

Strategic Plan 2020-2023: Executive Summary

For nearly 20 years, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict has worked to end grave violations against children in armed conflicts and to guarantee their rights. As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national, and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, Watchlist and its network members collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflicts in order to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children. With its unique role and specialized expertise, Watchlist has established itself as a well-respected, reliable network of NGOs that monitors, reports, and advocates for the protection of children's rights in armed conflict.

Despite tangible progress by the United Nations and its member states to address grave violations, children living in situations of armed conflict continue to face unprecedented suffering, with the number of recorded violations at an all-time high. Evolving conflict dynamics, including the emergence of armed groups employing terrorist tactics and the lack of child safeguards in the course of governments' efforts to counter terrorism, present new challenges to the protection of children's rights. The COVID-19 global pandemic brings additional concerns, as children affected by armed conflict face heightened vulnerabilities due to the fragile contexts in which they live, and the crisis is likely to have far-reaching, long-term negative impacts on these children. In order to effectively respond to these new realities, Watchlist has developed this 2020-2023 strategic plan, drawing from its previous experiences and reflecting on challenges and opportunities for the protection of children in armed conflict.

During the strategic period from 2020 to 2023, Watchlist will consolidate and build upon its unique position and the credibility it has gained over the years, in order to continue to advance the rights of children embroiled in war. Specifically, Watchlist will seek to:

1. Preserve the integrity of the UN's children and armed conflict (CAC) mandate;
2. Advance the implementation of the CAC agenda; and
3. Protect children's rights in new and emerging contexts.





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Goals and Strategies for 2020-2023

The UN's CAC mandate is an important tool for accountability for grave violations against children in armed conflict, which can spur concrete change for affected children. The current context and operating environment present a number of challenges, including evolving warfare and tactics at the field level, and an increasingly shrinking political space for engagement on human rights and specifically children's rights, both globally and at the New York level. Given these factors, Watchlist is concerned that the mandate is under threat, more than 20 years since its inception. At the same time, Watchlist recognizes its unique position to protect and uphold the integrity of the mandate.

Additionally, the COVID-19 crisis is likely to have far-reaching, long-term negative impacts on children living in situations of armed conflict. Given the evolving and unprecedented nature of the pandemic, Watchlist will seek to adapt its response to address developments, their impacts on children in armed conflict, and children's evolving needs.

In support of this aim, Watchlist staff will work towards the following three overarching strategic goals for the 2020-2023 strategic period: 1) Preserve the integrity of the CAC mandate; 2) Advance the implementation of the CAC agenda; and 3) Protect children's rights in new and emerging contexts.

GOAL 1

As the only NGO network working expressly on the UN's CAC agenda, Watchlist will work **to preserve the integrity of the mandate**. In order to achieve this goal, Watchlist will work towards the following three objectives:

- a) Watchlist will continue to advocate for a **credible and accurate list of perpetrators** of grave violations against children in armed conflict, as well as the inclusion of all relevant situations of concern, in the Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict.
- b) Watchlist will promote **an effective and well-functioning Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict**, with concrete results for children.
- c) Watchlist will advocate for **adequate child protection capacity, including resourcing and political support, in peacekeeping and special political missions**, including in situations of transition.

HOW WE WORK

As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national, and international NGOs, enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we strategically collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflicts in order to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children.

THEORY OF CHANGE AND AIM

By strengthening institutions and promoting international laws and norms for the protection civilians in armed conflict and specifically of children's rights, Watchlist seeks to put pressure on international level policy makers, i.e. governments and the United Nations, and increase the cost of noncompliance.

Watchlist firmly believes in the UN's CAC mandate as a strong tool for accountability. By protecting the integrity of the mandate, Watchlist aims to ensure its effectiveness

GOAL 2

Watchlist will work together with others to **advance the implementation of the CAC agenda**. In order to achieve this goal, Watchlist will work towards the following three objectives:

- a) Watchlist will advocate with UN and governments actors to **hold all perpetrators accountable for child rights violations**.
- b) Watchlist will encourage the **adoption and implementation of action plans** with greater transparency.
- c) Watchlist will **contribute to strengthening the collection and use of data on violations**, including its disaggregation by gender and improving reporting on the denial of humanitarian access.

MISSION STATEMENT

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict strives to end violations against children in armed conflicts and to guarantee their rights.

and impact. Laws and norms must be implemented to be effective, and Watchlist plays a role in translating New York-based initiatives into real progress for children in situations of armed conflict. By recognizing that warfare and tactics are evolving, Watchlist also seeks to ensure that the mandate and its tools remain relevant.



GOAL 3

In response to evolving threats for children in armed conflict, Watchlist will work with its network members and allies to **protect children's rights in new and emerging contexts**. In order to achieve this goal, Watchlist will work towards the following two objectives:

- a) It will contribute to **countering the negative effects on children's rights of efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism**.
- b) Watchlist will promote the systematic inclusion of **child's rights concerns and child participation in peace processes**.

Watchlist Operations 2020-2023



GOVERNANCE:

In this period, Watchlist's Advisory Board will seek to expand by at least one and add at least two new Associate Members, with a view towards strengthening the mobilization of stakeholders to further the CAC agenda.



OPERATIONS:

Watchlist will maintain its two full-time staff positions (Director, Advocacy Officer) and seek additional growth. In order to address short- to midterm organizational capacity constraints, as well as to be more sustainable in the long term, Watchlist will prioritize hiring a new position to support fundraising and operations. In the longer term and dependent on funding, Watchlist will seek to add another new position to reinforce current advocacy and research capacity.



FUNDRAISING:

Watchlist's program staff is responsible for fundraising, which can lead to a heavy workload. During this strategic period, Watchlist will seek to increase its funding in a sustainable way, focusing on the following goals: 1) diversify its donor base to include more non-governmental sources; 2) increase core funding; and 3) secure a greater number of multiyear grants.



COMMUNICATIONS:

Watchlist will continue to expand its social media presence in order to disseminate its advocacy to international level policy makers, as well as to journalists, academia, and broader policy audiences. During the 2020-2023 strategic period, Watchlist will prioritize developing a more targeted and streamlined

communications strategy that contributes to the above-outlined goals and objectives.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION:

In this strategic period, Watchlist's staff will produce four annual activity plans. Staff will assess progress on their implementation on a monthly basis, and the Advisory Board and staff will evaluate progress and assess priorities during its quarterly meetings. As in previous years, Watchlist's annual reports will detail activities, outcomes, and impact, and also include a financial report. In addition, in order to assess progress on the strategic goals outlined above, Watchlist staff and Advisory Board members will conduct a midterm review during their first quarterly meeting in 2022.



In the nearly 20 years since its establishment, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict has grown from a small "start-up" to a well-established network renowned for its expertise on children and armed conflict. It has contributed to the advancement of the UN's CAC agenda, which today includes a strong normative framework for the protection of children's rights in such contexts.

Data collection on the grave violations has generally improved since the inception of the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) in 2005. More than 30 parties to conflict have signed action plans with the UN, leading to concrete, positive changes for children on the ground.

Despite these advances, children in armed conflict continue to face grave violations. Parties to conflict have shown a flagrant disregard for international laws protecting children's rights. Evolving tactics, such as increasingly urban warfare, the denial of humanitarian access, and attacks on civilian infrastructure, present challenges for children's protection. These are further compounded by the emergence of armed groups employing terrorist tactics, as well as government-led counterterrorism efforts that challenge the bounds of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis is likely to have far-reaching, long-term negative impacts on children living in situations of armed conflict, including on the ability of UN country teams to monitor and report on grave violations against children.

Reflecting these new realities and drawing from its previous experiences, Watchlist will rise to meet these challenges and to remain relevant and effective in addressing the rights and needs of children affected by war during the 2020-2023 strategic period.

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

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Watchlist is a fiscally sponsored program of United Charitable, a US-based 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization.