

# Drones Campaign Brief - March 2014



## Campaign outline

Humanitarian aid and assistance is a natural response in any conflict zone. However the idea of “prevention” seems more unachievable and unrealistic. Why is this? Child Victims of War is highlighting the impact of drone warfare on children living in conflict zones. We are underlining the terrible effect of drones on children’s everyday lives and calling for an immediate re-evaluation of the use of drones in current conflicts.

The use of drones desperately needs to be challenged. International law establishes the importance of protecting children affected by armed conflict. Thanks to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) it has been established that States should “take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict”, (Article 38). As the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world the CRC should be highly valued on an international level.

## How do armed drones differ from other weapons?

Drones are remotely piloted aircraft capable of firing missiles and bombs. They can remain in the sky for long periods of time. The constant noise is invasive and the unpredictability of the missile strikes creates terror amongst entire communities. This can be profoundly traumatising for children, resulting in mental health problems and affecting their future development as they fear going to school or participating in social activities. With drone operators targeting SIM cards, even the use of a mobile phone can bring death to a household. As, Kat Craig, legal director at Reprieve states, “...drones not only kill innocent civilians, but ... their use amounts to a form of psychological torture and collective punishment.”

It has been argued that the long period of surveillance makes missile strikes more precise, yet a recent military study in the US shows that drone strikes are 10 times more likely to result in civilian casualties than strikes from manned aircraft. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/02/us-drone-strikes-afghan-civilians>

## The use of drones in armed conflict violates numerous articles of the CRC:

- **Article 3: The best interests of the child are always a primary consideration.**

Drones are used in asymmetrical warfare amidst some of the world’s poorest people. The impact on the lives of children in these communities has not been given due consideration by governments and military planners.

- **Article 6: The right to life, to survival and to development.**

Around 200 children have been killed in drone strikes in Pakistan alone – some directly targeted. Children have also been killed and injured in Afghanistan, Yemen and Gaza. Families affected by drone strikes may be deprived of home and income, and face debilitating medical expenses.

- **Article 19: The right to be protected from physical and mental violence.**

Drone warfare kills and injures, and can induce severe psychological trauma, especially in children who have witnessed drone strikes and/or lost close family members

*“When [children] hear the drones, they get really scared, and they can hear them all the time so they’re always fearful that the drone is going to attack them”.* Noor, Pakistan (Mar. 9, 2012).

- **Article 28: The right to education.**

Children are afraid to go to school and their parents are afraid to have them together in one place. Even those who attend school say they are too afraid and distracted to concentrate on their studies.

*“Our minds have been diverted from studying. We cannot learn things because we are always in fear of the drones hovering over us, and it really scares the small kids who go to school.”* Faheem, Pakistan (Mar. 2 2012)

- **Article 31: The right to rest and play.**

Children are afraid to play together outside. They can no longer relax and have a normal childhood.

*"[drones] made life quite difficult [in that] more than two can't sit together outside because they are scared they might be struck by drones."* Sadaullah, Pakistan (Feb. 26, 2012). *We all used to get together, all our friends in the village. We used to have fun. But now, that's not the case anymore."* Faheem, Pakistan (Mar. 2, 2012).

- **Article 38: Respect for International Humanitarian Law during conflicts.**

Under International Humanitarian Law:

- **drones may only be used when targets cannot be disabled or arrested by other means**
- **civilians should be given adequate warning of imminent attack**
- **drone attacks should not target nor affect civilians or potentially civilian persons or objects**

Neither the US nor UK appear to be adhering to these rules. There is a worrying lack of transparency regarding drone warfare and there are serious concerns that aspects of their current use are illegal. While the UK has only launched missiles from drones in declared war zones, its close intelligence sharing with the US makes it complicit in US covert drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.

The preamble of the Optional Protocol of the CRC (relating to children involved in armed conflict) highlights the importance of providing children who are victims of conflict with **psychosocial rehabilitation**. Instead of focusing on post-conflict care there should be urgent action and a reassessment of the excessive use of drones now. If certain methods of warfare were changed such **psychosocial recovery** may not be necessary.

NB Quotations from 'Living Under Drones' Stanford/NYU Report

## **Aims and objectives**

To be able to fulfil Article 38 of the CRC and **ensure protection** of children who are living in conflict zones preventive actions in warfare are imperative. To this end **Child Victims of War calls for:**

- **complete transparency regarding the UK's drones programme including disclosure of any fact finding inquiries into alleged incidents involving civilians;**
- **transparency regarding the extent of UK intelligence sharing and support for US drone strikes outside of non-international armed conflict;**
- **a moratorium until international consensus of their use within international law has been determined.**

## **Action**

2014 will see an array of powerful actions and exciting events which will raise public awareness:

- **21<sup>st</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> March: International Weekend of Action - Voices for Creative Non-Violence**
- **4<sup>th</sup> June: United Nations Day for Innocent Children Victims of Aggression**
- **4<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> October: National Week of Action on Drone Warfare**

<http://childvictimsofwar.org.uk/take-action/stop-drone-warfare/>

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