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The Houthis mislead Yemen's youth and pack them off to the front lines

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Hundreds of children in Yemen have been thrown into armed conflict in recent months. These young people are being used by militias who exploit the precarious financial situation of many average families to recruit young soldiers and send them to conflict zones. These children have been stolen from their families by the Houthis and by Al Qaeda.

The recruitment of children is morally and legally unacceptable and is prohibited under international law.

By throwing these children into their war in Yemen, the Houthis are killing the innocence of childhood.

International reports have revealed the extent of this growing phenomenon. One report recorded the deaths of 159 children who have been coerced into conflict.

Meanwhile, Al Qaeda members keep convincing the children that if they die they will immediately go to heaven. These children have been deprived of an education by those armed religious groups. Clearly, this recruitment has nothing to do with Islam.

Many children have been kidnapped and beaten into submission. Many more were persuaded to join the Houthis to escape from poverty.

Unemployment, poverty, low social awareness, the closure of a large number of schools and the declining standard of education are driving factors for the recruitment of children in Yemen.

Houthi militiamen deliberately mislead children by pretending to take them to attend tutorial sessions or making them think that their duties would be in civilian facilities. Instead, they are transferred to the battlefield, where children are expected to take a direct role in the fighting.

Other extremist groups, such as Al Qaeda, train children to serve their goals. Children serve military leaders, starting with clean-up work at the military headquarters before graduating to reconnaissance work and combat.

Regardless of who arms children, such groups do not take into consideration UN conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Geneva Conventions, and international protocols, such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Unicef has monitored and tracked a frightening increase in the recruitment and use of children in Yemen in 2015.

The documented evidence in 2015 amounted to 848 cases of children being recruited. This compares to 156 cases being monitored in 2014.

However, local estimates reckon the situation is even worse and in reality the numbers are far higher as the recruitment of children remains far from the gaze of monitoring organisations and activists.

According to UN reports in Yemen, nearly 1,300 schools have been destroyed by the war, while 3,600 schools were closed before the end of the last academic year.

Unicef's Education Under Fire report states that "as of August 2015, at least 1.8 million children were without an education. This is in addition to more than 1.6 million who were out of school before the conflict escalated."

That same report indicates that the war in Yemen prompted thousands of children to abandon books and pencils and go to fight in the conflict.

The international community must face down and stop these crimes.

This problem has existed for a long time and dates back to the time when Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime used to recruit children and minors.

Yemen's president Abdrabu Mansur Hadi issued a decree in November 2012 to ban the recruit of minors under 18 years into the army or for security purposes, but it seems this decision was

never implemented. Unfortunately, the Houthis and Al Qaeda have hijacked and smashed that protection. They must be stopped.