



**United Nations Human Rights Council - 46th Session
Interactive Dialogue with the Special Representative of the
Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC) Virginia Gamba
Geneva, 8 March 2021**

STATEMENT

Excellencies, Special Representative Gamba, colleagues, I am making this statement today on behalf of: Plan International, Arigatou International, the Child Rights International Network (CRIN), Save the Children, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, and World Vision International.

We commend the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting in their efforts to document grave violations against children and seek greater protection for them throughout this and last year, despite COVID-19 related lockdowns and mobility restrictions. The teams carry out this work with great responsibility, commitment, and courage.

We also wish to voice our support for the initial efforts of the Office of the Special Representative to better understand the gender dimensions of Children and Armed Conflict. We continue to call for strengthening the collection of sex and age-disaggregated data. It is crucial to recognize the diverse experiences of children and differentiated risks and needs of girls in particular in armed conflict so that all stakeholders avoid harmful assumptions that would exclude girls or prevent them from getting the assistance they need.

Girls suffer all six grave violations against children in conflict. Yet their experiences of recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups, and the other grave violations connected to their experiences, is little understood and not adequately documented. Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups have been largely overlooked by field actors, diplomats, policy-makers, and donors. Worldwide, almost two thirds of all conflicts involving the recruitment of children have used girls. Data also suggests that the likelihood of recruitment of girls increases with the length of the conflict. However, the recruitment of girls is severely under-reported. Verified data from the 2019 Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on the six grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict outlines that only 8% of 4,594 Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups identified in 11 countries were girls.

The lack of data on girls' association with armed actors has contributed to a misrepresentation of the problem. Plan International, in collaboration with UNICEF, conducted a desk review and field research specifically on Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups to better understand the ways

girls are recruited by armed groups, their experiences during association, and their experiences afterwards in any reintegration. Our research shows that the recruitment and use of girls is highly contextual with respect to both numbers and girl's roles and functions. In 14 countries where recruitment of girls was ongoing in 2019 Plan International collected information that emphasizes the uniqueness of their situations, the many reasons why girls may join an armed group, and their experiences during their involvement and afterwards – including the stigma they may experience.

We call upon:

- *The UN SRSG-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.
- *UN Member States* to support and adequately resource the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to ensure that data collection is sex and age-disaggregated and survivor-centered, and to support the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) on Children and Armed Conflict to develop gender-responsive action plans with listed parties to conflict with full consideration to age, gender, and diversity.
- *Parties to conflict, including state and non-state armed groups*, to cease the recruitment and use of children, including girls no matter their role, and to unconditionally release all children in their ranks. The release of girls should be included in all negotiations with armed forces and groups, including girls who are married to fighters. Children associated with armed forces and armed groups have the right to release and reintegration at all times, including in the midst of the conflict, without precondition.