

Children and Armed Conflict

Recommendations to the Security Council

Monthly Update:
June 2021

ISRAEL/OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory is a situation of concern in the Secretary-General's (SG) 2020 annual report on children and armed conflict (CAAC). Renewed violence erupted on May 10, ending after 11 days with a [ceasefire](#). Between May 10 and 21, at least [65](#) Palestinian children were reportedly killed and an additional 540 injured, and two Israeli children were reportedly killed and 60 injured. Civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip also incurred serious damage, including damage to at least 20 health facilities and 50 percent of the water network, and electricity output in Gaza fell by around 60 percent. Education facilities were also reportedly damaged, including at least 50 facilities in Gaza and three schools in Israel. Nearly [30,000](#) children were displaced and 58 UNRWA schools were used as emergency shelters. On May 12, Special Representative Virginia Gamba [called](#) on all parties to put in place concrete measures to better protect children, schools, and hospitals from the effects of violence. Addressing the UN General Assembly on May 20, SG António Guterres [described](#) the lives of children in Gaza as a "hell on earth" and called for rapid and unhindered access for humanitarian aid. **The Security Council should:**

- **Demand that all parties uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights law (IHRL)**, taking all feasible precautions to avoid, and in any event minimize, harm to civilians and civilian objects, including objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, as per SCR 2573 (2021);
- Call for all parties to **facilitate the safe, rapid, and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to all civilians in need**, including children;
- **Demand accountability for serious violations of international law**, including IHL and IHRL, as per SCR 2573 (2021), and call for all parties to continue to abide by the ceasefire.

[There is no designated lead country on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.](#)

MALI

Three armed groups are listed in the annexes of the SG's 2020 annual report on CAAC for recruitment and use and rape and other forms of sexual violence. Additionally, Platform, including affiliated groups, is listed for recruitment and use. MINUSMA's mandate is up for renewal in June, pursuant to SCR 2531 (2020). According to the SG's latest periodic report on Mali ([S/2021/299](#)), the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) verified 236 grave violations, including recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and sexual violence, in the first quarter of 2021. Eighty-nine children were separated from armed groups during the reporting period, and 1,230 schools were closed due to insecurity as of December 2020. **The Security Council should:**

- **Renew MINUSMA's child protection mandate**, reinforcing the existing capacity of the Child Protection Unit, and ensuring the child protection adviser's direct access to senior mission leadership and political and operational space to engage with all parties to conflict, including non-State armed groups; **ensure distinct budget lines for child protection**; call for the **protection of children's rights to be taken into account in the implementation of the peace agreement**, in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes, and in security sector reform;
- Urge the Government to **strengthen the legal framework on child protection and reinforce efforts to hold perpetrators of grave violations accountable**, including by finalizing the revision of the Child Protection Code and conducting timely and impartial investigations and prosecutions; ensure provision of comprehensive, gender-sensitive, and age-appropriate response for child survivors;
- Urge all Government and international actors to **ensure that counterterrorism operations fully uphold obligations under IHL and IHRL**, and call for continued and full implementation of the 2013 handover protocol, including for children allegedly associated with armed groups designated as terrorist, treating children primarily as victims, prioritizing their reintegration, and considering non-judicial measures as alternatives to prosecution and detention, as guided by the Paris Principles;
- Call on all parties to **immediately cease attacks on schools and education personnel** and urge the Government to continue to uphold its commitments under the Safe Schools Declaration;
- Call on all parties to **swiftly and fully implement the recommendations of the SCWG-CAAC elaborated in its third [conclusions](#)** on children and armed conflict in Mali.

[France](#) is the lead country on Mali. [Mexico](#) chairs the 2374 Sanctions Committee.

Situations involving parties listed for grave violations against children:

Afghanistan
Central African Republic
Colombia
Democratic Republic of Congo
Iraq
Mali
Myanmar
Somalia
South Sudan
Sudan
Syria
Yemen

For resolution language on Children and Armed Conflict, download the Children and Armed Conflict smartphone app from Watchlist, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland, available on iPhone, iPad, Android, and the web!



OPEN DEBATE ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

In June, the Security Council will hold its annual open debate on CAAC. See Watchlist's [Special Update](#) for targeted recommendations.

Recommendations to the Working Group

In February, the Working Group received the SG's sixth report on children and armed conflict in Myanmar ([S/2020/1243](#)). For targeted recommendations, see [Watchlist's February 2021 CAAC Monthly Update](#).

SYRIA

In May, the Working Group received the SG's third report on children and armed conflict in Syria ([S/2021/398](#)), covering the period between July 1, 2018, and June 30, 2020. During the reporting period, the CTFMR verified 4,724 grave violations affecting at least 4,474 children. Recruitment and use of children was widespread and systematic, and 98 percent of affected children were used in combat roles. Children continued to be detained for actual or alleged association with armed forces or groups, often in overcrowded conditions, with limited or no access to medical services, unable to contact relatives, and deprived of due process. Of the 65,400 individuals still held at Al-Hol and Al-Roj, 94 percent are women and children. During the reporting period, 1,557 children (847 boys, 356 girls, 354 sex unconfirmed) were killed and 1,160 maimed (754 boys, 211 girls, 195 sex unconfirmed), with airstrikes accounting for 36 percent of the child casualties. Explosive remnants of war and indiscriminate ground shelling of civilian-populated areas were also leading causes of child casualties. The CTFMR verified 371 attacks on schools, medical facilities, and protected persons, 311 of which were attributed to Syrian Government and pro-Government forces. Of the total incidents, nearly 60 percent involved airstrikes. The CTFMR also verified 137 incidents of denial of humanitarian access and an unprecedented trend of attacks on water facilities, impacting water access for over 700,000 people. All but one of the 46 attacks on water facilities were attributed to Syrian Government and pro-Government forces. **The Working Group should:**

- Strongly condemning the scale, severity, and recurrence of grave violations against children in Syria, **demand that all parties uphold their obligations under IHL and IHRL**, taking concrete measures to prevent, and in any case minimize, child casualties, and **call for immediate and concrete steps to hold all perpetrators accountable**;
- Call on all parties to **immediately end all recruitment and use of children and release all children from their ranks**; urge all listed parties, including Syrian Government forces, to **develop and sign action plans to end and prevent violations against children**, and call on the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to promptly and fully implement their action plan;
- Recalling that **children associated with armed groups should be treated primarily as victims**, including those children actually or allegedly associated with groups designated as terrorist and those children who may have committed crimes; **their reintegration should be prioritized in line with international juvenile justice standards**; and detention of children should only be used as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;
- Urge Member States to **facilitate the return of their nationals, including children of their nationals, held for their or their family members' actual or alleged association with ISIL**, following individual, rights-based needs assessments, provide reintegration support in line with international law and standards, prioritizing the child's best interests, and prevent children from becoming stateless;
- Call on all parties to **take immediate and specific measures to end and prevent rape and other forms of sexual violence against children** and to ensure the provision of comprehensive, gender-sensitive, and age-appropriate response and protection for child survivors;
- Call on all parties to **immediately cease attacks or threats against schools, medical facilities and transport, their personnel, and other civilian objects**; and urge the Government of Syria to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and to ensure attacks on these institutions and their personnel are investigated and those responsible duly prosecuted;
- Urge the Security Council to **urgently renew cross-border access** through Bab al-Hawa for at least 12 months to ensure the UN cross-border response into Northwest Syria continues, and **urgently address ongoing challenges to the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Northeast and Northwest Syria** following removal of Al Yarubiyah and Bab al-Salam crossing points in 2020.

NGO RESOURCES

Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace, and Security, [Podcast: Security Sector Engagement in Preventing the Recruitment and Use of Children](#), May 28, 2021

Human Rights Watch, [Ethiopia: Tigray Schools Occupied, Looted](#), May 28, 2021

Save the Children, [Hearing the Voices of Children in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique](#), May 20, 2021

Save the Children, [Yemen: Tens of Thousands of Children Denied Access to Education After a Single Month of Attacks on Schools](#), May 17, 2021

Watchlist et al., [Joint Open Letter to Secretary-General Guterres Calling for a Complete and Accurate List of Perpetrators](#), May 12, 2021

[Civil Society Statement on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict](#), May 11, 2021

Human Rights Watch, [Killing Schoolgirls in Afghanistan](#), May 10, 2021

Action on Armed Violence, [40 Percent of All Civilian Casualties from Airstrikes in Afghanistan in the Last Five Years Were Children](#), May 6, 2021

Presidency of the Security Council for June: Estonia

Party to Geneva Conventions I-IV, Additional Protocols I-III, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Rome Statute of the ICC, and ILO Convention 182. Has endorsed the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Vancouver Principles, and the Safe Schools Declaration.