

**Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children
Protecting children from sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse:
progress, new frontiers and the path forward**

***Ensuring access to reparation for children affected by conflict-related sexual violence to
respond and prevent sexual exploitation and sexual abuse
October 2025***

I. Introduction

1. The Global Survivors Fund (GSF) submits this note as contribution to the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children's final report on: "**Protecting children from sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse: progress, new frontiers and the path forward**" to be presented during the 61st session of the Human Rights Council. This submission specifically responds to questions 1, 2 and 3.
2. GSF was established in 2019 by Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad, Nobel Peace Prize laureates 2018. Its mission is to enhance access to reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence around the globe and ensure they receive comprehensive reparative measures addressing their urgent needs in the meantime. GSF's work is grounded in its unique co-creation model and survivor-centric approach.¹
3. This note focuses on children affected by conflict-related sexual violence and how realising their fundamental right to reparation is both a way to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and sexual abuse amounting to conflict-related sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) perpetrated by United Nations staff and related personnel. In addition, some considerations may be relevant to child victims of other gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law and other children within the scope of the Special Rapporteur's mandate. This submission draws on GSF's project work, its Global Reparation Study and additional research.²
4. GSF's four key messages are the following:
 - (I) States must establish administrative reparation programmes and include children affected by conflict-related sexual violence as a specific category of victims entitled to reparation. Providing adequate, effective and prompt reparation to children affected by sexual exploitation and sexual abuse amounting to conflict-related sexual violence is both a way to respond and prevent sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

¹ GSF, 'Annual Report 2024' (2025), https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Reports/AR2024_GSF_EN.pdf and GSF, 'Strategic Plan 2024-2030' (2024), https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Reports/Strategic_plan_24-30_web_DP.pdf.

² Global Reparations Studies accessible here: <https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/how-we-work/know/>.

(II) Education as a form of reparation is a priority form of reparation for children affected by conflict-related sexual violence and other war-affected children. Education as a form of reparation requires explicit acknowledgment of the harms suffered by child victims and that the education measures are shaped to help repair wrongdoing.

(III) Children have the right to participate in decisions that affect them, including in reparation processes. Safe, ethical and meaningful participation contributes to better reparation outcomes and supports children's healing, and empowerment. Meaningful participation itself has reparative value by restoring trust, agency and recognition.

(IV) The United Nations and Member States have a joint responsibility for reparation towards child victims of SEA by peacekeepers and other UN-related personnel. Establishing reparation programmes including access to education, access to medical and psychological support, collective and symbolic measures, and encourage community acceptance and inclusion, is crucial to both addressing, preventing and responding to SEA.

II. Background on the nature of violations and their impact

5. When sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, including SEA by peacekeepers and other UN-related personnel, is used in conflict and humanitarian settings, it often takes extremely brutal forms, affecting girls and boys, including very young ones. The impact on children is profound, long-lasting, and multidimensional, which extends beyond the immediate physical harm, causing long-lasting emotional and psychological distress, hampers their social integration, and jeopardises their overall well-being.³
6. Due to societal shame and discriminatory norms, child victims are often stigmatised, ostracised and revictimised by their communities and by their families. Girls are disproportionately affected by sexual exploitation and sexual abuse amounting to conflict-related sexual violence, trafficking, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced marriage, forced pregnancy. These consequences may create a vicious circle repeating itself over a number of generations.⁴
7. Conflict is also widely recognised as one of the biggest factors disrupting children's access to education globally: children often dropout from school due to unwanted pregnancy, bullying, stigmatisation, fear, and trauma they experience. For children who return from captivity or displacement, years of missed schooling frequently result in age gaps, with their age no longer matching their educational grade level.
8. In Nigeria, Boko Haram has abducted girls and forced parents to hand over girls for forced marriages, within which the group has perpetrated widespread rape, sexual slavery, sexual exploitation and other forms of sexual violence. The insurgency deliberately targeted the education system, attacking schools and kidnapping children. In Nigeria, at the Lafiya Sarari

³ GSF, Briefing on reparation for children born of conflict-related sexual violence, exploring survivor's perspectives from the Global Reparations Study (2024), https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Policy_Briefs/Briefing_on_children_born_of_CRS_V_web_Final.pdf

⁴ This transgenerational harm was defined by the ICC in Ntaganda Reparations Order, ICC-01/04-02/06-2659, para. 73.

school in Maiduguri, all students have been affected by the insurgency, with approximately 80 percent being children affected by conflict-related sexual violence.⁵

9. Children born of conflict-related sexual violence represent a particularly vulnerable group within the broader category of victims of conflict-related sexual violence. They are often perceived as 'children of the enemy' and therefore stigmatised and marginalised, facing barriers to access education, denial of legal identity or nationality, statelessness, and limited access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and psychosocial support. The mother often struggles to bond with her child or may reject her/him due to her trauma, fear of stigma, family or community pressure. These conditions heighten their vulnerability to multiple forms of exploitation, including trafficking, abduction, recruitment by armed actors, and sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers and other UN-related personnel.

III. Recommendations

The Global Survivors Fund makes the following four main recommendations to combat sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children affected by conflict-related sexual violence and other war-affected children:

(I) *Administrative reparation programmes including children affected by conflict-related sexual violence as a way to respond and prevent sexual exploitation and sexual abuse*

10. As rights-holders, children affected by conflict-related sexual violence and other gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law are entitled to adequate, prompt and effective reparation through judicial and administrative remedies. Too often, the only path to reparation is through judicial proceedings. However, reparation that can be solely accessed through courts poses additional challenges for survivors, and in particular for children, as many are prevented from accessing them and are left behind in judicial proceedings because they are not believed and considered as credible witnesses and because they are denied legal capacity or legal assistance, which can be especially problematic in case of a conflict of interest between the child and his parents or caregiver.
11. Administrative reparation programmes require minimal formality and low evidentiary thresholds. States should therefore establish administrative reparation programmes as they have the potential of being more timely, inclusive and accessible to children than courts, hence addressing the harms of larger number of children affected by conflict.
12. Yet, despite reparation being a right and a priority for children affected by conflict-related sexual violence, most do not receive any form of reparation during their lifetime. Their specific rights and needs are almost entirely overlooked in reparation initiatives worldwide,⁶ that often

⁵ GSF, *Reparative education as a path to healing in Nigeria*: <https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/latest/articles/reparative-education-as-a-path-to-healing-in-nigeria/> <https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/latest/articles/reparative-education-as-a-path-to-healing-in-nigeria/>

⁶ UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, *Children and Reparation : Past lessons and new directions*, 2010, p.v

fail to include specific forms of reparation responsive to their immediate and long-term wellbeing, including for those who are now adults.

13. Governments, because of their lack of awareness, capacity or commitment, rarely recognise children affected by conflict-related sexual violence as victims eligible for reparations. When reparation programmes do exist, some categories of children are left out, their specific rights and needs are overlooked, and reparations are not tailored to their needs. For example, Iraq's 2021 Yazidi Female Survivor's Law provides a reparation framework for the survivors of the violence perpetrated by ISIL, but it excludes children born of conflict-related sexual violence.⁷ On the other hand, a few countries, such as Colombia⁸ have recognised children born of rape as victims and included them in the scope of their reparation programmes, a promising trend.
14. Recognising and addressing the specific rights and needs of these children through inclusive protection and reparation measures is essential to prevent their further victimisation and heightened vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse, including by peacekeepers and other UN-related personnel, and to ensure their effective protection and recovery.

(II) Education as a form of reparation

15. Adequate reparation for the harms suffered by children affected by conflict-related sexual violence and other children who have suffered gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law entails a combination of different forms of reparations, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.
16. From GSF work around the world, it emerges that education-related measures are frequently mentioned by victims as a critical need and a desired form of reparation for them and their children. As mentioned by a survivor from Nepal, "*we need immediate support for our children's education. Children are the future of our country.*"⁹
17. The right to education and the right to reparation are separate human rights to which children and other individuals are entitled. Nevertheless, they can be complementary and mutually reinforcing.
18. To be reparative, education must both recognise the harms endured by child victims and be tailored to repair those injustices. Education as a form of reparation must go beyond what States are already obligated to provide, such as access to primary free education. It requires trauma-responsive approaches, qualitative, flexible, accessible and inclusive learning environments, financial support and engagement with caregivers and communities.

⁷ Amnesty, 'Iraq: Yazidi reparations law progress welcome, but more must be done to assist survivors (2021)' <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/iraq-yezidi-reparations-law-progress-welcome-but-more-must-be-done-to-assist-survivors/#:~:text=On%201%20March%202021%2C%20the.before%20the%20age%20of%2018>

⁸ Law 1448, 'Victims and Land Restitution Law' (10 June 2011), art. 181, <https://www.suin-juricol.gov.co/viewDocument.asp?ruta=Leyes/1680697>.

⁹ Elena Naughton and Dr. Susan Risal, 'Nepal Study on the Status of and Opportunities for Reparations for Victims and Survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence', (Conflict Victim Women's National Network, Global Survivors Fund, International Center for Transitional Justice and Nagarik Aawaz, June 2022), (GRS Nepal), p. 66, https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/fileadmin/uploads/gsf/Documents/Resources/Global_Reparation_Studies/GSF_Report_Nepal_EN_June2022_WEB.pdf.

19. While education could be an essential element in their healing process, it is incredibly difficult for children and young people affected by conflict-related sexual violence to simply return to school and resume their studies. For them to re-enter the education system, significant efforts are needed to overcome the many obstacles they face.
20. Education as reparation should be grounded in the principles of transitional justice and built around three interlinked pillars: quality, through trauma-responsive pedagogy, trained educators and cross-sector collaboration; flexibility, through accelerated and non-formal learning pathways that meet learners wherever they are - whether within the classroom, at home, or in displacement; and accessibility, through financial, social and infrastructural support that removes barriers to education, legal identity and psychosocial assistance for children affected by conflict-related sexual violence.
21. As highlighted in the latest report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, '*from the right to education perspective, the provision of education itself is a form of reparation often prioritised by victims*'.¹⁰ This is the first UN document that elaborates on how the right to education and the right to reparation complement each other, and what elements are needed for education to be reparative.
22. An innovative and flagship initiative developed by GSF, and its partner, the Neem Foundation, is reparative education, which reimagines schooling as a space for protection, healing and empowerment of children. In Borno State, Nigeria, GSF and NEEM have implemented a trauma-responsive educational model that integrates psychosocial support, medical care, play-based therapy and safe feedback spaces into the learning environment. The approach allows children to progress at their own pace within a flexible and inclusive trauma-informed and value-based curriculum centred on peace, respect and integrity. By involving all children affected by the insurgency, this model reduces stigma and fosters social reintegration.¹¹ This model also caters for the training of teachers on trauma-informed education, and includes families and relevant economical support to allow these children to continue their education. Furthermore, it looks into various approaches that can respond to the distinct needs of children or youth depending on their age, needs and wishes, including young adults too, from literacy and numeracy classes to accelerated programmes, vocational training or university grants. GSF is currently looking into upscaling such a model in Nigeria and in other countries. In June 2025, GSF and NEEM brought together survivor advocates, local and international CSOs, education experts as well as national and federal governmental authorities around a call to action brought by survivors and focusing especially on prioritising education as a form of reparation for survivors and children affected by conflict-related sexual violence in Nigeria.
23. Education is also essential to long-term peacebuilding. Many victims who drop out of school are isolated and stigmatised, leaving them vulnerable to sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, including SEA by peacekeepers, and recruitment by armed groups. Investing in education breaks this cycle, reintegrating children into society and opening doors to economic opportunities that can secure a brighter future.

¹⁰ United Nations, Human Rights Council (2025). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education (A/80/479)*, para. 46: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/a-80-479-avv-1-en.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/latest/articles/reparative-education-as-a-path-to-healing-in-nigeria/>

(III) Co-creation and other forms of meaningful participation

24. Children are often included in reparation programmes only through the perspectives and decisions of their caregivers, which limits recognition of their individual rights and agency. Participation is not only a right of child victims and survivors, but also an essential requirement for both the design and implementation of adequate reparation policies. Meaningful participation is a fundamental principle of child-centred, survivor-focused reparation. It requires the safe, informed, and voluntary involvement of child survivors in the design, implementation and evaluation of reparation programmes and other reparation initiatives. Participation must be adapted to each child's age, maturity, and evolving capacities, ensuring their views are heard and given due weight in all matters affecting them.
25. Children should be engaged in reparation processes at different stages and through various modalities, ranging from consultations to co-design and child-led initiatives. Forms of participation may include confidential interviews, hearings, peer-group discussions, consultations, co-creation workshops, and the establishment of child-friendly advisory mechanisms, such as children's committees. Meaningful participation strengthens the relevance, inclusiveness, and sustainability of reparations, while helping to restore children's dignity and sense of agency. All participatory processes must be guided by the principles of safety, non-discrimination, and the best interests of the child. The active and meaningful participation of children in reparation processes has also a reparative value in itself, by recognising child victims as right-holders.

(IV) Responsibility of the United Nations for child sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers and other UN-related personnel

26. Children who are victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers have the right to comprehensive support, assistance and access to reparation for the harm they have suffered.¹² Disciplinary action alone cannot address the gravity and long-term consequences of such violations, especially cases that result in child pregnancy. While the UN administrative justice system is not currently mandated to formally award reparation to child victims of SEA, this gap should be addressed in the future.¹³
27. According to the 2019 UN Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, each UN agency is responsible for "providing assistance to any victim of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by personnel of their respective agency, fund or programme and, where appropriate, by personnel of implementing partners."¹⁴ The UN should

¹² Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, GA Res'n 60/147, 16 December 2005

¹³ Ferstman, C. & Fluhr, F. (2024). *Independent review of the adjudication of claims pertaining to sexual exploitation and abuse by the United Nations internal justice system* (University of Essex Human Rights Centre – Memorandum, October 2024), para 113: https://repository.essex.ac.uk/39402/1/FerstmanandFluhr_Memorandum%20on%20SEA%20Internal%20Justice%20Cases%20October2024.pdf

¹⁴ Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (12 Dec. 2019).

ensure that such assistance goes beyond immediate relief¹⁵ and take concrete institutional responsibility to provide child victims' access to reparation.

28. Before children affected by sexual exploitation and abuse can access reparation, several critical steps must be taken to ensure they are physically and emotionally capable of engaging in reparation processes. Urgent, timely, and quality medical care is paramount to address the often-devastating physical injuries or health complications, including access to sexual and reproductive health services. Alongside this, psychological support must be provided to help children process their trauma. Additional practical enabling measures must also be taken, such as information about services in a child-friendly format, and transportation allowances, paying special attention to the specific needs of victims with additional vulnerabilities.
29. The United Nations and Member States have a joint responsibility for reparation towards child victims of SEA by peacekeepers and other UN-related personnel. They must ensure that future frameworks establish reparation programmes including access to education, access to medical and psychological support, collective and symbolic measures, and encourage community acceptance and inclusion, within their prevention and response to SEA. Reparation must also extend to children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse, whose claims should be addressed adequately, promptly, comprehensively and with dignity.

¹⁵ See Policy on Integrating a Human Rights-Based Approach to United Nations efforts to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, para.IV (A) Institutional responsibilities of the UN regarding sexual exploitation and abuse: https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/sites/www.un.org.preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/files/policy_on_integrating_a_human_rights-based_approach_to_un_efforts_to_prevent_and_respond_to_sea.pdf