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Children and Armed Conflict

Recommendations to the Security Council

**Monthly Update:
December 2023**

AFGHANISTAN

Hizb-i Islami of Gulbuddin, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-KP), and Taliban forces and affiliated groups, including the Haqqani network, are each listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's (SG) 2023 annual report ([S/2023/363](#)) on children and armed conflict (CAAC) for grave violations against children. In December, the SG is expected to report on UNAMA, pursuant to SCR 2678 (2023). According to the SG's September report on Afghanistan ([S/2023/678](#)), the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Report (CTFMR) verified 393 grave violations against children between April and June 2023. The most prominent violations were killing and maiming, recruitment and use, and the denial of humanitarian access. Children continue to be particularly vulnerable to harm from explosive remnants of war (ERW) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which were the primary cause of civilian casualties during the reporting period, including at least 65 children. **The Security Council should:**

- Demand that all parties in Afghanistan **fully uphold their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights law (IHRL)**;
- Call on the de facto authorities to **abide by Afghanistan's national and international commitments to protect children**, including the definition of a child as any individual under 18 years, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Paris Principles and Commitments, and the Safe Schools Declaration;
- Reiterate its call on the de facto authorities to **swiftly reverse the policies and practices restricting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Afghan women and girls**, including related to their access to education, employment, freedom of movement, and women's full, equal and meaningful participation in public life, pursuant to SCR 2681 (2023);
- Reiterate its **demand that all parties allow full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access consistent with international law for all humanitarian personnel**, including women, for United Nations agencies, international and national non-governmental organizations, and for other humanitarian actors, and to **allow women and girls safe access to humanitarian assistance and basic services**;
- **Ensure allocation of sufficient resources to the UN Country Team to strengthen capacities to deliver on its child protection mandate**, including for monitoring and engagement with parties to end and prevent grave violations, and to **address threats posed by landmines, ERW, and IEDs**.

Japan and the United Arab Emirates are the Security Council penholders on Afghanistan.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)

Fifteen non-State armed groups (NSAGs) are listed in the annexes of the SG's 2023 annual report on CAAC for various grave violations against children, and the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) are listed for rape and other forms of sexual violence. In December, MONUSCO's mandate is up for renewal, per SCR 2666 (2022). According to the SG's September report on MONUSCO ([S/2023/691](#)), between June and August, the UN verified 417 grave violations, that majority of which were cases of recruitment and use (185 children). According to the UN, grave violations against children in the DRC have increased by **41** percent in the first half of 2023 as compared to the same period a year ago. Escalation of violence since October, has led to further displacement, with more than five percent of children in DRC, or **2.8 million** children, reportedly now displaced, and concerns of sexual- and **gender-based violence** against women and girls. **The Security Council should:**

- **Renew MONUSCO's child protection mandate**, ensure that the mission is adequately resourced to fully and effectively implement this mandate, including by preserving the current dedicated child protection capacity;
- Stress the need to **maintain adequate child protection capacity during MONUSCO's transition and to subsequently increase child protection capacity in the UN Country Team**, including capacity for monitoring and reporting on grave violations per SCR 1612 (2005) and subsequent resolutions on CAAC and for continuing to strengthen the capacities of Government Forces and other State actors to protect the rights of conflict-affected children; and **ensure drawdown timelines allow appropriate time for planning, resource allocation, and capacity building**;
- Urge all armed groups to **immediately cease recruiting and using children, release those within their**

Situations involving parties listed for grave violations against children:

Afghanistan
Burkina Faso
Central African Republic
Colombia
Democratic Republic of Congo
Iraq
Lake Chad Basin
Mali
Myanmar
Philippines
Somalia
South Sudan
Sudan
Syria
Ukraine
Yemen

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WATCH LIST ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

DRC (cont'd)

- ranks, uphold their obligations under IHL and IHRL, and if they have not yet done so, engage with the UN to develop and implement concrete commitments, including action plans where relevant, to end and prevent grave violations against children;**
- Encourage the Government to **continue its cooperation with the UN on screening and age verification to prevent the recruitment of children**, call for age verification to be implemented at the territorial level, and encourage continued efforts to **hold perpetrators of grave violations accountable**;
 - Call on all parties to take immediate and specific steps to end and prevent rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, including by ensuring that survivors have access to comprehensive, gender-sensitive, and age-appropriate response and protection, and call on the Government to **accelerate efforts to implement aspects of its 2012 action plan relating to sexual violence** and the Joint Communiqué signed with the UN to fight sexual violence in conflict;
 - Call for the **swift and full implementation of the recommendations of the Security Council Working Group on CAAC** (SCWG-CAAC) elaborated in its eighth [conclusions](#) on DRC.

France is the Security Council penholder on DRC.

Recommendations to the Working Group

The Working Group continues to negotiate conclusions in response to the following reports of the SG on children and armed conflict: Myanmar ([S/2020/1243](#)), Syria ([S/2021/398](#)), Afghanistan ([S/2021/662](#)), and Somalia ([S/2022/397](#)). For targeted recommendations, see Watchlist's Monthly CAAC updates from [February 2021](#), [June 2021](#), [September 2021](#), and [July 2022](#), respectively.

SYRIA

In November, the Working Group received the SG's fourth report on the situation of CAAC in Syria ([S/2023/805](#)), covering July 2020 to September 2022. The CTFMR verified 5,219 grave violations against children, representing a 10 percent increase in verified violations as compared to the previous reporting period. Recruitment and use was the most prevalent verified violation – which more than doubled compared to the previous report. The UN verified 910 children had been detained for their or their family members' alleged association with armed forces or armed groups, while around 31,000 children are among the 55,500 persons who continue to be deprived of liberty in Hawl and Raj camps in NE Syria. Child casualties (1,891 children) also increased by 30 percent compared to the previous report, and explosive ordnance was the primary cause, followed by ground-based shelling, and IEDs. Rape and other forms of sexual violence continued to be underreported. While attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access decreased, the military use of schools and hospitals increased. Abduction more than doubled – the vast majority of cases were attributed to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham. **The Working Group should:**

- **Strongly condemning the scale, severity, and recurrence of grave violations** against children in Syria, **demand that all parties uphold their obligations under IHL and IHRL**, and call for immediate and concrete steps to hold all perpetrators accountable;
- Call on all parties to **immediately end all recruitment and use of children**, release all children from their ranks; urge all listed parties, including Syrian Government forces, to **develop, sign, and implement action plans to end and prevent all grave violations** against children, and call on the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to promptly and fully implement their action plan;
- **Remind all parties that children associated with armed groups should be treated primarily as victims**, including those children actually or allegedly associated with groups designated as terrorist and those children who may have committed crimes; their reintegration should be prioritized in line with international juvenile justice standards; and detention of children should only be used as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time;
- Urge Member States to **facilitate the return of their nationals, including children of their nationals**, held for their or their family members' actual or alleged association with ISIL, following individual, rights-based needs assessments, provide reintegration support in line with international law and standards, prioritizing the child's best interests, and prevent children from becoming stateless;
- Call on all parties to **immediately cease attacks or threats against schools, medical facilities and transport, their personnel, and other civilian objects**; and urge the Government Syria to take concrete measures to mitigate and avoid the military use of schools and hospitals, and to ensure attacks on these institutions and their personnel are investigated and those responsible duly prosecuted.

Presidency of the Security Council for December: Ecuador

Party to Geneva Conventions I-IV, Additional Protocols I-III, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Rome Statute of the ICC, and ILO Convention 182. Has endorsed the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Safe Schools Declaration, and the Vancouver Principles.

NGO RESOURCES

Save the Children, [Sudan: About 7,600 Children Fleeing Homes Daily in World's Largest Child Displacement Crisis](#), November 28, 2023

Human Rights Watch, et al., [On International Children's Day: Children Must Be Included in Peace Talks](#), November 20, 2023

[Letter to Secretary-General Guterres on the Protection of Children in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#), November 16, 2023

Save the Children, [Born into War: About 15,000 Babies Expected to Be Born into Gaza by the End of 2023](#), November 14, 2023

Human Rights Watch, ["Tanks on the Playground": Attacks on Schools and Military Use of Schools in Ukraine](#), November 9, 2023

Humanity & Inclusion, [Factsheet: Impact of Explosive Weapons in Gaza](#), November 9, 2023