

20 YEARS

**to BETTER PROTECT
CHILDREN AFFECTED
by CONFLICT**



Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

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Foreword by Ban Ki-moon

Secretary-General of the United Nations



The plight of children affected by war has galvanized the international community to find new and effective ways to protect the most vulnerable members of the human family.

Twenty years ago, the General Assembly recognized the unique predicament of children caught up in conflict, and created the mandate of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC).

Across two decades of advocacy and action by successive Special Representatives, this commitment has yielded results: tens of thousands of children have been released from armed forces and armed groups, thousands of children have received desperately needed services, and accountability for perpetrators has increased.

Equally important is the achievement of a new global consensus among Member States that children should not be recruited and used in conflict, and that they should be protected from all other grave violations.

In 2016, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with former child soldiers in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo

PHOTO: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

In 2014, I was pleased to support the “Children, Not Soldiers” campaign launched by my Special Representative and UNICEF, which has since generated noteworthy progress in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere. My annual report on children and armed conflict has also become an important tool to prevent the use of children in the armed forces, and I am pleased to note that all Governments that have been listed in that report have officially engaged with the United Nations towards this end. This is a major achievement and one of the founding objectives of this mandate.

States have the primary responsibility to protect the fundamental rights of the world’s children. I call on Member States, civil society, United Nations entities and everyone who can make a difference to rise to this test and give all children the childhood they deserve. 

Anthony Lake

UNICEF Executive Director

“Whatever the causes of modern-day brutality towards children, the time has come to call a halt.”

With these words in 1996, Graça Machel’s powerful report on children and armed conflict helped bring the world together in common cause to protect children caught in the crossfire of war. The resulting creation of the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has driven greater awareness — and greater action. Under the leadership of Special Representative Leila Zerrougui, the Office of the Special Representative is a relentless force to monitor, expose and put an end to grave violations against children.

This work has never been more important, nor more urgent.

Today, nearly 250 million children are living in countries and areas affected by conflict. An untold number of children are now living in communities besieged by conflict and often cut off from sufficient humanitarian aid. And far too many children have been recruited, forced into, or otherwise used by armed groups.

Around the world, millions of children have been scarred physically and psychologically by violence — experiencing horrors no child should ever

experience; witnessing events no child should ever see; victimized by the worst of humanity.

Each and every one of these children has the right to a childhood — to be safe, to learn, and to grow into adulthood. The right to progress, not only for their sake, but also for the sake of their societies. For children whose rights have been violated with impunity are less likely, as adults, to respect the rights of others.

For 20 years, the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has summoned outrage and compelled action to prevent grave violations against children, working in partnership with governments, NGOs, and UN agencies — and aided by the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism.

Our past progress — exemplified by some of the examples in this report — shows what we can do, through common effort — now and in the future. For example, last year alone, almost 10,000 boys and girls were released from armed forces or groups. Back in their homes. In school. In safe places where they can heal.

For the sake of these children, and our common humanity, we must build on this progress. Together. 

Hervé Ladsous

Under Secretary-General, DPKO

Protecting civilians in times of conflict is one of the most important tasks entrusted to peacekeeping missions by the UN Security Council.

Children are without a doubt the most vulnerable among the population.

Thousands of children are victims of unimaginable horrors. Thousands of them are traumatized by violence in conflict. We are proud to partner with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and promote their mandate.

In the past twenty years, the evolution of the mandate has resonated in the work of our missions. Protection of children is now systematically included in the mandates of UN peacekeeping operations. Child Protection Advisers (CPAs) play an essential role to advising the mission's leadership and ensuring that children's rights are taken into consideration in all aspects of our actions on the ground. From the Democratic Republic of the Congo to South Sudan, from Central African Republic to Darfur, our missions have been promoting child protection activities, including when we need to negotiate the release of children from armed forces and armed groups or support the implementation of action plans.

The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations committed against children is an essential tool. The information collected and verified through this mechanism supports our advocacy with parties to the conflict. It is also used for our response and preventive actions.

Through training on child protection, thousands of peacekeeping troops and police from around the world go back home every year with an expanded knowledge of what it means to protect children in the most difficult contexts. In collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict and with UNICEF, we have developed a pre-deployment training module for our military peacekeepers and we are currently developing specialized training on child protection for UN Police contingents, to ensure that all personnel working in a peacekeeping mission know what to do to better protect children.

I want to use this opportunity to reaffirm our strong support and collaboration to bring positive and lasting change to the lives of as many children as possible who are confronted by the most difficult of circumstances. 

Jeffrey Feltman

Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs

Graça Machel's seminal report on the impact of armed conflict on children correctly concluded 20 years ago that the most effective way to protect children from armed conflict is to stop the outbreak of armed conflict.

Today, conflict continues to rage around the world, and it is increasingly complex. With children at perhaps greater risk than ever, our response has had to keep up: The UN has continued to develop and refine its tools for conflict prevention, working with partners to ensure that dialogue and mediation efforts include concerns related to the involvement of children in armed conflict, and that ceasefire and peace agreements contain provisions against the practice.

The reports of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC) have covered many of the

places where Department of Political Affairs (DPA) missions are working to help parties find political solutions to violent conflict, including Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. These reports, along with the child protection advisers in many of DPA's missions, are critical to ensure that the imperative of protecting children is not forgotten.

Indeed, close cooperation between DPA and the SRSG-CAAC in the field is essential.

The recent reviews of how the UN helps maintain global peace and security and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda stress the need for all parts of the UN system to work together to achieve enduring peace. DPA is proud to be a close partner of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. 

Introduction by Leila Zerrougui

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict



When I began my work in 2012, I inherited a mandate with a strong legal framework and mechanisms to engage the UN's governing bodies, Member States and parties to conflict.

I was immediately impressed by the international community's strong engagement on this issue and my predecessors' extraordinary accomplishments to create such comprehensive tools.

Accordingly, I set out to consolidate the gains achieved and to explore how and where we could generate more progress for boys and girls. In particular, I sought to accelerate progress to

Leila Zerrougui meets families displaced by conflict during a mission to the Middle East.

PHOTO: OSRSG-CAAC/Stephanie Tremblay

address recruitment and use, which is at the heart of children's suffering in times of war and inextricably linked to other grave violations.

Since 2000 more than 115,000 child soldiers have been released due to the collective efforts of child protection actors. In recent years, the campaign 'Children, Not Soldiers' has contributed to this progress by helping us work closely with the Member States concerned as true partners through

addressing gaps, building capacity and developing strong national ownership.

Working in close collaboration with our partners in UNICEF, DPKO, DPA and others, this crucial work on child recruitment has helped to lay the foundation to address other grave violations. There has been substantial engagement and positive developments to protect schools and hospitals, including through preventing military use, as well as to curb sexual violence in conflict. The inclusion of child protection issues more frequently in peace processes has been invaluable to these efforts. Progress has also been enhanced through intensifying cooperation with our partners and developing new alliances for children, for example through partnership agreements with regional organizations. This has helped us to increase the mandate's reach as well as regional ownership of child protection.



Leila Zerrougui

Under-Secretary-General

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
Children and Armed Conflict

While it is important that we use this opportunity to look back over twenty years of work and assess the progress that has been made, it is equally vital to try to apply lessons learnt to the grave and urgent challenges that children still face. Protecting children in situations of armed conflict is a constant and evolving endeavor. Currently, we face extremely serious challenges to protect children from protracted conflicts, violent extremism and mass deprivation of liberty, just to name a few. My experience in this position has taught me that there will be both new and reoccurring concerns in the future. We need innovative solutions and broad collaboration to address these issues.

In this publication, I will present a retrospective of the work achieved in the past 20 years but will also present ideas on the way forward to bring children the protection they need and deserve.

Twenty years of work to protect children affected by war

Achievements and progress



Nyaruo, 14, (centre, with headscarf) attends classes in the UNICEF-supported temporary learning space in the Protection of Civilians (PoC) site in Bor, South Sudan.

PHOTO: UNICEF/UNO14O19/Rich

Working in collaboration with Governments, the UN system, NGOs and a broad range of partners has brought about progress for millions of children affected by conflict.

Grave violations against children identified

- Recruitment and use of children*
- Killing and maiming*
- Rape and sexual violence in conflict*
- Attacks on schools and hospitals*
- Abduction of children*
- Denial of humanitarian access

Achievements and progress made

○ 5 TRIGGERS FOR LISTING PARTIES TO CONFLICT

5 triggers for listing parties to conflict in the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

* Triggers for listing

MONITORING AND REPORTING MECHANISM ESTABLISHED

Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism established in all countries where parties are listed to provide timely and reliable information to the UN Security Council and UN highest bodies.

GLOBAL CONSENSUS THAT CHILDREN SHOULD NOT BE RECRUITED

Global consensus that children should not be recruited and used by national security forces in conflict, and should be protected from all other grave violations.

166 RATIFICATIONS

166 ratifications to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, adopted in 2000.

27 ACTION PLANS SIGNED

27 Action Plans signed with parties to conflict.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT
TELL THE WORLD THEY ARE

ACTION PLAN
HOW TO END THE RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT:

ONE Issue military command orders prohibiting the recruitment and use of children

TWO Release all children identified in the ranks of security forces

THREE Ensure children's reintegration into civilian life

FOUR Criminalize the recruitment and use of children

FIVE Integrate age-verification mechanisms in recruitment procedures

CHILDRENANDARMEDCONFLICT.ORG

United Nations unicef

PHOTO: United Nations/Graphic Design Unit

9 PARTIES TO CONFLICT DELISTED

9 parties to conflict in Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Uganda delisted from the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict following completion of their Action Plan.

11 RESOLUTIONS ON CHILDREN ADOPTED

11 resolutions on children and armed conflict adopted by the UN Security Council.

OVER 115,000 CHILD SOLDIERS RELEASED

Over 115,000 child soldiers released since 2000 as a result of dialogue and Action Plans.

PARIS PRINCIPLES ADOPTED IN 2007 AND ENDORSED BY 105 STATES

Paris Principles adopted in 2007 and endorsed by 105 States with the aim to ensure child soldiers are treated primarily as victims, not perpetrators and that their reintegration is a priority.

STRONG GLOBAL ACTION FOR SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS

Strong global action for the protection of schools and hospitals.

SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION

Safe Schools declaration against military use of schools adopted in 2015 and already endorsed by 56 States.

ENDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN CONFLICT

Strong international commitment and progress to end sexual violence against children in conflict.

Shining a spotlight on the plight of children

Looking back at the creation and evolution of the children and armed conflict mandate



A child soldier in the process of being demobilized in Afghanistan.

PHOTO: UNICEF/NYHQ2004-O654/Brooks

Since the 1990 World Summit for Children, the United Nations had sought to bring more international attention to the plight of children affected by armed conflict.

In December 1993, following a recommendation by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN General Assembly expressed its concern “about the grievous deterioration in the situation of children in many parts of the world as a result of armed conflicts.”

That year, wars were raging in Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Balkans, Somalia, Afghanistan and elsewhere. In

the post-Cold War era, inter-communal fighting was becoming more ubiquitous. The horrendous impact of conflict on children was impossible to ignore. Graphic images of child soldiers, of boys and girls killed and injured, displaced, had become common features in the media. Civilian populations, including boys and girls, were no longer on the margins of conflict, but becoming direct victims and the targets of belligerents. As the world watched brutal conflicts

unfold, people in their homes, in Government halls and everywhere asked: “What can we do to better protect the millions of children growing up in countries affected by war?”

The UN General Assembly and the Committee on the Rights of the Child asked the Secretary-General to name an expert to conduct a thorough study on the impact of conflict on children, including their participation in wars as child soldiers.

Graça Machel, Mozambique’s first post-independence Minister for Education, and an advocate for children’s rights, was named to undertake this massive project.

Graça Machel Report

Over two years, Graça Machel traveled to several countries affected by conflict and met children, families, humanitarian workers, Government officials and anyone who could help her gain a better understanding of what boys and girls were experiencing.

Her report, *“Impact of armed conflict on children”*, presented in 1996 to the General Assembly, described the brutality millions of children caught up in conflicts were exposed to and demonstrated the centrality of this issue to the international human rights, development and peace and security agendas. It was a call for urgent action. She identified children as the primary victims of armed conflict and included a set of recommendations, including the nomination of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict to keep the protection of children *“very high on the international human rights, peace, security and development agendas.”*



In 2015, Graça Machel speaks with a former child soldier during a visit to a UNICEF-assisted camp near Freetown, in Sierra Leone.

PHOTO: UNICEF/UNI29698/Grossman

A new UN mandate is born

On 12 December 1996, four months after the publication of Machel’s report, with the adoption of resolution 51/77, the General Assembly recommended the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict. The mandate was born. The international community had worked to bring the protection of children affected by war the attention it deserved and had now created a focal point for action to reinforce global child protection.

In August 1997, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Olara Otunnu, from Uganda, as his first

1996 —

Publication of Graça Machel report, *“Impact of Armed Conflict on Children”*

General Assembly Resolution 51/77 recommends the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children who would report to the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council.

Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Otunnu was mandated to “assess progress achieved, steps taken and difficulties encountered in strengthening the plight of children affected by armed conflict, encourage the development of networking, foster international cooperation to ensure respect for children’s rights in these situations and to contribute to the coordination of efforts by Governments and relevant United Nations bodies, specialized agencies as well as other competent bodies and non-governmental organizations.” 



“It is the singular characteristic of armed conflict in our time that children suffer most.”

—**Graça Machel**

A General Assembly Mandate

Excerpts from UN General Assembly Resolution 51/77

Recommends that the Secretary-General appoint for a period of three years a Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children.

Recommends that the Special Representative:

- (a) Assess progress achieved, steps taken and difficulties encountered in strengthening the protection of children in situations of armed conflict;
- (b) Raise awareness and promote the collection of information about the plight of children affected by armed conflict and encourage the development of networking;
- (c) Work closely with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, relevant United Nations bodies, the specialized agencies and other competent bodies, as well as non-governmental organizations;

- (d) Foster international cooperation to ensure respect for children’s rights in these situations and contribute to the coordination of efforts by Governments, relevant United Nations bodies, notably the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the specialized agencies and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, relevant special rapporteurs and working groups, as well as United Nations field operations, regional and subregional organizations, other competent bodies and non-governmental organizations;

Requests the Special Representative to submit to the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights an annual report containing relevant information on the situation of children affected by armed conflict, bearing in mind existing mandates and reports of relevant bodies;

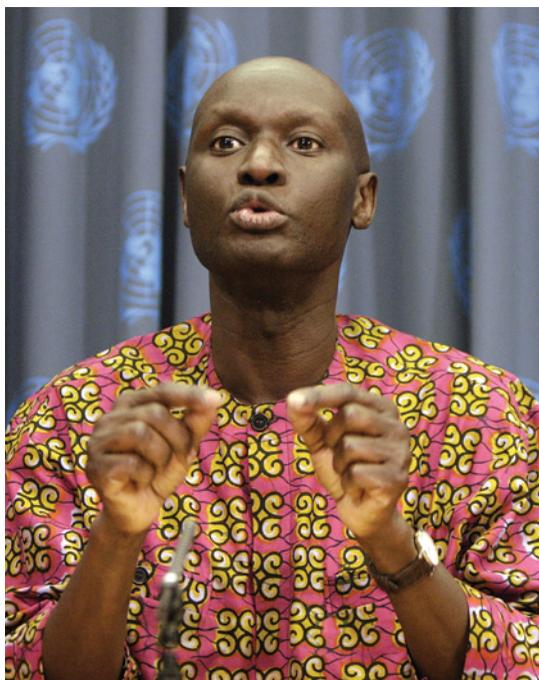
1997 

First Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict

The Secretary-General names Olara A. Otunnu as his first Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict

The Work Begins: Olara Otunnu takes office

The work of the first Special Representative began in earnest



Olara Otunnu briefs the press at the UN in New York in 2003.

PHOTO: UN Photo

He highlighted issues that could make a big difference for children:

The “prioritization of child rights within the terms of peace accords and in the mandates of peacekeeping operations, the demobilization of child soldiers and their social reintegration, the return and reintegration of displaced and refugee children, [...] psychological recovery, educational and vocational training, and issues of juvenile justice.”

In his first few months in office, Olara Otunnu travelled to Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan, former Yugoslavia and worked to generate support for the new mandate among Member States and regional organizations.

In his first report, presented to the General Assembly in 1998, Olara Otunnu laid out his plan to address the plight of children affected by conflict.

Children simply have no role in warfare

1st report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to the General Assembly A/53/482

The development and proliferation of lightweight automatic weapons has made it possible for very young children to bear and use arms. Many more are being used in indirect ways that are more difficult to measure, such as cooks, messengers and porters. Children have also been used for mine clearance, spying and suicide bombing.

Children affected by armed conflict: A peace and security issue on the agenda of the UN Security Council

On June 29 1998, the UN Security Council held its first Open Debate on children and armed conflict. In his address, Olara Otunnu proposed areas of engagement for the Council to move towards “prevention, protection and recovery.”

“Words on paper cannot save children in peril,” Otunnu declared, asking the Council to “lead the way by sending forth a clear message that the targeting, use and abuse of children are simply unacceptable.”

Otunnu then called on the Council to explore concrete initiatives to prevent or mitigate the suffering of children, insisting on humanitarian access to populations affected by conflict, calling for schools and hospitals to be considered “battle-free zones,” and asking for better monitoring and control for the flow of arms, especially light weapons.

He also highlighted the importance of healing, because children carry the scars of conflict deep in their hearts and minds. Reintegration programs are necessary, he said, to help children rebuild their lives, but also to break cycles of violence.

In 1999, the first resolution on children and armed conflict placed the issue of children affected by war



A young girl looks at her destroyed home after it was hit by an airstrike in Yemen in April 2015.

PHOTO: UNICEF/UNO18341/Jahaf

on the Security Council’s agenda. The resolution identified and condemned 6 grave violations affecting children the most in times of conflict, and requested the Secretary-General to report on the issue.

Throughout his tenure as Special Representative, Olara Otunnu advocated for the creation of a new set of tools to convince or pressure parties to conflict to protect children and abide by their obligations and international law.

1998 —○

First debate of the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict

The Security Council expressed its support for the mandate of the Special Representative in a Presidential Statement.

1999 —○

Security Council Resolution 1261

The first resolution on children and armed conflict placed the issue of children affected by war on the Security Council’s agenda.

Engagement with the General Assembly

Through the creation of the mandate of the Special Representative, the General Assembly demonstrated its commitment to placing the issue of children and armed conflict firmly on the international agenda. This commitment is also manifested in a number of connected efforts undertaken by the General Assembly.

Over the years, the General Assembly has adopted essential treaties and resolutions to create a normative framework to better protect children from the effects of war. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict provide the foundation for the protection of children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has almost universal ratification and the Special Representative continues to advocate with Member States who have not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol.

In addition, every year, the General Assembly adopts a resolution on the Rights of the Child, which addresses current issues and challenges. This resolution is negotiated within the Third Committee of the General Assembly on social, humanitarian, and cultural affairs, and generates advances such as the upcoming Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty.

The Special Representative presents his/her report to the General Assembly annually with information on progress achieved, challenges and outlines ongoing cooperation to better address the plight of children affected by conflict. With the submission of the report, the Assembly is kept abreast of the most pressing and emerging issues. The presentation of the report to a Third Committee session in October each year also serves as an interactive dialogue between Member States and the Special Representative. The Special Representative is also involved in General Assembly thematic initiatives related to children and armed conflict, including the Sustainable Development Goals, discussions

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict

In parallel to the development of the mandate were efforts to adopt an international instrument to end and prevent the recruitment of children in armed conflict. In 2000, the **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict** was adopted by the UN General Assembly. On 12 February 2002, the protocol entered into force.

Under the Protocol, States are required to:

- ⦿ ban compulsory recruitment below the age of 18;
- ⦿ ensure that any individual in their armed forces under the age of 18 does not take part in hostilities;
- ⦿ take all necessary measures to prohibit and prevent the recruitment and use of children under 18 by non-State armed groups.

With 166 ratifications as of December 2016, OPAC is becoming a universal legal norm, and has already impacted the lives of thousands of children worldwide.

2000 —

Security Council Resolution 1314

The second resolution on children and armed conflict reaffirmed that **the deliberate targeting of civilians, including children, may constitute a threat to peace and security** and requested the Secretary-General to continue to report to the Security Council on violations against children taking place in times of conflict.

related to refugees and internally displaced persons and the impact of violent extremism on children.

The General Assembly has also created space for the children and armed conflict mandate in human rights machinery through requesting the Special Representative to report to the Human Rights Council and its predecessor body, the Commission on Human Rights.

New tools to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers

In 2001, the Security Council sent a powerful message to the world that the recruitment of child soldiers would no longer be tolerated. Resolution 1379 requested the Secretary-General to attach an annex to his report on children and armed conflict, in which he would list parties to conflict who recruit and use children in situations on the Security Council's agenda. In a significant step, the resolution went further by requesting the Secretary-General to also list parties to conflict in situations that, although not on the Security Council's agenda, in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security in accordance with Article 99 of the United Nations Charter.

Subsequent resolutions added four additional triggers for listing: sexual violence, killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals and abduction of children. The Security Council indicated that to be

removed from the Secretary-General's annex, parties to conflict named in the report had to engage in dialogue with the UN to develop and fully implement Action Plans.

Action Plans are designed to end and prevent violations against children for which parties to conflict are listed. For example, an Action Plan to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers by Government security forces can include the following actions:

ACTION PLAN

HOW TO END THE RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT:

ONE Issue military command orders prohibiting the recruitment and use of children

TWO Release all children identified in the ranks of security forces

THREE Ensure children's reintegration into civilian life

FOUR Criminalize the recruitment and use of children

FIVE Integrate age-verification mechanisms in recruitment procedures

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United Nations

unicef



PHOTO: UN DPI/Graphic Design Unit

2001



Security Council Resolution 1379

The Security Council requested the Secretary-General to **list parties to armed conflict that recruit or use children** in violation of the international obligations applicable to them, in situations that are on the Security Council's agenda or that may be brought to the attention of the Security Council by the Secretary-General, in accordance with article 99 of the charter of the United Nations.

2002



International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict entered into force on 12 February. The date is now known as the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers.

Alhaji Babah Sawaneh: Former Child Soldier at the Security Council

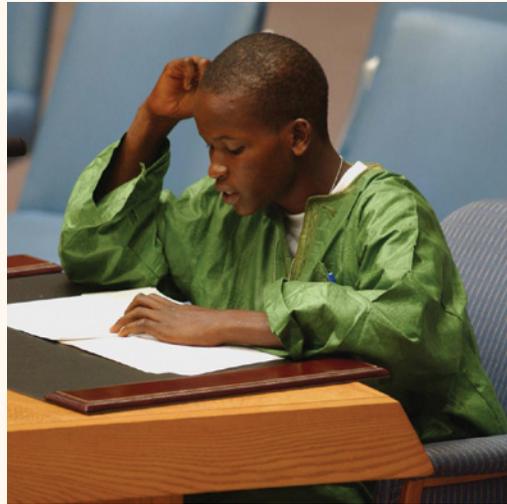
Alhaji Babah Sawaneh was only 10 years-old when he was abducted to become a child soldier with the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone. For the next two years, he fought in a war he described as “one of the most brutal and turbulent civil wars in the history of armed conflict.” He was rescued by the United Nations and its partners in 2000, and a year later, flew to New York to address the UN Security Council.

“I was used to fight when we were attacked,” he said. “During these attacks we killed people, burnt down houses, destroyed properties and cut limbs. But more often I went on food raids and did domestic work for my commander’s wife.”

At the end of his presentation, he said he was happy that thousands of children like him had been given the chance to escape a life of violence with the support of NGOs and the UN.

“I know there are more children held back, especially our sisters,” he cautioned at the time. “I ask this body on behalf of all the children of Sierra Leone to do all they can to bring our sad story to an end.”

Thirteen years later, in March 2014, Alhaji came back to the Security Council.



Alhaji Babah Sawaneh, 14, was the first child to address the UN Security Council, during a session devoted to the issue of children and armed conflict in November 2001.

PHOTO: UNICEF/UNI40829/Markisz

“I would like to tell you what happened to me,” he said. “I was able to return to school and with the help of my foster family and with friends, I worked hard and I didn’t give up. Two years ago, I finished my Bachelor of social science.”

With perseverance, progress is possible.

“Fifteen years ago, there were child soldiers in Sierra Leone,” he said. “I was one of them. Today, Sierra Leone is child soldier-free.”

2003

Security Council Resolution 1460

Supports the Secretary-General’s call for “**an era of application**” of international norms and standards for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. Expresses the Security Council’s intention to enter into dialogue or to support the Secretary-General to begin dialogue with parties to conflict that recruit or use children to develop clear and time-bound action plans to end this practice. Calls on parties to conflict listed by the Secretary-General to provide information on steps taken to halt the recruitment and use of children.

2004

Security Council Resolution 1539

Requests the Secretary-General to **devise a systematic and comprehensive monitoring and reporting mechanism** to provide timely, accurate and reliable information on the recruitment and use of children and other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict. Calls upon parties to conflict listed by the Secretary-General to prepare concrete, time-bound Action Plans to halt the recruitment and use of children in close collaboration with the United Nations. Expresses its intention to consider imposing targeted and graduated measures (sanctions) against parties that fail to develop an action plan or fail to meet the commitments included in their action plan.

Working with the Human Rights Council

Every year, the Special Representative submits a report to the Human Rights Council to inform the body of the progress made as well as the remaining challenges to protect the rights of war-affected children. The report is presented during an interactive dialogue at the Human Rights Council, together with the Special Representative on Violence Against Children, which allows the Special Representative to highlight the many links between the work of the mandate and that of the Council, as well as to exchange views with Member States on key areas of concern.

The Office of the Special Representative also submits information relating to countries on the children and armed conflict agenda for the Universal Periodic Review process of the Human Rights Council. When children and armed conflict issues are included in country-specific recommendations, it reinforces common advocacy efforts to promote greater protection of children in situations of armed conflict. Further, the Office of the Special Representative has worked closely with Special Procedures and Commissions of Inquiry mandated by the Human Rights Council, with a view to ensuring that the rights of children affected by armed conflict are given due attention in their work.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is another important interlocutor. Close cooperation has been ongoing for many years so that the



View of the Human Rights Council in session, Geneva, Switzerland.

PHOTO: UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

protection of the rights of children in situations of armed conflict are given consideration and concerns are reflected in the Committee's concluding observations on states. The Special Representative and his/her office have also engaged closely with the Human Rights Committee, including in relation to the review of state reports submitted under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. 

2005

Security Council Resolution 1612

Endorses the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) proposed by the Secretary-General to collect timely and reliable information on violations committed against children affected by armed conflict. The Security Council creates a subsidiary body, the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to review information provided by the MRM on country situations and make recommendations to the Council on measures to promote the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

The era of application

Making a tangible difference to the fate of children exposed to danger on the ground



Olara Otunnu addresses the Security Council in February 2005.

PHOTO: UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

From the outset, Olara Otunnu pointed out the world had devised a “formidable body of international instruments and local norms.”

The biggest challenge we collectively faced, he declared, was to translate “these standards and commitments into action that can make a tangible difference to the fate of children exposed to danger on the ground.”

The adoption of Resolution 1612, in July 2005, was the culmination of years of efforts to accomplish exactly that.

Security Council Resolution 1612

By endorsing the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism proposed by the UN Secretary-

General, Resolution 1612 sought to create an organized, functioning system at country-level to collect and verify information on grave violations committed against children.

“We have now entered the era of application,” Otunnu said in a press statement published on the day of the UN Security Council vote. “For the first time, the UN is establishing a formal, structured and detailed compliance regime of this kind. This brings together all the key elements we have been developing, in the last few years, to ensure accountability and compliance on the ground. This is a turning point of great consequence.”



INTERVIEW

Protecting children in DR Congo

Dee Brillenburg Wurth is the head of child protection at MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Can you describe your work?

I'm in charge of a team of about 30 child protection officers who monitor and report on child rights violations on a daily basis. The information they gather is analyzed and integrated into the statistics of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM).

Statistics are essential, but it's important to never forget that every single child we report on has his or her own story on his or her life before the violation happened, during the violation, and surviving after the violation. This information helps us understand the dynamics and patterns of violations, the perpetrators, their methodology. This helps us develop prevention activities. For example, the recruitment of children by armed groups remains a huge phenomenon. Analysis helps us understand how the different armed groups are operating so we can do targeted prevention activities, and engage with the leaders based on a sound knowledge of their modus operandi.

There are many armed groups in Congo, around 40 to 45. When I engage with armed group commanders, I use the information we gather through the MRM as part of the advocacy. I have

Dee Brillenburg Wurth talks about the protection of children to members of an armed group in eastern DR Congo.

PHOTO: MONUSCO

in some cases brought fact sheets showing several years of information about violations committed against children by the group under his command. I do this so that we can skip the "we don't recruit children" discussion and go straight to: how can we help you get the children off your hands and reintegrated. The commanders are impressed and immediately take you seriously.

There has been substantial progress to address the recruitment of children by Government forces in DRC.

Indeed, when we started working on the implementation of the Action Plan, some people told me the FARDC would never stop recruiting children.

I thought it was possible. Now we all know it's possible.

“

“Statistics are essential, but it's important to never forget that every single child we report on has his or her own story.”

—Dee Brillenburg Wurth

The Government owns this Action Plan. They are extremely committed to its full implementation. There is a strong collaboration between them and the United Nations. Congo is a big country and there are ongoing recruitment campaigns for the FARDC. What is extraordinary is when there are doubts about the age of recruits, when they find children trying to enroll, the army calls us for support.

“We have changed how we look at children. We don’t recruit children anymore, it’s in our blood. The change is irreversible,” an army general told me recently. That gave me goosebumps.

Do you feel you now have a strong ally to reach our wider objective: ending the recruitment and use of children and all grave violations by all parties to conflict in DRC?

This is obviously a priority, and we still have a lot of work ahead of us. We are putting a lot of effort into prevention.

Everybody knows killing someone is a crime, but a big challenge we face is that most people still do not know that recruiting children is a crime.

With the Government, we agreed that we needed to spread the word. And so we reached out to famous people and role models to record songs, messages and raise awareness throughout the country on this issue. In the past few years, the campaign to stop child recruitment has been supported by pop star Werrason, the national football team—the Leopards—who won the African Cup and famous basketball players, such as Bismack Biyombo, who plays for the NBA. The national television network also launched a weekly television program on children and armed conflict.

In addition, the Government is allowing us to engage with armed groups on the protection of children. There are also sustained efforts by the Government to hold perpetrators of grave violations against children accountable. We see more arrest warrants issued, and the first trial for the recruitment of children under national law will start very soon.

So when people ask me now if I believe that ending the recruitment and use of children in Congo is possible. I tell them: Yes, it is possible.

Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

Resolution 1612 also created a dedicated entity to give continuous attention to the issue within the Security Council: the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Through establishing this subsidiary body, the Council reaffirmed its commitment to provide strong tools to support the mandate and to ensure continued contact with the Special Representative.

The Working Group receives quarterly global updates and regular comprehensive reports on country-specific situations.

After country reports are submitted by the Secretary-General, the Working Group makes recommendations to parties to conflict, Governments and donors, as well as United Nations actors, on measures to end violations and promote the protection of war-affected children. To date, the Working Group has reviewed and issued recommendations on over 50 country-specific reports, which have generated tangible advances in often challenging situations for the protection of children.

The Working Group has also been proactive in its work on children and armed conflict, including through visiting countries on the agenda, organizing informal briefings from experts on issues related to child protection, and holding video-teleconferences with United Nations child protection staff in the field. The positive impact of the efforts of the Working Group has been demonstrated over the years, notably by including the protection of children affected by war in all relevant aspects of the work and resolutions of the Security Council.

There have been five Presidents of the Working Group: France, Mexico, Germany, Luxembourg and Malaysia. The mandate was strengthened under each presidency, new triggers for listing were added, support was given for the campaign “Children, Not Soldiers,” and stronger language evolved to address grave violations, the respect of international law and issues such as reintegration, impunity and the possibility of sanctions against perpetrators.



INTERVIEW

Jean-Marc de La Sablière

Former Permanent Representative of France to the UN, and first Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

"I am glad that [resolution] 1612 could provide the framework for the work being done today. When we negotiated 1612, there was a sense that achievements had to be consolidated. I was also looking for the most efficient architecture, and I am happy to have had the idea of the Working Group [of the Security Council on children and armed conflict].

"To me, there were two issues of great importance. First, the Security Council had to be regularly engaged on the issue of children and armed conflict. And second, I thought it was necessary to ensure a close link between the Special Representative and the Council to provide constant support and guidance.

"In my opinion, it was very important to begin by addressing the problem of child soldiers. By showing tangible results, we thought the issues surrounding the protection of children would become less politicized, and concerns would be addressed with impartiality.

Jean-Marc de La Sablière speaks to journalists following a meeting of the UN Security Council in May 2007.

PHOTO: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

"I think the campaign [‘Children, not Soldiers’] is allowing us to do just that and, I hope, to end the problem of recruitment by Governments. At the same time, the Campaign opens doors for something I had not been able to firmly establish from the beginning, and that is the dialogue with non-State actors. I am glad France contributed to this through the March 2015 Security Council open debate.

"The children and armed conflict mandate has been used as a model and has influenced the development of other mandates related to the protection of civilians. This mandate must be considered a success story for the United Nations."

“

In my opinion, it was very important to begin by addressing the problem of child soldiers.

—Jean-Marc de La Sablière

Sanctions

The readiness of the Security Council to impose sanctions against perpetrators of grave violations developed over time. In resolution 1539 (2004), the Council first expressed its intention to consider imposing targeted and graduated measures against parties to conflict who violate the rights of children. This commitment was reaffirmed in resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1882 (2009). In that same period, in 2006, the recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence and forced displacements of children were added as specific designation criteria for sanctions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Over the past few years, grave violations against children have been included as designation criteria in almost all relevant Sanctions Committees pertaining to situations where children are affected by armed conflict. Sanctions against individuals can include arms embargoes, asset freezes, travel bans, and financial or diplomatic restrictions. These Committees have thus become an important forum to pursue accountability against perpetrators of grave violations and the Special Representative is regularly invited to brief members of relevant Committees on the situation of children affected by armed conflict.

Working together with Member States

Shortly after the creation of the mandate, an informal group of Member States called "Friends of the Special Representative" was created in New York to provide support to the mandate. This group is now called the Group of Friends on children and armed conflict and continues to play an important role. In the past few years, additional Groups of Friends have been established in Geneva, Afghanistan, the Philippines, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan. In the field, the groups help Member States coordinate their



"Collaboration with civil society is another vital part of the implementation of the mandate."

activities and keep abreast of developments, challenges and requirements for the implementation of Action Plans.

Working together within the United Nations and with civil society

UNICEF, DPKO, DPA, OHCHR, UNHCR and the entire UN system are essential for the implementation of the mandate in countries affected by conflict and at UN headquarters. In countries where parties to conflict are listed, the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting, co-chaired by UNICEF and the highest UN representative, are mandated to collect information on the impact of conflict on children, respond to grave violations and engage in advocacy. For example, they assist in the release of children, provide reintegration services, and help vacate schools used militarily, often at a moment's notice.

Collaboration with civil society is another vital part of the implementation of the mandate. Local and international non-Governmental organizations provide information on grave violations, undertake research and advocacy, and deliver services to children, including through vocational training and reintegration programmes. 

Radhika Coomaraswamy is passed the torch

A second Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is appointed



In April 2006, Radhika Coomaraswamy, a lawyer and internationally known human rights advocate, became the second Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Under her tenure, the mandate continued to thrive and touch the lives of even more children around the world.

The implementation of Resolution 1612 began in earnest with the establishment of Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism. A first wave of Action Plans were signed and implemented in Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda, Sri Lanka and Nepal. In total, 18 Action Plans were signed

During a mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Radhika Coomaraswamy walks under a banner that is part of a local campaign to end the recruitment and use of children.

PHOTO: UN Photo/Marie Frechon

under Coomaraswamy's tenure and 8 parties delisted, representing a mix of national security forces and non-State armed groups.

The efficacy of the Action Plan, envisioned by the UN Security Council as a constructive, pragmatic tool to bring parties to conflict into compliance with international standards, and to bring positive change in the lives of child soldiers, was demonstrated conclusively during Coomaraswamy's tenure.

Expansion of the triggers for listing

Radhika Coomaraswamy also presided over a major expansion of the triggers for listing, which are grave violations committed against children by parties to conflict that warrant a listing in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

In 2009, two additional violations — killing and maiming, rape and sexual violence against children — became triggers for listing with the adoption of resolution 1882.

“This is a major step forward in the fight against impunity for crimes against children and a recognition of the reality of conflict today, where girls and boys are increasingly targeted and victimized, killed and raped, as well as recruited into armed groups,” Coomaraswamy declared in a press statement issued when resolution 1882 was adopted.

Two years later, attacks against schools and hospitals and attacks and/or threats of attacks against protected personnel also became a trigger for listing. The importance of expanding the Council’s tools to address this violation was summarized by Coomaraswamy’s remarks when the resolution was adopted:

“Half of all the children who do not go to primary school in the world live in conflict areas. They do not go to school because their schools have become part of the tragedy of conflict. Schools are increasingly under physical attack resulting in either full or partial destruction, oftentimes in violation of international



A child soldier stands next to a house in South Sudan, in June 2014

PHOTO: OSRSG-CAAC/Stephanie Tremblay

Having a direct effect on the ground

Radhika Coomaraswamy to the UN Security Council, 17 July 2008

“In Chad and Central African Republic in particular, I have seen how the Council’s work under Security Council Resolution 1612 is having a direct effect on the ground, how the imprimatur of the Council results in the response of non-State actors to enter into agreements and release children, how governments sit up and listen and how child protection activists both within and outside the UN system are strengthened and empowered by your commitment. All this is a tribute to your willingness to embark on this unprecedented initiative that is 1612 and I wish I could bring you the children who have been released from the clutches of armed groups because of your actions so that you may see the fruit of your work.”

2006 —

The second Special Representative is appointed

Radhika Coomaraswamy is appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict



Former child soldier Grace Akallo addresses the Security Council during an open debate on children and armed conflict.

PHOTO: UN Photo/Mark Garten

TESTIMONY

Grace Akallo, former child soldier from Uganda

“Sexual violence is a terrible crime and perpetrators must be punished.

“It has to stop. I am saying this out of experience. [...] I was lucky enough to be able to escape, [...] but so many girls are still waiting for their chance to be rescued.”

In 2009, Grace Akallo spoke to Members of the UN Security Council, where she appealed for the protection of boy and girl victims of rape and sexual violence.

In 1996, at age 15, Grace was abducted from her boarding school in Uganda by Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army. She was tortured, raped, and forced to kill. But Grace did not give up. After seven months, she managed to escape. Her hope for a better life gave her the strength to go back to school. Today she lives in the United States, and is the founder of an NGO working to protect the rights of vulnerable women and children.

humanitarian law. Schools are also closed as a result of threats and intimidation. Teachers and students are also killed and maimed in targeted attacks. Military use of schools is also a concern; as such use can put children in clear danger. To deprive children of an education is to destroy their future. A future destroyed, a future without hope will only sow the seeds of further conflict.

“Hospitals are also vital for children, especially in war. There are two-fold atrocities. Not only do such attacks kill and wound girls and boys, but they also leave them without access to treatment. Attacks on hospitals and hospital personnel deprive the community of a much needed lifeline. In fact, protecting hospitals and their personnel was the founding element of modern humanitarian law.”

During her tenure, Radhika Coomaraswamy sought to improve the guidance provided to child protection practitioners through the publication of three working papers on issues related to the implementation of the mandate:



The Six Grave Violations Against Children During Armed Conflict: the Legal Foundations



The Rights and Guarantees of Internally Displaced Children in Armed Conflict



Children and Justice During and in the Aftermath of Armed Conflict

2007 —

Paris Principles

In 2007, the Paris Principles and Paris Commitments are adopted with the aim to guide interventions to prevent unlawful recruitment or use of children, facilitate the release and reintegration of children associated with armed groups or armed forces, and to ensure the most protective environment for all children.

INTERVIEW

Radhika Coomaraswamy

What defined your years as Special Representative?

When I arrived, my first task was to operationalize [UN Security Council resolution] 1612. It was delicate, especially because the establishment of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism provided more information on violations committed not only by non-State actors, but also by States.

To move forward with the support of the international community, we developed a network of Member States fighting for children. We also ensured there would be constant interactions between our office and technical experts of the Security Council as the Working Group on children and armed conflict was beginning its work.

Then of course, there were the Action Plans. I spent a lot of time negotiating them with States and non-State actors.

How did you approach parties to conflict, and especially Member States to negotiate Action Plans?

From early on, the Action Plan as a tool was quite successful. Our goal was to engage as many parties to conflict as possible, to sign as many Action Plans as possible and to get all Member States off the list.

When I approached parties to conflict, I started from the premise that the recruitment of children is something they really do not want to see happening, a problem that can be solved.

I truly realized the power of the listing when I met the commander of an armed group deep in the Central African Republic's countryside. I think he arrived on a donkey. He and his colleagues were armed and some had guns pointed at us. One of my staff said: do you think it's a wise idea to tell him he's on a Security

Council list? We gently mentioned it and he asked, "What is this?" I explained: "This is not forever, if you work with us you can get off the list through an Action Plan and it's good for your community."

That was the beginning of a process and, in the end, I think he released 600 children.

Looking back, what do you think of the evolution of the mandate and of its impact to protect children?

We've come a long way. When you look back to the 1990s no one thought twice about recruiting child soldiers. Now, everywhere in the world, there is real awareness that using child soldiers is wrong and that there should be accountability. I think that is the great success story of the mandate.

When Member States decided to strengthen the mandate by adding triggers for listing, their main motivating factors were reinforcing international norms, deterrence and accountability. This has also led to important progress to sensitize parties to conflict to these other issues affecting children in conflict.

One of the greatest moments of my years as SRSR happened when Grace Akallo addressed the Security Council on sexual violence. Her speech was very powerful. Applause is usually forbidden in the Council, but when she finished speaking, the Secretary-General led an ovation that went on for several minutes. It was an emotional moment that helped pave the way for the addition of sexual violence as a trigger for listing.

And now thinking about the future of the mandate, I'd like to focus on one issue that is particularly dear to me: the reintegration of children. I think we need to keep strengthening the reintegration programs available. We also need to keep working to ensure they are well adapted to the communities, the context and the children they are destined to. Good reintegration programs are essential to help societies overcome conflict.

2009 —○

Security Council Resolution 1882

Killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children become **triggers to list parties to armed conflict** in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict

2011 —○

Security Council Resolution 1998

Attacks on schools and hospitals and attacks and threats of attacks against protected personnel become **triggers to list parties to armed conflict** in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

Leila Zerrougui takes the helm

A third Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is appointed



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with Leila Zerrougui at the Security Council open debate on children and armed conflict in August 2016.

PHOTO: UN Photo/Manuel Elias

The incumbent, Leila Zerrougui, a legal expert in human rights and the administration of justice, was appointed in September 2012 and is the third Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Immediately before this assignment, she was the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Deputy Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) where, between 2008 and 2012, she spearheaded the Mission's efforts in strengthening the rule of law and protection of civilians.

"I believe that the protection of all children from grave violations is within our reach," Leila Zerrougui told the UN Security Council in September 2012.

Throughout her tenure, the Special Representative has sought to effectively utilize the tools developed

since the creation of the mandate and foster relationships to increase national and regional ownership of the protection of children. In order for collective efforts to be as successful as possible, she has prioritized opening up the space for collaborative engagement with Governments in countries affected by armed conflict as well as engaging with a broad range of non-State armed groups. Peace processes have been key fora for this type of engagement. Other priorities have included developing stronger relationships with regional organizations and Member States to support engagement with parties to conflict, while at the same time continuing to work closely with United Nations and civil society partners on these issues.



"Children, Not Soldiers" campaign launched in 2014 in conjunction with UNICEF.

PHOTO: UN DPI/Graphic Design Unit

We are "Children, Not Soldiers"

A decade of work following the first listings of parties to conflict for recruitment and use of child soldiers was starting to yield results.

In 2014, the Special Representative launched the campaign "Children, Not Soldiers" with UNICEF to bring about a global consensus that child soldiers should not be used in conflict. The campaign was designed to generate momentum, political will and international support to turn the page once and for all on the recruitment of children by national security forces in conflict situations.

The campaign received immediate support from Member States, UN, NGO partners, regional organizations and the general public. The UN Security Council and General Assembly welcomed "Children, Not Soldiers" and requested regular updates through the Special Representative's reporting.

At the time of the launch, the countries concerned by the campaign were: Afghanistan, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen.

Representatives from each of these countries attended the launch event and expressed their full support to reach the objectives of "Children, Not Soldiers".

Two years on, the consensus envisioned is now a reality and thousands of child soldiers have been released and reintegrated with the assistance of UNICEF, peacekeeping and political missions, and other UN and NGO partners on the ground. All Governments concerned by the Campaign are engaged in an Action Plan process with the United Nations. Chad put in place all necessary measures to end and prevent the recruitment of children in its armed forces and is no longer listed. While crises have hampered progress in Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, there have been significant improvements and a reduction in verified cases of recruitment and use of children by national security forces, especially in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar and Sudan.

National campaigns to promote the objectives of "Children, Not Soldiers" have been launched in most countries concerned and beyond.

Abduction: Fifth trigger for listing

Worldwide outrage over the mass abductions of hundreds of children by Boko Haram in Nigeria and other parties to conflict in the Middle East and Africa provided the momentum for another expansion of the "triggers for listing." With the adoption of resolution 2225 in June 2015, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to include in the annexes to his annual report on children and armed conflict those parties that engage in patterns of abduction of children in situations of armed conflict.



TESTIMONY

“I want to be an example. It’s my turn to help others.”

By Mariana Palavra, UNICEF Myanmar

Win Thu Aung was recruited by the Myanmar Armed Forces when he was 15 years-old.

He spent four years in the Tatmadaw, before being released under the Joint Action Plan signed by the UN and the Government of Myanmar to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children.

Win Thu does not come from a wealthy family. He recounts selling tires in a motorcycle shop at age 10.

“My father was a rickshaw driver and my mother sold fruit. All of us were working. Lots of memories of hard work,” he said. By age 15, he had followed in his father’s footsteps and was a rickshaw driver, although not a very successful one. Customers were few and far between, money was scarce, so his mother told him to join the army.

Win Thu Aung did not question that decision. He imagined life in the armed forces would be synonymous with hard work. He already worked hard, so he thought it would not make a difference. But it made a big difference.

“I missed my family,” he said. “Especially my sister.”

As Win Thu began to long for his old life, he became aware of a national campaign to end and prevent child recruitment. Through TV and newspapers he

Win Thu Aung.

PHOTO: UNICEF Myanmar

also learned that a hotline had been set up to report cases of child soldiers in Myanmar. His release could be as close as a phone call away.

“Although I understood I was entitled to be released, I needed someone to report my case.” He waited, but nobody did it for him. “So, I did it myself: I called the hotline to report my case.”

The good news officially arrived by the end of 2014.

“Today, am I happy? Yes! I really want to start my life over again!” he exclaimed on the eve of his release. “I want to return to school. Then, I want to learn some skills, I want to learn how to drive.”

“The first thing I will do tomorrow is to hang out with my friends, go to People’s Square. But before I do that, I want to hug my mother and sister.”

Since the signature of the Joint Action Plan in 2012, 800 children and young people have been released by the army. Through the support of UNICEF and other partners, these boys benefit from social-economic reintegration programs to help them re-start their lives with their families, with an emphasis on access to education, vocational training, and income generating activities. Win Thu Aung has received rental subsidy, driving training, and a new sewing machine to support the family business. He has occasionally worked as a rickshaw driver, security personnel, car parking staff and electrician assistant. Soon, he will pass his heavy vehicle driving license and he will become a professional driver.

Working together with regional organizations

At the heart of the achievements of the children and armed conflict mandate are the coordinated efforts that have allowed for the work of individual actors to be multiplied. Working with regional organizations has been a key element of expanding the reach and effectiveness of the tools that were already in place.

A partnership with the African Union came to fruition in 2013, with the signing of a cooperation agreement between the Special Representative and the Peace and Security Council.

“As the African Union is taking a larger role in the continent’s mediation and peacekeeping operations, it had become essential to make our partnership stronger,” said Leila Zerrougui, in a statement announcing the agreement. “A significant number of children affected by armed conflict live on the African continent. With this agreement, my Office will work even more closely with the African Union and UNICEF to respond to their plight.”

Since then, the African Union has been fully engaged in mainstreaming the issue of children and armed conflict in its work and policies. The organization also holds annual sessions dedicated to children affected by war.

Another region where a partnership was sought to reduce the impact of conflict on children is the Middle East and North Africa. In 2014, the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Office of the Special Representative signed a cooperation agreement to develop and implement a child protection policy.

Collaboration with the European Union (EU) was also strengthened. The EU has a long-standing relationship with the Office of the Special Representative, which has contributed to the elaboration and implementation of a strong EU policy on the protection of children affected by war. As a key interlocutor who engages in human rights dialogue and capacity-building with the majority of countries on the children and armed conflict agenda, the organization’s support contributes to the implementation of the mandate.

Building on existing work with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was another priority because of the alliance’s leverage to improve the protection of children in areas where they have operations, notably in Afghanistan. In the past few years, in consultation with the Special Representative’s Office, NATO has developed and adopted a child protection policy and guidelines for its forces on the ground, dedicated resources to mainstream the agenda in its work generally and is embarking on a training for troops on children and armed conflict. 

2012 

Security Council Resolution 2068

Reiterates the Council’s readiness to adopt targeted and graduated measures (sanctions) against persistent perpetrators of grave violations against children.

2014 

Security Council Resolution 2143

Encourages Member States to consider concrete measures to deter the military use of schools and welcomes the campaign “**Children, Not Soldiers.**”

Publication of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism Field Manual, a comprehensive resource for practitioners, available on a dedicated website: www.mrrmtools.org

2015 

Security Council resolution 2225

Establishes the “abduction of children” as a trigger to list parties to armed conflict in the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.



INTERVIEW

Cindy Issac, Team Leader, Child Protection Section, Human Rights Unit, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

How is it to work on child protection in Afghanistan?

The context in Afghanistan is very difficult and insecurity is worsening, but working with Afghans is an absolute pleasure because there is a genuine interest to help children. I work for the UNAMA Human Rights Unit as the team leader for Child Protection. Our work is focused upon the coordination of efforts to support the Government of Afghanistan to implement the Action Plan [to end the recruitment and use of children in national security forces]. We have seen considerable progress, particularly in the past year, based upon the shared vision that the protection of children must remain a key priority of the Government and international community.

Part of the progress you mentioned involves the creation of Child Protection Units in national police recruitment centres. What are they?

Cindy Issac is the leader of UNAMA's child protection section in Afghanistan.

PHOTO: UNAMA

They are units dedicated to assessing the age of candidates to protect children from underage recruitment. In the space of a few months, we went from 4 child protection units to 17. The aim is to open 3 more before the end of 2016, and eventually throughout the country. The Ministry of Interior is leading this process effectively and we are seeing extremely positive results.

I've visited many of the child protection units and am impressed by the professionalism and commitment of the staff. For example, in the Western region, I observed one of the heads assessing the age of the recruits and it was amazing to see the pride in her work and how she was doing it.

The killing and maiming of children remains a very big concern in Afghanistan. What is the UN doing to advocate for the reduction of child casualties?

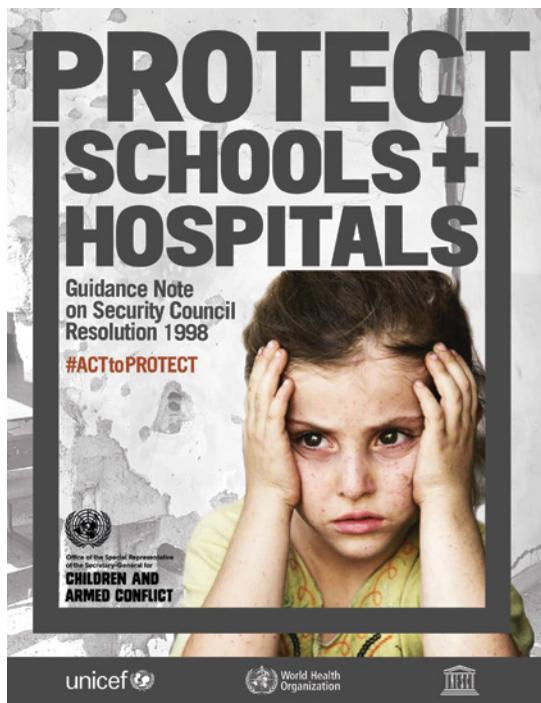
It's an issue of extreme concern: the numbers of children killed and injured are increasing and now make up about one-third of all civilian casualties. Ground engagements remain the leading cause of child casualties, followed by explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. The protection of civilians in armed conflicts is a core element of the UNAMA mandate and much work is being carried out. For example, UNAMA's Human Rights Unit is working closely with the relevant security bodies regarding the development of strategies to mitigate civilian casualties with the Government and other parties to the conflict.

You have been in Afghanistan for several years now, would you say the overall situation is improving for children?

I'm a positive person by nature. There is far more active engagement on the issue of children than there used to be. There is a sincere desire from the Government to protect children, to put in place the mechanisms to prevent recruitment and use, and I think we are making real headway. I mentioned the Child Protection Units, but there's much more. Recently, the Government signed onto the Safe Schools Declaration, designed to protect schools from being used in any way by military forces, and that is encouraging.

Promoting the protection of children's rights during and after conflict

Protecting education and healthcare is of vital importance during armed conflict



Joint guidance note published in 2014 by the Special Representative with UNICEF, UNESCO, and WHO entitled 'Protect Schools and Hospitals'.

PHOTO: UN DPI/GDU

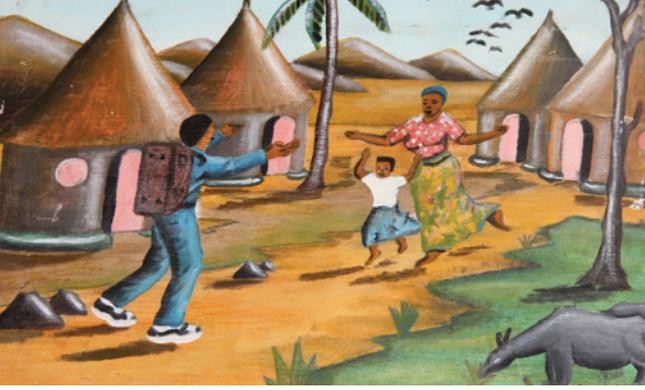
These facilities save and sustain lives and also enable children to enjoy economic, cultural and social rights once peace is achieved.

To address the vulnerability of schools and hospitals in situations of armed conflict, and to implement the tools provided by Security Council resolutions 1998 and 2143, the Special Representative published a joint guidance note in 2014 with UNICEF, UNESCO, and WHO entitled "Protect Schools and Hospitals". With this guidance

note, child protection actors in the field are better equipped to monitor, report, engage in advocacy, and work with parties to conflict to end and prevent attacks on schools and hospitals. The document is available in English, French and Arabic.

The guidance note also addresses the issue of the military use of schools and the Special Representative has undertaken significant advocacy efforts on preserving the civilian status of these institutions, including in light of the adoption of the Safe Schools Declaration in May 2015. As of November 2016, the declaration has been endorsed by 56 States, including 9 countries on the children and armed conflict agenda (Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Nigeria, State of Palestine, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan).

Ensuring access to education and healthcare, in contexts of armed conflict and in situations where children are displaced, has also been a priority for the children and armed conflict mandate. Funding for education and healthcare in emergencies is vital to maintain even a minimal level of services for conflict-affected children and has been a key focus in recent advocacy initiatives around thematic events such as the World Humanitarian Summit and the High-Level Plenary Meeting to Address Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants.



A painting in a reintegration centre in Goma, DRC, shows a former child soldier going back home.

PHOTO: OSRSG-CAAC/Stephanie Tremblay

Reintegration

Providing meaningful and sustainable reintegration services to children formerly associated with armed forces and groups remains one of the most pressing challenges we face. The physical end of conflict does not necessarily give closure to children for whom experiencing violence has been the norm. Children who have been recruited and used carry the scars of conflict and effective reintegration is vital so that they can live full lives and contribute to a peaceful society.

Former child soldiers experience trauma and stigma that can make it difficult to go back to their communities to begin or resume their education. As a result, many have a hard time finding their place in society once their ordeal is over. Girls face even more difficulties to be accepted back into their families and communities as they are often stigmatized or may be bringing a child home with them.

Without adequate reintegration and assistance to help children find ways to become productive members of their communities, these boys and girls may grow up to contribute to the stalling or, worse, the reversal of peace and development efforts.

Community-based reintegration services that provide psychosocial assistance to children have been designed to help them reclaim their lives through educational and vocational opportunities, taking into account the particular needs of girls.

Throughout her tenure, the Special Representative has strongly advocated with Member States in

order to ensure that resources for separation and reintegration are sufficient and that there is a focus on sustainability, including by ensuring that children are reintegrated into safe and secure environments to prevent re-recruitment back into armed groups or forces.

The promise of the Sustainable Development Goals for children affected by war

The new development agenda — which was adopted by the General Assembly and aims to leave no one behind and to endeavor to reach the furthest behind — is an opportunity to improve the protection of the rights of children affected by conflict.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize that children, who represent the majority of the population in most countries affected by conflict, are key to building peaceful and strong societies. Their rights and needs are well integrated in the development agenda. This includes ensuring quality education and health services, ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and stopping all forms of violence against children. Human rights, peace, justice and strong institutions are also at the heart of the SDGs.

Since their adoption in 2015, the Special Representative has engaged in advocacy to ensure the needs of children affected by conflict are given particular attention in the implementation of the SDGs. Additionally, the tools developed through the children and armed conflict mandate have provided a strong framework to address grave violations against children, and have the potential to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. Action Plans mandated by the Security Council include tangible activities to end and prevent violations against children, strengthen the legal framework for child protection and foster accountability. Progress in these areas contributes to the implementation of the new development agenda.



TESTIMONY

Somalia: The story of Bashir*, 16

Formerly a fighter for Al Shabaab

Bashir is slight in frame and stands at about 5'5"/165cm. He has a sweet smile, and inquisitive eyes—making eye contact when spoken to, but otherwise staring off into the distance or at his hands, all the while fiddling with whatever is in reach. He is quick to grin, and answers questions matter-of-factly.

At 14, Bashir left his small hometown and joined Al Shabaab, encouraged by some of his peers.

"Friends from school said it was the best, and so I joined them," he says. "I thought it was going to be good, but it ended up being bad; there were lots of guns and fights."

Bashir is reluctant to say what exactly he did for Al Shabaab, stating only that he was a foot soldier, and that there were many others like him.

"I saw many kids younger and older than me," he says. Children were used for different jobs including the retrieval of weapons from fighters who were killed, as well as soldiers, errand boys, and human shields. Bashir sustained shrapnel wounds in his legs and one of his eyes from a fight.

"The first time I fought I was scared and terrified of being shot," he says. The second time he was in a battle in 2012 he was captured.

A former child soldiers stands by the door at a reintegration center supported by UNICEF in Somalia.

PHOTO: UNICEF Somalia/2015/Sebastian Rich

As the battle raged, and only a handful of fighters escaped, Bashir watched as others were killed.

"Five of my friends died, and three died in front of me," he says, his voice is low and he is shifting in his seat uncomfortably. "I was really scared and really shocked, and I still have nightmares as if it is happening right in front of me."

Bashir was taken to a military barracks. UNICEF then sent him to an Interim Care Center run by the Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre as part of the UNICEF rehabilitation program for Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups where he took part in his first counseling session.

"After joining Elman, the counsellor made me talk, and talk, non-stop," he says as a big smile spreads across his face. "He was fun and nice though."

After seven months of counseling, and surgery to extract the shrapnel, Bashir moved in with his aunt, and began education and vocational training in day courses with Elman.

Bashir is now studying electrical repairs, because he says he wants to work for the community. His dream is to own an electrical shop in Mogadishu.

* Bashir's name has been changed to protect his identity

Children and armed conflict: Looking forward

Priorities for the third decade of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate



A young Syrian girl raises a card during an English language class in Faida 3 camp, an informal tented settlement for Syria refugees in Lebanon.

PHOTO: UNICEF/Romenzi

As we enter the third decade of this mandate, in a context of ever more complex and intense wars, our engagement to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict needs to be oriented to address a number of key challenges and priorities.

Strengthening respect for international law

The international community has long agreed that wars have rules that bind all parties to conflict and serve to protect civilians, including children. We also agree that ending violations against children is central to achieving peace and security, and essential to building the sustainable future envisioned by the global development agenda.

However, we are faced with the stark reality of protracted and proliferating conflicts, where the

fundamental principles of international humanitarian law are commonly flouted, and violations and abuses against children are widespread.

Collectively, the international community must strengthen its resolve and action to ensure respect for international humanitarian and human rights law in situations of armed conflict, in order to prevent grave violations against children and reduce the impact of conflict on girls and boys.

Lack of respect for the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution is evidenced by the rise in cases of killing and maiming of children, and attacks on schools and hospitals in numerous situations of conflict — with long-term impacts

on children and communities, such as permanent disabilities and prolonged disruption of education and health services. It is imperative to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law obligations through concrete measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, and promoting accountability for violations.

The denial of humanitarian assistance to civilians trapped or displaced by conflict has always been a reality of conflict, but it is increasingly being used as a tactic of war. Examples abound of children trapped in besieged areas, or deprived of access to food, water and medical assistance, including vaccines. This is the only grave violation against children that is not a trigger for listing. The international community is encouraged to examine options to facilitate access to civilians, including children, in need and to ensure respect for international humanitarian law.

In relation to the recruitment and use of children, the strong progress achieved to date can be further strengthened through continued efforts to achieve the universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, accompanied by the criminalization of child recruitment and use in conflict in national legislation and preventive measures.

An essential component of the response to child recruitment is also ensuring that these boys and girls are treated primarily as victims. In recent years, some of the gains made to ensure the appropriate treatment of recruited or allegedly associated children have been eroded, especially under the guise of national security or counter terrorism responses. Increasingly large numbers of children are systematically arrested and detained for their alleged association with parties to conflict.

In response, advocacy efforts must be redoubled to guarantee that every child who has been allegedly recruited and used in conflicts is treated as a victim and not a security threat. This principle cannot be



“It is imperative to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law obligations”

discarded or side-lined by Governments as the effective reintegration of children is essential both for the child’s wellbeing and to ensure long-term peace and security.

It is encouraging to see the international mobilization to end rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflict, and its devastating impact on children, in particular girls. Member States agree that collective action is necessary for sexual violence against children to be stopped and accountability for these crimes is improving in numerous country situations. Continued efforts are required to raise awareness, address stigma and ensure appropriate services for victims. The office continues to work closely with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to coordinate advocacy and response to address this violation.

Abductions of children have become an increasingly prevalent feature of conflict, and are commonly a precursor to other violations, such as recruitment and use, or sexual violence. A pattern of abduction of children is now a trigger for listing parties to conflict in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, with five parties currently listed. The office of the Special Representative is working on a guidance note to make full use of the tools available to end and prevent this violation. Further regional cooperation is also needed to coordinate responses to cross-border abductions and ensure the reintegration of former abductees.

The monitoring and reporting on the six grave violations remain as important today to measure the impact of conflict on children, to guide our response and inform prevention strategies.

Accountability a key to prevention

Accountability is key in the response to violations against children, and also a critical aspect of prevention. And yet, much more remains to be done to ensure perpetrators of grave child rights violations are brought to justice. Investigations into incidents should be conducted promptly and effectively, with those responsible held to account.

Justice and accountability are essential to protect children's rights during armed conflict, to ensure that violations are not repeated, to repair the damage to victims and, ultimately, to end the cycle of conflict. Strengthened legal frameworks — including judicial and legislative reform where necessary — are required to enable and support efforts to pursue accountability.

Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals calls for promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Justice and accountability come in many forms, including individual prosecutions, reparations, truth-seeking, and institutional reform. All these measures can ensure justice, provide victims with remedies, promote healing and reconciliation, inspire confidence in the institutions of the State and promote the rule of law.

Engagement with non-State armed groups

A key challenge and priority is engagement with non-State actors to end and prevent grave violations against children. Non-State armed groups have systematically constituted the vast majority of parties listed for grave violations against children in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. Of 59 parties to conflict listed in the 2016 annual report of the Secretary-General, 51 are non-State armed groups.

There are new possibilities of engagement to respond to and prevent violations committed by non-State armed groups but dialogue with this diverse group of actors presents unique challenges. Their nature, operational environments, aspirations and objectives need to be taken into consideration. The cooperation of Governments is also critical. As part of her advocacy, the Special Representative has urged all Governments concerned to facilitate dialogue between the United Nations and non-State armed groups, as a way to achieve the common goal of protecting children.

It is worth noting that 33 out of 51 non-State armed groups currently listed in the annexes to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict for the recruitment and use of children are active in the countries concerned by “Children, Not Soldiers”. The consensus generated by the campaign has led to the development of stronger child protection legal and policy frameworks in most of the countries concerned. Commanders of non-State armed groups are also beginning to realize the legal and political risks associated with the recruitment of boys and girls. Many have reached out to the United Nations since the beginning of the campaign to develop Action Plans.

Current UN engagement with non-State armed groups

- ⊙ Central African Republic
- ⊙ Colombia
- ⊙ Mali
- ⊙ Myanmar
- ⊙ Nigeria
- ⊙ the Philippines
- ⊙ South Sudan
- ⊙ Sudan

Peace processes as entry points to protect children

From early on, peace talks and ceasefire negotiations were identified as entry points to address children's needs and their protection. When parties to a conflict begin to negotiate peace, there are unique opportunities to address the needs of those who often form the majority of the population: children.

This mandate has demonstrated on several occasions that parties to conflict can agree on the protection of children, even when they disagree on almost everything else. Engagement on issues such as the separation, release and handover of children can provide an entry point and offer a unique common denominator for parties in otherwise difficult or protracted negotiations.

In Colombia for example, the involvement of the Special Representative contributed to a historic agreement between the FARC-EP and the Government to release all children recruited by the FARC.

"The agreement between the Government and the FARC-EP illustrates how the protection of children, the universal desire to build a better future for boys and girls, can truly serve as an entry point to negotiate peace. It is my hope that what has been accomplished will be emulated in future negotiations in Colombia and elsewhere," said Leila Zerrougui.

The Special Representative, and the entire UN system, use every opportunity for engagement with parties to conflict to obtain commitments and actions that make a difference in children's lives. Peace processes are critical opportunities and United Nations bodies, Member States and mediators are encouraged to support the inclusion of child protection priorities and perspectives in negotiations. 

Conclusion



Every day, the unspeakable horrors children have to endure remind us of the immense task still ahead of us. Action in each of the areas highlighted above has the potential to bring lasting change in the lives of boys and girls. More than ever, we need support for initiatives and programmes that have a direct impact in the lives of children. We also need to be prepared to address new challenges.

In August 2016, children play at dusk at the Protection of Civilians (POC) site near Bentiu, in South Sudan.

PHOTO: UNICEF/UNO28382/Rich

In the past two decades, the action generated by this mandate has represented a beacon of hope for millions of children. Our capacity to devise creative solutions and to keep improving how we work together will have a decisive impact for the future of boys and girls who cannot wait any longer for the protection we have promised. 

