WATCH LIST
ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

A Look Back at Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict in 2025

Over the last 12 months, children continued to suffer unacceptable levels of harm in armed conflicts around the world. For the second year in a row, the UN released record-breaking numbers of grave violations against children. Global funding cuts for humanitarian and development aid, budget restrictions and reform at the United Nations, and an increasingly polarized global policy environment, resulted in less prioritization for children's rights and protection in armed conflict even as the scale of need continues to expand. Against this backdrop, 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 2025:

January: On January 27, Watchlist with Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) held our annual policy workshop on children and armed conflict – the 12th CAAC policy workshop Watchlist's has organized since 2013. The workshop was our second 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 fifth 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.

Watchlist also commemorated Red Hand Day by convening an expert roundtable on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict alongside the Permanent Missions of Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom. The event aimed to enhance understanding about the scale and impact of child recruitment, including its implications for international peace and security, and spotlight the work of child protection actors in Haiti and Nigeria.

Later in February, Watchlist partnered with Security Council Report, the Permanent Missions of Malta, Belgium, and Norway, and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC) to hold the first ever capacity-building retreat for Security Council experts working on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC). The retreat brought together the members of the Security Council Working Group on CAAC and key stakeholders from the UN and civil society to strengthen understanding of the tools and mechanisms established under the UN's CAAC framework, in particular those available to the Working Group on CAAC.

March: In March, Watchlist was in Geneva participating in side events to the 58th session of the UN's Human Rights Council. Alongside Save the Children, Defence for Children International, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), the OSRSG-CAAC, the EU Delegation in Geneva, and the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the UN in Geneva, in partnership with the Geneva Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, Watchlist held a side event on strengthening prevention of, response to, and accountability for violations and abuses against conflict-affected children.

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.

Later in the month, Watchlist launched our CAAC Digital Library with an event during Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week in Geneva. The event included speakers from the OSRSG-CAAC, International Committee of the Red Cross, Justice Rapid Response, and the UN Institute for Disarmament Research. The Digital Library gathers key multilateral and national documents relevant to the CAAC agenda and aims to support the work of advocates, researchers, and other stakeholders to better protect children during armed conflict.

April: In April, Watchlist published the ninth edition of its annual 2025 Credible List Report with our recommendations for the Secretary-General's 2025 annual report on CAAC. This year, Watchlist recommended that four parties in three armed conflict situations be listed for grave violations and an additional 20 armed parties be further investigated to determine if they should be listed. At a hybrid launch event in New York on April 10, Watchlist and panelists delved deeper into grave violations against children in Haiti and Ukraine.

May: In May, Watchlist's thoughts turned to the UN's Protection of Civilians (POC) Week! We joined with 20 other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in a statement calling for urgent action to strengthen accountability and ensure robust implementation of protection mandates.

On May 20, Watchlist co-organized a side event on "Implementing Tools to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict." The event featured reflections on normative tools such as the Paris Principles and Commitments on Children Associated with Armed Groups, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, the Safe Schools Declaration, and the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences of the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA Declaration).

On May 29, after five long months of negotiation, the members of the Security Council confirmed Greece as the new chair of the Security Council Working Group on CAAC, with Panama as co-chair. With the new chair in place, the Working Group took up its negotiations on country-specific conclusions, reviewing reports and shaping recommendations for ending and preventing grave violations against children.

June: June was the month for all things CAAC at the UN Security Council – with the publication of the **Secretary-General's 2025 annual report on CAAC** on June 19 and **the Security Council's annual open debate on CAAC** held on June 25 and 26. Guyana held the Security Council presidency in June and organized the annual open debate on CAAC. In anticipation of these key moments on CAAC, Watchlist published on Open Letter to the Secretary-General Calling for a Complete and Accurate List of Perpetrators, alongside 20 other NGOs, released our Special Update: Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict, and co-authored a blog through the Beyond Compliance Consortium's blog symposium titled, "Recommitting to Compliance and Restraint to Reverse the Unprecedented Trends of Harm and Need Experienced by Children in Armed Conflict."

The report provided UN-verified information on grave violations against children across 26 armed conflict situations in 2024. For the second year in a row, the total number of UN-verified grave violations against children reached the highest level since the establishment of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), with 41,370 grave violations against children. This marked a 25 percent increase from 2023 (32,990). For the third consecutive year, government forces were the main perpetrators of killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian

access. The highest numbers were verified in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (8,554), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (4,043), Somalia (2,568), Nigeria (2,436), and Haiti (2,269), with the steepest percentage increases in Lebanon (545 percent), Mozambique (525 percent), Haiti (490 percent), Ethiopia (235 percent), and Ukraine (105 percent). The Secretary-General newly listed perpetrators in Central African Republic (CAR), Colombia, DRC, and Haiti for grave violations and added grave violations for already listed perpetrators in DRC and Sudan. Read Watchlist's press release on the report here.

The open debate on June 25/26 offered an opportunity for UN Members States to discuss the implementation of the CAAC agenda, with a particular focus on: (i) killing and maiming; (ii) the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons; and (iii) rape and sexual violence, particularly against girls. The SRSG-CAAC presented the key findings from the report, followed by reflections from the Director of Child Protection at UNICEF, Ms. Sheema Sen Gupta, and a 17-year-old from Syria who spoke on behalf of civil society.

The ensuing debate featured 91 interventions, representing 115 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, called for humanitarian access for children, and stressed normative frameworks such as the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles, and the Vancouver Principles, and the EWIPA Declaration, among other topics. Specific conflict situations featured prominently in statements – in particular the conflicts in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Ukraine, DRC, Sudan, Haiti, and Myanmar. Statements also noted the 20th anniversary since the MRM was established through Resolution 1612 (2005).

Ahead of the open debate, Algeria, Denmark, France, Greece, Guyana, Pakistan, Panama, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia held a joint press stakeout to express their "unwavering commitment to children across the world, acknowledging our collective responsibility to children affected by armed conflict." Their full statement to the press is available here.

July: In July, Watchlist and the CAAC community bid farewell to Ms. Virginia Gamba as her eight years serving as the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict came to an end. We thank Ms. Gamba for her dedication to the CAAC mandate and her collaboration with Watchlist and our partners as we worked together to strengthen the protection of children.

August: Late in August, Watchlist returned to Geneva to host our second Geneva CAAC policy workshop! The workshop was jointly organized alongside the Geneva Academy's Human Rights Platform, with support from the Governments of Belgium and Switzerland. The full-day event featured discussions on 1) challenges and priorities for the UN's CAAC agenda; 2) the Beyond Compliance Consortium's "harm and need" approach and how it can apply to the protection of children in armed conflict; 3) the protection of children's right to education in armed conflict; and 4) strengthening accountability for grave violations against children in armed conflict. Our summary report gives an overview of the discussions and recommendations.

Also in August, Watchlist published its report "Bringing Multilateralism Back Home: Integrating International Legal and Policy Instruments Relevant to the UN's Children and Armed Conflict Agenda into Domestic Law." The first in a series of publications, this report explores the ways in which national

governments have incorporated international laws and commitments to better protect children in situations of armed conflict. The report examines trends across 25 situations of concern included in the UN Secretary-General's annual reports on CAAC, drawing on data from Watchlist's CAAC Digital Library.

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 Ministerial working dinner on CAAC as part of its continuing contribution to the Beyond Compliance Consortium. Alongside Watchlist, the event was supported by the Permanent Missions of Malta, the United Kingdom, and Greece, along with representatives from the Beyond Compliance Consortium (the International Humanitarian Law Centre and War Child Alliance), and Save the Children. The event brought together Member States, UN actors and civil society organizations for a closed-door discussion on the dire consequences of armed conflict on children, alarming trends, and strategies to promote compliance with international law and restraint of armed actors to reduce the harm experienced by children in armed conflict.

Also during High-Level Week, Watchlist participated in side events focused on international law compliance, protecting education, children's rights, and early childhood development.

October: In October, Watchlist and the CAAC community welcomed Ambassador Vanessa Frazier as the new SRSG-CAAC! SRSG Frazier served as the Permanent Representative of Malta to the UN during Malta's 2023-2024 term as an elected member of the Security Council and chaired the Working Group on CAAC. The UN General Assembly renewed the mandate of the SRSG-CAAC during its Third Committee session, and the mandate's annual report to the UN General Assembly is available here. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with SRSG Frazier in her new role.

November – Watchlist was on the road again in November participating in conferences in Nairobi, Kenya, including the Dallaire Institute's Global Conference on Including Children in Peace Processes and the Fifth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration.

In addition to these international conferences, on November 10, Watchlist published the second report under its Bringing Multilateralism Back Home project, "Preventing and Addressing Grave Violations Against Children During Armed Conflict in Domestic Law: Lessons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Colombia, and Ukraine." Watchlist organized a launch event to share the key findings from this report on November 12, hosted by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland in New York. The event also featured speakers from UNICEF, Save the Children, and the Dallaire Institute.

December – Finally in December, Watchlist participated in an event organized by the Permanent Mission of Malta to mark the one-year anniversary of the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2764 (2024). Watchlist joined the panel, highlighting the timeliness of the resolution's focus on maintaining and sustainably transitioning child protection capacities when UN missions transition or withdraw, and stressing the serious impacts of global funding cuts in 2025 on child protection actors.

Despite delays in confirming the chair and challenging negotiations, at the close of the year, the Security Council Working Group on CAAC managed to adopt its conclusions on the DRC. We look forward to seeing this momentum continue in the new year!

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 2026. See you next year!