



Somalia: New Report Details Troubling Violations Against Children

17 January 2017

New York – In a new report on the impact of armed conflict on children in Somalia, the UN Secretary-General describes how grave violations against boys and girls were committed with impunity over the course of several years. This was due in part to the breakdown in law and order and the absence of state authority in large parts of the country.

“The volatile security situation continues to present considerable challenges, and I am deeply troubled by the scale and nature of the violations endured by the Somali children. Despite this difficult context, there have been significant political developments in Somalia in the past few years and positive measures taken by the Federal Government for the protection of boys and girls.” declared Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

The report, covering the period from April 2010 to July 2016, is the fourth by the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia. The majority of violations presented in the report took place in 2012, when the Somali National Army (SNA) and AMISOM conducted major joint operations against Al-Shabaab. As the military campaign against Al-Shabaab intensified again in 2015, the number of violations also increased, spiking during the first six months of 2016.

Recruitment and use and deprivation of liberty of children

The recruitment and use of children in Somalia remained a great concern throughout the reporting period, with a recurrent pattern of child recruitment and use by the SNA and armed groups. Over 6,000 cases were verified by the UN, with 70% committed by Al-Shabaab. Large numbers of children were abducted by the group for recruitment into their ranks, and were trained and used in combat. Some were as young as nine years-old and reportedly taught to use weapons and sent to the frontlines.

The detention of children by security forces on national security charges was another grave concern. The UN verified the detention of at least 931 children between 2014 and July 2016. The lack of due process for children deprived of their liberty has been an acute concern. Detention was also used as a tactic to run intelligence operations and counterterrorism activities with children used as spies.

“The scale of children’s detention on national security charges, as well as their use for intelligence purposes while detained, is extremely troubling and creates additional dangers for the boys and girls of Somalia,” said Leila Zerrougui. “Children suspected of association with Al-Shabaab should be primarily considered as victims with their best interest and international protection standards used as guiding principles.”

For children brought before a court, there were concerns about the lack of application of juvenile justice standards and the adherence to international obligations. In Puntland, where



children are considered adults at 15, boys were sentenced to death for their alleged association with Al-Shabaab, in contradiction with provisions of the federal constitution.

Killing and maiming

The UN verified the killing and maiming of over 3,400 children, with a majority of child casualties resulting from crossfire. In the report, the Secretary-General expresses deep concern at the unacceptably high number of children killed and maimed, including in asymmetric attacks by Al-Shabaab, in joint Somali National Army/AMISOM operations and in airstrikes conducted by parties operating bilaterally in Somalia. He called on all parties to conflict to uphold their obligations under international law and urged AMISOM and the African Union to investigate all reports of grave violations against children by their troops and to ensure accountability for perpetrators.

Action Plans

Two Action Plans were signed in 2012 by the Government to end and prevent the recruitment and use as well as the killing and maiming of children by the SNA.

“Despite a difficult security situation, the Government has made efforts to protect children, notably by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2015 and in the implementation of the Action Plans,” said Leila Zerrougui. “I urge them to continue their efforts and take measures such as the criminalization of child recruitment and use, the issuance of command orders prohibiting and sanctioning the recruitment and the systematization of troop screenings. I also strongly encourage them to swiftly domesticate the country’s international obligations under the CRC and to resolve existing legal ambiguities on the definition of a child.”

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