

The Global War on Children (1990–Present)



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Summary

The global environment for children in conflict zones has regressed significantly since the turn of the millennium, establishing a dangerous "new normal" characterised by unprecedented exposure, systemic displacement, and escalating violence.¹ The number of children living in areas affected by conflict has doubled since the 1990s, with over 473 million children—more than one in six globally—now residing amid the highest number of conflicts since World War II.²

This report documents the catastrophic toll of this war on children over the last two and a half decades, utilising data verified by the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and global humanitarian partners. Between 2005 and 2020, the UN verified over 104,100 children killed or maimed in conflict situations, a figure universally acknowledged to be a severe undercount.⁵ Concurrent with this violence, displacement has nearly tripled, with 48.8 million children uprooted by the end of 2024.⁶ The impacts extend beyond kinetic violence, encompassing widespread recruitment (over 105,000 children verified recruited 2005–2022)⁷, systematic denial of humanitarian access (DHA), and a staggering global malnutrition crisis affecting 43 million acutely malnourished children in 2024.⁸

The ongoing crisis in the Gaza Strip exemplifies the extreme convergence of these grave violations. Since October 2023, at least 14,500 children have reportedly been killed, representing an average of 32 children killed every day.⁹ This daily attrition rate is exponentially higher than the historical global average and has resulted in more child deaths in that short period than in four years of wars worldwide combined.¹¹ The catastrophe is compounded by the highest per capita rate of child amputees globally, the destruction of 95 per cent of schools, and a strategic denial of resources, which has led to famine conditions and rendered children in North Gaza 13 times more likely to suffer Severe Acute Malnutrition than those in the south.⁹ Immediate action to enforce international humanitarian law, ensure full humanitarian access, and prioritise long-term developmental and psychological support is urgently required to mitigate the devastating, lifelong consequences being inflicted upon this generation of conflict-affected children.

(Note: This report made me extremely sad and guilty. How can we explain this madness we do to children to our children? How can we call ourselves civilised when we are so cruel? It seems like a curse to live in a world where so many children die daily and where parents have to bury their children or a world where the parents are no more, and there is one to bury the children. How do you make sense of this madness?)

1. Introduction: The Systemic Nature of the War on Children

1.1 The Evolving Battlefield and Child Vulnerability

The dynamics of armed conflict have shifted decisively in recent decades, moving from defined interstate engagements to internal conflicts waged within populated areas. This fundamental change has exposed civilians to disproportionate levels of violence, with women and children bearing the brunt of the casualties. Data indicates that up to 90 per cent of modern conflict casualties are civilians, a stark increase from the estimated 5 per cent observed during the First World War.¹³ This operational shift places children, who are inherently vulnerable, directly into the line of fire.

Children are fundamentally dependent on the protection, care, and attachment provided by adults.¹⁴ In wartime, this protective environment collapses as parents lose their lives, become preoccupied with survival and subsistence, or become emotionally unavailable due to their own trauma.¹⁴ Furthermore, children are more susceptible to specific types of harm. They are more likely than adults to be killed or maimed by explosive weapons, such as landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), which cause serious, permanent, and disabling injuries.¹ The widespread destruction wrought by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has become a primary driver of death and permanent physical impairment among minors.¹⁵

1.2 The International Framework: Monitoring Grave Violations

In response to the escalating crisis, the United Nations established the Security Council-mandated Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) in 2005, following Resolution 1612.¹⁶ This mechanism serves as the definitive international standard for systematically documenting grave violations against children in armed conflict situations and fostering accountability by identifying perpetrators.¹⁶

The MRM focuses its monitoring efforts on the Six Grave Violations Against Children in Times of War¹⁷:

1. Killing and maiming of children.
2. Recruitment or use of children in armed forces and armed groups.
3. Rape or other grave sexual violence against children.
4. Abduction of children.
5. Attacks against schools or hospitals.
6. Denial of humanitarian access for children.¹⁷

1.3 Data Methodology, Scope, and Constraints

The figures used in this report are primarily drawn from data collected and verified by UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG CAAC), representing the most authoritative statistics available to the international community.¹⁹

Despite the rigorous verification process, a crucial caveat must be applied to all reported statistics: the official verified figures represent only a fraction of the actual violations committed. Between 2005 and 2023, for instance, over 347,000 grave violations were verified globally.²⁰ However, access and security constraints, coupled with the shame, pain, and fear suffered by child survivors and their families, severely hamper the reporting, documentation, and verification processes.⁵ Consequently, the statistical picture presented here is understood by experts as a severe and systematic *underestimation* of the true human toll of the global war on children.

2. The Global Statistical Picture: Scale of Exposure and Displacement

2.1 The Unprecedented Scale of Child Exposure

The sheer number of children caught in conflict zones has reached alarming levels. Over 473 million

children—a figure representing more than one in six children globally—now live in areas affected by conflict.¹ This exposure has dramatically increased over time: the percentage of the world’s children residing in conflict zones has effectively doubled from approximately 10 per cent in the 1990s to almost 19 per cent today.² This escalation occurs at a time when the world is experiencing the highest overall number of conflicts since World War II.¹

An analysis of global trends reveals a significant divergence between public health achievements and geopolitical failures. Globally, remarkable strides have been made in reducing overall child mortality; for instance, the global under-five mortality rate has fallen by 52 per cent since 2000.²² This success reflects sustained investment in healthcare, nutrition, and essential protections. However, the simultaneous doubling of children in conflict zones demonstrates that these public health gains are being systematically countered by escalating violence. Conflict operates as a powerful antagonist to humanitarian and developmental progress, concentrating deaths and suffering in fragile and underserved settings where access to proven, life-saving interventions is restricted.²² The global positive trend masks catastrophic, localised crises driven by violence, indicating that political and security stability is now the single greatest determining factor in child survival.

In reviewing the current year's data, UNICEF concluded that 2024 has been one of the worst years on record for children in conflict, reflecting escalating impacts in terms of both the number of children affected and the severity of violations against their lives.²

2.2 The Global Displacement Crisis

Conflict and violence have precipitated a mass movement of populations, making children the single most affected demographic in global displacement. The total number of children displaced by conflict and violence reached 48.8 million by the end of 2024.⁶ This figure has nearly tripled from approximately 17.0 million in 2010.⁶

This vast displaced population includes 19.1 million refugee and asylum-seeking children, alongside an estimated 29.4 million internally displaced children (IDPs) who have been driven from their homes but have not crossed an internationally recognised border.⁶ Major contemporary drivers of this displacement include intense conflicts in the Sudan, Myanmar, the Gaza Strip, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Afghanistan.⁶

Children are disproportionately represented in these figures. Although children account for 30 per cent of the global population, they represent approximately 40 per cent of all refugee populations and nearly half (49 per cent) of internally displaced persons.² This structural imbalance in displacement means that humanitarian responses must be fundamentally child-centric, focusing heavily on specialised protection, mental health services, and education rather than relying on response frameworks designed for general populations. The magnitude of this enduring crisis is further evidenced by the fact that more than 2.3 million children were born as refugees between 2018 and 2024 alone, meaning millions of children are growing up knowing no life outside of displacement or conflict conditions.⁶

3. Mortality and Physical Maiming: A 25-Year Toll

3.1 Long-Term Verified Casualty Data (2005–2020)

The cumulative violence inflicted upon children over the past two decades is staggering. Based on sixteen years of MRM data, between 2005 and 2020, the UN verified that over 104,100 children were killed or maimed in situations of armed conflict.⁵ While this verified figure establishes a baseline minimum, broader research estimates indicate a far higher, less-formally verified death toll, suggesting that more than 2 million children have been killed due to armed conflict since 1990.¹³

The existence of a vast disparity between the official verified figures and the broader estimates highlights a profound challenge to global accountability. The formal MRM figures, while critical for tracking specific violations, suffer from limitations related to access and security constraints in the most lethal conflict zones, suggesting that the true scale of killing and maiming far exceeds documentation.⁵ This gap reveals a systematic failure in monitoring and protecting children in high-intensity conflicts.

3.2 Calculating the Daily Attrition Rate

By calculating the long-term verified casualties over the period 2005 to 2020 (104,100 verified killed or maimed children over 16 years), the average daily verified casualty rate globally is approximately 18 children killed or maimed per day.

However, data from recent years underscores a dramatic escalation in conflict lethality. In 2024 alone, 11,967 children were verified as killed or maimed worldwide.¹⁵ This extreme spike, concentrated in situations such as Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Sudan, Myanmar, Burkina Faso, and the Syrian Arab Republic¹⁵, confirms that conflicts have become exceptionally dangerous for minors, resulting in casualty figures that far outpace the historical long-term average.

3.3 The Perpetual Threat of Maiming and Explosive Weapons

The definition of maiming under the MRM refers to "any action that causes a serious, permanent, disabling injury, scarring or mutilation to a child".²⁴ The primary driver of this violation is the pervasive use of explosive weapons. Explosive ordnance and explosive remnants of war (ERW), particularly when deployed in densely populated urban and civilian areas, cause widespread destruction and are disproportionately deadly to children.¹⁵

The data confirms this direct threat: in 2020 alone, explosive weapons were responsible for at least 47 per cent of all verified child casualties, resulting in more than 3,900 children killed and maimed.²⁵ Furthermore, children are more susceptible to serious injury from blast effects; a landmine explosion is notably more likely to kill or permanently injure a child than an adult.¹⁴ Research studies indicate that approximately 40 per cent of children injured in conflict suffer a permanent disability.²⁷ This long-term physical toll ensures that the humanitarian impact of conflict lasts for decades after hostilities cease, leaving a generation reliant on grossly inadequate care and rehabilitation.¹⁴

The following table summarizes the cumulative scope of grave violations documented under the MRM framework:

Table 1: Global Cumulative Verified Grave Violations Against Children (2005–2023)

Grave Violation Category	Verified Incidents/Children	Time Period	Context/Significance
Total Grave Violations (All Six)	Over 347,000	2005–2023	Indicates widespread, systematic targeting; recognized as a severe undercount. ²⁰
Killing and Maiming (Verified)	Over 104,100 children	2005–2020	Confirmed minimum casualty toll, driving an average of 18 daily casualties. ⁵
Recruitment and Use (Verified)	Over 105,000 children	2005–2022	Documents systematic use of children as combatants and support roles. ⁷
Child Casualties from	47% of all child	2020	Highlights the lethality

Explosive Weapons	casualties		of conventional warfare tactics in civilian environments. ²⁵
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4. The Systemic Violation of Child Rights (The Six Grave Violations)

4.1 Killing and Maiming: Geographical Hotspots (Violation 1)

While child casualties are globally distributed, they are heavily concentrated in several protracted conflict zones. Between 2016 and 2020, 79 per cent of all verified child casualties occurred in five regions: Afghanistan, Israel and the State of Palestine, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia.²⁵ The most recent data on children killed and maimed in 2024 continues to point to these regions, naming Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Sudan, Myanmar, Burkina Faso, and the Syrian Arab Republic as the situations with the highest numbers.¹⁵ This concentration underscores the failure of existing international protections in these specific crises.

4.2 Recruitment and Use of Children (Violation 2)

The recruitment and use of children as soldiers remains a widespread practice globally. Between 2005 and 2022, more than 105,000 children were verified as recruited and used by parties to conflict.⁷ These children often serve in combatant roles or support functions and are exposed to unconscionable forms of violence.⁷ In 2024, 7,402 children were verified as recruited and used, with the highest numbers recorded in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Myanmar.¹⁵

A critical factor driving this violation is the vulnerability created by displacement and deprivation. The loss of a child's basic needs due to conflict and the denial of humanitarian access can act as a powerful incentive for them to join armed groups or forces in the desperate hope of securing survival and meeting basic subsistence requirements.²⁹

4.3 Sexual Violence and Abduction (Violations 3 and 4)

Abduction is a significant violation, often preceding further abuses such as forced recruitment or sexual violence.¹⁵ Between 2005 and 2020, at least 25,700 children were verified as abducted.⁵ This violation occurs in diverse settings, including schools, homes, and public spaces.¹⁵ In 2024, almost 40 per cent of abductions specifically affected girls.¹⁵

Sexual violence is one of the most egregious, yet most systematically under-reported, violations due to the profound shame, stigma, and fear suffered by survivors.²⁰ Verified cases show that parties to conflict committed rape, forced marriage, and other grave forms of sexual violence against at least 14,200 children between 2005 and 2020.⁵ The evidence confirms that sexual violence is a highly gendered weapon of war, with girls accounting for 97 per cent of victims in verified cases from 2016 to 2020.²⁰ This statistic demonstrates that sexual violence is not merely a byproduct of chaos but a deliberate tactic of terror and control, used to subjugate populations, enforce displacement, and destroy community cohesion.

4.4 Attacks on Schools and Hospitals (Violation 5)

Attacks on educational and medical facilities constitute a severe breach of international humanitarian law and have devastating long-term consequences for children's development and survival. Between 2005 and 2020, the UN verified more than 13,900 incidents of attacks against schools and hospitals.⁵ When these essential structures are destroyed or militarized, children lose their opportunity for education, health care, and social support.¹⁴ The resultant gap in education can cost future generations significant benefits related to health, income, and psychological well-being, fueling the very cycle of poverty that often underlies conflict.³⁰

4.5 Denial of Humanitarian Access (DHA) (Violation 6)

The denial of humanitarian access (DHA) is defined as the intentional deprivation or impediment of humanitarian assistance indispensable to children's survival by parties to the conflict.¹⁸ Since 2005, the UN has verified no fewer than 14,900 incidents of denial of humanitarian access for children.⁵ Verified incidents peaked in 2019 at approximately 4,400 and have remained at high levels since.¹⁸

DHA is operationalised through various malicious acts, including attacks against relief workers and convoys, targeting critical infrastructure such as water and sanitation facilities, imposing bureaucratic and administrative impediments, and the outright suspension or diversion of aid.¹⁸

The analysis of DHA reveals that it functions as a primary driver of secondary casualties, transforming the battlefield into a systemic resource siege. By obstructing the delivery of food, clean water, and medicine, parties to conflict intentionally transition conflicts into man-made humanitarian crises, leading directly to malnutrition and preventable deaths.⁸ This strategic denial of resources, which targets children's survival needs, is highly effective and pervasive in active conflict zones such as Gaza and Sudan.⁸ The high casualty rates among humanitarian workers, such as the 452 aid workers killed in Gaza since October 2023³¹, further demonstrate how DHA is enforced through extreme violence, rendering relief operations dangerous or impossible.

5. Profound Secondary Impacts: Trauma, Orphanhood, and Hunger

5.1 The Psychological Crisis: Trauma and Toxic Stress

The psychological toll of conflict on children is enormous and often results in lifelong consequences, extending far beyond the immediate physical damage.³² Prolonged exposure to violence, loss, and radical uncertainty plunges many children into a state of 'toxic stress'.³² This accumulation of risk factors leads to a high probability of mental health problems, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and behavioural problems.³²

The psychological damage manifests in various ways:

- Anxiety and Insecurity: Loss of home, displacement, and separation from family often lead to chronic anxiety, difficulty sleeping, nightmares, and strained relationships.³²
- Emotional Withdrawal and Aggression: Children exposed to multiple sources of violence may become desensitised and emotionally numb, increasing the possibility of imitating the aggressive behaviour they witness and viewing such violence as normal.³²
- Somatic Symptoms: Physical symptoms, such as bed-wetting and various psychosomatic complaints, are common responses to relentless stress and fear.³²
- Self-Harm: In the most severe cases, children resort to self-harm as a response to unbearable psychological burdens.³²

5.2 Orphanhood, Separation, and Loss of Protection

Conflict systematically dismantles the protective structures essential for child development. Since 1990, more than 1 million children have been separated from their parents or orphaned due to armed conflict.¹³ The loss of parental care or separation from caregivers is considered one of the most severe war ordeals, particularly for younger children.³²

When children are separated, they lose not only material sustenance but also crucial emotional and psychological support. A certain proportion lose all adult protection and become known as "unaccompanied children," making them extremely vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and recruitment by armed groups.¹⁴

The long-term developmental implications of trauma and separation are severe. Exposure to mass trauma combined with reduced parental availability—often due to the parents' own psychological distress—can lead to increased child psychopathology and potentially mediate a cycle of violence.³³ Societies emerging from conflict face a generation struggling with severe mental health issues, lacking stable protective attachment figures, and potentially exhibiting aggressive behaviour, thereby sustaining the psychological legacy of violence long into peacetime.

5.3 Conflict-Driven Malnutrition and Stunting

Conflict and violence are profoundly linked to global hunger, serving as the main driver of 20 of the world’s 53 worst food crises.⁸ Despite global commitments to end malnutrition, conflict zones have severely stalled progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 2.2.

The numbers are alarming:

- Acute Malnutrition (Wasting): At least 43 million children globally were acutely malnourished in 2024, far exceeding the global target of reducing the number to 32 million.⁸
- Stunting (Chronic Malnutrition): In 20 conflict-affected countries, approximately 44 million children under the age of five were stunted in 2024, a number that has increased since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015.⁸

The failure to reduce stunting and acute malnutrition, particularly within conflict-affected settings, serves as a stark indicator of systematic breaches of international humanitarian law pertaining to civilian resource protection. Stunting, resulting from chronic undernutrition, inflicts lifelong physical and cognitive damage, severely limiting a child's future potential.⁸ Malnutrition, often driven by the strategic denial of aid and siege tactics, is unequivocally a violation of children's rights³⁵ and transforms conflict zones into famine environments, pushing thousands of severely malnourished children to the heightened risk of death.⁸

Table 2: Key Global Metrics on Children in Conflict (Recent Trends 2024)

Metric	Figure (Year of Data)	Context/Impact
Children in Conflict Zones	>473 Million (2024)	Represents 19% of global children; doubled since the 1990s. ²
Displaced Children (Refugee/IDP)	48.8 Million (End of 2024)	Children represent 49% of IDP populations; figure nearly tripled since 2010. ⁶
Children Killed/Maimed (Annual Verified)	11,967 (2024)	A spike in high-lethality conflict situations globally. ¹⁵
Acutely Malnourished Children (Global)	43 Million (2024)	Rates are failing to decline, heavily driven by conflict and aid constraints. ⁸
Stunted Children in 20 Conflict Zones	44 Million (2024)	Reflects chronic undernutrition leading to permanent cognitive damage. ⁸

6. Case Study: The Catastrophe in Gaza (October 2023–2025 Trends)

The scale and severity of the impact of the conflict in the Gaza Strip since October 2023 present a critical case study of the comprehensive war on children. The conflict has seen an unprecedented accumulation of grave violations, resulting in one of the most lethal environments for minors in modern history.

6.1 An Unprecedented Death Toll and Daily Attrition

The death toll among children in Gaza is staggering. At least 14,500 children have reportedly been killed

in the Gaza Strip since 7 October 2023.⁹

This casualty rate has established an exceptionally high level of daily violence. Based on reported figures, the conflict has resulted in an average of 32 children killed every day.⁹ To contextualize this rate of attrition, this figure alone is almost double the global verified daily average for both killing *and* maiming (approximately 18 children) recorded worldwide between 2005 and 2020. Furthermore, the number of children reportedly killed in Gaza in this short period exceeds the number of children killed in four years of wars worldwide combined.¹¹ This demonstrates a unique intensity and lethality that requires immediate international attention and accountability.

6.2 Injury, Amputation, and Permanent Disability Crisis

The use of sustained explosive force in a densely populated urban environment has created a humanitarian crisis defined by mass injury and disability. Approximately 25,000 children have been injured.¹¹ Crucially, Gaza now possesses the highest number of child amputees per capita in the world.¹¹ These statistics reflect the pattern identified globally where explosive weapons cause widespread, permanent, and disabling injuries, guaranteeing long-term developmental catastrophe for survivors.¹⁵

6.3 Displacement, Separation, and Unaccompanied Children

The military offensive and associated displacement orders have resulted in the internal displacement of over a million children within the Gaza Strip.¹¹ These children and their families often reside in overcrowded conditions, in makeshift tents, or among rubble.³⁷

The breakdown of family structures is catastrophic. An estimated 17,000 children have been separated from their parents or rendered unaccompanied following the death of their caregivers.⁹ This massive loss of protection significantly heightens their psychological trauma and vulnerability to exploitation, echoing the broader global pattern of conflict-induced orphanhood.¹³ Furthermore, the report acknowledges the suffering endured by Israeli children taken hostage during the 7 October 2023 attacks, stressing the imperative for the release of all remaining hostages.¹¹

6.4 The Malnutrition and Famine Emergency

The crisis in Gaza is defined by a dual catastrophe: mass kinetic violence and strategic resource starvation. Following severe restrictions on food and aid access, famine in Gaza Governorate was declared on 22 August 2025.³⁶ By late August 2025, 119 children were documented among the 317 malnutrition-related deaths since October 2023.³⁸ July 2025 was recorded as the deadliest month for child malnutrition deaths, with 24 children under five dying, representing 85 per cent of all such deaths in that year.⁹

Analysis of malnutrition rates within the Strip reveals profound regional disparities linked directly to the success of aid blockage as a military strategy. Children residing in North Gaza are facing the most severe conditions, being 13 times more likely to experience Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) and over 10 times more likely to experience Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) compared to children in South Gaza.¹² This hyper-localised starvation confirms that the denial of humanitarian access is functioning as a strategic, targeted weapon of war, primarily affecting the most vulnerable populations.

6.5 Infrastructure Collapse and Humanitarian Access Denial (DHA)

The denial of humanitarian access has been systematic, severe, and deadly. Since the start of the conflict, at least 452 aid workers have been killed in Gaza, including 315 UN staff.³¹ This unprecedented casualty rate among relief personnel directly impedes life-saving operations and constitutes an extreme form of DHA. Attacks on civilians queuing for aid further exacerbate the danger.³⁹

The destruction of essential civilian infrastructure has crippled long-term developmental prospects. Almost 95 per cent of schools were damaged or destroyed.⁹ This destruction has led to the guaranteed loss of a full academic year for over 645,000 schoolchildren.⁹ Most children have also lost access to quality

healthcare, safe water, and other vital services.⁹ The combination of physical destruction, mass separation (17,000 children unaccompanied), and debilitating physical injury (highest amputee rate) guarantees that the conflict's impact will cripple the development of an entire generation, locking them into long-term dependence, poverty, and profound psychological distress.

Table 3: Humanitarian Crisis Indicators for Children in Gaza (October 2023–2025 Trends)

Metric	Figure	Significance
Reported Child Fatalities (Since Oct 2023)	At least 14,500	Average of 32 children killed per day; exceeds four years of global war deaths. ⁹
Children Injured	25,000	Includes highest per capita rate of child amputees globally. ¹¹
Estimated Separated/Unaccompanied Children	~17,000	Indicates catastrophic disruption of protective family structures. ¹¹
Children in North Gaza SAM Risk	13x higher likelihood	Highlights extreme regional starvation driven by successful strategic denial of aid. ¹²
Damaged/Destroyed Schools	95%	Guarantees loss of a full academic year for over 645,000 children. ⁹
Aid Workers Killed (Since Oct 2023)	At least 452	Directly impedes life-saving humanitarian operations and constitutes DHA. ³¹

7. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The data collected over the last two and a half decades confirms that the 'war on children' is escalating, driven by evolving conflict tactics that prioritise urban combat, the use of wide-area explosive weapons, and the strategic deployment of resource denial. The unprecedented rise in both the number of children exposed to conflict and the severity of violations, particularly evident in the catastrophic case study of Gaza, demands a restructured international response founded on immediate humanitarian access and stringent accountability.

7.1 Accountability and Strengthening the Protection Framework

The immense gap between verified and estimated global casualties underscores a profound systemic failure in monitoring and accountability. The international community must prioritize the immediate strengthening of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), specifically ensuring safe, guaranteed access for verification teams, particularly in light of the high number of aid worker casualties in places like Gaza.³¹ Furthermore, states must commit to immediate, binding action to curb the primary cause of child killing and maiming: the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.¹⁵

7.2 Addressing Strategic Resource Deprivation

The data linking conflict to soaring rates of acute malnutrition and stunting demonstrates that humanitarian access denial (DHA) has become a primary military tool that leads to civilian death by starvation and disease.⁸ Policy must be directed at unequivocally prohibiting DHA as a tactic of warfare and ensuring that parties to conflict uphold their obligations under International Humanitarian Law to allow full, unimpeded, and safe passage of assistance indispensable for children's survival.¹⁸ In contexts facing famine, like Gaza, full humanitarian access is the sole remaining lifeline.³⁶

7.3 Prioritising Long-Term Developmental and Psychological Support

The enduring nature of conflict trauma, combined with mass separation and physical disability, dictates that humanitarian efforts must move beyond basic survival to holistic, long-term developmental support. Continuous funding and resources must be allocated to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to treat 'toxic stress,' PTSD, and behavioural disorders, thereby mitigating the risk of the intergenerational cycle of violence.³² Parallel investments are required for comprehensive rehabilitation programs for the high number of children maimed and disabled, ensuring they regain opportunities for education, social inclusion, and self-sufficiency, guaranteeing that IHL commitments extend to long-term quality of life.¹⁴

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