

Review of the June 2020 Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict

On June 23, 2020, the United Nations Security Council held its annual open debate on children and armed conflict (CAAC), under France’s presidency. At the debate, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC), Virginia Gamba, presented the Secretary-General’s annual report on children and armed conflict ([A/74/845-S/2020/525](#)), covering the period from January 1 to December 31, 2019. The debate marked the 15th anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1612 (2005), establishing the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (SCWG-CAAC). In addition to marking this milestone, the debate aimed to highlight the importance of education and vocational training to prevent the six grave violations against children in armed conflict and as central aspects of comprehensive reintegration for those formerly associated with armed forces or groups.

Given the Security Council’s remote [working methods](#), this year’s open debate was held via open virtual teleconference (VTC). Non-Council members were invited to submit written statements. In addition to the SRSG-CAAC, the Executive Director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore, briefed the Council, along with 15-year-old Mariam, the invited civil society speaker and a member of the Children’s Parliament of Mali. Mariam is the first girl-child to address the Security Council in an open debate. Following the debate, the Security Council issued a [press statement](#) condemning the scale and nature of all violations and abuses against children affected by armed conflict and expressing its concern over the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the situation of these children.

A total of 73 statements were submitted, representing 93 Member States, the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine, and the Liaison Office of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In addition to the 12 statements delivered on behalf of all 15 Council members, there were 61 written statements by non-Council members.

The tone of the debate was **largely positive, celebrating progress achieved by the MRM and the SCWG-CAAC over the past 15 years**, including the release of 155,000 children from armed forces and groups, and reaffirming support for the CAAC agenda. Many statements expressed **concern at the persistently high levels of grave violations committed against children in conflict and the lack of accountability for perpetrators**. More than half of interventions (42) acknowledged the **potentially devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in exacerbating vulnerabilities of children in armed conflicts**, with ten highlighting the particular obstacles the crisis poses for implementation of the CAAC agenda, including monitoring, reporting, and response to grave violations.

Several delegations raised the crucial importance of maintaining the independence and impartiality of the Secretary-General’s annexed list of perpetrators, stressing the need for decisions to be based on objective criteria. **Recalling the criteria set forth in the 2010 annual report on children and armed conflict ([A/64/742-S/2010/181](#))**, several cautioned against the **premature de-listing of warring parties who continue to violate children’s rights** – echoing criticisms raised by 25 non-governmental organizations in a recent [open letter](#) to Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Other prominent themes in this year’s open debate included the need for **dedicated child protection capacity in UN missions, calls for child protection considerations in efforts to build**

and sustain peace, and education as a key part of comprehensive reintegration programs for children separated from armed forces and groups.

The following analytical summary provides an overview of statements and key themes highlighted at the open debate, as well as an analysis of statements that pertain to Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict's [key recommendations](#) to the UN Security Council and Member States.

Analytical Summary of the June 2020 Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict

Participation:

- 2 UN representatives addressed the Council: Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director
- 1 civil society representative addressed the Council: Ms. Mariam, a 15-year-old representative of the Children's Parliament of Mali
- 73 interventions were made either virtually or through the submission of written statements. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines spoke on behalf of the A3+1 (Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, and Tunisia), Norway submitted a joint statement on behalf of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), Canada on behalf of the 45 members of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, the European Union delegation on behalf of its 27 members, and a group of endorsers of the Safe Schools Declaration submitted a joint statement (Argentina, Nigeria, Norway, and Spain). Together, these delegations represented 93 Member States, the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine, and the Liaison Office of NATO.
 - Generally, statements celebrated progress achieved in implementing the UN's CAAC agenda over the past 15 years, while expressing concern at persistently high levels of violations, lack of accountability, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - 12 speakers intervened in the VTC, representing all 15 Security Council members; 61 additional written statements were submitted to the debate.
 - 3 governments whose armed forces are currently listed for grave violations against children submitted written statements (Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Yemen).
- Analysis of written statements was based on a draft version of the UN meeting record (to be issued as S/2020/594). At the time of writing, the official meeting record was not yet available on the UN's Official Document System. Additional Member States may have issued written statements that were not submitted for inclusion in the official meeting record by the deadline.

Themes in Statements:

Concern regarding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children in armed conflict

- 42 statements¹ recognized the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in exacerbating existing vulnerabilities of children in armed conflict.
 - 13 statements² called for pandemic response efforts to take into consideration the rights and needs of children.
 - 8 statements³ called for unimpeded humanitarian access to facilitate the COVID-19 response.

¹ Andorra, Angola, Armenia, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, European Union, Germany, Greece, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Uruguay

² Canada, China, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), European Union, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nepal, Poland, Republic of Korea, Turkey, Uruguay

³ Armenia, El Salvador, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), Japan, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Switzerland

- 10 statements⁴ recognized the specific impact of pandemic restrictions on the implementation of the CAAC agenda, including monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children, the provision of reintegration programming, and sexual violence response.

Accountability and the need to end impunity

- 27 statements⁵ raised the importance of accountability and called for an end to impunity for perpetrators who violate children’s rights in armed conflict.
 - 10 statements⁶ recognized the role of international justice mechanisms, including specific references to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Need for dedicated child protection capacity in UN peacekeeping and political missions

- 23 statements⁷ called for the prioritization of child protection in UN peacekeeping and political missions.
 - 14 statements⁸ recognized the critical role played by dedicated child protection advisers in delivering on child protection mandates.
 - 10 statements⁹ called for sufficient resources (human, financial, and/or operational) and capacity to fully deliver on child protection mandates.

Support for the independence and impartiality of the listing mechanism and a credible, accurate list of perpetrators based on objective criteria

- 18 statements¹⁰ highlighted the critical need to ensure that the Secretary-General’s annexed list of perpetrators remains credible, accurate, and based on objective criteria that is consistently applied across country situations.
 - 4 statements¹¹ asked for “clarification,” “review,” or an “independent, objective, and transparent assessment” into the Secretary-General’s approach to his decisions on the listing and de-listing of parties from the report’s annexes.
 - 5 statements¹² recalled the specific criteria for listing and de-listing set out in the Secretary-General’s 2010 annual report (A/64/742-S/2010/181).

⁴ Chile, El Salvador, Estonia, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, San Marino, United Kingdom

⁵ Angola, Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Estonia, European Union, Fiji, Germany, Greece, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), India, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Peru, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Safe Schools Declaration Endorsing Group (Argentina, Nigeria, Norway, Spain), Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay

⁶ Austria, Costa Rica, Estonia, European Union, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), Malta, Poland, Safe Schools Declaration Endorsing Group (Argentina, Nigeria, Norway, Spain), Uruguay

⁷ A3+1 (Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia), Angola, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Dominican Republic, Estonia, European Union, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), Guatemala, India, Italy, Jordan, Luxembourg, Mexico, Poland, Republic of Korea, Safe Schools Declaration Endorsing Group (Argentina, Nigeria, Norway, Spain), Thailand, United Kingdom, Uruguay

⁸ Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 member), India, Italy, Jordan, Mexico, Poland, Republic of Korea, Uruguay

⁹ Austria, Dominican Republic, Estonia, European Union, Guatemala, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), India, Italy, Republic of Korea

¹⁰ Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Estonia, European Union, France, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Qatar, Safe Schools Declaration Endorsing Group (Argentina, Nigeria, Norway, Spain), Switzerland, United Kingdom, Uruguay

¹¹ Chile, Germany, Luxembourg, United Kingdom

¹² Austria, Belgium, Chile, Estonia, United Kingdom

- 3 statements¹³ reiterated that signing an action plan alone is not sufficient grounds for de-listing a perpetrator from the annexes of the annual report.
- 3 statements¹⁴ raised concerns regarding the pre-mature removal from this year's annexes of parties to conflict that continue to commit grave violations (in particular, the Tatmadaw for recruitment and use in Myanmar and the Saudi Arabia-led coalition for violations in Yemen).

Call for child protection to be considered in peace processes

- 18 statements¹⁵ called for the protection and rights of children impacted by armed conflict to be considered in efforts to build and sustain peace.
 - 11 delegations¹⁶ specifically highlighted the [Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict](#).

Other notable themes included the following:

COVID-19 global ceasefire

- 24 statements¹⁷ expressed support for the Secretary-General's March 23 call for a global ceasefire in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Call to endorse international legal and normative frameworks for the protection of children

- 23 statements¹⁸ urged others to endorse at least one of the following key legal or normative frameworks on child protection:
 - The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the involvement of children in armed conflicts: 12 statements¹⁹
 - The Paris Principles and Commitments: 11 statements²⁰
 - The Vancouver Principles: 12 statements²¹

¹³ Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Safe Schools Declaration Endorsing Group (Argentina, Nigeria, Norway, Spain)

¹⁴ Bangladesh, Germany, Luxembourg

¹⁵ A3+1 (Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia), Afghanistan, Angola, Argentina, Belgium, China, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, European Union, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), Italy, Mexico, Nepal, Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden), Philippines, Portugal, Switzerland, Thailand

¹⁶ Belgium, Dominican Republic, European Union, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), Italy, Mexico, Nepal, Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Portugal, Switzerland, Thailand

¹⁷ Afghanistan, Argentina, Armenia, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Estonia, Georgia, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), Guatemala, Indonesia, Japan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Malta, Peru, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom

¹⁸ Argentina, Austria, Canada, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, European Union, France, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Portugal, San Marino, Safe Schools Declaration Endorsing Group (Argentina, Nigeria, Norway, Spain), Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Uruguay

¹⁹ Austria, Dominican Republic, Estonia, European Union, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), Italy, Mexico, Portugal, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Uruguay

²⁰ Austria, Dominican Republic, France, European Union, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), Italy, Luxembourg, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Uruguay

²¹ Austria, Canada, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, European Union, Group of Friends of CAAC (45 members), Italy, Luxembourg, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Uruguay

- The Safe Schools Declaration: 17 statements²²

The treatment of children primarily as victims and concern over the detention of children

- 11 statements²³ recalled that children associated with armed forces or groups are to be treated primarily as victims and/or expressed concern that children are detained for such association.
- 8 statements²⁴ called for comprehensive reintegration support to be provided for such children.

²² Argentina, Austria, Dominican Republic, Estonia, European Union, Germany, Group of Friends (45 members), Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Safe Schools Endorsing Group (Argentina, Nigeria, Norway, Spain), Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Uruguay

²³ A3+1 (Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia), Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Slovakia, Switzerland, Uruguay

²⁴ A3+1 (Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia), Angola, Argentina, Belgium, Malta, Slovakia, Turkey, Uruguay

Annex I: Overview of Statements in Comparison to Watchlist and Its Partners' Messages

Security Council statements in order of delivery (12 statements representing 15 Member States): Belgium, Viet Nam, Dominican Republic, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines on behalf of the A3+1 (Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia), Germany, Estonia, United Kingdom, United States, China, Indonesia, Russia, France

Individual statements submitted in writing: Afghanistan, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Fiji, Georgia, Greece, Guatemala, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, the NATO, Pakistan, the Observer State of Palestine, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Yemen

Analysis of written statements was based on a draft version of the UN meeting record (to be issued as S/2020/594) as compared to Watchlist's [June 2020 Special Bulletin Recommendations](#). At the time of writing, the official meeting record was not yet available on the UN's Official Document System. Additional Member States may have issued written statements that were not submitted for inclusion in the official meeting record by the deadline.

* Joint statements:

- Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends (45 members: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Slovenia, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Uruguay)
- The European Union on behalf of its 27 members (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden)
- Norway on behalf of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden)
- Group of endorsers of the Safe Schools Declaration (Argentina, Nigeria, Norway, Spain)

Speaker	Support for the independence and impartiality of the listing mechanism and an accurate, credible list of perpetrators based on objective criteria	Concern at high levels of children killed and maimed; call for respect for IHL	Call for end to use of explosive weapons in populated areas	Call for greater accountability for perpetrators of grave violations against children	Call for the ratification of OPAC	Call for endorsement of the Paris Principles	Call for endorsement of the Vancouver Principles	Call for endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration	Call for systematic follow-up to SCWG-CAAC conclusions; full use of toolkit; better coordination with regional Groups of Friends	Call for dedicated CP capacity in peace/special political missions	Concern about impact of COVID-19 on children; call for response efforts to prioritize needs of children, including access to monitor, report, & respond to violations and provide humanitarian assistance	Treatment of children primarily as victims and in line with international juvenile justice standards; timely release and transfer to civilian CP actors	Child protection in peace processes
Belgium	X								X	X		X	X
Viet Nam													
Dominican Republic	X			X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Saint Vincent & the Grenadines (for A3 +1)										X		X	X
Germany	X	X	X	X				X		X	X	X	
Estonia	X	X		X	X			X	X	X	X		
United Kingdom	X			X				X	X	X	X		
United States				X									
China											X		X
Indonesia											X		
Russia													
France	X					X			X				
European Union*	X			X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Group of Friends of CAAC*				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X

Nordic Countries*	X			X				X					X
SSD Endorser Group*	X			X				X		X			
NATO													
Afghanistan		X											X
Andorra											X		
Angola				X						X	X		X
Argentina		X						X		X			X
Armenia		X									X		
Austria	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	
Azerbaijan													
Bahrain													
Bangladesh		X											
Brazil												X	
Canada	X						X		X	X	X		
Chile	X			X							X		
Colombia												X	
Costa Rica	X			X							X		
Ecuador											X		
El Salvador							X				X		X
Ethiopia		X											
Fiji				X									
Georgia													
Greece				X							X		
Guatemala		X								X			
India				X						X	X		
Ireland			X				X						
Italy					X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Japan											X		
Jordan										X			
Kyrgyz Republic											X		
Lebanon											X		

Liechtenstein	X										X		
Luxembourg	X					X	X	X		X	X		
Malta		X		X							X		
Mexico				X	X					X	X		X
Morocco													
Myanmar											X		
Namibia				X									
Nepal											X		X
Pakistan											X		
Palestine (Observer Mission)													
Peru				X							X		
Philippines											X		X
Poland				X						X	X		
Portugal					X						X	X	X
Qatar	X			X							X		
Republic of Korea				X						X	X		
San Marino					X	X	X				X		
Saudi Arabia													
Slovakia				X	X	X	X	X				X	
Slovenia				X	X	X	X	X			X		
Sri Lanka													
Switzerland	X							X			X	X	X
Thailand										X	X		X
Turkey											X		
Ukraine		X		X									
United Arab Emirates											X		
Uruguay	X			X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Yemen													
TOTAL	18	11	3	27	12	11	12	17	6	23	42	11	18