

Implementing the 'Children  
and Armed Conflict' Agenda:

# Analyzing Data on Trends, Enabling Factors, and Persistent Challenges in Situations with Listed Parties

By Rob Grace | November 2024

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## About Watchlist

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict ("Watchlist") strives to end violations against children in armed conflicts and to guarantee their rights. As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national, and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflicts in order to influence key decision-makers and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children. Watchlist is a fiscally sponsored project of United Charitable, a US-based 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization.

For further information about Watchlist, please visit: [www.watchlist.org](http://www.watchlist.org).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) agenda on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) celebrated its 25th year in 2024. The key elements of the CAAC agenda include the United Nations Secretary-General's (UNSG) annual reports on CAAC and the annexed lists of perpetrators, the mandate of the Special Representative of the UNSG for CAAC, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), and the UNSC Working Group on CAAC (SCWG-CAAC). These elements provide a unique framework for addressing grave violations against children in war.

The listing of any party to an armed conflict in the UNSG's list of perpetrators triggers the establishment of the formal MRM and the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting in that conflict situation. Additionally, the UNSG reports to the SCWG-CAAC on situations with at least one listed party. The SCWG-CAAC then makes recommendations to relevant actors to strengthen the protection of children and end and prevent grave violations against them. Currently, there are 18 such conflict situations.<sup>1</sup>

This report examines data from these situations where at least one party to armed conflict has been listed in the UNSG's annexed list of perpetrators and where the formal UN MRM has been established. Watchlist compiled data from the UNSG's annual reports on CAAC for each of these situations between 2002 and 2024 in its CAAC Global Dashboard, which serves as the basis for this analysis.<sup>2</sup> The analysis shows that the below factors play a role in shaping trends in grave violations:

- **Conflict and peace process dynamics.** Levels of grave violations often ebb and flow over time as the scale and severity of armed conflicts fluctuate.
- **Third-party supporters.** Third-party governments—including the 5 Permanent Members of the UNSC—have offered robust security support to some of the worst perpetrators of grave violations.

<sup>1</sup> The conflict situations are Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Lake Chad Basin region, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen.

<sup>2</sup> The Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard can be accessed at: <https://watchlist.org/resources/caac-global-dashboard/>.



- **Legal accountability.** The scale of ‘trigger’ violations is lower in contexts where the International Criminal Court (ICC) has jurisdiction, compared with contexts for which the ICC lacks jurisdiction
- **Local civil society activities.** In country contexts with the lowest levels of civil society participation, States exhibit a greater propensity to perpetrate ‘trigger’ violations. Conversely, States on the higher end of the civil society participation spectrum exhibit a lower propensity to perpetrate ‘trigger’ violations.

The report further examines these dynamics through case studies from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Northeast Syria. Finally, the report includes key recommendations related to: 1) elevating visibility for, and fortifying the credibility of, the CAAC agenda; 2) combatting impunity for grave violations; 3) deepening understanding of the drivers of grave violations; and 4) bolstering coordination among the varied actors advocating for and implementing the CAAC agenda.





# 1 INTRODUCTION



Photographer: Tom Stoddart, © Getty Images/ICRC.





## 1.1. Background

The United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) agenda on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) celebrated its 25th year in 2024. The key elements of the CAAC agenda include the United Nations Secretary-General's (UNSG) annual report on CAAC and its annexed list of perpetrators, the mandate of the Special Representative of the UNSG for CAAC, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), and the UNSC Working Group on CAAC (SCWG-CAAC). These elements provide a unique framework for addressing grave violations against children in war, those being:

- 1) killing and maiming of children,
- 2) recruitment and use of children,
- 3) rape and other forms of sexual violence against children,
- 4) abduction of children,
- 5) attacks on schools and hospitals, and
- 6) denial of humanitarian access for children.

The listing of any party to an armed conflict in the UNSG's list of perpetrators triggers the establishment of the formal MRM and the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) in that conflict situation. Additionally, the UNSG reports to the SCWG-CAAC on situations with at least one listed party. The SCWG-CAAC then makes recommendations to relevant actors to strengthen the protection of children and end and prevent grave violations against them. Currently, there are 18 such conflict situations.<sup>3</sup>

This report examines data from these situations where at least one party to armed conflict has been listed in the UNSG's annexed list of perpetrators and where the formal UN MRM has been established. Watchlist compiled data from the UNSG's annual reports on CAAC for each of these situations between 2002 and 2024 in its Global CAAC Dashboard, which served as the basis for this analysis.<sup>4</sup> The Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, as well as the analysis in this report, focuses on 'trigger' violations, those being the first five of the six grave violations against children. Each of these five violations—excluding denial of humanitarian access for children—can 'trigger' listing in the annexes to the UNSG annual CAAC reports.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> As of 2024, the conflict situations are Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Lake Chad Basin region, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen.

<sup>4</sup> The Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard can be accessed at: <https://watchlist.org/resources/caac-global-dashboard/>.

<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) initiated the listing mechanism with UNSC resolution 1379 (2001), which requested the UNSG to include in annual reports on CAAC a list of parties to armed conflict deemed responsible for the recruitment and use of children. Subsequent resolutions—notably UNSC resolution 1612 (2005)—led to the creation of the MRM. Although the listing mechanism initially focused solely on recruitment and use of children, the UNSC added killing and maiming and rape and other forms of sexual violence as 'trigger' violations in 2009, attacks on schools and hospitals in 2011, and abduction in 2015. Although the UNSG annual CAAC reports discuss all six grave violations, denial of humanitarian access remains the one violation that does not 'trigger' listing.



The analysis included in this report considers that CAAC stakeholders—including UN entities, Member States, and international and local civil society—seek to effect change via two broad avenues, which are:

- 1) **Reputational pressure.** The UNSG’s list of perpetrators of grave violations, which appears in annexes appended to the UNSG annual CAAC reports, is a form of ‘naming and shaming’ intended to discourage grave violations because of the stigma attached to the list. The annexes are often referred to as the ‘list of shame.’
- 2) **Constructive advocacy.** CAAC stakeholders support States and non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in developing and implementing action plans, and for States, joining relevant international hard law treaties and soft law instruments relevant to CAAC and adopting laws and policies on CAAC at the domestic level.

As this report will examine, in some contexts, CAAC stakeholders have succeeded in parlaying reputational pressure into state or NSAG receptivity to constructive advocacy. In other contexts, persistent challenges have stymied progress in pushing forward the CAAC agenda. This report—through data analysis, complemented by qualitative case studies—explores these dynamics and offers recommendations for the CAAC advocacy community.

## 1.2. Methodology

The research methods for this report entailed:

- **Quantitative analysis** of data from the Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, which as described above, collates data from UNSG annual CAAC reports on grave violations against children in armed conflict.
- **Qualitative analysis** of four case studies assessing the implementation of the CAAC agenda in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, the Philippines, and Northeast Syria.
- A series of **16 key informant interviews** conducted with experts on CAAC and/or civilian protection more broadly. The interviews were conducted remotely between August and October 2024. Several of the interviewees had direct experience engaging on CAAC issues in one or more of the four case study contexts.





### 1.3. Limitations

Several important limitations of the quantitative data are important to bear in mind:

- The scope of the analysis is limited to data relevant to all parties to armed conflict in **country contexts where at least one party was listed**. To illustrate with an example, the data *excludes* Burkina Faso for 2020 (a year for which the UNSG annual CAAC report documents violations in Burkina Faso but does not list parties for the country) and *includes* Burkina Faso for 2021, 2022, and 2023 (since, for those years, the UNSG annual CAAC reports document violations and list parties for the country).
- The data includes only incidents of grave violations against children documented in UNSG annual CAAC reports. These reports regularly acknowledge that these incidents almost certainly constitute an undercount, meaning that many more violations have been committed than the UN has not been able to document or verify.
- Various factors can impact the UN's ability to document and verify data. These factors include the extent of the UN's access in a particular context, security constraints, as well as the resources and funding at the disposal of the CTFMR. As access and/or capacity increase, the number of documented violations could conceivably increase, even though this increase might not correlate with a rise in the number of actual violations perpetrated. Additionally, the UN regularly verifies incidents that occurred in previous years, meaning that numbers reported in a certain year also regularly encompass violations that were perpetrated during an earlier time period.<sup>6</sup>
- As noted above, the scope of this report is limited to the five 'trigger' violations, meaning the first five grave violations, excluding denial of humanitarian access for children. Although denial of humanitarian access constitutes a crucial component of the CAAC agenda, this report focuses on killing and maiming, recruitment and use of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, and attacks on schools and hospitals.
- The data analysis focuses on violations documented between 2009-2023 (and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports between 2010-2024). The reason for this scope is that, from 2009 onward, the reports more robustly capture data across contexts and violation types.

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<sup>6</sup> Violations of rape and other forms of sexual violence are especially complicated to document due to a range of significant challenges that include severe social stigma and repercussions that victims can face for reporting violations. See "Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence," S/2017/249, April 15, 2017.



## 1.4. Report Structure

After this introduction, this report proceeds as follows:

- **Part 2** provides analysis of how trends have evolved over time. This part also presents data on listing decisions and action plans.
- **Part 3** explores possible drivers of the trends that Part 2 discusses. In particular, this part focuses on four sets of dynamics: 1) conflict and peace process dynamics, 2) the conduct of third-party supporters, 3) the viability of accountability processes, and 4) the role of local civil society.
- **Part 4** presents case studies of CAAC advocacy that further probe the dynamics discussed throughout this report. This part discusses advocacy directed toward two States—namely, the DRC and Myanmar—and two NSAGs, those being the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Northeast Syria.
- **Part 5** offers concluding remarks and recommendations.



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## KEY TRENDS



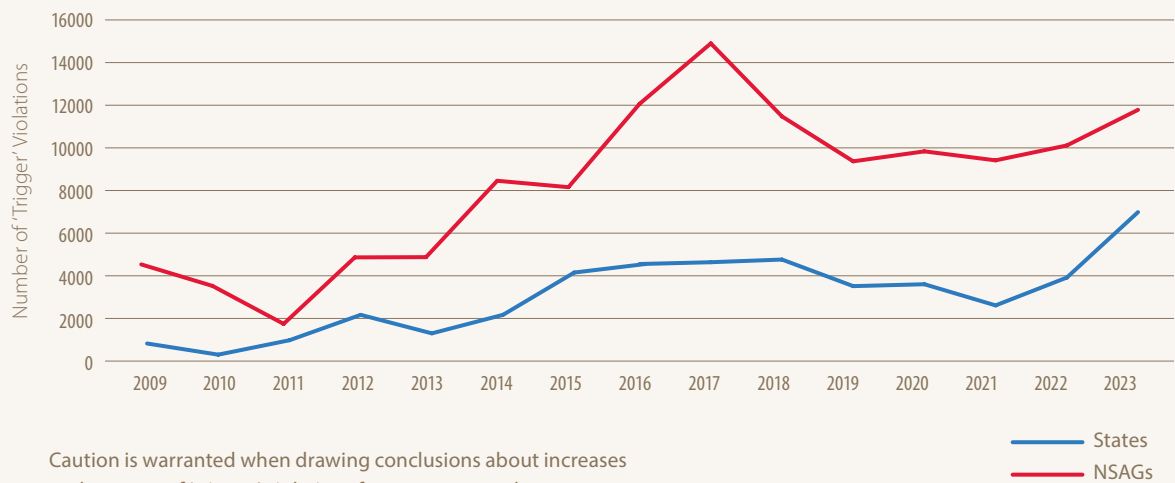
Photographer: Anmar Qusay, © ICRC.





Grave violations against children persist in countries suffering from armed conflict across the globe. The 2024 UNSG annual CAAC report documented 32,990 grave violations against children.<sup>7</sup> In situations with listed parties, the UN has consistently documented higher levels of ‘trigger’ violations perpetrated by NSAGs, compared with States.

**FIGURE 1: Trends in ‘Trigger’ Violations in Contexts with Listed Parties: States Compared with Non-State Armed Groups (2009-2023)**



Caution is warranted when drawing conclusions about increases or decreases of ‘trigger’ violations from year to year because the UN’s ability to document and verify violations can fluctuate across contexts and over time.

Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

This trend holds across different types of ‘trigger’ violations, with some exceptions for particular violations in certain years, as Figure 2 (below) shows. Additionally, in contexts with listed parties, there were two notable spikes in ‘trigger’ violations—in 2017 and 2023—that were driven by a confluence of different armed conflicts that escalated during these years.

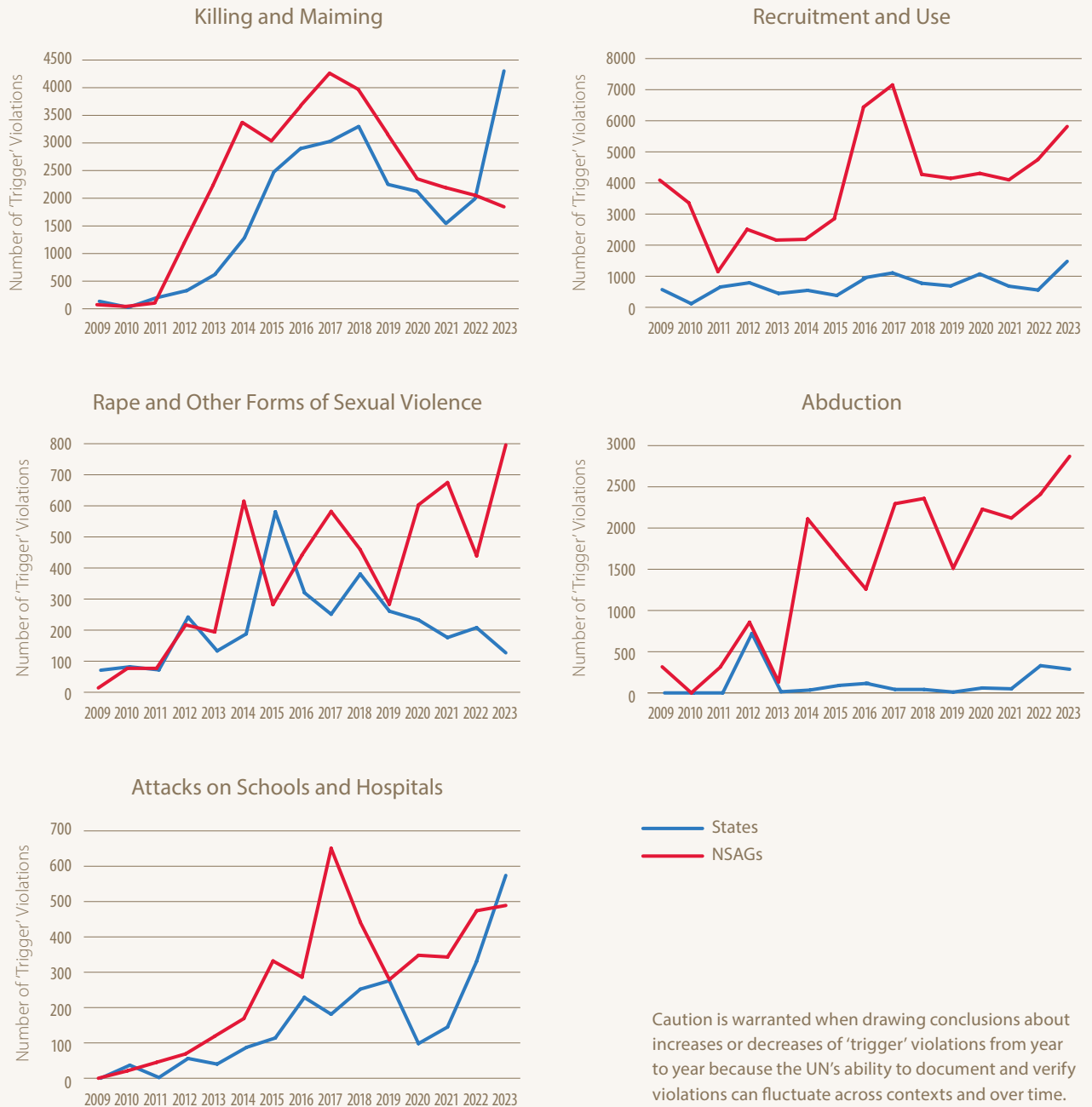
<sup>7</sup> Of these violations, 30,705 occurred in 2023, whereas 2,285 occurred in previous years but were not verified until 2023. See “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/78/842-S/2024/384, June 3, 2024, p. 2.

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“In situations with listed parties, the UN has consistently documented higher levels of ‘trigger’ violations perpetrated by NSAGs, compared with States.”



**FIGURE 2: State and Non-State Armed Group Trends by 'Trigger' Violation in Contexts with Listed Parties (2009-2023)<sup>8</sup>**



Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

<sup>8</sup> Note that the scales in this figure differ across violation types.



## The 2017 Spike in 'Trigger' Violations

The 2017 spike is largely driven by ongoing conflicts that escalated in Afghanistan, Central African Republic, DRC, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen, as well as in other contexts. As Figure 2 (above) shows, in 2017, NSAG-perpetrated grave violations reached their highest levels documented for killing and maiming, recruitment and use of children, and attacks on schools and hospitals.

**FIGURE 3:**  
Top Perpetrators in Contexts with Listed Parties During the 2017 Spike in 'Trigger' Violations

<b>Killing and Maiming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taliban forces and affiliated groups: <b>1,100+ violations</b></li><li>• Afghan National Defence and Security Forces: <b>700+ violations</b></li><li>• Coalition to restore legitimacy in Yemen led by Saudi Arabia: <b>600+ violations</b></li></ul>
<b>Recruitment and Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Al-Shabaab: <b>1,700+ violations</b></li><li>• Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (Boko Haram): <b>1,000+ violations</b></li><li>• Houthis/Ansar Allah: <b>500+ violations</b></li></ul>
<b>Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (Boko Haram): <b>100+ violations</b></li><li>• Al-Shabaab: <b>70+ violations</b></li><li>• Former Séléka coalition and associated armed groups in Central African Republic: <b>60+ violations</b></li></ul>
<b>Abduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Al-Shabaab: <b>1,600+ violations</b></li><li>• Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (Boko Haram): <b>100+ violations</b></li><li>• Bana Mura militias in DRC: <b>80+ violations</b></li></ul>
<b>Attacks on Schools and Hospitals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kamuina Nsapu in DRC: <b>300+ violations</b></li><li>• Syrian Government forces, including the National Defence Forces and pro-government militias: <b>100+ violations</b></li><li>• Taliban forces and affiliated groups: <b>70+ violations</b></li></ul>

Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.





## The 2023 Spike in 'Trigger' Violations

In 2023, various violation types—for both States and NSAGs—saw their highest levels ever documented by the UN. State-perpetrated violations peaked for recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, and attacks on schools and hospitals. NSAG-perpetrated violations peaked for abduction and rape and other forms of sexual violence. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Israeli forces were responsible for widespread killing and maiming of children, as well as attacks on schools and hospitals. Russian forces in Ukraine were responsible for particularly high levels of attacks on schools and hospitals. Widespread grave violations perpetrated by Myanmar armed forces, including related forces and affiliated militias, encompassed killing and maiming, recruitment and use of children, and attacks on schools and hospitals.

**FIGURE 4:**  
Top Perpetrators in Contexts with Listed Parties During the 2023 Spike in 'Trigger' Violations

Killing and Maiming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Israeli armed and security forces: <b>2,000+ violations</b></li><li>Myanmar armed forces, including related forces and affiliated militias: <b>600+ violations</b></li><li>Syrian Government forces, including the National Defence Forces and pro-government militias: <b>300+ violations</b></li></ul>
Recruitment and Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Myanmar armed forces, including related forces and affiliated militias: <b>1,100+ violations</b></li><li>Al-Shabaab: <b>500+ violations</b></li><li>Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (Boko Haram): <b>500+ violations</b></li></ul>
Rape and Other forms of Sexual Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (Boko Haram): <b>200+ violations</b></li><li>Islamic State West Africa Province: <b>80+ violations</b></li><li>Rapid Support Forces in Sudan: <b>50+ violations</b></li></ul>
Abduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Al-Shabaab: <b>600+ violations</b></li><li>Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (Boko Haram): <b>600+ violations</b></li><li>Islamic State West Africa Province: <b>200+ violations</b></li></ul>
Attacks on Schools and Hospitals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Israeli armed and security forces: <b>300+ violations</b></li><li>Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups: <b>200+ violations</b></li><li>Myanmar armed forces, including related forces and affiliated militias: <b>100+ violations</b></li></ul>

Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.



Currently, there are 72 parties to armed conflict listed for grave violations against children, spanning 18 contexts. Of these parties, 21 have signed joint action plans with the UN that have not yet been completed.<sup>9</sup>

**FIGURE 5:**  
**Listed Parties and Action Plans by Type of Armed Group or Force (2024)<sup>10</sup>**

Context	State Entities Listed	NSAGs Listed	Action Plans Signed and Not Yet Completed
Afghanistan	0	3	0
Burkina Faso	0	2	0
Central African Republic	0	5	3 NSAGs
Colombia	0	2	0
Democratic Republic of Congo	1	16	1 State, 2 NSAGs
Iraq	0	1	0
Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory	1	2	0
Lake Chad Basin	0	2	0
Mali	0	3	2 NSAGs
Myanmar	1	7	1 State, 1 NSAG
Nigeria	0	2	0
Philippines	0	3	0
Somalia	2	2	2 State entities
South Sudan	1	1	1 State, 1 NSAG
Sudan	1	7	4 NSAGs
Syria	1	4	2 NSAG
Ukraine	1	0	0
Yemen	1	3	1 NSAG

Source: UNSG Annual CAAC Report 2024 (S/2024/384)

<sup>9</sup> See “Action Plans,” Office of the Special Representative of the UNSG for Children and Armed Conflict, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/tools-for-action/action-plans/>. The party that most recently signed an action plan is the opposition Syrian National Army, including Ahrar al-Sham and Army of Islam, and their aligned legions and factions. See “The Opposition Syrian National Army, Including Ahrar al-Sham and Army of Islam, and Their Aligned Legions and Factions, Sign Action Plan to End and Prevent the Recruitment and Use and Killing and Maiming of Children,” Special Representative of the UNSG on Children and Armed Conflict, June 3, 2024, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2024/06/the-opposition-syrian-national-army-including-ahrar-al-sham-and-army-of-islam-and-their-aligned-legions-and-factions-sign-action-plan-to-end-and-prevent-the-recruitment-and-use-and-killing-and-maim/>.

<sup>10</sup> Da’esh is listed twice under both Syria and Iraq. Additionally, Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihada and Islamic State West Africa Province are both listed twice under Nigeria and Lake Chad Basin.



3

## ENABLING FACTORS AND CHALLENGES



Photographer: Ahmad Al Basha, © ICRC.





This section probes the drivers of the trends presented in Part 2. This section focuses, in particular, on four sets of dynamics, all of which emerged as notable themes in the key informant interviews conducted for this report. The analysis in this section relies on data from UNSG annual CAAC reports, as well as other sources of data, as indicated throughout the section. Caution is warranted given the fact that, as noted in the introduction to this report, the UN's ability to document and verify violations depends on a range of factors, including access, security, capacity, and funding, which can fluctuate across contexts and over time. Nevertheless, the analysis presented in this section offers suggestive evidence of key enabling factors and challenges that shape efforts to push forward the CAAC agenda.

### 3.1. Conflict and Peace Process Dynamics

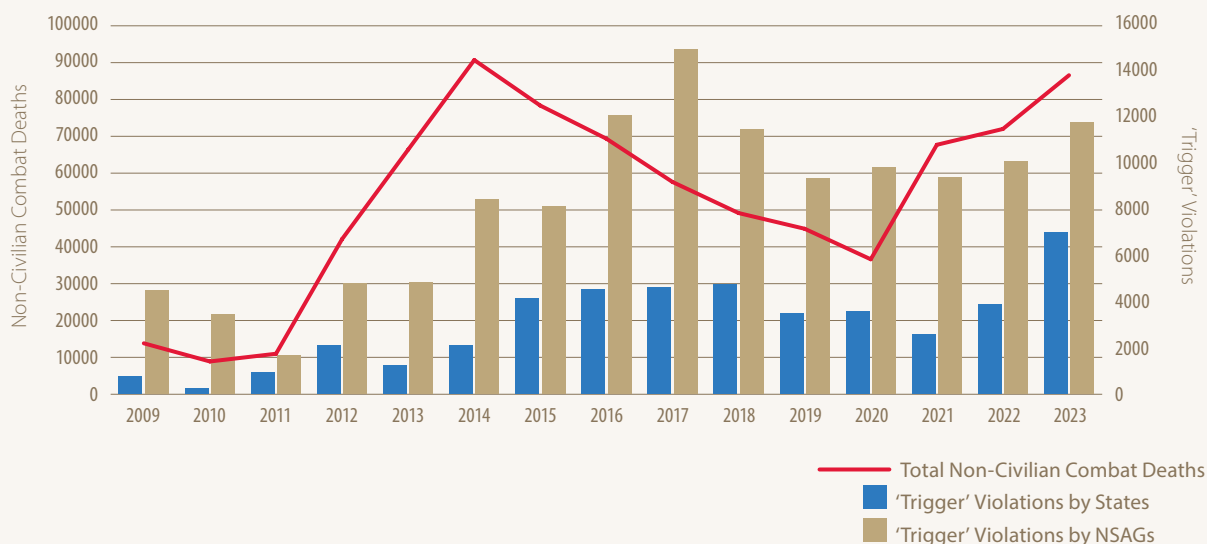
Overall conflict dynamics shape trends in grave violations across contexts and over time. Data from UNSG annual CAAC reports—compared with data documenting non-civilian combat deaths in contexts with listed parties—is consistent with the expectation that levels of grave violations often

ebb and flow as the scale and severity of armed conflicts fluctuate. As Figure 6 (below) shows, non-civilian combat deaths and 'trigger' violations by States and NSAGs have increased since 2011 in contexts with listed parties. However, the trends diverged between 2015-2017, when non-civilian combat deaths declined and 'trigger' violations continued to increase. 'Trigger' violations peaked for NSAGs in 2017, when non-civilian combat deaths were falling. The trends for grave violations and non-civilian combat deaths synch up again in subsequent years, with both following the same pattern of declining between 2017-2019 before reversing toward a multi-year increase between 2021-2023.

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“Overall conflict dynamics shape trends in grave violations across contexts and over time... [L]evels of grave violations often ebb and flow as the scale and severity of armed conflicts fluctuate.”

**FIGURE 6:**  
Fluctuations in Non-Civilian Combat Deaths and ‘Trigger’ Violations by States and Non-State Armed Groups in Contexts with Listed Parties



Caution is warranted when drawing conclusions about increases or decreases of ‘trigger’ violations from year to year because the UN’s ability to document and verify violations can fluctuate across contexts and over time.

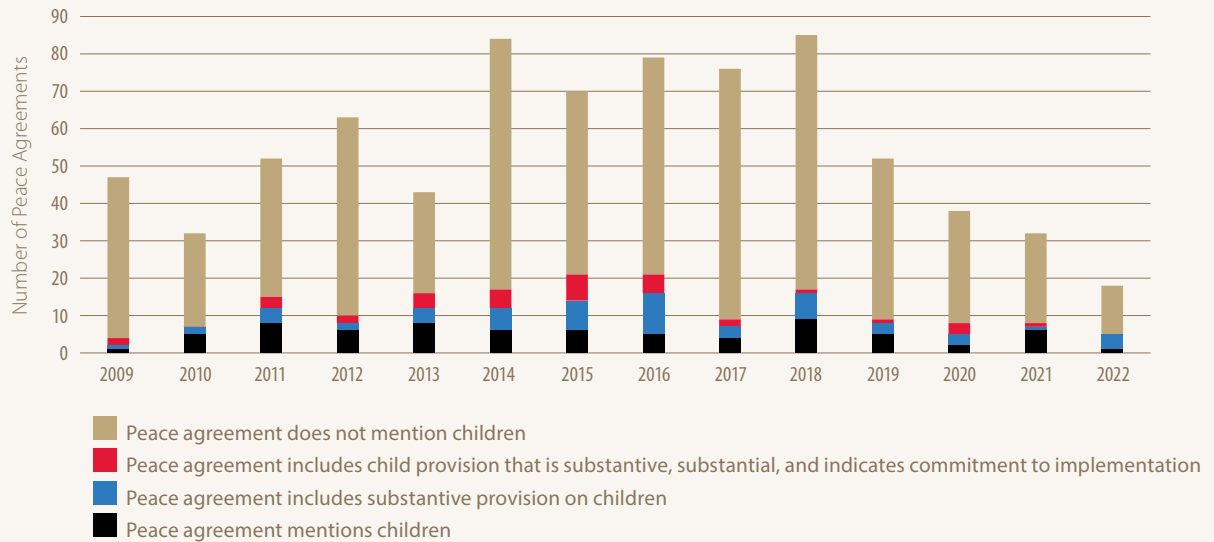
Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports / Uppsala Conflict Data Program Georeferenced Event Dataset.

Peace processes can offer a particular opportunity for CAAC stakeholders to persuade States and NSAGs to invest in protecting children during armed conflict. Previous Watchlist research and advocacy work has highlighted the importance of incorporating inclusive language on child protection in peace agreement and ceasefire provisions, including determinative language directed toward specific actions; explanations of child-specific terminology; a definition of a child as anyone under 18 years old; specific reference to relevant instruments of international law; ceasefire definitions or principles that incorporate the six grave violations against children; and child protection monitoring arrangements.<sup>11</sup> For ceasefire and peace agreements, conflict parties can incorporate provisions on releasing and reintegrating children, ending grave violations against children, protecting child rights, addressing children’s post-conflict needs, and creating and implementing monitoring and dispute resolutions mechanisms.<sup>12</sup> Numerous peace agreements have included child-specific measures, as Figure 7 (below) displays.

<sup>11</sup> “Checklist for Drafting Children and Armed Conflict Provisions in Ceasefire and Peace Agreements,” Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2016, <https://watchlist.org/wp-content/uploads/Checklist-for-CAC-relevant-provisions-in-peace-agreements-FINAL-10-12-16.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

**FIGURE 7:**  
**Peace Agreements with Child-Specific Provisions Globally (2009-2022)<sup>13</sup>**



Source: PA-X Peace Agreements Database

A peace process can conceivably have a mitigating or an aggravating effect on levels of grave violations. When working toward peace, parties to armed conflict can have incentives to demonstrate their commitment to CAAC as a confidence-building measure and to project an aura of political legitimacy to domestic and international supporters. Conversely, a pending peace process could incentivize recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups, as conflict parties aim to enhance their power and position in relation to an adversary. Similarly, post-conflict elections can be moments when previously warring parties resolve their disputes peacefully or can fuel further unrest, hence increasing the risk of grave violations. The advocacy case studies presented in Part 4 of this report examine these dynamics further.

<sup>13</sup> For more on Watchlist's previous engagement on this issue, see "Report of the Workshop Addressing Child Protection in Conflict Mediation: Charting a Way Forward," Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, 2014, <https://watchlist.org/wp-content/uploads/July-2014-CAAC-workshop-report-peace-processes.pdf>.



### 3.2. Third-Party Supporters

Third-party supporters of States and NSAGs—in particular, external governments that offer diplomatic, economic, and/or security support—can play an enabling role on CAAC issues when they use their leverage to push parties to armed conflict to adopt measures to mitigate grave violations. Conversely, third-party supporters can inhibit progress when they refrain from using this leverage or even shield conflict parties from repercussions.

CAAC stakeholders have continually recognized the important role that third-party governments can play in the CAAC agenda. Notably, UNSC resolution 1379 (2001), which established the listing mechanism for recruitment and use of children, “[u]rges Member States to... [c]onsider appropriate legal, political, diplomatic, financial and material measures,” which could include withholding

military assistance, “in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, in order to ensure that parties to armed conflict respect international norms for the protection of children.”<sup>14</sup>

“The States responsible for some of the highest levels of ‘trigger’ violations in a given year are Israel in 2023, Myanmar in 2023, and Syria in 2018, all years for which a P5 Member State provided the majority of arms. This trend of robust P5 security support holds for most cases when examining 10 of the worst state perpetrators.”

Especially in the context of the 2023 spike in grave violations, concerns persist about the inhibiting role played by Permanent Members (P5) of the UNSC. The United States, Russia, and China, in particular, are major arms suppliers to State perpetrators of grave violations against children. The States responsible for some of the highest levels of ‘trigger’ violations in a given year are Israel in 2023, Myanmar in 2023, and Syria in 2018, all years for which a P5 Member State provided the majority of arms. This trend of robust P5 security support holds for most cases when examining 10 of the worst state perpetrators.

<sup>14</sup> UNSC resolution 1379 (2001), para. 9(b).



**FIGURE 8:**  
Arms Exports to Top State Perpetrators of 'Trigger' Violations in Contexts with Listed Parties<sup>15</sup>

Perpetrator / Conflict Year	Number of 'Trigger' Violations	Volume of Arms Exports (measured by trend-indicator value)*	Proportion of Arms Provided to Perpetrator by Exporting Countries in Conflict Year
Israeli armed and security forces (2023)	2,400+	857 million	53%, U.S. 47%, Germany 0.7%, Italy
Myanmar armed forces, including related forces and affiliated militias (2023)	1,900+	121 million	91%, Russia 9%, Israel
Syrian Government forces, including the National Defence Forces and pro-government militias (2018)	1,300+	199 million	100%, Russia
Russian armed forces and affiliated groups (2022)	1,300+	129 million	95%, Iran 4%, China 1%, U.S. <sup>16</sup>
Saudi Arabia-led coalition in Yemen (2015)	1,200+	3,384 million (to Saudi Arabia)	52%, U.S. 22%, U.K. 11%, France 15%, Other States (to Saudi Arabia)
Somali National Armed Forces (2012)	1,100+	0	--
Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (2016) <sup>17</sup>	980+	171 million	53%, Brazil 40%, U.S. 6%, Canada 2%, India
Syrian Government forces, including the National Defence Forces and pro-government militias (2019)	970+	36 million	100%, Russia
Syrian Government forces, including the National Defence Forces and pro-government militias (2016)	940+	8 million	63%, Iran 38%, Russia
Sudan People's Liberation Army in South Sudan (2016)	920+	8 million	50%, Russia 50%, Uganda

\* Trend-Indicator Value (TIV) is a metric developed by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute to measure "the known unit production costs of a core set of weapons and is intended to represent the transfer of military resources rather than the financial value of the transfer."<sup>18</sup>

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Arms Transfers Database / Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

<sup>15</sup> Percentages in this table do not always add up to 100 due to rounding calculations.

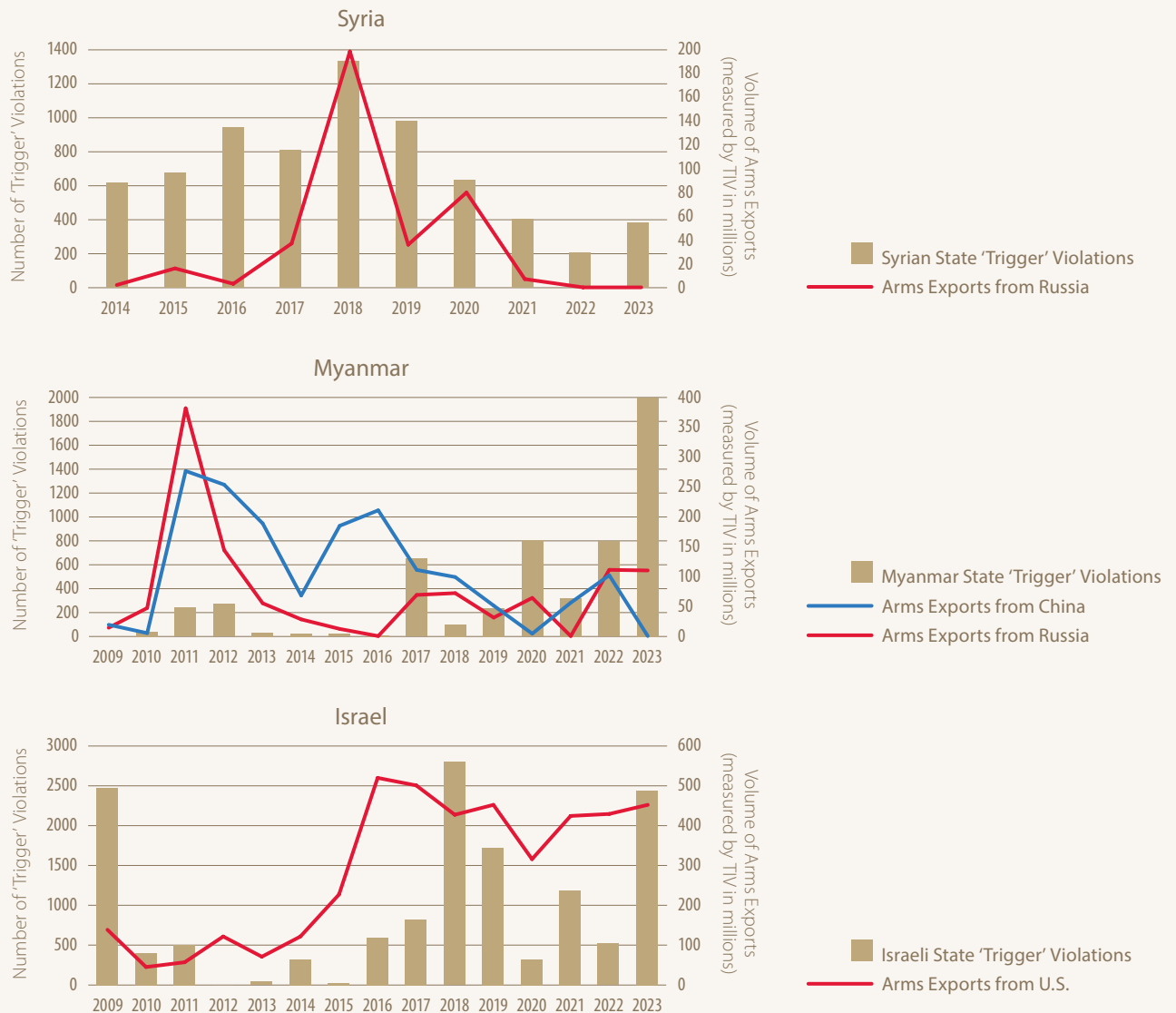
<sup>16</sup> Although the United States has imposed sanctions on Russia, the U.S. State Department has invoked waiver authority for certain exports, including those related to space cooperation. See "U.S. Sanctions on Russia: Legal Authorities and Related Actions," Congressional Research Service, April 26, 2024, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R48052/4>.

<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces was not a listed party during this year. All other perpetrators identified on this table were already listed or were listed as a result of the violations perpetrated during the year indicated.

<sup>18</sup> See "Sources and Methods," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Arms Transfers Database, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/sources-and-methods#trade-registers>.

Trends over time for 3 of the top state perpetrators show the extent to which P5 Member States have continued to send weapons to States responsible for violations year after year. In some contexts, the volume of P5 arms exports rises and falls along with the scale of violations that the recipients have perpetrated.

**FIGURE 9:**  
P5 Arms Exports to—and ‘Trigger’ Violations by—State Parties in Syria, Myanmar, and Israel<sup>19</sup>



Caution is warranted when drawing conclusions about increases or decreases of ‘trigger’ violations from year to year because the UN’s ability to document and verify violations can fluctuate across contexts and over time.

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Arms Transfers Database / Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

<sup>19</sup> China also exported arms (5 million TIV) to Syria in 2014. France also exported arms to Myanmar in 2014 and 2015 (10 million TIV each year, totaling 20 million TIV).

”

“[T]he scale of ‘trigger’ violations is lower in contexts where the ICC has jurisdiction, compared with contexts for which the ICC lacks jurisdiction. This finding is true for both States and NSAGs.”

### 3.3. Legal Accountability

Establishing effective legal accountability processes at international and domestic levels is essential for mitigating levels of grave violations. Complementarity between international and domestic accountability has been a core component of the CAAC agenda since the first UNSC resolution on CAAC, which emphasized the importance of “efforts by all relevant actors at the national and international level to develop more coherent and effective approaches to the issue of children and armed conflict.”<sup>20</sup>

However, widespread concern persists regarding Member States’ political buy-in and support for holding perpetrators of grave violations accountable. These concerns are driven in large

part by the continual third-party state support for perpetrators, as discussed above. There are also challenges at the professional and technical levels, including an ongoing need to mainstream child-specific investigative expertise while continuing to cultivate a pool of legal and investigate experts that focus on children.<sup>21</sup>

Recent notable developments regarding accountability for child-specific international crimes include:

- The Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC issued an updated Children’s Policy in 2023.<sup>22</sup>
- Various ad hoc investigative mechanisms—namely, the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar; the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic; and the Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)—have focused on child-specific issues within the ambit of their mandates.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> United Security Council resolution 1261 (1999), para. 5.

<sup>21</sup> For a more thorough examination of these issues, see “Advancing Justice for Children: Innovations to Strengthen Accountability for Violations and Crimes Affecting Children in Conflict,” Save the Children and Oxford Programme on International Peace and Security, March 2021, [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/advancing\\_justice\\_for\\_children\\_0.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/advancing_justice_for_children_0.pdf). See also “Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: Child Rights Mainstreaming,” United Nations, July 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/Guidance-Note-Secretary-General-Child-Rights-Mainstreaming-July-2023.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> See “Policy on Children,” Office of the Prosecutor, International Criminal Court, 2023, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2023-12/2023-policy-children-en-web.pdf>. Other notable developments from the ICC were the arrest warrants issued in March 2023 for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, Russia’s Commissioner for Children’s Rights, for unlawfully deporting and transferring children from occupied areas in Ukraine to Russian territory.

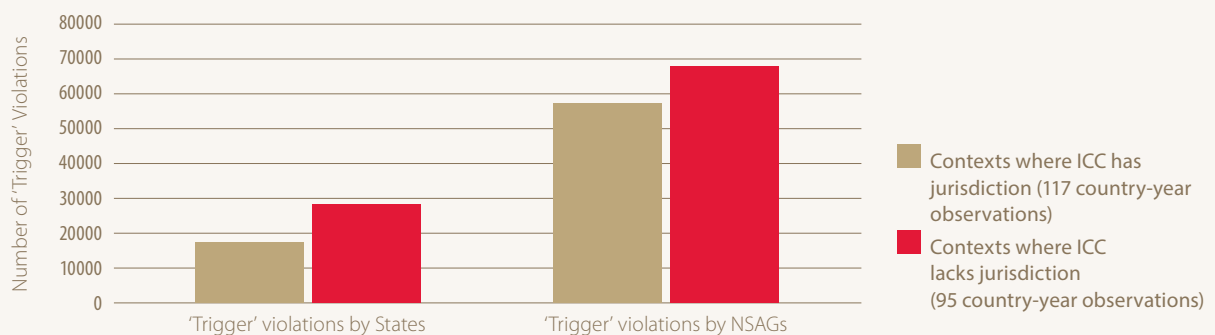
<sup>23</sup> See “Advancing Justice for Children.”



- Several commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions have focused their attention on children. Notably, in 2020, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic published the first thematic report from a commission of inquiry that focused specifically on children.<sup>24</sup>

Data from UNSG annual CAAC reports shows that the scale of ‘trigger’ violations is lower in contexts where the ICC has jurisdiction, compared with contexts for which the ICC lacks jurisdiction. This finding is true for both States and NSAGs.<sup>25</sup> Although other dynamics could explain this observation, the data is consistent with the expectation that the ‘specter’ of international criminal justice can mitigate conflict parties’ propensity to perpetrate grave violations against children due to the possibility of legal ramifications.<sup>26</sup>

**FIGURE 10:**  
The Relationship between ICC Jurisdiction and ‘Trigger’ Violation Levels  
in Contexts with Listed Parties (2009-2023)<sup>27</sup>



Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

<sup>24</sup> See “‘They Have Erased the Dreams of my Children’: Children’s Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic,” Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/43/CRP.6, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> However, this finding does not hold for UN-documented violations by unidentified perpetrators, which are not reported in Figure 10. Based on UN data, the Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard indicates that—in contexts with at least one listed party between 2009-2023—unidentified perpetrators were responsible for 2,717 ‘trigger’ violations in contexts where the ICC has jurisdiction and 2,014 ‘trigger’ violations in contexts where the ICC lacks jurisdiction.

<sup>26</sup> For an example of previous scholarship that puts forth this argument, see Hyeran Jo and Beth A. Simmons, “Can the International Criminal Court Deter Atrocity?” *International Organization*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Summer 2016): 443-475.

<sup>27</sup> Contexts included in the Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard—and incorporated into the analysis that Figure 10 presents—over which the ICC has jurisdiction are Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, DRC, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (specific to the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 2014), Mali, Nigeria, Philippines (until 2018, when the country withdrew from the Rome Statute), Sudan (which the UNSC referred to the ICC in 2005, specific to Darfur), and Ukraine (which accepted the jurisdiction of the ICC in two declarations lodged in 2014 and 2015). Relevant contexts over which the ICC lacks jurisdiction are Iraq, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines (from 2019 onward), Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Syria, and Yemen. However, the ICC does have jurisdiction over the conduct of parties to the Rome Statute that are militarily involved in these contexts.



### 3.4. Local Civil Society

Local civil society in conflicts across the globe plays a crucial role in engaging with parties to armed conflict to promote the protection of civilians (including children), document violations of international law, and advocate for the adoption of domestic laws and policies relevant to CAAC.<sup>28</sup> The importance of local civil society has been long recognized in the context of the CAAC agenda. In UNSC resolution 1612 (2005), which established the MRM, the UNSC:

Urge[d] all parties concerned, including Member States, United Nations entities and financial institutions, to support the development and strengthening of the capacities of national institutions and local civil society networks for advocacy, protection and rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict to ensure the sustainability of local child-protection initiatives...<sup>29</sup>

Local civil society can be instrumental to an effective MRM, providing information that would otherwise be impossible to gather.<sup>30</sup> A wide range of local civil society organization types also support CAAC stakeholders across the globe in identifying armed forces and armed groups that have recruited and used children and providing services to children who have been separated from armed forces or armed groups.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Gemma Davies, Veronique Barbelet, and Leigh Mayhew, "Reducing Violence and Strengthening the Protection of Civilians through Community Dialogue with Armed Actors," Humanitarian Policy Group, October 2024, [https://media.odi.org/documents/HPG\\_report\\_protection\\_final\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://media.odi.org/documents/HPG_report_protection_final_report_final.pdf); and Zachariah Mampilly et al., "The Role of Civilians and Civil Society in Preventing Mass Atrocities," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, July 2020, [https://vault.ushmm.org/adaptivemedia/rendition/id\\_44c8b44f54f659a4a1e2e4fe6dbc0ac499c2d1db](https://vault.ushmm.org/adaptivemedia/rendition/id_44c8b44f54f659a4a1e2e4fe6dbc0ac499c2d1db).

<sup>29</sup> UNSC resolution 1612 (2005), para. 17. For other UNSC resolutions on CAAC that discuss the importance of local civil society, see UNSC resolution 1539 (2004), para. 13; UNSC resolution 2143 (2014), para. 14; UNSC resolution 2225 (2015), para. 12; and UNSC resolution 2427 (2018), para. 37.

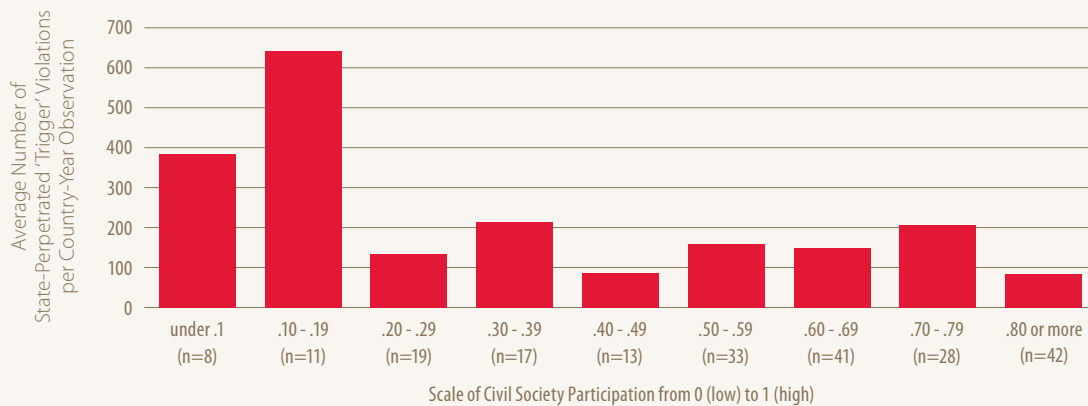
<sup>30</sup> See, for example, "The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Armed Conflict in Nepal 2005 – 2012: A Civil Society Perspective," Partnerships for Protecting Children in Armed Conflict, September 20212, <https://watchlist.org/wp-content/uploads/PPCC-Nepal-MRM-Study-FINAL-16p.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Sadiki Koko, "The Role of Civil Society in Conflict Resolution in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1998-2006: An Appraisal," Accord, August 29, 2016, <https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/role-civil-society-conflict-resolution-democratic-republic-congo-1998-2006/>; and "Watchlist Strengthens Local Partnerships to Combat Child Recruitment in the DR Congo," Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, November 2017, <https://watchlist.org/watchlist-strengthens-local-partnerships-combat-child-recruitment-dr-congo/>.



Analysis of data from UNSG annual CAAC reports is consistent with the notion that local civil society is central for protecting children during armed conflict. In country contexts with the lowest levels of civil society participation—as measured by an index from the Varieties of Democracy Dataset—States exhibit a greater propensity to perpetrate ‘trigger’ violations. Conversely, States on the higher end of the civil society participation spectrum exhibit a lower propensity to perpetrate ‘trigger’ violations. The trend illustrated in Figure 11 (below) also suggests that governments that crack down on civil society exhibit a greater propensity to perpetrate grave violations.

**FIGURE 11:**  
Local Civil Society Participation and Trends in State-Perpetrated ‘Trigger’ Violations  
in Contexts with Listed Parties (2009-2023)



Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports / Varieties of Democracy Dataset.





4

## ADVOCACY CASE STUDIES



Photographer: Karrar Al-Moayyad, © ICRC.





This section of the report presents four case studies of CAAC advocacy in the DRC, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Northeast Syria. The case studies focus on armed forces from two States (DRC and Myanmar) and two NSAGs (the MILF in the Philippines and the SDF in Northeast Syria). The DRC and Philippines cases are two contexts where CAAC stakeholders can point to clear successes, in particular, on the issue of recruitment and use of children. In Myanmar and Northeast Syria, CAAC stakeholders have achieved some degree of forward motion, yet challenges still stymie substantial progress.

These case studies are not comprehensive assessments of these contexts, but rather, contextual snapshots that probe how the enabling factors and challenges discussed in this report have shaped the trajectories of CAAC advocacy efforts.

#### 4.1. Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The DRC has been on the CAAC agenda since the beginning. The Government of the DRC or its security forces have appeared as listed parties every year since the inauguration of the CAAC listing mechanism in 2002. In 2017, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) was delisted for recruitment and use of children upon successfully implementing an action plan

(which was originally signed in 2012) but remains listed for rape and other forms of sexual violence. The FARDC has also been responsible for killing and maiming, with a particularly sharp uptick documented in 2017, due to the government's response to the Kamuina Nsapu rebellion. Amidst the immense scale of ongoing grave violations against children in the DRC, the delisting of the FARDC for recruitment and use constitutes a success story for CAAC advocacy.

”  
“Amidst the immense scale of ongoing grave violations against children in the DRC, the delisting of the FARDC for recruitment and use constitutes a success story for CAAC advocacy.”



**FIGURE 12:**  
**Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Listings for Grave Violations<sup>32</sup>**

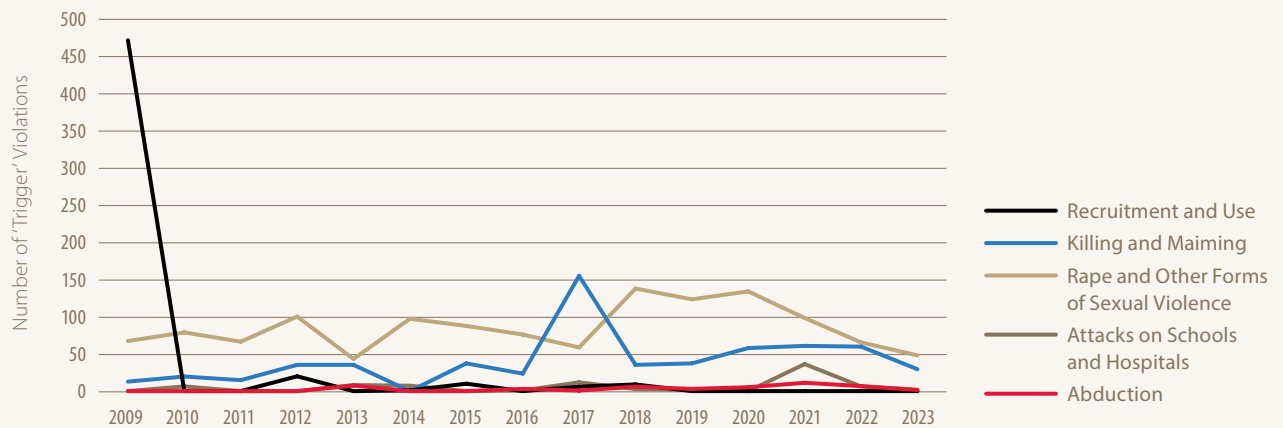
Year	Recruitment and Use	Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence	
2002	X		2012: action plan signed
2003	X		
2005	X		
2006	X		
2007	X		
2009	X		
2010	X	X	
2011	X	X	
2012	X	X	
2013	X	X	
2014	X	X	2017: recruitment and use action plan completed
2015	X	X	
2016	X	X	
2017		X	
2018		X	
2019		X	
2020		X	
2021		X	
2022		X	
2023		X	
2024		X	

Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

<sup>32</sup> In 2002 the entity listed was the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In all other years, the entity listed in the FARDC. In 2005, also listed are Laurent Nkunda and Jules Mutebutsi, dissident elements of FARDC for recruitment and use. The annex to the 2005 report mentions that this party is also responsible for rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as attacks on schools and hospitals. Between 2010-2012, the listed entity appears as Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), including recently integrated elements from various armed groups, including Congrès national pour la défense du peuple (CNDP), formerly led by Laurent Nkunda as well as elements currently led by Bosco Ntagandaa. The annexes to the 2006 and 2007 UNSG annual CAAC reports also mention FARDC responsibility for killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and abductions. The annex to the 2009 report also mentions FARDC responsibility for rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access to children. UNSG annual CAAC reports are not available for 2004 and 2008.



**FIGURE 13:**  
**'Trigger' Violations by Government Forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2009-2023)<sup>33</sup>**



Caution is warranted when drawing conclusions about increases or decreases of 'trigger' violations from year to year because the UN's ability to document and verify violations can fluctuate across contexts and over time.

Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

In the wake of the Second Congo War that ended in 2003, the post-war transition process in the DRC became an early test case for the recently birthed CAAC agenda. Advocacy focused on infusing CAAC considerations into the newly launched processes of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process, as well as brassage, which entailed integrating different armed factions into the FARDC.

A wide array of international stakeholders broke new CAAC-related ground in this context, including the Special Representative of the UNSG for Children and Armed Conflict; the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); and the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), which was equipped with child protection advisors. MONUC's child protection activities continued after the mission was renamed United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in 2010 and has had the largest Child Protection Section of any peacekeeping mission globally. Additionally, in 2006, the ICC issued its first arrest warrant for Thomas Lubanga Dyilo (leader of the Congolese NSAG, Union des Patriotes Congolais) for conscripting and enlisting children. The ICC found Lubanga guilty in 2012.

<sup>33</sup> The data presented in this figure includes data on violations for not only the FARDC but also the Congolese National Police and the National Intelligence Agency.



CAAC advocacy progress at first remained slow. Child recruitment for the FARDC escalated in 2009, the same year that the DRC adopted the Child Protection Law, which criminalized the recruitment of children into the armed forces. The UN documented 473 cases of child recruitment for which the FARDC was responsible in 2009 (as Figure 13 shows). Impunity endured, and the government was slow to prosecute or convict anyone for child recruitment under the 2009 law.<sup>34</sup>

CAAC stakeholders struggled to persuade the DRC government to sign a joint action plan with the UN on preventing recruitment and use of children. The effort began in 2009 when MONUC, seizing the moment in the wake of the peace agreement forged that year between the government and the National Congress for the Defence of the People (which had battled the government since 2006), initiated dialogue with the government about an action plan.<sup>35</sup> Years of advocacy would fail to make headway.

A key third-party government supporter, the United States, did not initially play an enabling role in CAAC advocacy efforts. Pursuant to the 2008 Child Soldier Prevention Act, which prohibits certain forms of U.S. military assistance to governments implicated in the recruitment or use of children, the United States had listed the DRC as a government responsible for the recruitment and use of children but had issued presidential waivers to the law each year. Consequently, U.S. arms continued flowing to the DRC government.<sup>36</sup> In 2012, the U.S. conditioned some military aid and training on the DRC government signing the action plan, and several days later the Government of the DRC acquiesced to signing.<sup>37</sup> In 2017, the UN delisted the FARDC for recruitment and use of children after the government followed through on complying with the action plan and no new cases of recruitment and use had been attributed to the FARDC for at least one full reporting period.

Key measures adopted by the DRC government during the process of implementing the action plan included the following:

- The Ministry of Defence issued a directive to prohibit the recruitment and use of children, as well as killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and military occupation of schools and hospitals;
- The National Intelligence Agency issued a directive to hand over all children in detention to child protection actors from the UN;
- The Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior created provincial joint technical working groups to address recruitment and use of children;

<sup>34</sup> "Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General," A/66/782-S/20021/261, April 26, 2012, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> "Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," S/2010/369, July 9, 2010, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> "CSPA Implementation Tracker: Democratic Republic of Congo," Stimson, <https://www.stimson.org/project/child-soldiers/cspa-implementation-tracker/country-profiles/democratic-republic-of-congo/>.

<sup>37</sup> Jo Becker, "U.S. Must Get Tough Over Child Soldiers," Human Rights Watch, September 28, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/09/28/us-must-get-tough-over-child-soldiers>.





- The DRC government endorsed the “Children, Not Soldiers” campaign launched by the Special Representative of the UNSG on Children and Armed Conflict;
- The DRC government excluded violations against children from an amnesty law passed in 2014;
- The President of the DRC appointed a special advisor on sexual violence and child recruitment; and
- The DRC government adopted and disseminated standard operating procedures on age verification for new recruits.<sup>38</sup>

The DRC government engaged constructively with the UN on screening FARDC troops and separating children from the FARDC and followed through on accountability measures, arresting and sentencing FARDC troops and Congolese National Police officers for recruitment and use of children.<sup>39</sup> A wide range of child protection stakeholders supported these efforts. MONUSCO advocated for child protection with the FARDC; gathered, shared, and reported on child protection issues in the DRC; screened FARDC troops; and trained FARDC and national police officers on child protection issues.<sup>40</sup> UNICEF provided services to children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG), supported child reintegration programs, and engaged in child protection training.<sup>41</sup> The United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre trained tens of thousands of children in mine awareness.<sup>42</sup> A Group of Friends of CAAC was formed in Kinshasa—including numerous international stakeholders, such as diplomatic representatives, the World Bank, and the European Union Advisory and Assistance Mission for Security Reform—that focused on coordinating efforts on advocacy, information exchange, and fundraising.<sup>43</sup> Local civil society also has played an essential role in the reintegration of CAAFAG—including by offering psycho-social services, education, and training—and in atrocity prevention and civilian protection more broadly in the DRC.<sup>44</sup> All of these efforts supported the completion of the recruitment and use action plan.

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<sup>38</sup> See “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” S/2014/453, June 30, 2014, pp. 11-16; and “Children and Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2018/502, May 25, 2018, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> “Keeping the Promise: An Independent Review of the UN’s Annual List of Perpetrators of Grave Violations Against Children, 2010 to 2020,” Eminent Persons Group, 2021, p. 13, <https://watchlist.org/wp-content/uploads/eminent-persons-group-report-final.pdf>; and “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/72/361-S/2017/821, August 24, 2017, p. 41.

<sup>40</sup> “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” S/2014/453, June 30, 2014, pp. 12-14.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., at 13-14.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., at 14.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., at 13.

<sup>44</sup> See Koko; and Megan Enoir et al., “Escaping ‘Perpetual Beginnings’ Challenges and Opportunities for Local Atrocity Prevention in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” Peace Direct, February 2021, [https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Escaping\\_Perpetual\\_Beginnings.pdf](https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Escaping_Perpetual_Beginnings.pdf).



Nevertheless, overall conditions for children in the DRC remain dire. The UN has listed the FARDC for rape and other forms of sexual violence since 2010, and the 2012 action plan also addresses this violation but has yet to be fully implemented. NSAG-perpetrated grave violations are also prevalent. These violations have unfolded amidst an impending withdrawal of MONUSCO, eliciting concerns about how this transition will impact the civilian protection environment.<sup>45</sup> The FARDC's experience ending the recruitment and use of children is colored by these broader contextual dynamics but nevertheless constitutes an important CAAC advocacy success story.

## 4.2. Myanmar Armed Forces

In the early years of the CAAC agenda, it appeared that advocacy with Myanmar security forces could follow the same path as the FARDC. The UN began listing the Tatmadaw Kyi (the government army) for recruitment and use of children in 2003.<sup>46</sup> After the listing, the Myanmar government sought to allay the criticism through several steps, including the formation of a Committee to Prevent the Recruitment of Child Soldiers.<sup>47</sup> However, the government exhibited hostility toward the CAAC agenda by lashing out at civil society organizations, denying accusations of governmental recruitment and use practices, and seeking to discredit the accusers.<sup>48</sup> After almost a decade of advocacy, the Government of Myanmar finally signed an action plan with the UN in 2012, and governmental recruitment and use of children declined sharply in subsequent years (2012-2016). However, progress on CAAC subsequently stalled amidst various escalating conflicts in the country, including the Rohingya crisis in Rakhine state, especially in 2017; ongoing conflicts between the government and various NSAGs, especially in Chin, Shan, and Kachin states; and unrest arising from the February 2021 coup during which the military seized power from the country's democratically elected government. Myanmar security forces are now listed for each of the 5 'trigger' violations.

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<sup>45</sup> See Paul Lorgeterie and Hugh Kinsella Cunningham, "UN Peacekeeper Pullout Brings Mixed Feelings in DR Congo's South Kivu Province," *The New Humanitarian*, August 26, 2024, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2024/08/26/un-peacekeeper-pullout-brings-mixed-feelings-dr-congo-south-kivu-province>.

<sup>46</sup> For information on recruitment and use of children during the time leading up to the listing, see "'My Gun Was as Tall as Me' Child Soldiers in Burma," Human Rights Watch, 2002, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2002/10/16/my-gun-was-tall-me/child-soldiers-burma>.

<sup>47</sup> "Sold to be Soldiers: The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Burma," Human Rights Watch, 2007, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/10/31/sold-be-soldiers/recruitment-and-use-child-soldiers-burma>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.



**FIGURE 14:**  
**Myanmar Armed Forces: Listings for Grave Violations<sup>49</sup>**

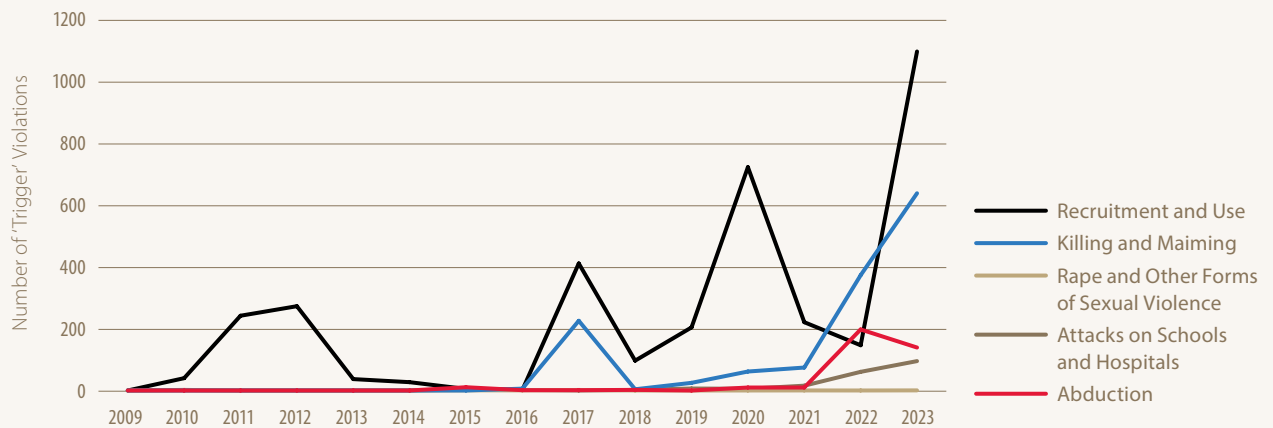
Year	Killing and Maiming	Recruitment and Use	Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence	Abduction	Attacks on Schools and Hospitals	
2002						2012: action plan signed
2003		X				
2005		X				
2006		X				
2007		X				
2009		X				
2010		X				
2011		X				
2012		X				
2013		X				
2014		X				
2015		X				
2016		X				
2017		X				
2018	X	X	X			
2019	X	X	X			
2020	X		X			
2021	X	X	X			
2022	X	X	X			
2023	X	X	X	X	X	
2024	X	X	X	X	X	

Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

<sup>49</sup> Between 2003-2010, the entity listed appears as the Tatmadaw Kyi; between 2011-2022, as Tatmadaw Kyi, including integrated Border Guard forces; in 2023, as Myanmar armed forces; and in 2024, as Myanmar armed forces, including related forces and affiliated militias. The annex to the UNSG annual CAAC reports from 2007 and 2009 also mention that the Tatmadaw Kyi was responsible for killing and maiming and denial of humanitarian access to children. UNSG annual CAAC reports are not available for 2004 and 2008.



**FIGURE 15:**  
**'Trigger' Violations by Myanmar Armed Forces (2009-2023)**



Caution is warranted when drawing conclusions about increases or decreases of 'trigger' violations from year to year because the UN's ability to document and verify violations can fluctuate across contexts and over time.

Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

The government's 2012 signing of a recruitment and use action plan, as well as constructive steps taken in the years that followed, showed a great deal of promise. In 2013-2015, the Government of Myanmar:

- Extended the recruitment and use action plan;
- Released over 800 people who had been recruited into the Tatmadaw as children;
- Issued a directive, via the Ministry of Education, to enroll all children separated from the Tatmadaw into government schools;
- Issued directives, via the Ministry of Health, to ensure that reintegrated children had access to healthcare;
- Centralized recruitment away from the battalion level (as part of the action plan's implementation);
- Scaled up military training on preventing child recruitment;
- Improved the military's age assessment methodology; and
- Collaborated with the country task force on a public awareness campaign to help end recruitment and use of children.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> "Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Myanmar," S/2017/1099, December 22, 2017.





During this period, it seemed that political developments in the country could further enable progress. In 2015, Myanmar held openly contested democratic elections, and a peaceful transfer of power ensued the following year.

However, this CAAC momentum would soon falter. Grave violations perpetrated in the context of the Rohingya crisis caused the Tatmadaw (including Border Guard forces that had been integrated into the Tatmadaw) to be listed for killing and maiming, as well as rape and other forms of sexual violence. Recruitment and use of children by the Tatmadaw and Border Guard Police also increased. The Government of Myanmar adopted a Child Protection Law in 2019 that constituted a significant—albeit imperfect—step forward on CAAC.<sup>51</sup> The same year, the government ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, although with reservations that still allowed children as young as 16 to be enrolled in military academies and military vocational training programs.<sup>52</sup>

Then, the UNSG delisted the Tatmadaw for recruitment and use in 2020, despite that the UNSG's annual CAAC report for 2020 documented 205 incidents of Tatmadaw-perpetrated recruitment and use. Subsequently, recruitment and use surged. The UN documented 726 incidents of recruitment use and use the following year. The delisting—as well as the delisting of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen for killing and maiming—fueled widespread criticism from Member States and civil society, evoking calls to ensure the credibility of the annexed list of perpetrators by applying objective, consistently applied, and transparent criteria to listing and delisting decisions.<sup>53</sup> An open letter to the UNSG signed by 25 civil society organizations (including Watchlist) in June 2020 asserted that the signatories were “deeply disappointed and troubled” by the delisting, especially given “the significant disparities between the evidence presented in the report and the parties listed in its annexes for committing grave violations against children.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Manny Maung, “Myanmar’s New Children’s Law a Step Forward,” Human Rights Watch, August 27, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/27/myanmars-new-childrens-law-step-forward>.

<sup>52</sup> “Children and Armed Conflict in Myanmar,” S/2020/1243, December 17, 2020, p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> “Keeping the Promise,” p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> “Open Letter to the Secretary-General on the 2020 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict,” June 22, 2020, <https://watchlist.org/wp-content/uploads/20200622-open-letter-to-the-secretary-general-re-annual-caac-report-final-updated.pdf>.



The UNSG relisted the Tatmadaw in the 2021 UNSG annual CAAC report. Recruitment and use continued to surge, along with incidents of attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction, and killing and maiming for which Myanmar armed forces and affiliated militias were responsible. Despite the UNSG's assertion in the 2021 annual CAAC report that "I am gravely concerned by the increase in the killing and maiming of children, including by landmines, explosive remnants of war and shelling, and the continuous attacks on schools and their use for military purposes," the Tatmadaw was not listed in that report's annex for attacks on schools and hospitals.<sup>55</sup> In the 2022 report, the UNSG "strongly condemn[ed] the violations against children resulting from the military takeover by the Tatmadaw, including the killing and maiming of children, as well as the attacks on and the use of schools and hospitals" but once again did not list the Tatmadaw for attacks on schools and hospitals, despite the report documenting 17 attacks on schools and hospitals for which the Tatmadaw was responsible.<sup>56</sup> The 2023 report finally listed Myanmar armed forces for attacks on schools and hospitals, as well as abduction. However, the most recent report in 2024 offers no sense of forward progress on any of the five grave violations for which Myanmar armed forces are listed.

A range of different dynamics have coalesced in Myanmar to complicate forward motion on CAAC. Russia and China continue to send high volumes of arms to the junta in the wake of the 2021 coup.<sup>57</sup> In 2022, the junta adopted an Organization Registration Law that has constrained the ability of civil

society to operate.<sup>58</sup> Myanmar is not a signatory to the Rome Statute, although the ICC does have jurisdiction over the Rohingya crisis, given that refugees fled to neighboring Bangladesh, which is a member of the ICC. Additionally, the Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar was mandated by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2018 to collect, preserve, and analyze evidence relevant to Myanmar. Nevertheless, progress on the ICC Prosecutor's investigation has been slow. Meanwhile, as noted earlier in this report, Myanmar armed forces—including related forces and affiliated militias—rank among one of the top state perpetrators of 'trigger' violations, with 1,900+ 'trigger' violations documented for 2023.

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“A range of different dynamics have coalesced in Myanmar to complicate forward motion on CAAC... Myanmar armed forces—including related forces and affiliated militias—rank among one of the top state perpetrators of ‘trigger’ violations, with 1,900+ ‘trigger’ violations documented for 2023.”

<sup>55</sup> “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/75/873-S/2021/437, May 6, 2021, p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/76/871-S/2022/493, June 23, 2022, pp. 19-20.

<sup>57</sup> Simon Lewis, “UN Expert Says Russia, China Sending Deadly Aid to Myanmar's Military,” *Reuters*, May 17, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/un-expert-says-russia-china-sending-deadly-aid-myanmars-military-2023-05-17/>.

<sup>58</sup> Rebecca Root, “Rule of Law: Myanmar's Junta Uses Legislation to Quash Civil Society,” International Bar Association, April 25, 2023, <https://www.ibanet.org/myanmar-junta-civil-society>.



### 4.3. Moro Islamic Liberation Front

Similar to the FARDC, the MILF constitutes an advocacy case study on recruitment and use of children that culminated with the UN delisting a party after successful completion of an action plan. However, the nature of recruitment and use of children by the MILF differed from what the UN had encountered in other contexts. As a UNICEF Lessons Learned report on engagement with the MILF stated, “The factors driving recruitment and the melange of socio-religious factors that influence children’s association with the separatist movement in Mindanao [the southern island in the Philippines where the MILF was based] are many and complex. There are few parallels with the other situations of forced recruitment and the related academic discourse.”<sup>59</sup> In Mindanao, children were not recruited into the MILF via physical force, but rather, joined voluntarily or due to economic, societal, or family pressures. Children were embedded in communities that viewed a child’s involvement (even as a soldier) in the MILF’s ideological cause as part of a religious and/or community obligation.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, over the course of the early 2000s, the MILF took significant steps to prevent and end the group’s practice of recruiting and using of children.

**FIGURE 16:**  
**Moro Islamic Liberation Front: Listings for Grave Violations<sup>61</sup>**

Year	Killing and Maiming	Recruitment and Use	Abduction	
2002				2009: action plan signed
2003		X		
2005		X		
2006		X		
2007		X		
2009		X		
2010		X		
2011		X		
2012		X		
2013		X		
2014		X		
2015		X		
2016		X		2017: action plan completed
2017				

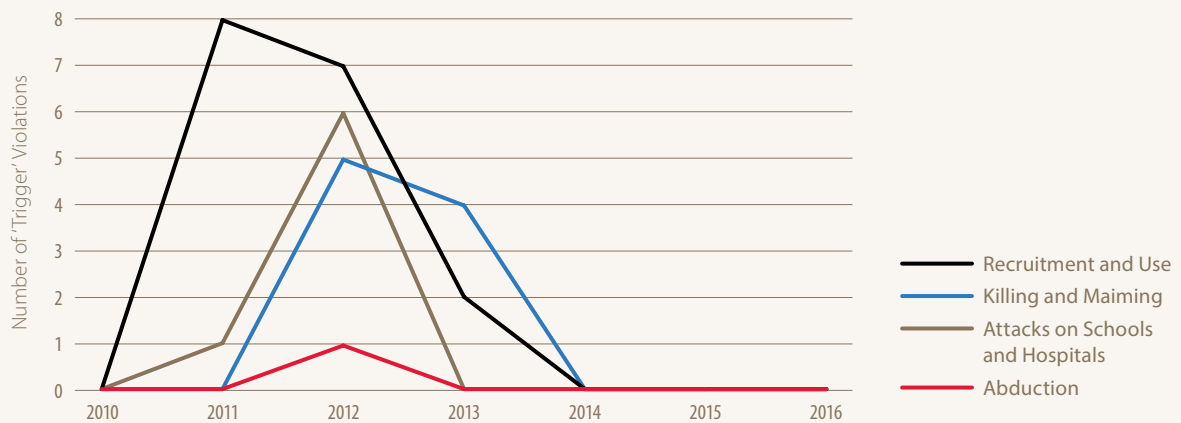
Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

<sup>59</sup> For more details, see “Children in Armed Conflict: Philippines, Processes and Lessons Learned, 2009-2017,” UNICEF, 2019, p. xiii, <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/media/881/file/Children%20in%20Armed%20Conflict:%20Philippines.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> Alpaslan Özerdem, Sukanya Podder, and Eddie L. Quitariano, “Identity, Ideology and Child Soldiering: Community and Youth Participation in Civil Conflict – A Study on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Mindanao, Philippines,” *Civil Wars*, Vol. 12, Issue 3 (2010): 304-325.

<sup>61</sup> The 2009 UNSG annual CAAC report also mentions that the MILF was responsible for killing and maiming and abduction. UNSG annual CAAC reports are not available for 2004 and 2008.

**FIGURE 17:**  
**'Trigger' Violations by Moro Islamic Liberation Front<sup>62</sup>**



Caution is warranted when drawing conclusions about increases or decreases of 'trigger' violations from year to year because the UN's ability to document and verify violations can fluctuate across contexts and over time.

Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

Similar to the DRC, in the Philippines, the birth of the CAAC agenda coincided with a peace process that shaped the trajectory of advocacy efforts. The MILF had fought against the government for decades since splintering from the Moro National Liberation Front in the 1970s. A key moment in the peace process was the Tripoli Agreement on Peace, signed by the Filipino government and the MILF in June 2001, just months before the adoption of UNSC resolution 1379 (2001), which mandated the UNSG's listing mechanism for recruitment and use of children.

The MILF already had a policy against recruitment and use of children. However, the policy did not align with international standards—in particular, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict—especially because the policy allowed numerous exceptions and also considered adulthood to begin with the onset of puberty, which could be considered to be as young as 13 years old.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> The UN did not document any instances of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by the MILF. Additionally, the levels of violations depicted in this figure are indicative of broad trends over time, but the generally low number of violations documented is likely due to issues of funding and resource capacity of the country field team in the Philippines, as well as issues of access, safety, and security for monitors in the country.

<sup>63</sup> "Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines," S/2008/272, April 24, 2008, p. 5.



Various factors over the next decade and a half would push the MILF's policy and practice toward alignment with international standards. The international context of the U.S.-led Global War on Terrorism gave the MILF an incentive to portray itself as a legitimate political entity rather than a terrorist organization.<sup>64</sup> This dynamic intersected with the peace process, especially in light of the Filipino government's strong security ties to the United States, as well as the forceful public stance against terrorism adopted by Malaysia, which played a key role in mediating peace talks between the government and the MILF.<sup>65</sup> Additional international engagement included the International Monitoring Team (involving Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Japan, Libya, Norway, and the European Union), which was mandated to monitor the peace agreement's implementation and also engaged on other dimensions of the conflict, including civilian protection.

Nevertheless, CAAC advocacy still required sustained efforts from the UN, as well as international and local civil society. The UN devoted time and resources to building trust with stakeholders within the MILF. New thinking was also needed from international CAAC stakeholders, given that the community-oriented dynamics of child recruitment in Mindanao necessitated different approaches than contexts where children had been forcibly recruited.<sup>66</sup> In the wake of the 2003 listing, the MILF adopted a series of productive measures, including General Order #2 in 2006, which prohibited recruitment of children under 18 years old. A country visit by the Special Representative of the UNSG on Children and Armed Conflict also played a role in persuading the MILF to sign the action plan.

Moreover, the Government of the Philippines took strides to demonstrate its own devotion to the CAAC agenda, seemingly further incentivizing the MILF's receptivity to CAAC advocacy efforts. A UNICEF retrospective report on engaging with the MILF stated that the MILF's decision to sign the action plan "was due in no small part to the recommencement of peace negotiations between the GPH [Government of the Philippines] and the MILF in 2007, and the spirit of accord and optimism that was emerging at the time."<sup>67</sup>

As in the DRC, the MILF's progress on implementing the action plan was not entirely smooth. The action plan expired in 2011, and progress stalled for the next couple years. Nevertheless, momentum once again picked up, leading up to and after the signing of the final peace agreement between the MILF and the Filipino government in 2014. In 2013, the MILF agreed to an open-ended extension of the 2009 action plan. The MILF then proceeded to institutionalize and implement processes and procedures to end child recruitment, and no new cases of recruitment and use were verified for a full reporting period, leading to the MILF's delisting in 2017.

<sup>64</sup> Henrique Garbino, "Rebels against Mines? Legitimacy and Restraint on Landmine Use in the Philippines," *Security Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2023): 525.

<sup>65</sup> Paul A. Roddell, "Separatist Insurgency in the Southern Philippines," in *A Handbook of Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, (ed.) Andrew T.H. Tan (Edward Elgar Publishing: 2007), p. 238.

<sup>66</sup> For more details, see "Children in Armed Conflict: Philippines, Processes and Lessons Learned, 2009-2017," pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, at 18.



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“For the MILF, the confluence of factors that fueled CAAC success points toward the importance of engaging in sustained, contextually tailored advocacy while capitalizing on enabling dynamics that can arise from conflict and peace process dynamics, as well as third-party stakeholders.”

Key measures that the MILF undertook during the process of implementing the action plan include:

- Issuing a supplemental general in 2010 reiterating the MILF’s policy against recruitment and use of children;
- Appointing focal points to ensure implementation of the action plan;
- Convening thousands of orientation sessions on ending recruitment and use of children;
- Launching a local “Children, Not Soldiers” campaign in 2015; and
- Issuing a command order in 2015 to induce compliance with guidelines on identifying and disengaging children.<sup>68</sup>

Grave violations persist in the Philippines at relatively low levels, and a continual decrease in reported grave violations inspires hope, although the UN acknowledges that constraints in the country continue to impede the ability to document and verify grave violations.<sup>69</sup> The Government of the Philippines has also sustained its commitment to CAAC, notably through the adoption in 2019 of the “Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act,” which prohibits grave violations against children during armed conflict in the country.<sup>70</sup> Still, three other NSAGs in the Philippines—Abu Sayyaf Group, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, and New People’s Army—are listed for recruitment and use of children and are all persistent perpetrators (listed for over 5 years). None have adopted action plans. For the MILF, the confluence of factors that fueled CAAC success points toward the importance of engaging in sustained, contextually tailored advocacy while capitalizing on enabling dynamics that can arise from conflict and peace process dynamics, as well as third-party stakeholders.

<sup>68</sup> “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines,” S/2013/419, July 12, 2013, p. 13; and “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines,” S/2017/294, April 5, 2017, p. 14.

<sup>69</sup> “Philippines: Continuous Decrease in Grave Violations & Discussion Around Peaceful Resolution of Conflict Offers Hope for Sustainable Protection of Children,” Office of the Special Representative of the UNSG for Children and Armed Conflict, October 22, 2024, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/2024/10/philippines-continuous-decrease-in-grave-violations-discussion-around-peaceful-resolution-of-conflict-offers-hope-for-sustainable-protection-of-children/>. See “Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2024/626, p. 2, which states, “Challenges relating to insecurity in and access to conflict-affected areas, along with access restrictions imposed by parties to the conflict, constrained the documentation and verification of grave violations against children. Therefore, the information contained in the present report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in the Philippines during the reporting period, and the actual number of violations is likely to be higher.”

<sup>70</sup> “Law Protecting Child Soldiers a Victory for the Philippines—UNICEF,” UNICEF, February 20, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/press-releases/law-protecting-child-soldiers-victory-philippines-unicef>.

## 4.4. Syrian Democratic Forces

Unlike the previous three case studies just discussed, when the Syrian Civil War erupted (escalating from Arab Spring-inspired political protests that began in March 2011), the CAAC agenda had already been firmly established. In 2011, as political unrest in Syria spiraled into armed conflict, the UNSC adopted its 8<sup>th</sup> resolution on children and armed conflict—UNSC resolution 1998 (2011)—which added attacks on schools and hospitals as a ‘trigger’ violation. In late 2012, the Special Representative of the UNSG for Children and Armed Conflict made her first visit to the country. The MRM on Children and Armed Conflict was launched in Syria the following year, just as Kurdish forces were consolidating control over territories in Northeast Syria. The Kurds in Northeast Syria have engaged constructively with CAAC stakeholders, but grave violations nevertheless persist. Despite signing an action plan in 2019, high levels of recruitment and use of children continue (Kurdish forces have been listed for this violation since 2014), along with widespread detention of children by Kurdish forces.

**FIGURE 18:**  
Syrian Democratic Forces:  
Listings for Grave Violations<sup>71</sup>

Year	Recruitment and use	
2013		2019: action plan signed
2014	X	
2015	X	
2016	X	
2017	X	
2018	X	
2019	X	
2020	X	
2021	X	
2022	X	
2023	X	
2024	X	

Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

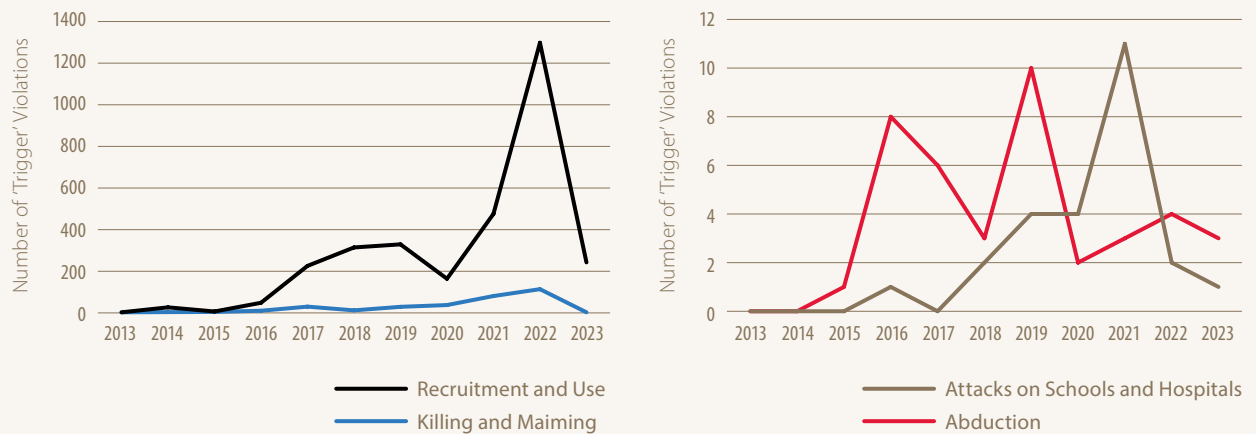
”

“Despite signing an action plan in 2019, high levels of recruitment and use of children continue (Kurdish forces have been listed for this violation since 2014), along with widespread detention of children by Kurdish forces.”

<sup>71</sup> Between 2014–2018, the entity is listed as People’s Protection Units. Beginning with the 2019 report, the listed entity includes People’s Protection Units as well as Women’s Protection Units.



**FIGURE 19:**  
**‘Trigger’ Violations by Syrian Democratic Forces (2013-2023)<sup>72</sup>**



Caution is warranted when drawing conclusions about increases or decreases of ‘trigger’ violations from year to year because the UN’s ability to document and verify violations can fluctuate across contexts and over time.

Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

Measures to consolidate control in the autonomous northeast included the establishment of the SDF—which includes Kurdish People’s Protection Units and Women’s Protection Units—in 2015 and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria in 2016, renamed the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria in 2023. The Kurds have battled ISIL, which first gained territory in Syria in 2013 and was repelled over the next 6 years by Kurdish military efforts, with the support of a U.S.-led international coalition. Many of the grave violations for which Kurdish forces are responsible have related to anti-ISIL operations.

In the wake of the listing of the Kurdish People’s Protection Units for recruitment of use of children in 2014, the SDF adopted a series of constructive steps in response to CAAC advocacy efforts, those being:

- Signing a Geneva Call ‘Deed of Commitment’ committing to demobilize children under 18, although a reservation allowed for children aged 16 and 17 to be used in non-combatant roles (2014);
- Issuing a military order declaring 18 as the minimum age for recruitment (2018);
- Issuing a military order proclaiming a commitment to implementing the action plan (2019);

<sup>72</sup> In addition to the violations presented in this figure, the UN also documented one instance of rape and other forms of sexual violence in 2014, included in the 2015 UNSG annual CAAC report.



- Establishing senior focal points, an implementing committee for the action plan, an age assessment committee, a child protection committee, and a civilian complaint mechanism (2019-2020); and
- Adopting a Child Rights Law that states a commitment to upholding the rights of children (2022).<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, as noted, SDF-perpetrated grave violations are still prevalent. Incidents of SDF-perpetrated recruitment and use increased sharply in 2017 in the context of the battle to wrest control of Raqqa from ISIL (contributing to the global 2017 spike in ‘trigger’ violations mentioned earlier in this report) and spiked even more dramatically in 2022. Kurdish authorities now hold tens of thousands of detainees, many of whom are children (approximately 29,000) in detention facilities and detention camps. Many of these detainees are foreign nationals that Kurdish authorities have thus far unsuccessfully sought to repatriate. Detainees have been subject to torture and other forms of ill-treatment and lack adequate access to food, water, and essential services.<sup>74</sup> Implementing the action plan with the SDF, according to the UNSG country report on CAAC in Syria from 2023, “has faced notable setbacks” and has become “increasingly challenging.”<sup>75</sup> In particular, in 2022, the SDF suspended operations for many of its child protection coordination activities, including reassigning its child protection focal points without designating replacements, although cooperation between the UN and the SDF subsequently resumed.<sup>76</sup>

These developments unfold in the broader context of the Syrian Civil War, wherein grave violations have been prevalent from all parties involved in the conflict, and an environment of impunity prevails. The Government of Syria is listed for all five ‘trigger’ violations but has not concluded an action plan to date. Notably, in June 2024, the opposition Syrian National Army, including Ahrar al-Sham and Army of Islam, and their aligned legions and factions, signed an action plan that addresses recruitment and use and killing and maiming. Figure 20 (below) displays patterns of ‘trigger’ violations for different conflict parties in the Syrian Civil War.

<sup>73</sup> “Syria: New Measures Taken by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units to Stop Recruiting Children Under 18,” Geneva Call, June 22, 2018, <https://www.genevacall.org/news/syria-new-measures-taken-by-the-kurdish-peoples-protection-units-to-stop-using-children-under-18/>; “Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2021/398, April 23, 2021, p. 13; and “Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2023/805, October 27, 2023, pp. 11-12.

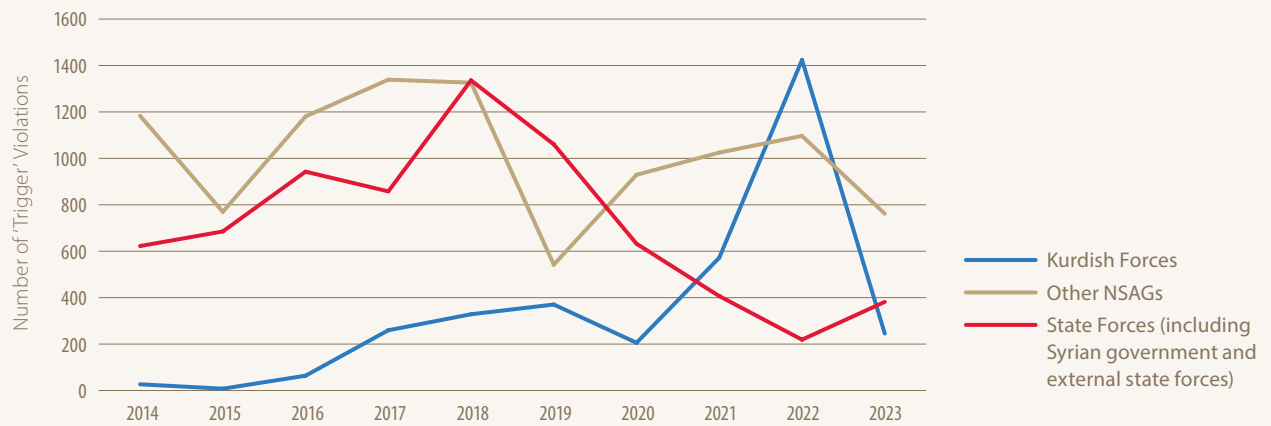
<sup>74</sup> “Aftermath: Injustice, Torture, and Death in Detention in North-East Syria,” Amnesty International, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/7752/2024/en/>; and “Northeast Syria: Military Recruitment of Children Persists,” Human Rights Watch, October 2, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/02/northeast-syria-military-recruitment-children-persists>.

<sup>75</sup> “Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2023/805, October 27, 2023, p. 11.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



**FIGURE 20:**  
**'Trigger' Violations by Different Parties in the Syrian Civil War (2014-2023)**



Caution is warranted when drawing conclusions about increases or decreases of 'trigger' violations from year to year because the UN's ability to document and verify violations can fluctuate across contexts and over time.

Source: Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports.

The United States continues its robust security support for the Kurdish autonomous authorities and is deeply involved in the detention system in Northeast Syrian terms of providing funding, equipment, and supplies for detention facilities, as well engaging in screening and interrogation of detainees suspected of affiliation with ISIL.<sup>77</sup> The United States has also taken steps to try to address the widespread detention problems, including by facilitating and supporting the repatriation of detainees who are foreign nationals.<sup>78</sup> However, there have been calls for the United States to exert its leverage as a third-party supporter to push the Kurdish autonomous authorities to make substantial progress in CAAC, including with regard to implementing the 2019 action plan.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, this case is emblematic of a conflict party that has taken a series of constructive steps yet still falls short on fulfilling its obligations to protect children during armed conflict.

<sup>77</sup> "Aftermath," pp. 51-68.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.





5

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Photographer: Thomas Glass, © ICRC.



As the analysis in this report has detailed, the CAAC agenda has matured over the past two and a half decades but currently confronts a challenging moment in its development. Data available through the Watchlist CAAC Global Dashboard, based on data collected and reported in UNSG annual CAAC reports, allows for an examination of successes and challenges while also painting a clear picture of the continued prevalence of grave violations against children during armed conflict. This report's analysis points toward the following recommendations that will be necessary for the CAAC agenda moving forward.

## 1) Elevate visibility for, and fortify the credibility of, the CAAC agenda.

- **UN Member States and relevant child protection stakeholders** should:
  - Ensure that effective monitoring, reporting, and response to grave violations continues, including engagement with armed forces and armed groups to develop and sign action plans to end and prevent violations and taking action to address persistent perpetrators of grave violations against children.
  - Promote implementation of recommendations to parties to armed conflict by disseminating the conclusions adopted by SCWG-CAAC and following up systematically on implementation.
  - Ensure that, during peace processes, child protection considerations are incorporated from the start and that child protection experts are consulted with during, and included in, every step of the process.
- **The UNSG** should ensure that parties are listed and de-listed according to the 2010 criteria, consistently across all country situations.

## 2) Combat impunity for grave violations.

- **UN Member States** should:
  - Ratify the Rome Statute for the ICC and the Arms Trade Treaty if they have not already done so.
  - Encourage cooperation with international justice mechanisms, including the ICC, and call for dedicated child rights expertise within investigative and justice mechanisms.



- Use appropriate political, diplomatic, financial and material measures, including the withholding of military assistance, to promote compliance by parties to armed conflict with international standards for the protection of children, consistent with UNSC resolution 1379 (2001), para. 9(b).
- Ensure that the risks of serious violations against children are central to assessments under article 7 of the Arms Trade Treaty. States must deny or suspend the export, supply, and transfer of arms, weapons, and other military assets to parties to armed conflict where there is an overriding risk that they will be used to undermine peace and security or to commit or to facilitate serious violations of international law, including gender-based violence and serious violence against children.

### 3) Deepen understanding of the drivers of grave violations.

- **UN agencies, civil society organizations, humanitarian organizations, and relevant academic institutions** should invest in research that analyzes root causes and drivers of grave violations across contexts, document cases of successful intervention to end and prevent grave violations, and share lessons learned to inform future responses to grave violations against children.

### 4) Bolster coordination among the varied actors advocating for and implementing the CAAC agenda.

- **UN Member States** should leverage the UN's vast policy architecture on protection to support the need for resources and staff capacity in the implementation of the CAAC agenda, providing political, financial, and technical support for dedicated child protection staff in UN missions and UN Country Teams.
- **The SCWG-CAAC** should leverage all available tools in its toolkit, including consistent adoption of conclusions, frequent video conferences with CTFMRs for up-to-date information and connection with the field, annual field visits to countries on the CAAC agenda, and regular and sustained engagement with the Office of the Special Representative of the UNSG for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as civil society organizations.
- **All child protection stakeholders** should strengthen their engagement with civil society organizations working at field level who can further the Council's understanding of children's needs in situations of armed conflict and advocate for the implementation of the Council's conclusions on CAAC. UN Member States can invite civil society actors to brief the Council more regularly, ensuring such briefings are conducted in ways that do not increase the risk of reprisals.





Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

Email: [watchlist@watchlist.org](mailto:watchlist@watchlist.org)

Website: [www.watchlist.org](http://www.watchlist.org)