

Review of the July 2022 Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict

On July 19, 2022, the United Nations Security Council held its annual open debate on children and armed conflict (CAAC) under Brazil's presidency. At the open debate, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC) Virginia Gamba presented the Secretary-General's (SG) annual report on CAAC ([A/76/871-S/2022/493](#)), covering the period from January 1 to December 31, 2021. The open debate offered an opportunity for UN Member States to discuss the implementation of the CAAC agenda, with a particular focus on three topics: (i) protection of refugee, internally displaced, and stateless children; (ii) abduction of children and its differentiated impacts on girls and boys; and (iii) reintegration of children and peacebuilding.

For the first time since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Security Council convened the annual CAAC open debate in person. In addition to the SRSG-CAAC, briefers included the Executive Director of UNICEF Catherine Russell and Patrick Kumi, a South Sudanese youth activist who was selected as the civil society briefer.

The debate featured 74 interventions, representing 105 Member States and the Observer State of Palestine.¹ Joint statements were delivered on behalf of the European Union (EU), the Group of Friends of CAAC, the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and the Nordic countries. The Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil H.E. Ambassador Fernando Simas Magalhães chaired the debate.

Member States expressed concern about the persistently high numbers of grave violations against children documented in the SG's annual report, including the 20 percent increase in cases of abductions and sexual violence against children. The need to **end impunity, hold perpetrators accountable, and increase compliance with international law** featured prominently in statements. Member States encouraged those who have not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) and to endorse and implement the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Safe Schools Declaration, and the Vancouver Principles.

Over 30 statements raised concerns about the impact of the war in Ukraine on children, with 27 of those statements explicitly citing Russia's responsibility for violations of international law in Ukraine. Member States welcomed the SG's decision to designate **Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Ukraine**, as situations of concern with immediate effect, as well as his call for enhanced monitoring capacity in the Central Sahel region. Member States also highlighted child protection concerns in other specific armed conflict situations, particularly Afghanistan, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Myanmar, Syria, and Yemen.

Following the adoption of Security Council Resolution (SCR) 2601 (2021), 31 Member States called for action to protect children's right to education during armed conflict. Twenty statements called for measures to **prevent and respond to attacks on schools and education facilities** with five Member States raising particular **concerns about the military use of schools**. In line with SCR 2601, Member States stressed the importance of providing

¹ See Annex I for a full list of statements and joint statements.

education that is inclusive for girls, refugee and displaced children, and children with disabilities. Eleven statements **condemned restrictions placed on girls' access to education in Afghanistan**.

Recalling that children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups (**CAAFAG**) **should be treated primarily as victims of violations of international law, 27 statements called for prioritizing, strengthening, and increasing funding for reintegration** of these children. Member States also raised the need to **provide adequate financial support and operational capacity to those engaged in implementing the CAAC agenda**, including resources for the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), the Office of the SRSG-CAAC, UNICEF, and civil society. Ten statements echoed the SG's call for **child protection mandates and capacity to be included in all relevant UN peacekeeping and special political mission mandates**.

Consistent with recent years, several delegations raised the crucial importance of **maintaining the independence and impartiality of the CAAC mandate, stressing that the annexed list of perpetrators in the SG's annual report must be evidence-based, with listing and delisting decisions based on transparent, objective criteria**. Thirteen statements (representing 69 Member States and the EU delegation) echoed concerns raised by 18 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in a May 2022 [open letter](#) to SG António Guterres about the annual CAAC report. Three Member States expressed disappointment with specific listing decisions, namely, the movement of Syrian Government Forces from Section A to B and the non-listing of Israeli Government Forces.

Other prominent themes in this year's debate included **calls to integrate child protection in efforts to build and sustain peace, including through meaningful opportunities for children and youth to participate in these processes; the denial of humanitarian access for children; and the impact of the use of explosive weapons on children**.

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 non-Council Member States.

Analytical Summary of the July 2022 Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict

Participation:

- Two UN representatives addressed the Security Council: UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba; UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell.
- One civil society representative addressed the Council: Mr. Patrick Kumi, a South Sudanese youth advocate, founder of a refugee youth-led community organization in Uganda, and former child soldier.
- 74 total interventions. Canada spoke on behalf of the 49 members of the Group of Friends of CAAC. The EU delegation gave a statement on behalf of its 27 members, as well as EU candidate countries (Albania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Ukraine), while Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Monaco, and San Marino also aligned themselves with the EU statement. Denmark spoke on behalf of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). Botswana delivered a statement on behalf of the 56 members of the Group of Friends of the R2P. In total, 105 Member States and the Observer State of Palestine were represented in statements during the debate.
 - Three Member States whose armed forces are currently listed for grave violations against children made statements in their national capacity (Iraq, Myanmar, and Syria).
- This analysis is based on the provisional UN meeting record ([S/PV.9096](#), [S/PV.9096 Resumption](#)).

Themes in Statements:

Accountability and compliance with international law

- 51 statements² raised the importance of accountability, ending impunity for violations of children's rights in armed conflict, and ensuring compliance with international legal obligations, including international humanitarian law, human rights law, and/or refugee law.
- 16 statements³ welcomed and encouraged concrete action to end and prevent grave violations against children, including engagement by parties to conflict with the UN to develop and implement action plans.

The war in Ukraine and new situations of concern

- 32 statements⁴ highlighted child protection concerns in Ukraine.

² Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Czechia, Estonia, Ethiopia, EU, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Group of Friends of the R2P (55 Member States and the EU), India, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Morocco, Myanmar, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Norway, Observer State of Palestine, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay

³ Albania, Australia, Brazil, China, France, Ghana, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, Spain

⁴ Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czechia, Estonia, EU, France, Georgia, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Guatemala, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States

- 27 statements⁵ specifically emphasized Russia’s responsibility for violations of international law in Ukraine, including grave violations against children.
- Nine statements⁶ expressed concerns regarding reports of forced deportations of Ukrainian children to Russia.
- 21 statements⁷ took note of or welcomed the addition of new situations of concern in this year’s annual report.

Access to education for children affected by armed conflict

- 31 statements⁸ raised the importance of protecting the right to education for children affected by armed conflict.
 - 22 statements⁹ highlighted the need to ensure access to education is inclusive for girls, refugee and displaced children, and/or children with disabilities.
- 20 statements¹⁰ called for measures to prevent and respond to attacks on schools and education facilities and/or raised concerns about the military use of schools.
 - Eight statements¹¹ called for implementation of SCR 2601 (2021).
- 11 statements¹² specifically condemned restrictions placed on girls’ access to education in Afghanistan.

Reintegration of CAAFAG and treatment of these children primarily as victims

- 27 statements¹³ emphasized the need to prioritize, strengthen, and/or fund reintegration programming for children affected by armed conflict.
 - 12 statements¹⁴ recalled that CAAFAG should be treated primarily as victims and/or expressed concern about the detention of children for their alleged association.

⁵ Albania, Bulgaria, Canada, Czechia, Estonia, EU, France, Georgia, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Guatemala, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States

⁶ Bulgaria, Czechia, EU, Germany, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Poland, Ukraine, United States

⁷ Albania, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Estonia, EU, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States

⁸ Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Ecuador, Estonia, EU, France, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, Iran, Ireland, Japan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States

⁹ Albania, Andorra, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Ecuador, Estonia, EU, France, Germany, Iran, Ireland, Lebanon, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Spain, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States

¹⁰ Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Ecuador, Chile, Ghana, Ireland, Italy, Myanmar, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Spain, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom

¹¹ Andorra, Brazil, Ireland, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland

¹² Albania, Canada, Estonia, EU, Iran, Ireland, Lebanon, Norway, Poland, United Kingdom, United States

¹³ Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, China, France, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), India, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Malta, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

¹⁴ Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Ghana, Iraq, Italy, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland

- Three statements¹⁵ acknowledged the importance of handing CAAFAG over to child protection authorities to prevent the deprivation of their liberty, including through the adoption of handover protocols or standard operating procedures.
- Six statements¹⁶ called for children detained for their or their family members' alleged affiliation with terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq to be repatriated to their respective countries of origin.

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

- 25 statements¹⁷ urged others to endorse at least one of the following key legal or normative frameworks on child protection:
 - OPAC: 15 statements¹⁸
 - The Paris Principles and Commitments: 13 statements¹⁹
 - The Vancouver Principles: 13 statements²⁰
 - The Safe Schools Declaration: 19 statements²¹

Child protection capacity in UN peacekeeping and political missions

- 23 statements²² called for the prioritization of child protection in UN peacekeeping and political missions.
 - 10 statements²³ echoed the SG's call to ensure that child protection provisions and capacity are included in all relevant mandates of UN peacekeeping and special political missions.
- 16 statements²⁴ called for strengthening/increasing capacity and ensuring sufficient resources (human, financial, and/or operational) are allocated to fully deliver on child protection mandates.

¹⁵ Germany, Ghana, Spain

¹⁶ Albania, China, Iraq, Russia, Syria, Türkiye

¹⁷ Algeria, Bulgaria, Chile, France, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Group of Friends of the R2P (55 Member States and the EU), Guatemala, India, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Uruguay

¹⁸ Algeria, Bulgaria, Chile, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Group of Friends of the R2P (55 Member States and the EU), Guatemala, India, Ireland, Malaysia, Malta, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Slovenia

¹⁹ Bulgaria, Chile, France, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Ireland, Italy, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Uruguay

²⁰ Bulgaria, Chile, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Uruguay

²¹ Bulgaria, Chile, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Uruguay

²² Australia, Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Germany, Ghana, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Group of Friends of the R2P (55 Member States and the EU), EU, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, United States

²³ Brazil, Bulgaria, India, Kenya, Malaysia, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, Türkiye, United States

²⁴ Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Estonia, EU, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Group of Friends of the R2P (55 Member States and the EU), India, Ireland, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand

Independence and impartiality of the CAAC agenda and SG's list of perpetrators based on objective criteria

- 13 statements²⁵ highlighted the critical need to ensure that the SG's annual list of perpetrators remains credible, complete, and evidence-based, with listing and delisting decisions based on objective criteria that are consistently applied across all country situations.
- Nine statements²⁶ expressed their support for the impartiality and integrity of the CAAC mandate and the MRM.
- Three statements raised concerns over specific listing and delisting decisions in the SG's annual report, including the movement of Syrian Government Forces from Section A to Section B,²⁷ and the non-listing of Israeli Government Forces.²⁸

Support for the MRM and improved data collection and analysis

- 16 statements²⁹ called for increased financial and/or political support for the UN's MRM and to those involved in implementing the CAAC agenda.
- 11 statements³⁰ called for strengthening systematic analysis of the impacts of gender, disability, and other factors on children's vulnerability to grave violations, including through the improved disaggregation of data, to inform response and prevention efforts.

Call for child protection to be considered in peace processes

- 13 statements³¹ called for children's rights and protection to be considered in efforts to build and sustain peace.
- 12 statements³² highlighted the role of the Peacebuilding Commission.
- Eight statements³³ called for meaningful participation of children and youth in peacebuilding processes, including in the design of reintegration programming and policies and/or justice mechanisms.

Humanitarian access for children

- Eight statements³⁴ called on parties to conflict to allow and facilitate safe, rapid, and unimpeded humanitarian access to civilians, particularly children.

²⁵ Belgium, Canada, China, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Group of Friends of the R2P (55 Member States and the EU), Ireland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland

²⁶ Chile, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Liechtenstein, Malaysia, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland

²⁷ Canada

²⁸ Malaysia, Observer State of Palestine

²⁹ Albania, Algeria, Australia, Canada, Estonia, EU, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Group of Friends of the R2P (55 Member States and the EU), Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Slovenia, South Africa, Switzerland, Türkiye

³⁰ Andorra, Australia, Chile, China, Estonia, Gabon, Germany, Ireland, Malta, Mexico, United Arab Emirates

³¹ China, Ghana, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Poland, Slovenia, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay

³² Bangladesh, Brazil, Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Guatemala, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand

³³ Germany, Group of Friends of CAAC (48 Member States and the EU), Group of Friends of the R2P (55 Member States and the EU), Liechtenstein, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain

³⁴ Albania, Guatemala, Myanmar, New Zealand, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Republic of Korea, Spain, United States

- Two statements³⁵ made explicit reference to SCR 2286 (2018) on the protection of health care workers and facilities.
- Three statements³⁶ called on the SRSG-CAAC to develop a guidance note on the denial of humanitarian access to support monitoring and reporting efforts.

Impact of the use of explosive weapons on children in armed conflict

- Seven statements³⁷ highlighted the need to mitigate the impact of the use of explosive weapons on children in armed conflict, including demining efforts, mine risk education, and avoiding the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA).

³⁵ New Zealand, Spain

³⁶ EU, Malaysia, United States

³⁷ Azerbaijan, Ghana, India, Iraq, Ireland, Kenya, Sudan

Annex I: Statements in Order of Delivery and Joint Statements

Security Council statements in order of delivery (15 Member States): Brazil, Norway, Ghana, United States, France, India, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Gabon, Mexico, United Kingdom, Ireland, Russia, Albania, China

Additional statements in order of delivery: Canada* (on behalf of the Group of Friends of CAAC and national capacity), Ukraine, Malta, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Iran, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Uruguay, Ecuador, Slovenia, Estonia, Denmark* (on behalf of the Nordic countries), Italy, Germany, Greece, Botswana* (on behalf of the Group of Friends of the R2P), the EU*, Czechia, Belgium, Poland, Slovakia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Guatemala, Australia, Republic of Korea, Sudan, Spain, Israel, Japan, Andorra, Syria, Malaysia, Georgia, Portugal, Lebanon, Romania, Observer State of Palestine, Ethiopia, Chile, Bulgaria, Pakistan, Yemen, Türkiye, the Philippines, Iraq, Egypt, South Africa, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Lithuania, Myanmar, Morocco, Argentina, Algeria, Armenia

* Joint statements:

- Canada on behalf of the **Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict** (48 members + the European Union: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Slovenia, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Ukraine, Uruguay)
- **The European Union** on behalf of its 27 members (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden); candidate countries of Albania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Ukraine; the country of the stabilization and association process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Andorra, Georgia, Monaco, and San Marino
- Botswana on behalf of the **Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect** (55 members + the European Union: Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Sudan, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay)
- Denmark on behalf of the **Nordic countries** (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden)