

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **UN Turns a Blind Eye to Abuses Against Children in Yemen**

*Secretary-General Fails to Return Saudi/Emirati-Led Coalition to UN “List of Shame” for Violations in Yemen*

*New York, June 21, 2021* – By failing to return the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition to his annual “list of shame,” the United Nations Secretary-General has reneged on his commitment to protect all children affected by war, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict said. In a [report](#) issued today, the Secretary-General once again omitted the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition from his list of actors that abuse children in warzones, despite the UN’s own finding that the coalition had killed or maimed 194 children in Yemen in 2020.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres released his annual report on children and armed conflict today. It details grave child rights violations in 2020 in armed conflicts around the world, including Yemen. The Secretary-General [removed](#) the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition from his annual list of child rights abusers last year, despite the UN finding that it was responsible for killing and maiming 222 children in Yemen in 2019. At the time, he had [vowed](#) to re-list the coalition if it failed to sustainably decrease violations.

“As the UN’s latest report shows, the Secretary-General’s decision to remove the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition from his shame list last year sent a clear message that parties can get away with killing children,” said Adrienne Lapar, director of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. “If the Secretary-General does not immediately reconsider his decision and return the coalition to his list, he seriously undermines international efforts to protect children in war and emboldens warring parties to be more abusive against children.”

Since March 2015, the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition has been responsible for killing and maiming thousands of children in Yemen and attacking hundreds of schools and hospitals. In a particularly deadly [attack](#) on February 15, 2020, the coalition killed 25 children and injured 18 others. This attack was the third most lethal strike for children since the start of the coalition’s intervention in 2015.

Other parties were also left off the list despite ample UN-verified evidence of their responsibility for grave violations against children. For example, the UN found Israeli government forces responsible for killing and maiming 302 Palestinian children and committing 26 attacks on schools or hospitals in 2020, yet they remained off the list. In Colombia, dissident groups of the former *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP) recruited and used 66 children in their ranks, but the armed group was not listed.

In a positive move, the Secretary-General returned the Myanmar military—known as the Tatmadaw—to his list for recruiting and using children in armed conflict. The Tatmadaw, which had been listed since 2003, was removed from the list for recruitment and use last year, despite the UN finding that it was responsible for recruiting and using at least 205 children in 2019; it remained listed for killing and maiming and sexually abusing children in armed conflict. In 2020, the UN found the Tatmadaw responsible for recruiting and using 726 children in roles such as soldiers, porters, and mine clearers, and killing and maiming 62 children, among other violations.

“Secretary-General Guterres has set the record straight that the Tatmadaw’s abuses against children in conflict in Myanmar are unacceptable,” said Lapar. “Now that the Tatmadaw is back on the UN’s list of shame, the military junta must immediately end its flagrant disregard for children’s rights, which has only worsened since the February coup. The junta must protect girls and boys from violence, including by halting all forms of recruitment and use, even in non-combat roles such as porters and camp workers.”

The Secretary-General also added the Somali Federal Defense and Police Forces (who had already been listed for killing and maiming children and recruitment and use) to his list for rape and other forms of sexual violence

against children and the Afghan National Army for killing and maiming children. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), a local defense group formed to support Nigerian security forces in the fight against Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria, was removed from the list after it successfully implemented a UN [action plan](#) and significantly decreased cases of recruitment and use of children.

For the first time, the Secretary-General's report includes information on the situation of children in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and the Lake Chad Basin, drawing the attention of the UN Security Council to these increasingly heated conflicts. In Burkina Faso, the armed groups Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), as well as other warring parties, committed 80 attacks on schools and hospitals. Meanwhile in Cameroon, the UN verified a total of 285 grave violations against children, including 165 children killed or maimed. In the Lake Chad Basin, the UN documented hundreds of violations, including the abductions of 188 boys and girls, some of whom were also victims of sexual violence and forced recruitment. In all three contexts, the UN found children had been detained for their alleged association with armed groups or on national security-related charges; children in armed conflict are [victims](#) of serious violations of international law who should receive [reintegration support](#).

The Secretary-General's report, however, fell short of raising attention to the increasingly worrying situation of children affected by the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region, where thousands have been displaced due to violence and girls as young as 8 have been [targeted](#) for rape. Northern Mozambique was also left out, despite reports that children have been [beheaded](#), [abducted](#), and forcibly recruited or married off to fighters.

The Secretary-General's annual report and its annexed list of perpetrators have served as a unique and important tool for holding perpetrators accountable and pressuring them to end abuses and protect children in times of war. Their impact and credibility largely rely on the application of the same standards to all parties, whether they be non-state armed groups, government forces, or coalitions of governments.

Civil society groups have previously [expressed concerns](#) about efforts to politicize the list and the Secretary-General's failure to include all parties responsible for child rights abuses. Earlier this year, an independent [analysis](#) by a group of international experts [revealed](#) persistent discrepancies in the listing of perpetrators, including at least eight parties to conflict who were found responsible for killing and maiming over 100 children in a single year, yet were not listed. The experts also found double standards in the treatment of state and non-state parties to conflict.

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**See also:**

- [Open Letter from 18 Nongovernmental Organizations \(NGOs\) to the UN Secretary-General Calling for a Credible, Evidence-based List of Perpetrators, May 12, 2021](#)
- [“A Credible List”: Recommendations for the Secretary-General's 2021 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, April 2021](#)
- [Keeping the Promise: An Independent Review of the UN's Annual List of Perpetrators of Grave Violations against Children, 2010 to 2020, March 2021](#)

*Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a New York-based coalition of NGOs that seeks to end violations against children in armed conflict and to guarantee their rights. For more information, visit: <https://watchlist.org/>.*