



**Geneva-based Group of Friends
on Children and Armed Conflict**



Save the Children



Concept Note

Human Rights Council Side-Event

Child's Rights Approach to the Implementation of the Tools of the Children and Armed Conflict Mandate:

Strengthening Child Participation and Accountability

14 March 2023, 3-4 pm (CET), Room XXII, Palais des Nations

1. Background

The mandate of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC) was established by the UN General Assembly in December 1996 (A/RES/51/77) to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict, raise awareness, promote the collection of information about the plight of children affected by war and enhance international cooperation to ensure their rights are fulfilled. For its implementation, the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate can rely on several tools and instruments:

The CAAC mandate is based on multiple legal instruments and norms which encompass international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989 and to date the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history with 196 State parties. The CRC provides the international legal foundation for the respect, protection and fulfilment of the rights of the child. It recognizes a specific set of human rights for all children. It also states that all persons under the age of 18 should be considered as children and, as such, be granted special protection under international law.

The adoption in 2000 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict marked a new significant advance in the protection of children in armed conflict, and in particular the prohibition of the recruitment of children into armed forces and groups and their participation in hostilities. At present, 172 countries have ratified this Optional Protocol.



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As of 1999, the Security Council also placed the CAAC mandate on its agenda and since then has equipped it with several tools for its implementation. The Security Council identified the 6 grave violations against children in armed conflict, established a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism of these grave violations, and called upon parties to conflict to prepare concrete,

time-bound Action Plans to end and prevent grave violations. The Security Council also put the prevention of grave violations at the heart of conflict prevention and called to strengthen cooperation with regional and sub-regional organizations and establish preventive measures to ensure equal access to and the continuation of education in conflict.

Other international instruments were spearheaded by Member States supportive of the CAAC agenda to step up global action for the mandate and call on Member States to take political commitments to its full implementation:

- *The Paris Principles and Commitments on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups* were adopted in 2007 to combat the unlawful recruitment and use of boys and girls by armed forces or armed groups. 112 States had endorsed this international political commitment as of today.
- *The Safe Schools Declaration* was launched in 2015 to strengthen the protection of education from attack and restrict use of schools and universities for military purposes. To date, 116 States have endorsed this international political commitment, the latest being Colombia in December 2022.
- *The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers* were launched in 2017 and comprise 17 principles to prioritize the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers in UN peacekeeping operations. To date, 105 States have endorsed this international political commitment.

With grave violations against children on the rise, these tools for the implementation of the children and armed conflict mandate are critical, not only to improve the protection of children affected by armed conflict but also to break cycles of violence, in a collective effort to reach sustainable peace. The strengthening of prevention of grave violations and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups are at the core of this effort. Upholding children's rights and ensuring their future also means moving from legal frameworks and political commitments towards concrete action and swift implementation of



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these measures. This also requires applying a child rights approach to implementation, notably with regards to participation and accountability.

Under the CRC all children have the right to freely express their views on all matters and decisions that affect them and decisions that affect them, and to have those views taken into account at all levels of society. While their right to participate remains enshrined in law in practice their voice in matters affecting them is rarely considered and they remain underrepresented in high-level decision-making processes. Furthermore, violations and crimes against children remain prevalent in armed conflict and under-reported. It is essential to keep accountability high on the international agenda to guide the documentation, analysis, and prosecution efforts in that regard. This entails the development of safe and adequate ways to engage with children and foster collaboration around sustainable accountability approaches giving due consideration to be best interest of the child and do no harm principles. Children need to be part of the solutions and can play a meaningful role in shaping our global responses to the prevention of grave violations, protection of children affected by armed conflict, and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups.

2023 marks the 30th anniversary of the recommendation by the Committee on the Rights of the Child to the General Assembly requesting the Secretary-General to undertake a study on the impact of armed conflict on children in January 1993. This is a timely occasion to reinforce the child rights approach to the implementation of the tools of the CAAC mandate through further collaboration with relevant partners including Member States, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and civil society organizations.

2. Objectives

The event will allow participants to discuss how tools to implement the children and armed conflict mandate can be further harnessed to contribute to the protection of children in armed conflict. It will also look at how reintegration programs play a role in preventing relapse into conflict and breaking cycles of violence. It will further be an opportunity to reinforce partnerships and share best practices and lessons learned for a more child rights-based narrative and approach around children affected by armed conflict. Finally, the event will also be an opportunity to encourage all Member States to ratify and fully implement the Convention on



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the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols as well as to endorse and implement the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles without delay.

3. Format

The event will be held hybrid on 14 March 2023 at 3-4pm, in room XXII in the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. It is aimed at all Member States, UN entities, civil society representatives and others who have a stake in the implementation of the children and armed conflict mandate. We require participants, especially attendees who would like to follow the event online, to register **by Monday 13 March** via the following link: <https://warchild.tfaforms.net/46>. Connection details will be shared with confirmed attendees ahead of the event. For any questions, please contact Mr. Romain Consiglio (romain.consiglio@un.org) and Ms. Karine Moreau (karinem@warchild.org.uk).

4. Program

- Moderator: Sophie Bray-Watkins, Youth Advocacy and Participation Adviser, War Child (3 min)
- Vocal recording of children, members of the VoiceMore youth group Masisi, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo (7 min)
- Panel discussion (30 min):
 - Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
 - H.E. Ms. Laura Gil, Vice Minister for Multilateral Affairs of Colombia
 - Ms. Najat Maalla, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children
 - Ms. Mikiko Otani, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child
 - Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism in Syria
- Q&A (15 min)
- Closing remarks: Michel Anglade, Director and UN representative, Save the Children Geneva Advocacy Office (3 min)

A short coffee break will follow