

Children and Armed Conflict:

UN SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

SPECIAL UPDATE:
JULY 2018

Recommendations for the UN Security Council and Member States

On July 9, 2018, the UN Security Council will hold its Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict (CAC), under the presidency of Sweden, current chair of the Security Council Working Group on CAC. At the debate, the Secretary-General (SG) will present his annual report on CAC, pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2225 (2015), covering January 1 to December 31, 2017. Sweden will take the opportunity of the debate to highlight protection of children's rights and prevention of future violations, and plans to introduce a resolution for adoption.

At this writing, the SG's 2018 annual report had not yet been released. The recommendations below, therefore, are based on other UN reporting, and are reflective of trends Watchlist and its members have identified through their work in conflict-affected countries.

The impartial inclusion of country situations and listing of perpetrators in the annual report on the basis of credible evidence gathered, reviewed, and rigorously verified by the UN-led Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) is essential to address grave violations and promote accountability. It is anticipated that for the second year in a row, the annexes of the SG's report will be divided into two categories: parties to conflict that have "put in place measures [...] aimed at improving the protection of children" and those that have not. It is unclear what criteria the SG has used to determine these two categories, and the division undermines listing as a tool for condemnation and accountability. Considering that violations by parties deemed to have put in place measures, such as the Saudi Arabia-led Coalition, continued in 2017, Watchlist urges the SG to carefully monitor and publically document measures listed parties have implemented during the reporting period, and return to a single list of parties that commit grave violations against children in future annual reports on CAC.

Ongoing reform processes at the UN, including budget cuts to peacekeeping and efforts to streamline protection mandates, threaten the UN's ability to deliver on the Security Council's CAC mandate, particularly as a result of diminished child protection capacity in peace missions. Child protection advisers play a critical role in monitoring and reporting, operationalizing action plans, and strengthening the overall child protection architecture in field missions. Watchlist reiterates its calls for continued support for child protection in UN peace operations.

In his 2018 annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2018/462), the SG highlights the alarming impacts of the denial of humanitarian access on children, including the use of starvation as a method of warfare. In a number of country situations on the CAC agenda, including Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine, parties have used various means to prevent civilians from accessing humanitarian assistance, leading in many instances to manmade public health crises, extreme hunger, and in some cases, famine. Parties to conflict have also attacked hospitals, contracting access to treatment while health care needs have skyrocketed. In order to promote accountability for this violation, as well as strengthened and standardized monitoring and reporting, Watchlist recommends that States request the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC) to develop practical guidance on data collection on the denial of humanitarian access.

On the 18th 'birthday' of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC), Watchlist calls for universal ratification of the protocol and encourages those States that have not yet signed or ratified to do so without delay. Watchlist encourages States to declare their support for a 'Straight-18' standard and to promote global consensus to end the military recruitment and use of children. Watchlist further calls on States that have not yet done so to endorse the Paris Principles and Vancouver Principles, which offer practical guidance for the protection of children from recruitment and use and their effective reintegration.

In view of the upcoming Open Debate, Watchlist recommends that the Security Council and other UN Member States:

1. Call for an accurate and credible list of perpetrators of the grave violations, grounded in impartial evidence-based reporting:

Situations before the Council involving parties listed for grave violations against children:

[Afghanistan](#)

[Central African Republic](#)

[Colombia](#)

[Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)

[Iraq](#)

[Mali](#)

[Myanmar \(Burma\)](#)

[Nigeria](#)

[Philippines](#)

[Somalia](#)

[South Sudan](#)

[Sudan](#)

[Syrian Arab Republic](#)

[Yemen](#)

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- a. Welcoming the SG's 2018 annual report, reiterate support for the Security Council's CAC mandate, including the integrity and impartiality of the mechanism for listing all perpetrators of grave violations of children's rights;
- b. In support of his impartiality, call on the SG to ensure an accurate and credible list of perpetrators in the annexes of his annual reports; taking note of their reformatting for a second consecutive year, strongly urge the SG to publicly document and carefully monitor measures listed parties have taken during the reporting period to protect children; and further call for a return to a single list of parties that commit grave violations in future annual reports on CAC.

2. Call for more effective monitoring, reporting, and response to child rights violations in armed conflict situations:

- a. In order to effectively implement the Council's CAC agenda, preserve standalone capacity of UN peacekeeping and political missions to monitor, report, and respond to grave violations against children; and to this end, call for a review of the consolidation of child protection functions within human rights components of these missions to determine impact on delivery of the UN's child protection mandate;
- b. Call on States, UN entities, and other parties concerned to integrate child protection provisions, including those relating to release and reintegration, in the early stages of all peace and ceasefire negotiations; to this end, urge stakeholders to draw upon new and existing tools, including the *Checklist for drafting CAC provisions in peace agreements*, developed by Watchlist and other experts;
- c. Expressing grave concern over the detention of children on national security charges, urge States to treat children associated with armed groups as victims entitled to full protection of their rights, including rehabilitation and reintegration into society; in cases where children may have committed illegal acts, States should ensure they are treated in accordance with international juvenile justice standards, including the use of detention only as a last resort and for the shortest possible period of time;
- d. Reminding all parties of their obligations under international law to allow and facilitate safe, timely, and unhindered humanitarian access to civilians in need, including children, request the OSRSG-CAAC to develop practical guidance on data collection on denial of humanitarian access to standardize and support the work of UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting.







3. Call for effective implementation and signing of more UN action plans with armed forces and groups listed in the annexes of the SG's annual report on CAC:

- a. Emphasize the responsibility of all listed parties, including those designated as having put in place measures to protect children, to enter into and fully implement concrete and time-bound action plans with the UN to end all violations; and further call on parties with existing action plans to take timely steps towards more effective implementation and to report on their progress;
- b. Encourage the UN to strengthen its engagement with armed non-State actors to end and prevent violations against children, including through negotiation and signing of action plans; and to this end, call on States to allow and facilitate access for these purposes;
- c. Urge those parties to conflict that have signed action plans to widely disseminate their commitments following signature, including to civil society and affected communities, in order to increase transparency, facilitate monitoring, and promote compliance.

4. Call for strengthened accountability for all perpetrators of child rights violations, including those who attack schools and hospitals and/or deny humanitarian access:

- a. Urge Member States to implement the SG's recommendations regarding measures to protect health care (S/2016/722), including by supporting UN data collection on attacks on health care in armed conflict through the Security Council-mandated MRM and other mechanisms, and specifically to allow independent monitors unhindered access to affected locations and persons;
- b. Hold to account parties to conflict who deliberately target schools; call upon States to commit to avoiding the military use of schools by endorsing the *Safe Schools Declaration*, and to integrate guidance on military use of schools into their training materials and special operating procedures;
- c. To promote global consensus to end military recruitment and use of children, support the Straight-18 standard, and encourage States that have not yet signed or ratified the OPAC to do so without delay; further encourage States to endorse the Paris Principles and Vancouver Principles.

NGO Resources

-  Child Soldiers International, [Why 18 Matters: A Rights-Based Analysis of Child Recruitment](#), May 2018
-  Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, [Education under Attack](#), May 2018
-  Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, [Violence on the Front Line: Attacks on Health Care in 2017](#), May 2018
-  Watchlist, ["Everyone and Everything Is a Target," The Impact on Children of Attacks on Health Care and Denial of Humanitarian Access in South Sudan](#), April 2018
-  Watchlist, [A Credible List: Recommendations for the 2018 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict and Listings](#), March 2018
-  Watchlist, ["A Checklist for Mainstreaming,"](#) March 2013

About Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a global network of international human rights and humanitarian non-governmental organizations which strives to end violations against children in armed conflicts through local partnerships, reporting and advocacy.

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Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

122 East 42nd Street, Suite 1620, New York, NY 10168-1289 • Telephone: 212.972.0695 • Fax: 212.972.0701

Email: watchlist@watchlist.org • Website: www.watchlist.org