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Eighty-first year****Letter dated 7 April 2026 from the Permanent Representative of  
Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to submit herewith the report of the annual policy workshop on children and armed conflict, convened on 26 January 2026 by the non-governmental organization Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict.\*

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 67, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Aglaia **Balta**  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative

\* Circulated in the language of submission only in line with current liquidity management measures.



**Annex to the letter dated 7 April 2026 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

**Report of the Annual Policy Workshop on Children and Armed Conflict**  
*26 January 2026*

**I. Introduction**

1. The non-governmental organization (NGO) Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (“Watchlist”) convened a virtual policy workshop on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) on 26 January 2026. The workshop brought together representatives of United Nations (UN) Member States, including members of the Security Council, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), civil society organizations, and academia, to discuss priorities for the United Nations children and armed conflict (CAAC) agenda in 2026. This is the 14th such policy workshop organized by Watchlist since 2013. The workshop sought to engage participants in identifying priorities and developing recommendations for concrete, targeted actions to be taken in the coming year within the framework of the CAAC agenda.
2. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict opened the workshop with a keynote address, reflecting on current challenges facing children in armed conflict, highlighting the significance of the 30th anniversary of the CAAC mandate, and outlining priorities for advancing the agenda in 2026. The keynote set the tone for the day’s discussions by underscoring the importance of sustained political commitment, multilateral cooperation, and increased support for key mechanisms under the CAAC agenda.
3. In addition to the keynote message, the workshop consisted of four closed working sessions. The first session provided a strategic stocktaking of key challenges and priorities for advancing the CAAC agenda in 2026, including reflections on the work of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (SCWG-CAAC), the importance for the Secretary-General’s (SG) listing and de-listing decisions to be based on MRM data, and the need to translate Working Group recommendations and conclusions into concrete change for children. The second session, entitled “Beyond the Numbers: Bringing Children to the Forefront of the CAAC Agenda,” examined how child-centered research, meaningful and ethical child participation, and psychosocial approaches can better reflect the lived experiences of children affected by armed conflict and inform protection responses and accountability. The third session explored the implementation of key normative frameworks for child protection in armed conflict, including the Paris Principles, Vancouver Principles, Safe Schools Declaration, and the EWIPA Political Declaration, focusing on practical steps to move from endorsement to effective implementation. The final session examined the impact of counterterrorism measures on children affected by armed conflict and discussed legal, policy, and operational approaches to uphold children’s rights and protection in counterterrorism contexts.
4. This report summarizes the discussions in these sessions and provides recommendations for action by the Security Council, the United Nations, Member States, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to end and prevent violations against children in situations of armed conflict in 2026 and going forward.

## **II. Opening Keynote Address**

5. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict opened the workshop with a keynote message highlighting recent developments affecting children in situations of armed conflict and outlining priorities for advancing the CAAC agenda in 2026. Marking 30 years of the CAAC mandate, children continue to face escalating risks amid increasingly complex and protracted conflicts. The address recalled that the mandate has contributed to concrete protection outcomes, including the release of more than 220,000 children from armed forces and armed groups, and the signing of over 40 action plans and other commitments. The adoption of 14 Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict was also highlighted. It further underscored that protecting children in armed conflict remains central to the international peace and security agenda and requires sustained political engagement, multilateral cooperation, and renewed commitment from Member States and United Nations partners.
6. The Special Representative reflected on recent developments affecting the children and armed conflict agenda and highlighted key priorities for 2026. The keynote underscored the continued importance of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) as a central tool for verifying grave violations against children, informing Security Council engagement, and supporting advocacy and child protection programmatic responses. The keynote stressed that the MRM continues to provide accurate, timely, reliable, and field-based information that guides both programmatic responses and policy engagement, while emphasizing that safe access for monitors and protection of those responsible for collecting and verifying information remain essential.
7. Looking ahead, the Special Representative called for strengthened efforts to expand engagement with parties to conflict through the development and implementation of action plans, described as practical and adaptable tools to end and prevent grave violations against children. The keynote underscored the importance of harnessing new technologies, intensifying child-centered advocacy, upholding the principles of the UN Charter, and strengthening collaboration across stakeholders. The Special Representative also stressed the importance of including children in peace processes and ensuring that their perspectives inform advocacy and policy efforts. The address concluded with a call for collective action to translate political commitments into measurable protection outcomes for children affected by armed conflict.

## **III. Challenges and Priorities for the CAAC Agenda in 2026**

8. The first working session of the workshop examined progress, challenges, and priorities for advancing the CAAC agenda in the year ahead. Panelists reflected on the work of the SCWG-CAAC, the role of the Group of Friends of CAAC, and operational perspectives from the United Nations, examining how existing tools and mandates can be leveraged to respond to escalating violations against children and evolving conflict dynamics.
9. Panelists emphasized that, despite an increasingly challenging political environment, the CAAC mandate continues to deliver meaningful results through sustained multilateral engagement and consensus-building within the Security Council. Reflections highlighted efforts by the SCWG-CAAC to address backlogs in country-specific reports and advance conclusions despite lengthy and challenging negotiations, underscoring the value of dialogue and compromise in achieving collective outcomes. Panelists stressed that the effectiveness of the Working Group should ultimately be measured not by the number of meetings or conclusions adopted, but by tangible improvements in the protection of children affected by armed conflict. They further underscored the importance of

close engagement with Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs) to ensure that conclusions reflect realities on the ground and respond to evolving trends in grave violations.

10. Panelists also identified a range of persistent and emerging challenges facing the CAAC agenda, noting that the SG's 2025 Annual Report on CAAC documented 41,370 verified grave violations against children in 2024, representing a 25 percent increase compared to 2023 and the highest number recorded since the establishment of the CAAC mandate, alongside growing pressures on humanitarian and child protection actors due to constrained resources and access. They emphasized the need to preserve impartiality and strict adherence to the established listing and delisting process grounded in MRM data and cautioned against political dynamics that could undermine the CAAC agenda. Sustained dialogue with parties to conflict, including through action plans, was highlighted as one of the most effective tools for ending and preventing violations supporting implementation of commitments undertaken by parties to conflict. Panelists further stressed that safeguarding monitoring capacities and humanitarian programs remains essential to maintaining timely and verified information and ensuring effective responses to violations against children.
11. In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed (a) the importance of strengthening engagement with national authorities, including opportunities to support reform efforts and accountability measures in evolving contexts such as Syria; (b) the need to sustain investment in monitoring and reporting and analysis to better understand and respond to trends in grave violations; (c) the continued relevance of action plans as a proactive tool for engagement with parties to conflict and for promoting behavioral change, compliance with international law, and restraint; (d) the importance of reinforcing coordination among United Nations entities, Member States, civil society actors, and regional Groups of Friends to advance implementation of the CAAC agenda; and (e) the value of elevating children's perspectives and participation in advocacy efforts to mobilize broader political support for child protection in armed conflict.

#### **IV. Beyond the Numbers: Bringing Children to the Forefront of the CAAC Agenda**

12. The second session of the workshop examined how child-centered research, meaningful child participation, and psychosocial approaches can strengthen understanding of the impacts of armed conflict on children and inform more effective protection responses. Panelists explored how the CAAC agenda, while grounded in monitoring and reporting of grave violations, must also reflect the lived experiences of children affected by conflict, including mental health impacts, displacement, and the erosion of family and community structures.
13. Panelists emphasized that children experience conflict in ways that differ fundamentally from adults and that centering children's perspectives is essential to ensuring that responses under the CAAC agenda reflect the realities children face in conflict. Discussions highlighted research demonstrating that quantitative monitoring data alone cannot fully capture the range of harms experienced by children, particularly slow-moving or less visible impacts such as psychological distress, disruption of education, and community erosion. Panelists noted that many forms of harm experienced by children, including mental and social impacts that accumulate over time, often fall outside existing legal or monitoring categories, underscoring the need to look beyond quantitative indicators to better capture children's lived experiences of conflict. Panelists highlighted the importance of complementing monitoring data with qualitative research and ethical child participation initiatives to better understand needs, inform programming, and strengthen policy responses. They also stressed the importance of safeguarding meaningful participation to avoid tokenism and ensure diverse representation of children affected by conflict.

14. Panelists further examined the operational implications of shrinking humanitarian resources and funding reductions for child protection actors. They highlighted evidence showing significant reductions in access to mental health and psychosocial services, staffing capacity, and frontline protection activities, with particularly severe impacts in conflict-affected contexts. Participants noted that funding cuts have constrained service delivery, reduced outreach to vulnerable children, and affected monitoring and reporting efforts. Panelists emphasized the need to recognize child protection services as essential and life-sustaining components of humanitarian response and called for greater investment in localized capacity, strengthened collaboration across sectors, and closer links between field-level experience and policy advocacy. They also emphasized the growing role of frontline child protection actors in humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy, noting that field-based practitioners increasingly play a critical role in elevating protection concerns and informing policy discussions at national and international levels.
15. In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed (a) the importance of integrating children's perspectives more systematically into CAAC advocacy and decision-making processes; (b) the role of community-based protection mechanisms and locally led efforts to protect children, including informal prevention and early-warning practices developed by communities themselves; (c) the need to balance meaningful child participation with safeguarding considerations to prevent risks or unintended harm; (d) opportunities to strengthen accountability frameworks, including ongoing discussions related to the new Crimes Against Humanity Treaty and the advocacy for the inclusion of a stand-alone crime of recruitment and use of children; and (e) the importance of adapting child protection approaches to evolving funding realities while preserving core protection standards and outcomes for children affected by armed conflict.

**V. The Normative Frameworks for Child Protection in Armed Conflict: A Renewed Call for Endorsement and Implementation**

16. The third session examined how existing international frameworks and political commitments can effectively translate into concrete protection outcomes for children affected by armed conflict. Panelists reflected on lessons learned from the implementation of key instruments, including the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, the Safe Schools Declaration, 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), and discussed opportunities to strengthen coordination, endorsement, and implementation efforts across national, regional, and multilateral levels.
17. Despite growing challenges to multilateralism and rising numbers of grave violations against children, normative frameworks continue to provide practical tools for advancing child protection. Discussions highlighted progress achieved through peer learning, national implementation measures, and communities of practice supporting the Safe Schools Declaration, including legislative reforms, training initiatives, and regional cooperation efforts. Panelists emphasized that implementation itself constitutes a form of protection, noting that sustained technical cooperation, peer learning, and practical application of commitments can directly reduce risks faced by children in conflict. They underscored that implementation requires sustained political commitment and practical engagement beyond endorsement, including legal reforms, reintegration measures, and operational guidance to strengthen child protection. Panelists stressed the importance of maintaining momentum by scaling existing good practices. They highlighted the growing role of regional and state-led coordination in advancing implementation, noting that practical cooperation

among neighboring countries and regional actors has enabled the adaptation and dissemination of protection practices even in contexts of United Nations peacekeeping missions' transition or withdrawal.

18. Panelists also highlighted the Paris Principles as a key child protection framework, emphasizing their contribution to the release of children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG) and the importance of integrating them into the work and guidelines of regional bodies such as the African Union and NATO. Panelists noted that states have taken practical steps to implement the Principles, including legal reforms and sanctions against those responsible for recruiting children. They also highlighted continuing challenges in ensuring that all groups of children are reached and stressed the importance of reintegration, release without preconditions, and gender-sensitive approaches that respond to the specific needs of girls.
19. Panelists also highlighted lessons emerging from the implementation of the Vancouver Principles, noting that troop- and police-contributing countries have adopted diverse approaches to integrating child protection into peacekeeping training, planning, military doctrine, and deployment practices. Comparative research demonstrated how national policies, pre-deployment training, and mental health support systems can strengthen preparedness for protecting children in complex operational environments. These research findings will be more fully elaborated in forthcoming Watchlist's research. Discussions further emphasized the growing relevance of normative frameworks beyond United Nations peacekeeping contexts, including regional and member-state-led operations.
20. Though the only one of these frameworks not explicitly focused on children, panelists highlighted the opportunity for the EWIPA Political Declaration to spur concrete action to protect children from a key driver of harm in armed conflict – explosive weapons in populated areas. In addition to making up a large proportion of the casualties from explosive weapons, panelists also stressed that children face patterns of harm from blast injuries that are distinct from adults, and their particular needs must be taken into consideration as endorsing states update their trainings, policies, and doctrine to implement their commitments under the EWIPA Declaration. Speakers called for integrating protection considerations related to explosive weapons into broader child protection frameworks, given the disproportionate and often lifelong impacts of explosive weapons on children, including complex injury patterns requiring specialized care and long-term support. Participants also highlighted the need to strengthen coordination between actors working on CAAC and EWIPA to better leverage complementarities and ensure that these commitments reinforce one another in practice.
21. In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed (a) the importance of strengthening implementation through practical tools such as legislative guidance, training programs, and peer exchange among Member States; (b) opportunities to expand endorsement and operationalization of existing frameworks, including among regional organizations; (c) the need to ensure gender-responsive reintegration and release processes consistent with the Paris Principles; (d) the importance of reinforcing connections among complementary child protection frameworks ; and (e) approaches to measuring success based on tangible improvements in protection outcomes for children rather than endorsement alone.

## VI. Upholding Children's Rights in Counterterrorism Contexts

22. The fourth session of the workshop examined the intersection between counterterrorism (CT) frameworks and the CAAC agenda, focusing on the legal, policy, and operational challenges affecting children associated with armed groups designated as terrorist organizations. Panelists explored how differing security and protection approaches shape responses to children in conflict settings and discussed opportunities to strengthen child-rights-based policies while addressing security concerns.
23. Panelists highlighted that counterterrorism frameworks and child protection approaches often operate according to different underlying assumptions, with CT responses frequently viewing children through a security risk lens, while international law related to child rights and CAAC resolutions recognize CAAFAG, including those children associated with armed groups designated as terrorists by the UN, primarily as victims of recruitment and use and entitled to protection, and reintegration. Panelists discussed challenges arising from the interaction between counterterrorism measures and child protection approaches, noting that responses to children associated with armed groups may differ depending on whether the armed group in question is designated as terrorist. Discussions emphasized that the impact of CT measures on children in armed conflict, including prosecution, detention, and criminalization, can create significant barriers to reintegration. Participants also noted that counterterrorism measures often carry gendered implications, disproportionately affecting boys and young men who are more likely to be perceived as security threats. Panelists underscored that international child rights and humanitarian law obligations apply equally in counterterrorism contexts and stressed the importance of ensuring that responses prioritize the best interests of the child.
24. Panelists further examined the practical consequences of CT policies and strategies for children affected by armed conflict. They noted that detention of children for their alleged association with armed groups designated as terrorist organizations, or because of family ties to alleged members of such groups, remains widespread in several contexts and often results in prolonged deprivation of liberty, stigma, and further hampers their reintegration, while also affecting family members and communities. Discussions highlighted research demonstrating that security-driven responses may overlook children's lived experiences and long-term needs, including mental health support, education, and community acceptance. Panelists emphasized that effective reintegration requires sustained, rights-based approaches grounded in evidence, early intervention, and community trust, and cautioned that exceptional national security measures can undermine long-term protection outcomes and may increase risks of re-recruitment. Panelists further observed that limited evidence exists demonstrating that security-driven detention approaches improve long-term security outcomes, underscoring the importance of evidence-based, child-centered approaches.
25. In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed (a) the need to strengthen coordination between humanitarian, child protection, and national security/CT actors to ensure coherent responses to children affected by counterterrorism measures; (b) challenges related to detention and transfer processes, including the importance of clear handover protocols and safeguarding during transfers from military to civilian authorities ; (c) opportunities to reinforce reintegration pathways through family tracing and reunification, access to education, medical and psychosocial support,; (d) the importance of addressing stigma and community acceptance to prevent re-recruitment and support sustainable reintegration and (e) the need for sustained engagement by Member States, United Nations actors, and donors to support long-term, child-centered approaches in counterterrorism environments.

## VII. Recommendations

26. Throughout the workshop discussions, the following recommendations were proposed to strengthen implementation of the CAAC agenda, enhance protection outcomes for children affected by armed conflict, and address emerging challenges.

### Challenges and Priorities for the CAAC Agenda in 2026

- a. UN Member States should sustain political and financial support for the MRM, including by ensuring adequate resources for Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting to maintain monitoring, reporting, and verification capacities and enable continued engagement on CAAC.
- b. The Security Council should reinforce the effectiveness of the SCWG-CAAC by promoting the timely adoption and implementation of conclusions grounded in verified information and linked to measurable protection outcomes for children. Security Council members should ensure timely appointment of subsidiary body chairs, including to the SCWG-CAAC.
- c. The Secretary-General should ensure listing and de-listing decisions are impartial and based on verified information collected through the MRM.
- d. The United Nations should strengthen sustained dialogue with parties to conflict, including through the negotiation and implementation of concrete, time-bound action plans aimed at preventing and ending grave violations against children.
- e. UN entities and Member States should strengthen engagement with national authorities and regional partners to support the implementation of child protection and reinforce compliance with international law.
- f. Donors should prioritize predictable and sustained funding for monitoring and reporting activities, recognizing that reductions in resources and humanitarian access directly affect the ability to document and verify grave violations against children, as well as to respond to these grave violations with appropriate protection services.

### Beyond the Numbers: Bringing Children to the Forefront of the CAAC Agenda

- a) UN entities and civil society organizations should promote meaningful, safe, and inclusive participation of children and youth in CAAC-related policy discussions and advocacy processes, while ensuring appropriate safeguarding measures.
- b) UN entities, humanitarian actors, and research institutions should complement quantitative monitoring with qualitative and child-centered analysis to better capture the full range of harms experienced by children, including mental health impacts and community-level effects of conflict.
- c) Donors and humanitarian partners should recognize child protection services, including psychosocial support and case management, as essential and life-sustaining components of humanitarian response and provide sustained and flexible funding to maintain these services.
- d) UN agencies and humanitarian actors should strengthen locally led protection approaches by supporting community-based protection mechanisms and reinforcing locally developed prevention and early-warning practices.
- e) UN entities and partners should strengthen connections between field-level child protection actors and policy fora to ensure operational realities inform advocacy and decision-making processes.

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## The Normative Frameworks for Child Protection in Armed Conflict: A Renewed Call for Endorsement and Implementation

- a) Member States should move beyond endorsement toward the operational application of child protection frameworks, including the Paris Principles, Vancouver Principles, Safe Schools Declaration, and the EWIPA Political Declaration, including by integrating commitments into national policies and strengthening coordination across relevant government ministries to assess and improve implementation at the national level.
- b) National governments should integrate the Vancouver Principles into national legislation, military doctrine, operational guidance, and training programs, including pre-deployment preparation for peacekeeping personnel.
- c) Regional organizations and Member States should expand peer-learning initiatives and regional coordination mechanisms to support national implementation efforts and exchange good practices related to child protection frameworks.
- d) The UN and Member States should strengthen coherence across normative child protection frameworks by aligning related commitments through coordinated policy guidance, joint advocacy, and integrated training and programming approaches.
- e) The UN, Member States, civil society, and academic experts should leverage complementarities across thematic issues that mutually reinforce protection outcomes for civilians broadly and children specifically.
- f) Member States should promote accountability measures and practical tools to assess progress and ensure that political commitments result in measurable protection outcomes for children.

## Upholding Children's Rights in Counterterrorism Contexts

- a) UN Member States should ensure that counterterrorism policies and strategies comply fully with international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and child protection standards. Children should be treated primarily as victims, including in counterterrorism responses, and their best interest must be a primary consideration.
- b) National authorities should promote diversion and alternatives to detention for children associated with armed groups including those designated as terrorist organizations as well as family tracing and reunification, reintegration, and community-based support measures such as medical and psychosocial assistance, education, and family reunification. Detention must be used only as a last resort and for the shortest time possible.
- c) UN entities, humanitarian actors, and counterterrorism actors should strengthen coordination to ensure coherent and child-sensitive responses in counterterrorism contexts.
- d) Donors and international partners should provide sustainable funding for long-term reintegration programs, including education/vocational training, medical and psychosocial support, and family tracing and reunification initiatives that address stigma and support sustainable recovery.
- e) United Nations actors and research institutions should support evidence-based policy development by strengthening research and data collection on the impacts of counterterrorism measures on children, including gender-specific impacts.