ACT to END and PREVENT VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN AFFECTED by ARMED CONFLICT

Report on ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY the Contributions to the Trust Fund for CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT 2018-2019

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT
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An Era of Action for Prevention

By SRSG Virginia Gamba

Since the creation of the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate 24 years ago, the international community has developed powerful instruments to strengthen the protection of boys and girls affected by armed conflict.

However, this has not been sufficient to stop violations committed against children in conflicts around the world. As the nature of conflict evolves and emerging issues take precedence, existing tools continuously need to be refined and redesigned.

With the 25th anniversary of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate approaching, we need to reflect on why, despite the existence of powerful instruments, violations against children are continuing unabated. Consideration needs to be given to whether existing international norms and frameworks are strong enough to respond to and prevent violations or whether the main issue is the translation of those norms and frameworks into tangible actions on the ground.

Actions are powerful; I have launched the ACT to Protect campaign to embrace this idea, to move from commitments to actions, from reaction to prevention, in line with the vision of the Secretary-General.

There is no single formula to cure the plight of children affected by conflict; but together, there are concrete actions that we can take to protect boys and girls and to build protective environments for children during conflicts.

PROTECTING children used and abused by, for and in armed conflict. This implies maintaining a strong monitoring and reporting mechanism, while increasing our advocacy with parties to conflict and securing the necessary resources for child protection capacities on the ground.

Children are used and abused, as expendable fuel of armed conflict. It is our duty to ensure that they stop being violated and benefit from the best protection possible.

—Virginia Gamba
PREVENTING violations committed against children from occurring in the first place remains the best way to protect them. Prevention should be at the heart of our actions as per Security Council Resolution 2427 (2018). Member States as well as regional and sub-regional organizations are called to develop and expand initiatives to prevent violations and abuses against children affected by armed conflict, which can include the development of prevention plans, working with communities to thwart violations before they can take place, as well as endorsing international instruments and strengthening accountability.

RAISING awareness and strengthening partnerships for children is also crucial to make the voices of the most vulnerable heard in times of war, so they can resonate loud and clear at the highest level. Through promoting the stories of conflict-affected children, strengthening advocacy and messaging on the six CAAC violations and mainstreaming the Children and Armed Conflict agenda, we can ensure that these issues remain a priority for the international community. Increasing and expanding partnerships with regional and sub-regional organizations, Member States, UN agencies, civil society, academia and other relevant entities is also an inherent part of the CAAC mandate activities. As we are approaching the 25th anniversary of the mandate, we must build on our achievements for children.

PROMOTING lessons learned and best practices. We all know that the protection of children requires concerted efforts from all of us, from families, to communities, to Member States to sub-regional, regional and international organizations, and on the ground. Only together, united in our will, can we implement the changes required for the protection of children. This also means learning from past experience and making sure that our collective approach to protect children improves constantly through issues such as reintegration, the inclusion of child protection measures into mediation and peace processes and providing support and capacity to child protection actors.

Together, we have come a long way to defend the rights of children. The time has come to reach the furthest behind. Abandoning children in conflict zones to a violent fate is unacceptable. Let us act now so that future generations might remember us for what we did to better protect children affected by armed conflict and not for what we failed to do.

—Virginia Gamba

I would like to express my gratitude to the donors to the Trust Fund for Children and Armed Conflict. Their contributions have enabled me to implement all aspects of the mandate and thus strengthen the protection of children affected by war. Through these contributions, we have financed additional temporary staff capacity, travel of technical staff to support the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFRM) in the development of action plans, public outreach and advocacy campaigns, and participation in the analysis, assessment and response to new and emerging trends in violations against children in armed conflict.

I look forward to continuing and intensifying our collaboration in the coming year.

Thank you,

Virginia Gamba
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
A mandate guided by four pillars

These four pillars aim to guide the actions of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC) and its partners in the coming years.

1. **Protecting**
   - children used and abused by, for and in armed conflict

2. **Preventing**
   - violations committed against children in armed conflict

3. **Raising awareness**
   - and strengthening partnerships for children

4. **Promoting**
   - lessons learned and best practices

The Children and Armed Conflict mandate sits at the junction of the human rights, peace and security, peacebuilding, development and humanitarian agendas.

It is also linked to other thematic agendas such as the Youth, Peace and Security, the Protection of Civilians and the Women, Peace and Security agendas. While it is important to recognize those links and build bridges between different agendas, it is equally important to maintain the specificity of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate as a topic in its own right.

The Children and Armed Conflict mandate fosters a unique collaboration within the United Nations family between a broad range of entities as well as with outside actors including Member States, regional and sub-regional organizations and civil society partners, among others. Finally, it also provides crucial inputs to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in support of the Agenda 2030.

The Sustainable Development Goals in support of the Agenda 2030

These goals are particularly relevant for the Children and Armed Conflict mandate

- **Goal 3**: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- **Goal 4**: Quality Education
- **Goal 8**: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all
- **Goal 16**: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies
Four pillars to guide the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

1. Protecting children used and abused by, for and in armed conflict
   - Monitoring and reporting
   - Advocating with parties to conflict
   - Securing capacity and resources

2. Preventing violations committed against children in armed conflict
   - Developing prevention plans
   - Strengthening accountability
   - Promoting international commitments

3. Raising awareness and strengthening partnerships for children
   - Providing a space for children to be heard
   - Mainstreaming CAAC issues globally
   - Strategic communications and key messaging

4. Promoting lessons learned and best practices
   - Strengthening training and research on CAAC
   - Advocating for the reintegration of children affected by conflict
   - Integrating child protection measures in mediation & peace processes
Groups of friends of CAAC are crucial partners and are present in many countries on the CAAC agenda. Here at the launch of the ACT to Protect campaign in Mali in July 2019.

PHOTO: MINUSMA/ Harandane Dicko
Trust Fund for Children and Armed Conflict

The Trust Fund is key for supporting the implementation of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

The trust fund was used, inter alia, to enable staff to accompany the Special Representative on field visits as well as to international high-level events and meetings. It also allowed appropriate and timely follow-up, enabled coordination with partners and ensured adequate communications.

The present publication reports on how the Trust Fund enabled the OSRSG-CAAC to implement its mandate in 2018-2019. It provides highlights about the field visits, notes achievements in global outreach and advocacy, and exemplifies 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 organizations, and other stakeholders.

This report does not contain a comprehensive list of all activities undertaken by the Special Representative and her office but illustrates the impact of the Trust Fund as complementary to the regular budget resources. Further details on the work and advocacy of the office are available in the annual report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict to the Security Council and in the reports of the Special Representative to the General Assembly and Human Rights Council.

In 2018-2019, the Special Representative and her team traveled to:

12 countries on the CAAC agenda:
- Afghanistan
- Central African Republic (CAR)
- Colombia
- Iraq
- Jordan (for Yemen)
- Mali
- Somalia
- South Sudan
- Sudan
- Myanmar
- The Philippines
- Thailand

The SRSG and her team also participated in high-level meetings to advocate for the protection and prevention of violations against children including in:
- Austria
- Canada
- Ethiopia
- France
- Germany
- Italy
- Malta
- The Netherlands
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia

The SRSG and her team also conducted visits to support regional activities including to:
- Argentina
- Belgium
- Egypt
- Ethiopia
- Jordan
- Kenya
- Peru

Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, at a reintegration center in South Sudan with UNICEF partners.

PHOTO: OSRSG-CAAC / Fabienne Vinet
Pillar 1: Protecting children used and abused by, for and in armed conflict

1. Monitoring and Reporting
Enhance the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on violations against children by increasing engagement with Country Task Forces, improving gender and age disaggregated data, including IDP and refugee children, and identifying new and emerging trends of violations against children.

2. Advocating with Parties to Conflict
Engage in direct advocacy with parties to conflict to end and prevent violations including through field missions and dialogue on action plans.

3. Securing Capacity and Resources
Ensure and advocate for sufficient dedicated child protection advisors in the UN and partner organizations as well as accompanying resources for child protection activities.

Increased patrols in Central Mali by MINUSMA to protect civilians, including children.
PHOTO: UN Photo/Gema Cortes
At least 16,800 children were released from armed groups and armed forces in 2018 and 2019, most of whom benefitted from reintegration programmes.

4 Action Plans signed with non-state actors; in the Central African Republic (CAR) with the Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC), the Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) and L’Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC) addressing the four violations for which the armed groups are listed under the umbrella of the ex-Seleka coalition. In Syria, an Action Plan was signed with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) for the recruitment and use of children.

Comprehensive Action Plan signed by the Government of South Sudan to address all violations against children. Opposition forces that will unify with the South Sudan People’s Defense Forces (SSPDF) also signed.

Adoption of a Roadmap by the Government of Yemen in December 2018 to expedite the implementation of the Action Plan signed in 2014 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by its forces.

Signature of a Roadmap by the Somali Federal Government in October 2019 to expedite the implementation of their 2012 Action Plans on ending and preventing child recruitment and use and killing and maiming; also includes prevention of sexual violence.

Signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen in March 2019 and endorsement of a workplan with time-bound activities.
Three regional workshops with UN country teams, including CTFMR Co-Chairs, in Amman (November 2018), Nairobi (January 2019) and Bangkok (August 2019) to strengthen the implementation of the CAAC agenda and MRM.

Armed forces and groups in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mali, the Philippines, South Sudan and Sudan vacated schools after advocacy by the United Nations as well as by local communities.

Action plan under development in Iraq to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). Negotiations for action plans are also ongoing with other parties in Mali, CAR, Myanmar and Yemen.

In the DRC, the UN engaged with 24 factions of armed groups leading to the signature of unilateral commitments and roadmaps to end child recruitment and use and other violations, resulting in the separation of 1,221 children.

Staff from the office undertook technical visits in support of the CTFMRs such as to Mali for a workshop with the force officers of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) on the implementation of the International humanitarian law and human rights compliance framework of the Joint Force (2018); to South Sudan to support the development of a Comprehensive Action Plan with the Government to address all violations against children (2019); to the Central African Republic to support the development of a national prevention plan by the Government (2019); to Afghanistan to support the CTFMR and to follow up on the Action Plan’s Roadmap to compliance on recruitment and use, as well as on the measures taken by the Government and its partners to mitigate child casualties; and to Myanmar to provide training to the Government Forces on CAAC and to support the preparation of a Comprehensive Action Plan with the Tatmadaw to address all violations (2018-2019).
PILLAR 2: Preventing violations committed against children in armed conflict

4 DEVELOPING PREVENTION PLANS
Support the development of prevention plans at national, sub-regional and regional level

5 STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY
Promote international, regional and national norms and policies on accountability and justice for children victims of violations

6 PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS
Promote ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) and endorsement of the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration

In the Central African Republic, a national prevention plan is under preparation following the visit of the Special Representative in May 2019.

PHOTO: OSRS-CAAC / Stephanie Tremblay
Pillar 2: Achievements and Activities

- Security Council Resolution 2427, adopted in July 2018, reaffirms the important role the Special Representative can play in conflict prevention and calls on Member States, the UN, as well as regional and sub-regional organizations to include measures for the protection of children in all their activities related to the prevention of conflict.

- The SRSG has increased her engagement and cooperation with regional organizations such as the African Union, the European Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States), the Andean Community, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, including technical discussions to promote regional strategies on prevention.

- Increased cooperation with regional organizations led to the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the European Parliament in April 2019; in Nairobi in January 2019, the States of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the Region asked the Special Representative to cooperate on regional prevention initiatives to better protect conflict-affected children.

- Opening of a Europe Liaison CAAC Office in Brussels (October 2018) to strengthen engagement with European partners, including the European Union and the UN offices and partners in Geneva, Vienna and Paris, as well as civil society organizations based in Europe.


- At least 102 countries have committed to protecting education and signed the Safe Schools Declaration.

- The Paris Principles and Commitments have been endorsed by at least 110 States.

- At least 89 countries have endorsed the Vancouver Principles.

- In the Central African Republic, a national prevention plan is under preparation following the visit of the Special Representative in May 2019 and at the Prime Minister’s request.

- Following extensive work by the CTFMR in Somalia and supported by a visit of the Special Representative to the country, a national strategy and operational framework on the prevention and response to child recruitment, release and reintegration is awaiting final endorsement by the authorities.

- 170 State Parties have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC), including the Gambia in September 2019.

PHOTO: OSRSG-CAAC / Fabienne Vinet
Pillar 3: Raising awareness and strengthening partnerships for children

**PILLAR 3: Raising awareness and strengthening partnerships for children**

**7 PROVIDING A SPACE FOR CHILDREN TO BE HEARD**
Raise awareness on violations against children and ensure the voices of children affected by armed conflict, including those displaced, are heard at the highest levels.

**8 MAINSTREAMING CAAC ISSUES GLOBALLY**
Organize and participate in seminars, conferences and other relevant events to raise awareness about the issue of children affected by conflict.

**9 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND KEY MESSAGING**
Strengthen advocacy and messaging on violations against children, including through campaigns, liaising with partners and bringing global attention to emerging trends in child rights violations.

The new CAAC campaign ACT to Protect Children Affected by Conflict was launched globally on 2 April 2019 in New York.

PHOTO: OSRSG-CAAC / Fabienne Vinet
Pillar 3: Achievements and Activities

The new CAAC campaign ACT to Protect Children Affected by Conflict was launched globally on 2 April 2019 in New York, with the European Union and the African Union as co-sponsors. The campaign was subsequently launched in Brussels at the European Parliament (April 2019), in the Central African Republic (May 2019), in Somalia (June 2019) in Mali (July 2019) and in Bangkok (August 2019).

As the UN leading advocate for the protection of children, the Special Representative continued to draw attention and call for actions on the issue of conflict affected children in a variety of fora. She participated in several events organized by Groups of Friends of CAAC and partners, including Member States, United Nations entities and civil society organizations. Among these, the Special Representative:

- was a keynote speaker at the event “OPAC turns 18” in February 2018, co-organized by Child Soldiers International;
- was invited to speak at a Board Meeting of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children in Stockholm in February 2018;
- promoted child participation in conflict resolution and peace-building at the event “Hear Our Voices: Listening to Children Affected by Conflict” co-organized with World Vision;
- attended the International Review Workshop on the Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles, held in Ottawa in February 2019;
- In May 2019 was a speaker at the third International Conference on Safe Schools, hosted by the Government of Spain in Palma de Mallorca;
- Peter Majok, from South Sudan, and Mariatu Kamara, from Sierra Leone, were speakers at the 2019 Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict.

PHOTO: OSRSG-CAAC / Fabienne Vinet
emphasized the voice of partners at the centennial anniversary of Save the Children marked in May 2019 in The Hague and supported their global symposium on the theme “Stop the war on children”;

co-hosted with the SRSG for Sexual Violence in Conflict an event on the importance of a survivor-centred approach on the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict in June 2019;

was a speaker at the Security Council Arria Formula Meeting on the Protection of Boys and Girls in Shrinking Humanitarian Space on 12th February 2019.

The Special Representative and her team continued to have regular interactions and meetings with civil society organizations including in New York, Geneva, Argentina, Belgium, Colombia, Ethiopia, Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom among others, as well as during field visits including in CAR, Mali, Somalia and South Sudan.

OSRSG-CAAC promoted the voices of conflict-affected children:

Yenny Londono, from Colombia, represented children and civil society organizations at the 2018 Open Debate on CAAC

Mohamed Sidibay, from Sierra Leone, was a speaker at the high-level event “Funding the Future: Challenges and Responses to the Reintegration of Child Soldiers”.

PHOTO: OSRSG-CAAC / Fabienne Vinet

The new CAAC campaign Act to Protect Children Affected by Conflict has been launched so far in 7 locations, including New York.

PHOTO: OSRSG-CAAC / Fabienne Vinet

Kaba William, from Sierra Leone, shared his story at the high-level event on the “Reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces” in June 2018

Mohamed Sidibay, from Sierra Leone, was a speaker at the high-level event “Funding the Future: Challenges and Responses to the Reintegration of Child Soldiers” during the high-level week in September 2018

Angela Atim Lakor, from Uganda, shared her experience as a former child soldier turned activist at the launch of the campaign ACT to Protect children affected by conflict in New York in April 2019

Heba Alibrahim, from Syria, shared her story at the launch of the campaign ACT to Protect children affected by conflict in Brussels in April 2019

Peter Majok, from South Sudan, and Mariatu Kamara, from Sierra Leone, were speakers at the 2019 Open Debate on children and armed conflict.
Pillar 4: Promoting Lessons Learned and Best Practices

**PILLAR 4: Promoting Lessons Learned and Best Practices**

10. **STRENGTHENING TRAINING AND RESEARCH ON CAAC**
Support the development of training curricula and related tools on violations against children; support research on CAAC issues including the detention of children for their association with parties to conflict, abduction, as well as the nexus between child protection, prevention, peacebuilding and development.

11. **ADVOCATING FOR THE REINTEGRATION OF CHILDREN AFFECTED BY CONFLICT**
Promote concerted action to improve reintegration and rehabilitation efforts through the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers and sustainable and long-term programmes.

12. **INTEGRATING CHILD PROTECTION MEASURES IN MEDIATION & PEACE PROCESSES**
Develop a practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues into peace processes.

Launch of the Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict in February 2020.
Pillar 4: Achievements and Activities

- **Launch of the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers (GCR)** together with UNICEF in September 2018. The Coalition gained increased support throughout the months and several consultations were organized with academia, NGOs, Member States, financing experts, international organizations as well as former child soldiers and other conflict-affected children. These consultations enabled the GCR to deepen its research on the gaps and needs in funding and programming and support its recommendations on new modalities or mechanisms to ensure long-term, sustainable funding for this strategic post-conflict intervention. **Three papers will be published in 2020.**

- **Development of the Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict**, as encouraged by the Security Council in its Presidential Statement on 31 October 2017 (S/PRST/2017/21). The OSRSG CAAC, in collaboration with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations, and UNICEF, held two consultations bringing together senior level mediation and child protection experts. The first consultation took place in November 2018 in Geneva, funded by the Government of Sweden, and the second one, at high-level, took place in October 2019 in Brussels, funded by the Government of Belgium. The latter was facilitated by the European Institute of Peace and aimed at reviewing the draft guidance while discussing lessons learned and challenges faced to integrate child protection issues in peace processes throughout the years. **The guidance was published on 12 February 2020.**

- **The Special Representative continued to work with NATO to strengthen its child protection architecture** by supporting training for child protection focal points, stock-taking of lessons learned and best practices, and contributed to the update of the policy document on the protection of children in armed conflict.

- In 2018-2019, the CAAC Office provided **briefings and trainings** on children and armed conflict to experts from international and regional organizations and Member States, including in Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines and for NATO. Office staff also participated in child protection workshops organized by the Department of Peace Operations and contributed to the development of child protection **training modules** for the G5 Sahel Forces and NATO. The SRSG also supported the launch of the Manual for Child Protection staff in UN peace operations in New York in November 2019.

- **The opening of the United Nations Liaison Office for Children and Armed Conflict (Europe)** facilitated trainings and briefings on CAAC issues with Europe based organizations, including the European External Action Service and human rights and gender advisers from Common Security and Defence Policy missions of the European Union.

- **The Special Representative travelled to Doha in December 2019 for the establishment of the analysis and outreach hub** of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in Qatar.

- **The Special Representative actively advocated for a rights-based approach to address the plight of children actually or allegedly associated with groups listed as terrorists by the United Nations**, in cooperation with relevant partners within and outside the United Nations. She co-led a group of United Nations counterparts on the issue of children and foreign fighters to ensure child rights are upheld in all contexts and countries concerned, including host countries and countries of origin.
2018-2019 Children and Armed Conflict Trust Fund Status

Engagement mission on Children and Armed Conflict met armed group in Zuid Kivu, DRC.  PHOTO: MONUSCO / Jacob De Lange

**Trust Fund Contributions 2018-2019**

- Total contributions $2,621,562

**Expenditure 2018-2019**

- Total expenditures $2,908,183

* Data includes contributions made prior to 2018.
The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict would like to thank donor Governments for their crucial contributions to the Trust Fund.