



On 21 February, Paris will host a major conference on the impact of armed conflicts on children, titled "Protect Children from War", and based on the "[Paris Principles](#)" signed ten years ago.

Child soldiers are child victims, their interests must be put first, and the convention on the rights of the Child must be respected: these are the three points that will be presented by the French government and UNICEF representatives at the conference. The principle of reintegration in the community is essential. As mentioned by Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, "children are victims, but it is not their war, it is that of adults".

The issue of child protection in armed conflict was highlighted on 12 February during International Child Soldiers' Day and at the International conference organised by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the theme "Children and armed Conflicts", to which Her Majesty Queen Mathilde took part.

Special Representative Leila Zerrougui stressed the need for all countries to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in order to provide long-term opportunities for child soldiers.

The impact of agreements signed by major regional organisations such as the European Union, NATO, the African Union and the Arab League, contribute to progress made over the past two decades. These organisations aimed to answer the need for policies that protect children in conflict situations. Today, everyone is aware of the situation, and no country can remain indifferent to Leila Zerrougui's calls and the historic resolution on the [the Rights of the Child](#) . The fight against impunity has moved forward. Sentences do exist and must be applied. Recruiting child soldiers is now a crime.



Leila Zerrougui interviewed at UNRIC

“There is hope, but many great challenges still lie ahead. Children are often left behind in new types of conflicts”, explained Leila Zerrougui in an interview with Radio Doualia – Monte Carlo at the UNRIC offices.

The EU plays a major role in this fight thanks to its advocacy work and its financial support. It organises military and police trainings in the field, and runs important programmes around family and social reintegration.

Some European countries such as Belgium, France and Germany are helping protect child soldiers through their own training programmes.



The long process of raising awareness and protecting the hundreds of millions of children currently affected by armed conflicts must be intensified to prevent states and military groups from recruiting these children and violating their rights. At the same time, taking a holistic approach that integrates the SDGs is a way to take care of these conflict-affected children and restore their confidence. Then, they can reintegrate into a society that protects their rights and where they have an opportunity to grow up normally, to go to school safely, and contribute to a more lasting peace.

Leila Zerrougui remains confident in light of the [real progress](#) made these last 20 years: “child recovery is possible because they have their future ahead of us”.