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# BUILDING PEACE: PROTECTING CHILDREN in CONFLICT

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

# Moving towards an era of prevention



**SRSG Gamba with children in South Kordofan, Sudan.**

PHOTO: Fabienne Vinet, OSRSG-CAAC

“The dynamics in the use and abuse of children in, for and by armed conflict are a constant reminder that children are always the first casualty of war.”

Virginia Gamba

**W**hen I assumed the role of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, I pledged to increase the Office’s capacity to mobilize global action to bring tangible protection for millions of children caught up in conflict.

Since the creation of the mandate in the late nineties, crucial work to address child recruitment has helped lay the foundations to address other grave violations, including sexual violence in conflict and the protection of schools and hospitals. In line with the Secretary-General’s guidance to better integrate prevention into the work of the United Nations, my office is developing new and innovative strategies to better understand what is needed to prevent violations against boys and girls. We are also working on practical guidance to include children’s needs and their protection more systematically in peace processes.

This would not be possible without the solidarity of the international community and I have launched several initiatives to develop new alliances for children, including through agreements with regional and sub-regional organizations that will focus on the prevention of violations against children.

I also felt there was an urgent need to focus our attention on reintegration programmes. Helping children recover from the trauma of war requires a broader approach, which includes looking at the potential of reintegration to contribute to building peaceful societies. In September, my office launched the Global Coalition for Reintegration, which I hope will raise global attention to the resources needed to rescue children from the horrors of war and to give them a second chance to build peaceful, productive lives.

As we work together to address the immense challenges we are faced with, let us never forget that our actions should aim to contribute to building a peaceful future for boys and girls and their country. 

# A mandate to end and prevent violations against children affected by armed conflict

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict serves as the leading UN advocate for the protection and well-being of children affected by armed conflict.

The mandate of the Special Representative was created by the General Assembly (resolution A/RES/51/77) following the 1996 publication of a report by Graça Machel that highlighted the disproportionate impact of war on children and identified them as the primary victims of armed conflict.

The first Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict was named in 1997 by the Secretary-General to raise awareness about the plight of children affected by armed conflict, promote the monitoring and reporting of abuses and foster international cooperation to end and ultimately to prevent violations against children in times of war. The Special Representative reports annually to the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

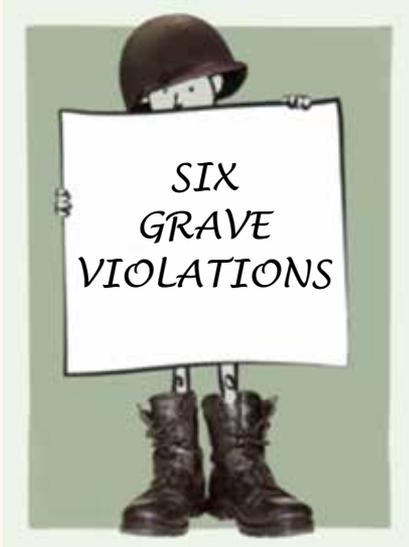
Since 1999, the systematic engagement of the UN Security Council has placed the situation of children affected by armed conflict at the heart of issues affecting peace and security.

## The Council has requested the UN to:

- gather and verify information detailing where and how children are affected by armed conflict,
- include this information in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict,
- name parties to conflict who commit violations that are triggers for listing,
- engage in dialogue with listed Governments and armed groups to develop Action Plans aimed at ending and preventing violations against children.

# Six grave violations affecting children in times of conflict

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In 1999, the Security Council identified and condemned the 6 grave violations affecting children the most in times of conflict and requested the Secretary-General to report on them.

Ending and preventing these violations is the focus of the Special Representative's work and advocacy.

## ⦿ RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN

**The world agrees they are children not soldiers**

In many conflicts children take direct part in combat. However, their role is not limited to fighting. Many girls and boys are also used in support functions

such as porters or cooks. No matter their role, child soldiers are exposed to acute levels of violence – as witnesses, direct victims and forced participants.

## ⦿ KILLING AND MAIMING OF CHILDREN

**Because no child should live in constant fear of death or injury**

Wars have rules that bind all parties to conflict and serve to protect civilians, including children. However, we are faced with protracted and proliferating conflicts, where the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law are commonly flouted. In 2017, the UN verified the killing and maiming of over 10,000 children in countries affected by conflict.

## ⦿ SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

**No tolerance for sexual violence against boys and girls**

Despite the global mobilization to end sexual violence in conflict, this violation is often perpetrated against children, and remains underreported. Girls and boys who survive rape and sexual violence suffer from long-term trauma, health consequences and stigma.

## ⊙ ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS

### **Act to protect schools and hospitals**

The notion that schools and hospitals should be zones of peace is challenged by modern warfare. Apart from physical damage to schools and hospitals, conflict and insecurity can result in the forced closure or the disrupted functioning of these institutions. Also of great concern is the use of schools for military purposes.

## ⊙ ABDUCTION OF CHILDREN

### **No child should fear ending up in unknown hands, alone and in pain**

In the 1990s and early 2000s in northern Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army notoriously used systematic abductions as its modus operandi to recruit children and commit sexual violence. Since then, mass abductions of children have become more common and used by armed groups as a tactic to terrorize or target particular ethnic groups or religious communities.

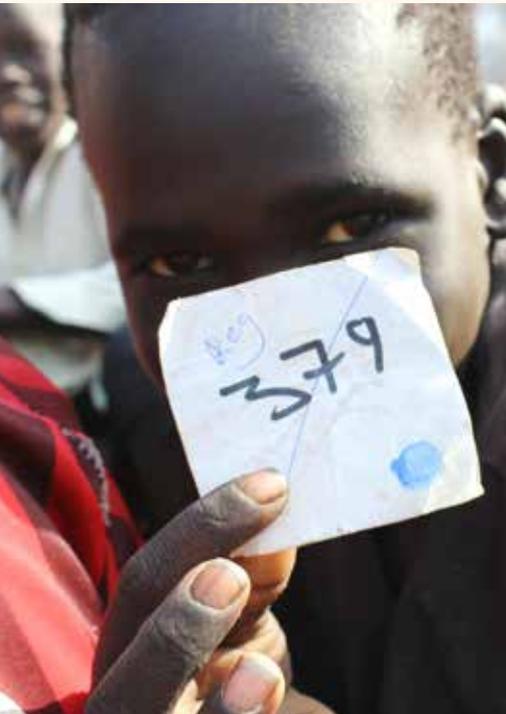
## ⊙ DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

### **Food, shelter & health care for all children**

The denial of humanitarian assistance to civilians trapped or displaced by conflict has always been a reality, 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.

**A boy holds his registration number following a ceremony formalizing his release from a South Sudanese armed group.**

PHOTO: UNICEF



# Progress and achievements

## ⊙ OVER 130,000 CHILD SOLDIERS RELEASED

Over 130,000 child soldiers released since 2000 as a result of dialogue and Action Plans.

## ⊙ GLOBAL CONSENSUS TO PROTECT CHILDREN

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.

## ⊙ 12 RESOLUTIONS ON CHILDREN ADOPTED

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

## ⊙ 29 ACTION PLANS SIGNED

29 Action Plans signed with parties to conflict.

## ⊙ 12 PARTIES TO CONFLICT DELISTED

12 parties to conflict delisted from the annexes of the annual report of the

Secretary-General on children and armed conflict following completion of their Action Plan.

## ⊙ 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

## ⊙ 168 PARTIES

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

## ⊙ PARIS PRINCIPLES ADOPTED IN 2007

Paris Principles adopted in 2007 and endorsed by 108 States with the aim to ensure child soldiers are treated primarily as victims, and that their reintegration is a priority.

## ⊙ SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION

Safe Schools declaration against military use of schools adopted in 2015 and already endorsed by 81 States.

## ⊙ VANCOUVER PRINCIPLES

Vancouver Principles on peacekeeping and the prevention of the recruitment and use of Child soldiers, adopted in 2017 and endorsed by 67 Member States.

**Former child soldiers are back in school following their release.**

PHOTO: UNICEF



# Our commitment for children affected by armed conflict

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## Priorities for the next two years:

### COMMITMENTS

- ① Finalize the implementation of existing Action Plans and generate engagement with more parties to conflict to sign and implement new Action Plans;
- ① Advocate for the endorsement of international commitments such as the Safe School Declaration, Paris Principles and Vancouver Principles;
- ① Work towards universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

### REINTEGRATION

- ① Increase the number of child soldiers released and ensure they have access to sustainable reintegration programs;
- ① Increase the availability of services available for child survivors of sexual violence, including health and psychological assistance.

### PREVENTION

- ① Develop regional and sub-regional action plans to prevent violations against children;
- ① Improve the protection of schools and hospitals through advocacy and the pursuit of accountability for perpetrators;
- ① Support efforts to end and prevent sexual violence against children in conflict by raising awareness about this issue and fostering accountability for perpetrators.

### PARTNERSHIPS

- ① Build broad support to achieve more protection of civilians, including children during the conduct of hostilities;
- ① Increase support to ensure children have access to humanitarian assistance;
- ① Develop guidance on the integration of child protection issues in peace processes.



Children line up in a schoolyard in Beni, DR Congo.

PHOTO: Stephanie Tremblay, OSRSG-CAAC

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