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CBC

Afghan war taking a toll on children: report

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Aerial attacks, land mines and forced suicide bombings are only a few of the devastating consequences of the war in Afghanistan increasingly affecting the country's children, a new report said.

Watchlist, a non-governmental organization that tracks violations against children in war-torn countries, says children bear the brunt of the conflict in Afghanistan.

The New York-based organization said at least 346 children were killed in 2009 in aerial strikes and search-and-raid operations. Others were killed by landmines and other explosive devices as they played outside or collected food and water near their homes.

A few were forced to strap explosives to their bodies that were then detonated by armed groups.

Children also died in insurgent attacks against local schools.

The findings were backed up by Radhika Coomaraswamy, the top United Nations official for children and armed conflict, at a special session of the UN Security Council Wednesday.

"We find children being used as suicide bombers. There were seven such cases in Afghanistan," Coomaraswamy said. "The children don't do the detonating themselves."

A few years ago, there were no reported cases of these child-related suicide bombings, Coomaraswamy said.

Watchlist called on the Afghan government and other countries to make the protection of children from conflict-related violence a top priority.

"Current strategies of the Afghan government and its international supporters, though aimed at protecting civilians, have largely neglected the specific needs of children affected by armed conflict," the report said.

At the start of the United Nations special session Wednesday, senior officials urged the Security Council to take action by freezing assets and imposing arms embargoes and travel bans on the leaders of rebel groups and military forces that recruit child soldiers or maim, sexually assault or kill children during conflicts.

"The naming and shaming exercise, along with the possibility of sanctions against persistent violators, has persuaded parties to cease this reprehensible behaviour and should deter others from future offences," Coomaraswamy told the 15-member body at the start of a daylong debate on children and armed conflict.