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In the past several years, we faced unprecedented challenges for the protection of children growing up in countries affected by conflict.

In the majority of countries on the children and armed conflict agenda, boys and girls were killed, maimed, abducted, sexually abused, recruited and used by armed forces or groups. Their schools and hospitals were under attack and they were too often denied access to vital humanitarian assistance. Millions of children fled conflict, sometimes alone, leaving the world to cope with the highest number of displaced people since World War II.
We faced enormous challenges to protect children, but together with our partners, and with the support of the international community, we managed to accomplish significant progress.

In 2015, with the addition of abductions as a trigger for listing, the Security Council gave us a precious tool to engage with parties to conflict to end and prevent this violation. We have made full use of this trigger during the period covered by this donor review.

The campaign “Children, Not Soldiers”, which ended in 2016, helped us achieve one of the founding objectives of this mandate: a global consensus among Member States that children do not belong in security forces in conflict, and should be protected from all other grave violations.

Also in 2016, the mandate’s 20th anniversary was an opportunity to look back at the accomplishments of the past two decades and to acknowledge how our tools can be used to stop the use and abuse of children, for, by and in armed conflict.

In 2017, under the management of the new Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Office started to develop prevention actions compatible with our protection and peace and security functions. Following the guiding policy of the Secretary-General, we have enhanced our engagement with Member States and with parties to conflict with a view to speeding an end to violations against children as well as preventing those violations from happening in the first place.

Ending unacceptable violations against children has united the international community since the creation of the United Nations. We need your support to reach more children who urgently need protection from the devastating impact of armed conflict. More importantly, we need to be there for children as early as possible to attempt to prevent violations in the first place.

The SRSG-CAAC office has limited resources, which have been allocated to our core mandate activities: monitoring and reporting violations. Our voluntary trust fund supports all other work, namely the possibility of sending technical assessment and technical assistance teams to support action plan generation and delivery, the implementation of public outreach programmes and campaigns to advance the prevention of child use and abuse in armed conflict, and the analysis and assessment of the trends in violations against children in armed conflict.

Extra-budgetary funds have made an enormous difference to the way we service our community. They will make even more of a difference now that we have to incorporate the prevention and enhanced engagement strategies of the Secretary-General in the day-to-day work of the OSRSG-CAAC.

In acknowledgement of our donor’s confidence in OSRSG-CAAC’s ability to carry out its mandate, we will publish a bi-annual report on the work undertaken by our office with the help of Trust Fund donations.

We hope this transparency and information sharing will cement and increase our partnership in the future.

Thank you,

Virginia Gamba
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
The Trust Fund plays a key role to support the implementation of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC), which is to raise awareness on behalf of children, promote the collection of information about the plight of children affected by war, and foster international cooperation to improve their protection.

The fund has been in existence since the early 2000s. At this time, we are taking the last three years -2015 to 2017- as a starting point for this report, so as not to make it unwieldy.

In the past three years, the Trust Fund was used to support the following areas of work:

1. High-level, technical and assessment visits to the field, including promotion of specific national, regional and/or international actions to protect children in situations of conflict;

2. Advocacy, outreach and special events to promote awareness and support for the children and armed conflict agenda;

3. Participation and input into academic research and training activities.

The present report details the work supported by the Trust Fund between 2015 and 2017. It provides highlights of field visits, notes the achievements in global outreach and advocacy, and illustrates ways in which the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict raised the issue of children and armed conflict with Member States, regional organisations, and other stakeholders.

This report is not meant to be a comprehensive list of all activities undertaken by the office, but is instead meant to illustrate the use of the Trust Fund for Children and Armed Conflict.

Ongoing clashes between militias and security forces have displaced thousands of families and left 850,000 children without access to basic services. After a year of disruption and uncertainty, children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are returning to school in the Kasais.

| PHOTO | unicef.org
Part 1

High-level, technical and assessment visits to the field, including promotion of specific national, regional and/or international actions to protect children in situations of conflict

Between 2015 and 2017, the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict supported engagement between the United Nations and parties to conflict in the majority of countries on the agenda.

The Special Representative continued to use high-level field visits as a key advocacy tool to foster constructive relations with parties to conflict, to gain new commitments from Governments and non-State armed groups to end and prevent grave violations against children, or to accelerate the implementation of existing commitments.

The trust fund also enabled staff to undertake key technical field visits to support the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting in their engagement with parties to conflict and the implementation of Action Plans.

Staff from the office of the Special Representative meet with the Commander of Restoring Hope in Saudi Arabia to discuss measures to protect the children of Yemen. October 2017.

[PHOTO] alriyadh.com
The Special Representative and/or her staff travelled to:

- Afghanistan
- Argentina
- Austria
- Bangladesh
- Belgium
- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Colombia
- Cuba
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Egypt
- Ethiopia
- France
- Germany
- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- Italy
- Malta
- Myanmar
- Namibia
- The Netherlands
- Nigeria
- Panama
- The Philippines
- Senegal
- Somalia
- South Africa
- South Sudan
- Sudan
- Switzerland
- Turkey
- Uganda
- United Kingdom
- United States

Achievements for children:

**Global consensus** that children should not be recruited and used in conflict

**5 new Action Plans signed** between 2015 and 2017 (SPLM-iO in South Sudan, Sudan Security Forces, SPLM-North in Sudan, CJTF in Nigeria, Coordination des Mouvements de l’Azawad in Mali)

**8 ratifications** to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict between 2015 and 2017 (Bahamas, Brunei Darussalam, Central African Republic, Guinea, Kiribati, Micronesia, Pakistan, Samoa) and 1 signature (Myanmar)

**2 parties** to conflict delisted (FARDC in DRC and MILF in the Philippines)

**Over 25,000 child soldiers** released in the past 3 years

**Paris Principles** endorsed by 105 Member States

**Inclusion of child protection** measures in the peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP

**Safe Schools declaration adopted** in 2015 with steady increase in endorsements by Member States (73 States as of April 2018)

**Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers** adopted in 2017 and endorsed by 62 Member States

Democratic Republic of the Congo

During the reporting period, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continued to make important progress in the implementation of its Action Plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by its national security forces, and – with **delisting for this violation in 2017** – became the second country impacted by the campaign “Children, Not Soldiers” to finalize its Action Plan. The FARDC are continuing the implementation of their Action Plan to end and prevent sexual violence against children.

In 2015, staff from the office of the Special Representative travelled to the DRC to support the work of the CTFMR to speed up the implementation of the Action Plan.
Republic Of Sudan

In 2016, the Republic of Sudan signed an Action Plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by its national security forces. The Special Representative witnessed the signing of this Action Plan in Khartoum. During her visit, the SRSG also successfully advocated for the release of children detained by the authorities for their alleged association with an armed group.

In 2015, the Special Representative also participated in consultations in Austria with other listed parties to conflict from the Sudan (Justice and Equality Movement, the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid and the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi) to speed up the implementation of existing Action Plans and to generate new commitments. As a result of joint efforts with the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, the leaders of the three groups signed a joint statement on the situation of children in Darfur, in which they pledged to end and prevent grave violations against them.

Additional engagement with parties to conflict in the Sudan led to the signing of an Action Plan with the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). The SRSG also witnessed the signing of this Action Plan, which took place in Geneva in November 2016, on the margins of a conference organized by Geneva Call.

Colombia

In Colombia, the Special Representative’s involvement in the peace talks at the invitation of the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) contributed to a historic agreement between the parties to release and reintegrate all children recruited by the FARC-EP. This was also an important milestone for the mandate, illustrating how peace talks or ceasefire negotiations can be used as an entry point to address children’s needs and their protection.
Staff from the office of the Special Representative traveled to the Philippines to support the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting in the implementation of the Action Plan, as well as dialogue with other parties to conflict and engagement with the Government to continue strengthening the national child protection framework.

**Afghanistan**

In 2016, the Special Representative traveled to Afghanistan to engage in high-level dialogue with the Government to support the implementation of the Action Plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. She also advocated for the protection of schools and hospitals and raised concerns about the killing and maiming of children, two violations on the rise in the country. Following her visit, the Government adopted age assessment guidelines and inaugurated additional child protection units, located in Afghan National Police recruitment centres, thus expanding its capacity to prevent underage recruitment. Staff from the office of the Special Representative also conducted technical visits in 2016 and 2017.

**Philippines**

In the Philippines, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) finalized the implementation of its action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and was delisted in 2017. All 1,869 children identified by MILF as associated with its armed wing underwent formal disengagement in a series of ceremonies, the last of which was held in March 2017.

Staff from the office of the Special Representative carried out two technical visits to Bogota in 2016. This was followed by a high-level visit by SRSG Gamba in 2017 to follow up on the implementation of the agreement, to advocate for adequate reintegration of the children released and the inclusion of children in ongoing talks between the Government and the Ejercito de Liberacion National.
Central African Republic

In the Central African Republic, child protection concerns were first included in the 2014 Accord de cessation des hostilités en République centrafricaine (Brazzaville Agreement). This was followed by active engagement with parties to conflict by the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting, supported by OSRSG-CAAC, which led to an agreement to prevent and end grave violations against children signed by 10 armed groups in May 2015, on the margins of the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation. Despite a challenging situation on the ground, over 8,100 children were separated from armed groups during the reporting period. Staff from the office of the Special Representative travelled to the Central African Republic to provide support for the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting.

Nigeria

Following the listing of Boko Haram, the SRSG travelled to Nigeria in January 2015 to support the roll-out of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), and to engage with the Nigerian authorities. In 2016, following the listing of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) for recruitment and use of children, the office of the Special Representative supported dialogue initiated with that group to develop an Action Plan to end and prevent recruitment and use of children, which was signed in 2017.

Mali

In Mali, the office facilitated discussions and provided support for the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting’s engagement with armed groups. This led to the signing of an Action Plan to end grave violations against children with the Coordination des Mouvements de l’Azawad in early 2017.

Myanmar

In 2015, the Special Representative undertook a visit to Myanmar to assess progress and challenges in the implementation of the Action Plan to stop the recruitment and use of children by the armed forces of Myanmar (Tatmadaw). Following the Special Representative’s visit, Myanmar signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention
In South Sudan, the office of the Special Representative continued to support engagement with the Government to stress the importance of protecting children and of respecting the terms of the Action Plan the SPLA recommitted to in 2014. During the reporting period, over 1,700 children were released from an armed group and received reintegration services. In 2015, the office supported engagement with the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-iO), which led to the signing of an Action Plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children.

Engagement with Partners

Engagement and coordination with partners – Member States, regional organizations, UN and civil society – are a vital part of the children and armed conflict mandate. Contributions to the Trust Fund greatly increased the office’s capacity to support the work of the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting and to remain fully engaged in the coordination processes with the office’s partners by providing expertise and technical advice to ensure a broader integration of child protection concerns and needs.

Somalia

The SRSG visited Somalia in 2015 and again in 2016 to assess the implementation of the Action Plans to end and prevent the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children by the Somali National Army. She urged authorities to treat children associated with armed groups primarily as victims, and advocated successfully for the release of children allegedly associated with Al-Shabaab.

In November 2017, the Special Representative sent a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh to follow up on the crisis in northern Rakhine State.

In September 2017, newly arrived Rohingya refugees walk ashore after traveling by boat from Myanmar on the Bay of Bengal to Teknaf in Cox’s Bazar district, Bangladesh.
Working with Member States

Support from Member States is essential to improve the protection of children affected by war. The Special Representative consistently worked on mainstreaming the issue of children and armed conflict through regular briefings to the Security Council Working Group, presentations at Security Council open debates on children and armed conflict, and participation in international events.

During the reporting period, the New York Group of Friends on children and armed conflict proved essential to bring children’s protection needs to the forefront. Additional Groups of Friends were established in countries on the Children and Armed Conflict agenda to strengthen lines of communications between the international community, the UN, and concerned Member States, notably to improve coordination to support the implementation of Action Plans.

Working with Civil Society

The Special Representative made it a priority to work with civil society actors engaged in the field of child protection. She was a keynote speaker at several events organized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and ensured regular contacts with civil society partners. In that regard, the Trust Fund provided essential support to the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to strengthen collaboration with NGOs, including by enabling staff to travel to meetings and events with civil society organizations in New York, Geneva, and elsewhere.
The network of Civil Society partners the office closely works with includes:

- Child Rights Connect
- Child Soldiers International
- Defence for Children International
- Geneva Call
- Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
- Human Rights Watch
- International Center for Transitional Justice
- International Committee of the Red Cross
- Protecting Education in Insecurity and Conflict
- Save the Children
- Watchlist for Children and Armed Conflict
- War Child
- World Vision

Working with Regional Organizations

The implementation of the cooperation agreement between the African Union Peace and Security Department, UNICEF and the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict continued apace with the recruitment of a child protection advisor assigned to the Peace and Security Department. The Special Representative attended the 2016 Children and Armed Conflict Open Session of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. She also attended the annual High-level retreats of the African Union in Egypt and in Chad.

The European Union (EU) continued its strong engagement with OSRSG-CAAC, and embraced the objectives of “Children, Not Soldiers”, notably by organizing special sessions dedicated to the campaign and the Children and Armed Conflict mandate at the European parliament. Cooperation with the EU also included technical presentations on child protection at trainings organised by the European External Action Service and partners. The Special Representative is currently finalizing plans to open a liaison office in Brussels.

Collaboration with the League of Arab States continued through the framework of the cooperation agreement signed in 2014. The office was represented at technical level at the sectoral meeting on human rights in 2015 and a workplan was finalized later that year.

The SRSG and her office continued the engagement with NATO, including with the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan regarding the protection of children in conflict in the field. The Office provided support for the creation and implementation of the “Protection of Children in Armed Conflict–Way Forward”, a NATO policy paper published in 2016. The SRSG and her Office also contributed to the NATO Standard Operational Procedures on reporting CAAC violations, which was finalized in 2016 and participated in trainings on child protection in Belgium, Turkey and Afghanistan.
Part 2

Advocacy, outreach and special events to promote awareness and support for the children and armed conflict agenda

Between 2015 and 2017, the office’s communications strategy aimed to highlight progress, challenges and collaboration with a wide range of partners to improve the protection of children. The Trust Fund was essential to the implementation of the office’s communications.

Children, Not Soldiers Campaign

The campaign “Children, Not Soldiers” was a central element of that strategy. Launched in 2014, the campaign, a joint initiative with UNICEF, aimed to galvanize support to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by Government security forces by 2016.

The campaign received immediate support from Member States, partners and the general public. “Children, Not Soldiers” paved the way for the office’s 20th anniversary celebrations in 2017, and can be credited for significant achievements including the global consensus that children should not be used in conflict, as well as the delisting of Government Forces in Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, following the successful completion of their Action Plans.

Donations to the trust fund supported the campaign’s international outreach with the production of promotional materials, including brochures, pins, lanyards, and USB drives. These were used by the Office, colleagues and partners in concerned countries, but also widely distributed during international events and high-level meetings. With the help of these funds, the communications package and branding materials were also translated into French and Arabic.
Most countries concerned by “Children, not Soldiers” launched national campaigns, with the support of the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and received promotional materials to support their advocacy work. The campaign’s success also had a broader impact and was used as an advocacy tool to fight the recruitment and use of children by several other countries on the CAAC agenda.

This campaign ended in 2016 and the Office of the Special Representative is currently developing a new initiative that will build on “Children, Not Soldiers” achievements, while creating additional advocacy tools to better address all 6 grave violations included in its mandate.

The trust fund was used to ensure maintenance of the website throughout the reporting period. It was also used to enable the communications officer to travel with the SRSG during field visits or to attend international events to ensure adequate communications and produce web and social media material.
Part 3

Participation and input into academic research and training activities

Throughout the reporting period, the Special Representative and her staff were actively involved in academic research and training activities.

The Special Representative participated in high-level retreats and symposia on peace and security, international law and child protection in conflict where she put forward concerns and best practices for the protection of children.

Here are some of the events attended:

- Workshop on children and armed conflict, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (January 2015)
- Universalizing the Rome Statute of the ICC, Africa Legal Aid, South Africa, (May 2015)
- Darfur armed groups consultations, Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution and UNAMID, Austria (May 2015)
- UNOAU 6th Annual Retreat of Special Envoys and Mediators on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability, Namibia (October 2015)
- Law, Justice and Development Week, World Bank, USA (November 2015)
- Watch Our School, Leiden University’s Faculty of Governance & Global Affairs, the Netherlands (May 2016)
- Nobel Peace Prize Forum, USA (June 2016)
- African Union 7th Annual Retreat on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability, Egypt (October 2016)
- From Suez to Syria: Modern armed conflicts and the evolution of international humanitarian law, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Red Cross, UK (June 2017)
- Discussion on the Impact of armed conflict on children, Stimson Center, USA (October 2017)
- UNOAU 8th Retreat on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability, Chad (October 2017)
- Fourth Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of child labour, Argentina (November 2017)
- Milan Forum for Parliamentary Action in Preventing Violent Extremism and Mass Atrocities, Italy (November 2017)

Presentation by the office of the Special Representative during an event on the importance of education in conflict. | PHOTO | OSRSG-CAAC
Staff from the Office provided child protection expertise in trainings and international events, including:

**Juvenile Justice** in a Counterterrorism Context Initiative, Expert meeting, Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) Criminal Justice Sector and Rule of Law Working Group, Malta (November 2015)

**IV International Course** for the Formation of Catholic Military Chaplains to International Humanitarian Law & International Conference on the Responsibility to Protect: Moral and Legal Perspectives, Italy (October 2015)

**Child Protection** workshops, Department of Peacekeeping Operations (annual events)

**NATO** child protection trainings

**European Union** child protection trainings (annual events)

**Development of Training** on Child Protection and Protection Of Civilians, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Austria (October/November 2016)

**UNODC Meeting.** Treatment of Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups by the Justice System, Austria (December 2016)

**United Nations** – League of Arab States General Cooperation meeting, Switzerland (May 2016)

**NATO** Children and Armed Conflict Training, Turkey (September 2017)

**Workshop** on Institute for International and Security Studies, Workshop on Children and Armed Conflict and Women, Peace and Security: Leading to Change - Closing the Implementation Gap (April 2017)

**Development of Implementation Plans** between Darfuri movements and the United Nations, Uganda (April 2017)

**Navigating the Legal Challenges** and Grey Areas Around Child Protection and Reintegration in Contemporary Conflict, United Nations University, USA (August 2017)

**NATO** Resolute Support Mission (RSM) Children and Armed Conflict Workshop, Afghanistan (December 2017)

In addition to these activities, the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict worked with UNICEF and DPKO to develop interim guidance for the field to ensure adequate monitoring and reporting on the abduction of children, following the addition of this violation as a trigger for listing in 2015.
Part 4

2015-2017 Children and Armed Conflict Trust Fund Status

Trust Fund Contributions 2015-2017

Total contributions $2,637,494

* Data includes contributions made prior to 2015 that were also used between 2015-2016, as well as contributions pertaining to agreements signed during 2015-2016.

Trust Fund Expenditures 2015-2017

Children are learning again in Mosul, Iraq, shortly after this school reopened.

PHOTO | UNICEF/UN050217/Anmar

Children are learning again in Mosul, Iraq, shortly after this school reopened.

PHOTO | UNICEF/UN050217/Anmar
The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC) would like to thank donor governments for their crucial contributions to the Trust Fund, which multiplied the work of the office.
A girl carries water in a makeshift camp, north of Raqqa, in the Syrian Arab Republic. | PHOTO | UNICEF/UN067453/Souleiman