

## Review of the July 2023 Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict

On July 5, 2023, the United Nations Security Council held its annual open debate on children and armed conflict (CAAC) under the United Kingdom's presidency. The open debate offered an opportunity for UN Member States to discuss the implementation of the CAAC agenda, with a particular focus on the following topics: (i) effective strategies and approaches in preventing and responding to grave violations against children; (ii) how existing successful initiatives to protect children can be scaled up; (iii) what innovative and new approaches can be piloted to better protect children in conflict; and (iv) how to ensure age- and gender-sensitive, child-centered approaches.

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/77/895-S/2023/363](#)), covering the period from January 1 to December 31, 2022. In addition to the SRSG-CAAC, the Deputy Director for Programs at UNICEF, Mr. Omar Abdi, briefed the Council alongside a 17-year-old child representative, Ms. Violeta\*, who spoke on behalf of civil society. Ms. Violeta was the second girl child to brief a Security Council open debate on CAAC and the first to do so in person.<sup>1</sup>

**The ensuing debate featured 74 interventions, representing 95 Member States and the Observer State of Palestine.**<sup>2</sup> Joint statements were delivered on behalf of the European Union (EU), the Group of Friends of CAAC, the Baltic countries, CANZ (Australia, Canada, and New Zealand), and the Nordic countries. The Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the UN, Dame Barbara Woodward, chaired the debate.

Member States reaffirmed their support for the CAAC agenda, the mandate of the SRSG-CAAC, and international legal and normative frameworks to protect children in war. Statements expressed **concern about both the high number of grave violations against children** documented in the SG's annual report, as well as the **increasing number of situations where children's rights are being violated**, noting the addition of Haiti and Niger as new situations of concern. The need to **end impunity, hold perpetrators accountable, and increase compliance with international law** featured prominently in statements. Ten statements expressed concern that **Government forces were the main perpetrators of several grave violations in 2022**, including killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.

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, the Vancouver Principles, and the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA Declaration).

In over 30 interventions, Member States called for action to **protect children's right to education, including ensuring continued access to education during armed conflict**. Seventeen statements highlighted the role education plays in prevention and mitigation of violence against children, including reintegration and peacebuilding. Fourteen statements called for measures to **prevent and respond to attacks on schools and education facilities** with four Member States recalling the need to implement SCR 2601 (2021). Finally, 16

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<sup>1</sup> The first girl child briefed the Council virtually during the 2020 Open Debate on CAAC.

<sup>2</sup> See Annex I for a full list of statements and joint statements.

statements **expressed concerns about the significant increase (112 percent) in attacks on schools and hospitals** recorded by the UN in 2022.

Member States also raised **concerns over grave violations in specific country situations**. In particular, **27 statements highlighted the impact of the war in Ukraine on children**, with 17 of these statements emphasizing **forced deportations of Ukrainian children to Russia**. Member States also highlighted child protection concerns in other specific armed conflict situations, particularly Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Afghanistan, and Myanmar.

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**. Fourteen statements (representing 66 Member States and the EU delegation) echoed concerns raised by 21 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in a May 2023 [open letter](#) to SG António Guterres about the annual CAAC report. In a notable deviation from recent years, **23 Member States commented on specific listing decisions**, namely, the listing of Russian armed forces and affiliated groups for grave violations in Ukraine, the absence of parties to conflict in Israel/occupied Palestinian Territory from the list, listing for additional grave violations by the Myanmar armed forces, and new listings in Burkina Faso.

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. Eight 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**. Member States also **encouraged concrete action to protect children in armed conflict, including the implementation of action plans and handover protocols**, and welcomed such steps taken in 2022, namely, new action plans signed in Iraq and Yemen and handover protocols in Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

Other themes in this year's debate included the need to **prioritize and increase funding for reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG)**; **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 2023 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 Deputy Executive Director for Programs Omar Abdi.
- One civil society representative addressed the Council: Ms. Violeta,\* a 17-year-old Colombian peace advocate.
- 74 total interventions. Canada spoke on behalf of the 49 members of the Group of Friends of CAAC. The European Union delegation gave a statement on behalf of its 27 members, as well as candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, and North Macedonia), while Georgia, Monaco, and San Marino also aligned themselves with the European Union statement. Denmark spoke on behalf of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). Estonia spoke on behalf of the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). New Zealand spoke on behalf of CANZ (Australia, Canada, and New Zealand).
- In total, 95 Member States and the Observer State of Palestine were represented in statements during the debate.
  - One Member State whose armed forces are currently listed for grave violations against children made a statement in its national capacity (Russia).
- This analysis is based on the provisional UN meeting record ([S/PV.9366](#), [S/PV.9366 Resumption](#)).

### Themes in Statements:

#### *Accountability and compliance with international law*

- 39 statements<sup>3</sup> emphasized the need to hold perpetrators accountable and to address impunity for violations of children's rights in armed conflict.
  - In this regard, 10 statements<sup>4</sup> reiterated support for / the need for cooperation with international justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- 38 statements<sup>5</sup> called for compliance with international law, including international humanitarian, human rights law, and/or refugee law, as well as implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions.
- 10 statements<sup>6</sup> expressed concern that Government forces were the main perpetrators of several grave violations in 2022, including killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.

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<sup>3</sup> Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Baltic countries, Bangladesh, CANZ, China, Croatia, Czechia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, European Union, France, Gabon, Germany, GoF of CAAC, India, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Nordic countries, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Ukraine, United States

<sup>4</sup> Austria, CANZ, Ecuador, European Union, France, GoF of CAAC, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia

<sup>5</sup> Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, CANZ, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czechia, Ecuador, Egypt, European Union, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, GoF of CAAC, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Kuwait, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Nordic countries, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, United States

<sup>6</sup> Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czechia, GoF of CAAC, Malta, Republic of Korea, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay

### ***Access to education for children affected by armed conflict***

- 32 statements<sup>7</sup> emphasized children’s right to education, including the need to ensure access to education for children living in situations of armed conflict.
  - 17 statements<sup>8</sup> highlighted the role of education in prevention and mitigation of violence against children, including reintegration and peacebuilding.
- 16 statements<sup>9</sup> raised concerns about the increase in UN-verified incidents (112 percent) of attacks on schools and hospitals in 2022.
- 14 statements<sup>10</sup> called for measures to prevent and respond to attacks on schools and education facilities and/or raised concerns about the military use of schools.
  - 4 statements<sup>11</sup> called for implementation of SCR 2601 (2021).
- 4 statements<sup>12</sup> condemned policies restricting girls’ access to education in Afghanistan and/or called on the de facto authorities to reverse these policies.

### ***Specific country situations***

- 27 statements<sup>13</sup> highlighted child protection concerns in Ukraine.
  - 17 statements<sup>14</sup> expressed concerns regarding forced deportations and/or abductions of Ukrainian children to Russia.
- 17 statements<sup>15</sup> raised concerns about grave violations against children in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
- 12 statements<sup>16</sup> raised concerns about grave violations against children in Myanmar.
- 11 statements<sup>17</sup> raised concerns about grave violations against children in Afghanistan.
- 10 statements<sup>18</sup> noted the addition of new situations of concern (Haiti and Niger).

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<sup>7</sup> Andorra, Argentina, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Chile, China, Dominican Republic, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Guatemala, India, Iran, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Morocco, Nordic countries, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, San Marino, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States

<sup>8</sup> Andorra, Bulgaria, Chile, Dominican Republic, Gabon, Germany, Guatemala, Iran, Japan, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, United Arab Emirates

<sup>9</sup> Albania, Argentina, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, CANZ, Croatia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Uruguay

<sup>10</sup> Algeria, Argentina, Bulgaria, Colombia, Gabon, Georgia, Guatemala, Italy, Luxembourg, Philippines, Portugal, San Marino, Sri Lanka, Switzerland

<sup>11</sup> Gabon, Georgia, Portugal, Switzerland

<sup>12</sup> France, Iran, Ireland, United States

<sup>13</sup> Albania, Austria, Baltic countries, Belgium, Bulgaria, CANZ, Czechia, European Union, France, Georgia, Germany, Guatemala, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States

<sup>14</sup> Albania, Austria, Baltic countries, Belgium, Czechia, European Union, Guatemala, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States

<sup>15</sup> Belgium, Egypt, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Observer State of Palestine, Pakistan, Russia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Yemen

<sup>16</sup> Albania, Austria, Bangladesh, CANZ, France, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Russia, United Kingdom, Uruguay

<sup>17</sup> Albania, Belgium, China, France, Iran, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Russia, Slovenia, United States, Uruguay

<sup>18</sup> Baltic countries, Belgium, Bulgaria, CANZ, Czechia, Dominican Republic, European Union, GoF of CAAC, Mexico, Republic of Korea

### ***Independence and impartiality of the CAAC agenda and SG's list of perpetrators***

- 23 statements commented on specific listing and/or non-listing decisions in the SG's annual report, including:
  - The listing of Russian armed forces and affiliated groups: 18 statements<sup>19</sup>
  - The absence of any perpetrators in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian territory: 6 statements<sup>20</sup>
  - The listing of Myanmar armed forces (formerly referred to as the Tatmadaw Kyi, including integrated border guard forces) for additional grave violations: 3 statements<sup>21</sup>
  - Additional listings in Burkina Faso: 1 statement<sup>22</sup>
- 14 statements<sup>23</sup> reiterated the need to ensure that the SG's list of perpetrators remains credible, complete, and evidence-based, with all perpetrators held to the same clear, objective standards.
- 6 statements<sup>24</sup> highlighted the impartiality, independence, and credibility of the CAAC mandate and the MRM, and/or the need to preserve these qualities.

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

- 21 statements urged others to endorse at least one of the following key legal or normative frameworks on child protection:
  - The Safe Schools Declaration: 18 statements<sup>25</sup>
  - The Paris Principles and Commitments: 12 statements<sup>26</sup>
  - The Vancouver Principles: 12 statements<sup>27</sup>
  - OPAC: 9 statements<sup>28</sup>
  - The EWIPA Declaration: 4 statements<sup>29</sup>

### ***Support for the MRM and need for additional resources and analysis***

- 18 statements<sup>30</sup> reinforced the importance of support for the UN's MRM and to those involved in implementing the CAAC agenda.

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<sup>19</sup> Albania, Baltic countries, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, European Union, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Nordic countries, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom

<sup>20</sup> China, Lebanon, Malaysia, Observer State of Palestine, Pakistan, Yemen

<sup>21</sup> European Union, Republic of Korea, Switzerland

<sup>22</sup> Republic of Korea

<sup>23</sup> Belgium, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, European Union, France, GoF of CAAC, Ireland, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Malta, Nordic countries, Portugal, Switzerland, Yemen

<sup>24</sup> Croatia, GoF of CAAC, Malaysia, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Slovenia

<sup>25</sup> Argentina, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Dominican Republic, France, Germany, GoF of CAAC, Guatemala, Italy, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Uruguay

<sup>26</sup> Austria, Bulgaria, CANZ, Croatia, Dominican Republic, France, Germany, GoF of CAAC, Portugal, San Marino, Slovenia, Uruguay

<sup>27</sup> Austria, Bulgaria, CANZ, Croatia, Dominican Republic, Germany, GoF of CAAC, Malaysia, Portugal, San Marino, Slovenia, Uruguay

<sup>28</sup> Austria, Bulgaria, Dominican Republic, France, Germany, GoF of CAAC, Malaysia, Portugal, San Marino

<sup>29</sup> Bulgaria, Ireland, San Marino, Spain

<sup>30</sup> Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, CANZ, Ecuador, European Union, France, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Uruguay

- 9 of these statements<sup>31</sup> called for sufficient resources, including funding and/or personnel, to be allocated for monitoring and reporting and to support country teams.
- 8 statements<sup>32</sup> highlighted the specific impacts of gender, disability, and other factors on children’s vulnerability to grave violations and called for data collection, response, and/or prevention efforts to take these factors into consideration.

***Engagement and concrete action to end and prevent grave violations***

- 17 statements<sup>33</sup> 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.
- 8 statements<sup>34</sup> welcomed concrete commitments taken to protect children in 2022, namely the signing of new action plans by parties to conflict in Iraq and Yemen and the adoption of handover protocols in Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

***Reintegration of CAAFAG and treatment of these children primarily as victims***

- 12 statements<sup>35</sup> emphasized the need to provide, strengthen, and/or fund reintegration programming for children affected by armed conflict.
  - 6 statements<sup>36</sup> recalled that CAAFAG should be treated primarily as victims.
  - 3 statements<sup>37</sup> 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.

***Child protection capacity in UN peacekeeping and political missions***

- 12 statements<sup>38</sup> called for the inclusion and prioritization of child protection in UN peacekeeping and political missions.
  - 8 statements<sup>39</sup> 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.
- 6 statements<sup>40</sup> called for strengthening/increasing capacity and ensuring sufficient resources (human, financial, and/or operational) are allocated to fully deliver on child protection mandates.

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<sup>31</sup> Algeria, CANZ, Ecuador, European Union, France, Malta, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Uruguay

<sup>32</sup> Austria, Bangladesh, Gabon, Greece, Germany, Italy, Malta, Thailand

<sup>33</sup> Albania, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Colombia, Croatia, Czechia, Ghana, GoF of CAAC, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal, San Marino, South Africa, Switzerland, Ukraine

<sup>34</sup> Austria, Bulgaria, CANZ, Croatia, European Union, Ghana, San Marino, Uruguay

<sup>35</sup> Andorra, Bahrain, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Gabon, Greece, India, Nordic countries, South Africa, Switzerland, Yemen

<sup>36</sup> Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Gabon, Greece, Guatemala

<sup>37</sup> Austria, Bulgaria, Germany

<sup>38</sup> Belgium, Brazil, CANZ, Egypt, Ghana, India, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Spain

<sup>39</sup> Belgium, Brazil, CANZ, Egypt, India, Malaysia, Mexico, South Africa

<sup>40</sup> Bangladesh, GoF of CAAC, India, Malta, Spain, Ukraine

### ***Call for mainstreaming child protection and children's voices in peace processes***

- 10 statements<sup>41</sup> called for child protection concerns to be considered and prioritized in efforts to build and sustain peace, including through creating space for the safe and meaningful participation of children and youth in these processes and the work of the Security Council.

### ***Humanitarian access for children***

- 9 statements<sup>42</sup> called on parties to conflict to allow and facilitate safe, rapid, and unimpeded humanitarian access to civilians, particularly children.

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

- 9 statements<sup>43</sup> highlighted the need to mitigate the impact of the use of explosive weapons on children in armed conflict, including demining efforts, explosive ordnance risk education, and avoiding the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

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<sup>41</sup> Bangladesh, China, Costa Rica, Ghana, GoF of CAAC, Guatemala, Mozambique, Slovenia, South Africa, United States

<sup>42</sup> Albania, Armenia, Bahrain, Belgium, CANZ, Gabon, Malta, Nordic countries, Spain

<sup>43</sup> Algeria, Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Ghana, Ireland, Japan, San Marino, Slovenia

## Annex I: Statements in Order of Delivery and Joint Statements

Security Council statements in order of delivery (15 Member States): Malta, France, China, Ghana, Albania, Brazil, Switzerland, Mozambique, Japan, United States, Ecuador, Gabon, United Arab Emirates, Russia, United Kingdom

Additional statements in order of delivery: Mexico, Poland, Ukraine, Colombia, Portugal, Indonesia, Liechtenstein, Republic of Korea, Costa Rica, Luxembourg, Greece, Austria, Slovenia, Thailand, Italy, Croatia, European Union\*, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Denmark\* (on behalf of the Nordic countries), Uruguay, Romania, Canada\* (on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict), New Zealand\* (on behalf of CANZ), Chile, Spain, Kuwait, Qatar, San Marino, Estonia\* (on behalf of the Baltic countries), Bulgaria, Türkiye, Armenia, Philippines, Israel, Czechia, Bangladesh, Slovakia, Germany, Algeria, Malaysia, Belgium, Morocco, the Observer State of Palestine, Pakistan, Yemen, Azerbaijan, Ireland, Iran, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Andorra, Lebanon, South Africa, Ethiopia, India, Georgia, Argentina, Bahrain.

\* Joint statements:

- The **European Union** on behalf of its 27 members (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, 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, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia; the potential candidate Georgia; as well as Monaco and San Marino
- Denmark on behalf of the **Nordic countries** (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden)
- 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, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Ukraine, Uruguay)
- New Zealand on behalf of **CANZ** (Australia, Canada, and New Zealand)
- Estonia on behalf of the **Baltic countries** (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)