

A young boy with dark hair, wearing a black and white long-sleeved shirt and black pants, sits on a stone wall. He is looking back over his shoulder towards the camera. The background shows a damaged building with arched windows and a metal fence. A red circle in the top left corner contains the text 'WATCH LIST ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT'. A dotted line circle highlights the boy's torso, with a small red dot at the bottom center of the circle.

WATCH LIST ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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Foreword

- 2021 marked an important year for children affected by armed conflict: the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations' Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate, the 20th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1379 (2001), which first mandated the Secretary-General to publish a list of parties to conflict who recruit and use children in their ranks, and the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour. In addition to these key milestones, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict celebrated the 20th anniversary of its founding in 2001. These occasions provided an opportunity to reflect and take stock of progress made towards protecting children in armed conflict, as well as to identify existing gaps and emerging challenges.

Over the past 25 years since the establishment of the CAAC mandate, significant progress has been made to promote the protection of children in armed conflict. The UN has signed more than 30 action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children, and at least 13 parties to conflict have fully complied with their commitments, leading to their delisting from the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report on CAAC. Over the past 20 years, more than 170,000 children have been released from armed forces and armed groups. Measures for monitoring and reporting on grave violations, as well as both prevention and accountability mechanisms, have been put in place to uphold the integrity of the CAAC mandate and work towards a world where children are safe.

Yet despite the progress made, more children are living in conflict zones today than at any time in the previous two decades. The rapid, ongoing expansion of the global counterterrorism agenda threatens to undermine existing laws and norms for protecting children's rights. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated children's vulnerability to rights violations and abuse, which parties to conflict exploit, targeting children in distinct ways on the basis of their gender, age, and disability. It is evident that Watchlist's mission is as relevant and needed today as it was 20 years ago.

In 2021, Watchlist and its network of human rights and humanitarian organizations sought to further advance the CAAC agenda and promote the protection of children's rights in countries affected by armed conflict. Despite the ongoing global pandemic, Watchlist continued to advocate with the UN Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (SCWG-CAAC) for the protection of children in war. In 2021, Watchlist successfully influenced 14 Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 2601, the Security Council's thirteenth thematic resolution on CAAC, which condemns attacks and threats of attack against education and urges Member States to develop effective measures to prevent and address such attacks. Watchlist also influenced the SCWG-CAAC's conclusions on the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict in South Sudan.

Watchlist made strides to hold perpetrators accountable for committing grave violations against children in armed conflict. Following the premature delisting of several perpetrators from the Secretary-General's 2020 annual CAAC report, Watchlist convened a group of international experts on CAAC—known as the "Eminent Persons Group"—to conduct a systematic review of the listing and delisting process. Watchlist acted as a convener and facilitator, helping to organize advocacy meetings for the experts and supporting the publication in March 2021 of the EPG's report, *Keeping the Promise: An Independent Review of the UN's Annual List of Perpetrators of Grave Violations against Children, 2010 to 2020*.

In line with its *2020-2023 Strategic Plan*, Watchlist conducted research and advocacy to defend children's rights in the face of the ever-growing global counterterrorism agenda. In March 2021, Watchlist published a policy brief examining the challenges facing children allegedly associated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which found that these children have not received the recovery and reintegration support they need. During the year, Watchlist spoke at several government roundtables about the detention of children in armed conflict and called on governments to sign handover protocols for the swift transfer of children from security force custody to civilian child protection actors for reintegration and other services.

Amidst the celebration of important anniversaries, 2021 served as an important reminder of the need to continue to defend and uphold existing protection frameworks, to strengthen efforts to prevent conflict before it starts, and to promote accountability for and to children. Watchlist will continue to support the CAAC mandate and stand united with its network members and partners in its mission to protect children in war.

On behalf of Watchlist and its members, we are sincerely grateful for your ongoing support of Watchlist's mission and efforts to defend children's rights and advance the UN's CAAC agenda. In an increasingly polarized world where the effects of division speak loudly, we are proud to work as a united global network for the protection of the most vulnerable in armed conflict. We have witnessed that progress is possible when action is put behind hope, and because of your support, we are able to advance towards a world where all children are protected from harm.

JO BECKER
Co-Chair, Watchlist Advisory Board
Representing Human Rights Watch

LYNDSAY HOCKIN
Co-Chair, Watchlist Advisory Board
Representing World Vision International



Advocacy

- In 2021, Watchlist advocated to advance the implementation of the UN’s children and armed conflict agenda, defend and uphold existing protection frameworks, and promote accountability for and to children.

Advancing the UN’s Children and Armed Conflict Agenda

In January 2021, Watchlist and Fordham University’s Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs (IIHA) co-hosted the seventh annual policy workshop on children and armed conflict. The two-day virtual workshop convened representatives from UN Security Council Member States, non-Council Member States, relevant UN offices and agencies, and civil society to discuss the implementation of the UN’s CAAC agenda, clearly identify priorities, and develop targeted recommendations for the year 2021. The workshop provided a forum for dialogue on emerging contexts and challenges, safeguarding child protection capacity, and agenda-setting for the SCWG-CAAC. In June 2021, a summary report of the policy workshop was issued as an official UN Security Council document ([S/2021/504](#)).

Throughout the year, Watchlist used its [Children and Armed Conflict Monthly Updates](#) to advocate with members of the Security Council and its Working Group for the protection of children in armed conflicts around the world. Monthly Updates provide recommendations for mainstreaming child protection concerns into action by the UN Security Council, as well as for country-specific

conclusions of the SCWG-CAAC. With these targeted recommendations, Watchlist successfully influenced 14 Security Council resolutions, with over 70 percent of its recommendations either fully or partially reflected in the final adopted texts, strengthening language for the protection of children in armed conflict. These resolutions included peacekeeping mandate renewals in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Mali, the renewal of the UN’s special political mission in Afghanistan, as well as Security Council Resolution 2601.

Resolution 2601, adopted unanimously in October 2021, with 99 Member State co-sponsors, calls on all parties to safeguard, protect, respect, and promote children’s right to education, including in armed conflict, emphasizing its lifesaving role, and reaffirming its fundamental contribution to peace and security. Importantly, the resolution condemns the military use of schools in contravention of international law, recognizing that such use endangers children and teachers and disrupts education. Watchlist engaged closely throughout the negotiations on the resolution and coordinated with civil society colleagues and UN partners to provide targeted recommendations. The resolution was an important addition to the CAAC agenda and brought strong,



new elements, including an emphasis on girls' access to education and the needs of marginalized groups, including children with disabilities and refugee and displaced children.

Watchlist also influenced the single country-specific conclusions adopted in 2021 by the SCWG-CAAC—conclusions on the Secretary-General's report on CAAC in South Sudan—with all of Watchlist's recommendations partially or fully incorporated in the final text.

Watchlist's advocacy and outreach encouraged active participation in the 2021 Security Council open debate on children and armed conflict. In May 2021, Watchlist published its annual special update ahead of the open debate. The two-page brief recommends that Member States call for increased compliance with international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law and child protection norms, and strengthen accountability for grave violations against children; make effective use of existing mechanisms and tools to monitor, report, and respond to child rights violations in armed conflict; and prioritize the protection of the rights and well-being of children in armed conflict, including in contexts of counterterrorism. Watchlist presented its recommendations to the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict in New York during a closed meeting ahead of the open debate in June.

Promoting Accountability for Grave Violations through a Credible, Accurate List of Perpetrators

The listing and delisting of perpetrators in the Secretary-General's annual CAAC reports remains one of the most unique and powerful tools for promoting accountability for grave violations against children. Watchlist worked closely with members of its civil society network, UN offices, and other stakeholders to draw attention to grave violations against children in conflict

and other situations of concern, and build support for the impartial, fact-based listing of child rights violators in the Secretary-General's annual CAAC reports.

Watchlist's research and advocacy for a credible and evidence-based list fed into an independent review of the UN's annual list of perpetrators of grave violations against children from 2010 to 2020, which was published by a group of international experts in March 2021. The independent assessment of the "Eminent Persons Group" identified dozens of cases where multiple and egregious violations against children did not lead to listing in the Secretary-General's annual report on CAAC, or where listing decisions reflected unexplained inconsistencies.

In April 2021, Watchlist published its fifth annual policy note, *'A Credible List': Recommendations for the Secretary-General's 2021 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict*, which presents information on grave violations committed against children in 14 countries in 2020 and recommends to the Secretary-General that 11 parties in 10 countries be added to the annexes of the 2021 annual report, listed for additional violations, or investigated further with a view towards possible listing. The policy note also recommends that the Secretary-General include three new situations of concern in his 2021 report. The Secretary-General's annual report (S/2021/437) reflects two of these recommendations in the re-listing of the Tatmadaw Kyi for recruitment and use in Myanmar and the listing of the Afghan National Army for killing and maiming.

In an open letter to Secretary-General António Guterres, published in May 2021, 18 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including Watchlist, called for a complete list of perpetrators in his report to the Security Council. In the letter, the organizations reiterate their disappointment with the significant disparities between evidence presented in the 2020 annual report and the parties listed in its annexes for committing grave violations against children. At the Security Council open debate on CAAC, 16 Member States echoed concerns raised in the open letter and several delegations raised the crucial importance of maintaining the independence and impartiality of the CAAC mandate, in particular, the Secretary-General's annual report and its annexed list of perpetrators, stressing the need for listing decisions to be based on objective criteria.



Research

- International standards, including both hard and soft law, provide a robust framework for the treatment of children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG) in all contexts of conflict. All children recruited and used by armed groups have equal rights and are entitled to recovery and reintegration support.

In March 2021, Watchlist published a 28-page policy note titled, [Bridging the Gap: Bringing the Response to Children Formerly Associated with ISIL in Iraq in Line with International Child Protection Standards](#), that examines challenges facing children allegedly associated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). It highlights the lack of a national strategy or legal framework to guide the Government of Iraq's response to children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups. The brief concludes that children who were recruited and used by the armed group have not received the recovery and reintegration support they need to successfully return to civilian life in Iraq and provides a list of targeted recommendations to the Government of Iraq; the Iraqi Federal and Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) Parliaments; Iraqi ministries; international donors; UN agencies; and foreign governments with child nationals accused of ISIL affiliation.

Watchlist's research and advocacy for a credible and evidence-based list fed into an [independent review](#) of the UN's annual list of perpetrators of grave violations against children from 2010 to 2020, which was published by a group of international experts in March 2021. The independent assessment of the "Eminent Persons Group" identified dozens of cases where multiple and egregious violations against children did not lead to listing in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict, or where listing decisions reflected unexplained inconsistencies. Watchlist worked to disseminate the group's findings and recommendations ahead of the Secretary-General's 2021 annual report. Two of the perpetrators highlighted in the review of the Eminent Persons Group were then listed in the Secretary-General's 2021 annual report. These listings were the Afghan National Army for killing and maiming, and the Somali Federal and Police forces for sexual violence.



Partnerships

- Since its inception, Watchlist has worked in partnership with local civil society organizations in conflict-affected countries. It is through this collaboration that Watchlist is better able to advocate for children living in situations of armed conflict, while also supporting grassroots efforts to monitor, report, and respond to grave violations against children.

Support to Local Civil Society Organizations

In 2021, Watchlist provided project-based support to its long-time partner in the DRC, the *Association des Jeunes pour le Développement Integre-Kalundu* (AJEDI-Ka). The project supports AJEDI-Ka's work to monitor, report, and respond to grave violations against children in Eastern DRC. The sub-grant also supports AJEDI-Ka's work with children released from armed forces and armed groups, with a particular focus on girls formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups; AJEDI-Ka will provide these children with education and vocational training to support their reintegration into their communities.

In February 2021, Watchlist's director participated in a [virtual conference](#) organized by its longstanding civil society partner in Colombia, COALICO, in commemoration of the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, also known as Red Hand Day. The event centered around

the theme, "Stop! A Promise to Prevent Child Recruitment and Ensure Its Non-Repetition," linking the obligations of the Government of Colombia under the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) with its commitments under the peace agreement with the FARC-EP armed group.

Joint Advocacy Initiatives

In March 2021, Watchlist signed on to three joint statements to the UN Human Rights Council that further raised concerns around the evidence-based listing of perpetrators in the Secretary-General's annual report. In a [joint statement](#) delivered during the Interactive Dialogue with the SRSB-CAAC at the 46th Regular Session of the Human Rights Council, Watchlist joined five international NGOs in calling upon the SRSB-CAAC to commit to substantive efforts to ensure that country teams are adequately capacitated and resourced on the gender

dimensions of CAAC, and increase efforts to properly reflect the lived realities of girls in armed conflict, and prevent and respond to grave violations against them.

In a [second joint statement](#) to the Human Rights Council, Watchlist joined ten international civil society organizations to call upon the UN Secretary-General to initiate a due diligence procedure to ensure that annual report's annexes accurately and consistently reflect the evidence collected and verified by the MRM, and the listing and de-listing criteria are consistently applied.

In a [third joint statement](#) to the Human Rights Council, seven international civil society organizations, including Watchlist, highlight grave violations perpetrated against children in armed conflict, call for restored credibility of the list of perpetrators in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict, and express deep concern with the impact of policies to counter terrorism on children's rights in armed conflict.

In May 2021, Watchlist joined 25 NGOs in a [joint statement](#) released ahead of the Security Council open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The statement calls for the comprehensive protection of civilians from conflict, during conflict, and in the devastating aftermath of conflict. It calls on the Secretary-General, UN Security Council, UN Member States, and armed actors to take urgent and ambitious action to shift mindsets and invest in robust policies, strategies, and practices required to adequately protect civilians caught in armed conflict.

Institutional Learning and Advocacy

Throughout the year, Watchlist worked with civil society partners to exchange lessons learned and best practices in an effort to further mainstream child protection concerns and educate broader policy audiences on CAAC.

In commemoration of the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers (Red Hand Day), Watchlist, together with Save the Children, War Child UK, and World Vision International, organized a [virtual event](#) focusing on key challenges for the effective reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups. The event was co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Germany, Niger, Norway, and the UK.

Watchlist also designed and facilitated a five-day social media campaign for Red Hand Day, titled #RaiseYourRed. Led by Watchlist and its network of civil society partners, the campaign aimed to educate the broader public on the recruitment and use of children and Red Hand Day, and challenges that remain to ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers. The campaign served as a call to unite the global community to end the recruitment and use of children.

In 2021, Watchlist continued to provide a training tool for Security Council members, CAAC experts, and other stakeholders through its innovative [smartphone application](#). The CAAC application, originally launched in 2013 and substantially updated in 2016 and again in 2020, serves as a comprehensive tool with easy-to-access information on CAAC-related topics. Watchlist updated the app with information from the Secretary-General's 2021 annual report on children and armed conflict, as well as Resolution 2601.





Organizational Update

- As a global network of human rights and humanitarian organizations, Watchlist strives to end and prevent grave violations against children in war.

An Advisory Board comprised of five distinguished NGOs in the child rights field provides guidance and supervision for Watchlist to achieve its programmatic goals. The Advisory Board – ChildFund Alliance, Human Rights Watch, Save the Children, War Child, and World Vision International – shares responsibility for overseeing Watchlist’s staff, programs, fundraising, and finances.

Watchlist’s network is also fueled by nine Associate Members who share a wealth of knowledge and expertise on children’s rights.

Watchlist was immensely grateful for the support of several donors, especially for the funding it received in 2021 from the Governments of Australia, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, as well as sub-grants from Save the Children Norway and Save the Children Sweden. Watchlist also expresses its heartfelt thanks to individual donors who continue to value its mission and contribute financial support.

The united support of our partners, funders, and network members, together with the generosity of individual donors, allows Watchlist to strive towards a world where all children are protected, and their rights are fully realized.

”

In 2021 the Children and Armed Conflict mandate reached its 25th anniversary. It was a moment to reflect both on the significant progress made towards the protection of children in armed conflicts and the continued urgency for action. As Watchlist celebrated its 20th anniversary, never has its role as a leading voice for the protection of children’s rights in war, and as a convener of leading human rights and humanitarian organizations for strong and united advocacy for the rights and protection of children in armed conflicts, been so crucial.

- Lyndsay Hockin, Watchlist Advisory Board Co-Chair, representing World Vision International

Financials

	1/1/2020 through 12/31/2020	1/1/2021 through 12/31/2021
REVENUE		
Grants and Contributions	\$ 159,610.68	\$ 416,799.76
Government Grants	\$ 273,562.78	\$ 185,110.97
Other Revenue	\$ -	\$ -
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 433,173.46	\$ 601,910.73
EXPENSE		
Personnel Related Expenses		
Gross Payroll Expense	\$ 174,892.33	\$ 220,535.41
Payroll Fees	\$ 1,260.00	\$ 3,540.00
Payroll Taxes	\$ 14,048.81	\$ 17,698.18
Benefits	\$ 19,024.94	\$ 24,555.07
Total Personnel Related Expenses	\$ 209,226.08	\$ 266,328.66
Non-Personnel Related Expenses		
Rent & Occupancy	\$ 23,400.00	\$ 23,192.30
Telephone Expense	\$ 1,905.33	\$ 1,805.42
Sub Contractors - PC	\$ 72,315.44	\$ 102,849.92
Media, Website, Programming Expense	\$ 4,568.57	\$ 4,021.62
Postage/Delivery	\$ -	\$ 37.70
Printing	\$ 1,201.27	\$ 21.05
Office Supplies	\$ 336.29	\$ 430.62
Donations Out	\$ 27,700.00	\$ 42,148.00
Equip Purchase Under \$5,000	\$ 1,018.75	\$ -
Program Related Supplies	\$ 38.48	\$ -
Legal Fees	\$ 2,014.00	\$ -
Dues and Subscriptions	\$ 75.00	\$ 247.99
Travel Expense	\$ (1,534.35)	\$ 213.64
Meals/Entertainment Non-Travel	\$ 819.21	\$ 567.07
Conferences and Meetings	\$ 1,014.25	\$ 150.00
Total Non-Personnel Related Expenses	\$ 134,872.24	\$ 175,685.33
Fees		
Bank Fees	\$ 942.15	\$ 638.10
Administrative Fees	\$ 49,231.29	\$ 57,918.45
Annual Fee Expense	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00
Total Fees	\$ 51,673.44	\$ 60,056.55
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 395,771.76	\$ 502,070.54
Surplus/(Deficit)	\$ 37,401.70	\$ 99,840.19
Ending Net Assets	\$ 251,829.79	\$ 351,669.98

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