

FOREWORD

Together and Forward: Delivering the United Nations Children and Armed Conflict Mandate

By Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

Twenty-five years ago, in December 1996, the United Nations General Assembly took the extraordinary decision to create a mandate to protect children from the ravages of war and adopted Resolution 51/77.¹

The inception of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) was an unprecedented action which brought hope for millions of children living in conflict situations. It further prepared the ground for decades of commitments and actions during which Member States, the United Nations and civil society organizations have strengthened the protection of children affected by war.

The mandate has evolved over the years – and is still evolving – allowing my Office to better address the needs and rights of children in armed conflict. An important milestone was reached when, in 1999, the United Nations Security Council adopted its first resolution on children in armed conflict² acknowledging its impact on peace and security. The Council has also identified and condemned six grave violations affecting children in times of conflict: the recruitment or use of children as soldiers; the killing and maiming of children; rape and other forms of sexual violence against children; the abduction of children; attacks against schools or hospitals; and the denial of humanitarian access for children.

Through my office, the United Nations monitors these violations, identifies perpetrators, and engages with parties to conflict to develop action plans and other forms of commitment aimed at ending and preventing such crimes.

1 United Nations General Assembly (1997). Resolution 51/77 (A/RES /51/77). <https://undocs.org/A/RES/51/77>

2 United Nations Security Council (1999). Resolution 1261 (1999) (S/RES/1261). <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1261>

The CAAC mandate is one of concrete and practical engagement between the United Nations and listed parties. While too many violations against children are verified every year, even more children are able to avoid such tragic fate, thanks to our common work to protect them.

Twenty-five years of actions and commitments has resulted in tangible progress for conflict-affected children: over 170,000 children have been released from armed groups and armed forces following United Nations' advocacy. Thirteen (13) resolutions and multiple Presidential Statements on children and armed conflict have been adopted by the United Nations Security Council. Hundreds of commitments have been undertaken by parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations against children, including 37 Action Plans, of which 20 are currently under implementation. Furthermore, the international community has supported the mandate through a series of initiatives that act as powerful preventive tools: the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles, among them.

In January 2022, as we commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate, my Office launched the Study on its evolution throughout the period 1996-2021.³ By looking at all the important achievements made, and by identifying the challenges that impacted the implementation of the mandate, the study provides an in-depth view of 25 years' work for conflict-affected children. The study further presents opportunities to improve the protection of children in the short and long term; for the mandate anniversary is beyond all an opportunity to look forward and imagine strategic actions to inspire the future we want for the mandate.

So, what do we want for the mandate in the years to come? Allow me to share a few ideas which emerged from the consultative process undertaken for the development of the study.

The Children and Armed Conflict mandate has always had **partnerships** as its foundation and our joint advocacy and outreach can be strengthened through enhancing such strong alliances. A **bolstered collaboration amongst all partners**, including Member States, Regional and sub-regional Organizations, civil society organizations, academia, Groups of Friends on children and armed conflict, as well as media, can further amplify our advocacy efforts in the years to come.

Reinforcing the focus on **prevention** should also be a priority as mandated by the last two Security Council CAAC resolutions (in 2018 and 2021). The proactive engagement with parties to conflict working with the Country Taskforces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs) and other early warning systems in situations not on the children and armed conflict agenda, can

3 Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (2022). Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate 1996-2021. New York: United Nations. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>

be decisive in **preventing grave violations against children** from occurring in the first place. In that sense, making sure that emerging crises are added quickly as situations of concern could allow the CAAC mandate to play an early warning role.

Lastly, not only maintaining but also **reinforcing child protection capacity** in United Nations missions and country teams is of utmost importance. Our work is only possible because of the fully dedicated child protection staff on the ground. The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown that strengthening child protection capacity should also include **taking advantage of digital technology**. Such tools could help us improve data analysis, as well as reintegration initiatives and the inclusion of child protection elements in peace processes and mediation efforts.

These are only some of the recommendations that we might want to consider as we envisage the next 25 years to better protect children affected by conflict. And many questions remain for which I hope we can work together and explore possible answers. *How can we build better coalitions of child protection champions? How can the CAAC mandate influence cultural and social perceptions to change behavior for the protection of children? How can we ensure that the mandate and its tools remain relevant and up to date in the evolving dynamics of armed conflict? How can we ensure that communities are more resilient in the face of grave violations?*

The Dallaire Institute has been an important partner to the CAAC office in the past and I hope that it can continue to shed light on these important questions.

It is our responsibility as a global community to propose innovative solutions to improve the protection and wellbeing of conflict-affected children in the years to come to end grave violations once and for all. Let us do this together.