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

Contribution of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to the Universal Periodic Review of Ethiopia, 2024

The information provided has been gathered by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in Ethiopia. It has been collected and verified by the United Nations based on the guidelines of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children (MRM), established through Security Council resolution 1612 (2005).

<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>

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Input for the Universal Periodic Review of Ethiopia

Office of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

April 2024

Background

Ethiopia was added as a situation of concern under the children and armed conflict mandate in 2022, as per the report of the United Nations Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/76/871-S/2022/493) issued on 23 June 2022 and covering the year 2021. As noted in the document, the Secretary-General decided to include the situation in his next report “(i)n view of the gravity of clashes in 2021 between the Ethiopian National Defence and Federal Police Forces, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front and other parties, including militias and regional forces, and the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions, and the denial of humanitarian access.”

Following the decision of the Secretary-General, the United Nations established a Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in Ethiopia to facilitate the monitoring and reporting on grave violations against conflict-affected children and the engagement with parties to conflict on ending and preventing such violations.

In 2022, the United Nations verified 270 grave violations against 187 children (93 boys, 39 girls, 55 sex unknown), between the ages of 2 months and 17 years, including 1 boy who was a victim of multiple violations. These included 5 children recruited and used (4 boys, 1 girl), 173 children killed (66) and maimed (107) (85 boys, 33 girls, 55 sex unknown), 5 girls who were subjected to sexual violence, 77 attacks on schools, the abduction of 5 boys, and 5 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access to children. In addition, the military use of 2 schools and 1 hospital were verified. The killing and maiming of children, especially due to explosive remnants of war, and attacks on schools were of particular concern. Most grave violations in 2022 were attributed to unidentified perpetrators (147), including violations caused by explosive remnants of war (58), the Gumuz People’s Democratic Movement (73), Eritrean Defense Forces (16), Tigrayan Forces (11), and the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (10).

Grave violations in 2023, which will be documented in the next report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict to be issued in June 2024, were verified at similarly high levels.

The information verified by the United Nations does not represent the full scale of violations against children in Ethiopia due to a variety of factors, especially the lack of access to areas affected by conflict and space for child rights monitors to operate. The actual level of grave violations is therefore believed to be much higher, with hundreds of reported violations from 2023 remaining under verification in 2024.

The signing of the *Agreement for Lasting Peace Through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities* in November 2022 marked a significant development towards peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia, two years after the eruption of conflict in the country. A National Rehabilitation Commission was subsequently established, and steps towards the implementation of a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process were taken.

The situation, however, remains complex and is marked by prevailing conflict in several parts of the country involving various parties with intricate alliances and along ethnic lines. The use of heavy

artillery, drone strikes, urban combat, and armed confrontations involving Government, regional forces and armed groups have resulted in significant civilian casualties, including children, and the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure. The escalation of conflict in the Amhara region was of particular concern in 2023. Accountability for grave violations remains largely absent, and humanitarian access to conflict-affected regions severely limited. Child protection programmes, including for reintegration support and victim assistance benefitting conflict-affected children, remain severely underfunded.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in June 2023, conducted a visit to Ethiopia during which child protection and prevention measures were discussed with the Federal Government and it was agreed to formalize cooperation through an exchange of letters.

Recommendations

- **Fully implement** the *Agreement for Lasting Peace Through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities* and **take all necessary actions** to address ongoing conflict in several regions of Ethiopia.
- **Enhance collaboration** with the United Nations on the protection of conflict-affected children, including on the implementation of protection and prevention measures recommended by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict communicated through an exchange of letters following her visit to Ethiopia in 2023.
- **Ensure** that the work of the National Rehabilitation Commission and the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process prioritize the rights and needs of children, in particular children associated with armed forces and groups. **Provide** immediate assistance to children, including through comprehensive and sustainable reintegration programmes. **Facilitate** access to encampments to enable the identification, transfer, and reintegration of children.
- **Urgently** facilitate mine action programmes in conflict-affected areas, in particular mine risk education benefitting children and demining of contaminated areas, especially around schools and other locations frequented by children. **Endorse and implement** the Safe Schools Declaration.
- **Comply** with applicable international humanitarian and human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, **adopt** concrete measures to end and prevent grave violations, unconditionally release associated children, protect schools and hospitals from military use and attack, and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded access to areas where children may be present. **Endorse** and fully **implement** the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles) and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (the Vancouver Principles).