.”

– **Virginia Gamba, UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, UN Security Council, June 25, 2025**

Between April and June 2025, a disturbing pattern of grave violations against children in armed conflict zones, particularly in Sudan, South Sudan, Yemen, and Gaza, has underscored the persistent failure of the international community to enforce existing legal protections. Despite well-established frameworks under international humanitarian law, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), enforcement remains sporadic and politicized, leaving children among the most vulnerable in times of war.

In Sudan, from April 10-12, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) attacked internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Zamzam and Abu Shouk in North Darfur. The assaults resulted in the deaths of over 100 civilians, including at least 20 children. Witness accounts detailed the destruction of basic infrastructure such as shelters, schools, and medical tents, as well as the abduction of humanitarian workers. Over 400,000 people, mainly women and children, were displaced. The continued lack of humanitarian access has compounded the risks of food insecurity, disease outbreaks, and psychological trauma among child survivors. A 15-year-old girl from the region, in an interview with MSF, poignantly described the personal toll: “My brother was only ten. He ran to the clinic. On May 3 in Fangak County, South Sudan, a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital, clearly marked as a civilian facility, was bombed by the South Sudan People’s Defence Forces (SSPDF). Seven civilians, including a 9-month-old baby, were killed. Such attacks violate the Geneva Conventions, which prohibit the targeting of medical and humanitarian institutions. In Yemen, escalating violence in areas like Marib and Saada has deepened the humanitarian crisis. Since the conflict began in 2015, over 11,000 children have been killed or maimed.

According to recent reports from UNICEF and OCHA, incidents of child recruitment, school bombings, and aid obstruction have increased, while malnutrition and cholera continue to afflict children under five at alarming rates.

Meanwhile, in Gaza, conflict escalation since late 2023 has severely impacted children. As of June 2025, more than 3,000 children have been confirmed dead, with many others injured. Critical infrastructure including schools, hospitals, and shelters, has been repeatedly targeted, resulting in massive displacement, interruption of education, and loss of access to healthcare. Despite comprehensive documentation such as the UN Secretary-General's 2025 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, which recorded 41,370 grave violations in 2024, international responses have been inconsistent. The UN Security Council has largely limited its actions to non-binding statements, and the ICC faces legal and political barriers in pursuing war crimes accountability.

This ongoing crisis reflects not a lack of laws but a breakdown in their enforcement.

While legal frameworks exist, including Security Council Resolution 1612 and the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), their efficacy is hindered by geopolitical influences. The manipulation of mechanisms like the UN's "list of shame" for political ends has further eroded credibility. Commemorating International Criminal Justice Day 2025, the theme "Justice Beyond Borders: Uniting Voices for Peace and Accountability" serves as a sobering reminder: justice must prioritize children not merely as victims, but as rights-holders. Accountability must follow through with the prosecution of war crimes, survivor support, and unwavering commitment to protect children in armed conflict.





Beasts of No Nation is a harrowing tale that pierces the silence surrounding children in armed conflict. Directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga and based on Uzodinma Iweala's novel, the film follows Agu, a young boy whose life is shattered by civil war in an unnamed West African country. Orphaned and alone, Agu is forced into life as a child soldier under a brutal warlord, played chillingly by Idris Elba.

Told with devastating intimacy, the film captures Agu's descent from innocence into trauma, exposing the psychological scars war leaves behind. Through his eyes, we witness the human cost of conflict—not in statistics, but in the stolen childhood of one boy who once cherished school, family, and play.

Released in 2015, *Beasts of No Nation* broke ground with its raw portrayal of war and justice denied. Premiering at the Venice Film Festival, it won acclaim and a Marcello Mastroianni Award for Best Young Actor, with Elba earning BAFTA and SAG nominations. More importantly, it sparked global dialogue on the use of child soldiers and failures of international justice.

On International Criminal Justice Day, the film's message is especially urgent. Children like Agu are still coerced into violence in wars they did not start. Justice often never comes. *Beasts of No Nation* is not just a war film—it's a cry for justice. It forces us to confront impunity and the silencing of victims. In Agu's trembling yet resilient voice, we are asked a haunting question: ***What peace exists when justice abandons its children?***

The difficulties of administering justice when minors are implicated in serious crimes connected to armed conflicts are highlighted in a recent ruling by the Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court. A minor suspected of transporting weapons and drugs as part of a cross-border terror operation was denied bail. These charges, which allege involvement in narco-terror networks, underscore the seriousness of threats to national security and public safety, as well as the vulnerability of children to exploitation. The High Court's decision emphasized that while the Juvenile Justice Act generally favors bail and rehabilitation for children, exceptions must be made in cases involving grave offenses.

According to UN estimates, the use of children in terrorism, armed conflict, and narco-trafficking is on the rise, with over 41,000 serious violations reported globally in the past year alone. This is not an isolated legal issue. While minors involved in such acts are often victims of broader systems of exploitation, international frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Rome Statute recognize that justice systems must still address accountability in cases involving serious and organized crimes. This complex balance is reflected in policies such as the Global Declaration on Advancing Child-Centred Justice (2025) and India's NALSA (Child Friendly Legal Services for Children) Scheme, which promote protective, non-custodial approaches for children—yet also acknowledge that public safety and the gravity of certain offenses sometimes demand firm legal action.



One evening in Uganda in 1996, fifteen-year-old Grace Akallo was preparing for her school exams at St. Mary's College in Aboke. It was just another day in her life filled with hopes, dreams, and the promise of education. But that night turned into a nightmare. Rebel forces from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) attacked the school dormitory and abducted 139 girls at gunpoint. Grace was one of them.

For months, the girls endured brutal conditions such as forced to march barefoot through forests for days. The LRA, led by Joseph Kony, indoctrinated children into violence, turning them into child soldiers and sex slaves. Grace was given a gun, trained to kill, and beaten into submission. She witnessed deaths, suffered starvation, and was subjected to physical and emotional abuse, her identity as a schoolgirl quickly disappears by the harsh reality of war.

After seven terrifying months in captivity, Grace managed to escape amidst a military clash. But freedom did not mean the end of her struggles. Returning to her old life, she faced stigma, silence, and deep emotional scars like many former child soldiers. Yet, Grace was determined not to be broken. She resumed her education, fighting against shame and pain with every exam she took. Education became her tool for healing and reclaiming her life.

Grace's journey didn't stop at survival. She went on to graduate from Gordon College in the U.S., earned a Master's degree, and became an international advocate for children in conflict. She co-founded the Network of Young People Affected by War (NYPAW) through UNICEF in 2008 and has spoken at the United Nations, demanding justice for thousands of children who, like her, were robbed of their childhoods by armed conflict. She has testified before the U.S. Congress and continues to advocate for international criminal accountability for war crimes against children.



She co-authored the book 'Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children', sharing her powerful journey with the world. In 2009, she has been widely recognized and applauded at the UN Security Council, where she delivered a powerful testimony during a high-level debate on children affected by armed conflict.

Her story is not just about surviving war but it's about rewriting the narrative. From abducted schoolgirl to global voice for justice, Grace Akallo stands as a living testament to resilience, dignity, and the urgent need to end impunity for violations against children. As the world observes International Criminal Justice Day, Grace's voice reminds us: Justice for children is not charity, it's a global responsibility.



“Justice is for all”; yet, for millions of children around the world, it remains a distant promise. Despite being guaranteed protection under international law, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children often find themselves trapped in systems that are not designed to hear them, represent them, or act in time. These challenges stem from a combination of age-based legal incapacities, lack of child-friendly court procedures, inadequate legal representation, and systemic judicial delays.



Children are often not recognised as rights-holders with independent legal standing. In many jurisdictions, they cannot file complaints, give testimony, or meaningfully participate in proceedings without adult intervention; even in cases involving their own abuse or exploitation. Courts remain intimidating and often hostile spaces for minors, lacking the psychological support and procedural flexibility required to accommodate their needs. Legal aid, where available, is rarely equipped with trained, child-sensitive professionals, and many countries do not have specialised benches or frameworks to expedite cases involving minors.

Globally, several cases underscore these systemic failings. In India, the 2018 Kathua rape and murder case involving an 8-year-old girl highlighted not only the brutality of crimes against children but also the protracted delays and politicisation that often accompany such trials. In the United States,

These are not isolated instances but indicators of systemic gaps. Judicial systems globally continue to prioritise procedural formalism over substantive protection when it comes to children. The failure to institutionalise mechanisms like child-specific courts, trauma-informed policing, and accessible legal aid perpetuates the exclusion of children from meaningful justice. However, there are emerging best practices worth noting. South Africa's child-friendly courts, Uganda's national child helpline (116), and Norway's Barnahus model, also known as "Children's Houses," is a child-friendly, interdisciplinary, and multi-agency approach to supporting child victims and witnesses of violence and abuse.

Ensuring access to justice for children requires more than legislative promises; it demands the creation of environments where children feel safe, heard, and respected. Justice for a child is not just about punishment of the perpetrator; it is about recognition, redress, and healing. Until legal systems centre children not just as victims but as independent rights-bearers, the wait for justice will remain long and uncertain.





In the pursuit of international criminal justice, particularly through institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC) and Special Tribunals, child witnesses often stand at the intersection of vulnerability and truth-telling. These children many of whom have endured grave violations such as recruitment as child soldiers, sexual violence, or the witnessing of massacres are not merely legal tools to establish facts. They are survivors of conflict whose psychological and emotional safety must be safeguarded as carefully as legal procedures are followed.

The role of child witnesses in international criminal trials is both powerful and delicate. Their testimonies can be pivotal in convicting perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide. However, involving children in judicial processes, particularly in open courtrooms where they may recount deeply traumatic experiences, risks re-traumatization if not managed with a trauma-informed approach.

International courts have recognized these dangers and taken some protective measures. The ICC, for instance, under Article 68 of the Rome Statute, is mandated to take appropriate steps to protect the safety, physical and psychological well-being, dignity, and privacy of victims and witnesses, especially children. Special provisions include in-camera (private) testimonies, use of voice and face distortion, pseudonyms, and support from psychologists or child protection officers throughout the trial process.

A notable example is the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), where many child soldiers were both witnesses and victims. The Court allowed them to testify behind screens and employed child psychologists to prepare them for court appearances. In some cases, evidence from prior interviews or video-recorded statements was admitted to reduce the emotional toll of repeating traumatic events.

Yet, challenges remain. While procedural safeguards exist, their implementation often varies, and in some instances, legal considerations such as the rights of the accused to cross-examine witnesses may conflict with child protection protocols. Courts must walk a fine line between ensuring a fair trial and preventing harm to young witnesses. Additionally, the long duration of international trials and the limited capacity of courts to offer long-term psychological support mean that child witnesses may be left with lingering trauma long after the judgment is delivered.

Moreover, cultural sensitivity is often under-addressed. Children from conflict-affected areas may face social stigma for testifying, especially in tightly-knit or conservative communities, and their reintegration post-testimony can be difficult.

Therefore, justice systems must go beyond technical compliance. A truly trauma-informed approach would involve child-sensitive training for all court staff, consistent involvement of child protection agencies, post-trial psychosocial support, and, critically, ensuring that child witnesses understand the process and feel a sense of agency rather than exploitation.

As the world commemorates International Criminal Justice Day, the role of children in these processes deserves deeper reflection. Child witnesses are not just narrators of atrocity they are symbols of resilience and stakeholders in peacebuilding. Their protection is not a procedural luxury but a moral and legal imperative in the pursuit of justice.

This edition has uncovered powerful narratives—of children forced into war, of survivors who now fight for justice, of youth caught between vulnerability and violence, and of leaders like Grace Akallo who turn pain into purpose. These stories remind us that violations against children are not just tragedies—they are failures of justice, made worse by silence and inaction.

Real change begins when we confront what is uncomfortable, when we refuse to look away, and when we ask ourselves hard questions. Consider this as a prompt for thought, dialogue, or legal advocacy:

In a world where many children are denied safety, justice, or a future, what is one step you can take—through your voice, work, or education—to help uphold their rights and restore their dignity?

 Submit Your Reflection:

We invite our readers to share a short reflection (100-150 words) in response to this question.

 Send your write-up to: cchr@nliu.ac.in

Subject line: “Reflection – CCHR Newsletter (JULY 2025 Edition).”

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**RAISE YOUR VOICE, CHANGE
BEGINS WITH ONE.**

”

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