

# BELGIUM'S CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL WORKING GROUP ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT (2019-2020)

Annelies Verstichel<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

## ABSTRACT:

This article looks at the objectives of Belgium's chairmanship of the United Nations' (UN) Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (SCWG-CAAC) and to what extent they were achieved. It furthermore analyzes the SCWG-CAAC conclusions, their structure, and the traditionally challenging points in the negotiations. Finally, the article concludes by reflecting on gaps and opportunities moving forward.

## INTRODUCTION

Children's rights in general and the UN's CAAC Agenda in particular have been a foreign policy priority of the Government of Belgium for decades, both in financial and policy terms. Its Head of State at the time, King Baudouin, addressed the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on the occasion of the entry into force of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990. Thirty years later, King Philippe addressed the UN Security Council (UNSC) during a special session dedicated to CAAC during Belgium's chairmanship of the Security Council in February 2020. As a UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Advocate, H.M. Queen Mathilde, Queen of the Belgians, is a steady champion of the importance of reintegration and mental health support for children affected by armed conflict and has spoken at numerous events at the UN in recent years. Belgium has been and remains an important donor of UNICEF and its CAAC-related work. It also has financed nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working on CAAC, such as the international network-based organization Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict with a Secretariat in New York, and specific projects related to CAAC, such as MONUSCO's<sup>1</sup> project on accountability for the recruitment of children, and funding for the Junior Professional Officer posts (JPOs) working on CAAC. As a result, awarding Belgium the chairmanship of the SCWG-CAAC was the logical result of this commitment and a unanimous decision by the UNSC members when distributing chairmanships of subsidiary bodies to the incoming non-permanent UNSC members at the end of 2018.

## BELGIUM'S CHAIRMANSHIP OBJECTIVES

When Belgium took up its chairmanship of the SCWG-CAAC, this subsidiary body of the UNSC as well as the CAAC mandate was well established over time. Twelve UNSC resolutions on CAAC had been adopted at the time, the last one being Resolution 2427 (2018) negotiated and adopted under its predecessor, Sweden.<sup>2</sup> The year 2020 marked the 15th anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1612 (2005) that established the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and the SCWG-CAAC.<sup>3</sup> It also marked the 20th anniversary of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Building on the work of its predecessor Sweden, Belgium decided

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1 The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO).

2 Since the end of Belgium's chairmanship, a new UNSC resolution on CAAC was adopted, UNSC Resolution 2601 (2021), on October 29, 2021, co-drafted by Norway and Niger, relating to attacks against schools and educational facilities.

3 This anniversary was marked by a Security Council press statement 14224, adopted at the annual open debate on CAAC of the Security Council, on 23 June 2020, under the French Presidency of the SC: "Press statement on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict", <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14224.doc.htm>.

not to aim for adopting a new UNSC resolution on CAAC, but instead to focus on improved implementation of this strong SC mandate during its term.

Belgium was not against adopting a new resolution per se – it was open to extend the mandate through a new resolution, in case of clear need – but did not want to seek visibility with a new UNSC resolution if there was no value added. In the year before Belgium entered the UNSC, an initiative was taken to look into making the only CAAC violation that is not yet a trigger for listing parties to the annexes of the UN Secretary-General’s (UNSG) annual reports on CAAC for committing grave violations, namely the denial of humanitarian access, a trigger. However, after careful consideration on part of the humanitarian actors who resisted the initiative fearing the impact it would have on the perception of impartiality of their work on the ground, this initiative was abandoned. Nevertheless, during Belgium’s chairmanship of the SCWG-CAAC, the UNSC adopted two Presidential Statements, as well as one press statement, which furthered the CAAC mandate.

Belgium set itself the following objectives as Chair of the SCWG-CAAC: 1) reducing the length of reporting cycles of country-specific reports and as a result adopting country-specific conclusions more frequently and in a timely manner; 2) improving the follow up of the implementation of conclusions; 3) better mainstreaming the CAAC agenda throughout the work of the Security Council; 4) continuing the practice of field visits; and 5) inclusiveness, engagement with and transparency towards the different stakeholders of the CAAC agenda, including civil society. As thematic and geographical priorities, Belgium wanted to focus on the importance of reintegration of children affected by armed conflict, the special needs of girls, mediation, and the Sahel region.

These objectives were inspired by the research done by the NGO network Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict in its publication, “Working Methods 2006-2016: Strengthening the Impact of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict”<sup>4</sup> on the implementation of the SCWG-CAAC toolkit, as elaborated under the French Presidency of the SCWG-CAAC.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, “Working Methods 2006-2016: Strengthening the Impact of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict”, January 2018, <https://watchlist.org/publications/working-methods-2006-2016-strengthening-impact-security-council-working-group-children-armed-conflict/>.

5 See Annex to the letter dated 8 September 2006 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council: “Options for possible actions by the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict (“toolkit)”, 16 May 2008, S/A.51/2007/2, <https://undocs.org/S/AC.51/2007/2>.

### *Timely Conclusions*

A key tool of the SCWG-CAAC are its country-specific conclusions, containing recommendations based on the findings of the country-specific reports of the UNSG on the situation of children affected by the armed conflict. These reports are drafted when parties to conflict are listed in the annexes of the UNSG's annual reports on CAAC for committing grave violations.<sup>6</sup>

By the time Belgium took up the chairmanship of the SCWG-CAAC, the reporting cycles of the country-specific reports had become increasingly long. The second report of the UNSG on Syria (S/2018/969) covered almost five years (from 16 November 2013 to 30 June 2018), and the second report on Yemen (S/2019/453) covered more than five years (from 1 April 2013 to 31 December 2018). The fourth and fifth reports on Myanmar (S/2017/1099 and S/2018/956) together covered more than five years as well (from 1 February 2013 to 31 August 2018).<sup>7</sup> As a result, it was deemed that conclusions relating to events which took place more than five years ago were at risk of losing their relevance.

Belgium agreed with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC), Ms. Virginia Gamba, to produce country-specific reports more frequently and developed a yearly work plan with her in order to achieve this. Belgium wanted to deal with all the 14 countries on the CAAC agenda with parties listed for grave violations against children during its two-year mandate as Chair of the SCWG-CAAC. This would effectively reduce the reporting cycle of country-specific reports the Office would have to produce to two years. As a result, country-specific conclusions could be adopted by the SCWG-CAAC more frequently, and the recommendations therein would be more timely and more relevant, lending themselves to meaningful UNSC action.

Thanks to the increased output of the Office of the SRSG-CAAC and everyone involved in the MRM, Belgium achieved its objective and adopted 13 conclusions (on Syria, Myanmar, Yemen, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Iraq, Colombia, Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Nigeria, and the Philippines) and drafted the conclusions based on the UNSG's third report on the situation of children and armed conflict in South Sudan (S/2020/1205), which was published in December 2020. These have since been adopted under its successor Norway in March 2021.

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6 For an overview of all reports and conclusions, see <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/subsidiary/wgcaac/sgreports> or <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/virtual-library/>.

7 The UNSG's fifth report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Myanmar (S/2018/956) (covering the period from 1 July 2017 to 31 August 2018) constituted an update of the fourth report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Myanmar (S/2017/1099) (covering the period from 1 February 2013 to 30 June 2017) following a request by the Swedish Chair of the SCWG-CAAC in order to include the atrocities which took place from August 2017 onwards.

Shorter reporting cycles make it easier for the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs) and the Office of the SRSG-CAAC to draft new reports and verify the violations therein. The UNSG's sixth report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Myanmar (S/2020/1243), for example, was published in December 2020, covering a reporting period of less than two years (from 1 September 2018 to 30 June 2020). The UNSG's third report on Syria (S/2021/398), published in April 2021, covered exactly two years (from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2020).

Belgium only managed to achieve this goal thanks to the commitment of SRSG-CAAC Gamba and her Office in speedy report production, as well as everyone involved in the MRM at the field and headquarters level, including the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), noting in particular the CTFMRs on the ground.

### *Implementation of Conclusions*

Another objective of Belgium's chairmanship was to improve the follow up of the implementation of country-specific conclusions. It did so among others by introducing a new practice: regular video-teleconferences with the CTFMRs on the ground. This gave the opportunity to the co-chairs of the CTFMRs (the local UNICEF Representative on the one hand, and the Deputy SRSG of the UN peacekeeping operation (if there was one) or the UN Resident Coordinator on the other hand) and the Child Protection Advisors (CPAs) to present their work and their engagement with the country concerned, allowing them the opportunity to interact directly with the UNSC members in New York. Often these video-teleconferences were timed ahead of the renewal of the mandate of a UN peace operation or special political mission. The video-teleconferences allowed for reviewing the CAAC-related aspects of the mandate, or the need for reinforcing or reducing them. It also allowed for reviewing the CPA capacity of UN peace operations and for identifying the need to reinforce or safeguard this capacity.

Originally, the idea was to organize video-teleconferences on a country-specific situation in the year that no conclusions were adopted about a given country on the CAAC agenda. This would have allowed the SCWG-CAAC to deal with all the 14 country situations with listed parties at least once a year (either through the adoption of conclusions or monitoring the follow up of these). However, this proved to be quite ambitious.

Video-teleconferences were organized with the CTFMRs of Afghanistan, Colombia, the DRC, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Philippines, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Yemen. No conclusions were adopted on Libya, a situation of concern with no listed parties. However, a video-teleconferences with the CTFMR of Libya allowed the SC members to monitor the situation outside the process of adopting conclusions. Via CAAC workshops organized by its embassies in e.g., Bamako, Bogota and Kinshasa, Belgium also followed up on conclusions locally in the

countries concerned. The fact that Belgium is a member and, in some cases, co-founder of local Groups of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict contributes to its ability to be active on the CAAC agenda worldwide.

Global Horizontal Notes on children and armed conflict, which are quarterly updates of the situation in all the countries of concern and are presented by UNICEF to the SCWG-CAAC, are another way to closely monitor the situation, including on the implementation of conclusions. At the initiative of Sweden, Belgium's predecessor as Chair of the SCWG-CAAC, a new format of the Global Horizontal Note was introduced in 2019, in order to improve the focus on early warning, prevention and the implementation of measures to better protect children. In addition, the objective was to make these Global Horizontal Notes more user-friendly, including the use of visuals such as graphs during the presentations. In 2020, a section on COVID-19 was added. The quarterly discussion of these Global Horizontal Notes in the SCWG-CAAC allowed for reviewing the follow up of conclusions on specific country situations and for discerning indicators of worsening situations in the framework of an early warning and prevention perspective.

### *Mainstreaming the CAAC Agenda*

From its very first resolution on CAAC, the Security Council formally acknowledged that the protection of children affected by armed conflict is a fundamental peace and security concern. As a result, this topic cannot be viewed as a niche subject confined to the SCWG-CAAC or to the annual open debate on CAAC in the UNSC. Rather, the issue requires attention across all the geographical and thematic discussions taking place in the UNSC and all its other subsidiary bodies.

Belgium tried to mainstream the CAAC agenda throughout the work of the UNSC in several ways. Belgium started a new practice of convening monthly meetings to preview the Programme of Work of the UNSC, presented by the incoming president of the respective month. This allowed for identifying CAAC-related opportunities and needs related to the agenda topics of the UNSC, both geographical ones (e.g., mandate renewals of peace operations and sanction regimes) and thematic ones (e.g., the yearly open debate on the Protection of Civilians and the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2286 (2016)). These meetings included technical experts from the Office of the SRSG, UNICEF and DPO, which allowed UNSC members to engage with UN counterparts on a regular basis. The UNSC mandate renewals of UN's peace operations with CAAC-related aspects in their mandates had to be followed up by budget discussions in the UNGA's Fifth Committee, including to ensure the necessary CPA capacity with corresponding budget lines.

Furthermore, Belgium encouraged respective presidents of the UNSC to extend invitations to speakers to address the Security Council in a direct manner, both in open sessions as well

as during closed consultations, on the situation of children affected by armed conflict. For example, in May 2019, UNICEF's Executive Director Henrietta Fore addressed the UNSC on Yemen in an open session of the UNSC and SRSG-CAAC Gamba debriefed the UNSC on her field trip to CAR during closed consultations of the UNSC. Belgium also encouraged the UNSC to include aspects of the CAAC-agenda in the terms of reference for UNSC field visits.

Regarding UNSC's subsidiary bodies, Belgium worked towards setting up joint meetings of the SCWG-CAAC and sanctions committees that included CAAC-related criteria in their mandates. For example, a joint meeting of the SCWG-CAAC and the sanctions committee on CAR, chaired by Côte d'Ivoire at the time, was set up on July 29, 2019.<sup>8</sup> Belgium also advocated for including CAAC-related criteria in relevant sanctions regimes for designating individuals and entities committing grave violations against children. For example, the Yemen sanctions regime included an explicit reference to the recruitment and use of children when it was renewed in January 2020,<sup>9</sup> upon advocacy of Belgium among others.<sup>10</sup>

### *Field Visits*

Belgium continued the practice of its predecessors of organizing field visits, another tool in the SCWG-CAAC's toolkit. In December 2019, the SCWG-CAAC undertook a field trip to Mali,<sup>11</sup> building on experiences of previous visits to South Sudan (2018), Sudan (2017), DRC (2014), Myanmar (2013), Afghanistan (2011) and Nepal (2010). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the field visit planned for 2020 could unfortunately not take place.

As there is no UN budget foreseen for these trips, not even for the Chair of the SCWG-CAAC, as is the case with UN sanctions committees, and costs lie where they fall, this has an impact on full participation by all UNSC members. Therefore, in general, only one field visit per year takes place, and destinations have to be identified in a careful manner, taking into account reporting cycles and adoption of conclusions, field visits by the SRSG-CAAC and the work of the local CTFMRs, in order to reinforce messages and either take advantage of momentum created to further the CAAC-agenda or instigate such momentum.

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8 See press release 13937, "Special Representatives Deliver Briefings during Joint Informal Consultations of 2127 Sanctions Committee, Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict", <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13937.doc.htm>.

9 SC Resolution 2511 (2020), para. 6.

10 An interesting research tool, giving an overview of CAAC-related aspects in SC resolutions and PRSTs, is the CAAC Dashboard created by the Security Council Division of the UN Secretariat. See <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/repertoire/research-tools/children-and-armed-conflict>.

11 See 2019 annual report of the SC WG CAAC, S/2019/981, 20 December 2019, para. 23, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/981>.



Belgium ensured that at least one field visit of the SCWG-CAAC took place, in order to familiarize the SCWG-CAAC members with the situation in Mali, to follow up on the implementation of conclusions and to pass on messages to the different stakeholders in the country.

### *Inclusiveness, Engagement with and Transparency towards Stakeholders*

Belgium wanted to be an inclusive and transparent Chair of the SCWG-CAAC, actively engaging with all key stakeholders. It periodically organized NGO roundtables, gave regular briefings to the Group of Friends on CAAC chaired by the Government of Canada in New York, and was a panelist and active participant in the annual policy workshops on Children and Armed Conflict organized by Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University. By organizing Arria-formula meetings of the UNSC<sup>12</sup> and other events at the UN (cf. next section), Belgium sought to provide a forum for non-UNSC members to actively engage on the CAAC mandate. It invited civil society briefers to speak at the UNSC, e.g., Jo Becker, then-Chair of the Advisory Board of the NGO network Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, on February 12, 2020,<sup>13</sup> and in Arria-formula meetings and high-level events at the UN, such as Hichem Khadhraoui, Director of Operations at Geneva Call, and Dragica Mikavica, Senior Advocacy Adviser at Save the Children.<sup>14</sup>

In November 2019, Belgium hosted DPO's biennial meeting for CPAs of UN missions worldwide and the launch of the new CPA handbook. It also organized a meeting of the SCWG-CAAC experts with the CPAs in order to exchange experiences and engage directly with the technical experts from the field who could showcase their critical work directly to Member States.<sup>15</sup> In 2019 and 2020, Belgium organized CAAC trainings for incoming UNSC members, with presentations from the Office of the SRSG-CAAC, UNICEF, DPO, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Belgium also reached out to the Permanent Representative of each country about which the SCWG-CAAC received a report, in order to explain the whole process from the presentation

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12 The Arria-formula meeting is an open format of the UNSC where non-UNSC members can participate.

13 Security Council Briefing: "Children and armed conflict: integrating child protection into peace processes to resolve conflict and sustain peace", 12 February 2020, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k11/k11i7q08m6>.

14 See "Children and Armed Conflict: Protecting Boys and Girls in Shrinking Humanitarian Space – Security Council Open Arria-formula meeting", 12 February 2019, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k10/k10n2g95mc> and "Launch of the Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict", 12 February 2020, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1i/k1irx3k88a>.

15 See 2019 annual report of the SC WG CAAC, S/2019/981, 20 December 2019, para. 22, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/981>.

of the report to the adoption of conclusions and to listen to any of their concerns. Furthermore, Belgium as a Chair made sure that the Permanent Representative of the country concerned was invited to and present at the formal SCWG-CAAC sessions, during which the report was presented and during which the conclusions were formally adopted.

Belgium as Chair of the SCWG-CAAC also placed importance on hearing directly from children affected by armed conflict themselves. During its field trip to Mali, the SCWG-CAAC met the Children's Parliament of Mali. Moreover, Belgium invited child speakers to high-level events it organized at the UN<sup>16</sup> and a former child soldier from the FARC-EP in Colombia to the UNSC session on February 12, 2020,<sup>17</sup> to share their experiences. Furthermore, the Arria-formula meeting which Belgium organized on November 26, 2019, explored how children and youth formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups can be involved in the design and implementation of reintegration programming solutions, and included the testimony of another former child soldier.<sup>18</sup> With these examples, Belgium sought to emphasize the importance of actually engaging children as they are at the heart of all these efforts. Children's right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and further elaborated upon in General Comment 12 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

### *Thematic and Geographical Priorities*

Belgium regularly organizes events related to CAAC<sup>19</sup> and continued this practice as Chair of the SCWG-CAAC. In that way, it continued its role as a guardian of the mandate and also put the spotlight on some of its thematic and geographical priorities. As mentioned, these were the importance of reintegration of children affected by armed conflict and support of their mental health, the special needs of girls, mediation, and the Sahel.

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16 See, for example, at the High Level Event "How are we going to stop the war on children", 23 September 2019, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1d/k1dceazhg7>, and at the High Level Event "Launch of the Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict", 12 February 2020, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1i/k1ix3k88a>.

17 Security Council Briefing: "Children and armed conflict: integrating child protection into peace processes to resolve conflict and sustain peace", 12 February 2020, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k11/k11i7q08m6>.

18 Arria-formula meeting "Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAGs): Bridging the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus", with co-sponsors Peru, Poland and the UK.

19 See, for example, the Conference "OPAC turns 18", 21 February 2018, organized together with Child Soldiers International and co-sponsored by UNICEF and the Permanent UN Missions of Canada, Colombia, France and Sierra Leone, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1z/k1z77kufw>.

Belgium organized, for example, a dedicated high-level session of the UNSC with its Head of State, King Philippe, hosting, on the topic of mediation and CAAC on February 12, 2020,<sup>20</sup> as one of the signature events of its Presidency of the UNSC. The UNSG presented the “Practical Guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict”<sup>21</sup> at the special session, and a Presidential Statement was adopted,<sup>22</sup> in which the UNSC “encourages the Secretary-General (...) to broadly disseminate (...) and to promote the use of the practical guidance in UN-supported, -sponsored, and -facilitated peace and mediation processes.” It also encourages “United Nations entities, Member States as well as regional and sub-regional organizations involved in peace and mediation (...) to promote the integration of child protection issues in peace processes”.

Under the Presidency of Niger of the UNSC, on September 10, 2020, a special session of the UNSC was dedicated to attacks on schools, with a focus on the Sahel,<sup>23</sup> at which a Presidential Statement<sup>24</sup> was also adopted condemning attacks on schools and calling for special attention to the situation of girls who are disproportionately affected by such attacks.

Belgium furthermore organized several Arria-formula meetings of the UNSC on CAAC. It organized, for example, an Arria-formula meeting<sup>25</sup> on February 12, 2019, on the occasion of the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, or Red Hand Day, on the protection of children affected by armed conflict in contexts where operating space for humanitarian actors is shrinking, with a specific focus on examples from CAR. A peace agreement with non-state armed groups had been signed a couple of days before, and panelists highlighted how CPAs’ engagement with parties to conflict can be maintained, for example, leading to the signing of action plans or the release of children, despite the sometimes-limited humanitarian space. Belgium organized another Arria-formula meeting on November 26, 2019, with a focus on reintegration and more particularly, on how the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

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20 Security Council Briefing: “Children and armed conflict: integrating child protection into peace processes to resolve conflict and sustain peace”, 12 February 2020, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k11/k11i7q08m6>.

21 Practical Guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict, S/2020/114, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Practical-guidance-for-mediators-to-protect-children-in-situations-of-armed-conflict.pdf>. This practical guidance was drafted, based on high-level consultation workshops organized in 2018 and 2019, financed by the Governments of Sweden and Belgium, and facilitated by the European Institute of Peace.

22 S/PRST/2020/3, [S/PRST/2020/3 - E - S/PRST/2020/3 -Desktop \(undocs.org\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/PRST/2020/3-E).

23 Security Council meeting “Children and armed conflict: Attacks against schools as a grave violation of children’s rights”, 10 September 2020, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1f/k1fakju0sb>.

24 S/PRST/2020/8, <https://undocs.org/en/S/PRST/2020/8>. At the time of writing, work is ongoing to transform this PRST into a resolution, at the initiative of Niger.

25 Arria-formula meeting, “Protecting Conflict Affected Children when Humanitarian Space is Shrinking”, with co-sponsors Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, and France.

can be bridged and a short-term humanitarian approach to reintegration can be linked to longer-term development and peacebuilding approaches.<sup>26</sup>

Other noteworthy events are the event “Girl in Crisis: Protection of Girls Affected by Armed Conflict in the Lake Chad Basin,” organized with Niger and Plan International on August 1, 2020, the day before the annual open debate on CAAC of the UNSC, as well as the high-level event, “How Are We Going to Stop the War on Children?,” organized with Save the Children on September 23, 2019, during the UNGA high-level week, with the participation of H.M. Queen Mathilde, Queen of the Belgians, and Nobel Prize Winner Nadia Murad, and co-sponsored by Côte d’Ivoire, France, Germany, Indonesia, South Africa and the European Commission.<sup>27</sup>

### *Conclusion: Most Active Subsidiary Organ of the UNSC*

As a result of these objectives, the SCWG-CAAC was, under Belgian chairmanship, easily the most active subsidiary organ of the UNSC. In 2019, for instance, it met more than 40 times in 13 formal and 28 informal meetings (excluding the so-called “informal informals” such as the monthly meetings to preview the Programme of Work of the UNSC).<sup>28</sup> This was more than double the number of meetings of the second most active subsidiary organ of the UNSC, the ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, which met about 20 times in 2019. Due to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including limitations on holding in-person meetings, the SCWG-CAAC was forced to amend its rules and procedures and working methods and agreed to hold virtual meetings in the form of closed video-teleconferences. As a result, in 2020, three formal in-person meetings and 18 virtual meetings were held.<sup>29</sup> The negotiations of conclusions were largely replaced by a written procedure, with one or two virtual meetings to settle the most difficult points in the texts.

## UNDERSTANDING THE WORKING GROUP’S CONCLUSIONS

Adopting country-specific conclusions remains the core activity of the SCWG-CAAC. The very strength of these conclusions consists of their adoption by consensus. Recommendations contained in such country-specific conclusions are a unanimous message of all 15 members of the UNSC, including of its five permanent members (P5), and are thus a powerful advocacy

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26 Arria-formula meeting “Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAGs): Bridging the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus”, with co-sponsors Peru, Poland and the UK.

27 High Level Event “How are we going to stop the war on children”, 23 September 2019, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1d/k1dceazhg7>.

28 See 2019 annual report of the SC WG CAAC, S/2019/981, 20 December 2019, para. 7, <https://undocs.org/S/2019/981>.

29 See 2020 annual report of the SC WG CAAC, S/2020/1260, 31 December 2020, para. 8, <https://www.undocs.org/en/S/2020/1260>.

tool in the hands of the Office of the SRSB-CAAC, the CTFMRs, civil society and other CAAC-related actors and advocates. At the same time, the requirement of consensus is one of the greatest hurdles to overcome for the adoption of the conclusions.

Since the adoption of the first conclusions of the SCWG-CAAC in 2006, the conclusions steadily grew in length from a mere three to four pages in the early years, to on average 10 pages by the time Belgium took over as Chair of the SCWG-CAAC in 2019. Belgium decided to build on the work of its predecessors and continue the same template of conclusions as evolved by the time Belgium took up its chairmanship. This chapter aims at explaining the structure and the different sections of country-specific conclusions, pointing at the traditionally challenging points in the negotiations.

### *Adoption by Consensus*

Finding a balance between the formulation of a text that is agreeable to all UNSC members and, at the same time, contains strong messages without being watered down to the lowest common denominator is one of the greatest challenges for a chair of the SCWG-CAAC. The most difficult and sensitive conclusions to be negotiated are the ones about country situations with state actors listed in the annexes of the UNSG's annual report on CAAC for grave violations against children. These state actors have direct access to the members of the UNSC and can exert greater political pressure than non-state actors can. When UNSC members are themselves involved in a conflict in one of the country situations under scrutiny, especially when they are themselves listed, arguably becoming judge and party at the same time, it can become nearly impossible to find consensus on a text. The most difficult negotiations can take months on end.

However, the very fact that, time and again, consensus has been found on conclusions, even on country situations about which the UNSC is usually divided, illustrates that the UNSC – and more generally the international community as a whole – is united in its commitment to addressing violations against children affected by armed conflict. Belgium thrived on that consensus, and both forged it and diplomatically pushed the normative envelope on sensitive issues to ensure the greatest possible gains for children.

### *Cycle: From the Presentation of the UNSG Report to the Adoption of Conclusions*

The cycle of the adoption of country-specific conclusions starts with the presentation of the UNSG's report on a specific country by the SRSB-CAAC to the SCWG-CAAC in a formal session in the presence of the Permanent Representative of the country in question. After the presentation of the report by the SRSB-CAAC, the Permanent Representative of the country in question takes the floor with a statement, reflecting on the report and the situation in his or her country. This statement will later be annexed to the conclusions when

these are published after adoption. After this statement, the members of the SCWG-CAAC have a question-and-answer session with the Permanent Representative. At some point, the Permanent Representative leaves the room, and the SCWG-CAAC continues its session with the SRSG-CAAC. This session, like all formal and informal sessions of the SCWG-CAAC, takes place behind closed doors, with only the UN and UNSC members present.

On the basis of the UNSG's report, the statement of the Permanent Representative and the discussions of the SCWG-CAAC, draft conclusions are elaborated by the SCWG-CAAC Chair. When drafting the text, the Chair can consult the Office of the SRSG-CAAC, UNICEF, DPO, and ICRC, for instance, to further clarify elements of the report or verify developments on the ground or the accuracy of a formulation in light of International Humanitarian Law. Sometimes input is received from a local Group of Friends on CAAC if there is one established in that country context, with recommendations based on the UNSG's report for consideration of the members of the SCWG-CAAC. For instance, the Group of Friends on CAAC in Somalia based in Nairobi sent recommendations to the members of the SCWG-CAAC for the negotiations on the conclusions on Somalia in 2020. Next, the zero draft of the conclusions is circulated to the members of the SCWG-CAAC by the Chair, upon which the SCWG-CAAC meets in informal sessions to negotiate these conclusions. During Belgium's chairmanship, texts were generally agreed upon in two readings (each consisting of several sessions). Sometimes, however, three or even four readings were needed. Once an agreement is reached with a silence procedure on the text not being broken, these conclusions will be adopted by the SCWG-CAAC in a formal session, in the presence of the SRSG-CAAC, a UNICEF representative and the Permanent Representative of the country in question. The Permanent Representative and the SRSG-CAAC both make a statement and reflect upon the adopted conclusions, followed by an interactive session with the SCWG-CAAC. After the formal SCWG-CAAC session as such, a press release is published, with the public message of the conclusions contained therein. The adopted conclusions themselves are sent to the UN editors for a final check, which sometimes takes several weeks, after which they are published on the website of the UN.<sup>30</sup> In implementation of the conclusions, the UN Secretariat prepares and sends several letters to, for instance, the government in question and donors.

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached New York, where the UN headquarters are based, in March 2020 and the city entered lockdown, the working methods of the SCWG-CAAC had to be adapted. Virtual sessions of the SCWG-CAAC only counted as informal sessions; hence these had to be followed up by written procedure in order to formalize them.<sup>31</sup> The in-person negotiations of the conclusions were replaced by written comments sent by the members of

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30 See <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/subsidiary/wgcaac/sgreports>.

31 See Report of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, S/2020/1260, paras. 7-8, <https://www.undocs.org/en/S/2020/1260>.

the SCWG-CAAC, on the basis of which the Chair drafted a new version of the text. An online negotiation had to resolve the most difficult points of contention. Negotiating sensitive texts by written procedure and online meetings is far from ideal. Nevertheless, the SCWG-CAAC managed to agree on several conclusions with these new methods. The fact that Belgium had chaired the SCWG-CAAC for almost 15 months in person created a basis of experience and trust upon which could be built in order to continue the work online.

### *Structure of the Conclusions*

As already mentioned, when Belgium took up the chairmanship of the SCWG-CAAC, it decided to build upon the work of its predecessors regarding the structure of the conclusions. Throughout the years, the conclusions have steadily increased in length, to an average of approximately 10 pages.

### *Introduction*

The first four paragraphs of conclusions constitute an introduction, referring to the session of the SCWG-CAAC at which the UNSG's report on the country was presented and describing in general the discussion that took place. In the first years of the SCWG-CAAC, the conclusions included a paragraph on the statement of the Permanent Representative of the country in question, made at the session during which the report was presented.<sup>32</sup> However, as this often involved long discussions, it was decided from the conclusions on Afghanistan adopted in 2016<sup>33</sup> onwards to annex the statement as a whole to the conclusions, once adopted and published. Nevertheless, paragraph 3 of the conclusions, which describes the discussion of the SCWG-CAAC upon the presentation of the UNSG's country-specific report, often remains a contested and hotly debated paragraph. No value judgments can be made in that paragraph, nor recommendations be made, even when those were made in the formal session of the SCWG-CAAC during which the report was presented and discussed. The description is a factual listing of topics discussed. Paragraphs 2 and 4 refer to the relevant UNSC resolutions on CAAC relevant for the CAAC mandate and are usually repeated unaltered in all conclusions.

### *Public statement by the Chair of the Working Group*

The next section of the conclusions contains the "Public statement by the Chair of the Working Group." This section is published as a press release upon formal adoption of the conclusions by the SCWG-CAAC.<sup>34</sup> Paragraph 5 of the conclusions is always subject to the longest negotiations. Once agreement on certain elements is reached on this paragraph, it is easier to agree them later on in the text.

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32 Until the conclusions on Syria, S/AC.51/2014/4, para. 4, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2014/4>.

33 See the conclusions on Afghanistan, S/AC.51/2016/1, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2016/1>.

34 See for all press releases: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/subsidiary/wgcaac/sgreports>.

The public statement usually starts with a chapeau addressing all parties to the armed conflict, in particular the parties listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual reports on CAAC, including state actors when applicable. What follows is an expression of concern regarding the various CAAC violations taking place in the country concerned, with a message to the parties to armed conflict calling them to end these violations and prevent new ones from happening. Addressing the public statement to all parties to the armed conflict, in particular the listed parties,<sup>35</sup> in the chapeau, including for violations for which they are not necessarily listed, is a choice for several reasons.

First of all, it is done for practical reasons. The public statement would become unreadable and too long if per listed party different violations for which they are listed are addressed. Secondly, the public statement calls for preventing violations in the future, which is a message applicable to all parties. Thirdly, even though a party is not listed for a certain violation, it does not mean that it has not committed these violations on a lower scale. Sometimes, however, the chapeau is short and reads, for example: "The Working Group agreed to address a message to the following parties through a public statement by its Chair"<sup>36</sup>. Messages are then split up in common messages "to all parties" or "to all parties to the armed conflict", and specific messages "to the Government" and "to all armed groups".<sup>37</sup> Sometimes specific messages are addressed to specific parties, such as "the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen",<sup>38</sup> "the Civilian Joint Task Force",<sup>39</sup> or "to the United States of America",<sup>40</sup> or messages are addressed more widely "to all those concerned".<sup>41</sup>

Sometimes, there is a discussion about whether a specific conflict is an "armed conflict" according to International Humanitarian Law. In that case, reference is made to the explanation in the conclusions on Colombia of 2010, "recalling that resolution 1612 (2005) does not seek

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35 Sometimes only the listed parties are addressed, see for example the conclusions on Syria, S/AC.51/2019/1, para. 5, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2019/1>.

36 See, for example, the conclusions on the Philippines, S/AC.51/2020, para. 5, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/9>.

37 See, for example, the conclusions on Myanmar, S/AC.51/2019/2, para.5, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2019/2> and the conclusions on the Philippines, S/AC.51/2020, para. 5, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/9>.

38 See the conclusions on Yemen, S/AC.51/2020/1, para. 5 (l), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/1>.

39 See the conclusions on Nigeria, S/AC.51/2020/8, paras. 5 (aa) – (bb), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/8>.

40 See the conclusions on Afghanistan, S/AC.51/2020/2, para. 5 (v), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/2>.

41 See, for example, the conclusions on Yemen, S/AC.51/2020/1, paras. 5 (o) – (q), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/1>, and the conclusions on Afghanistan, S/AC.51/2020/2, para. 5 (z)-(cc), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/2>.



to make any legal determination as to whether the situations referred to in the Secretary-General's reports are or are not armed conflicts within the context of the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols thereto, nor does it prejudge the legal status of the non-State parties involved in these situations".<sup>42</sup>

Paragraph 6 in the conclusions contains a message to community and religious leaders and is repeated usually unaltered in all conclusions, since the conclusions adopted on Nigeria in 2017.<sup>43</sup>

### *Recommendations to the Security Council - Letters*

Under this heading, the SCWG-CAAC recommends the President of the Security Council to transmit letters to the government of the country under scrutiny, to the UNSG,<sup>44</sup> to the chair of the sanctions committee (when applicable), and to other relevant actors, such as the President of the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council and the Chairperson of the AU Commission,<sup>45</sup> the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD),<sup>46</sup> the Government of the State members of the G5 Sahel,<sup>47</sup> and the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen.<sup>48</sup>

In the letter to the government, many messages of the public statement are repeated. Sometimes some messages are more detailed or tailor-made. In the letter to the UNSG, often recommendations are made regarding the peacekeeping operation in the country concerned, including regarding the CPA capacity, the MRM, action plans with listed parties, or peace and mediation processes and the importance of including the protection of children.<sup>49</sup>

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42 See the conclusions on Colombia, S/AC.51/2010/3, para. 5, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2010/3>.

43 See the conclusions on Nigeria, S/AC.51/2017/5, para. 6, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2017/5>. A message to only "community leaders" was already included in para. 5 of the conclusions on the Philippines, S/AC.51/2017/4, para. 5, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2017/4>.

44 Letters to the Secretary-General can be consulted online: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/subsidiary/wgcaac/letters>.

45 See the conclusions on Nigeria, S/AC.51/2020/8, para.9, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/8>.

46 See the conclusions on South Sudan, S/AC.51/2021/1, para. 9, <https://undocs.org/S/AC.51/2021/1>.

47 See the conclusions on Mali, S/AC.51/2020/11, para. 9, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/11>.

48 See the conclusions on Yemen, S/AC.51/2020/1, para. 8, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/1>. It is to be noted that in the case of the Coalition, the letter is transmitted by the Chair of the SC WG CAAC, not by the President of the Security Council. The retainment of this paragraph under this section and not the next one ("Direct Action by the Working Group") is the result of a compromise in the negotiations.

49 See for example the conclusions on Syria, S/AC.51/2019/1, para. 8 (a), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2019/1> and the conclusions on the Philippines, S/AC.51/2020/9, para. 8 (d), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/9>.

No letters are sent to non-State actors which are listed parties to the conflict, as many are also armed groups designated as terrorist by the UN and the UNSC sending letters to designated terrorist groups is not deemed legitimate. Non-state actors are only addressed through the public statement. This, however, often amounts to frustration among listed state actors, as an imbalance is perceived in the amount of criticism they receive as opposed to non-State actors.

Finally, this section can also include direct recommendations to the Security Council,<sup>50</sup> regarding for example the mandates of UN peacekeeping operations.

#### *Direct Action by the Working Group – Letters*

Under the last section of the SCWG-CAAC conclusions, letters are sent to donors, such as the World Bank and the conveners of the Humanitarian Task Force on Syria in Geneva,<sup>51</sup> and relevant governments. Under this section, letters have been sent to other relevant actors, such as to the leadership of the NATO Resolute Support Mission.<sup>52</sup>

#### *Hard Negotiations*

As mentioned, the most difficult and sensitive conclusions to be negotiated are the ones about country situations with state actors listed for grave violations against children. When UNSC members are themselves involved in a conflict in one of the country situations under scrutiny, especially when they are listed themselves, it becomes nearly impossible to find consensus on a text. The challenge is to find consensus on a text without watering down the messages in the text to meaningless recommendations. In order to work towards consensus, Belgium involved and mobilized its whole diplomatic network during its chairmanship of the SCWG-CAAC. The triangle of Belgian embassies in capitals around the world, the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels from desk officer to Human Rights and UN Directors to Political Director to Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Belgian Mission to the UN in New York was crucial in bringing its chairmanship to a good end.

Some issues were time and again difficult to negotiate. One of them was referring to the Paris Principles and Commitments to end the unlawful recruitment and use of children, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and

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50 See, for example, the conclusions on Iraq, S/AC.51/2020/4, para. 9, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/4>, the conclusions on Somalia, S/AC.51/2020/6, para. 11, <https://www.undocs.org/en/S/AC.51/2020/6>, the conclusions on Mali, S/AC.51/2020/11, para. 10, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/11>, and the conclusions on South Sudan, S/AC.51/2021/1, para. 11, <https://undocs.org/S/AC.51/2021/1>.

51 See the conclusions on Syria, S/AC.51/2019/1, paras. 10-11, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2019/1>.

52 See the conclusions on Afghanistan, S/AC.51/2016/1, para. 14, <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2016/1>.

Use of Child Soldiers, and the Safe Schools Declaration. As these texts are not the result of intergovernmental negotiations, but voluntary commitments of States to go beyond what is legally required, there was no consensus in the SCWG-CAAC to include recommendations in the conclusions to sign up to these texts.<sup>53</sup> Once a government had endorsed one of these texts, this was, however, welcomed.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, once a government had voluntarily signed up to these texts, consensus was found to recommend these governments to implement their commitments,<sup>55</sup> “guided by” these documents.<sup>56</sup> Since Presidential Statement/2020/3 was adopted (cf. supra), conclusions of the SCWG-CAAC have also started to make reference to the UN Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict, encouraging actors involved in peace and mediation processes to use it.<sup>57</sup>

Like in all other UN fora, references to gender are increasingly hard to maintain in conclusions of the SCWG-CAAC. Belgium as a Chair managed to keep references to, for example, sexual and gender-based violence against children in all conclusions,<sup>58</sup> to specialized and gender-sensitive services for victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence in armed

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- 53 One notable exception is, for example, the reference to the Safe Schools Declaration in the conclusions on Colombia, even though Colombia has not endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration yet. See the conclusions on Colombia, S/AC.51/2020/5, para. 5 (l), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/5>. Similarly with the reference to the Paris Principles in the conclusions on South Sudan, even though South Sudan has not endorsed these yet. See the conclusions on South Sudan, S/AC.51/2021/1, para. 5 (d), <https://undocs.org/S/AC.51/2021/1>.
- 54 See, for example, the conclusions on Myanmar, S/AC.51/2019/2, para. 5 (q), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2019/2>, and the conclusions on Somalia, S/AC.51/2020/6, para. 7 (p), <https://www.undocs.org/en/S/AC.51/2020/6>. As the Vancouver Principles is still a relatively (?) recent document, the SCWG-CAAC has not had the occasion yet to welcome the endorsement by a country in its conclusions.
- 55 See, for example, the conclusions on the DRC, S/AC.51/2020/10, para. 7 (j), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/10>: “Recalling the endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and calling for their swift implementation, (...)”.
- 56 See, for example, the conclusions on Afghanistan, S/AC.51/2020/2, para. 5 (f), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/2>: “(...) urging that children associated or allegedly associated with parties to conflict must be treated primarily as victims and that detention should be considered only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, in line with international law and guided by the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles), which was endorsed by the Government of Afghanistan”. See also, for example, the conclusions on Colombia, S/AC.51/2020/5, para. 5 (o), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/5>.
- 57 See, for example, the conclusions on Colombia, S/AC.51/2020/5, para. 5 (c), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/5> and the conclusions on South Sudan, S/AC.51/2021/1, para. 5 (d), <https://undocs.org/S/AC.51/2021/1>.
- 58 See, for example, the conclusions on Myanmar, S/AC.51/2019/2, paras. 5 (j), 7 (b), and 9 (c), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2019/2>, in line with SC Resolution 2427 (2018), OP18 and SC Resolution 1261 (1999), OP10.

conflict,<sup>59</sup> as well as to reintegration and rehabilitation opportunities for children affected by armed conflict that need to be gender-sensitive.<sup>60</sup> It also managed to insert a reference to early marriage and forced marriage of girls for the first time in SCWG-CAAC conclusions.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, the need for and importance of accountability for grave violations committed against children has been a central element as well in the conclusions negotiated under Belgian chairmanship.<sup>62</sup> This includes maintaining increasingly contested references to the International Criminal Court, where applicable.<sup>63</sup>

## INSIGHTS ON GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES MOVING FORWARD

Belgium's chairmanship of the SCWG-CAAC (2019-2020) continued in the footsteps of its predecessor Sweden and focused on the implementation of the CAAC mandate. Moving forward, the following recommendations can be considered by its successors.<sup>64</sup>

First of all, a close working relationship between the Chair of the SCWG-CAAC and the SRS-CAAC, consistent with their respective mandates, should be maintained. The development of a yearly work plan regarding the publication of country-specific reports is a good practice to be continued. Ideally, the SCWG-CAAC should adopt conclusions on all country-specific situations with listed parties during the two-year mandate of a Chair of the SCWG-CAAC (currently 14). For this to occur, country-specific reports should be published in a regular and timely manner.

Furthermore, the focus on the follow-up of the implementation of country-specific conclusions, including through continuing the practice of regular video-teleconferences with the CTFMRs on the ground, should be maintained. Future chairs of the SCWG-CAAC could improve this focus on the follow up of conclusions by engaging and involving the country concerned. Also, the discussions in the SCWG-CAAC on Global Horizontal Notes on children and armed

59 See, for example, conclusions on Iraq, S/AC.51/2020/4, para. 5 (v), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/4>.

60 See, for example, the conclusions on Myanmar, S/AC.51/2019/2, paras. 5 (t), 7 (i), and 9 (a), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2019/2>, in line with SC Resolution 2427 (2018), OP26.

61 See, for example, conclusions on Yemen, S/AC.51/2020/1, para. 5 (f), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/1>: “early marriage of girls” (as this was the wording used in the second report on Yemen, S/2019/453) and conclusions on Somalia, S/AC.51/2020/6, paras. 5 (g), (i) and 7 (l): “forced marriage”.

62 See, for example, conclusions on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/AC.51/2019/1, paras. 5 (c), (f), (g) and 7 (c), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2019/1>.

63 See, for example, the conclusions on the Central African Republic, A/AC.51/2020/3, paras. 5 (j), (o), and 7(c), <https://www.undocs.org/S/AC.51/2020/3>.

64 Belgium included these recommendations in a letter to the Security Council of 24 December 2020, S/2020/1288, <https://undocs.org/S/2020/1288>.

conflict should allow for regular updates for country situations under consideration as well as emerging country situations of concern. More thought should go into how to leverage these Global Horizontal Notes for early warning and improved prevention. Future chairs could also improve how to deal with situations of concern with (so far) no listed parties, such as “Libya”, “Israel and the State of Palestine”, or “Burkina Faso”. The organization of a video-teleconference with the CTFMR of Libya under the Belgian chairmanship was one way of doing so.

Continuing the practice of field visits and of mainstreaming the CAAC agenda throughout the work of the UNSC are critical to maintaining attention and urgency on the issue. Extending invitations to speakers to address the Security Council in a direct manner on the situation of children affected by armed conflict, both in the open sessions as well as during consultations behind closed doors, is one example. Organizing joint meetings of sanctions committees and the SCWG-CAAC, is another. The monthly meetings of the SCWG-CAAC to present and discuss the Programme of Work of the UNSC with the President of the UNSC of the month and representatives of the Office of the SRSG-CAAC, UNICEF and DPO is yet another practice that is recommended.

Engagement with all stakeholders, including the country concerned, civil society, and everyone involved in the MRM will remain essential. Holding regular NGO roundtables, for example, is a practice that is recommended. Furthermore, the organization of Arria-formula meetings of the UNSC, in which non-UNSC and civil society members can take part, is another way of engaging stakeholders.

The Chair of the SCWG-CAAC is one of the guardians of the CAAC mandate. Even though the Chair has no formal role in the drafting process of the UNSG’s annual report on CAAC, messages can be passed on, as Belgium did during its tenure as chair. It underlined the importance of evidence-based listing and delisting of perpetrators in the annexes of the UNSG’s annual reports on CAAC, accurately reflecting the data collected and verified by the MRM, according to the criteria included in the UNSG’s annual CAAC report of 2010.<sup>65</sup> Maintaining the integrity and impartiality of the listing mechanism is crucial for this precious and powerful tool, as it provides leverage to the UN to work with listed parties to improve the situation of children affected by armed conflict. Such a mechanism must be resourced with robust capacity on the ground to monitor and report further challenged by COVID-19 but deemed more relevant and necessary than ever.<sup>66</sup>

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65 See UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (A/64/742-S/2010/181), April 13, 2010, <https://undocs.org/A/64/742 paras. 176-180>.

66 See, for example, the interventions of Belgium at the annual open debate on CAAC, on 2 August 2019, [https://newyorkun.diplomatie.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/pdf/caac\\_eng.pdf](https://newyorkun.diplomatie.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/pdf/caac_eng.pdf), and on 23 June 2020, [https://newyorkun.diplomatie.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/20200623\\_caac\\_intervention\\_final.pdf](https://newyorkun.diplomatie.belgium.be/sites/default/files/content/20200623_caac_intervention_final.pdf).

*Annelies Verstichel, LL.M. (Columbia Law School), PhD (European University Institute), is a career diplomat and was responsible for Belgium's chairmanship of the SCWG-CAAC during its mandate in the UNSC as a non-permanent member (2019-2020)*