



**MISSION PERMANENTE  
DE LA FRANCE AUPRÈS  
DES NATIONS UNIES  
À NEW YORK**

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**CONCEPT NOTE**

**Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict  
23 June 2020 at 3pm via videoconference**

In the context of its presidency of the Security Council, France will organize an open debate on Children and Armed Conflict on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. The open debate will focus on the findings of the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict. It will also be an opportunity to reflect on the ways and means of implementation of the agenda, 15 years after the adoption of landmark resolution 1612 (2005) which established the UN-led Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and the Working group of the Security Council on CAAC. Furthermore, the open debate aims at highlighting the importance of education and vocational training, as important means to prevent the six grave violations against children in armed conflict and as central aspects of comprehensive reintegration packages for children associated with armed forces or groups.

**A UN success story since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005)**

Over the last 15 years, the mechanism as envisioned in resolution 1612 has been a true UN “success story”, delivering tangible and life-saving results in ending and preventing violations against children in situations of armed conflict. Information collected led to the signature of 32 action plans and most importantly: the MRM and related advocacy efforts have contributed to the release of more than 155,000 children from parties to conflict and the removal from the annual report's annexes (the “list”) of 12 armed forces and groups through action plan completion. As for the Working Group, successively chaired by France, Mexico, Germany, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Sweden and now Belgium, it has adopted over 60 country-specific recommendations on children and armed conflict and carried out 7 country-visits, leading to concrete and sustainable progress on the ground. The Working Group has also provided a much-needed direct link between the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the Security Council.

2020 also marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, ratified by 170 countries. These normative frameworks have been further strengthened by the Paris Principles and Guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups (2007), and through political commitments such as the Safe Schools Declaration (2015), the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (2017), and other documents highlighting the importance of child protection for a range of related issues.

Nevertheless, despite the undeniable success of the tools put in place, hundreds of thousands of children continue to be affected by armed conflict. The Secretary-General's report highlights over 25,000 verified grave violations against children in 19 situations, more than half committed by non-State actors. Education in particular has been severely affected, with reports of nearly 500 schools attacked, and thousands of children out of schools. Accountability of all parties to conflict for these grave violations remains paramount.

## **Empowering children through education, skills and livelihood opportunities**

Access to safe, quality education is one of the critical needs of children affected by armed conflict. It is fundamental both to children's well-being and to the fulfilment of their most basic rights. It is also a critical component of short-, medium- and long-term reintegration programming for children formerly associated with armed forces or groups and their communities. In addition, access to education can support the prevention of the recruitment and use of children when coupled with access to livelihood opportunities for families and communities.

More than ever, education, a central goal of the Sustainable Development Agenda, must be prioritized. For a child in conflict, schools and vocational training centers provide access to a safe space to learn and a protective environment that reduces risks of sexual or domestic violence, forced marriage and recruitment by parties to conflict, among others. In many contexts, extreme poverty and very limited natural resources are key factors that influence recruitment and use of children. Quality education can make a positive, transformative contribution to conflict-affected societies, and operates as a counterweight to the effects of conflict and those who seek to promote it, as well as prepare the ground for children to restart their lives when the conflict has ended.

Unfortunately, education continues to be under attack in conflict situations, schools are destroyed or closed, teachers are threatened or killed, and children are denied access to education. Between April 2017 and December 2019, the Sahel for instance witnessed a six-fold increase in school closures due to violence. More than 3,300 schools were closed as of December 2019, affecting almost 650,000 children and more than 16,000 teachers. Attacks on schools and education personnel produce a long-term decline in access to education, weaken education systems, often affecting girls more significantly, and affect a country's development potential as a whole. With the COVID-19 pandemic, an already dire situation is being made even worse for this vulnerable population.

It is critical that parties to conflict protect education in armed conflict and stop attacking schools, education personnel, and students, and that we all make efforts to ensure that quality education for all children affected by armed conflict is prioritized.

For these reasons, education and vocational training are central aspects of reintegration programmes as reaffirmed on multiple occasions by the Global Coalition on Reintegration of Child Soldiers launched in 2018 by the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, together with UNICEF and other key actors.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this forum, three briefing papers were researched and finalised in 2019 on: 1) *Gaps and Needs of Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups' Successful Reintegration*, 2) *Reframing Child Reintegration: From the Humanitarian Action to Development, Peacebuilding, Prevention and Beyond*, and 3) *Financing Support for Child Reintegration*. A summary of the papers can be found at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/global-coalition-for-reintegration-of-child-soldiers/>.

## Issues for consideration

In the context of the open debate, Member States will be invited to consider the following non-exhaustive list of questions:

- **Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism:** How can we ensure that the MRM is adequately supported and financed to guarantee the ‘systematic gathering of accurate, timely, objective and reliable information’ as called for in RES 1612? How can member States and the Security Council create the space necessary for the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting to engage with parties to the conflict on the protection of children? How can we ensure that Child Protection Advisors within peace operations and UNICEF are given the appropriate resources and fully capacitated to carry out their work ?
- **Security Council Working Group on CAAC:** How can the work of the Working Group be further strengthened? How can members of the Council ensure that the recommendations are streamlined throughout the work of the Council and ensure their follow-up?
- **Education and vocational training:** How can we better integrate the specific needs of girls and boys in armed conflict situations into the implementation of SDG4 and 16? How can we ensure that children affected by conflict access safe, quality education, also taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic and its future repercussions?
- **Reintegration of children in their families and communities:** How can we ensure that Member States, the UN, financial institutions, civil society and the private sector work together to reduce recruitment and use of children? How can the Global Coalition for Reintegration mobilize all relevant actors so that released children receive the specialized support they need? How can we better promote shared responsibility of multiple stakeholders across sectors and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus?
- **Further engagement and commitments:** Can your Government ratify Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, endorse the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles, if not yet done so?

## Format and briefers

The open debate will take place on Tuesday, 23 June at 15.00 via Open VTC. Member States and Observers are invited to submit written statement of ≈500 words to SCAD ([dppa-scdocs@un.org](mailto:dppa-scdocs@un.org)). Statements sent by June 24<sup>th</sup> will be included in a compilation document.

The following speakers will brief the Security Council:

*Ms Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict*

*Ms Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF*

*Civil society briefer (TBC)*