

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 8 June 2021 from the Permanent Representative of
Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

In its capacity as President of the United Nations Security Council for June 2021, Estonia intends to hold a high-level open debate on the theme “Children and Armed Conflict” on Monday, 28 June 2021, at 8 a.m. (Eastern Daylight Time).

In order to guide discussions on this topic, Estonia has prepared the attached concept note (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Sven Jürgenson**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 8 June 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council open debate on the theme “Children and Armed Conflict”, to be held on 28 June 2021

I. Introduction

1. During its presidency of the Security Council Estonia will organize a high-level open debate on children and armed conflict on 28 June 2021.
2. The open debate will consider the findings of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/75/873–S/2021/437). It will also be an opportunity to focus on issues related to the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda, including the mid-term and long-term impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the protection of children in conflict, as well as the importance of a gender perspective in child protection, considering the specific risks faced by girls in armed conflict.
3. Equally, it will allow for the consideration of ways to strengthen the mainstreaming of child protection in the Council’s agenda and by the United Nations and its Member States in all relevant activities, including conflict mediation and prevention. This objective is also linked to ensuring sufficient United Nations child protection capacity. The protection of children in armed conflict is underpinned by compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and supported by international initiatives alongside further prevention measures at the national or regional levels.

II. Background

4. In 2020, the situation of children in armed conflict was marked by a sustained high number of grave violations. Verified cases of abduction and sexual violence against children were of particular concern. Abduction continued to occur in conjunction with other violations, such as the recruitment and use of children and sexual violence. Children continued to be denied humanitarian access. Attacks on schools endangered children and infringed upon their right to education. The protection of children was strongly affected by the escalation of conflict, armed clashes and disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Children were also affected by the spillover of conflict across borders and intercommunal violence.
5. The year 2021 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict agenda, including the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, by the General Assembly. This anniversary provides an opportunity to reflect on the advances made in the protection of children in armed conflict and to explore ways to further strengthen the efforts in this regard.

Impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic on the protection of children in armed conflict

6. The pandemic exacerbated the dire situation of children affected by armed conflict. It increased children’s vulnerability to grave violations and posed challenges to the monitoring and verification of grave violations and child protection responses.

It also underlined the importance of protecting schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure, as well as protected personnel, and ensuring unimpeded humanitarian access. The pandemic has also had a strong impact on the functioning of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in armed conflict, with technologies and existing child protection networks critically supporting the capacity of United Nations teams on the ground to collect information on grave violations and to engage with parties to conflict despite access and movement restrictions. The COVID-19 pandemic is also likely to have a long-term impact on the socioeconomic situation of the communities affected by conflict, which can lead to negative coping mechanisms and to an increase in recruitment and use and other forms of exploitation owing to a lack of accessible alternatives. In this regard, the implementation of the call for a global ceasefire by the Secretary-General and the implementation of Security Council resolutions [2532 \(2020\)](#) and [2565 \(2021\)](#) remains of key importance.

Gender perspective in child protection

7. Girls and boys each face particular risks in conflict, requiring gender-sensitive approaches and responses. Girls – especially refugee, internally displaced, migrant and indigenous girls and girls with disabilities – can be particularly vulnerable to certain violations. Sexual violence, which overwhelmingly affects girls, remains vastly underreported owing to stigmatization, social and cultural norms, the absence of services and possibilities for redress and safety concerns. There are growing concerns linked to the abduction of children, which often, especially for girls, is followed by sexual violence. With increased attacks on schools and abduction of children from schools and along school routes, girls are usually the first to drop out of school and find it more difficult to return. These specific risks have underlined the importance of comprehensive services tailored to the needs of girls, as well as of gender-sensitive reintegration activities.

Mainstreaming child protection in the work of the Security Council as well as into all relevant activities at the national, regional and international levels

8. The protection of children is important for all situations under the consideration of the Security Council. Ensuring that child protection considerations, with the aim of ending and preventing grave violations against children, inform all activities linked to peace and security contributes to breaking the cycles of violence. Mainstreaming child protection also entails considering child protection concerns in all phases of the conflict cycle from early warning to post-conflict recovery, including in peace, security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes. Cooperation with all stakeholders, including community networks and civil society organizations on the ground, support these efforts.

Role of sufficient United Nations child protection capacity

9. The ability of the United Nations to monitor and prevent grave violations against children and to deliver on their mandated child protection tasks is dependent on ensuring, sustaining and strengthening sufficient child protection capacity, including in United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions and in the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The risks posed by gaps in child protection capacity are heightened in the context of mission transitions and drawdowns with a need for careful planning to ensure that child protection activities are transferred without disruption. Sufficient child protection capacity in situations of armed conflict can also be key for resilience of child protection activities during crises, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Compliance with international law, including international humanitarian and international human rights law, in order to prevent and end grave violations against children

10. International instruments, including those related to international humanitarian law, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, have played an important role in preventing and ending grave violations against children. Efforts by Member States in this regard have also been accompanied by various international initiatives, e.g. Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the Safe Schools Declaration, as well as by national accountability mechanisms for grave violations alongside prevention measures such as national legislation, early warning analysis, planning and tools, establishment of dedicated child protection focal points and awareness-raising and training, which are equally key in ensuring that the grave violations are no longer perpetrated.

III. Issues for consideration

11. During the session, Member States may wish to address the following questions in their statements:

Impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic

(a) How to address the risks added by the COVID-19 pandemic for children in armed conflict? How can the long-term negative effects of the pandemic on children and on the monitoring and reporting efforts be prevented?

(b) How can practical solutions, including through the use of information and technology, support the documentation and verification of grave violations during a pandemic or other similar emergency?

Gender perspective in child protection

(c) What are the specific risks faced by girls affected by armed conflict? How to ensure their right to education and health and protection from gender-based violence, including in the context of COVID-19?

(d) How can the analysis of the impact of armed conflict on girls be better incorporated in the work of the monitoring and reporting mechanism at the field level? How can partnership with other United Nations and non-United Nations entities support the gender analysis of grave violations against children?

(e) How to better address the specific impact that grave violations have on girls and take into account their specific needs in providing assistance to victims of grave violations?

Mainstreaming child protection

(f) How to ensure that child protection is systematically mainstreamed in the work of the Security Council as well as all relevant activities at national, regional and international level?

(g) What added value can regional and subregional organizations have in mainstreaming child protection in their work and activities?

Child protection capacity

(h) What steps are necessary to ensure sufficient child protection capacity in situations of armed conflict, including in peacekeeping operations and special political missions?

(i) How can Member States support training and development of child protection capacity in their capacity as troop-contributing countries within their own armed and security forces?

Accountability and prevention

(j) How can the international community support national accountability efforts for grave violations against children as well as the development of child-sensitive national investigation and judicial systems?

(k) How can different actors active in mediation, ceasefire negotiations and peace talks ensure that child protection concerns are effectively included in these initiatives, using the Guidance issued in 2020?

(l) How can child protection be integrated as a part of early warning systems and be an integral part of prevention efforts? What practical measures can be taken at the national level to ensure violations against children are prevented?

IV. Format and briefers

12. The open debate will take place on Monday, 28 June 2021 at 8.00 a.m. (Eastern Daylight Time) via open videoconference. The meeting will be chaired by the President of the Republic of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid.

13. The following speakers will address the Security Council:

- The Secretary-General
- The Executive Director of UNICEF
- Advocate for Children Affected by War with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Peace and Reconciliation, Forest Whitaker
- A civil society representative (to be confirmed)

14. All Member States of the United Nations that are not members of the Security Council and permanent observers to the United Nations are invited to participate by submitting written statements through the e-Speakers module on the e-deleGATE+ platform. Member States should transmit their statements in Microsoft Word format with a cover letter signed by the Permanent Representative or Chargé d'affaires and addressed to the President of the Security Council no later than the date of the meeting, 28 June 2021. The statements will be published as part of an official compilation document containing the interventions submitted in connection with this open videoconference.