

A Look Back at Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict in 2024

The last 12 months saw devastation for children on a massive, heartbreaking, completely unacceptable scale. With armed conflicts escalating, blatant disregard for international law, including protections for children, persistent impunity, and record-levels of grave violations against children reported, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and our members and partners continued to raise our voices for children – demanding an end to grave violations, accountability for those who continue violating children’s rights, and striving to strengthen the protection of children living through war.

Together, let’s take a look back at key moments for Watchlist and for the UN’s Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) agenda in 2024:

January: On January 30, Watchlist with Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) held our annual policy workshop on children and armed conflict – the 10th CAAC policy workshop Watchlist’s has organized since 2013. The workshop was our first in partnership with SIPA and brought together members of the UN Security Council, as well as non-Council Member States, UN offices and agencies, civil society, and academia. Check out the key points and recommendations in our [summary report!](#)

February: In February, Watchlist marked International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers (also known as “Red Hand Day”) with our fourth annual [#RaiseYourRed](#) social media campaign, aimed at raising awareness of the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) and resources to address the ongoing grave violation of recruiting and using children.

March: In March, [Watchlist was in Geneva](#) participating in side events to the 55th session of the UN’s Human Rights Council. Alongside the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, Watchlist organized a side event on [Protecting Education in Armed Conflict: Access and Accountability](#), with support from the Permanent Missions of Colombia, Malta, and Switzerland to the UN in Geneva, the Group of Friends of CAAC in Geneva, and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA).

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for CAAC (SRSG-CAAC) provided her annual briefing to the Human Rights Council in March. Read her report [here](#).

April: The Chair of the Security Council Working Group on CAAC, Malta, held the UN Security Council Presidency in April and organized a briefing on April 3 on Addressing the Consequences of the Denial of Humanitarian Access for Children. Didn’t catch the briefing? Watch it [here](#) on UNwebTV!

Also in April, Watchlist published the [2024 Credible List Report](#) with our recommendations for the Secretary-General’s 2024 annual report on CAAC. This year, Watchlist made 35 recommendations regarding behaviors by 24 armed actors across 15 armed conflict contexts. At a hybrid launch event in New York on April 16, Watchlist and panelists delved deeper into grave violations against children in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Haiti, and Sudan.

May: May was a busy month for the Watchlist network! On May 1, Watchlist published a new policy note on [Explosive Weapons and the Children and Armed Conflict Agenda](#) – exploring ways in which children are severely impacted by the use of explosive weapons and how explosive weapons are used in relation to four of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict. Throughout the rest of the year, we have continued to raise the key findings and recommendations from the report.

Also in May, Watchlist joined the public launch of the [Beyond Compliance Consortium](#) – a partnership that brings together nine academic, humanitarian, and human rights organizations working in the fields of international law, political science, and humanitarian protection work. Funded by the UK Government, the consortium is undertaking a three-year theoretical, empirical, and operational research program aimed at contributing to the effective prevention and reduction of humanitarian need and civilian harm in war. Since its launch in May, the consortium has already established an ongoing [Blog Symposium](#) – Watchlist staff have contributed to three blogs to date – as well as a [podcast series](#).

June: June was the month for all things CAAC at the UN Security Council – with the publication of the [Secretary-General's 2024 annual report on CAAC](#) on June 13 and the **Security Council's annual open debate on CAAC** held on June 26 & 27. The Republic of Korea held the Security Council presidency in June and was responsible for organizing the annual open debate on CAAC. In anticipation of these key moments on CAAC, Watchlist published an [Open Letter to the Secretary-General Calling for a Complete and Accurate List of Perpetrators](#), alongside 22 other NGOs, and released our [Special Update: Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict](#).

The report provided UN-verified information on grave violations against children across 26 armed conflict situations. The overall number of grave violations reached the highest ever verified in a single year since the start of the UN's systematic monitoring with nearly 33,000 grave violations – a 21 percent increase from the previous year. The situation with by far the highest number of verified grave violations against children was Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Deeply concerning increases in grave violations were also noted in Sudan, Nigeria, the Lake Chad Basin region, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). For the second year in a row, government actors were the main perpetrators of the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access for children. New parties were added to the annexed list of perpetrators – sometimes called the “list of shame” – including parties in Burkina Faso, DRC, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (for the first time ever), Mali, and Sudan. Read Watchlist's full response to the report [here](#).

The open debate on June 26 & 27 offered an opportunity for UN Members States to discuss the implementation of the CAAC agenda, with a particular focus on the denial of humanitarian access for children; drawdown of peacekeeping operations and special political missions; and attacks on schools and hospitals. The SRSG-CAAC presented the key findings from the report, followed by reflections from the Deputy Executive Director at UNICEF, Mr. Ted Chaiban, the former UN Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, speaking in his capacity as a member of the Elders, and a 16-year-old from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who spoke on behalf of civil society.

The ensuing debate featured 77 interventions, representing 110 Member States, as well as the Observer States of Palestine and the Holy See. Statements reflected a deep concern at the alarming rise in grave violations against children, called for accountability and compliance with international law, expressed support for the CAAC mandate and called for action plans to end and prevent violations, among other topics. Specific conflict situations featured prominently in statements – in particular the conflicts in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar, and Haiti. Statements also noted the 25th anniversary since the adoption of the first Security Council Resolution on CAAC – Resolution 1261 (1999).

Also in June, the opposition Syrian National Army signed a new [joint action plan](#) with the UN on ending and preventing recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children. Action plans are key tools for

armed actors to partner with the UN to take concrete, time-bound steps to end and prevent grave violations against children.

July: Watchlist continued its usual activities and took time to recover in preparation for...

August: ...our [return to Geneva](#) to organize Watchlist's first CAAC policy workshop outside of New York! The workshop was jointly organized alongside the Geneva Academy's Human Rights Platform, with support from the Permanent Mission of Switzerland. The full-day event featured a keynote address from Ms. Ann Skelton, Chair of the UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child, and panel discussions on 1) Challenges and priorities for the UN's CAAC Agenda: Geneva and New York perspectives; 2) Mechanisms to Increase the Protection of Children Affected by Armed Conflict; 3) Strengthening Accountability for Grave Violations against Children in Armed Conflict; and 4) Fireside Chat on Global Tools and Initiatives to Protect Children in War. Our [summary report](#) gives an overview of the discussions and recommendations.

September: During the UN General Assembly's High-Level Week, Watchlist continued to spotlight the protection of children in armed conflict through co-organizing a side event on humanitarian access for children alongside Save the Children, the Permanent Missions of Algeria, Belgium, Canada, Greece, Luxembourg, and Malta to the UN, Geneva Call, CIVIC, War Child Alliance, World Vision, and the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace, and Security. Watchlist also spoke during the [Summit of the Future](#) Action Day session on protection of civilians in urban warfare, highlighting the impact of explosive weapons on children.

Also in September, Watchlist launched our [Children and Armed Conflict Global Dashboard](#) – a new tool to view and search data on grave violations against children collected and verified by the UN's monitoring and reporting mechanism. The Dashboard aims to support researchers, advocates, governments, and others to be able to view trends on grave violations by situation and over time. Watchlist put the new Dashboard to good use right away – publishing [Implementing the Children and Armed Conflict Agenda: Analyzing Data on Trends, Enabling Factors, and Persistent Challenges in Situations with Listed Parties](#) in November.

October: In October, Watchlist organized and convened a panel at Geneva Peace Week on [Safeguarding the Present and Future: Ensuring that Children are Protected in War](#), where we shared more information about the CAAC Global Dashboard and initial findings from analysis.

Also in October, the SRSB-CAAC gave her annual briefing to the UN General Assembly (her report is available [here](#)) and published a new [joint study](#) on the linkages between child trafficking and grave violations. Finally, a new [handover protocol](#) was signed in Central African Republic to ensure that children associated with armed forces and armed groups are swiftly transferred to appropriate civilian child protection authorities.

November – Watchlist marked the anniversary of the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers with a high-level event in New York, hosted by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN and co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the UN.

Also in November, the Office of the SRSG-CAAC and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child released a joint statement commemorating [35 years since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

December – Finally in December, the Security Council Working Group on CAAC undertook a visiting mission to Colombia. This is the second Working Group visiting mission organized during Malta’s Chairmanship, following up from a 2023 visit to Nigeria. The Working Group visits are a continuing good practice and a way for Security Council members to get a closer look at the impact of the CAAC agenda on the ground.

Also in December, the Security Council negotiated a new resolution on children and armed conflict, focused on ensuring child protection activities can continue when UN peace operations undergo transitions or withdraw. At the time of writing, the Security Council has scheduled a vote on the draft resolution for Friday, December 20. If passed, this will represent the 14th thematic Security Council resolution on CAAC.

In 2024, the Working Group adopted seven conclusions on CAAC in: [Afghanistan](#), [Central African Republic](#), [Colombia](#), [Iraq](#), the [Philippines](#), [Somalia](#), and [Sudan](#). In addition, the Working Group has agreed its conclusions on Nigeria, with formal adoption scheduled before the end of the year at the time of writing. Congrats to Malta on completing its two-year term as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on CAAC!

With gratitude for Watchlist’s dedicated staff and member organizations, we look forward to continuing to work together to protect children in armed conflict in 2025. See you next year!