

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

**MESSAGE TO INFORMAL MEETING ON 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 51/77 ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT  
New York, 8 February 2017**

*Delivered by Ms. Maria Luiza Viotti, Chef de Cabinet*

Today we celebrate an important anniversary. In 1996, Graça Machel produced a landmark report highlighting the devastating impact of conflict on children. The report catalyzed political will to develop a framework to protect children in armed conflict and prevent them from being used in hostilities and recruited by State forces and armed groups. It moved the General Assembly to create the mandate of the Special Representative to strengthen international cooperation on this critical issue and led to the adoption, in the year 2000, of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. To date, 166 States have ratified the Protocol, and I call today for its universal ratification.

The children and armed conflict mandate has helped make a tangible difference to the lives of boys and girls in many countries. Thanks to the efforts of Governments, the United Nations and civil society partners, more than 115,000 children have been released from the ranks of State forces and armed groups and given support to reintegrate into society. Dialogue on the protection of children has also been established with parties to conflict.

However, the persistence and multiplication of conflicts continues to place children at grave risk. The number of children killed and maimed in the context of armed conflict, subject to sexual violence and deprived of their liberty, remains unacceptable. Children and their families are being displaced and fleeing as refugees in unprecedented numbers. We have seen homes and schools directly targeted and food and water supplies deliberately cut off, depriving children of their basic needs and rights.

The only way we can truly protect children is by preventing conflict. And to do that, we must create the conditions for inclusive and sustainable development. To this end, Member States and the United Nations must strengthen our partnership and ensure concrete progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

But when prevention fails, we must ensure that the tools created by the international community over the past two decades are used effectively and strengthened. To promote informed and timely action, we need to continue to monitor and report on violations against children. The forthcoming Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty can also make an important contribution, and I urge States to support it.

We also need to urgently prioritize support to children who have been affected by armed conflict. Education, particularly in emergency settings, must be a key element of our response.

I welcome this timely opportunity to renew our focus on reducing the impact of armed conflict on children and to recommit to the international obligations for protecting the fundamental rights of

children. I call on everyone to consider how best to build on current achievements to end the devastating harm that conflict inflicts on children and their societies.

I wish you a productive meeting.