
A MANDATE TO PROTECT CHILDREN AFFECTED BY CONFLICT



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

Moving towards an era of prevention



“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, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

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.

SRSG Gamba with children in South Kordofan, Sudan.


PHOTO: Fabienne Vinet, OSRSG-CAAC

These four pillars aim to guide the actions of the CAAC Office and its partners in the coming years.

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.

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).

RAISING awareness and strengthening partnerships for children is also crucial to make the voices of the most vulnerable in times of war heard at the highest level. Increasing and expanding partnerships with all relevant entities is also an inherent part of the CAAC mandate activities.

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. 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. 

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 is 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 (A/RES/51/77) following the publication of a groundbreaking report by Graça Machel in 1996 highlighting the disproportionate impact of war on children and identifying them as the primary victims of armed conflict.

The first UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict was appointed in 1997 by the Secretary-General to: **PROTECT** children used and abused by, for and in armed conflict; **PREVENT** violations committed against children from occurring in the first place; **RAISE** awareness and strengthen partnerships for children; **PROMOTE** lessons learned and best practices.

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.

BIOGRAPHY SRSG VIRGINIA GAMBA



Professor Virginia Gamba was appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict at the Under-Secretary-General level in April 2017. Prior to this appointment, she was Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, established by the UN Security Council, on the use of chemicals as weapons in Syria.

Professor Gamba brings more than 30 years of experience and professional leadership to issues related to disarmament, peace and human security.

Six grave violations affecting children in times of conflict

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.



In many conflicts, children take direct part in combat. They are also used in other functions such as lookouts, porters, cooks or for sexual purposes. No matter their role, children recruited and used are exposed to acute levels of violence – as direct victims, witnesses, and forced participants.



Every year, thousands of children are injured and killed as a direct result of conflict.

Many are also victims of landmines and unexploded ordnance. Some are even used to carry out suicide attacks. Survivors carry the mental and physical scars of such violence for the rest of their lives.



Children are often subjected to rape, sexual violence and forced marriage in situations of conflict. Despite the global attention and mobilization to end sexual violence in conflict, this violation against girls and boys remains underreported due to fear of stigma and lack of services. Children who experience sexual violence suffer from long-term trauma and health consequences, including unintended pregnancies and can be ostracized by their communities for life.





The notion of schools and hospitals as zones of peace is challenged in many conflicts. Schools are used for military purposes and students, teachers and schools targeted. Conflict and insecurity can result in the closure or disrupted functioning of schools and hospitals, preventing access to education and health care for boys and girls.



Mass abductions of children have been on the rise in recent years and are used as a tactic to terrorize or target political, ethnic and religious groups. The abduction of children is often the precursor to other violations and has been systematically exploited by armed elements to recruit child soldiers and commit sexual violence.



The denial of humanitarian access to civilians trapped or displaced by conflict is increasingly used as a tactic of war. Examples abound of children trapped in besieged areas, or deprived of access to food, water, shelter and medical assistance, including vaccines.

Progress and achievements

⊙ OVER 155,000 CHILD SOLDIERS RELEASED

Over 155,000 child soldiers released since 2000 as a result of UN dialogue and Action Plans.

⊙ MONITORING AND REPORTING MECHANISM

A Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism was established in all countries where parties are listed to provide timely and reliable information to the UN Security Council and UN highest bodies through the OSRSG-CAAC.

⊙ 170 OPAC RATIFICATIONS

170 ratifications to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict have been obtained.

⊙ 12 CAAC RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED

12 resolutions on children and armed conflict adopted by the UN Security Council since 2005.

⊙ 32 ACTION PLANS

32 Action Plans and joint commitments signed with parties to conflict.

15 Action Plans currently under implementation.

⊙ 13 PARTIES DELISTED

13 parties to conflict delisted from the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict following Action Plans signed with the UN leading to measures to better protect children and verified sustained implementation.

⊙ PARIS PRINCIPLES ADOPTED IN 2007

Paris Principles adopted in 2007 and endorsed by at least 110 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 endorsed by at least 102 States.

⊙ VANCOUVER PRINCIPLES

At least 89 countries have endorsed the Vancouver Principles.

⊙ ACT TO PROTECT CAMPAIGN

Campaign launched in at least 7 countries on the CAAC agenda and endorsed by partners around the world.



Our commitment for children affected by armed conflict

Priorities for the next two years:



PROTECTING CHILDREN USED AND ABUSED BY, FOR AND IN ARMED CONFLICT

- ⦿ Enhancing the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM);
- ⦿ Advocating with parties to conflict;
- ⦿ Securing capacity and resources for child protection actors on the ground.



PREVENTING VIOLATIONS COMMITTED AGAINST CHILDREN FROM OCCURRING IN THE FIRST PLACE

- ⦿ Supporting the development of prevention plans at national, sub-regional and regional level;
- ⦿ Advocating for international, regional and national norms and policies on accountability and justice for children victims of violations;
- ⦿ Promoting international Commitments such as ratification of OPAC and endorsement of the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration.



RAISING AWARENESS AND STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHILDREN;

- ⦿ Providing a space for children to be heard;
- ⦿ Mainstreaming CAAC issues globally;
- ⦿ Strengthening advocacy and messaging on violations against children including through the campaign ACT to Protect.



PROMOTING LESSONS LEARNED AND BEST PRACTICES

- ⦿ Strengthening training and research on CAAC lessons learnt and general issues;
- ⦿ Advocating for the reintegration of children affected by conflict, including through the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers;
- ⦿ Integrating child protection measures in mediation and peace processes.



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