

Strategic Plan 2024-2027: Executive Summary

For more than 20 years, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict ('Watchlist') has worked to end grave violations against children in armed conflicts and to guarantee their rights. As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national, and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, Watchlist and its network members collect and disseminate information on violations against children in armed conflict in order to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children. With its unique role and specialized expertise, Watchlist has established itself as a well-respected, reliable network of NGOs that monitors, reports, and advocates for the protection of children's rights in armed conflict.

Despite certain achievements of the children and armed conflict (CAAC) agenda and mechanisms, more children live in conflict zones than at any time in the past two decades. In 2022, Save the Children reported that 468 million children lived in areas affected by armed conflict, and nearly 200 million lived in 'the world's most lethal war zones'.¹ Children face unprecedented suffering, with the number of verified violations at an all-time high. These include killing and maiming, use and recruitment, cases of sexual violence, and abduction. Schools and hospitals have also been destroyed, and humanitarian relief has been denied on arbitrary grounds, depriving children of vital services. To address these realities, Watchlist has developed this strategic plan for the period 2024-2027. This document is informed by past experiences and considers challenges and opportunities for the protection of children in armed conflict.

During the period from 2024 to 2027, Watchlist will consolidate and build upon its unique position and the credibility it has gained over the years to continue to increase the protection of children affected by war. Specifically, Watchlist will seek to:

1. Preserve the integrity of the UN's CAAC architecture;
2. Advance the implementation of the CAAC agenda; and
3. Elevate CAAC in relevant global policy discussions and actions, including on emerging and protracted issues.

¹ <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/worst-conflict-affected-countries-to-be-a-child>.



Photo: Lorenzo Merlo / ICRC

Goals and Strategies for 2024-2027

The UN's CAAC mandate is an important tool for accountability for grave violations against children in armed conflict, which can spur concrete change for affected children. The current context and operating environment present a number of challenges, including evolving warfare and tactics at the field level and an increasingly shrinking political space for engagement on international humanitarian law, human rights, and specifically children's rights, both globally and at the New York level. More than 20 years since its inception, the CAAC architecture is under threat. At the same time, Watchlist recognizes its unique position to protect and uphold the integrity of this same architecture.

In support of this aim, Watchlist will work towards the following three overarching strategic goals for the 2024-2027 strategic period: 1) Preserve the integrity of the CAAC architecture; 2) Advance the implementation of the CAAC agenda; and 3) Elevate CAAC in relevant global policy discussions and action, including on emerging and protracted issues.

GOAL 1

As the only NGO network working expressly on the UN's CAAC agenda, Watchlist will work to **preserve the integrity of the CAAC architecture**. In order to achieve this goal, Watchlist will work towards three objectives:

- a) Watchlist will continue to advocate for a **credible and accurate list of perpetrators** of grave violations against children in armed conflict, as well as the inclusion of all relevant situations of concern, in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict.
- b) Watchlist will continue to champion for an **effective and well-functioning Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict**, with tangible results for children.
- c) Watchlist will advocate for **leadership on the CAAC agenda by key stakeholders**.

HOW WE WORK

As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national, and international NGOs, enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we strategically collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflicts in order to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children.

THEORY OF CHANGE AND AIM

By strengthening institutions and promoting international laws and norms, Watchlist seeks to put pressure on international level policy-makers (i.e. governments and the United Nations) and increase the cost of noncompliance.

Watchlist firmly believes in the UN's CAAC mandate as a strong tool for accountability. By protecting the integrity of the mandate, Watchlist aims to ensure its effectiveness and impact. Laws and norms must be implemented to be effective, and Watchlist plays a role in translating New York-based initiatives into real progress for children in situations of armed conflict. By recognizing that warfare and tactics are evolving, Watchlist also seeks to ensure that the mandate and its tools remain relevant.



GOAL 2

Watchlist will work together with others to **advance the implementation of the CAAC agenda**. In order to achieve this goal, Watchlist will work towards two objectives:

- a) Watchlist will advocate with UN actors to increase compliance with international law on CAAC and **hold all perpetrators accountable for child rights violations**.
- b) Watchlist will encourage the **adoption and implementation of CAAC commitments**.

GOAL 3

Watchlist will work to elevate CAAC in relevant global policy discussions and action, including on emerging and protracted issues. In order to achieve this goal, Watchlist will work towards two objectives:

- a) Watchlist will leverage its coordinating role and institutional knowledge with a wide network of actors to provide thought leadership toward **ensuring that CAAC is mainstreamed in emerging policy and normative processes**.
- b) Watchlist, together with key partners, will **conduct research on topical CAAC issues and disseminate its findings**.

MISSION STATEMENT

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict strives to end violations against children in armed conflicts and to guarantee their rights.

Watchlist Operations 2024-2027



GOVERNANCE:

In this period, Watchlist will seek to expand its Advisory Board by at least one member and add at least two new Associate Members, with a view towards strengthening the mobilization of stakeholders to further the CAAC agenda.



OPERATIONS:

Watchlist will maintain its four staff positions (Director, Global Advocacy Advisor, Grants and Operations Coordinator, Researcher) and seek additional growth. Although the first priority is to fully secure funding for its current organizational structure, in order to address short- to midterm organizational capacity constraints, as well as to be more sustainable in the long term, Watchlist will prioritize hiring a new position with a focus on advocacy and research.



FUNDRAISING:

Watchlist's program staff are responsible for fundraising, which can be a burden on the already overcommitted team. During this strategic period, Watchlist will seek to increase its funding in a sustainable way, focusing on the following goals: 1) diversify its donor base to include non-governmental sources; 2) increase core funding; and 3) secure a greater number of multiyear grants.



COMMUNICATIONS:

Watchlist will continue to expand its social media presence to disseminate its advocacy to international level policy makers, as well as to journalists, academia, and broader policy audiences. During the 2024-2027 strategic period,

Watchlist will prioritize developing a more targeted and streamlined communications strategy that contributes to the above-outlined goals and objectives.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION:

In this strategic period, Watchlist's staff will produce four annual activity plans. The Advisory Board and staff will evaluate progress and assess priorities during its quarterly meetings. As in previous years, Watchlist's annual reports will detail activities, outcomes, and impact, and also include a financial report. In order to assess progress on the strategic goals outlined above, Watchlist staff and Advisory Board members will conduct a midterm review during their first quarterly meeting in 2026.



Photo: Wael Al Absi / ICRC

Conclusion

More than 20 years since its establishment, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict has grown from a small 'start-up' to a well-established network renowned for its expertise on children and armed conflict. It has contributed to the advancement of the UN's CAAC agenda, which today includes a strong normative framework for the protection of children's rights in such contexts. Data collection on grave violations has generally improved since the inception of the UN's MRM in 2005. 38 action plans have been signed with the UN to end and prevent grave violations, and of these, 12 have fully complied with their commitments and been delisted.

Despite these advances, children in armed conflict continue to face grave violations of their rights. Parties to conflict have shown a flagrant disregard for international laws protecting children's rights, and evolving tactics, including by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, the denial of humanitarian access, and attacks on civilian infrastructure, presenting new challenges for children's protection.

Reflecting on these new realities and drawing from its previous experiences, Watchlist has developed this 2024-2027 strategic plan. During this next strategic period, Watchlist will rise to meet these challenges and to remain relevant and effective in addressing the rights and needs of children affected by war.

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

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