



Permanent Mission
of Austria to the
United Nations in New York



United Nations Security Council Arria-Formula Meeting
Red Hand Day 2026: Safe Education to Prevent the Recruitment and
Use of Children in Armed Conflict
New York, Monday 23 February 2026, UN Conference Room 4 (15:00 – 18:00)

Overall Objective

Panama and co-sponsors convene a United Nations Security Council Arria-Formula Meeting in connection with Red Hand Day, to highlight that education is a right and that safe, inclusive, and continuous education is a strategic tool to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, and serves as a pillar for the reintegration of those affected by armed conflict.

Background

- Red Hand Day (*International Day Against the Use of Child Soldiers*) has been observed every 12 February since 2002, marking the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which raises standards to prohibit the recruitment and use of persons under 18 years of age and strengthens protection obligations.
- The commemoration also serves as a reminder of the broader international legal framework protecting children affected by armed conflict, including their right to education and the protection of schools as civilian objects under International Humanitarian Law, as reflected in the Geneva Conventions, their Additional Protocols, and customary international law. These protections are further reinforced by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1998 (2011) on attacks against schools and General Assembly resolution 64/290 on the right to education in emergency situations.

Context

Available evidence confirms a deterioration of the protective environment for children in conflict settings, with direct impact on access to education:

- The Secretary-General's Annual Report on CAAC (*covering 2024, published in 2025*) recorded 41,370 verified grave violations, describing trends of intensification and expansion of patterns of violence against children.
- In 2024, a 44 per cent increase in attacks against schools and protected personnel was recorded (*alongside a 52 per cent increase in the denial of humanitarian access*), interrupting

or disrupting education and increasing vulnerabilities linked to recruitment and use and other grave violations.

- In parallel, the international community has warned about the scale of attacks on education. The United Nations reported approximately 6,000 attacks against students, educators, and educational institutions between 2022 and 2023, underscoring both the vulnerability of education in conflict settings and the urgent need to strengthen its protection.

In this context, an Arria-Formula meeting focused on safe education would provide an opportunity to address both the protection of education from attack and its preventive role in conflict-affected contexts. The meeting would: (i) highlight the education–protection–peace and security nexus; (ii) examine concrete measures to safeguard schools, students, and teachers from violence; and (iii) discuss how safe, inclusive, and continuous education can contribute to preventing recruitment and supporting sustainable reintegration, thereby reducing the risk of re-recruitment.

Expected Outcomes

- Create an inclusive space to bring this issue to the forefront of United Nations discussions, enabling the active participation of the wider membership and providing a platform for a broad range of relevant stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to the dialogue.
- Reflect policy recommendations for the Security Council, including possible mandate language, strengthened follow-up by the WGCAAC, and enhanced coherence with the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), ensuring that Council action is informed by verified data, consistent with established monitoring frameworks, and contributes to accountability for grave violations against children.

Guiding questions

- How do attacks on education and school insecurity amplify vulnerabilities and push children into higher-risk environments?
- Which educational interventions and best practices have shown the greatest impact in reducing recruitment risk and preventing re-recruitment (*including in displacement contexts*)?
- How can schools and teachers be protected without generating adverse effects, such as the militarization of the school environment, while also considering the role of education as a preventive tool against violence, recruitment, and future conflict?
- What components are essential for the educational reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or groups? How can teachers and educators best support the process of their (*or children's*) reintegration and what tools and differentiated approaches (*e.g.*

gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive programmes, responses in urban and digital environments, responses in displacement) do they require for doing so?

- How can specific approaches to survivors of gender-based violence be incorporated, ensuring confidentiality and non-revictimization?
- How are girls affected by the denial of their access to education?
- How can Member States review the implementation of GA resolution A/RES/64/290 to ensure its continued importance?

Programme

1. Opening remarks, H.E. Eloy Alfaro de Alba, Permanent Representative of Panama to the United Nations.
2. Briefers:
 - Ms. Vanessa Frazier, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.
 - Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF.
 - Mr. Eliot Minchenberg, Director of UNESCO Liaison Office in New York & Representative to the UN.
 - Mr. Johnny Cesar Etienne, Save the Children Haiti's Operations Director (CSO).
3. Interventions by Security Council Members, Co-Sponsors and Members States.
4. Closing remarks, H.E. Ricardo Moscoso, Deputy Permanent Representative of Panama to the United Nations.

Format

Statements by United Nations Security Council members, co-sponsors and other United Nations Member States, as time permits. Interventions are suggested to be limited to three (3) minutes.

To request further information and to subscribe to the list of speakers, please contact the Permanent Mission of Panama to the United Nations at email mcaballero@mire.gob.pa .

The meeting will be held in all official United Nations languages and is intended to be webcast on UN WebTV.