SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT, MARCH 2015

Background to Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict Special Bulletin

(1) Facilitate the opportunity for ANSAs to sign and implement action plans and/or other protective measures:
Watchlist's research[1] suggests that action plans can play a positive and strategic role in bringing an end to grave violations against children. To date, 22 parties have signed action plans, eight of which are government security forces and 14 are armed non-state actors (ANSAs). Action plans have been implemented and completed in five countries (Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Uganda) resulting in the delisting of two government security forces and seven ANSAs (five of which were in Cote d'Ivoire). The "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign achieved some results in 2014, such as the signing of an action plan by the Yemeni armed forces and a recommitment to the 2012 action plan by the South Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

Now, more needs to be done to engage with ANSAs, the majority of listed parties. Challenges to action plan conclusions with ANSAs include government opposition to UN engagement with ANSAs operating in their territory, and insufficient engagement by the UN. Governments should permit access to groups operating within their territory. Wherever possible, UN efforts to engage with ANSAs should be intensified and adequate resources provided to enable sustained contact with ANSAs to build confidence and trust, create awareness of the issues, and support behavioral changes, including through the agreement of action plans. Another challenge is the wide variety among ANSAs. Engagement strategies must be tailored to the specific context and to individual groups. In some situations, other measures may be more effective in achieving the goal of protecting of children against grave violations, and non-UN interlocutors more able to access ANSAs. Complementary approaches that result in commitments by ANSAs, or in public statements, command orders or other responses to prevent violations should be encouraged, and collaboration with child protection experts supported where appropriate. Such initiatives may prepare the ground for the adoption of action plans. Finally, engagement strategies should include detailed planning and identification of resources necessary for implementation of agreements reached with ANSAs. In particular, release and reintegration plans incorporating psychosocial, education, and livelihood support should form part of the development of action plans to ensure that the necessary care and support for children is immediately available on their release, and that they are protected against recruitment and other forms of exploitation.

(2) Consider children and armed conflict (CAAC) in the peacemaking process:
The Security Council has repeatedly called on parties to conflict to ensure that the protection of children is taken into account during peace negotiations. In her 2013 report to the UN General Assembly, the SRSG-CAAC, highlights the need to mainstream children's concerns in the peacemaking process: "Incorporating specific commitments in political settlements, ceasefire arrangements, peace agreements and relevant implementation mechanisms can provide important opportunities and entry points for the rapid release of children from armed forces and groups and their reintegration. Early consideration of children's issues in peacemaking processes also facilitates planning and resource mobilization." Despite this call, child protection commitments in peace agreements are rare: in a survey based on the UN Peacemaker Database (1999-2014), Watchlist found that child protection was included in 79 out of 407 documents (19 percent), of which only 56 documents included CAAC specific references. Recruitment and use of children appeared most frequently (55 percent), followed by denial of humanitarian access (31 percent), attacks on schools and/or hospitals (6 percent), abductions (3 percent), rape and sexual violence (3 percent), and killing and maiming (2 percent).

(3) Expand the Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1612 listing criteria to include abductions:
Extremist groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria have committed egregious cases of mass abductions of children. In April 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped 276 girls from a school in Chibok, Nigeria. Most of the girls remain in the custody of the armed group. In May 2014, ISIS abducted 153 Kurdish boys as they returned from taking year-end exams in the city of Aleppo, Syria. Yet, abductions of children are not a new trait of armed conflict. Since the 2006 Secretary-General annual report on children and armed conflict, nearly 90 percent of the incidences of abductions are attributed to ANSAs. Children are abducted for a number of reasons, including exploitation, punishment, retaliation, and tactical advantages. Often, abductions are a precursor to other violations, such as recruitment and use, rape and other forms of sexual violence, or killing and maiming. In some cases, little, if any,

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[1] Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, Action Plans to Prevent and End Violations against Children, (2013).

information is known about the fate of the child after s/he is abducted. In these situations, abduction is the only violation that can be recorded. The expansion of the SCR 1612 listing criteria would be a step in the right direction to enhance the international community's ability to protect children in armed conflict, and hold perpetrators to account.

(4) Promote safe schools and end the military use of schools:
Extremist groups also attack education. Watchlist documented numerous attacks or threats of attacks Boko Haram in Nigeria. The group has destroyed and ransacked school property and carried out deliberate killings and abductions of students and teachers. They have created a climate of fear by threatening and intimidating teachers and students who continue to go to school. The growing insecurity has led to school closures, the flight of teachers, and the withdrawal of many students. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Taliban have also targeted education, in particular the education of girls. Further, the latest Secretary-General report documented the military use of schools in 15 out of the 23 country situations included in the report. This practice disrupts the education of thousands of children and puts them at risk of recruitment, attacks, and other violations. The Secretary-General's report notes, however, that discussion on the consequences of military use of schools can be a strategic entry point for dialogue with armed groups. In her Guidance Note on Security Council Resolution 1998 (2011), the SRSG-CAAC included a draft Operational Strategy for the prevention of military use of schools, which, alongside action plans, can help frame dialogue with ANSAs. In December 2014, following a state consultation process led by Norway and Argentina, the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict were unveiled. The Guidelines offer concrete guidance to both state parties and ANSAs on measures to mitigate the impact of military use of schools on students' safety and education. While there is no formal endorsement process for ANSAs, the UN and other international organizations must play a critical role in disseminating and promoting the implementation of the Guidelines among armed groups.

(5) Consider children and armed conflict in UN-mandated peace and political missions:
In many conflict situations, children are amongst those at highest risk from grave violations. Their protection should be prioritised. In order to fully understand what constitutes threats to children in conflict, disaggregated data by gender and age should be gathered and inform planning processes, strategy development and resource allocation. Relevant data on trends and risks to children gathered by country-level task forces for monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children should be shared with the mission's military and civilian personnel.

UN and regional peace operations have a vital role in the protection of children. In order for them to competently fulfil this duty, in-depth training is required. Currently, most troop contributing countries allocate 1-2 hours of basic orientation into child rights and child protection. Instead, the recently revised Department of Peacekeeping Operations Specialised Child Protection Training Materials, developed through a multi-agency, consultative process, should be used as the standardized child protection training as part of the pre-deployment training curriculum for all UN military peacekeepers. Furthermore, governments whose security forces perpetrate grave violations against children, and are 'blacklisted' in the Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict, should be barred from contributing troops or police to UN Missions[2]. Currently, the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo and Yemeni armed forces, both listed for grave violations against children in the annual report, are contributing troops to a number of peace and political missions around the world.

(6) Increase the effectiveness of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict:
The Security Council Working on Children and Armed Conflict adopted in 2006 a "toolkit" of 26 actions and recommendations it may apply in its country-specific conclusions. The tools available range from letters to parties concerned to forwarding information to sanctions committees. Watchlist has found that the Working Group has relied predominantly on a minority of the tools available to it, and many tools remain underutilized. Between 2006 and 2014[3], the Working Group used an average of 7.4 out of 26 available tools (28 percent) per conclusion. Tools rarely used by the SCWG-CAAC include press conferences, demarches, letters to justice mechanisms, and request for information from parties concerned.

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[2] Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, A Policy Prohibiting Listed Government Forces from Contributing Troops to UN Missions, (2014).
[3] Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, Working Methods 2006-2014, (2015).