

# Children and Armed Conflict:

UN SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

SPECIAL UPDATE:  
JULY 2023

## Recommendations for the UN Security Council and Member States

On July 5, 2023, the Security Council will hold its open debate on children and armed conflict (CAAC), under the United Kingdom's presidency. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC) will present the Secretary-General's (SG) 2023 annual report on CAAC (forthcoming), covering the period from January 1 to December 31, 2022.

Since its inception, the UN's CAAC agenda has made valuable progress in protecting children from the devastating impacts of war, encouraging compliance with international law, and promoting behavior change of warring parties. The CAAC agenda encompasses a unique set of tools that Member States, UN offices and agencies, and civil society can leverage to strengthen the protection of children and respect for their rights in war. The Secretary-General's annual report, including the listing and de-listing of perpetrators, the Office of the SRSG-CAAC, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), and the Security Council Working Group on CAAC (SCWG-CAAC) each play a role in strengthening our collective understanding of the specific ways that war impacts children, spurring concrete commitments and measures to end and prevent grave violations against them, and reinforcing international legal and normative standards for the protection of children's rights in armed conflict.

The CAAC agenda is as necessary today as it has ever been. Armed conflicts continue to devastate children's lives, tearing apart families and communities and hindering the fulfillment of children's rights, such as health care, education, and participation. Today's wars are often prolonged and fought in urban areas amid civilian populations, blurring the lines between the battlefield and traditional protected spaces. Homes, schools, hospitals, and other critical civilian infrastructure have come under attack, with immediate and long-term impacts for children's survival and well-being. The use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas (EWIPA) has resulted in deaths, physical injuries, and psychological trauma and has hindered civilians' ability to safely return and rebuild once conflict ends.

The proliferation of counterterrorism measures that lack adequate safeguards for children's rights, shrinking civic space, challenges to principled humanitarian action, pervasive impunity, and disregard for international law all undermine efforts to protect children in armed conflict. Children formerly associated with armed forces and groups (CAAFAG), especially those allegedly associated with armed groups designated as 'terrorist', are treated as security threats, rather than victims of serious violations in need of reintegration support. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated children's vulnerability to rights violations and abuses. Parties to conflict exploit these vulnerabilities, targeting children in distinct ways on the basis of their gender, age, disability, and other characteristics. Despite its critical role in delivering on child protection mandates, specialized child protection capacity represents only a tiny fraction of overall peacekeeping personnel and budgets (0.13 percent and 0.21 percent, respectively, as of 2020).

Against this backdrop, the open debate is a critical opportunity for Member States to reaffirm their support for the CAAC agenda and recommit to defending children's rights in armed conflict. This encompasses not only upholding international legal and normative standards, but also strengthening implementation of existing tools and frameworks, providing adequate, sustained funding to support child protection, holding perpetrators of grave violations accountable, and redoubling efforts to prevent grave violations. Finally, children themselves should be at the heart of efforts to protect them. Member States, UN offices and agencies, and civil society child protection actors should work towards consistent, meaningful, and safe participation of children in decision-making processes affecting them.

## Situations before the Council involving parties listed for grave violations against children:

[Afghanistan](#)

[Burkina Faso](#)

[Central African Republic](#)

[Colombia](#)

[Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)

[Iraq](#)

[Lake Chad Basin](#)

[Mali](#)

[Myanmar \(Burma\)](#)

[Nigeria](#)

[Philippines](#)

[Somalia](#)

[South Sudan](#)

[Sudan](#)

[Syrian Arab Republic](#)

[Yemen](#)

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In view of the upcoming open debate, Watchlist recommends that the Security Council and other UN Member States:

**1. Strongly reiterate support for the UN's CAAC agenda and call for increased compliance with international law and child protection norms:**

- a. Reaffirm commitments to uphold international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law and child protection norms, and encourage Member States who have not 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 endorse and implement the Paris Principles and Commitments, Vancouver Principles, Safe Schools Declaration, and EWIPA Declaration; encourage endorsers to exchange lessons learned and good practices.
- b. Urge Member States to bring to justice all those responsible for grave violations against children, including through prompt investigation and, where appropriate, prosecution for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other egregious crimes against children; encourage cooperation with international justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court (ICC), and call for dedicated child rights expertise within investigative and justice mechanisms.
- c. Call for a complete, evidence-based list of perpetrators in the annexes of the SG's annual reports that accurately reflects data collected and verified by the UN's MRM; strongly urge the SG to implement a rigorous, objective, and transparent process to ensure that parties are listed and de-listed according to the [2010 criteria](#), consistently across all country situations.





**2. Strengthen the effective use of existing mechanisms and tools to monitor, report, and respond to grave violations:**

- a. Strongly condemn all grave violations and abuses against children and encourage the signing and implementation of joint action plans with the UN to end and prevent grave violations; demand that all parties take action to protect children in accordance with the principles of precaution, distinction, and proportionality.
- b. Call for increased financial and political support for the UN's MRM, encouraging systematic analysis of the impact of gender, disability, and other vulnerabilities to inform response and prevention efforts; further support efforts to strengthen and enhance monitoring and reporting, including the disaggregation of data by gender, age, and disability.
- c. Call for increased child protection capacity in UN peace operations and political missions, with financial, political, and operational support to fully deliver on child protection mandates; prioritize child protection considerations in the context of mission drawdown or transition.
- d. Urge donors to provide long-term, predictable funding for reintegration of CAAFAG.

**3. Redouble efforts to prevent grave violations against children and protect their rights in war:**

- a. Call for renewed efforts to mark and clear explosive remnants of war, prioritizing areas where displaced civilians are returning and where children are likely to pass through, and promote explosive ordnance risk education.
- b. Call for effective measures to prevent and address attacks and threats of attack on education facilities, paying particular attention to inclusive access to education for girls, refugee and internally displaced children, and children with disabilities, per [SCR 2601 \(2021\)](#).
- c. Recalling that CAAFAG should be treated primarily as victims and that detention should be used only as a last resort, call for the release and timely transfer of children in security force custody to civilian child protection authorities and encourage the adoption and effective implementation of [handover protocols](#) to prevent the military detention of children as well as for access to detention facilities for UN and other independent monitors; in cases where children may have committed violent criminal acts, ensure they are treated in accordance with international juvenile justice standards.
- d. Call for the protection, rights, well-being, and empowerment of children affected by war to be fully incorporated and prioritized in ongoing and future efforts to build and sustain peace, per [SCR 2427 \(2018\)](#); encourage and facilitate the meaningful, consistent consideration of children's perspectives in these processes, where possible and compatible with their best interests, drawing on existing tools, including the [Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict](#).

**NGO Resources**

-  Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (Watchlist), et al., [Open Letter Calling By 21 NGOs Calling for a Complete and Accurate List of Perpetrators](#), May 2023
-  Watchlist, "[A Credible List": Recommendations for the Secretary-General's 2023 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict](#)", April 2023
-  Save the Children, [Stop the War on Children: the Forgotten Ones](#), November 2022
-  Watchlist and the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, [Operational Guidance: Negotiating and Implementing Handover Protocols for Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups](#), March 2022

**About Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict**

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a global network of international human rights and humanitarian non-governmental organizations which strives to end violations against children in armed conflicts through local partnerships, reporting and advocacy.

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