



Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

25
YEARS

Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate 1996-2021



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Acknowledgements

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict would like to thank Ms. Alessia Chiocchetti for leading the development of this study and for coordinating the consultations at various levels with all stakeholders involved. The Special Representative is thankful for the important contributions received from the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting that responded to the online questionnaires. She also acknowledges the support provided by Ms. Stacy Topouzova and Mr. Musa Chibwana at different stages of the process.

The Special Representative would like to thank the Member States¹, UN entities² and civil society organizations³ that provided inputs and comments to the drafts as the study was progressing, as well as the team members of the Office of the Special Representative involved in the development of the various chapters.

A note of deep appreciation is extended to all the children and youth who participated in the focus group discussions and consultations facilitated by the Dallaire Institute, Defence for Children International, and the International Rescue Committee in the framework of this study. Their views brought to life the real meaning and value of the children and armed conflict mandate.

1 Algeria, Argentina, Belgium, Estonia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Niger, Norway, Poland, and Qatar.

2 Department of Peace Operations, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, International Labour Organization, Office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Office of Counter Terrorism, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, and World Health Organization.

3 All Survivors Project, Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace, and Security, Defence for Children International, Geneva Call, International Rescue Committee, Norwegian Refugee Council, Plan International, Save the Children International, War Child UK, and World Vision International.

Preface

This is the first study that comprehensively analyses the challenges, opportunities, and successes in delivering the United Nations children and armed conflict mandate since its inception in 1996.

The study presents a short evolution of a unique United Nations instrument that was initially mandated by the General Assembly and subsequently enhanced through 13 Security Council resolutions. Understanding the way in which the mandate grew and how it has been implemented over the years will hopefully assist Member States and the public at large to renew their commitment to the protection of children in armed conflict and the prevention of grave violations.

This study explores three time periods in the delivery of the mandate. Moreover, the study explores, among other issues, the background on the establishment of the mandate, its evolution over the past 25 years and the reflections generated by this experience, including through an analysis of the trends of grave violations against children, the modalities in monitoring and reporting and in pursuing engagement with listed and non-listed parties, the efforts made in prevention and the importance of partnerships. When possible, the study also brings to life the experiences of child survivors and child protection experts on the ground, who, after all, are the backbone of the mandate. Lastly, the study attempts to highlight some collective recommendations in the form of a way forward to illuminate the next 25 years in the pursuit of better protection of children in situations of armed conflict worldwide.

Ultimately, the mandate is about giving a voice to children, bringing attention to their plight in conflicts they neither created nor chose and, above all, protecting them. This study is a testament to the determination of the international community to do more and do better for children. Let us commit now to ending all violations against children in situations of armed conflict. It is time.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Virginia Gamba'.

Virginia Gamba
Special Representative of the Secretary-General
for Children and Armed Conflict



Abbreviations and acronyms

ACP-EU	African, Caribbean and Pacific States - European Union
CTFMR	Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
MARA	Monitoring and Reporting Arrangements
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MRM	Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
SRSR CAAC	Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict



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“When I was a child growing up in Sierra Leone, I wanted to become a human rights lawyer to fight for the rights of every child and young women in Sierra Leone, because it was as if they had no rights. Children and young women were faced with all forms of violence that affect their well-being and we hardly find people to assist them properly in the judiciary, so my dream was to become an influential lawyer to fight against the several injustices our generation faces.”

24-year-old young refugee woman from Sierra Leone who witnessed atrocities in Libya



Introduction

Photo credit: © UN Photo/Myriam Asmani

The mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC) was created by the General Assembly in 1996.⁴ This followed the publication of the landmark report on the impact of armed conflict on children, prepared by Graça Machel, the expert appointed by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali on 8 June 1994, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157 of 20 December 1993. The report was initiated at the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in accordance with the provisions of article 45(c) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The first SRSG CAAC was Under-Secretary-General Olara Otunnu of Uganda, who was appointed in 1997 by Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The SRSG CAAC implements the decisions of the General Assembly, including through annual reporting to the General Assembly in New York and to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, as well as the 13 Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict. Since 1999, the Security Council, through its resolution 1261, has undertaken to give special attention to the protection, welfare and rights of children when taking action aimed at promoting peace and security.

In the same resolution, the Security Council condemned the practices that, in the context of the mandate, are referred to as the six grave⁵ violations against children in armed conflict settings: recruitment and use, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access for children. Although the Security Council focused on six violations, it did not initially take specific decisions as to how to engage on each one of these. Over the next twenty years, through successive resolutions, the Security Council progressively included all of these violations, except the denial of humanitarian access, as triggers for the inclusion of parties to conflict in the annexes to the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, and also emphasized the need to prevent violations against children in armed conflict from occurring in the first place.⁶

Beyond the responsibility of serving its reporting requirements, which it does on the basis of the efforts of the United Nations-led country task forces on monitoring and reporting (CTFMRs) and their equivalents in non-Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) settings, the Office of the Special Representative undertakes research, analysis and advocacy, and provides assistance and support to CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations, as well as to parties to conflict who enter into action plans⁷ and other forms of commitment⁸ with the United Nations to end and prevent violations against children.

The Special Representative represents the Secretary-General and advocates for ending and preventing the six grave violations against children in armed conflict situations, working with affected States, parties to conflict, civil society organizations, as well as the departments, offices, agencies, funds and programmes, and all the Member States of the United Nations. The Office of the SRSG CAAC engages in a coordinated manner with the UN-led CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations.

Since the establishment of the mandate on children and armed conflict, Member States, working in partnership with the United Nations and civil society organizations, have strengthened the protection of children affected by conflict through the development of legally binding instruments – the most notable example being the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of

4 General Assembly resolution 51/77.

5 The word “grave” refers to the determination of gravity of the six violations against children in armed conflict.

6 Security Council resolution 2427 (2018).

7 Action plans are written, signed commitments between the relevant party to conflict and the United Nations, with specific, concrete and time-bound actions to establish sustainable measures to protect children from the impact of conflict.

8 Examples of commitments include road maps, workplans, command orders, legislation, decrees, directives, child protection policies, handover of children associated with armed groups to civilian protection actors, standard operating procedures, commitments by armed group commanders, national complaint mechanisms and age assessment procedures.



children in armed conflict, which entered into force in 2002, and as at December 2021 has 172 States parties – and the development and adoption of political commitments, in partnership with civil society organizations, to better protect children and prevent violations against them, such as the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), the Safe Schools Declaration, and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (Vancouver Principles).

From the inception of the children and armed conflict agenda, and through collaborative work with partners, including, in particular, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, hundreds of thousands of children have benefited from improved protection, with over 170,000 children released from armed forces and armed groups and reintegrated into society. The signature of 37 joint action plans between the United Nations and parties to conflict has critically, although not quantifiably, prevented violence against children in situations of armed conflict in multiple contexts.

A. Purpose

This study looks at the results achieved under the mandate in the past 25 years, the challenges that impacted its implementation and the opportunities to improve the protection of children affected by conflict. It identifies lessons learned and good practices, as well as new working methods that have emerged as a result of specific circumstances, including – but not limited to – the recent coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The study further analyses opportunities and risks in engaging with parties to conflict in order to improve the protection of children and prevent grave violations against children from occurring in the first place. Lastly, the study aims to serve as a reference for those of the general public who have an interest in learning more about the mandate and how it has evolved throughout the years, as well as in knowing more about the work of the Office of the SRSG CAAC.

B. Methodology

The study adopts an inductive approach to data collection and analysis, ensuring a constant, iterative and self-reflective process for data analysis.

The study draws upon General Assembly resolution 51/77 (1996), the 13 Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict that have been adopted to date,⁹ relevant resolutions of the women, peace and security agenda,¹⁰ and relevant resolutions of the youth, peace and security agenda.¹¹ It also references a range of legal instruments that are relevant to the study, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict; the four Geneva Conventions of 1949; Protocols I and II Additional to the Geneva Conventions; the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 (1999); the Convention against Torture; the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; and other relevant instruments, including regional instruments.

9 Security Council resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011), 2068 (2012), 2143 (2014), 2225 (2015), 2427 (2018) and 2601 (2021).

10 Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2331 (2016) and 2467 (2019).

11 Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020).

This study was developed based on the reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, the conclusions developed by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict¹² and the statements by the Presidents of the Security Council. The study references a range of additional sources, including non-binding instruments such as the Vancouver Principles, the Paris Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration. The study also references reports by relevant United Nations entities and non-profit organizations, think tanks, academia and other relevant secondary sources that have been published by organizations, researchers, institutes and centres on issues related to the mandate; those can be found in the recommended bibliography at the end of this study.

This study was informed by several research tools, including surveys, qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with experts, practitioners, children and youth. The varied research tools allowed for theoretical sampling that ensures that data are examined through a variety of viewpoints. Furthermore, the research tools allowed for cross-referencing data and triangulation.

The numeric data relating to grave violations against children in armed conflict are drawn solely from reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict and therefore duly verified by the United Nations through the MRM. The study does not include external data sets on children and armed conflicts, which may not be verified by the United Nations, or may be collected using different methodologies.

The study was informed by 57 bilateral consultations and nine multilateral round-table discussions at the technical level with Member States, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which were held between March and November 2021, and three final round tables with the same entities at the principal level at the end of the process.¹³

To ensure the integration of field perspectives, the study was also informed by the outcome of a 72-question survey that was shared with all CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations. The survey included questions on trends in grave violations throughout the 25-year implementation of the mandate, on the monitoring and reporting tools available to CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations, on data collection, on the gender dimension of grave violations and on lessons learned which could help inform the next 25 years of the implementation of the mandate. Responses to the survey were representative of 16 situations currently on the children and armed conflict agenda.¹⁴

Finally, an essential and invaluable contribution to the study was the input received from 181 children and youth (97 boys and 84 girls), between 10 and 24 years of age, through 29 small and age relevant FGDs and consultations facilitated by the Dallaire Institute, Defence for Children International and the International Rescue Committee, in September and October 2021. The FGDs and consultations were conducted with internally displaced populations, refugees and host community children in seven situations on the children and armed conflict agenda,¹⁵ as well as with youth refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sierra Leone; an online consultation brought together five youth representatives from Cameroon, Ireland, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan.

12 See www.un.org/securitycouncil/subsidiary/wgcaac/sgreports.

13 Disclaimer: The participation of a Member State to the consultations held in the framework of this study does not imply its endorsement of all international instruments referred to in the study.

14 Situations on the agenda of the Security Council: Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Situations not on the agenda of the Security Council or other situations: Burkina Faso, Israel and State of Palestine, Lake Chad Basin, and Lebanon.

15 The Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Israel and State of Palestine, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen.



C. Limitations of the study

This study is framed by the General Assembly resolutions on the rights of the child,¹⁶ as well as the above-mentioned 13 Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict. The scope of the study is thus limited to the six grave violations and other issues of concern identified and condemned in those resolutions. Nevertheless, this study is not designed to be a guide on the normative frameworks related to all aspects of the rights of the child in situations of armed conflict. The study is also limited in scope to situations of children and armed conflict that have been or are currently included in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict,¹⁷ but it does not engage on a comparative analysis of all the country situations.

The information, data and trends reflected in this study are drawn from the reports of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict published from 2000 to 2021. While the quantitative and qualitative data improved throughout the years, particularly since the establishment of the MRM in 2005, it can only be considered as a broad overview of the scale and impact of grave violations against children in armed conflict. Lack of access and other types of restrictions for monitoring and reporting, security concerns for survivors, witnesses and monitors and the sensitive nature of certain violations in some contexts are among the main challenges that have been faced throughout the implementation of the mandate.

Lastly, the responses to the survey provided important insight in the recent implementation of the MRM; however, the analysis of the responses is not representative of the overall implementation of the MRM since its establishment in 2005.



Photo credit: © OSRSG CAAC / Fabienne Vinet

¹⁶ General Assembly resolution 51/77 and subsequent resolutions.

¹⁷ The reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict do not seek to make any legal determination as to whether situations which are referred to in the Secretary-General's reports are or are not armed conflicts within the context of the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols thereto, or prejudice the legal status of the non-States parties involved in these situations.





Background on the establishment of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

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The mandate was born in the post-cold war era. Since then, the scope and scale of armed conflict and violence have been evolving. Inter-State war, the major preoccupation at the time the United Nations was founded, is a rare event today, even if the threat of a major global conflict remains real; meanwhile, intra-State armed conflict has been resurgent. Over the past decade, internal conflicts have contributed to the highest number of conflict-related fatalities since the end of the cold war, disproportionately affecting women and children. Today, intra-State conflicts are characterized by great complexity. They typically involve the proliferation of non-State armed groups, linkages with criminal and sometimes extremist interests, growing internationalization and connections to global supply chains. These factors have made conflicts longer and more difficult to resolve, while increasing the vulnerability of civilians to atrocity crimes, often on a large scale, and human rights violations.¹⁸

In 1996, after over two years of extensive research and in-depth consultations, the Graça Machel report¹⁹ was published. This was a pivotal moment, in that it was the first time such type of research was produced, which enabled the international community to understand the impact of armed conflict on children. The report opened by noting that “millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders, but targets. Some fall victim to a general onslaught against civilians; others die as part of a calculated genocide. Still other children suffer the effects of sexual violence or the multiple deprivations of armed conflict that expose them to hunger or disease. Just as shocking, thousands of young people are cynically exploited as combatants”.²⁰ The report provided the initial impetus and guidance to the actions of the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Secretary-General, and the appointed Special Representative, in their resolve to protect children from the horrors of war.

Small arms and light weapons have been the primary weapons used in fighting. Beyond the human tragedy that those arms and weapons cause, they also overload local and national health services, reduce the available workforce, and disrupt social and societal structures.²¹ Further, the simplicity of using small arms makes it possible for a child to carry and use them. The post-conflict explosive remnants of war (ERWs) and anti-personnel landmines, and the surge in improvised explosive devices (IEDs), continue to affect children in a disproportionate manner.

One of the reasons for the rise in civilian casualties was the increased blurring of lines between “combatants” and “civilians” as many contemporary conflicts are fought in urban areas, with the use of weapons that can cause massive loss of life and extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure.²²

In the worst cases, children became the primary targets of violence, mostly by armed groups feeding their ranks and their needs through the abduction and forced recruitment of children. Some of these immediate child rights violations included, inter alia, recruitment and use by armed forces and groups, killing and maiming, and sexual violence. Such abuse would not only rob children of their childhood and adversely affect their development, but also potentially have dire and long-lasting consequences for the maintenance of international peace and stability.²³

18 The State of Global Peace and Security in Line with the Central Mandates Contained in the Charter of the United Nations: Report of the Secretary-General (United Nations publication, 2020).

19 “The impact of armed conflict on children” A/51/306.

20 Ibid., para. 1.

21 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Small arms and light weapons and mine action”. Available at www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52142.htm.

22 The State of Global Peace and Security (United Nations publication, 2020).

23 S. Hodgson, “Whose action plan? An analysis of the UN Security Council resolution 1612 action plan and monitoring and reporting mechanism in Nepal”, *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, vol. 4, No. 2 (July 2012).



Relevant instruments of international human rights law and international humanitarian law²⁴ contain rules regarding the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. The mandate is uniquely buttressed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.²⁵ The Convention is of utmost importance for the protection of children in armed conflict and is a guiding source of core principles and standards. Of particular importance to the mandate is article 38 of the Convention, which stipulates that States parties “undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child”²⁶ and “shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities”²⁷ Furthermore, the Convention provides that States parties “shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces” and stipulates that “in recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years, States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest”.²⁸ The Convention contains an array of key rights of children, including the right to life²⁹ and the right to the protection of the law against “arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, [or] unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation”.³⁰ Notably, the Convention outlines four key principles that underpin the mandate, namely non-discrimination (art. 2), the best interests of the child (art. 3, para. 1), child survival and development (art. 6, para. 2), and the right of children to be heard (art. 12, para. 1). All those principles are at the core of the mandate. Pursuant to the Convention, the Committee on the Rights of the Child was established to examine progress made by States parties (art. 43). As we will describe later in this study and of relevance to the mandate, to further protect children from recruitment and use by parties to conflict in hostilities, the General Assembly adopted in 2000 the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.³¹ The Optional Protocol entered into force in 2002. It provides that States parties “shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities” (art. 1) and that States parties “shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces” (art. 2).



Photo credit: © UN Photo/Amanda Voisard

Further, a relevant instrument is the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which was adopted in 1990 by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (now the African Union) and entered into force in 1999. That Charter addresses contextual child rights issues as well as rights similar to those encapsulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In its preamble, the Charter reaffirms “adherence to the principles of the rights and welfare of the child contained in the declaration, conventions and other instruments of the Organization of African Unity and in the United Nations and in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child”.³²

24 The four Geneva Conventions (1949), Protocols I and II Additional to the Geneva Conventions (1977), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention against Torture (1984) and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948).

25 United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

26 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 38(1).

27 Ibid., Article 38(2).

28 Ibid., Article 38(3).

29 Ibid., Article 6(1).

30 Ibid., Article 16, para. (1).

31 United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 2173, No. 27531.

32 See https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36804-treaty-african_charter_on_rights_welfare_of_the_child.pdf.

The Charter defines a child as “every human being below the age of 18 years” (art. 2). This definition informs the other articles of the instrument, including article 22, paragraph 2, which states that “States Parties to the present Charter shall take all necessary measures to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostilities and refrain in particular, from recruiting any child”. Concerning the best interest of the child, the Charter provides that “in all actions concerning the child undertaken by any person or authority the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration” (art. 4).





The evolution of monitoring and reporting grave violations through the mandate

Photo credit: © MONUSCO/Bas de Lange

This chapter draws upon data on the six grave violations and other issues of concern that are reported in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict between 2000, year in which the first report was published, and 2021. The chapter further discusses the foundational period of the Office of the SRSO CAAC, from its creation pursuant to a General Assembly decision and the first Security Council resolution to the broadening of the mandate.

A. Creation of the mandate: December 1996

Informed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the General Assembly in its resolution 48/157 of 20 December 1993 entitled “Protection of children affected by armed conflicts” requested the Secretary-General to appoint an expert to undertake a comprehensive study of this question, including the participation of children in armed conflict, as well as the relevance and adequacy of existing standards, and to make specific recommendations on ways and means of preventing children from being affected by armed conflicts and of improving the protection of children in armed conflict and on measures to ensure effective protection of these children; and to promote their physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration, taking into account the recommendations by the World Conference on Human Rights and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (operative para. 7).

In 1993, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in accordance with the provisions of article 45(c) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, recommended that the General Assembly request from the Secretary-General a comprehensive study on the impact of armed conflict on children.³³ Accordingly, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157, on 8 June 1994, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali appointed Graça Machel of Mozambique to undertake an extensive study on children in armed conflict. After undertaking consultations spanning two years, on 26 August 1996 the Secretary-General transmitted to the General Assembly Machel’s landmark study entitled “Impact of armed conflict on children”.³⁴

At the time, 30 major armed conflicts raged around the world. In reminding the world about the plight of children, she noted that in the past decade, an estimated two million children had been killed in armed conflict and that three times as many had been seriously injured or permanently disabled, many of them maimed by landmines. Countless others had been forced to witness or even take part in horrifying acts of violence (para. 2).

Against this background, Machel proposed the “elements of a comprehensive agenda for action” by which Member States and the international community, more broadly, could improve the protection of children in armed conflicts (see note by the Secretary-General to the report). Moreover, she called for “urgent and resolute action” on the part of the international community to address the plight of children affected by armed conflicts. In particular, she advocated for the protection of children in armed conflict by drawing upon the core principles and norms enshrined in international law, including customary international law and domestic law.

The General Assembly adopted resolution 51/77, which created the mandate of the Special Representative. In the resolution, the General Assembly recommended that the Secretary-General appoint for a period of three years a Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children and encouraged UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)/Centre for Human Rights to provide support to

³³ CRC/C/16.

³⁴ A/51/306.



the Special Representative (operative para. 35). Furthermore, the General Assembly recommended that the Special Representative foster international cooperation to ensure respect for children's rights and contribute to the coordination of efforts by Governments, relevant United Nations bodies, notably OHCHR/Centre for Human Rights, UNHCR, UNICEF, the specialized agencies and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, relevant special rapporteurs and working groups, as well as United Nations field operations, regional and subregional organizations, other competent bodies and NGOs (operative subpara. 36(d)). Thus, resolution 51/77 advocated for a broad array of actors to advance the children and armed conflict agenda.

In the resolution, the Special Representative was requested "to submit to the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights an annual report containing relevant information on the situation of children affected by armed conflict, bearing in mind existing mandates and reports of relevant bodies" (operative para. 37). This established one of the foremost instruments with which the Secretary-General could report on specific country situations, verified violations and engagement with States and non-States parties to armed conflict, among other actions. Importantly, the annual report serves as an instrument through which the Secretary-General could continue to shed light on the impacts of armed conflict on children.

B. First period: January 1997–December 2006

In 1997, Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed the first SRSG CAAC, Olara Otunnu of Uganda, with the grade of Under-Secretary-General to enable him to advocate at the highest levels for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The annual reports of the SRSG CAAC to the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, starting in 1998, were designed to build on the advocacy work done by the Office of the Special Representative and to raise awareness on the plight of children affected by armed conflict as indicated in General Assembly resolution 51/77. In his first two years in office, Otunnu's efforts focused on setting up the Office through financial support and the secondment of staff by various governments. In terms of the substantive nature of his work, Otunnu embarked on an "era of application" campaign. The rationale for the campaign was that "words on paper cannot save children and women in peril".³⁵ Under this campaign, the SRSG CAAC initiated outreach and advocacy activities targeting senior political and government leaders from several countries affected by armed conflicts to inform them of his mandate and proposed activities, to seek their cooperation in the conduct of his work, to discuss the plight of children in each situation and to prepare for field visits to those countries.

In 1999, following the advocacy and public awareness generated by the Machel report, and by the work of the newly created Office of the OSRSG CAAC, the Security Council adopted its resolution 1261 (1999). In the resolution, the Security Council strongly condemned the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction and forced displacement, recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in violation of international law, and attacks on objects protected under international law, including places that usually have a significant presence of children such as schools and hospitals, and called on all parties concerned to put an end to such practices (operative para. 2). The Security Council requested the Secretary-General to submit a first report on children and armed conflict and decided to remain actively seized of the matter (operative paras. 20 and 21).

The first annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council³⁶ included contextual data in narrative format and was not necessarily centred on statistics or numerical representations. The report

³⁵ A/54/430.

³⁶ A/55/163-S/2000/712.

provided qualitative analysis on specific country contexts and touched on a variety of issues of concern. Throughout this initial period, only the recruitment and use of children in contravention of international law was being monitored and reported to the Security Council, in addition to other issues that had a negative impact on children affected by armed conflict such as the illicit flow of small arms, the threat of landmines, the importance of protecting children from the impact of sanctions, uprooted and displaced children, the special needs of girls, as well as education.

Paragraph 2 of the report, citing data from UNICEF for the period 1986–1996, noted that 2 million children were killed and 6 million were injured. The conflicts left more than 1 million children orphaned. At that time, there were over 23 million children who had been displaced by war within and outside their countries. Increasingly, children were specifically targeted, recruited as combatants or abducted to serve as sexual slaves. The number of child combatants under the age of 18 was estimated at 300,000. It was further noted that between 8,000 and 10,000 children were victims of landmines.

The report included the terms of reference for Child Protection Advisers to be deployed with peacekeeping operations as of February of the same year. The role of Child Protection Advisers was to help ensure that the rights and protection of all children were a priority throughout the peacekeeping process and the consolidation of peace in war-torn countries.³⁷ Child Protection Advisers were also meant to act as a liaison between different sectors of a peace operation and between the peace operation and all relevant agencies and entities, including the United Nations system, governments, the international community, civil society and NGOs.³⁸ The first Child Protection Adviser assumed responsibilities with the United Nations peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), pursuant to Security Council resolution 1260 (1999).

On 11 August 2000, the Security Council adopted resolution 1314 (2000). In the resolution, the Security Council reaffirmed its strong condemnation of the deliberate targeting of children in situations of armed conflict and the harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children, and the long-term consequences this has for durable peace, security and development. The Security Council called upon all parties to armed conflict to ensure the full, safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all children affected by armed conflict. It underlined the importance of giving consideration to the special needs and particular vulnerabilities of girls affected by armed conflict, including, inter alia, those heading households, orphaned, sexually exploited and used as combatants. It urged that their human rights, protection and welfare be incorporated in the development of policies and programmes, including those for prevention, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Lastly, the Security Council noted that the deliberate targeting of civilians, including children, may constitute a threat to international peace and security and requested the Secretary-General to report to it on the implementation of that resolution and resolution 1261 (1999).



Olara A. Otunnu, first Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
Photo credit: © UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

³⁷ United Nations, “UN announces deployment of Child Protection Advisers, groundbreaking development in UN peacekeeping”, press release, 22 February 2000.

³⁸ A/55/163-S/2000/712.



The year 2000 also saw the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the entry into force of ILO Convention No. 182.

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict

The Optional Protocol codified a number of provisions to protect children, including article 3 which provides that States parties shall raise the minimum age for the voluntary recruitment of persons into their national armed forces from that set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, recognizing that under the Convention persons under the age of 18 years are entitled to special protection. Article 1 of the Optional Protocol stipulates that States parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities. Article 2 stipulates that States parties shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces. Notably, article 4, paragraph 1, stipulates that armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years. Together, the provisions outlined in the Protocol raised the minimum age of recruitment to 18 years and marked an important development in the protection of children in armed conflict, and specifically in its efforts to advance the prohibition of the recruitment and use of children in hostilities.

ILO Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention

This Convention provides, in article 3, that the term “worst forms of child labour” comprises (a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; (b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances; (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; and (d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. The preamble states that the effective elimination of the worst forms of child labour requires immediate and comprehensive action. This Convention is a “fundamental” ILO Convention. In this connection, the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work provides that all ILO members have an obligation to respect, promote and realize the principles concerning the effective abolition of child labour. ILO Convention No. 182 is the first ILO Convention to achieve universal ratification. It is also the most rapidly ratified convention in the history of the organization, with most of the ratifications occurring within the first three years after its adoption in 1999.

In 2001, the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict³⁹ again broadly referred to the main issues emerging from the work of the United Nations and its NGO partners on the ground, noting that “a large number of children have been directly affected by armed conflict, many of them uprooted from their homes and communities, maimed or killed. Others have been made orphans,

³⁹ A/56/342-S/2001/852.

abducted, abused and exploited. Particularly damaging for future generations is the impact of war on girls”.⁴⁰ The report further states that girls undergo sexual abuse and enslavement during war; that war indirectly affects many more children by destroying entire social networks and infrastructures; and that the increase in the destruction of schools and the subsequent displacement of teachers leave children at a higher risk of recruitment. The report concludes that these trends have become common features of conflicts and they deserve special attention and action.



“Because my father was killed, I was deprived from education and I am now under control of my uncle, so I can’t achieve my dream.”

FGD participant,
girl, age group 15–18, Iraq

Following that second annual report, the Security Council adopted resolution 1379 (2001). The resolution was premised on the recognition of the harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children and the long-term consequences this had for durable peace, security and development. The resolution expressed the Security Council’s readiness to include provisions for the protection of children when considering the mandates of peacekeeping operations, and reaffirmed, in this regard, its readiness to continue to include, where appropriate, Child Protection Advisers in peacekeeping operations. Further, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to annex to his annual reports on children and armed conflict a list of parties to armed conflict that recruit or use children in violation of relevant international obligations in situations on the Council’s agenda, and in situations that could be brought to the attention of the Security Council by the Secretary-General in accordance with Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations.⁴¹

The third annual report of the Secretary-General⁴² indicated that the reports to the Security Council over the past year had highlighted the plight of children affected by armed conflict. The report included reference to addressing impunity, in which the Secretary-General noted that the Security Council, in its resolution 1379 (2001), urged Member States to prosecute those responsible for egregious crimes perpetrated against children in situations of armed conflict and to exclude those crimes from amnesty provisions, where feasible. The entry into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court strengthened this objective considerably (para. 13 of the report). The Secretary-General also included a specific section on child soldiers, which described the newly created annexes to the annual reports on children and armed conflict, listing parties to armed conflict that recruit or use children in contravention of the international obligations applicable to them (para. 27). The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict both entered into force in 2002.

Subsequently, the Security Council adopted resolution 1460 (2003), welcoming the entry into force of the Optional Protocol. It highlighted that “the conscription or enlistment of children under the age of 15 into the national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities is classified as a war crime by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which recently entered into force”. The resolution supported the campaign for “an era of application” of international norms and standards for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. This was the first step towards a system that would afford a higher degree of accountability for those committing grave violations against children.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Para 2.

⁴¹ The provision allows the Secretary-General to refer to the Security Council a situation that in his view may threaten international peace and security.

⁴² S/2002/1299.



In the resolution, the Security Council called on the Secretary-General to enter into dialogue with parties to armed conflict in violation of the international obligations applicable to them on the recruitment or use of children in armed conflict, in order to develop clear and time-bound action plans to end this practice (operative para. 4). Moreover, it requested the Secretary-General to report on progress made by the parties listed in the annex to his report in ending the recruitment or use of children in armed conflict in violation of international obligations applicable to them (operative subpara. 16(a)). This resolution provided a comprehensive framework for addressing the protection of children affected by armed conflict and paved the way for engagement with all parties to conflict through the development of action plans with these parties to conflict.

In 2003, in his fourth annual report on children and armed conflict,⁴³ the Secretary-General noted that despite tangible progress in the struggle to ensure the protection, rights and well-being of children exposed to armed conflict, their general situation remained grave and unacceptable. In discussing the main trends identified, the report noted that children continued to be the main victims of conflicts. Their suffering took many forms. Children were killed, made orphans, maimed, abducted, deprived of education and health care, and left with deep emotional scars and trauma. Forced to flee from their homes, refugees and internally displaced children were especially vulnerable to violence, recruitment, sexual exploitation, disease, malnutrition and death. Children were being recruited and used as child soldiers on a massive scale. Furthermore, the report noted that girls faced additional risks, particularly sexual violence and these egregious violations of children's rights took place in a pervasive climate of impunity (see para. 24). Lastly, the report states that children in war zones have been deliberately killed or maimed by parties to conflict, often in extremely brutal ways (para. 25).

The Security Council adopted resolution 1539 (2004), in which it requested the Secretary-General to devise a systematic and comprehensive MRM to provide timely, accurate and reliable information on the recruitment and use of children and other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict. It called upon parties to conflict listed by the Secretary-General to prepare concrete, time-bound action plans, in close collaboration with the United Nations, to halt the recruitment and use of children. It expressed its intention to consider imposing targeted and graduated measures, including sanctions, against parties that fail to develop an action plan or fail to meet the commitments included in their action plan.

The next annual report of the Secretary-General,⁴⁴ covering the year 2004, noted that field practitioners had encountered various constraints in the collection of information, including security problems, non-cooperation of parties and the absence of a coherent and functioning mechanism for monitoring and reporting at the country level (para. 4). It noted that, in the context of that report, there was no universally applicable definition of "armed conflict" in general, and that the mandate of the SRSG CAAC did not contain a definition of the term (para. 7). Thus, the report indicated the challenges of reporting on the general trends of grave violations and highlighted the limitations of the tools that the Special Representative had at the time.⁴⁵

⁴³ A/58/546-S/2003/1053, A/58/546/Corr.1-S/2003/1053/Corr.1 and A/58/546/Corr.2-S/2003/1053/Corr.2.

⁴⁴ A/59/695-S/2005/72.

⁴⁵ "In the performance of his mandate, my Special Representative has adopted a pragmatic and cooperative approach to this issue, focusing on ensuring broad and effective protection for children exposed to situations of concern, rather than dwelling on the definition of the term 'armed conflict'. Reference in the present report to any State or situation should not be construed as a legal determination that there exists a situation of armed conflict within the meaning of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols" (Ibid., para. 7).

The report included a specific section outlining the action plan for the establishment of a monitoring, reporting and compliance mechanism (chap. III), which would focus on the six violations against children prioritized for their egregious nature and because they could be monitored:

- (a) Killing or maiming of children;
- (b) Recruiting or using child soldiers;
- (c) Attacks against schools or hospitals;
- (d) Rape or other grave sexual violence against children;
- (e) Abduction of children;
- (f) Denial of humanitarian access for children.

Based on the information provided by that report, the Security Council adopted its landmark resolution on children and armed conflict, resolution 1612 (2005), which established the MRM to collect timely and reliable information on violations committed against children affected by armed conflict. The resolution stemmed from a deep concern over the lack of overall progress on the ground, where parties to conflict continued to violate with impunity the relevant provisions of applicable international law relating to the rights and protection of children in armed conflict. The Security Council requested the Secretary-General to implement without delay the MRM, beginning with its application, within existing resources, in close consultation with countries concerned, to parties in situations of armed conflict listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report that are on the agenda of the Security Council, and then, in close consultation with countries concerned, to apply it to parties in other situations of armed conflict listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report.

Establishment of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism

Against the background of a growing focus on accountability, the Security Council in its resolution 1612 (2005) mandated the establishment of an MRM. In particular, the MRM would be used to collect and provide timely, objective, accurate and reliable information on the recruitment and use of child soldiers in violation of applicable international law and on other





violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict, and the mechanism would report to the working group to be created (operative subpara. 2(a)). The establishment of the MRM created a framework through which it would be possible to systematically collect data on violations, verify the collected data and submit regular country-specific reports. In doing so, it further strengthened the protection of children in armed conflict and bolstered the tools available to strengthen the implementation of the mandate.

The resolution stipulated that the MRM would be triggered by the listing of parties on recruitment and use of child soldiers, which at the time was the only violation within the mandate for which parties could be listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict. A number of provisions in the resolution reaffirmed that the goal of monitoring should be to report to the working group established by the resolution, and to establish dialogue with national Governments including at the country level with the aim of supporting and supplementing, as appropriate, the protection and rehabilitation roles of national Government (operative subparas. 2(b) and 2(c)). It stressed that any dialogue established under the framework of the MRM by United Nations entities with non-State armed groups in order to ensure protection for and access to children must be conducted in the context of peace processes where they exist and the cooperation framework between the United Nations and the concerned Government. In this way, resolution 1612 (2005) spelled out the core tenants of the MRM framework which marked an important development in the mandate.

The CTFMRs play a key role in the implementation of the mandate where an MRM has been established following the listing of parties to conflict in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict. The purpose of the CTFMRs is to provide timely and reliable information on the six grave violations and other issues of concern and to produce reports on the situation of children affected by armed conflict in the concerned country on the children and armed conflict agenda. CTFMRs also engage parties to conflict in dialogue, including for the preparation and implementation of action plans and other forms of commitment by parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations against children, as well as the monitoring of their implementation.

Lastly, CTFMRs serve as a forum to discuss, follow up and trigger appropriate responses by United Nations country teams and other organizations involved, including NGOs, to relevant Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict, applicable recommendations of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, as well as conclusions of relevant country-specific reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, developed by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in accordance with the mandate of each CTFMR member. The composition of the CTFMRs varies from country to country. In situations where an MRM is not officially established, in other words where no parties to conflict are listed in the annexes to the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, the United Nations establishes similar coordination structures for the purpose of monitoring and reporting, which will provide the necessary data to the SRSG CAAC, to inform the Secretary-General's decision on listing parties to conflict in the annexes to his annual reports and therefore trigger the official establishment of the MRM. In this study, these coordination mechanisms in the other situations of concern are referred to as "CTFMR equivalents in non-MRM situations". The data documented in non-MRM situations are also used to assess the impact of armed conflict on children in a given situation and inform advocacy and programmatic response accordingly.

The CTFMRs are co-chaired by the highest United Nations authority in the country (a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for a peacekeeping operation or a country-based special political mission, or the Resident Coordinator) and the UNICEF Representative. This type of leadership ensures that the United Nations, supported by civil society organizations, provides timely, accurate and reliable

information to the SRSR CAAC in order to prepare and finalize all the reports on children and armed conflict and engage the members of the Security Council, other Member States concerned and armed groups as necessary. In this regard, Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) underlined that the MRM must operate with the participation of and in cooperation with national Governments and relevant United Nations and civil society actors, including at the country level (operative subpara. 2(b)).

Establishment of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

The Security Council by its resolution 1612 (2005) established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.⁴⁶ It stipulated that the Security Council would regularly meet and discuss country-specific issues or “situations” under the auspices of the Working Group. Furthermore, it envisioned that after country reports were submitted, the Working Group would adopt conclusions through which it could make recommendations to parties to conflict, governments, donors, United Nations actors, as well as to community and religious leaders on measures to end violations and promote the protection of war-affected children. It thereby established an additional body through which concrete measures of accountability and engagement could be pursued.

The Working Group is served by and receives information from the Office of the SRSR CAAC. The Office collects information provided by the CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations, compiles it and works with each CTFMR and equivalent to address possible inconsistencies. The Office provides quarterly global updates and regular comprehensive reports on country-specific situations to the Working Group. Subsequently, the Working Group makes recommendations to parties to conflict, governments and donors, as well as United Nations actors, on measures to end violations and promote the protection of conflict-affected children.

Since its establishment on 16 November 2005, the Working Group has reviewed and issued observations on over 50 country-specific reports,⁴⁷ which have generated tangible advances in often challenging situations for the protection of children. The Working Group has also been proactive in its work on children and armed conflict, including through visiting countries on the agenda, organizing informal briefings by experts on issues related to child protection and holding video teleconferences with United Nations child protection staff in the field.

The positive impact of the efforts of the Working Group has also been demonstrated by the inclusion of the protection of children affected by armed conflict in all relevant aspects of the work and resolutions of the Security Council.

In April 2006, Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Radhika Coomaraswamy of Sri Lanka to be the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.



Radhika Coomaraswamy, second Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
Photo credit: © UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

⁴⁶ See www.un.org/securitycouncil/subsidiary/wgcaac.

⁴⁷ See www.un.org/securitycouncil/subsidiary/wgcaac/sgreports.



The 2006 annual report on children and armed conflict⁴⁸ noted that although progress had been made with respect to the protection of children in a number of situations of armed conflict, new situations had arisen that were of great concern. Thus, it alluded to general trends in broad terms by adopting a narrative approach to presenting the trends.

The report noted that the recruitment and use of child soldiers and other grave violations were beginning to “migrate” within regions and that the movement of rebel groups across borders to prey upon vulnerable children needed further attention and adequately developed monitoring expertise to effectively address the problem. Of particular concern were the Mano River and Great Lakes regions of Africa. Another preoccupying phenomenon was the use of children by mercenaries and mercenary groups (para. 4).

While the report adhered to its largely narrative format, it also included United Nations-verified data drawn from the newly established MRM. Although the United Nations started immediately to verify information as mandated by Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), the report noted that adequate data had yet to be gathered systematically and reports from the field indicated that this data collection was a growing concern (para. 4). Furthermore, it highlighted that insecurity and a lack of access to affected areas by the United Nations often precluded access to information, especially when non-State actors operated in isolated areas. For example, insurgents and rebel groups in Iraq and Afghanistan operated in a clandestine manner and often in inaccessible areas, posing a challenge in obtaining evidence on recruitment practices and other grave violations against children (para. 5). The report was the first to include country-specific sections on development in each situation on the children and armed conflict agenda.

At the closure of the first decade of implementation, the agenda had greatly advanced, including through the establishment of MRMs on the ground. The initial reporting to the Security Council had been challenging and this was reflected in the texts of the annual reports. The collection, verification and reporting capacity on children and armed conflict was a gradual process that necessitated more robust Security Council resolutions such as those leading to the establishment of the MRM and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Another challenge was the sustained focus on one specific children and armed conflict violation over others, that of recruitment and use of child soldiers. Although other violations were mentioned in documents relating to children and armed conflict, the first efforts at both monitoring and reporting as well as engagement with parties to conflict clearly focused on recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Given these challenges and initial constraints, the earlier annual reports could be characterized as being foundational and general, in broad terms, adhering to a largely narrative format with less numerical data and inconsistent application, and focusing on the phenomenon of the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

⁴⁸ A/61/529-S/2006/826 and A/61/529/Corr.1-S/2006/826/Corr.1.



Summary of the Milestones of the first period

- **1996:** The Machel report on the impact of armed conflict on children was presented to the General Assembly.
- **1997:** The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was created.
- **1999:** The Security Council, in its resolution 1261, identified some of the violations against children in situations of armed conflict which later became known in the context of the mandate as the “six grave violations”.
- **2000:** The General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.
- **2000:** The Security Council, in its resolution 1314, noted that the deliberate targeting of civilian population, including children, may constitute a threat to international peace and security and requested the Secretary-General to continue to report to it on the protection of children in armed conflict.
- **2000:** ILO Convention No. 182 entered into force.
- **2001:** The Security Council, by its resolution 1379, requested that parties that recruit and use children be listed in the annual reports of the Secretary-General.
- **2002:** The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict entered into force.
- **2003:** The Security Council, by its resolution 1460, requested the Secretary-General to report on progress made with the listed parties.
- **2004:** The Security Council, by its resolution 1539, requested the Secretary-General to prepare an action plan to establish an MRM on grave violations against children.
- **2005:** The report of the Secretary-General (A/59/695-S/2005/72) presented the action plan for the establishment of a monitoring, reporting and compliance mechanism.
- **2005:** The Security Council, by its resolution 1612, established the MRM on grave violations against children and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

C. Second period: January 2007–December 2016

During the tenure of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, there were two Special Representatives for Children and Armed Conflict: Under-Secretary-General Radhika Coomaraswamy of Sri Lanka (2006–2012) and Under-Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui of Algeria (2012–2017).

In 2007, for the first time, the annual report of the Secretary-General⁴⁹ noted that references to reports, cases and incidents, in that report, referred to information that had been gathered, vetted and verified for accuracy, and that in situations where access to, obtaining or independently verifying information received was hampered by factors such as insecurity or access restrictions, it was qualified as such (para. 4).

In February 2007, 58 States⁵⁰ endorsed the Paris Principles and the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups. The aim of the Paris Principles and

⁴⁹ A/62/609-S/2007/757.

⁵⁰ As at 1 November 2021, 112 States have adopted the Paris Principles.



the corresponding guidelines is to combat the unlawful recruitment or use of children by armed forces or armed groups. Specifically, the Paris Principles sought to prevent the occurrence of recruitment and use of children, to secure their release and to support their social reintegration.

The next annual report of the Secretary-General⁵¹ highlighted a new set of challenges in that humanitarian access is increasingly restricted in conflict-affected areas, aggravated by recurrent threats, beatings, abductions and killings of humanitarian workers, attacks and looting of aid convoys (para. 16). These challenges not only affected the overall humanitarian situation on the ground, but also the MRM and the programmatic response. Nevertheless, the report continued to draw upon country-specific numerical data and contextual data to provide accounts of trends. In doing so, it also referred to country-specific trends which greatly assisted in providing relevant information on the manner in which children were being affected in situations of armed conflict.



Leila Zerrougui, third Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
Photo credit: © UN Photo/Manuel Elías

The Security Council, in its resolution 1882 (2009), expressed its deep concern that children continued to account for a considerable number of casualties resulting from killing and maiming in armed conflicts including as a result of deliberate targeting, indiscriminate and excessive use of force, indiscriminate use of landmines, cluster munitions and other weapons and use of children as human shields, and also about the high incidence and appalling levels of brutality of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed against children, in the context of and associated with armed conflict including the use or commissioning of rape and other forms of sexual violence in some situations as a tactic of war. Through this resolution, the Security Council specifically asked the Secretary-General to expand the scope of the annexes to his annual reports on children and armed conflict and to also list parties responsible for patterns of killing and maiming of children and parties responsible for patterns of sexual violence against children. The request took into account the potential listing of those parties that engage in contravention of applicable international law, in patterns of killing and maiming of children and/or rape and other sexual violence against children in situations of armed conflict (operative para. 3). Lastly, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to include in the following year's report information on the criteria and procedures used for listing and delisting in the annexes, bearing in mind the views expressed by all members of the Working Group during information briefings (operative subpara. 19(d)).

The 2010 Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict⁵² included a chapter regarding information on the criteria for listing and delisting (chap. V). The information included an explanation on the Council's decision to expand the scope of the annexes beyond the violation of recruitment and use of children to include killing and maiming and rape and sexual violence against children (paras. 171–174). The report noted that the reference to acts in contravention of applicable international law suggested that the acts in question were not merely crimes under the national law of the State where the crime had been committed, but rather acts that amounted to a violation of applicable international law, including international

51 A/63/785-S/2009/158 and A/63/785/Corr.1-S/2009/158/Corr.1.
52 A/64/742-S/2010/181.

humanitarian or human rights law. Isolated incidents of killing, maiming or sexual violence, which were not part of a pattern, would not be listed (para. 173). It continued to say that the reference to “patterns” of violations rather than to “crimes”, whether war crimes or crimes against humanity, suggested that the Security Council did not necessarily intend to raise the threshold for inclusion to the actual commission of international crimes, which could only be met through an investigative or prosecutorial process (para. 174). The chapter also broached and defined the notion of a “pattern” in the commission of a violation and included specific criteria for listing and delisting of the three violations which were listable at the time (see paras. 175–180). Furthermore, the report indicated that the delisted party must ensure continuous and unhindered access to the United Nations for monitoring and verification of compliance with commitments for a minimum period of one reporting cycle following the delisting, failing which it may be relisted in the annexes and the Security Council alerted to the non-compliance (para. 180).

That annual report was followed by a statement by the President of the Security Council, which took note of the report.⁵³

The year 2010 also witnessed the first country visit of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in connection with a situation on the children and armed conflict agenda: Nepal. Since then, the Working Group has conducted regular field visits to one of the situations on the agenda until the COVID-19 pandemic precluded such visits in 2020 and 2021.

The 2011 annual report on children and armed conflict⁵⁴ highlighted that attacks against schools were a significant concern and a growing trend. The infrastructure of schools had been physically destroyed by armed actors, and students and education personnel had been attacked, threatened or intimidated. In some situations, girls and girls’ schools had been specifically targeted. The use of schools by armed elements had, in certain circumstances, compromised the civilian nature of schools and put students at risk (para. 211). The report further noted that hospitals had borne the brunt of conflicts around the world, with physical attacks or threats of attacks on personnel or infrastructure leading to the disruption of the delivery of health services and/or the closure of hospitals. Looting of medical equipment by parties to conflict had also been documented. Access to medical facilities had been an issue in a number of conflicts, with children and other vulnerable populations being denied access through restriction of access or intimidation by parties to conflict (para. 212).

The report included specific reference to the deprivation of liberty of children for their association with opposing parties to conflict. The Secretary-General noted that the detention of children on grounds of association with armed groups, including threats of violence against or ill-treatment of children for intelligence-gathering purposes, was a growing trend, and he would invite the interested authorities to work with the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to devise appropriate measures to better protect these children (para. 221).

Following the presentation of the 2011 report, through its resolution 1998 (2011), the Security Council expressed deep concern about attacks as well as threats of attacks in contravention of applicable international law against schools and/or hospitals, and protected persons in relation to them as well as the closure of schools and hospitals in situations of armed conflict as a result of attacks and threats of attacks, and called upon all parties to armed conflict to immediately cease such attacks and threats. The Security Council requested the Secretary-General to expand the scope of his annexes to list parties responsible for recurrent attacks or threats of attacks on schools and hospitals, as well as on protected

⁵³ S/PRST/2010/10.

⁵⁴ A/65/820-S/2011/250.



persons in relation to schools and hospitals (operative para. 3), and to include in his reports on children and armed conflict information on the criteria and procedures used for listing and delisting parties to armed conflict in the annexes to his periodic report (operative subpara. 22(d)). This marked another notable moment in the development of the mandate, as it expanded the scope of the Secretary-General's annexes and, in turn, strengthened the MRM framework.

In his 2012 report on children and armed conflict,⁵⁵ the Secretary-General included important elements to follow up on specific requests in Security Council resolution 1998 (2011). Specifically, the Secretary-General noted four sanctions committees that had designation criteria on grave violations against children, namely concerning Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Sudan. The Secretary-General added that other sanctions regimes involving individuals or entities that committed grave violations against children, in particular those against Al-Qaida and the Taliban, were encouraged to include designation criteria for grave violations against children (para. 219). The Secretary-General also noted that reports of child casualties in the course of military operations, including the use of explosive weapons, aerial bombardments and drones, continued to be of concern (para. 242). The report included information on the criteria and procedures used for listing and delisting parties to conflict in the annexes to the annual reports, for attacks on schools and hospitals, in line with the above-mentioned resolution. The recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming of children in contravention of applicable international law, and rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, would continue to be the basis for listing and delisting, in conformity with past practice and the 2010 report on children and armed conflict (see paras. 226–232 of the 2012 report). Accordingly, the annexes to the 2012 report added to the list of parties to conflict that commit grave violations against children those that engaged in attacks on schools and/or hospitals. The report also included for the first time, in the narrative section, a brief explanation of the rationale behind the decisions to delist parties to conflict.

During the tenure of SRSO Leila Zerrougui, the increasing availability of verified data on grave violations further supported the monitoring and analysis of trends, both thematic and country-specific, of issues and violations affecting children. The annual reports produced in these years reflected the international environment and the increase in violence against children.

The 2013 annual report of the Secretary-General⁵⁶ identified several overarching developments which affected children. The report states that United Nations child protection actors have noted with concern that the evolving character and tactics of armed conflict are creating unprecedented threats to children. The absence of clear front lines and identifiable opponents, the increasing use of terror tactics by some armed groups and certain methods used by security forces, including those framed as counter-terrorism operations, have made children more vulnerable. Children are being used as suicide bombers and human shields, while schools continue to be attacked, affecting girls' education especially, and to be used for military purposes. In addition, children are being held in security detention for alleged association with armed groups. Furthermore, drone strikes have resulted in child casualties and have had a serious impact on the psychosocial health of children (para. 8). Thus, the report established the background against which several general thematic trends were discussed, including the rise in detention of children and the effects on children due to the uses of drones in war. In some cases, bureaucratic impediments, sanctions and counter-terrorism measures also contributed to increasing risks for children, including the denial of humanitarian access and other grave violations.

⁵⁵ A/66/782-S/2012/261.

⁵⁶ A/67/845-S/2013/245.

The 2013 report further identified a worrisome trend in the growing practice of States to arrest and detain children with or without criminal charges, be it as a perceived threat to national security, for alleged membership in an armed group or for acts committed while participating in hostilities. Children captured in the course of military operations were often held in detention for long periods, in poor conditions and, in certain cases, without access to counsel or judicial review to assess the lawfulness of their detention. While not referring to country-specific contexts when describing this general trend, the report noted what it argued were the consequences of this trend, namely that this pattern of ill-treatment of children in detention includes physical violence, sexual assault and threats of rape, prolonged stress positions, the use of painful instruments of restraint, solitary confinement, forced nudity and deprivation of food, water and basic facilities (see para. 10).

Another general trend that the report highlighted was the increasingly worrisome number of reports of child casualties in the course of military operations using weaponized unmanned aerial vehicles, or armed drones. The mixed use of armed and surveillance drones resulted in permanent fear in some communities, affecting the psychosocial well-being of children and hindering the ability of such communities to protect their children (see para. 11).

The 2014 annual report of the Secretary-General⁵⁷ similarly referred to general thematic trends, stating that armed conflict continued to have a disproportionate impact on children and that the indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas or attacks directly targeting civilians, through explosive weapons, air strikes or the use of terror tactics, had taken a worrisome toll on children. In 2013, the United Nations observed a significant spike in the killing and maiming of children in several situations, including in Afghanistan and Iraq (see para. 6).

The 2014 report also included a summary of the trends that it had identified in specific countries. The report also indicated that the “recruitment and use of children in conflict remained prevalent. More than 4,000 cases were documented by the United Nations in 2013, but thousands more children are estimated to have been recruited and used” (para. 9).

In March 2014, the SRSG CAAC, together with UNICEF, launched the global campaign “Children, not soldiers” to end the recruitment and use of children by government security forces listed in the Secretary-General’s annual reports on children and armed conflict. This initiative built on the commitments and measures taken by Government forces to ensure that children were not recruited or used by parties to conflict in any capacity. The campaign was designed to generate momentum, political will and international support to turn the page once and for



“I have seen many people die. ISIS in a school were sending drones to militants, an airplane targeted the school after a while, I have also seen a child fastened over the school was killed as well.”

FGD participant,
boy, age group 15–18, Iraq



“(We experience) physical and psychological violence, denial of resources and equal or denial of opportunities, as well as threats and harassment. There are also forced and early marriages, and we are displaced and live in the camps and areas near military barracks, thus affecting the psychological aspect. Lack of employment and awareness of the dangers of recruitment have also made many children involved in the armed forces.”

FGD participant,
boy, age group 12–17, Yemen

57 A/68/878-S/2014/339.



all on the recruitment of children by national security forces in conflict situations. The campaign received support from Member States, NGO partners, regional organizations and the general public.

The Security Council, in its resolution 2143 (2014), welcomed the campaign, which was unanimously adopted and set out practical steps to combat violations against children in armed conflict. While reiterating a number of key issues, the resolution contained some new elements, including references to the use of schools by armed forces. The Security Council encouraged Member States to establish a vetting mechanism to ensure that perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other egregious crimes against children were not included in army ranks or other security forces. It also included recommendations for child protection training for peacekeepers and military personnel, and the role of Child Protection Advisers in integrating child protection in mission activities.⁵⁸ The Security Council also urged concerned Member States, when undertaking security sector reforms, to mainstream child protection, including through age-assessment mechanisms to prevent underage recruitment and the establishment of child protection units in national security forces (para. 13). Moreover, the resolution focused on the role regional organizations could play in child protection and the need to incorporate child protection provisions in peace agreements.

Against the background of this growing momentum, Argentina and Norway led consultations to develop the Safe Schools Declaration initiative,⁵⁹ through which States endorsing the Declaration expressed their political support and commitment to protect education in armed conflict, including by endorsing and committing to implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. The Safe Schools Declaration emphasizes the importance of the continuation of education during armed conflicts and further advocates for the implementation of the Guidelines. Therefore, the Declaration makes a notable contribution to advancing the protection of the right of children to education and strengthening the children and armed conflict mandate's advocacy for safe schools for children. The Declaration opened for endorsement at an international conference in Oslo, Norway, on 29 May 2015, and has since been endorsed by 113 States.



“One of the most frustrating issues related to the armed conflict and the ruling of the Taliban in my region in Afghanistan, was the fact that I couldn't go to school. Indeed, I always wished to study, learn and develop my knowledge but the Taliban didn't let us go to school. They were threatening us, in particular girls, but also boys. Going to school was forbidden. This made me very unhappy because I wanted to go to school, I loved and still love to learn.”

FGD participant, young male, 19 years old, refugee from Afghanistan

The 2015 annual report of the Secretary-General⁶⁰ illustrated several overarching trends. In particular, it noted that mass abductions of civilians, including children, had become an increasingly prevalent feature of conflict in many situations. It also noted that the abduction of children had primarily been a precursor to other violations, such as killing and maiming, recruitment and use, or sexual violence. In many instances, abducted children were also arbitrarily detained by Governments and armed groups. While these trends continued in 2014, armed groups abducted children in greater numbers and increasingly used abductions as a tactic to terrorize or target particular ethnic groups or religious communities (see para. 6).

58 Security Council Report, Children and Armed Conflict: Sustaining the Agenda. Available at www.securitycouncilreport.org/research-reports/children-and-armed-conflict-sustaining-the-agenda.php.
59 See https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents_safe_schools_declaration-final.pdf.
60 A/69/926-S/2015/409.

The report brought attention to an issue observed in one of the six grave violations against children, noting that the information contained in that report demonstrates the increase in the frequency and scale of abductions (para. 8) and the long-term consequences of abductions are of concern (para. 9).



“Girls are raped, and nothing is done about it.”

FGD participant,
girl, age group 11–17, Nigeria

Following the presentation of the 2015 annual report on children and armed conflict, the Security Council adopted resolution 2225 (2015). This resolution came in the wake of the abduction of the Chibok girls by Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups in Nigeria. In the preamble of the resolution, the Security Council expressed “grave concern over the abduction of children in situations of armed conflict, the majority of which are perpetrated by non-State armed groups”. The Security Council urged for the immediate, safe and unconditional release of all abducted children and called upon those parties listed in the Secretary-General’s report to adopt without delay concrete time-bound action plans to halt all violations (operative paras. 4 and 5). The Security Council requested the Secretary-General to list parties in the annexes to his annual report that engage in patterns of abduction of children in situations of armed conflict, along with those that recruit, kill, maim or sexually abuse children or target schools and hospitals (operative para. 3). Resolution 2225 (2015) added abduction as an additional violation to trigger the inclusion of a party to armed conflict in the annexes to the Secretary-General’s annual report on children and armed conflict. The resolution thus marked an important development in the mandate, as it expanded the scope of the annexes and its monitoring and engagement needs. In doing so, it advanced the pursuit of accountability and engagement with parties to conflict.

The 2016 annual report of the Secretary-General⁶¹ indicated that serious challenges for the protection of children affected by armed conflict continued throughout 2015. It emphasized the increased intensity of grave violations in a number of situations of armed conflict, arguing that the violations were directly related to the denigration of the respect for international humanitarian and human rights law by parties to conflict (see para. 4). The report states that protracted conflicts had a substantial impact on children (para. 5) and that attacks on schools and hospitals were prevalent in 2015, linked to the increasing use of air strikes and explosive weapons in populated areas, and armed groups particularly targeted girls’ access to education, although attacks on schools and hospitals were also carried out by government forces (para. 7).

The 2017 report of the Secretary-General⁶² again provided general trends, stating that while in some country situations the impact of armed conflict on children was low in 2016 and few violations were documented, in other country situations incidents affecting children continued at high levels. More specifically, it noted that in 2016, there were at least 4,000 verified violations by government forces and more than 11,500 verified violations by the range of non-State armed groups (see para. 5). It was further noted that the denial of humanitarian access to children was also a troubling trend in certain contexts, and children were trapped in besieged areas or deprived of access to food, water and medical assistance, including vaccines (para. 10). Finally, the report noted that an increasing number of non-State armed groups that were used to fighting on behalf of Governments as well as ongoing air strikes by multiple entities, including international coalitions, were once again a particular concern (para. 11).

The second decade of the implementation of the mandate was characterized by a more robust monitoring and reporting methodology and more structured and consistent narratives in the annual reports, which provided more information on trends and on country situations. Another characteristic of this decade was the accompaniment of the Security Council to the children and armed conflict agenda, through several resolutions that reflected growing concern about the evolving nature of armed conflict and its impact on children.

⁶¹ A/70/836–S/2016/360 and A/70/836/Add.1–S/2016/360/Add.1.

⁶² A/72/361–S/2017/821.



Summary of the milestones of the second period

- **2007:** The Paris Commitments and the Paris Principles were adopted.
- **2009:** The Security Council, in its resolution 1882, requested that parties that engage in patterns of killing and maiming, and rape and other sexual violence be listed in the annexes to the annual reports of the Secretary-General.
- **2010:** The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict provided criteria and procedures used for the listing and delisting of parties to conflict.
- **2011:** The Security Council, by its resolution 1998, added attacks on schools and hospitals as triggers for the listing of parties.
- **2014:** The campaign “Children, not soldiers” was launched to end, by 2016, the recruitment and use of children by government security forces listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General’s annual reports on children and armed conflict.
- **2014:** The Security Council, in its resolution 2143, reiterated a number of key issues, but also focused on the use of schools by armed forces and encouraged Member States to establish a vetting mechanism to ensure those who have perpetrated genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other egregious crimes against children are not included in army ranks.
- **2015:** The Safe Schools Declaration was adopted.
- **2015:** The Security Council, by its resolution 2225, added abduction as a violation triggering the listing of parties to conflict in the annexes to the Secretary-General’s annual reports on children and armed conflict.

D. Third period: January 2017–present day

In 2017, Secretary-General António Guterres of Portugal appointed the fourth SRSR CAAC, Virginia Gamba of Argentina.

The annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict published from 2017 further expanded on the reporting and analyses of the general trends of the six grave violations against children and other issues of concern, including the addition of a section on developments and concerns to differentiate the parties that were willing to engage with the United Nations to put in place measures during the reporting period, aimed at improving the protection of children, from those that were not. This new narrative section was conceptualized in the annexes: identified within each annex are those parties to conflict that have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children (section A) and those parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children (section B).

Moreover, since 2017, the annual reports have incorporated more numerical data and provided more detailed country-specific accounts of trends while continuing to extrapolate general thematic trends that extended to multiple country contexts.

The 2018 annual report of the Secretary-General⁶³ indicated that children continued to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict in many country situations and that in 2017, there had been

⁶³ A/72/865-S/2018/465.



a large increase in the number of violations compared with the number reported for 2016, with at least 6,000 verified violations by government forces and more than 15,000 by a range of non-State armed groups (para. 5).

Furthermore, the report noted that in 2017, changing conflict dynamics, including the intensification of armed clashes, directly affected children. Surges in the recruitment and use of children often coincided with increasing levels of killing and maiming of children, and spikes in armed clashes and violence had led to a substantial increase in the number of child casualties in some situations (paras. 6–7). Moreover, a high number of denials of humanitarian access had prevented thousands of children from receiving essential aid (para. 9).

Finally, it was reported that over 900 cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against girls and boys had been verified across all country situations, representing an increase from the previous year. While reporting on this trend, however, the report indicated a range of challenges with data collection, verification and reporting. In particular, cases of conflict-related sexual violence remained particularly challenging to verify, including as a result of the sensitivity of the issue, and as such remained chronically underreported (see para. 9).

On 9 July 2018, the Security Council adopted resolution 2427, expressing its concern at the regional and cross-border nature of grave violations, and focusing on concrete guidance and its links to the Secretary-General's conflict prevention agenda. The resolution emphasized that children who have been recruited in violation of applicable international law by armed forces and armed groups and are accused of having committed crimes during armed conflict should be treated primarily as victims. The resolution notably recognized that the protection of children affected by armed conflict should be an important aspect of any comprehensive strategy to resolve conflict and sustain peace and stressed also the importance of adopting a broad strategy of conflict prevention, which addresses the root causes of armed conflict in a comprehensive manner in order to enhance the protection of children on a long-term basis. The resolution places emphasis on the vital role of the United Nations, in consultations with international partners and key stakeholders including regional and subregional organizations, to support national authorities in



developing strategies for sustaining peace, conflict prevention and peacebuilding as well as to ensure that these strategies strengthen coherence between political, security, human rights, development and rule of law activities. In the resolution, the Security Council expressed its commitment to consider and use the tools of the United Nations system to ensure that early warning of potential conflicts translates into early, concrete preventive action, including towards the goal of protecting children and with a view to building sustainable peace, by or in coordination with the most appropriate United Nations or regional actor, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations (operative para. 8).

In the same resolution, the Security Council welcomed the launch of a process to compile practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues in peace processes and underlined the importance of engaging armed forces and armed groups on child protection concerns during peace processes and in the peacebuilding process (operative para. 22). Lastly, this is the first resolution to provide granular detail on ensuring long-term and sustainable reintegration and rehabilitation opportunities for children affected by armed conflict that are gender- and age-sensitive, including access to health care, psychosocial support, and education programmes, as well as raising awareness and working with communities to avoid stigmatization of these children and facilitate their return, while taking into account the specific needs of girls and boys, to contribute to the well-being of children and to sustainable peace and security (operative para. 26).



“I know a boy who was forcefully conscripted into Boko Haram and came back after some years, but he had lost one eye while he was with the Boko Haram group and when returned, he was despised by community members. He left the community and never returned.”

FGD participant,
boy, age group 11–17, Nigeria

Recognizing the importance of solid reintegration programmes aimed at preventing the recruitment and re-recruitment of children by parties to conflict, in September 2018, the SRSR CAAC and UNICEF launched the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers. This initiative stemmed from a recognition that a “reintegration gap” remains to be filled through increased awareness and coordinated global action, not only as a humanitarian and human-centred imperative, but also as a strategic investment in long-term and sustainable peace and development. The Coalition is an alliance of Member States, United Nations agencies, the World Bank, civil society organizations and academia. It was launched to generate new ideas for sustainably addressing how to support child reintegration programmes.

In 2019, the SRSR CAAC launched an international campaign “ACT to protect children affected by conflict”. Building on the preceding campaign “Children, not soldiers”, “ACT to protect” seeks to advance awareness about the six grave violations against children. The campaign also seeks to increase awareness about the plight of children affected by war, while highlighting the interconnectedness of the six grave violations and the need to tackle them comprehensively. It also calls for action and commitments to strengthen the protection



Launch of the campaign ACT to Protect children affected by conflict in Mali
Photo credit: © UN Photo/Harandane Dicko

of children affected by armed conflict and gives concrete examples of engagement for different target groups. The campaign has been strengthening collaboration between the United Nations, civil society and the international community to support actions designed to end and prevent grave violations committed against children in times of conflict. Thus far, it has been launched in a number of countries, including in the Central African Republic, Mali, Somalia and South Sudan, as well as in New York, Brussels and Bangkok. The campaign will run until the end of 2022.

The Secretary-General's report published in 2019⁶⁴ opened with a broad discussion on general trends. It indicated that in 2018, continued fighting between parties to conflict, new conflict dynamics and operational tactics, combined with widespread disregard for international law, had a devastating effect on children. More than 24,000 grave violations against children were verified by the United Nations in 20 country situations. While the number of violations attributed to non-State actors remained steady, there was an alarming increase in the number of violations attributed to State actors and to international forces compared with 2017 (see para. 5).

The report also provided detailed data and trends in specific grave violations. To start, it noted that verified cases of the killing and maiming of children reached record levels globally since the creation of the MRM on children and armed conflict pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) (para. 6 of the report). It indicated that attacks on schools and hospitals had a devastating effect on access to education and to health services for thousands of children, with a total of 1,023 verified attacks (para. 8).

In reporting on sexual violence against children, the report noted that in 2018, 933 cases of sexual violence against children had been verified. It further noted that cases of violations relating to sexual violence remained significantly underreported, in particular when perpetrated against boys, owing to stigma, the lack of services and concerns for the protection of victims. Therefore, the report argued that impunity for sexual violence against girls and boys by parties to conflict "remained endemic" (see para. 9).

When examining the trends in abduction, the report indicated that approximately 2,493 children had been abducted in 2018 (para. 10).

Lastly, the report noted that millions of people, children foremost among them, had inadequate access to or had been denied assistance that was essential for their survival and well-being. In 2018, only 795 incidents of denial of humanitarian access could be verified, compared with 1,213 in 2017. In its analysis, the report indicated that the decrease could be explained by restricted access to information, rather than an improvement of the situation (see para. 11).

In keeping with the aforementioned format of the annual report, and its reporting on the grave trends of violations against children, the 2020 annual report of the Secretary-General⁶⁵ indicated that the United Nations had verified over 25,000 grave violations against children in 19 situations, more than half committed by non-State actors, and a third by government and international forces. Overall, 24,422 violations were committed or continued to be during the reporting period, and 1,241 were committed previously and verified in 2019 (see para. 5). Much alike the preceding report, this report analysed the trends pertaining to specific grave violations in tandem with country-specific trends.

The report states that some 7,747 children, some as young as 6, were verified as having been recruited and used. Among those, 90 per cent were used by non-State actors (see para. 6). In providing these analyses, the report indicated the challenges and limitations to extrapolating generalizations from the

⁶⁴ A/73/907-S/2019/509.

⁶⁵ A/74/845-S/2020/525.



correlations in the data sets. In other words, it illustrated that a decrease in the number of verified attacks may not necessarily amount to a tangible decrease in attacks.

When examining the trends pertaining to each grave violation, the report started by examining the trends pertaining to the killing and maiming of children. The report indicated that some 10,173 children had been verified as having been killed (4,019) or maimed (6,154). It further indicated that while a general decrease in the number of verified child casualties had been observed, the number of incidents of the killing and maiming of children remained the highest verified violation, which underlined the serious concerns about the violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, about the lack of capacity and of measures to mitigate harm, and about warfare in densely populated areas (see para. 7).

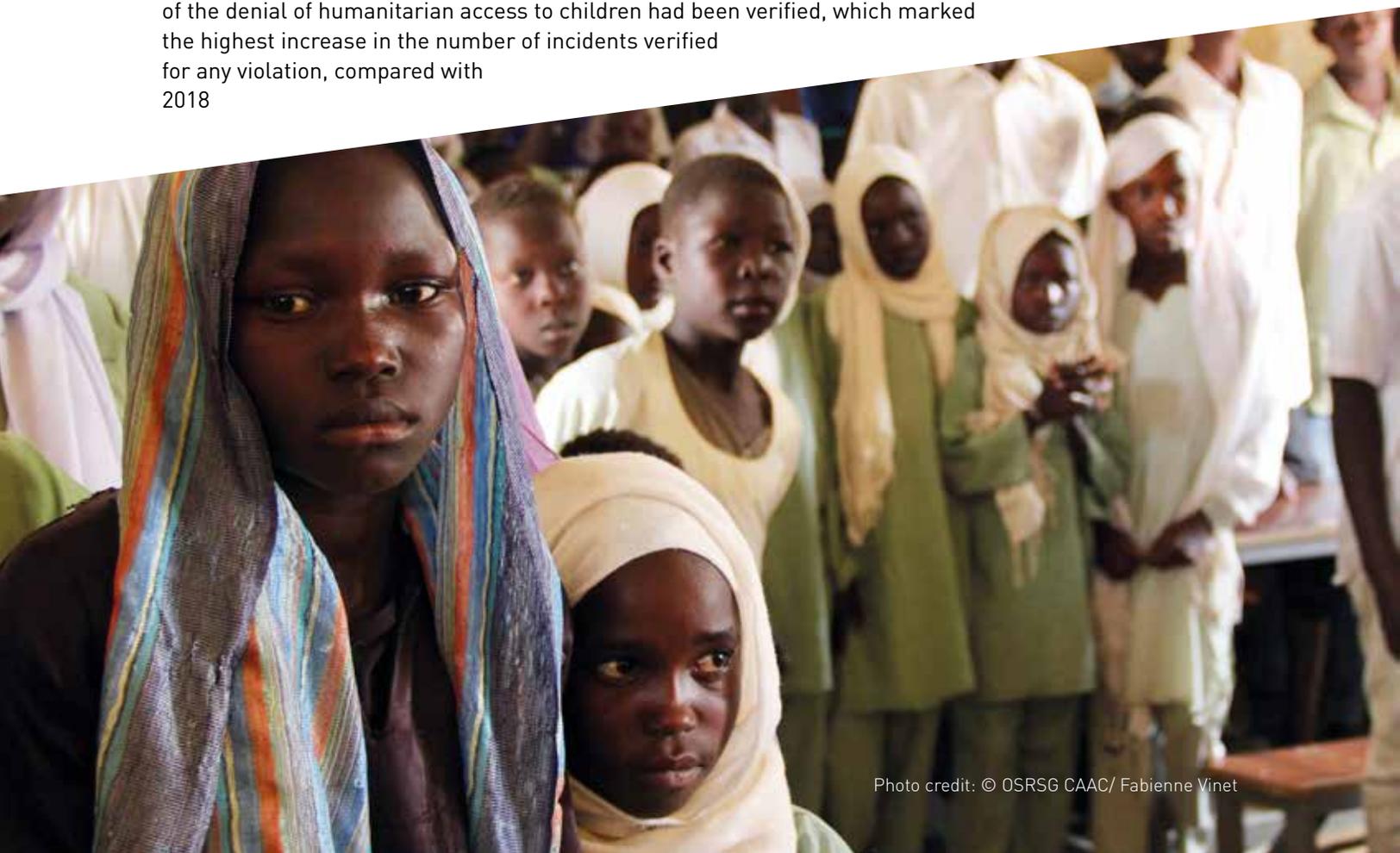
The report indicated that there had been 927 verified attacks on schools (494) and hospitals (433), including on protected persons. Globally, attacks on schools and hospitals committed by State actors (503) had nearly doubled (see para. 8).

When examining the denial of humanitarian access to children, the report noted that some 4,400 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access to children had been verified, which marked the highest increase in the number of incidents verified for any violation, compared with 2018



“We lived in the KM5 neighbourhood in Bangui, (they) used a school there to bury the bodies, they kidnapped my father several times, that’s why we had to leave. Children are raped, several schools and health centres in the provinces serve as bases for armed groups.”

FGD participant,
sex unknown, age group 16–21,
Central African Republic



(para. 9). As with previous reports, this report indicated that “rape and other forms of sexual violence continued to be vastly underreported, with 735 verified cases [in 2018]” (para. 10). The report noted the abduction of 1,683 children, with over 95 per cent of cases perpetrated by non-States actors (para. 11).

In February 2020, the Secretary-General launched, at a dedicated session of the Security Council, the Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict. Throughout the years, child protection issues have mostly been addressed in an ad hoc manner in peace negotiations, and the Practical Guidance aims to provide mediators and other actors engaged in peace negotiations with concrete tools and measures to ensure that elements for the protection of children are considered in the discussions as relevant. The Practical Guidance seeks to assist mediators to identify entry points and possible confidence-building measures to engage parties on this issue. In May 2020, the SRSR CAAC decided to conduct a study to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the six grave violations, including a dedicated section on COVID-related impacts on the Global Horizontal Note presented to the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, from that moment onwards and offered support to all CTFMRs in the field to assist their adaptability and reinforcement of their capacities to continue monitoring and reporting violations. Despite the challenges, in most situations, monitors were able to continue receiving information on alleged violations and, when unable to verify them due to the lack of access, lockdowns and other national public health measures of pandemic containment, these violations were kept until conditions would enable verification.

In April 2021, the Office of the SRSR CAAC launched its study on the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the mandate in an Arria-formula meeting hosted by Estonia and cosponsored by several Members States. The SRSR was requested to produce a follow-up study in 2022 once more data on the impact of COVID-19 on the MRM and on engagement with parties to conflict would be available. The study on the impact of COVID-19 showed how monitors on the ground were affected in the undertaking of their work, but also marked an alarming trend in the increase of military use of empty schools and the increased vulnerability of children to recruitment and use and to rape and other forms of sexual violence including trafficking, mostly caused by the isolation, impoverishment and critical deterioration of the socioeconomic situation resulting from the pandemic and the global and national measures put in place to counter it.⁶⁶ In addition, the pandemic had negative effects on community protection mechanisms and on rule of law institutions, and many parties to conflict used the pandemic to advance their military objectives.

In 2021, still under the impact of COVID-19, the annual report covering January to December 2020⁶⁷ was published and considered by the Security Council. The report captured the impact of the pandemic on all situations: The pandemic aggravated existing vulnerabilities of children, including by hampering their access to education, health and social services, limiting child protection activities and shrinking safe spaces. The socioeconomic impact of the pandemic exposed these children to grave violations, notably recruitment and use, abduction and sexual violence. Attacks on schools and hospitals, and the military use thereof, exacerbated the plight of children (see para. 7).

Given the challenges caused by the pandemic and the spike of violent armed conflict registered towards the end of 2020, the 2021 report of the Secretary-General emphasized the difficulties in accessing children in situations of concern for monitoring and reporting purposes. The report also identified three elements in need of reinforcement in the pursuit of the children and armed conflict agenda: improve the capacity and resources available to child protection experts on the ground (para. 9); include elements for the protection of children in peace processes and resulting peace agreements as promoted by the Practical Guidance for

⁶⁶ United Nations, Office of the SRSR CAAC. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict (New York, 2021).

⁶⁷ A/75/873-S/2021/437.



Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict presented to the Security Council in February 2020; and improve the data analysis capacity (para. 8) of children and armed conflict issues at headquarters and in the field through the CTFMRs in order to deal with quick response to emerging situations.

The trends identified in the 2021 report included a significant increase in abduction and cases of sexual violence and attacks on schools, and denial of humanitarian access for children. The report states that verified cases of abduction and sexual violence against children increased alarmingly by 90 and 70 per cent, respectively. Abduction is often combined with the recruitment and use of children and sexual violence. Continued high levels of denial of humanitarian access to children remained a concern. While attacks on hospitals decreased and attacks on schools increased, both continued to endanger children (see para. 5).

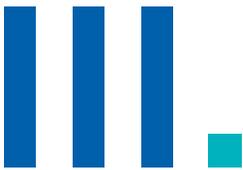
In recent years, the annual reports of the Secretary-General started to highlight to the extent possible the distinction between violations monitored and verified within the relevant reporting period covered by the report and those verified during the reporting period but that occurred in previous years and could not be verified earlier due to access restrictions, capacity constraints or other conflict-related challenges for verification. Highlighting this distinction notably aimed at enhancing context analysis. The 2020 report had already started to methodically include explicit reference in each situation to the overall verified violations and violations verified at a later stage due to conflict-related impediments. These figures increased in the 2021 report.

In October 2021, the Security Council adopted resolution 2601, in which the Council strongly condemned attacks against schools and called on all parties to safeguard, protect, respect and promote the right to education. The Council expressed grave concern about the significant increase of attacks against schools in recent years and the alarming number of children denied their right to education, with emphasis on the importance of addressing girls' equal enjoyment of their right to education. The Security Council further condemned the military use of schools in contravention of international law and encouraged Member States to take measures to avoid the use of schools by armed forces and deter the use of schools by armed groups, urging all parties to respect the civilian character of educational facilities, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The Council also urged Member States to develop domestic legal frameworks to ensure respect for their relevant international obligations and to develop measures to prevent attacks and ensure the protection of schools and related protected personnel. The Council also condemned the lack of accountability for violations of international law and for abuses committed against children and teachers connected to schools and urged Member States for investigations and prosecutions. It also urged Member States to provide protection and assistance to children, including those in vulnerable situations, such as girls, internally displaced persons, children undergoing reintegration assistance, refugees and children with disabilities, among others. The Security Council requested Member States, the Office of SRSG CAAC and other United Nations bodies, and called on regional and subregional bodies, to establish strategies and coordination mechanisms for information exchange and cooperation relating to the protection and prevention of attacks against schools, among others. The resolution underscored the importance of supporting national authorities to develop and establish appropriate strategies for the protection of schools and continued access to education in situations of armed conflict. The Council encouraged the Secretary-General, together with the SRSG CAAC, relevant United Nations bodies and child protection actors, to carry out and include in his relevant reporting lessons learned and best practices on the continuation of education in armed conflict, local initiatives to protect schools, and the prevention of the military use of schools. The resolution further recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the inequitable access to vaccines had exacerbated existing inequalities in access to education and the continuation of education in armed conflict.



Summary of the milestones of the third period

- **2017:** The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers was adopted.
- **2018:** The Security Council adopted resolution 2427, which emphasized that children associated with parties to conflict must be treated as victims.
- **2018:** The Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers was launched.
- **2018:** The campaign “Let them play: tell the world they are children, not soldiers” was launched.
- **2019:** The campaign “ACT to protect children affected by conflict” was launched.
- **2020:** The Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict was launched.
- **2020:** The Office of the SRSR CAAC was awarded the Sapienza Human Rights Award.
- **2021:** The study Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict was launched.
- **2021:** The Security Council adopted resolution 2601, which condemned attacks against schools, children and teachers as well as called upon parties to safeguard, protect, respect and promote the right to education.



Reflections on trends in the implementation of the mandate

Photo credit: © OSRSG CAAC/ Fabienne Vinet

A. Identifying trends and changes in an evolving context

The initial years in the reporting of children and armed conflict issues to the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and, since 2000, also to the Security Council reflected fewer situations of conflict than in the early 1990s, with a majority of them located in Africa. Latin America and East Asia, for example, have experienced a remarkable reduction in conventional armed conflict over the past four decades, despite the recent rise in tensions affecting several countries.⁶⁸ A positive trend is also evident in Europe, after a dramatic escalation at the end of the cold war as armed conflicts erupted in parts of the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe.⁶⁹

The first 10 years of reporting on children and armed conflict to the Security Council marked a period in which efforts focused on putting in place a practical architecture for the improved protection of children from recruitment and use, as described above. This architecture depended on sustainable, organized and verifiable monitoring of this grave violation, as well as the ability to discern emerging trends in other types of violations as originally envisaged in the General Assembly discussions on the vulnerability of children during armed conflict.

The need to engage with parties to conflict, as well as the need to establish dedicated monitoring assets in the situations, was expressed in several Security Council resolutions but was implemented step by step over a longer period and within existing resources. Seven situations were chosen for the establishment of formal United Nations-led MRMs: Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Somalia, Sri Lanka and the Sudan. Concurrent with the establishment of these MRMs, in 2005 and 2006, the first action plans for ending recruitment and use of children, with the authorities in charge in both cases, were also signed.

In 2001, the Security Council through its resolution 1379 urged regional and subregional organizations to take steps to eliminate cross-border activities which are deleterious to children in times of armed conflict, such as the cross-border recruitment and abduction of children, the sale of or traffic in children, attacks on camps and settlements of refugees and internally displaced persons, the illicit trade in precious minerals, the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, and other criminal activities (operative subpara. 13(c)). The spillover of armed conflicts further demonstrated that armed conflicts are not limited to geographical jurisdictions.

The transnational nature of conflict and the specific dynamics of association have both compounded each other and severely impacted the vulnerability of children through various phenomena: from the emergence of armed groups active across borders which abduct and recruit children across borders, to children associated with country-specific armed groups to the repercussions of children and families affiliated with armed groups, designated terrorist organizations, including foreign fighters.



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⁶⁸ The State of Global Peace and Security (United Nations publication, 2020).

⁶⁹ Ibid.



Following reporting by the monitoring mechanism on children and armed conflict, the last violation that became a trigger for the listing of parties to conflict was the abduction of children, established through Security Council resolution 2225 (2015), which was in part in response to the tactics of a listed extremely violent armed group in Nigeria, Boko Haram and affiliated and splinter groups, which frequently engaged in the abduction of girls and boys from their schools.

It is estimated that since 2011, more than 40,000 foreign fighters,⁷⁰ including women and children, from some 120 countries travelled to Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic to join groups affiliated to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Al-Qaida. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, dozens of children associated with armed groups were originally abducted and/or recruited in neighbouring or nearby countries, including in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania and the Sudan.⁷²

Additionally, the territorial defeat of ISIL in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic left unaddressed the phenomenon of third-country nationals who may have alleged or actual links or family ties to designated terrorist groups and remain stranded in concerning humanitarian and human rights conditions in detention facilities and camps in the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, most of whom are children.

This leads to challenges regarding cross-border repatriation and reintegration of children captured or released in countries other than their countries of origin. In this context, the mandate contributed to the development of the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syria/Iraq Third Country National Returnees, co-chaired by UNICEF and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, which coordinates more than 15 United Nations entities in an “all of UN” approach. The Global Framework, which was launched on the margins of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly in September 2021, provides a comprehensive approach that responds to both the humanitarian assistance and protection needs of children and adults as well as supports requesting Member States to promote security and address accountability in the protection, repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration process of their nationals, who may have alleged or actual links or family ties to designated terrorist groups.

Children have not been spared from the impact of terrorism globally. They have suffered from abductions, recruitment and use by non-State armed groups designated as terrorist organizations. National counter-terrorism frameworks have criminalized children believed to be associated with such armed groups applying a security lens so that they are often treated as security threats rather than as victims of rights violations. They are often arrested and detained, thus exposing them to further violations such as recruitment and use as informants, torture, sexual violence and trafficking or execution on suspicion of association.⁷³



“At the time when the crisis was intense, we could not go to school, there was 24-hour curfew, and we could not move around. Some children died because the Boko Haram members threw explosives into their houses.”

FGD participant,
girl, age group 11–17, Nigeria

70 Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat (S/2020/95).

71 Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (A/HRC/40/49).

72 See for example the most recent reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2020/1030 and S/2018/502).

73 A/HRC/40/49.

The Security Council through resolution 2427 (2018) reaffirmed that children associated with armed forces and armed groups, including those having committed crimes during armed conflicts, should be treated primarily as victims. The resolution further emphasized that no child should be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily, with the deprivation of liberty of children used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, and children associated or allegedly associated with armed groups, including those who commit terrorist acts, should be swiftly handed over to relevant civilian child protection actors. Security Council resolution 2427 builds upon the Paris Principles, which states that children who are accused of crimes under international law allegedly committed while they were associated with armed forces or armed groups should be considered primarily as victims of offences against international law; not only as perpetrators (Principle 3.6).



“When national security forces come across children formerly associated with armed groups, they equally considered that they have been associated with gangs or criminals or people offending the government.”

CTFMR survey respondent

In 2016, the Secretary-General commissioned an in-depth global study on children deprived of liberty, following an invitation by the General Assembly in its resolution 69/157 of 18 December 2014. The study was the first scientific attempt based on global data, to comprehend the magnitude of the situation of children deprived of liberty, its possible justifications and root causes, as well as conditions of detention and their harmful impact on the health and development of children. The study, published in 2019, identified best practices in non-custodial solutions applied by States in relation to the following six situations: (a) detention of children in the administration of justice; (b) children living in prisons with their primary caregivers; (c) migration-related detention; (d) deprivation of liberty in institutions; (e) detention in the context of armed conflict; and (f) detention on national security grounds. The study proposed recommendations to support States and the United Nations in dealing with this phenomenon. Partly because of this study, the SRSG CAAC redoubled efforts in the establishment of handover protocols for the better protection of children and in consolidating reintegration initiatives such as those launched in 2018.

To conclude, the need to prevent violations against children from occurring in the first place and of operating regionally in pursuit of prevention and better protection of children from suffering the six grave violations against children in armed conflict is one of the key priorities for the mandate. It is no coincidence that Security Council resolution 2427 (2018) is about prevention and has a strong language on the need to develop strong national and regional partnerships in pursuit of better protection for children.

As armed conflicts evolve and as children face multiple new threats, the child protection architecture must also adapt to adequately respond to the challenges.

Aside from the situation in Colombia in 2017 and the peace process in South Sudan in 2020, which responded to the start of a national peace process, very few situations on the children and armed conflict agenda today are undergoing official peace processes, although many see variations of national dialogue, ceasefires or other ongoing mediation towards a peaceful resolution of disputes; this was addressed by the technical guidance published by the Office of the SRSG CAAC in 2020, for mediators and other actors involved in peace process and mediation efforts to include the protection of children at the heart of the negotiations.



B. Trends in violations since the establishment of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism

Since the establishment of the MRM in 2005, the United Nations has verified more than 266,000 grave violations against children across more than 30 conflict situations that have been included in the annual reports of the Secretary-General. However, and as emphasized in other chapters of the present report, this represents only a fraction of the violations of child rights that have occurred, as access, security and other constraints often hamper the documentation, verification and/or reporting of violations.

Figure 1: Number of grave violations against children verified by the United Nations, 2005–2020

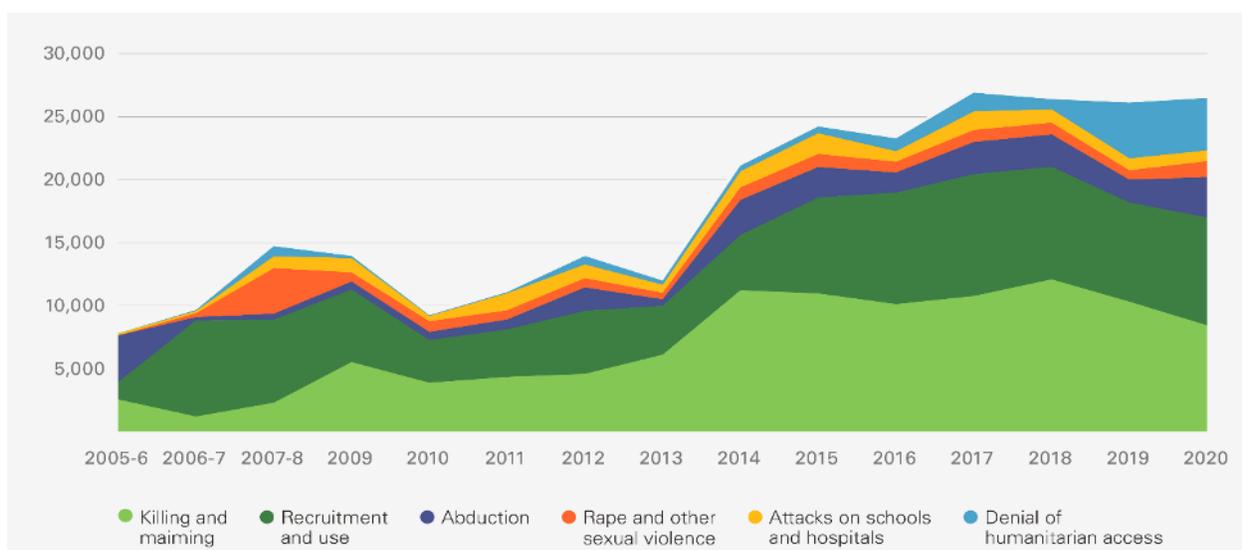


Figure 1 highlights the dramatic impact that armed conflicts have had on children, including in recent years where more than 20,000 overall violations have been verified annually. It is important to note that the overall increase in verified violations observed over the 16-year period should be read in conjunction with the increasing strength of the MRM and subsequently the increased ability of the country task forces to document, verify and report violations over time.

Killing and maiming

At least 104,100 children have been verified as killed or maimed by parties to conflict since 2005, with child fatalities accounting for about one third of those cases. Fatalities have mostly occurred in hot conflict situations or in spikes of armed combat while maiming has been caused mostly by ERWs, IEDs, mines, cross-shooting, shrapnel, and mortar and air strikes, as well as in the context of crowd control actions with excessive use of force.



“I have seen an airplane targeted a factory while ISIS were inside, I live nearby, and I was injured.”

FGD participant, boy, age group 14–18, Iraq

Recruitment and use

Of the 266,000 verified violations since 2005, more than 93,000 involved children who were recruited and used by parties to conflict, including in fighting roles. In 2020, the number of children recruited and used across all situations remained high, with over 8,500 total verified cases.

A related issue of concern, the deprivation of children's liberty for their alleged or actual association with parties to conflict or for national security reasons, has been documented more systematically over the years. In 2020, more than 3,000 children were detained, aligning with annual averages observed in more recent years.

Abduction

Verified cases of abductions perpetrated by parties to conflict have affected 25,700 children since 2005. This violation is steadily increasing, and its object can lead to other violations such as recruitment and use and/or is linked to other violations such as rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as attacks against schools and hospitals. In 2020, with the abduction of 3,200 children, there was a 90 per cent increase in this violation compared with the previous year.

Rape and other sexual violence

While the MRM only captures a fraction of all grave violations against children that are believed to have been committed against them, cases of sexual violence are particularly underreported. Nevertheless, since 2005, the United Nations has verified the rape and other forms of sexual violence of at least 14,200 children, the majority of them were girls. In 2020, more than 1,200 cases were verified, making it one of the highest annual totals recorded since 2005, and a 70 per cent increase compared with 2019.



“Adolescents are being recruited in Afghanistan. They stop being a child at 12 or 13 years old.”

FGD participant,
sex unknown, age group 16–21,
refugee from Afghanistan in Greece



“In our community, I have witnessed children being abducted and used in the armed forces.”

FGD participant,
sex unknown, age group 15–24,
South Sudan



“I was raped countless times in Libya, I saw young girls raped to death.”

FGD participant,
16-year-old girl refugee from Sierra Leone, who had to travel through Libya



Attacks on schools and hospitals

With more than 13,900 attacks on schools and hospitals verified since 2005, children's rights to education and health have continuously come under attack. About three quarters of all verified attacks since 2005 concerned educational facilities, personnel and pupils, including more than 500 documented in 2020 despite the closure of many schools due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. A related issue of concern, the military use of schools and hospitals, has been documented more systematically over time. Since 2005, there have been more than 2,100 United Nations-verified instances of military use of schools and hospitals – most of which concerned schools – thereby exacerbating risks for children by depriving them of places to learn and to heal.



“It is no secret that there have been many attacks on schools in Afghanistan – all were aware of the attacks on girls’ schools.”

FGD participant,
sex unknown, age group 16–21,
refugee from Afghanistan in Greece

Denial of humanitarian access

The denial of humanitarian access for children was identified early on as a critical issue affecting children living in conflict zones. Since 2005, at least 14,900 such incidents have been verified through the MRM, which included, among others, targeted violence and threats against humanitarian relief personnel and facilities, the looting of life-saving supplies, and onerous physical and administrative barriers. Cases of denial of humanitarian access have also been steadily increasing over the years.



“(I have witnessed) the prevention of humanitarian access because of the blockade applied to all land, sea and airports.”

FGD participant,
sex unknown, age group 15–18, Yemen

The survey conducted by the Office of the SRSR CAAC with all CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations further yielded interesting findings in relation to a perceived increase, in the most recent years, in almost all violations except for rape and other forms of sexual violence, which remains severely underreported due to the sensitivity linked to this violation and the insufficient appropriate response services for survivors. The survey respondents identified a number of reasons for the overall increase in grave violations. These include dire economic situations and inadequate reintegration programmes; the exacerbation of conflicts and an increased number of armed groups; widespread impunity; specific targeting; the number of ERWs and unexploded ordnance (UXO); and improved monitoring and reporting.

The survey results also indicated that children are disproportionately affected by conflict and that the impact of conflict on children is inherently gendered. Boys and girls often face different risks, and hence have different needs and require different types of support at different stages of the conflict cycle. In some cases, the gendered impact of grave violations against children results from the sociocultural and religious orientations of the communities involved in the conflicts.

For instance, boys are at higher risk of recruitment and use which subsequently lead them to become victims of killing and maiming during combat. Their susceptibility to recruitment and use in some contexts is because they are perceived as adults, even before they turn 18 years of age. They are socialized to be providers and defenders of the clans and tribes, which invokes a sense of responsibility to take up arms and fight. A CTFMR survey respondent noted:

In the gender restrictive environment, girls are at lesser risk of being recruited and used by armed forces or groups. Boys are at a higher risk, as culturally and socially adulthood is perceived to be earlier than 18 years and thus ... boys under 18 years [are] being recruited.... ISIL recruited and used boys also including from minority groups, to indoctrinate them with their radical beliefs [sic] ... girls were also recruited and used with the intention to extinguish and cause inflict harm on specific minority communities, including Yazidi, Turkmen and Christians, as girls and young women were forced into sexual slavery and forcibly impregnated.

Survey respondents noted that since boys are more likely to be associated with armed groups and armed forces in the public sphere and recruited as fighters, they are more exposed to the risk of being arrested and deprived of their liberty. While in detention, children are at risk of torture and ill-treatment and are often denied access to legal assistance or contact with relatives. They are deprived of education and health or social services needed for them to return to their communities. The survey also indicated that girls may be more at risk of sexual violence in detention. A respondent pointed out that girls are likely to experience sexual abuse by other detainees or guards.

Another CTFMR respondent argued that the gender restrictive environment does not allow girls to participate in public life equally as boys can and, therefore, boys are predominantly exposed to and victims of grave violations.



Photo credit: © UN Photo/Amanda Voisard

While boys are more visible victims of recruitment and use, girls are equally at risk of and affected by such violence in many contexts. One respondent echoed this sentiment:

Although MRM data showed a lower level of recruitment and use of girls, analysis among partners, agencies and communities reveals that they are [as much] at risk as boys to be recruited and used. What may differ is the purpose for which they are recruited and used, reportedly to be used as wives, cooks, maids, [or] protecting sacred objects that groups used for their protection.

The survey results show that 67 per cent of respondents believe that girls are at higher risk of becoming victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence. According to the respondents, in many cases, sexual violence is committed in conjunction with other grave violations, including abduction, recruitment and use as well as deprivation of liberty. Girls' physical and mental health and well-being are severely affected by the consequences of sexual violence. This includes, but is not limited to, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, trauma, isolation and, in some cases, suicidal behaviour. Moreover, girls and particularly those who experience unwanted pregnancy as a result of the violence are subject to stigmatization and rejection. This, in turn, hinders the survivors from reporting the violence and even from access to critical services such as education and health. It is significant to emphasize that even though girls are at higher risk of rape and other forms of sexual violence, male victims of such violence are largely ignored and underreported due to the challenges in data collection and verification on such violations. This results from the risk of stigmatization, discrimination, reprisals and/or marginalization from the community, limited-service provision for the survivors and a lack of confidence in the capacity of the judiciary to bring perpetrators to justice.



While the survey responses show that boys and girls are equally at risk of attacks against schools and hospitals, some gendered aspects were identified. On the attacks against schools, a respondent argued that in a country where the rate of girls' enrolment in higher-level schools is lower, it is likely that more boys are affected by those attacks. It was also identified that in cases of attacks against hospitals, girls may suffer from restricted access to sexual and reproductive health services.

The results of the CTFMR survey indicate that more than 70 per cent of respondents believe that boys and girls are equally at risk of and impacted by abduction. The analysis identified that the purpose of abduction might vary between boys and girls. While the purpose of abducting boys is highly related to recruitment and use, girls are more likely to be abducted for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Moreover, the survey results indicate that both girls and boys are equally at risk of and affected by denial of humanitarian access. A few respondents, however, pointed out that girls might be more impacted because it might be more difficult for them to access humanitarian aid due to the fact that they are more restricted in their movements mainly as a result of cultural or societal dynamics.

The survey results also yielded information on an underreported issue: the impact of conflict on children with disabilities. According to survey respondents, during armed conflict, children with disabilities are at high risk of being victims of violence, social exclusion, reduced access to services and deterioration of infrastructure. Despite the increased commitment to ensuring the protection of the rights and well-being of children with disabilities affected by conflict, they continue to remain among the most vulnerable populations.

The survey results show that 42 per cent of respondents believe that children with disabilities are not given sufficient space in the implementation of the mandate. The respondents were then asked to identify the areas of improvement for the mandate to be more inclusive to children with disabilities. The answers were categorized into five main areas: better data, capacity-building for actors, raising awareness, resource mobilization and targeted

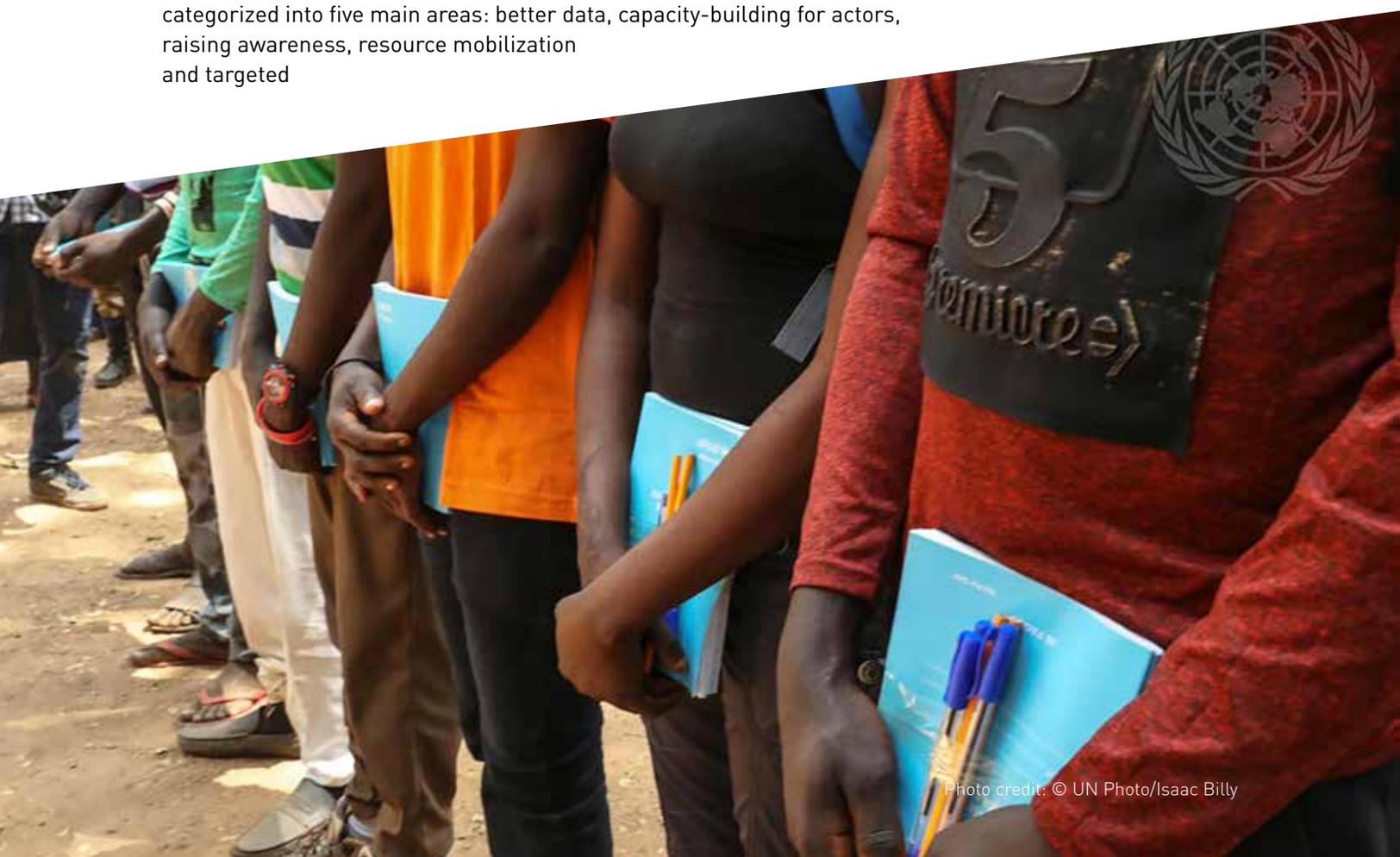
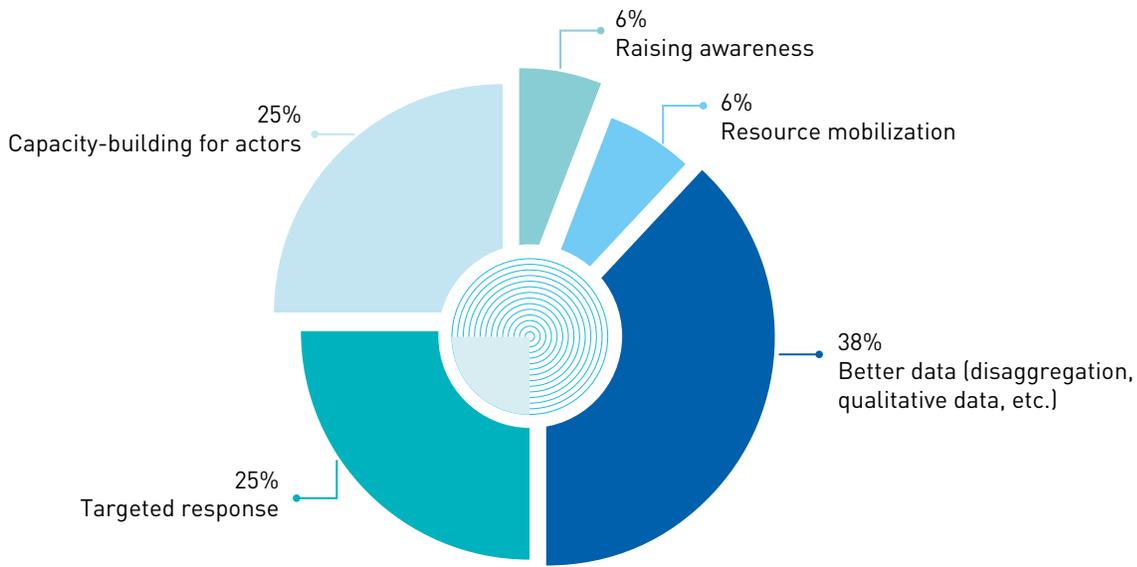


Photo credit: © UN Photo/Isaac Billy

response. Better data (data disaggregation and improvement of qualitative analysis) was identified as the most critical element for the implementation of the mandate to be more disability inclusive. This was followed by capacity-building for actors, including the development of a specific tool, and targeted response for children with disabilities (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Areas of improvement for the implementation of CAAC mandate identified by CTFMR survey respondents



The CTFMR survey respondents further identified other groups of children that are inadequately included in the implementation of the mandate. The survey demonstrated that, in some contexts, certain groups are perceived as overlooked. The groups of children identified are (1) forcibly displaced and refugee children; (2) children from indigenous or minority ethnic communities; (3) children with special needs; and (4) children from areas controlled by armed groups. For instance, the respondents specifically identified children who separate from armed groups and are overlooked throughout the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration because no appropriate reintegration programmes are available, as well as children with disabilities particularly in the context of forced displacement and children who are at risk of statelessness, such as children born of rape. Further analysis is needed in this regard to properly assess this aspect and further improve the implementation of the mandate to ensure that no child is left behind.

The majority of respondents (66 per cent) reported that all six grave violations had been adequately examined. Others highlighted that certain violations had been overlooked. The denial of humanitarian access was mentioned in the majority of examples, as in some situations it had been difficult to determine whether this violation was perpetrated by parties to conflict or by criminal actors, or because of security concerns, or because it was not a trigger for listing. The respondents also reported the challenges in documenting and verifying rape and other forms of sexual violence, mainly due to the risk of stigmatization, discrimination, reprisals and/or marginalization from the community, and a lack of confidence in the capacity of the judiciary to bring perpetrators to justice.



C. Approaches in, and challenges to, monitoring and reporting over the years

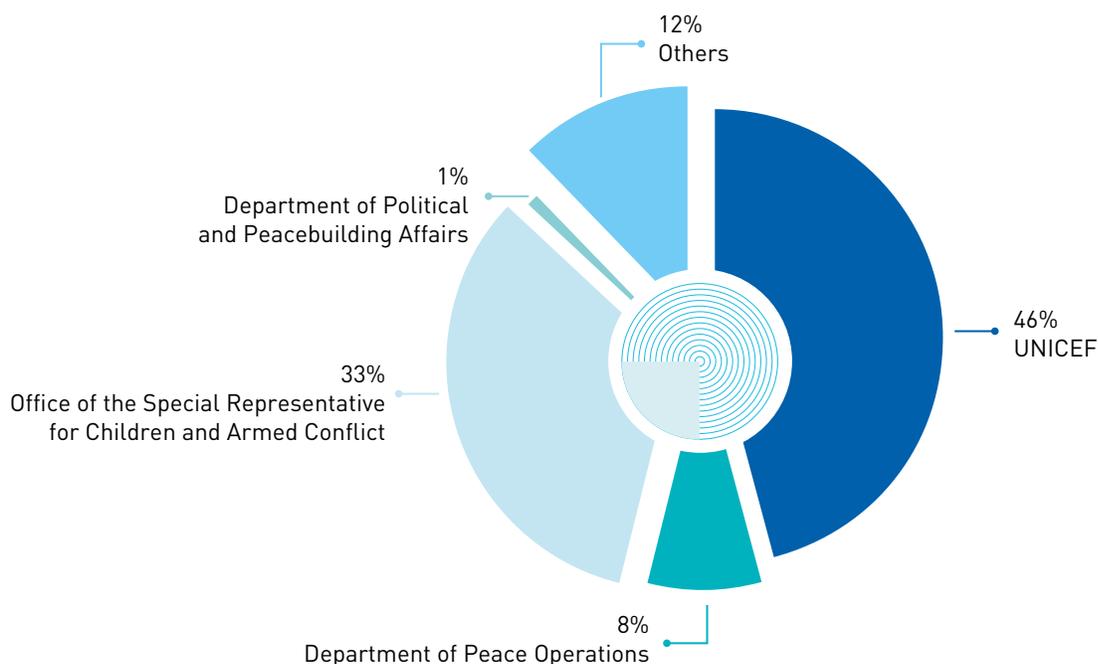
In situations where the MRM is officially established following the listing of at least one party to conflict in the annexes to the Secretary-General’s annual report on children and armed conflict, a CTFMR is created and co-chaired by the highest United Nations authority in the country (either the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for a peacekeeping mission or in-country special political mission, or the United Nations Resident Coordinator) and the UNICEF Representative.

Membership of CTFMRs vary depending on the context, but they generally include United Nations entities, agencies, funds and programmes present in the country and international NGOs with relevant expertise related to child protection. In situations where there is no MRM, the United Nations country teams usually led by the Resident Coordinator and UNICEF establish mechanisms that in the framework of this study will be referred to as CTFMRs equivalents in non-MRM situations.⁷⁴

Report submissions produced by the CTFMRs, and their equivalents in non-MRM situations, must be cleared by both Co-Chairs before being submitted to the SRSG CAAC. The modalities and approaches in monitoring and reporting through the MRM have evolved over time to meet the challenges and new conflict dynamics in the various situations on the children and armed conflict agenda.

The CTFMRs, and their equivalents in non-MRM situations, have strived to maintain a solid and effective MRM in their respective situations while maintaining high standards of verification, which are at the heart of the MRM methodology to document and verify information, and the methodology is applied consistently across country situations.

Figure 3: Entities providing additional MRM guidance to CTFMRs



⁷⁴ For more information on the CTFMRs role and their composition, please see www.mrmtools.org/files/5_Annexe_V_Country_Task_Force_ToR_-_as_of_13.3.2012.pdf.

The MRM Guidelines and Field Manual were developed by the Technical Reference Group for the MRM;⁷⁵ published in 2014,⁷⁶ they have been partially updated since. The Office of the SRSG CAAC has been leading the development of additional guidelines, in collaboration with UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and others to further strengthen the implementation of the MRM across country situations. MRM partners and monitors are periodically trained on the guidelines.

In the CTFMR survey, the respondents said that additional guidance was provided to them mainly by UNICEF (46 per cent) and the Office of the SRSG CAAC (33 per cent). Other entities identified as providing additional guidance in the monitoring and reporting of grave violations were the Department of Peace Operations (8 per cent) and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (1 per cent), as well as other actors (12 per cent), including OHCHR and international NGOs (see figure 3).

While efforts have been made over the years to ensure that the MRM methodology is applied consistently across all country situations, the ability of CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations to collect and verify information has been conditioned to a variety of factors and challenges.

Firstly, access constraints and restrictions have been the main challenge in documenting and verifying information. These restraints can be caused by ongoing conflict, armed clashes, military operations, threats against monitors, human rights defenders or community leaders, or the presence of armed actors which renders an area unsafe to go into. Access can be denied for political reasons, military and security imperatives, or public health measures. Cumbersome or complex administrative formalities have resulted in access constraints. The lack of infrastructure and the requirement for heavy logistical means to reach remote locations have also created access impediments. With no or limited access to conflict-affected areas and communities, it is challenging to collect and verify information in a safe environment for both the MRM partners and the victims.

Secondly, survivors of violations, children and their families and communities have to feel comfortable and agree to report violations. This means building confidence in the protection systems to allow for confidential and safe reporting. This also means that the victim and the family are duly informed of the purpose for which the information is collected and consent to it. The United Nations presence on the ground, whether through UNICEF programming or a peacekeeping operation or special political mission, facilitates the development of trust with the communities and creates an environment conducive to data collection and verification of grave violations, with survivors and witnesses having the confidence to share their stories. However, in a climate of ongoing conflict and insecurity created by perpetrators living in the community, coupled with widespread impunity, children and their families frequently fear to report a violation because of possible repercussions on their safety, or due to the stigma associated with certain violations, such as sexual violence.

Thirdly, there is a lack of available services through which victims and survivors would be able to report safely an incident of violation(s) and access the needed medical, psychosocial and judicial support and services. This is particularly evident in rural or remote places or areas where conflict is active and insecurity is widespread.

Additionally, lack of, or limited capacity for, child protection experts dedicated to the MRM on the ground has been another challenge for monitoring and reporting. In situations where conflict is rife and involves

⁷⁵ See reference to the Technical Reference Group in chapter III, section G.

⁷⁶ See mrmtools.org.



many actors and types of increasingly sophisticated weaponry, adequate expert capacity in monitoring and reporting becomes critical and might require specific reinforcements to capture the many and compounding ways in which children are affected.

Furthermore, the changing nature of conflicts, which are becoming increasingly complex and transnational in nature, has added a new layer of complexity to monitoring and reporting violations against children. This is compounded by the proliferation of armed actors, including armed groups designated as terrorist organizations or private security companies contracted by governments.

These new complexities have translated into increased difficulties to attribute responsibility for violations and, in recent years, there has been a growing trend reflected in the annual and country-specific reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict of violations that cannot be attributed to a specific party or are attributed to a cluster of actors operating jointly. Of particular concern in this regard are the safety risks that some CTFMRs are facing in attributing violations to specific parties to conflict.

In this context, the Office of the SRSR CAAC has increasingly conditioned the content of the Secretary-General's annual reports and country-specific reports on children and armed conflict to a caveat highlighting that the data stated as verified in the reports reflect only the tip of the iceberg and cannot be considered as the absolute totality of violations against children that actually occurred in situations of armed conflict. This means that the figures in the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict are representative of trends and patterns of violations, but not the absolute total.

Efforts to understand better the needs of CTFMRs in the field were undertaken as early as 2019, with the Office of the SRSR CAAC and UNICEF joint regional workshops with the Co-Chairs of CTFMRs in the four regions of the world. The results of these workshops were published in 2021.

It is possible to refer to data analysis needs when considering the issue of “late” verification of violations. Action plans or commitments offer additional and pertinent verification opportunities to exploit and analyse. When parties to conflict agree to cooperate with the United Nations and/or at the end of a conflict or crisis, security and access for monitors improve and children can be found and separated from parties to conflict. This is not just an opportunity to free children from conflict but also to report the violation that rendered them part of it in the first place. These verifications are referred to as “late verifications” of violations that occurred in previous reporting periods and could not be confirmed at that time. This is why in many situations, the United Nations may gather additional information about the impact of armed conflict on children and verify a tangible number of violations, for example, recruitment and use, long after they had occurred.

The violation of recruitment and use is an illustrative example: cases of child recruitment and use are in some instances verified once children have been separated from parties to conflict and in some cases after being used for many years. These separations can be the result of a successful United Nations engagement with these parties, but they can also happen, for example, as children escape, are caught during military operations or are identified through a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. Similarly, new information can be obtained and verified once a conflict is over.

In case of verification taking place at a later stage, contextual analysis is key to accompanying data to describe the situation as accurately as possible at a given time, which in turn serves to confirm trends identified earlier as well as estimate the number of children affected in that conflict situation through a certain period. Since the information collected through the MRM is not intended to provide the absolute total number of violations, but to allow the United Nations and the parties to conflict to take appropriate

action and change behaviour based on trends, late verification can improve the general understanding of the number of children affected by grave violations during armed conflict. Violations verified at a later stage can also help to improve the programmatic response to survivors of violations and its data analysis can guide respondents on how to develop such programmes.

D. Modalities and approaches in engaging with parties to conflict

The Secretary-General and the SRSR CAAC are mandated by the Security Council, through its resolution 1460 (2003) and subsequent resolutions (1539 (2004), 1612 (2005) and 2427 (2018)), to engage with all listed parties in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict for the purpose of ending and preventing the violation(s) for which the parties are listed. Specifically, in resolution 1460 (2003), the Security Council expressed its intention to enter into dialogue, as appropriate, or to support the Secretary-General in entering into dialogue with parties to armed conflict in violation of the international obligations applicable to them on the recruitment or use of children in armed conflict, in order to develop clear and time-bound action plans to end this practice (operative para. 4).

Since the establishment of the mandate, concerted efforts have been made by the United Nations and the international community to improve the protection of children through actions to end and prevent grave violations against children in armed conflict. To this end, the SRSR CAAC and the Co-Chairs of the CTFMRs as well as key partners on the ground, including the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and other United Nations entities as well as relevant civil society organizations, have been using a pragmatic and cooperative approach based on dialogue with parties to armed conflict.

The engagement of the SRSR CAAC and the United Nations-led CTFMRs on the ground with the parties to conflict has, in the past, been primarily premised on engaging parties listed in the annexes to the annual reports. The practice of action plans commenced in 2005 with the start of monitoring and reporting processes in seven situations: Burundi,⁷⁷ Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal, Somalia, Sri Lanka and the Sudan.

In some situations, action plans have served as a confidence-building measure to reinforce the need and appetite for a peace agreement. In a very important way, the adaptation of the mandate to the realities on the ground can best be captured by the way that action plans were negotiated and under which conditions they started.

While monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in situations of conflict is ongoing, listed parties concerned are incentivized to engage in action plans to end violations against children and aspire to a



Photo credit: © UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

⁷⁷ The Palipehutu-FNL did not enter into an action plan but was delisted in 2012 after years of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in partnership with the United Nations and after its transformation into a political party.



removal from the list or, more recently, governments are encouraged to put in place prevention measures to protect children and avoid a trend and pattern of grave violations by their forces that could lead to a possible listing. In the most successful cases since 2016, the existence of action plans with armed groups and armed forces has contributed to creating conditions for a safe environment for peace processes to follow.

The impacts of such engagement and actions plans have been observed especially at the field level. The survey conducted for the CTFMR and non-CTFMR situations revealed lessons learned from the field perspective regarding action plans. The respondents reported that engagement with armed groups and the development of actions plans have contributed to the direct and systematic release of hundreds of children associated and the provision of holistic assistance while contributing to holding perpetrators accountable.⁷⁸



Photo credit: © UN Photo/Harandane Dicko

Recently, there has been another change in the modality and approach in engagements with parties to conflict. The adoption of Security Council resolution 2427 (2018) provided a stronger focus on prevention. The SRSG CAAC is expected to further strengthen the link between child protection and conflict prevention, including through engagement with parties to conflict. It also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals and underlines the importance of developing regional, subregional and national prevention plans and strategies. The resolution further elaborated on and detailed the crucial nature of prevention efforts in further protecting children and securing their rights, by expanding on the role that governments and regional organizations can play through strategies, coordination, initiatives and information exchange, in cooperation with the SRSG CAAC, to prevent violations and abuses against children affected by armed conflict.

Preventive elements were always present in the engagement of the SRSG CAAC with parties to change behaviour and through action plans that created mechanisms to end and also prevent violations. However, resolution 2427 (2018) consolidated this tool into a coherent approach for the future.

The SRSG CAAC typically engages directly with listed parties only at the request of the Co-Chairs of the relevant CTFMR in the situations concerned and this type of direct involvement has increased from 2018 onwards. One of the reasons for which the CTFMRs Co-Chairs solicit the direct intervention of the SRSG CAAC is the highly political nature of some types of engagements in most recent conflict situations. In this regard, the SRSG CAAC advocates on behalf of the Secretary-General on all issues related to children and armed conflict.

⁷⁸ CTFMR survey respondents.



Activities that can be included in action plans and other forms of commitment to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children

For example, an agreement between government security forces and the United Nations to end the recruitment and use of children can include the following actions:

- i. Criminalize the recruitment and use of children by armed forces;
- ii. Issue a military order to stop and prevent child recruitment and facilitate the release of associated children;
- iii. Investigate and prosecute those who recruit and use children;
- iv. Appoint child protection high-level focal points in security forces;
- v. Release all children identified in the ranks;
- vi. Provide regular, unimpeded access to military camps and bases so child protection actors can verify that no children are in the ranks;
- vii. Provide release and reintegration programmes for children;
- viii. Strengthen birth registration systems and integrate age-verification mechanisms in recruitment procedures;
- ix. Implement national campaigns to raise awareness and to prevent the recruitment of children.

Of the 37 action plans⁷⁹ signed by parties to conflict with the United Nations so far, 5 were signed from the establishment of the mandate up to 2006, 21 were signed between 2007 and 2016, and 11 were signed between 2017 and 2021. Some of the action plans signed between 2010 and 2015 made little progress or were dormant following their signature due to changes in the context on the ground. All of these were revitalized between 2017 and 2021 through updating their commitments.⁸⁰

The successful engagement with parties to conflict shows an increasing commitment by parties to conflict, matched by a determination by the SRSG CAAC and partners on the ground, to enhance their dialogue to establish concrete measures for the protection of children. As prevention plans represented an additional tool to protect children, they can also support the sustainability of action plans by ensuring that parties that have fully implemented their action plan, and have been delisted, thereafter develop prevention plans to sustain the measures taken in the action plan into the future, thus preventing violations from re-emerging.

Since the establishment of the mandate, there have been 26 action plans developed addressing the violation of recruitment and use of children by parties to conflict. A higher number of parties have been listed for the recruitment and use of children rather than for any other violation, which partially explains why action plans have predominantly focused on this violation. For example, in the annexes to his report on children and armed conflict covering the year 2020, the Secretary-General listed 61 parties to conflict.⁸¹ Most of them (57) were listed for recruitment and use of children, 24 for killing and maiming of children, 20 for rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, 15 for abduction and 14 for attacks on schools and hospitals.

79 This number refers only to action plans signed by parties to conflict with the United Nations. In addition, there are hundreds of commitments of different forms that have been signed or undertaken by parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations against children in collaboration with the United Nations.

80 The 2012 action plan with the Somali National Army to end the recruitment and use of children, signed on 3 July 2012, and the action plan to end the killing and maiming of children, signed on 6 August 2012, had to be revitalized through a road map to expedite the implementation of the two action plans adopted in October 2019.

81 A/75/873-S/2021/437.



Until 2009, all action plans had solely focused on ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children, since this was the only violation that was considered as a trigger for the listing of parties to conflict. These action plans were signed following an agreed and ongoing peaceful resolution of conflict and included benchmarks on the separation, demobilization and reintegration of children in an orderly and verifiable manner, as well as regarding the development of national legislation prohibiting the recruitment and use of children below the age of 18.

Since 2010, most action plans have been negotiated prior to peace processes and, in some instances, have served as a trust-building exercise to encourage parties to continue developing lasting peace agreements.

The components of action plans must be flexible and tailored to each specific context and to the nature of the party, whether it is a State or non-State actor, so there can be no “one size fits all” approach to engagement. However, it is important to note that all written action plans and other forms of commitment have a common baseline to ensure that all are in line with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as well as other applicable international standards on the protection of children and relevant Security Council resolutions.

In the fluid world of conflict, with allegiances changing frequently, the nature and/or status of parties may evolve. In this context, there are cases of armed groups whose structure has evolve, which can result in splintering into two or more factions. Other groups change names and/or merge with others; pro-government militias may be absorbed into regular national armies. In each of these situations, if any of these parties are listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General’s reports, and continue to exist in another form or name, the listing will be adjusted to reflect the most accurate status and name of the listed party.

Originally, a party to conflict could be listed for one violation and an action plan for that same violation had to be structured. With the increase in listable violations, more existing parties found themselves also listed for other violations that require additional action plans. The question then became whether an existing action plan could be broadened to encompass other violations or whether an action plan had to be developed for each violation with the same actor. To engage better in pursuit of changing behaviour of parties to conflict, more recent action plans have attempted to encompass all the violations for which the party has been listed, and sometimes all six violations regardless of listing status, as a preventive measure.

The CTFMRs have been instrumental to the development and signing of action plans and other forms of commitment and are in the front line of dialogue and engagement with parties to conflict in most instances. Once an action plan is agreed upon, it is signed by the CTFMR Co-Chairs and witnessed by the SRSR CAAC. There have been exceptions to this process in specific situations where the CTFMR requested the SRSR CAAC to sign in their stead.

In all cases, the language of action plans and other forms of commitment is carefully reviewed and CTFMRs engage in a careful assessment of potential risks and evaluation of the situation. Through mutually agreed time-bound activities and benchmarks to identify progress, there are concrete and quantifiable results to be achieved by the signatory parties, with the United Nations monitoring compliance. Not all parties wish for the United Nations



Photo credit: © OSRSG CAAC/Fabienne Vinet

to monitor compliance and prefer to issue unilateral types of commitment while producing results. In these cases, their efforts might be recognized as a measure taken to better protect children in the annual reports, but it cannot lead to delisting unless the measure is monitored by the United Nations.

Action plans and other forms of commitment signed between a listed party and the United Nations are adapted to the context concerned because each party and each conflict situation are unique. However, all action plans and other forms of commitment contain the same types of activities. These tools were designed for use by listed parties to conflict to change their behaviour and halt the pattern of violations for which they were listed. Some of the key elements of an action plan or other forms of commitment include: official command orders issued through the chain of command of the armed forces or groups specifying a commitment to halt violations and to take disciplinary measures against perpetrators; agreed means of cooperation between the party concerned and the United Nations to address grave violations committed against children; and access to territory under the control of the party and to bases, camps, training facilities, recruitment centres or other relevant installations, for ongoing monitoring and verification of compliance.⁸²

The United Nations does not make public the text of action plans with parties to conflict, as they address situations of ongoing conflict where military operations are ongoing and continuing. An action plan is not a plan to cease military activity, but rather to spare children from the commission or result of that activity. It tends to be easier to engage with governments that are countering armed and terrorist groups within their national sovereign territory rather than transnational actors.

Willingness to engage, putting in place measures to halt the pattern of grave violations against children in a situation of armed conflict, information exchange and the observation of the manner in which the measures in place have led to the break of a pattern effectively change the behaviour of listed parties.

Another reflection on the process of engaging with listed parties in pursuit of changing behaviour and halting the commission of grave violations against children during an armed conflict is that when mutually agreed measures are implemented successfully, this might lead to a surge in children released from armed forces or armed groups. Such a surge, unless correctly planned for, can exert stress on existing reintegration platforms available to assist children in those situations.

The prevention of re-recruitment of children by parties to conflict due to lack of alternative livelihood opportunities is particularly important. The analysis undertaken in the framework of this study shows that smooth implementation and sustainability of the gains made through action plans depend on the commitment of the actors involved in prioritizing child protection. The role of the international community in supporting the parties to continue upholding their commitments cannot be underestimated. The current SRSG CAAC is also focusing her work on developing dedicated studies on variables affecting the continuum between the prevention of violations, release of children and the provision of effective reintegration of the children to their communities.



“(Children) are consequently under risks of re-recruitment and can be used for other criminal activities since there is no programme to facilitate their social and economic rehabilitation.”

CTFMR survey respondent

82 A/64/742-S/2010/181, para. 179.



Reflecting on the various modalities of engagement described above, since its resolution 1460 (2003), even prior to the existence of the MRM, the Security Council called first and foremost for the engagement of the United Nations with listed parties to end violations against children, ultimately leading to a change in behaviour of the parties to conflict. Action plans resulting from these engagements are a critical component of the mandate. By the same token, action plans that occur as part of a peace process or immediately follow a signed peace agreement tend to be easier to monitor and implement than those that are developed and implemented while military operations are still ongoing.

E. Modalities and approaches to hold parties accountable

As the monitoring and reporting process and the engagement process have been discussed, this section will explore the modalities and approaches that the mandate uses to foster accountability for parties to conflict that commit the six grave violations. The section looks at how listing and delisting of parties to conflict can be used as an accountability tool to hold States and non-States parties accountable for committing grave violations against children. The section also considers other accountability mechanisms that the children and armed conflict agenda supports or engages with.

1. Listing and delisting

In 2001, through its resolution 1379 (2001), the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to annex to his reports a list of parties to conflict that commit grave violations against children, initially limited to the violation of recruitment and use of children (operative para. 16). Through its resolution 1882 (2009), the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to include in the following year's annual report information on the criteria and procedures used for listing and delisting parties to armed conflict in the annexes to his periodic reports, bearing in mind the views expressed by all members of the Working Group during informal briefings. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon included the criteria for listing and delisting of parties in section V of his 2010 annual report on children and armed conflict.⁸³

In devising criteria and procedures for listing and delisting, the Secretary-General was guided by operative paragraph 3 of resolution 1882 (2009), namely the Council's request to list parties that engage, in contravention of applicable international law, in patterns of killing and maiming of children and/or rape and other forms of sexual violence against children. The reference to the acts in question was not merely crimes under the national law of a State where the crime had been committed, but rather acts that amount to a violation of applicable international law, including international humanitarian law or international human rights law. The threshold for inclusion revolves around the notion of a "pattern". Based on the use of the notion in similar contexts, a "pattern" denotes a "methodical plan", "a system" and a collectivity of victims. Based on the notion of a "pattern" as a threshold for inclusion in the list, reference to the description of the actors in contravention of applicable international law involving killing, maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence is as follows: Killing and maiming should include mutilation, torture resulting in serious injury or death and killing in contravention of applicable international law. Rape and other forms of sexual violence should include rape, sexual slavery and/or any other form of sexual violence. Recruitment and use of children would continue to be the basis for listing and delisting in conformity with past practice and in line with applicable international law.

⁸³ A/64/742-S/2010/181.



The annual report contains two annexes that provide lists of parties to conflict that have committed the designated violations. Annex I is a list of parties to armed conflicts that are on the Security Council's agenda. Annex II is a list of parties to armed conflicts that are not on the Security Council's agenda, or in other situations.

Since 2017, the report includes a section on developments and concerns to differentiate the parties that were willing to engage with the United Nations to put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children, from those that were not. Subsequently, the two annexes have been subdivided into a section listing those parties to conflict that have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children (section A) and a section listing those parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children (section B).

Being listed in the annexes to the annual reports of the Secretary-General has ramifications on the listed party.

For example, State actors that are repeatedly listed cannot be considered for deployment as troop-contributing countries in any existing or potential United Nations peacekeeping operation until they are delisted.⁸⁴ A party can be delisted on the condition that there is United Nations-verified information that it has ceased commission of the grave violation against children for which the party was listed in the Secretary-General's annual



“The accountability mechanism by MRM through Secretary-General's annual report and its annex listing reduced the targeting of civilian premises by the parties to the conflict.”

CTFMR survey respondent

⁸⁴ See Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on uniting our strengths for peace: politics, partnership and people (A/70/95-S/2015/446), para. 289, endorsed by the Secretary-General in A/70/357-S/2015/682, para. 127.



report on children and armed conflict, for a period of at least one reporting cycle. As part of the delisting process, a party to conflict, whether a State or non-State actor, is required to enter into dialogue with the United Nations to prepare and implement a concrete, time-bound action plan to cease and prevent grave violations committed against children for which the party had been listed in the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009). Subsequently, resolutions of the Security Council 1998 (2011) and 2225 (2015) have included two other violations that would include listing of parties relating to attacks on schools and hospitals, and to the abduction of children.

The action plan should include: (a) a halt to violations and/or the pattern of violations concerned; (b) official command orders issued through the chain of command of the armed force or group specifying a commitment to halt violations and to take disciplinary measures against perpetrators; (c) an agreed means of cooperation between the party concerned and the United Nations to address grave violations committed against children; (d) access to territory under the control of the party and to bases, camps, training facilities, recruitment centres or other relevant installations, for ongoing monitoring and verification of compliance, and the framework of access to be mutually agreed upon by the United Nations and the party; (e) verifiable information regarding measures taken to ensure the accountability of perpetrators; (f) implementation of an agreed prevention strategy by the party to address violations; and (g) designation of a high-level focal point in the military hierarchy of the group responsible for the fulfilment of action plan criteria.

The criteria to list and delist parties are adjusted and adapted to new scenarios and circumstances in order to make a decision on listing or delisting parties to conflict in and from the annexes of the annual reports on CAAC. The decision to delist a party is made by the Secretary-General on a case-by-case basis and an explanation of this decision is included in the annual report as requested by the relevant Security Council resolutions.⁸⁵

Once a party is delisted, ongoing monitoring and reporting of the situation is required as long as the Secretary-General remains concerned that such violations may recur. The delisted party must ensure continuous and unhindered access to the United Nations for monitoring and verification of compliance with commitments for a minimum period of one reporting cycle following delisting, failing which it may be relisted in the annexes and the Security Council alerted to the non-compliance.

Moreover, over the years, several listed parties were technically delisted primarily as a result of the fact that they had ceased to exist or had been integrated into other armed groups or formally embedded into the armed forces of a government.

2. Removal of situations from and inclusion of new situations in the Secretary-General's reports

Between 2002 and 2012, many parties to conflict, and consequently the countries in which these parties operated, were removed from the narrative of the annual reports due to the ceasing to exist of an armed group or, primarily, the end of an armed conflict situation or a successful completion of a peace process. In some cases, countries were mentioned only in one given year and subsequently removed from the narrative of the report. There were other situations that ceased to feature due to the sustained implementation of action plans and subsequent delisting of the relevant listed parties. When parties from

⁸⁵ It should be noted that the annexes list perpetrators of grave violations against children within a particular country, not the country itself. The purpose of the lists is to identify specific parties to conflict that are responsible for grave violations against children. In that regard, the names of countries are referred to only in order to indicate the locations or situations where offending parties are committing the violations in question.

these situations were removed from an annual report, there was no need to retain the same situations in the next report, hence they were removed.

However, not all delisting decisions vis-à-vis States parties culminate in a removal of the situation from the annual report narratives, or even from the annexes.

Another important issue concerning the removal of situations from or inclusion of situations in the annual reports relates to situations where no party to conflict is listed. With no listed party, the United Nations cannot officially establish a CTFMR for that situation. Whereas the listing and delisting process in the annual reports is better understood, no such general understanding supports the inclusion of new situations in or removal of situations from the annual reports which might explain the ad hoc nature of such decisions over the years. Nevertheless, in the last years, the SRSR CAAC has been advocating with the United Nations agencies and country offices to submit formal reports with their recommendation for inclusion of a situation in the Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict.

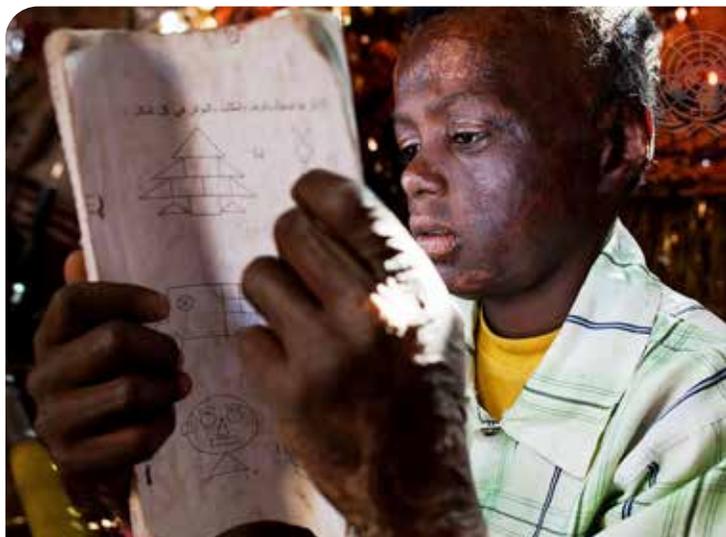


Photo credit: © UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran

The adoption of Security Council resolution 2427 (2018), and its clear focus on prevention, including its call to States to mainstream child protection into all relevant activities in conflict prevention, provides a general framework to enhance the protection of children in situations of concern and assists in engagement possibilities to put in place prevention measures leading to the ending of violations and preventing the emergence of other violations. A structured approach to addressing situations of concern further reinforces national efforts aimed at the protection of children and ensures that such measures are agreed upon jointly with the United Nations, in parallel to ongoing monitoring and reporting.

3. Working with accountability mechanisms

Over the past few years, grave violations against children have been included as designation criteria in almost all relevant sanctions committees pertaining to situations where children are affected by armed conflict. Targeted sanctions against individuals and entities can include arms embargoes, asset freezes, travel bans and financial restrictions. These committees have thus become an important forum to pursue accountability against perpetrators of grave violations and the Special Representative is regularly invited to brief relevant committees on the situation of children affected by armed conflict.⁸⁶

Promoting and supporting accountability efforts at the national level have been at the heart of the mandate over the years. In many instances, the mandate contributed to the development and/or strengthening of national justice systems to protect children either through an action plan, as mentioned above, or through routine engagement and advocacy with national governments. The CTFMR Co-Chairs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations engage with governments to advocate, promote and support legislative reform, so that child protection legal and policy frameworks are strengthened. As a result, national laws are promulgated; in addition, supporting the application of domestic legislation to protect children is routinely undertaken by CTFMRs. Supporting national structures in this regard is also regularly done by CTFMRs. Some CTFMRs have taken a step further by providing technical support to national justice mechanisms.

⁸⁶ Office of the SRSR CAAC. 20 Years to Better Protect Children Affected by Conflict (New York, 2016).



Some countries on the children and armed conflict agenda have been particularly active in combating impunity and holding perpetrators of violations accountable through their respective judicial systems.

Another important aspect in accountability efforts is how transitional justice systems are an important avenue to advancing accountability for perpetrators of violations against children, often within the framework of implementing a peace agreement.

Over the years, the mandate has also interacted with international justice mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court. In 2008, the SRSG CAAC submitted her *amicus curiae* observations in the case against Thomas Lubanga Dyilo.⁸⁷ Mr. Lubanga was charged with the war crimes of conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years or using them to actively participate in hostilities. The then Special Representative, Radhika Coomaraswamy, acted as an expert witness at the trial. In her testimony, she underlined that the involvement of children in armed conflict must take into account children serving in support roles during combat such as spies, messengers, porters, scouts and cooks.⁸⁸ She also highlighted that girls often experience sexual slavery and repeated instances of rape, forced marriages and forced pregnancy, which should be recognized as active participation. Mr. Lubanga was found guilty and was sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment. The conviction of Mr. Lubanga not only set important international jurisprudence on the war crime of recruiting and using children, but also made a significant contribution to the development of the right to reparations in international law. The justice for victims of grave violations needs to include far more than finding the perpetrator accountable and should also focus on the restoration of the victims' rights and reparations to address the harm suffered, including physical or mental harm, and loss of family, education and livelihood. For many children, reparations could provide more immediate accountability, assist them to move on with their lives and enable community reconciliation.

The mandate can provide a wealth of information on verified trends of violations which can be instrumental in framing trials and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. More recently, in 2021, the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has been working with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, OHCHR and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on a submission of an *amicus curiae* observations in the reparations phase of the case against Dominic Ongwen. On 4 February 2021, the Chamber convicted Mr. Ongwen on 61 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including sexual and gender-based crimes, which occurred in northern Uganda between July 2002 and December 2005.⁸⁹ The focus of the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has been to include key principles, considerations and types of reparation measures that could be considered by the court in its decision on reparations for children victims and for their families.

Lastly, the mandate has engaged with several mechanisms set up by the Security Council, the General Assembly or the Human Rights Council to investigate serious human rights violations and abuses, including to collect evidence of the most serious international crimes and violations of international law and prepare files to be used in judicial proceedings.

⁸⁷ International Criminal Court, The Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, Case No. ICC-01/04-01/06.

⁸⁸ Office of the SRSG CAAC, "ICC: The Special Representative Has Visited the International Criminal Court after the Submission of an 'Amicus Curiae' on the Lubanga 'S Case'", 28 April 2008. Available at <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2008/04/28apr08/>.

⁸⁹ International Criminal Court, The Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen, Case No. ICC-02/04-01/15, Trial Judgment, 4 February 2021.

F. Prevention

The Office of the SRSG CAAC pursued several prevention initiatives, particularly since Security Council resolution 2427 (2018). The SRSG CAAC has also been engaging and advocating with Member States, regional and subregional organizations, United Nations entities, as well as civil society organizations to develop new measures to prevent grave violations from occurring including through the development of prevention plans. In particular, she focused on ensuring sufficient and sustainable resources for the protection and reintegration of children enduring the effects of war (particularly focusing on the need to prevent re-recruitment when no solid reintegration alternatives were offered) and to prevent grave violations against children (mostly through the construction of subregional and regional prevention policies on children and armed conflict and through public outreach and advocacy). Prevention initiatives undertaken since 2018 include global advocacy campaigns; the development of technical guidelines to reinforce monitoring; studies and analyses; initiatives such as the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers and public global advocacy campaigns which include the creation of a Group of Friends of Reintegration; the issuance of public statements; prioritizing partnerships with other United Nations bodies and offices, civil society and Member States, including through encouraging the multiplication of Groups of Friends on children and armed conflict in countries affected by conflict and in international hubs; holding consultations with NGOs at national and international levels; and attempting to join and support NGO-led projects in the field.

Specific prevention initiatives at the national level have also been promoted, in cooperation with and support of governments to ensure that institutions, legislation, regulations, judicial systems, policies, coordinating bodies, information exchange, technical expertise, capacity, resources and standard operating procedures are in place to address emerging violations against children and to respond to preventing further violations. Embedding such policies and mechanisms in existing organizational structures, such as interministerial committees, and across all levels of government is essential to ensuring that child protection efforts are sustained.





1. Prevention in the context of implementing the mandate and engaging with parties to conflict

The data provided by the monitoring and reporting on grave violations can be used by United Nations country teams to inform their programmatic response, and thus define programmes that respond both to the needs of child victims of grave violations and to trends and patterns to prevent further violations. United Nations engagement seeks to end violation but also to prevent the recurrence of violations against children. Parties are called to put in place concrete, time-bound activities that prevent the reoccurrence of violations. Advocacy targets all actors concerned and also contributes to preventing violations. Similarly, advocacy and engagement by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator to facilitate humanitarian access play a critical role. Raising awareness of norms, standards and principles for protecting children is equally important.

Joining international and regional instruments, such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration or the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and their domestication into national legislation, where appropriate, creates a framework for governmental action to prevent violations, including through programming, security responses and accountability. National legislation criminalizing grave violations and promoting accountability is an essential element in deterring grave violations, and in breaking the cycle of violence.

A children and armed conflict prevention plan is a political action plan, a strategy or statement adopted at the highest levels of a government, or regional or subregional organization. With Security Council resolution 2427 (2018), the opportunity to promote and develop prevention plans increased. Prevention plans at regional or national levels can address specific trends and patterns, such as cross-border violations, and create momentum for addressing grave violations and mobilizing resources for preventing violations against children as well as coordination action, including promoting accountability. Additionally, support to other key sectors of the State is crucial to ensuring that specific protection elements are supported. Support for the education, social security and health sector as well as for rule of law and security institutions as a whole is essential to sustaining the gains in prevention. Without the support of strengthened national sectors, progress on ending and preventing violations cannot be sustained.

At the national level, the coordination of action is crucial to prioritizing and mobilizing resources, and to ensuring that strategic decisions are translated at the technical level. Interministerial coordination committees as well as technical committees at the local level and designated focal points within ministries and security forces can ensure that trends and patterns of violations that emerge (early warning), as well as specific cases of violations, are addressed promptly and remedied. This furthers the prevention of violations by ensuring a prompt reaction from states authorities and can also facilitate communication with the United Nations for the purpose of support and assistance. National and local coordination mechanisms and focal points can ensure the mainstreaming of child protection in various state and local programmes and activities. This promotes a child-sensitive national security and defence sector, further preventing violations. This would also include training and capacity-building for state and local institutions, and for the national security and defence sector.



Photo credit: © MONUSCO/ Bas de Lange



What to include in a prevention plan?

Each prevention plan needs to build on a solid analysis of the protection risks for children and be tailored to the specific context and objective, the regional scope, the conflict's cross-border or subregional nature and the actors involved. Complementarity is paramount but each level is different. They must be made compatible, so workshops to align national plans with those of neighbours and with regional plans would be needed.

National context: The scope of a national prevention plan can be more ambitious than in the regional context. The government has influence over a broader range of instruments and a deeper reach to national actors. The end goal should be to build a solid national and local child protection system based on a strong legislation and a robust legal system, applicable in peacetime as well as in conflict. A prevention plan would build on earlier commitments from an existing action plan, complemented by additional measures to strengthen protection.

Cross-border: A prevention commitment between two or more bordering countries would be desirable in contexts where armed groups operating on both sides of a border are committing violations against children, be they recruitment and use, abduction, killing or maiming or other violations, and/or where children from one country are picked up and detained on the other side of the border. The commitments in a prevention plan would more specifically refer to concrete actions to be taken by the military and other security forces, border forces, civil society, and regional or subregional organization.

Regional and other organizations: A prevention plan in a regional or subregional setting will depend on the role and mandate of the organization. Ideally, the regional plan would serve to establish a common approach, through policies and strategies to raise awareness and prevent violations, by setting up coordinating mechanisms through focal points at national levels and headquarters, formulating joint binding or voluntary standards for member States, and measures to promptly detect escalating violations. For organizations with a peacekeeping capability, awareness-raising, joint training and training modules, clear standard operating procedures and guidelines on engagement with children would be key elements. It could also be possible to put pressure on a national action plan through a regional initiative.

2. Global campaigns

Children, not soldiers

In 2014, the campaign "Children, not soldiers" was launched jointly with UNICEF in collaboration with other United Nations partners (the then Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Political Affairs), with the objective to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by government security forces listed in the Secretary-General's global annual reports on children and armed conflict by 2016. Building on best practices, the campaign further aimed to mobilize political attention and support, including through technical assistance, for Governments taking measures to professionalize their security forces, ensuring that they become and remain "child free". At the official completion of the campaign in December 2016, concrete advances in targeted countries included the criminalization of the recruitment and use of children, the issuance of military command orders, the systematic screening of troops, the adoption of age-assessment guidelines, the development of handover protocols and the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces.



ACT to protect children affected by conflict

While the progress in ending the recruitment and use of children by listing government security forces illustrated that global advocacy and collaboration could lead to tangible changes for conflict-affected children, the situation on the ground remained dire for children, who continued to experience grave violations. In fact, verified instances of grave violations against children were on the rise.⁹⁰ In response to this alarming trend, in April 2019 the SRSG CAAC together with the European Union and the African Union as co-sponsors and following consultations with United Nations entities, Member States and civil society organizations, launched “ACT to protect children affected by conflict”, a global advocacy campaign to increase awareness and action for children affected by war and to highlight the interconnectedness of the six grave violations and the need to tackle them comprehensively.



Photo credit: © OSRSG CAAC/Fabienne Vinet

“ACT to protect” also seeks to firmly place the issue of children and armed conflict at the heart of the prevention, peacebuilding and development agendas. By shedding light on all six grave violations committed by both armed groups and armed forces, “ACT to protect” is enabling a greater engagement with a broader number of parties operating in all countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. While “ACT to protect” is still ongoing, it has already resulted in progress for children despite the challenges posed to the roll-out of the campaign by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since April 2019, the campaign has been launched in seven locations:

- Global launch in New York, with the European Union and the African Union as co-sponsors (April 2019)
- Regional launch in Brussels at the European Parliament (April 2019)
- National launch in the Central African Republic (May 2019)
- National launch in Somalia (June 2019)
- National launch in Mali (July 2019)
- Regional launch in Bangkok (August 2019)
- National launch in South Sudan (February 2020).

Let them play

“Let them play: tell the world they are children, not soldiers” is an initiative by the SRSG CAAC related to FIFA World Cups, to raise global awareness about the need to stop the use and abuse of children in armed conflict. The focus of this campaign is not only to raise awareness on the need to prevent the six grave violations against children, but also to assist in the efforts made for the reintegration of children, particularly those stigmatized due to their experiences.

3. Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers

The Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers was launched in 2018, together with UNICEF and other partners. It is an alliance of Member States, United Nations entities, the World Bank, civil society organizations and academia, co-chaired by the Office of the SRSG CAAC and UNICEF. It is composed of

⁹⁰ Over 21,000 grave violations verified by the United Nations in 2017, compared with over 15,500 in 2016 (A/72/865-S/2018/465).

a Steering Committee (Member States, the United Nations, the World Bank and NGOs), an Expert Advisory Group (the United Nations, the World Bank, NGOs and academia), and a Friends of Reintegration Group (28 Member States, co-chaired by France, Kazakhstan and Malta). Membership of the latter is Andorra, Argentina, Belgium, Canada, China, Djibouti, the Dominican Republic, France, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Malta, Mexico, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and Uruguay. The Steering Committee tasked the Expert Advisory Group to conduct research over 12 months to study particularly key areas of child reintegration, including the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. In 2020, three briefing papers were published: (a) “Gaps and Needs for the Successful Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Groups or Armed Forces”; (b) “Reframing Child Reintegration from Humanitarian Action to Development, Prevention, Peacebuilding and Beyond”; and (c) “Financing Support for Child Reintegration Issues and Options Study, as well as the overview summary”. The launch event took place in July 2021 and was attended by 90 Member States and by United Nations representatives, academics and civil society.

To further enhance the collaboration with academia, an Academic Advisory Group on Child Reintegration has been created to engage experts in identifying and working on a research agenda to further knowledge about child reintegration and improve support for this vital group.

4. Development of technical guidance documents relevant to the mandate

The Office of the SRSG CAAC started producing technical guidelines to support the field in the implementation of the MRM in 2009 through working papers examining the six grave violations, and other issues of particular concern that were emerging throughout the years. In 2014, the Office of the SRSG CAAC together with UNICEF and the former Department of Peacekeeping Operations (now Department of Peace Operations), developed the MRM guidelines for the field and the manual to be used by the monitoring teams on the ground to perform their tasks. More recently, the Office of the SRSG CAAC is working closely with UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs on the development of additional guidance for the field to complement the Field Manual and provide up-to-date guidance to the field teams to meet the new challenges they are facing related to the evolving contexts in which the MRM is being implemented.

In addition to these guidelines, the Office of the SRSG CAAC has led the development of the Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, which was launched through a dedicated session of the Security Council in February 2020. In the statement by the President of the Security Council of 31 October 2017,⁹¹ the Security Council encouraged the Special Representative, together with relevant child protection actors, to carry out lessons learned initiatives in order to compile comprehensive best practices on the children and armed conflict mandate, including practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues in peace processes. Therefore, the Office of the SRSG CAAC started a consultative process with relevant child protection and mediation actors, including UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. This initiative was duly noted by the Security Council in its resolution 2427 (2018), in which it welcomed the launch of a process to compile practical guidance in this regard.

The 18-month consultative process to develop this guidance included a survey that was sent to all the United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions, together with bilateral interviews with senior experts in the fields of mediation and child protection, case study analyses and a desk review of specific child protection language included in peace agreements. In addition, in November 2018, initial

⁹¹ S/PRST/2017/21.



consultations were held in Geneva, supported by the Government of Sweden, in which 10 child protection and mediation experts met to identify and discuss the preliminary elements to be included in the guidance.

In October 2019, the second high-level consultations took place in Brussels in partnership with the European Institute of Peace and the Government of Belgium, bringing together 20 senior experts in the fields of mediation and child protection, including current and former Special Representatives for Children and Armed Conflict, current and former United Nations Special Envoys of the Secretary-General and senior diplomats. The consultative process concluded that, in peace negotiations, child protection issues were mostly addressed in an ad hoc manner. Children’s rights, needs and concerns are hardly addressed in peace processes mainly because mediators are rarely provided with specific and effective tools designed to identify child protection and child rights issues and to channel their possible added value in peace negotiations.

The practical guidance addresses this gap in a non-prescriptive manner by providing mediators and other stakeholders supporting mediation efforts with specific measures for consideration in peace talks and peace agreements. It aims to assist in the identification of entry points and possible confidence-building measures to engage parties on this issue. The guidance is built on evidence that the viability and sustainability of peace are enhanced by the protection of children and the fulfilment of their rights, and also by the prevention of grave violations against them.

Rolling out this practical guidance is the next step for the Office of the SRSR CAAC and a special effort at promoting the guidelines among mediators and diplomats will be led by its Office in Doha during 2022.

G. Partnerships

1. Partnership with United Nations entities

Over the past 25 years, the SRSRs CAAC have operated in close cooperation with various United Nations entities in line with the mandate to contribute to the coordination and to foster international cooperation.

Under the General Assembly mandate, the SRSR CAAC advocates for children in armed conflict situations and undertakes research to identify trends and patterns as well as the dynamics by means of which children are used and abused in and by armed conflict. The reports yearly in this respect to the General Assembly and to the Human Rights Council. The results of the SRSR’s visits to the field, interactions and collaboration with other United Nations entities, and the activities with Member States and civil society developed during the year, are all embodied in the annual reports of the SRSR CAAC to the General Assembly, presented to its Third Committee in New York. In reporting to the General Assembly over the years, it is possible to see a constant increase in the activities and collaboration undertaken by the various SRSRs CAAC since the beginning of the mandate.



Photo credit: © UN Photo/Nektarios Markogiannis

The issue of children and armed conflict is strongly embedded in the work of the Human Rights Council and its special procedures. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 51/77 and subsequent resolutions, the Special Representative is requested to submit every year a report to the Human Rights Council on the activities undertaken in fulfilment of the mandate, including information on field visits, progress achieved and challenges remaining on the children and armed conflict agenda. Every year, the Human Rights Council holds an interactive dialogue with the Special Representative on the submitted report. Additionally, in September 2014, at the invitation of the President of the Human Rights Council, the Special Representative also briefed the special session of the Council on the situation in Iraq, which provided an important opportunity to highlight violations of the rights of children. The Human Rights Council has increasingly included language on the protection of conflict-affected children in its resolutions on country-specific situations or thematic issues. The Group of Friends on children and armed conflict in Geneva, co-chaired by Belgium and Uruguay, has played a vital role to that end.

Since the inception of the universal periodic review mechanism, the Office of the SRSG CAAC has regularly submitted contributions for the reviews of countries on the children and armed conflict agenda, which have given rise to recommendations on the protection of conflict-affected children. For example, under the third cycle of the universal periodic review (2017–2022), the Office of the Special Representative has made 13 submissions, namely on Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

In addition, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has played a crucial role regarding the mandate, as following a recommendation by the Committee, the General Assembly adopted resolution 48/157, which recommended that the Secretary-General appoint an independent expert to study the impact of armed conflict on children. Since the start of the mandate, each Special Representative has maintained close contacts with the Committee including through bilateral meetings or by issuing joint press releases. Over the years, the Office of the SRSG CAAC provided on multiple occasions information to the Committee on the status of the protection of the rights of conflict-affected children in specific country situations ahead of its country reviews. The Committee's concluding observations on countries on the children and armed conflict agenda regularly take into account recommendations from the Secretary-General's annual or country-specific reports on children and armed conflict and the conclusions of the Security Council Working Group insofar as they are relevant to reporting on a particular country situation. On the other hand, the SRSG CAAC is using every opportunity to call for the universal ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. Throughout the years, the SRSGs CAAC used the observations of the Committee for advocacy purposes with the Member States concerned, urging the States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols to implement the recommendations of the Committee. After the adoption by the Committee of general comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system, the SRSG CAAC regularly encouraged States parties to increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years. The SRSG CAAC also regularly called on all United Nations entities to use the concluding observations of the Committee as advocacy tools to promote States parties' follow-up to and implementation of recommendations relating to children and armed conflict.

Special rapporteurs and independent experts have also been highlighting concerns about children and armed conflict in their reports, and proactively advocated for the protection of children's rights, including during their field trips. The Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination has focused one of its reports on the recruitment of children by non-State armed groups, including mercenaries and private military and security companies,⁹² to name only one example. The Office of the SRSG CAAC has been cooperating very

⁹² A/HRC/39/49 and A/HRC/39/49/Corr.1.



close cooperation with all special rapporteurs and independent experts through the organization of joint events to raise awareness on specific aspects of the children and armed conflict agenda, the publication of joint press releases on the occasion of key international days, the contribution to reports and field trips and the sharing of information and best practices. In recent years, a very close cooperation has been established with the following thematic mandate holders, to name only a few: the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; and the Special Rapporteur on the right to education. Furthermore, a close collaboration has been established with country mandate holders, including the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Central African Republic, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

Throughout the 25 years of the implementation of the mandate, the SRSG CAAC has increasingly enhanced the partnership with United Nations entities that are directly involved in the implementation of the MRM in the field and that are integral part of CTFMRs in situations on the children and armed conflict agenda. In this regard, the partnership with UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs has been essential for the provision of data to inform the development of the reports produced by the Office of the SRSG CAAC. The collaboration and interdependence in order to monitor and report grave violations against children to the Security Council have led to an increase in United Nations entities involved in the implementation of the mandate, not only in the field, but also at headquarters level.

In May 2000, the Office of the SRSG CAAC convened, for the first time, the Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict, which at that time composed of UNICEF; the Department of Peacekeeping Operations; the Department of Political Affairs; the Office of Legal Affairs; the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); the United Nations Development Fund

for Women (UNIFEM); the Department for Disarmament Affairs; the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa; the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women; UNHCR; the United Nations Development Programme; and ILO.⁹³ Since then, the Task Force has evolved, including additional members, and it is currently composed of the following entities: UNICEF; the Department of Peace Operations; the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; ILO; OCHA; the Office for Disarmament Affairs; the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa; the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide; OHCHR; the Office of Legal Affairs; the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict; the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the United Nations Development Programme; UNHCR; the United Nations Population Fund; the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; and the World Health Organization. The Task Force usually meets twice at the principal level and twice at the technical level in the process of producing the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

In his report on children and armed conflict published in 2005, the Secretary-General noted that a Steering Committee of the Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict will be convened to undertake a regular review of overall progress in monitoring and reporting, focusing particularly on the implementation and functioning of the mechanism. The Steering Committee, which would meet at the level of principals twice a year and at the level of experts every month, would be composed of the following members of the Task Force: the Office of the SRSG CAAC, UNICEF, OCHA, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UNHCR and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.⁹⁴ As of September 2010, the Steering Committee was replaced by an MRM Technical Reference Group following the request of further technical guidance from the CTFMRs on the ground. The Technical Reference Group aims to:

- Serve as a platform for consultation and agreed guidance on technical issues pertaining to the development of working tools and the implementation of the MRM;
- Serve as a forum for multi-stakeholder review and input as appropriate to members' proposals for MRM strengthening on technical matters;
- Serve as a forum for organizing the implementation of inter-agency advocacy strategies around the prevention of grave violations against children.

The Technical Reference Group is co-chaired by the Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF. In addition, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs are considered core members of the Technical Reference Group for their role as Co-Chairs of CTFMRs in situations where a peacekeeping operation or a country-based special political mission, respectively, is present. Nevertheless, its terms of reference provide for the Technical Reference Group to be opened to other United Nations entities involved in the MRM and it may therefore be expanded as relevant. In 2014, the Technical Reference Group produced the Guidelines and Field Manual on the MRM on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, which serve as reference documents for child protection practitioners to implement the MRM in the field. Most recently, in October 2021, the Technical Reference Group published the "Consolidated Recommendations from the Regional Consultations on Children and Armed Conflict", which was the outcome of four regional consultations held in Asia, the Middle East, Central Africa and East Africa with CTFMRs, their equivalents in non-MRM situations, as well as the regional offices of relevant United Nations entities to discuss strategic and political engagement on the mandate and provide a forum to exchange on best practices and lessons learned in its implementation. The implementation of these recommendations will be monitored by the Technical Reference Group.

⁹³ A/59/695-S/2005/72, para. 92.

⁹⁴ A/59/695-S/2005/72, para. 95.



To strengthen the CTFMR members' ownership of the mandate and ensure that members can also use their participation and input in the monitoring and reporting, the SRSG CAAC undertook several consultations at the principal level to revitalize the Technical Reference Group. Such interventions resulted in policy recommendations and internal instructions to the field from United Nations agencies, such as the World Health Organization and UNHCR. To further assist collaboration and exchanging on challenges, best practices and lessons learned from the MRM, the Office of the SRSG CAAC teamed up with UNICEF headquarters to undertake, for the first time, a three-year project to bring together the Co-Chairs and senior Child Protection Advisers from situations in armed conflict to regional workshops, which also included a one-day meeting at the highest level with the regional representatives of United Nations entities while also bringing from New York representatives of the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. Over a period of three to four days, these regional workshops proved to be very successful at bringing together all relevant stakeholders at the global and regional level, as well as the Co-Chairs of CTFMRs who were able to exchange information and discuss common methods and common challenges in the pursuit of stronger monitoring, reporting, engagement and support to joint action plans, as applicable. Four regional workshops were conducted in Jordan, Kenya, Senegal and Thailand. The only Latin American situation, that of Colombia, was brought to share experiences in Senegal with counterparts of West and Central Africa. The project extended from 2018 to 2020, and its results and recommendations were published in 2021.

The SRSG CAAC also engages in inter-agency cooperation through established networks and groups mandated to improve coordination among United Nations entities and other international organizations on cross-cutting issues of particular relevance. Given that the recruitment and use of children is one of the worst forms of child labour, in 2021 the SRSG CAAC joined the Alliance 8.7, a global inclusive partnership to achieve target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, led by ILO. The same year, in order to join efforts to act and advocate against child trafficking in conflict settings, the Office of the SRSG CAAC became a member of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons.

Enhanced efforts by the SRSG CAAC for the reintegration of children released from armed groups and armed forces favour even broader coordination in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. Before the creation of the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, the Office of the SRSG CAAC had been a member of the Paris Principles Steering Group aimed at promoting reintegration standards and encouraging States to politically commit.

Other cooperation between the Office of the SRSG CAAC and other United Nations entities occurs on a constant basis throughout the year mostly for information exchange purposes, decisions to undertake joint projects or events, and the issuance of public statements. For example, the Office of the SRSG CAAC works closely with OCHA to ensure child protection concerns are also reflected in briefings to the Security Council's Informal Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.



More than 30 press releases and press statements per year, including:

2021

- Joint statement with EU High Representative Josep Borrell, to mark the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers (February 2021);
- Joint statement with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, to express serious concerns about the rapid degradation in the humanitarian situation in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique (March 2021);
- Joint statement with the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, to commemorate the Day of the African Child (June 2021);
- Joint statement with the League of Arab States and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, on preventing violations and violence against children in the Arab region (July 2021);
- Joint statement with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, to express grave concern over rising levels of sexual violence in Somalia (August 2021);
- Joint statement with UNICEF to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of the Machel report “Impact of armed conflict on children” (August 2021);
- Joint statement with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, to call the Taliban and relevant parties to uphold the rights of children (August 2021);
- Joint statement with UNICEF to launch the “Consolidated Recommendations from the Regional Consultations on Children and Armed Conflict” (October 2021);
- Joint statement with the United Nations Special Envoy for Myanmar and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, to call for the immediate protection of the rights of children (October 2021);
- Joint statement with the ILO Director-General and the CEO of War Child UK, to mark the United Nations International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour (November 2021).

2020

- Joint statement with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, deploring the continued reports of human rights abuses committed against civilians including women and children in the south-west and north-west regions of Cameroon (February 2020);
- Joint statement with the Global Partnership and Fund to End Violence against Children, calling for attention on the hidden crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, violence against children (April 2020);
- Joint statement with the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child; the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children; and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, calling for universal ratification of two optional protocols (Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography), which protect children from sale, sexual exploitation, and recruitment and use in hostilities (May 2020);
- Joint statement with the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, on the occasion of the Day of the African Child (June 2020).



2. Partnership with Member States

Considering that Member States bear the primary responsibility for protecting children and applying relevant international and local protection norms, discussions in New York, capitals or elsewhere with political and government leaders to convey that message and to seek their support have been central to the mandate. Member States thus constitute the first destination for action and the first line of response, ultimately playing a key role in ensuring an area of application of international standards and norms for the protection of children.

Systematic engagement and partnerships with Member States have thus been an essential aspect of the work of the Office of the Special Representative, in the context of frameworks and forums such as the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council, or with regional organizations and groupings or in bilateral contacts with Member States that are most actively engaged or affected.

Since the inception of the mandate, Member States have played a central role, not only by creating the mandate through General Assembly resolution 51/77, but also by providing tools to the mandate through subsequent Security Council resolutions. Beyond the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, Member States have been central in placing the issue on the international political, humanitarian and development agenda, including through the organization of the London and the Tokyo symposiums on children and armed conflict held in 1998, the ministerial conference of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on war-affected children held in Accra in 2000, or the International Conference on War-Affected Children hosted by the Government of Canada in Winnipeg in 2000, to name only a few. They have also played a crucial role in moving forward legal frameworks to protect conflict-affected children through the adoption of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction; the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, among others. A push by Member States to complement international obligations by voluntary commitments – such as the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles – has also been central to advancement in the agenda. Most recently, the efforts of the State of Qatar to institutionalize the International Day to Protect Education from Attack were successful and have raised public awareness on this vital issue. In all these processes, the Office of the SRSG CAAC as well as its partners were closely involved to ensure that the highest standards of child protection were put forward.

Member States have expressed strong support for the work of the SRSG CAAC since the beginning. They have been crucial in funding the activities of the Office solely through voluntary contributions when the mandate was created or later through a combination of assessed and voluntary contributions and the provision of Junior Professional Officers. Furthermore, within the first two years of its creation several Member States formed an informal support group in New York, “Friends of the Special Representative”, to provide support and advice to the Special Representative in developing the role and its activities. Today this group is known as the Group of Friends on children and armed conflict, and Groups have been established in New York, Geneva, Addis Ababa, Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

3. Partnership with regional and other organizations

Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations is critical to maintaining international peace and security, promoting and protecting human rights, and implementing the sustainable development agenda. These relationships have assumed even greater importance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which demands a collective, coordinated and unified response from all regions. The complexity of the global challenges we face today, which spare no country or region, demands cohesive, collective action and effective global-regional collaboration.⁹⁵ Regional, subregional and other international organizations play a central role in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts.

For example, the Security Council, in its resolution 2457 (2019), encouraged the United Nations and the African Union to strengthen their efforts to coordinate their engagement in a mutually supportive manner, across the range of possible responses to conflict – from prevention and mediation to peacekeeping and peacebuilding to post-conflict recovery and development. All elements of those are crucially relevant for the protection of children: from preventing violations through engagement, to ensuring that child protection concerns are included in mediation and peace processes, through to mainstreaming child protection in peacekeeping operations or supporting the reintegration of children.

Developing and advancing partnerships with regional and subregional organizations are central to the mandate, as highlighted by related General Assembly and Security Council resolutions covering children and armed conflict, and have been a priority to the SRSG CAAC.

Such partnerships, based on the principles of complementarity and comparative advantages, allow for strategic discussion on enhancing the protection of children through existing regional organs or committees, the exchange of information and the sharing of good practices and lessons learned. The partnerships foster coordination among Member States, including with a view to strengthening legislation and developing and implementing initiatives for the protection of children, and they help to address grave violations and other abuses against children that are the result of regional or cross-border conflict dynamics, thus preventing the further spread of violence affecting children.

Ultimately such cooperation builds on the global consensus to protect children and results in a strategic and sustainable approach to addressing violations of children's rights which is mindful of regional and national specificities. The United Nations and regional organizations share a deep commitment to an effective multilateral system, mindful that multilateralism is not only a matter of confronting shared threats, but also about seizing common opportunities.⁹⁶ In this regard, work on child protection builds on the existing political consensus on this issue and unites global, regional and national actors around concrete objectives, such as separating children from armed groups and armed forces, making child protection a priority in peace efforts, ensuring that perpetrators of grave violations are held accountable or funding programmes to provide the necessary assistance to children and reintegrate them into society.



Photo credit: © OSRSG CAAC/Fabienne Vinet

⁹⁵ A/75/345-S/2020/898, para. 105.

⁹⁶ A/75/345-S/2020/898, para. 107.



The Security Council, in resolution 2427 (2018), called on regional and subregional organizations and arrangements to mainstream child protection into their advocacy, policies, programmes and mission planning; train personnel and include child protection staff in their peacekeeping and field operations; establish dedicated child protection mechanisms; and develop regional and subregional prevention initiatives.

The Office of the SRSG CAAC builds partnerships with regional and subregional organizations, including by exchanging at high level on ways to develop concrete strategies to protect children and providing technical advice and implementing capacity-building activities. Information on children and armed conflict trends is shared regularly, through high-level briefings as well as exchanges at the technical level; joint advocacy and initiatives on child protection are conducted whenever possible.

Key partners for the Office are regional and subregional organizations in Africa, specifically the African Union and Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms, such as ECOWAS, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, as well as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. The Special Representative also frequently engages with the League of Arab States, based on a memorandum of understanding signed in 2014. Cooperation with the League of Arab States has led to, for example, the Office of the SRSG CAAC delivering a capacity-building session on the practical guidance for mediators to include elements for the protection of children in peace processes and other mediation efforts, which was delivered to the Arab network for women peace mediators in Cairo on 1 December 2021. Similarly, the exchanges with the African Union have been constant and enriching, leading to improved understanding of common measures and practices for the protection of children in armed conflict, including participation of the Office of the SRSG CAAC in relevant African Union initiatives and workshops on an annual basis as well as joint launches of campaigns such as the “ACT to protect” campaign.

Since the creation of the mandate, establishing a strong cooperation with the European Union and its institutions was a priority for the SRSG CAAC, in order to encourage them to make the protection of children affected by armed conflict a significant aspect of their political, development and humanitarian agenda. Throughout the years, Special Representatives have held regular exchanges with European Union high-level representatives and provided briefings to the Political and Security Committee, the Working Party on Human Rights, and several European Parliament committees and subcommittees. Moreover, multiple initiatives have been developed in collaboration with the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the European External Action Service, the European Parliament, and the African, Caribbean and Pacific States - European Union (ACP-EU) framework.

As a result of those collaborations, the European Parliament adopted in 1998 a resolution condemning the recruitment and use of children as soldiers. In 1999, key elements proposed by the Special Representative were endorsed by the ACP-EU Ministerial Negotiating Conference and have been incorporated into the Partnership Agreement signed in 2000 in Benin. In March 2000, the ACP-EU Joint Assembly adopted a comprehensive resolution on child soldiers. In 2003, as a result of collaborative efforts with the Office of the Special Representative, the European Union adopted and later updated in 2008 the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict. Subsequently, the European Union developed a checklist to integrate the protection of children affected by armed conflict into operations mandated through its Common Security and Defence Policy. In 2006, on the initiative of the European Union, a joint United Nations–European Union two-week pilot specialization course on “Child protection, monitoring and rehabilitation” that brought together child protection practitioners was convened to share and deepen expertise in support of important initiatives around the monitoring and reporting of grave child rights violations. Every second year, the Office of the Special Representative and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission have adopted a joint statement

on International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers (Red Hand Day). Furthermore, the Office of the SRSG CAAC, together with its partners, has provided several training sessions on child protection and the children and armed conflict mandate to European External Action Service staff.

At the end of 2018, to further strengthen this collaboration, the SRSG CAAC opened a United Nations Liaison Office for Children and Armed Conflict (Europe) in Brussels, tasked with enhancing cooperation with European Union institutions and member States, and relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United Nations Human Rights Council and other Geneva-based mechanisms and institutions, among others. As a result, collaboration between the SRSG CAAC and the European Union further increased in recent years around both geographic situations and different thematics such as prevention, mediation, reintegration, accountability and protection. In 2019, the SRSG CAAC organized her first regional launch of the “ACT to protect” campaign in Brussels at the European Parliament and signed a memorandum of understanding with the European Parliament to establish a framework of cooperation on children and armed conflict. The Liaison Office provided information on children and armed conflict for the European Union human rights dialogues and for members of the European Parliament, and closely followed discussions on and provided language proposals for European Union policy documents relevant to the children and armed conflict mandate, including the European Union Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, the European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child, the European Union’s Integrated Strategy in the Sahel, and the European Parliament resolution on children’s rights adopted on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Liaison Office also initiated and participated in several side events, raising awareness on the plight of conflict-affected children, and had regular meetings with members of the European External Action Service, European Commission cabinets and departments, as well as with Member States represented in the different Council of the European Union preparatory bodies. Finally, during the SRSG CAAC’s country visits, the Liaison Office facilitated meetings between the SRSG CAAC and the respective European Union delegation, as well as European Union Military Training Missions to enhance cooperation in the field. In addition, the Special Representative has also engaged with other organizations, such as the Andean Community, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.



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4. Partnership with civil society

The collaboration between the Office of the SRSG CAAC and civil society organizations is an essential element of the implementation of the mandate. Local and international NGOs with expertise on issues related to children and armed conflict have long been engaged in the protection of children in armed conflict, both in the field and at headquarters through key advocacy and programmatic activities. Specifically, NGOs provide information on grave violations, undertake research and advocacy and deliver services to children, including through vocational training and reintegration programmes.

Exchanges between the Office of the SRSG CAAC and NGOs take place throughout the year in the form of informal discussions and structured consultations, which include the meetings held twice a year between the SRSG CAAC herself and relevant NGOs at the headquarters level in connection with the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. Such consultations provide an opportunity for NGOs to formally address, directly with the SRSG CAAC priority areas and issues of particular concern in relation to the reporting period, which the SRSG CAAC may consider for inclusion in the annual report. Once the annual report of the Secretary-General is published, the SRSG CAAC prioritizes meeting with civil society to discuss the content of the annual report and answer possible questions.

Since 2017, the meetings of the Office of the SRSG CAAC with civil society have increased and been extended to other venues aside from New York. Regular meetings with civil society organizations are now taking place in Geneva and Brussels; upon travel of the SRSG CAAC to the field, meetings also occur in countries where a CTFMR is present. In some situations, NGOs are part of the CTFMRs and actively participate in the monitoring of grave violations. Nevertheless, the verification of cases is always carried out by the United Nations according to the MRM standards. Throughout the years, strong partnerships have emerged between the Office of the SRSG CAAC and an increasing number of NGOs, which have resulted in concrete outcomes for the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

It is important to note that without civil society partnerships, the implementation of the mandate both in the field and at headquarters would be impossible. From the role of NGOs in the MRM, the assistance for the development of action plans, the direct engagement with parties to conflict, their role in child protection programmatic response (including on the reintegration of children), the provision of public awareness and outreach, advocacy projects and campaigns, as well as special research studies undertaken by the Office of the SRSG CAAC, the work of civil society is crucial. In addition, NGOs often serve as early warning mechanisms in situations that are not on the children and armed conflict agenda and contribute to retaining the memory of commitments and actions long after a situation has left the agenda. Civil society is a multiplying force for the protection of children, and for the prevention of grave violations against them.

5. Partnership with academia

Establishing links with academic and research institutions to promote research and fill knowledge gaps on conflict-affected children has been an important aspect of the mandate since its creation. In 2002, after a proposal by the Special Representative, the Research Consortium for Children and Armed Conflict was established under the auspices of the New York-based Social Science Research Council, which brought together 19 academic and research institutions. In 2020, the Special Representative supported the creation of the first international academic network for the protection of children in armed conflict (Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflict), led by the University of Perugia, Italy, in cooperation with the Istituto di Studi Politici Internazionali "S. Pio V" and the International Institute of Humanitarian Law at San Remo, and promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy. Furthermore, a group of experienced academics will advise the SRSG CAAC on issues related to the

reintegration of children (Academic Advisory Group for Child Reintegration).

In addition, universities have a significant role to play in developing adequate academic curricula and training professionals who work on children's rights. The Office of the SRSG CAAC has thus supported the Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflict in setting up, in 2021, the Autumn School "Building competencies and awareness on the international protection of children, particularly girls, affected by armed conflict". Furthermore, with the support of the Government of Malta and in cooperation with the University of Malta, the Office of the SRSG CAAC is in the process of developing the "Virtual summer school on child protection and the prevention of grave violations against children in armed conflict".



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Consecutive Special Representatives have engaged with universities in public activities to raise awareness and mobilize support for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. Consecutive Special Representatives have also taken part in multiple policy workshops on children and armed conflict, organized by academic and research institutions. Regular interactions with research institutes, such as the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security, a formal institute at Dalhousie University, have been crucial to exchanging best practices on ways to protect conflict-affected children.



IV.

Looking ahead: the next 25 years of the mandate

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Considering the past 25 years and in recognition of the challenges and opportunities identified in this report, it is possible to identify some strategic initiatives and recommendations that can guide the way forward for the mandate. The following list includes those recommendations that are premised on the existing Security Council resolutions.

A. Strengthening the focus on prevention

Prevention entails strengthening the normative foundation of societies and mobilizing public opinion in order to create a social and political climate that is capable of impeding abuse against children.⁹⁷ General Assembly resolution 51/77, which facilitated the establishment of the mandate, underscored the “importance of preventive measures such as early warning systems, preventive diplomacy and education for peace to prevent conflicts and their negative impact on the enjoyment of the rights of the child”. Thus, furthering the implementation of this resolution could entail that the mandate strengthens its proactive engagements with parties to conflict, relying on CTFMRs and other early warning systems in situations not on the children and armed conflict agenda, and making sure that emerging crises are added quickly as situations of concern to allow the agenda to play an early warning role.

B. Strengthening advocacy and outreach

Advocacy is at the core of the mandate, and as the United Nations leading advocate for the protection of conflict-affected children, the Special Representative will continue to use her voice to amplify the voices of those most affected by wars: children. New forums to ensure that the voices of conflict-affected children can be heard will be developed, for example based on the outcomes of the Nairobi Process.

Collaboration with other entities, United Nations partners, civil society organizations or academia, including in the development of studies and research papers, will also provide opportunities for strengthened advocacy on specific issues. Additionally, more visually accessible analyses and use of MRM data are envisaged to further inform the overall advocacy efforts on the mandate, including with Member States.

Strengthening partnerships with non-United Nations actors such as regional and subregional organizations, civil society organizations and community leaders, media and Groups of Friends on children and armed conflict will be pursued to amplify advocacy efforts. The development of advocacy tools adaptable to contexts and parties to conflict, governments or the general public could support a more tailored approach to advocacy and communications, including through awareness-raising campaigns. Finally, increasing the involvement of the Office of the SRSG CAAC with global coalitions on issues of common interest, such as Alliance 8.7 to end child labour or the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, offers an opportunity to extend the reach of the mandate to new audiences.

⁹⁷ E/CN.4/1998/119.



C. Enhancing the monitoring and reporting mechanism

With the evolving context of armed conflicts, there is need to review the MRM to further strengthen it and ensure that it can be responsive to the changing needs, as this study has shown. Of note is the need to address cross-border monitoring and reporting, as appropriate, so that transnational grave violations against children are appropriately addressed. Enhancing the MRM will also include addressing the gender dimensions of violations. Further, the monitoring and reporting will need to be harmonized with other mandates, such as that of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and with its Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements (MARA), to ensure that there is a common system of information gathering where two mandates may overlap.

D. Delivering on improved reintegration of children

Reintegration programming needs to be prioritized for survivors of grave violations, and especially not fail to identify girls' experiences and their reintegration needs, as well as to address the challenges related to each specific geographical context. For example, it is of particular concern that in some situations, children must still have a release certificate as a precondition to receive assistance. These conditions prevent children who leave armed groups through informal processes accessing the services they need. As a result, these children are often forced to re-join the armed groups in order to be formally released, which clearly puts them at further risk.

The programming requires a long-term approach and adequate resourcing. Reintegration needs to address the cross-border dimensions of grave violations, such as cross-border abductions. This is in consonance with resolution 2427 (2018), in which the Security Council calls on Member States, United Nations entities and other relevant actors to include child protection provisions – especially those relating to the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or groups – into all peace negotiations, ceasefire and peace agreements, and their monitoring mechanisms. The Security Council further calls for children's rights and protection to be incorporated into conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery activities, as well as peacebuilding planning and strategies. It also urges action to include children's views in the design and implementation of such policies and programmes, where possible.

A formal and globally representative group of academics has been convened to research and write five papers in 2022. Members of the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers agreed that hearing the voices of and engaging with children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups to enhance programming will contribute to improving reintegration outcomes. Accordingly, the Nairobi Process has been established to bring together those children for their input and experience, to help inform future reintegration programming approaches. Designed as a stakeholder-led process, its primary objective is to facilitate consultation between children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups and provide them with a new platform for discussion and advocacy. The Nairobi Process will culminate in a symposium in Nairobi in 2022. Following up on a briefing paper on financing



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and funding, a project to establish the Financing Innovation Forum has been launched. As a first step, this one-year project will dive deeper into understanding the inner workings of current complex funding mechanisms that support child reintegration, which will form part of a published study. The second step will entail examining new, innovative or untapped sources to support programming for these children. This will include an assessment on partnering with the private sector, microfinancing, crowdsourcing or other sources for such activities, which will form the other part of the published study. The process will culminate in a convening of the Financing Innovation Forum in Washington, DC, to discuss the study and plan for next steps and pilot projects.

E. Strengthening collaboration with Member States and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

As a powerful tool in service of the mandate and the only subsidiary body of the Security Council dedicated to a protection issue, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict is a key enabler for global engagement and advocacy on children and armed conflict. In this regard, it is also a strong complement to the global advocacy of the SRSG CAAC. The Special Representative thus envisages further strengthening the collaboration with the Working Group.

The Working Group is key to ensuring that issues related to children and armed conflict are given all the necessary attention and included in the broader work of the Security Council when the body discusses country-specific or thematic issues of high relevance to the mandate. Moreover, country visits and country-specific conclusions are important tools to pursue and support United Nations engagement with governments and parties to conflict at the country level, and conclusions have often been used as advocacy road maps to support and enhance local dialogues by many CTFMRs.

More recently, a new practice has emerged with regular video teleconferences of the Working Group with the Co-Chairs of the CTFMRs or equivalents to CTFMRs which should be continued as they provide the Working Group with first-hand information on the situation of children in an interactive formula. When sequenced with adopted conclusions, a country-specific report and possibly a country visit, these provide a formidable opportunity for using different and complementary tools to maximize the impact of dialogue and advocacy with governments and parties to conflict. Therefore, the Working Group is a highly strategic instrument to support the mandate and enhance the protection of children globally.

Thus, the systematic mainstreaming of the work and decisions of the Working Group, such as the conclusions, in the bilateral relations of the Working Group members would be beneficial for the protection of children and would further enhance the mandate. In addition, and complementary to the Working Group, Groups of Friends on children and armed conflict in specific country situations have been established over the years to support the work of CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations. As of November 2021, there are 11 country-based Groups of Friends. These Groups have proved to be a key tool to supporting and enhancing the work of CTFMRs and multiplying the advocacy of the SRSG CAAC. They have been supporting CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations and facilitating their work and engagement, advocating with parties to conflict on specific issues, supporting fundraising for the implementation of action plans or other child protection activities, and discussing issues as they emerge in the situation.



F. Strengthening collaboration with regional bodies

In resolution 1379 (2001), the Security Council urged regional and subregional organizations and arrangements to consider establishing, within their secretariats, child protection mechanisms for the development and implementation of policies, activities and advocacy for the benefit of children affected by armed conflict, and to consider the views of children in the design and implementation of such policies and programmes, where possible. Some regional organizations have already strengthened their child protection components or are in the process of doing so. Enhancing partnerships with regional and other organizations provides enormous opportunities for the protection of conflict-affected children in all regions and will remain a priority for the SRSG CAAC. Early warning, joint advocacy, political engagement at high level, norm-setting, peacebuilding and peacekeeping, peacemaking and mediation, prevention coordination in cross-border dynamics, and exchange of best practices and lessons learned are all priority areas of engagement with regional organizations.

The SRSG CAAC will prioritize political engagement with the African Union to carry out joint advocacy and engagement with parties to conflict to prevent violations and raise awareness on the situation of children affected by armed conflict. In that regard, the future nomination of a Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission would deepen that cooperation. Working on prevention and supporting the efforts of African Regional Economic Commissions and Mechanisms towards strategies to prevent violations are a priority, as is support to African States that have expressed wishes to engage in more preventive measures to sustainably protect children. The use of the “ACT to protect” campaign would also be an essential tool. Joint work on mediation and integrating child protection concerns into the mediation efforts of the African Union and African Regional Economic Commissions and Mechanisms would be a priority. The Office of the SRSG CAAC is also keen, in cooperation with the Department of Peace Operations, to support African Peace Support Operations, as appropriate, to enhance their capacity in terms of child protection. Finally, joint work on early warning of situations as they emerge that could threaten children and analysing conflict dynamics would be beneficial for both organizations. Working closely with the African Union is beneficial to children and armed conflict on all



of these fronts, including in ensuring complementarity of actions for the better protection of violations against children and their prevention.

The SRSG CAAC will continue to strengthen cooperation with the European Union via her Liaison Office, including through the regular provision of background information and language proposals to discussions relevant to the children and armed conflict mandate, as well as of training sessions including to relevant staff of the European Parliament as foreseen in the memorandum of understanding between the Office of the Special Representative and the Parliament. To enhance joint advocacy and raise awareness about conflict-affected children, the Special Representative is encouraging European Union Member States to create a Brussels-based Group of Friends on children and armed conflict, like those that exist in New York and Geneva to the United Nations or in Addis Ababa to the African Union. The Special Representative is also keen to analyse, together with the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UNICEF, how cooperation on issues related to children and armed conflict can be strengthened on the ground, including in the area of child protection training to national counterparts. In this regard, a joint United Nations–European Union course, such as the one organized in 2006 and referred to in the section on the cooperation with the European Union, could be beneficial for both organizations.

G. Strengthening collaboration with accountability mechanisms

The aspiration to end impunity for grave violations committed against children in the context of armed conflict will need a collaborative effort with the existing accountability mechanisms. The precedent set when the SRSG CAAC acted as *amicus curiae* in the International Criminal Court proceedings is a good example, and SRSG CAAC will continue to strengthen collaboration with accountability mechanisms, including with regional accountability mechanisms such as the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the European Court of Human Rights. The SRSG CAAC will also continue to support national accountability mechanisms as relevant.

H. Strengthening collaboration with civil society organizations

Solidifying and further enhancing partnership with civil society organizations for the implementation of the mandate are priorities. In this regard, the Office of the SRSG CAAC will identify additional avenues to promote dialogue and exchanges with NGOs in view of addressing concerns on children affected by armed conflict in situations on the children and armed conflict agenda, and in other conflict situations that may arise.

The Office of the SRSG CAAC will continue to engage with NGOs for information-sharing, including women's groups that represent the particular needs of girls, while continuing to use the data and analysis transmitted through the MRM as the only source to inform the development of the reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, as mandated by the Security Council.

The Office of the SRSG CAAC envisages working more closely with NGOs to incorporate lessons learned and good practices to enhance its advocacy for the protection of all children in armed conflict and to facilitate its interactions with conflict-affected children through the good offices of the NGOs operating in situations of armed conflict.



I. Maintaining and reinforcing child protection capacity in United Nations missions and country teams

There has been a call through Security Council resolution 1261 (1999) to ensure that personnel involved in United Nations peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities have appropriate training on the protection, rights and welfare of children. Moreover, States and relevant international and regional organizations were urged to ensure that appropriate training would be included in their programmes for personnel involved in similar activities.⁹⁸

In two peacekeeping missions – the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) – child protection teams and units were retained and not consolidated with human rights components. These two situations, where the greatest number of monitors are pooled to service the MRM obligations, are some of the ones that have advanced furthest in the release of children, the development of various commitments with armed groups and the implementation of action plans with governmental actors. South Sudan, as well, was able to engage on the Comprehensive Action Plan with the government and armed groups in 2020. These two examples can demonstrate that a strong presence of child protection expertise on the ground can contribute to the improved protection of children in situations of armed conflict, and their example is thus envisaged to be adapted to other situations.

Strengthening child protection capacity requires regular engagement, including taking advantage of digital technology. Child protection training is also envisaged to be rolled out to members of armed forces. The mandate, in its proactive endeavours, can engage with troop and police contributing countries to integrate information on their responsibilities towards civilian communities, and in particular towards children, into their military programmes.

Finally, the SRSR CAAC intends to advocate for the inclusion of child protection experts in the offices of United Nations resident coordinators, as it would greatly assist in the identification of potential situations of concern.

J. Strengthening data analysis and information management capacity on CAAC

The nature of armed conflicts, and of actors directly and indirectly involved in them, has evolved throughout the years. In addition, emerging as well as existing areas of concern require further attention: the aggravating role of climate change; the impact of conflict on children with disabilities; the need for a better understanding of the gender dimension of grave violations (beyond the collection of sex-disaggregated data); the aggravating effect of poverty and inequalities; children on the move and in internally displaced and refugee settings; the challenges posed by the emergence of new technologies, such as the online recruitment of children; and the incidence of the proliferation and illicit traffic of arms as well as the impact of landmines, ERWs and IEDs on children in conflict and post-conflict situations, to name but a few. This list, however, is not exhaustive and new challenges may arise in the face of the evolving nature of conflict and its many dimensions. Crises such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated the need for flexibility and reactivity to unexpected and disruptive situations affecting the well-being of children.

⁹⁸ Security Council resolution 1261 (1999). This call was subsequently reiterated in Security Council resolutions 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1612 (2005), 2143 (2014), 2225 (2015), 2427 (2018) and 2601 (2021).

In this context, the ability to analyse and differentiate data is fundamental to proposing constructive actions to address these challenges. Conflict affects children in different ways, depending on age, gender and disability, with children facing different risks, having different needs and requiring different types of support. These differentiated protection challenges of boys and girls must be recognized and better captured to inform protection and prevention responses. To that end, data analysis and information management capacity will be strengthened. Enhanced data analysis and information management will also further inform advocacy efforts conducted by Office of the SRSG CAAC and its United Nations partners, and support national and regional entities engaged in the protection of conflict-affected children in developing or enhancing their capacities, including in the framework of mediation and prevention efforts.



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Moreover, the strengthening of data analysis will assist in reaching other goals such as the following.

Measuring impact

To overcome the multiple challenges facing child protection actors in contemporary situations of armed conflict, United Nations entities, including United Nations peacekeeping operations, recently piloted new methodologies and performance indicators to measure the realization of the child protection mandate and capture the impact of their work across all mission components (civilian, military and police). These evidence-based benchmarks focus on (a) how peacekeeping operations can better integrate responses to child protection threats in their own activities; (b) how to strengthen the protection of children through behavioural change of parties to conflict, thereby reflecting the exceptional access enjoyed by Child Protection Advisers and other in-mission child protection actors; (c) how to address support to the MRM as well as alternative forms of accountability targeting the commission of children and armed conflict violations; (d) how to highlight the importance of institutional reforms as part of an effective child protection mandate; and (e) how to provide for accessible, adequate and gender sensitive support to children, families and their communities. The initial findings of this new important initiative emphasize the importance of prioritizing approaches that are responsive to local needs and priorities, while at the same time reflecting potential constraints posed by resource availability, access and political will.

To continue capturing the impact of the child protection mandate in United Nations peacekeeping operations, a systematic roll out of performance indicators would provide child protection and peacekeeping stakeholders with these evidence-based benchmarks, against which to assess the impact of the child protection mandate and enable United Nations operations to capture the results of child protection-related activities with due consideration to children's participation.

Preserving and transferring knowledge, data and capacities

In the context of mission transitions, a smooth transfer of child protection knowledge, data and capacities to relevant successor entities is imperative to ensure the continuity of child protection work, and the retention of historical data and institutional memory. Preserving the gains made in preventing and responding to child protection concerns, in avoiding unauthorized access to sensitive information and



in mitigating potential risks to children, communities, partners and personnel further aligns with United Nations guidelines and policies on transitions in the context of mission drawdown or withdrawal. The transition of a United Nations mission also signals a major shift in the structure and functioning of a country's MRM. CTFMR partners and successor entities may face challenges, such as a limited child protection mandate or inadequate resources for an incoming special political mission, delayed arrival of the special political mission in the country, limited experience on the ground upon arrival and restricted access in the country. To mitigate these challenges, SRSG CAAC will work with CTFMR partners to explore, evaluate and adjust MRM roles, responsibilities, and structures. Child Protection Advisers should have the primary responsibility of ensuring the security, thorough preservation and timely transfer of child protection knowledge to relevant successor entities.



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Improving data analysis and implementation of roll out reintegration initiatives and initiatives on the inclusion of elements for the protection of children in peace processes and mediation efforts

The Analysis and Outreach Hub of the Office of the SRSG CAAC will (a) support and lead on certain aspects of the Office's reintegration efforts, working from the recommendations of the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers that the SRSG CAAC founded in 2018; (b) lead on the dissemination and application of the (Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict), and provide technical assistance as required to mediation processes; and (c) highlight the role of education in conflict and post-conflict efforts to assist children affected by war, and conduct outreach campaigns on this and other topics.

K. Building a platform for discussion of emerging paradigms

This study was developed in cooperation with Member States, United Nations entities and civil society organizations engaged in the implementation of the mandate. Assistance and input in discussion and analysis by all those involved have proved beneficial in this study, and perhaps this structure or a similar mix of Member States, United Nations entities and civil society organizations could generate a platform for discussion of emerging paradigms such as the following:

- ▶ How can the data from the MRM be better analysed and refined in order to contribute to early warning as well as the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals? Grave violations and trends in these grave violations are likely indicators of wider trends in insecurity and the emergence of conflict. For example, spikes in the recruitment and use of children may point towards a deteriorating security situation and possibly tactical and strategic military preparations by parties for conflict. How can the mandate continue to be relevant and its tools up to date? For example, the use of teargas, among other means, may not lead to "serious, permanent, disabling injury, scarring or mutilation to a child"; nevertheless, in more recent years there has been an increasing use of teargas during raids and demonstrations, and the relevance to the MRM definition of maiming developed in 2014 may need to

be updated. Similarly, the MRM definition of “use of children” refers to “the use of children by armed forces or armed groups in any capacity, including, but not limited to, children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies and collaborators. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities”.⁹⁹ In some situations, children may be providing support on a voluntary basis to parties to conflict in roles that fall under the definition of “use of children”, but neither the party to conflict nor the children or families concerned are aware of it as it may be culturally perceived as a legitimate practice.

- ▶ How can the mandate influence cultural and social perceptions in order to change behaviour for the protection of all children in armed conflict?
- ▶ How can a continuum of protection for children be ensured? Violence against children happens before and continues after the formal end of an armed conflict and is often linked to it. The data on grave violations, disaggregated by gender, age and type of violations, can usefully inform the programmatic response of the United Nations and other development actors.
- ▶ How can the mandate and its partners ensure that prevention measures are taken, and that governments, societies and communities are more resilient in the face of grave violations? Ultimately, child protection is fully functioning if the international community is able to prevent violations from taking place. Developing strategies to end all forms of violence against children in all settings, secure communities, schools and hospitals, for example, significantly contributes to preventing violations: child secure spaces in communities help mitigate the risks of abduction, sexual violence and other violence against children. Strong communities, with tools at their disposal to enhance child protection and with the support of United Nations and other humanitarian actors, can make a significant contribution to child protection.
- ▶ How can governments increase their prevention efforts to end all forms of violence against children, by taking a whole-of-government approach to child rights and focusing on grave violations which so dramatically undermine respect for these rights.
- ▶ How can we build better coalitions of child protection champions with regional organizations, Member States and civil society to act to protect children? While many actors are present and active in child protection, it is essential to reinforce coalitions to ensure that all actors pull in the same direction. The contribution of regional and subregional organizations to maintaining peace and security, mediating conflict and brokering peace, and promoting sustainable development is essential, and must be supported. As conflicts acquire more cross-border dimensions, it is ever more crucial that champion States are able to work with neighbouring States affected by armed conflict to end and prevent violations.
- ▶ How do we connect the efforts on ending and preventing grave violations against children to global trends that may point to political tensions and possibly conflicts, such as the climate emergency that is adversely affecting resources and livelihoods; the impact of globalization and inequality on local communities; the violations of human rights and the use of modern technology to incite violence, hate and racism; and the declining respect for international humanitarian law and the protection afforded to the least vulnerable?

It is in cooperation, commitment and perseverance that children are better served. It is with this resolve that SRSG CAAC will continue to serve, first and foremost, as representative of all the children who are used and abused in, for and by armed conflict.

⁹⁹ See www.mrmtools.org/1095_1125.htm.



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Relevant international laws, standards and principles on the protection of children in armed conflict

International humanitarian law

- ▶ Four Geneva Conventions relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts (1949)
- ▶ Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions (1977)
- ▶ Customary international humanitarian law

International human rights law

- ▶ Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000)
- ▶ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- ▶ Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951)
- ▶ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
- ▶ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- ▶ Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984)
- ▶ General Assembly resolutions on the rights of the child, including resolutions 51/77 and 52/107 and subsequent resolutions
- ▶ Regional human rights instruments, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990)
- ▶ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998)



- ▶ Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (ILO Convention No. 182) (1999)
- ▶ Customary international human rights law

Security Council resolutions

- ▶ Resolutions on children and armed conflict: 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011), 2068 (2012), 2143 (2014), 2225 (2015), 2427 (2018), 2601 (2021)
- ▶ Resolutions on women, peace and security: 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2331 (2016), 2467 (2019)
- ▶ Resolutions on youth, peace and security: 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018), 2535 (2020)

Principles and standards

- ▶ Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles) (2007)
- ▶ Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict (2014)
- ▶ Safe Schools Declaration (2015)
- ▶ Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (2017)



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