

## **A new Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict**

Background Note, April 2012

On January 25, 2011, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced that his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC), Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, will be leaving her position by the 31 July 2012<sup>1</sup>.

**Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict believes that the UN system requires continued strong leadership and action from a dedicated SRSG-CAAC to address the continuing violations against children in armed conflict and other situations of concern.**

### **1. What are key qualifications to look for in the next SRSG-CAAC?**

Given the central role of the SRSG-CAAC in advancing the Children and Armed Conflict-agenda, we believe that it will be critical for the new SRSG-CAAC to possess the following qualifications:

- Demonstrated commitment to promote and protect human rights of all children;
- Proven track-record of public advocacy for human rights;
- Willingness and ability to conduct field missions, including missions conducted under difficult circumstances in conflict areas;
- Willingness to act urgently in situations requiring immediate attention and to speak out regardless of where violations occur;
- Proven ability to work effectively with UN member states, UN agencies, and other key stakeholders, including children;
- Legitimacy with civil society, with whom this person must closely coordinate;
- Strong diplomatic skills and the ability to engage both governments and non-state actors regarding violations against children;
- Highest international standing and integrity.

### **2. A Timely and Transparent Hiring Process**

The procedure for selecting a new SRSG-CAAC should be conducted in a transparent way.

Consistent with the UN's high standards in transparency, accountability and professionalism, we urge the Secretariat to adopt an open hiring process where candidates' qualifications and experience will be fairly

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sgsm14083.doc.htm>

judged. We would also welcome the opportunity for civil society organizations to comment on the top three candidates.

The procedure for selecting a new SRSG-CAAC should also take place in a timely manner in order to ensure the continuity and stability of the work.

We note that the Secretariat released its call for nominations for a new SRSG Sexual Violence in Conflict on April 19, 2012 – only three days after the formal announcement of SRSG Margot Wallström’s departure. This short time-frame stands in sharp contrast with the procedure for the SRSG-CAAC, whose departure was announced by the Secretary-General in January 2012, and for whom the Secretariat is yet to release a call for nominations at the time of writing.

### **3. Why do we need a dedicated SRSG-CAAC for children and armed conflict?**

The 66<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly reached a consensus requesting a renewal of the SRSG-CAAC’s mandate for a further three years. The General Assembly thereby acknowledged the indispensable role played by the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict in global efforts to protect children in armed conflict. We believe it would be essential to retain the mandate of the SRSG-CAAC in its current form in order to:

- Serve as a global advocate for the millions of children affected by armed conflict before governments, non-state armed groups, UN actors, the media, the international Criminal Court, civil society, and in other significant fora, and highlight new areas of work that the international community must address;
- Produce reports for the Secretary-General and briefings for the Security Council’s Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict on specific country situations;
- Together with UNICEF and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), implement the UN monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) on Children and Armed Conflict that documents grave violations against children in 15 countries, in order to provide the Security Council with the objective and timely information that it requires for action;
- Play a leadership role in negotiating UN action plans with governments and non-state armed groups to end violations against children, resulting in the release of thousands of children from armed groups and armed forces and the protection of countless children from recruitment and other abuses.

### **4. What are the risks involved in ‘cost-cutting measures’ such as restructuring mandates or merging support offices of Special Mandate-holders?**

The Security Council’s progress on its three distinct protection agendas (children and armed conflict; protection of civilians; and women, peace and security) has led to several innovative developments, including the development of the UN-led MRM, the Protection of Civilians Aide Memoire and SCR 1820 on halting sexual violence. The separation of these three agendas has allowed for each agenda to develop to its fullest potential, with the focused attention of the Security Council.

The existence of an SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict with dedicated staff has allowed for the development and implementation of the MRM, one of the most innovative and effective tools to protect children in situations of armed conflict worldwide, and critical support for the Security Council's working group on children and armed conflict. The MRM establishes a direct link between the protection of war-affected children and the Security Council in order to halt violations and hold perpetrators accountable. Since its creation, the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict has also collaborated closely with the SRSG-CAAC to ensure compliance by parties to conflict with Security Council resolutions.

'Cost-cutting measures', or restructuring of the mandate, risk diluting the efforts of this important office, weakening the MRM, and undermining the work of the Working Group – thereby potentially depriving millions of children of an effective advocate to defend their rights with world leaders at the highest level.

While we believe that the UN system can always work more effectively, we consider the current annual budget of the SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict of US\$1.8 million for 2011, compared to the UN's overall budget of US\$5.15 billion, a worthwhile investment to protect children from the scourges of war.

## **5. What can you do?**

UN Member States, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations:

- Urge the Secretary-General to conduct a timely and transparent selection process, making public the qualifications for the position; the timeline for nominations, shortlistings, and final selection; and consulting widely with all stakeholders, including NGOs that work on children and armed conflict.
- Highlight the importance of retaining the mandate of the SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict, without reduction in dedicated staff resources, and selecting a strong candidate who meets above-mentioned qualifications.
- Emphasize the need to endow the Office of the SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict with adequate resources to carry out its mission.