

## PRESS RELEASE

### **UN Security Council debate a unique opportunity to address violations of children's rights by armed groups**

**New York, March 24, 2015** – Tomorrow, for the first time, the United Nations (UN) Security Council will hold an Open Debate on the topic of armed non-State actors. The debate offers a unique opportunity to provide concrete and specific recommendations to end and prevent grave violations perpetrated against children by these groups.

The vast majority of parties, 51 out of 59, listed for grave violations against children in the [Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict](#) are armed non-State actors. Armed groups have a significant impact on civilians in situations of armed conflicts.

“Ending grave violations by armed groups represent a significant challenge and one that UN Member States, the UN, international NGOs and others must collectively work together to address,” said Eva Smets from [Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict](#). “The UN must scale up its efforts to engage with armed groups to promote compliance with international norms on the protection of children. Armed groups must also demonstrate their willingness to engage, and governments must facilitate access to those groups operating within their territory,” said Smets.

Humanitarian dialogue with armed groups can lead to concrete, time-bound action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children. For government security forces, the UN was able to set up a “[Children, Not Soldiers](#)” campaign, which focuses on ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children in seven countries (Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen) by 2016. To date, 22 parties, 14 of which are armed non-State actors, have signed action plans with the UN.

In situations where dialogue between the UN and armed groups is not possible, other measures may be more effective in achieving the goal of protecting children against grave violations. In these cases, governments and the UN should support complementary approaches and collaboration with child protection actors. Such measures may include unilateral commitments, public statements, and command orders.

Armed groups themselves also have a responsibility to engage with the UN and other actors

Tomorrow's Open Debate also offers the opportunity to lay the groundwork for an expansion of the UN Security Council's Children and Armed Conflict agenda. “Recent mass abductions of children in Iraq, Nigeria and Syria remind us of the horrific nature of this crime, but it is not a new feature of armed conflict,” said Smets. “The addition of abduction as criteria for including parties in the UN list of shame would be a step towards enhancing the international community's ability to protect children in armed conflict, and hold perpetrators to account.”

Since the 2006 Secretary-General annual report on children and armed conflict, nearly 90 percent of the cases of abduction are attributed to armed groups. Children are abducted for the purpose of exploitation, punishment, retaliation, or tactical advantages.

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**Background on abductions:**

In the September 2014 Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict, five Member States (Russia, Lithuania, Canada, Japan, and Portugal) called for the expansion of the triggers. A resolution adding abductions as the fifth “trigger” for inclusion of parties into the annexes of the annual report could happen as early as June 2015, under the Malaysian Presidency of the Security Council. The Security Council has established six grave violations against children, but only four have been designated as “triggers” for listing of perpetrators: recruitment and use of child soldiers, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and attacks on schools and hospitals. The other two violations, abductions and denial of humanitarian access, are currently not triggers.

**Background on Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict:**

Established in 2001, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (‘Watchlist’) is an international network of human rights and humanitarian non-governmental organizations striving to end violations against children in armed conflict and to guarantee their rights. As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national and international NGOs, enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we strategically collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflict to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children. Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a project of Tides Center, a non-profit public charity.

Website: [www.watchlist.org](http://www.watchlist.org)

Watchlist staff will be in attendance at the March 25<sup>th</sup> Open Debate and available for interviews. They will be live-tweeting from the Security Council chamber.

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