

Children and Armed Conflict

UN SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Recommendations to the UN Security Council and Member States

On June 24, 2026, the Security Council will hold its open debate on children and armed conflict (CAAC), under Colombia's presidency. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC) will present the Secretary-General's (SG) 2026 annual report on CAAC (forthcoming), covering the period from January 1 to December 31, 2025. The open debate will focus on the protection of schools and educational settings and on the prevention of attacks against schools.

Since its inception, the UN's CAAC agenda has made valuable progress in protecting children in armed conflict, encouraging compliance with international law and promoting behavior change of warring parties. The agenda encompasses unique tools that Member States, UN offices and agencies, and civil society can leverage to strengthen the protection of children and ensure full respect for their rights. The SG's annual report, the Office of the SRSG-CAAC, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), and the Security Council Working Group on CAAC (SCWG-CAAC) each play a role in spurring concrete commitments and measures to prevent and end grave violations against children and upholding international legal and normative standards for their protection.

Despite this progress, in 2024, the UN [verified](#) the highest ever number of grave violations in a single reporting period, including 2,374 verified attacks on schools and hospitals, representing a 44 percent increase. For the third consecutive year, government forces were the primary perpetrators of attacks on schools and hospitals. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) continues to be a major driver of harm to children and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Despite advances in normative frameworks for the protection of education through the Safe Schools Declaration and [SCR 2601 \(2021\)](#), substantial gaps remain in the implementation of concrete measures to protect education during armed conflict, including restricting the military use of schools and ensuring accountability for attacks on education.

As we mark 30 years since the inception of the CAAC mandate, more action is needed to enforce compliance with obligations to protect children in armed conflict and ensure accountability for those who continue to commit grave violations. Persistent funding shortfalls, shrinking civic space, restrictions on humanitarian access, and the drawdown and transition of UN missions continue to undermine efforts to protect children affected by armed conflict. Reductions in [funding](#) have strained child protection services, including support for education and reintegration programs for children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG). The withdrawal and transition of UN peace operations and political missions, including the loss of child protection capacity, risk constraining the ability to monitor, verify, and respond to grave violations. Continued disregard for international law, pervasive impunity, and inconsistent implementation of existing commitments and frameworks further erode protection for children and weaken efforts to prevent and respond to grave violations.

The open debate presents a critical opportunity for Member States to reaffirm their commitment to the CAAC agenda and translate it into action, including implementing existing frameworks, investing in child protection capacities, and holding perpetrators accountable. Member States, UN entities, and civil society should work towards consistent, meaningful, and safe child participation in decisions affecting them.

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

- 1. Strongly reiterate support for the UN's CAAC agenda, demand increased compliance with international law and child protection norms, and strengthen accountability measures for perpetrators of grave violations:**
 - a. Reaffirm commitments to uphold international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law and child protection norms; encourage Member States who have not done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict; and demand timely, meaningful accountability for all violations and abuses committed against children in armed conflict.

Situations involving parties listed for grave violations against children:

Afghanistan
Burkina Faso
Central African Republic
Colombia
Democratic Republic of Congo
Haiti
Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory
Lake Chad Basin
Mali
Myanmar
Nigeria
Somalia
South Sudan
Sudan
Syria
Ukraine
Yemen

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- b. Strongly condemn all grave violations and abuses against children and urge the signing and implementation of joint action plans with the UN to end and prevent grave violations; demand that all parties take action to protect children in accordance with the principles of precaution, distinction, and proportionality.
- c. Demand that all parties to conflict allow and facilitate unimpeded, rapid, and safe access to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations, especially children, and respect and protect humanitarian personnel, assets, and infrastructure.
- d. Urge Member States to bring to justice all those responsible for grave violations against children, including through prompt investigation and, where appropriate, prosecution for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other egregious crimes against children; encourage cooperation with international justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, and call for dedicated child rights expertise within investigative and justice and accountability mechanisms.
- e. Call for a complete, evidence-based list of perpetrators in the annexes of the SG's annual reports that accurately reflects data collected and verified by the MRM; strongly urge the SG to implement a rigorous, objective, and transparent process to ensure that parties are listed and de-listed according to the [2010 criteria](#), consistently across all country situations.

2. Strengthen the effective use of existing mechanisms and tools to monitor, report, and respond to grave violations:

- a. Call on Member States who have not done so to endorse and implement the Paris Principles and Commitments, Vancouver Principles, Safe Schools Declaration, and the EWIPA Declaration; and encourage endorsers to uphold their commitments and fully implement and exchange lessons learned and good practices.
- b. Call for increased financial and political support for the UN's MRM, encouraging systematic analysis of the impact of gender, disability, and other vulnerabilities to inform response and prevention efforts; further support efforts to strengthen and enhance monitoring and reporting, including data disaggregation.
- c. Call for increased child protection capacity in UN peace operations and political missions, including maintaining child protection best practice, capacity, and standards in all new mission, with financial, political, and operational support; prioritize child protection considerations in the context of mission drawdown or transition, per [SCR 2764 \(2024\)](#).
- d. Urge donors to provide predictable and long-term funding for comprehensive, gender-sensitive, age-appropriate, and disability-inclusive child protection response systems and services, including for reintegration of CAAFAG.

3. Redouble efforts to prevent grave violations against children and protect their rights in armed conflict:

- a. Call for effective measures to prevent and address attacks and threats of attack on schools and education facilities and strengthen implementation of [SCR 2601 \(2021\)](#) and the Safe Schools Declaration, prohibiting the military use of schools through, inter alia, legislation, military doctrine, and operational guidance, and paying particular attention to inclusive access to education for girls, refugee and internally displaced children, and children with disabilities.
- b. Call on states to review military doctrine, policies, and planning around the use of EWIPA, adopting an avoidance policy, and ensuring child-specific impacts are systematically considered and addressed; renew efforts to mark and clear explosive remnants of war; and promote explosive ordnance risk education, conflict preparedness, and protection for affected communities.
- c. Demand that all parties take immediate and specific steps to end and prevent rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, ensure survivors have access to comprehensive, gender-sensitive, and age-appropriate response systems and services, and strengthen preventative measures.
- d. Recalling that CAAFAG should be treated primarily as victims and that detention should be used only as a last resort, call for the release and timely transfer of children in security force custody to civilian child protection authorities and encourage the adoption and effective implementation of [handover protocols](#) to prevent the military detention of children as well as for access to detention facilities for UN and other independent monitors; in cases where children may have committed violent criminal acts, ensure they are treated in accordance with international juvenile justice standards.
- e. Call for the protection, rights, well-being, and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict to be fully incorporated and prioritized in ongoing and future efforts to build and sustain peace, per [SCR 2427 \(2018\)](#); encourage and facilitate the meaningful, consistent consideration of children's perspectives in these processes, where possible and compatible with their best interests, drawing on existing tools, including the [Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict](#).

NGO RESOURCES

Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, [Education Under Attack](#), June 2026 (forthcoming)

Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition Members, [Care in the Crosshairs: Violence Against Healthcare in Conflict](#), May 2026

Watchlist, "[A Credible List](#)": [Recommendations for the Secretary-General's 2026 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict](#), April 2026

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, [The Impact of Funding Cuts on Children and their Protection in Humanitarian Contexts: An Analysis One Year On](#), March 2026

Children and Crimes Against Humanity Coalition, [Justice for Children in the Future: Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Humanity](#), May 2025

Save the Children, [Children and Blast Injuries: The Devastating Impact of Explosive Weapons on Children, 2020–2025](#), 2025