



**Child Rights International Network (CRIN) and  
Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI)  
UPR Submission: 50<sup>th</sup> Session, November 2025  
United States of America**

**Executive summary**

1. This submission was prepared in April 2025 and concerns the militarisation and military recruitment of under-18s in the United States of America (USA), particularly as affecting children's rights. Specific issues include:
  - **Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child:** Although the USA has ratified the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) and on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography (OPSC), it has not ratified the Convention itself. Moreover, the consideration of its most recent reports under the Optional Protocols has been repeatedly postponed at the request of the State, most recently at the time of writing from September 2025 to an unspecified future date.
  - **Under-18 recruitment and deployment:** The State under review recruits into its armed forces children from the age of 17 with parental consent, although it is unclear how much its military relies on under-18 recruitment.
  - **Military youth activities and organisations:** Various entities, including the Joint Reserve Officers' Training Corps and the US Cadet Corps, involve children in military-style activities.
  - **Criminalisation:** The State under review has not taken sufficient action to criminalise the recruitment of children between the ages of 15 and 18 by non-state armed groups. It is unclear whether it includes private security and military companies and paramilitary "militia" groups in its definition of non-state armed groups.
  - **Arms transfers:** The US is supplying arms to Israel which are being used in military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, resulting in severe violations of children's rights.

**Military recruitment**

2. The draft was suspended in 1973 and since then all military enlistment has been on a voluntary basis. The Selective Service Act, however, remains in force, and although registration under the Act was suspended along with the draft, it was reinstated in 1980 for all male residents aged 17. Registration as a conscientious objector is not possible; conscientious objections may not be invoked until the individual is called up. A number of conscientious objectors therefore refuse to register; they thereby become liable to criminal penalties, although these are rarely enforced.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Failure to register for Selective Service is a felony punishable by a fine of up to \$250,000 and/or 5 years imprisonment, and non-registrants may be ineligible for certain benefits, including federally-funded student financial aid, federal jobs, and job training. Additionally, failure to register may bar the individual from many state funded programmes, including student financial aid and state and local government jobs, and from applying for a Driving Licence in most US states; details are available at: United State Government, [Selective Service System: Benefits and Penalties](#), 2025.

3. Seventeen-year-olds can join the US Armed Forces with parental consent.<sup>2</sup> However, there is no publicly available breakdown of military enlistment figures by age, so it is unclear how many children the US Armed Forces recruit in practice.
4. The US maintains an "understanding" regarding the definitions of "feasible measures" and "direct part in hostilities" set out in the Declaration made on ratification of OPAC.<sup>3</sup> Despite this, the US has, in practice, refrained from deploying personnel under the age of 18 to hazardous duty or imminent danger postings since 2008.<sup>4</sup>
5. The Department of Defence Instruction 1332.45, revised in April 2021, states that service members under 18 years of age are temporarily non-deployable.<sup>5</sup> This falls short of prohibiting all overseas postings for service personnel aged under 18.

## **Military youth activities and organizations for youth**

6. The US has military-connected programmes for children, including the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) and the US Cadet Corps.
7. The JROTC operates in more than 1,700 public and private high schools, military institutions and correction centers in the US and overseas.<sup>6</sup> JROTC classes offer training in a range of topics, including marksmanship.<sup>7</sup> It is supposedly an elective programme, but a New York Times article found that "thousands of public school students were being funneled into the classes without ever having chosen them, either as an explicit requirement or by being automatically enrolled." The majority of these schools with high enrolment numbers had a large proportion of students from low-income households, showing a potential concerning targeting of children from marginalised backgrounds. In 2019, a freshman (the typical age of a freshman is 14-15) in Florida had her request to get out of a required JROTC class refused. Her father described it as "indoctrination". The same article quoted the Army as saying that "44 per cent of all soldiers who entered its ranks in recent years came from a school that offered J.R.O.T.C."<sup>8</sup>
8. The US Cadet Corps is a non-profit military youth programme for those aged nine to 18 years of age who are "*instructed by active duty, reserve and retired military personnel,*

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<sup>2</sup> United States Code, Title 10 - Armed Forces, Sec. 505. Available at: <https://uscode.house.gov/browse/prelim@title10&edition=prelim>.

<sup>3</sup> Full text of the declaration available at: [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-11-b&chapter=4&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-11-b&chapter=4&clang=_en).

<sup>4</sup> See *Report of the United States of America to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict*, CRC/C/OPAC/USA/5, 15 October 2024, para. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Defence Instruction 1332.45, Section 3.5.c.(4). Available at: <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/133245p.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> US Army Junior ROTC, *Army Junior ROTC Program Overview*. Available at: <https://www.usarmyjrotc.com/army-junior-rotc-program-overview/>.

<sup>7</sup> US Army Junior ROTC, *Marksmanship*. Available at: <https://www.usarmyjrotc.com/marksmanship/>.

<sup>8</sup> The New York Times, 'Thousands of Teens Are Being Pushed Into Military's Junior R.O.T.C.', 11 December 2022. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/11/us/jrotc-schools-mandatory-automatic-enrollment.html>.

*senior cadets and dedicated adult volunteers (21 years of age or older) who make up the United States Cadet Corps Officer Corps*".<sup>9</sup> Cadets wear a military enlisted uniform, as authorised by the Secretary of Defense, and photographs on the website show military training with children wielding military-style rifles.<sup>10</sup>

## Criminalisation

9. The US has resisted criminalising the recruitment of children under the age of 18 by non-state actors. It does not appear that the US has amended existing legislation such as the 2008 Child Soldiers Accountability Act and the 2008 Child Soldiers Prevention Act to prohibit the recruitment of children between the ages of 15 and 18 years of age. Furthermore, the definition of non-state armed groups in its OPAC Declaration<sup>11</sup> does not explicitly include private military companies or militias.
10. The proliferation of armed militias in the US, with memberships in the thousands, highlights the need for legal constraints on their recruitment activities.<sup>12</sup> Due to the opaque nature of many of these groups, it is unclear to what extent children may be among their members.
11. A proposal - the "Preventing Private Paramilitary Activity Bill"<sup>13</sup> - is currently before Congress, which would explicitly criminalise various activities when undertaken by such militias, but the current draft does not include the recruitment of persons aged under 18 by such groups.

## Arms transfers

12. The US is the largest supplier of arms to Israel. Since 7 October 2023, the US has "enacted legislation providing at least \$12.5 billion in direct military aid to Israel".<sup>14</sup> Israel has been using American-made weapons, including "thousands of precision-guided munitions, small-diameter bombs, bunker busters and small arms".<sup>15</sup> Gaza's Ministry of Health has reported that in the period from 7 October 2023 and 25 March 2025 at least

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<sup>9</sup> United States Cadet Corps, <https://www.uscadetcorps.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> The United States understands that the term "armed groups" in Article 4 of the Protocol means nongovernmental armed groups such as rebel groups, dissident armed forces, and other insurgent groups.' UN Treaty Collection, [Chapter IV: Human Rights \(11b\)](#), 2024.

<sup>12</sup> The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) identified 52 active militia groups throughout the United States in 2023, a decline from 61 in 2022. SPLC, [Continued insurrection fallout causes militias to adapt](#), 4 June 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Congress.gov, Preventing Private Military Activity Act of 2024. Available at: [https://www.congress.gov/bills/118th-congress/senate-bill/3589/all-info#:~:text=Introduced%20in%20Senate%20\(01%2F16%2F2024\).,-Preventing%20Private%20Paramilitary&text=This%20bill%20establishes%20a%20federal,is%20subject%20to%20criminal%20penalties.](https://www.congress.gov/bills/118th-congress/senate-bill/3589/all-info#:~:text=Introduced%20in%20Senate%20(01%2F16%2F2024).,-Preventing%20Private%20Paramilitary&text=This%20bill%20establishes%20a%20federal,is%20subject%20to%20criminal%20penalties.)

<sup>14</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, *US Aid to Israel in Four Charts*, last updated 13 November 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/article/us-aid-israel-four-charts>.

<sup>15</sup> BBC, 'Gaza war: Where does Israel get its weapons?', 3 September 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68737412>.

50,144 Palestinians have been killed, including 15,613 children and 113,704 injured.<sup>16</sup> Many more children are orphaned, homeless and without access to lifesaving humanitarian aid.

13. Arms should not be transferred to States where they could be used to commit serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian laws. This is set out in international standards and domestic legislation in the US such as the U.S. Conventional Arms Transfer Policy.<sup>17</sup>

## Previous UPR cycles

14. The USA has in previous cycles received numerous recommendations regarding the ratification of international treaties, with, in the most recent cycle, a recommendation from Switzerland, Rwanda, Bahamas, Luxembourg, Mali, and Morocco<sup>18</sup> relating explicitly to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was also listed in recommendations from no fewer than 28 other States.<sup>19</sup> The USA indicated that it intended “to review how we could move towards its ratification”.<sup>20</sup>
15. In the Second Cycle, Uruguay recommended to “*increase the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into the armed forces to 18 years, and criminalize explicitly the violation of the provisions of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict*”, a recommendation which the USA did not support,<sup>21</sup> but which was not repeated in the Third Cycle.
16. In the Third Cycle, the US received a recommendation from Mexico that it “stop the illegal export of weapons to other countries”.<sup>22</sup>

## Suggested recommendations

17. That the State Under Review:

- Without further delay, ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and promptly fulfil all its reporting requirements under international treaties.
- Permit registration under the Selective Service Act as a conscientious objector, thereby ceasing to render conscientious objectors liable to criminal sanctions and other Federal and State penalties.

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<sup>16</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation Update #275 | Gaza Strip*. Available at: <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-275-gaza-strip>.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of State, *The U.S. Conventional Arms Transfer Policy*, 23 February 2023. Available at: <https://2021-2025.state.gov/the-u-s-conventional-arms-transfer-policy>.

<sup>18</sup> A/HRC/46/15, 15 December 2020, para 26.47.

<sup>19</sup> El Salvador, Pakistan, Romania, Australia, Belarus, France, India, Slovenia, Russian Federation, Togo, Afghanistan, Sudan, Chile, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Cuba, Spain, Japan, Kenya, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Uganda, North Macedonia, Kazakhstan, and Slovakia.

<sup>20</sup> A/HRC/46/15/Add.1, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021, para 20.

<sup>21</sup> A/HRC/30/12, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2015, para 176.267, and A/HRC/30/12/Add.1, para 16.

<sup>22</sup> A/HRC/46/15, para 26.108, and A/HRC/46/15/Add.1, para 17.

- Raise to 18 its minimum recruitment age into the armed forces at the earliest opportunity, and in the interim, cease all postings overseas of service personnel aged under 18.
- Cease the practice of allowing military training programmes such as the JROTC to count towards the requirements for graduation from secondary education, and meanwhile ensure that no students are required by their educational institutions to enrol on such programmes.
- Closely monitor the activities of all voluntary programmes offering military training to children, such as the JROTC and the US Cadet Corps, and impose strict minimum age limits on the access to firearms for participants in such organisations.
- Amend the 2008 Child Soldiers Accountability Act and the 2008 Child Soldiers Prevention Act to prohibit all recruitment of children between the ages of 15 and 18 years of age.
- Explicitly criminalise all recruitment of children into armed and uniformed groups which are not linked to the national armed forces.
- Cease the transfers of arms to States where it is likely that they will be used to commit violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

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## About the submitting organisations

Conscience and Peace Tax was founded to represent at the international level the various national organisations advocating the expanding the right of conscientious objection to military service to objection also to having one's taxes used to fund military expenditure. It has enjoyed ECOSOC consultative status since 1997, and has worked at the UN on all aspects of conscientious objection to military service and on the militarisation of youth.

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CRIN is a human rights organisation that uses research, policy, art and advocacy to push new, critical thinking on children's rights issues. It presses for rights - not charity - and campaigns for a genuine shift in how governments and societies view and treat children. Its vision is a world where children's rights are recognised, respected and enforced, and where every rights violation has a remedy. It has an area of work focusing on the military recruitment of children.

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