



Security Council

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Letter dated 22 June 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Estonia had the honour to host a Security Council Arria-formula meeting on the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict. We take this opportunity to thank again the co-sponsors of the meeting, which included France, Ireland, Kenya, Niger, Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, United Kingdom, the United States and Viet Nam, as well as Belgium, Canada, Germany and Sweden, for co-organizing this event in cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict.

We are pleased to share the compilation of statements made at the meeting by the briefers, members of the Security Council and other United Nations Member States, as well as the written statements submitted (see annex). This is not a verbatim transcript and the statements may be checked against delivery by viewing the recording of the meeting, which is available at <https://media.un.org/en/asset/klh/klhemuglb0>. The statements, recording and related background documents can also be viewed on the event web page at <https://un.mfa.ee/events/united-nations-security-council-arria-formula-meeting-on-children-and-armed-conflict/>.

We 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 22 June 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council



Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

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

**United Nations Security Arria Formula Meeting on the
Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in
situations of armed conflict**

7 May 2021

Mr. President,
Your Excellencies
Distinguished members of the Security Council,

I am honored to be here with you today and I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Estonia for its leadership in the organization of this Arria formula and all the 14¹ member states that are supporting this meeting.

Excellencies,

The COVID-19 pandemic has had, and is still having, a major negative impact on our lives. Vulnerable people living in dire situations, including because of armed conflicts, have been particularly affected and children, once again, find themselves at the center of despicable events and suffering. They have lost family members, friends, teachers, doctors, and other important reference points in their lives. More than one year after the outbreak of the pandemic, there are important lessons that can be learned, and among these I would like to share with you the three that are particularly relevant to my mandate.

First of all, no one is immune to the COVID-19 pandemic and, as a result, we must be able to invest more on preventive actions to better protect children affected by armed conflict globally. The study we are launching today clearly outlines the difficulties faced by the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting on the ground to document and verify grave violations against children. Measures put in place by Member States to contain the spread of the virus resulted in remote working arrangements and the impossibility to physically access areas, as well as survivors of violations or witnesses, to be able to make a solid assessment on whether the pandemic led to a concrete increase or decrease in violations. The second and third quarter of 2020 were particularly impacted by these access restrictions. In particular, violations that can lead to further stigmatization of the victims, such as rape and other forms of sexual violence or recruitment and use of children in some contexts have been extremely hard to document and verify. We are collecting data that shows that abduction, recruitment and use, attacks on schools and hospitals and sexual violence have been impacted by the pandemic, either because children became more vulnerable to use and abuse or because the socio-economic crisis resulting from the measures to combat the pandemic left them and their families with few options other than falling prey to the dynamics of armed conflict. For these reasons, I believe we should invest in early warning mechanisms and develop new and creative preparedness measures to prevent violations from happening in similar situations in the future, including through the development of prevention plans and through capacity-building of local actors to identify and report grave violations to the relevant child protection focal points in a manner more conducive to their immediate protection.

Second, an enhanced engagement with parties to conflict must be prioritized. During 2020, this aspect of my mandate has been severely challenged, again due to the impossibility for the United Nations on the ground to physically meet parties to conflict to

¹ France, Ireland, Kenya, Niger, Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, United Kingdom, the United States and Viet Nam, together with additional co-sponsors Belgium, Canada, Germany, and Sweden

develop new action plans or other types of commitments to end and prevent grave violations against children in armed conflict. The monitoring of ongoing actions plans has also been interrupted, as well as related activities such as screening exercises, trainings, meetings, and the dissemination of action plan measures. For some armed groups operating in remote areas with hardly any access to electricity, it was certainly impossible to hold online meetings. On a positive note, though, some Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting were able to find creative solutions to continue engaging with armed groups despite COVID-19 restrictions either by relying on local counterparts or, for those based in urban areas, on good internet connections. Technology is indeed an important element that needs to be further explored in the context of the MRM.

Third, it is imperative to focus on long-term actions for the protection of children affected by conflict, through flexible funding and the development of tailored child programs to meet the needs of children on the ground. The economic reintegration support for children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups was significantly delayed for large numbers of children recently separated, as agencies were unable to set up new reintegration projects due to the challenges I mentioned earlier. To this end, I believe it is of key importance to establish new partnerships among international, regional and local actors, including the donor community, with the aim to provide a holistic approach to child protection prevention and response initiatives. This would also facilitate progress in the achievement of the sustainable development goals and the agenda 2030.

Excellencies,

I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize the importance of focusing on preventive actions to improve the protection of children and in this regard, the need to prioritize the allocation of flexible funding and resources for child protection. Funds should not be diverted from essential child protection and MRM activities to support COVID-19 prevention and response interventions, but rather ensure that child protection is mainstreamed in preparedness and response plans and emergency funding proposals, including in the context of the COVID-19 response.

I believe we must invest more on analysis of MRM data to be able to assess what the overall impact of the pandemic has been on children affected by armed conflict so as to find new ways to address similar situations in the future. In this regard, it is important to note that any increase in CAAC violations resulting from this health crisis, once identified, should be considered within a broader context of increased vulnerabilities of children to many violations and abuses as a result of the pandemic such as exposure to exploitative and hazardous relationships, increased social isolation, and reduced access to services and humanitarian assistance. Many violations are interdependent, and responses should be coordinated at the interagency level.

Excellencies,

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic on children used and abused in, for and by armed conflict will have long-lasting effects on them and on the environment they live in. We must join forces and put in place measures to ensure children are protected, while enhancing the capacity of the United Nations on the ground to be able to sustainably monitor and report grave violations against children in armed conflict as well as engage in prevention of violations whenever possible and as demanded by joint action.

The Covid-19 Pandemic is a global problem that requires global solutions: for children used and abused in, for and by armed conflict, the Pandemic is an aggravating factor. In dealing with this complex scenario we must remember that children are the most vulnerable of populations and that the SDGs demand that we move forward globally leaving no one behind. Children used and abused by conflict deserve to be prioritized; we must make sure they are not left behind.

I Thank you, Mr. President.

**MONUSCO DSRSG for Protection & Operations
Remarks to the UNSC Arria Formula Meeting on
the Impact of COVID on Children and Armed Conflict
7 May 2021**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed.

Let me begin by thanking Ambassador Jurgenson and his team at the mission of Estonia for organizing this Arria formula meeting and for inviting MONUSCO and myself to contribute to the discussion. I would also like to thank you my dear friend Special Representative Virginia Gamba, SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict for spearheading this initiative, with the support of the Government of the UK, to launch such an important study on the impact of COVID-19 on children and armed conflicts

Here in the DRC, as in many countries, children are the first victims of conflicts. As you are aware, the DRC has been on the agenda of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict since it was established. The DRC remains among the countries with the highest rates of documented grave violations against children, particularly child recruitment, sexual violence and abduction. Now, with

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COVID-19, these children are hit by a double crisis: A pandemic that has severely limited their access to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, health, psychosocial and education services. Additionally, many children suffer the trickledown effect of the economic crisis on their families' livelihoods, leading to increased vulnerability to child recruitment by the numerous armed groups in eastern DRC.

MONUSCO's Child Protection Section, and its close partner UNICEF, sees the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on boys and girls in the Eastern DRC every day. Despite limited mobility under COVID-19 restrictions, our teams documented an increase in most child rights violations in 2020 compared to 2019: Documented cases of killing and maiming of children more than doubled, attacks against schools and hospitals tripled, and sexual violence and abduction of children both increased.

COVID-19 continues to hamper our ability to document these violations I just described. As a case in point: In 2019, our teams separated 3,100 children from armed groups, while in 2020 this dropped to 2,100 children. Girls appear to be

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more seriously impacted by the COVID-19 crisis than boys, particularly when it comes to access to services.

It took creativity on the part of our Child Protection Section, UNICEF and our Government partners to mitigate the risk of the pandemic worsening an already extremely fragile environment for children in Eastern DRC. We maximized deployment of partners to the field and remote monitoring of more visible violations such as attacks on schools and hospitals, when our staff was under Mission lockdowns. When these were lifted, we immediately resumed COVID 19-compliant deployments of our staff to release children from armed groups. We also worked closely with the Congolese Armed Forces and Police to sensitize them to need to the risks COVID-19 poses to detained children and to speed up the time of handover of children formerly associated with armed groups from detention to child protection actors.

In 2020 and 2021, nine non-state armed groups factions signed our Children and Armed Conflict unilateral declaration and roadmap committing to end and prevent child recruitment and other grave child violations, bringing the total armed groups

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that have formally signed unilateral declarations to 39. As a direct result of this dialogue, 838 children were voluntarily released by their commanders in 2020, and 50 more in the first quarter of 2021.

Excellencies,

It is clear that COVID-19 will be with us for many months to come, so what can we learn from this last year to keep children protected during times of both armed conflict and pandemic?

First, we need to underscore the importance of increased collaboration between Governments and the different members of the UN family devoted to protecting children and the right to health. We saw here in the DRC that the pandemic catalyzed improved coordination across the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism referral system within the Country Task Force.

Second, even in the midst of pandemic, peace processes and negotiated surrenders continue. Here in DRC, we expect the Government to soon issue its long-awaited

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national ordonnance on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. MONUSCO is in the process of finalizing its support to the Government on this very important framework and will prioritize COVID-compliant demobilization of children.

Third, with the successful release of more than 2,100 children after our direct engagement with armed groups, we know engagement can work even during COVID-19.

Fourth, successful monitoring and reporting also requires adapting our working methods to maximize the use of social media, traditional media tools, and savvy messaging to counter misinformation.

Finally, I would like to echo SRSG Gamba's call for adequate and sustainable funding of child protection activities with a particular focus on education and sustainable livelihood activities.

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Thank you for your attention.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children
Briefing by Fiona Frazer, UNAMA Human Rights Chief
7 May 2021

I would first like to acknowledge the efforts made by the Office of the SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict in conducting this study one year after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic on the impact on violations against children in situations of armed conflict, and I thank SRSG Gamba and Estonia for bringing us together today for this important discussion.

As Head of the human rights component of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and country representative for OHCHR, I oversee the child protection work in UNAMA, and we work closely with our SRSG, Deborah Lyons, who serves as the co-chair, together with the UNICEF country representative, of the Afghanistan UN-led Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) on grave violations against children.

In Afghanistan, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was recorded in the Western Province of Herat in February of 2020. Since then, COVID-19 has added to the uncertainty, increased vulnerability, and extreme distress of children and their families. Quarantine measures such as school closures and restrictions on movement have disrupted children's access to education, healthcare and response mechanisms.

The economic and social conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic also exacerbated protection risks for vulnerable families, many of whom had already depleted their limited financial, mental, and social coping capacities due to prolonged conflict and recurrent natural disasters.

As was the case in many facets of life during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Afghanistan CTFMR having adapted its Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) methodology with the added priority of using COVID-safe measures, faced many challenges in its monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children amidst the pandemic.

It is difficult, *with certainty*, to establish direct causality between COVID-19 and the trends that the Afghanistan CTFMR has verified related to the six grave violations against children.

However, data recorded and the trends seen, corresponding with the timeline of the pandemic, together with observations and information that interlocutors and contacts on the ground have shared, paint a certain picture of the outbreak's effect on Afghan children's lives.

For example, during these times of isolation, acute stress in the home, increased poverty, and food insecurity, families and communities were more likely to resort to harmful coping mechanisms, making children more susceptible to child recruitment and use, child marriage and hazardous child labour, placing girls and boys at greater risk of neglect, violence, and exploitation. At the same time, school closures prevented children from access to learning and limited their interactions with peers.

In 2020, the CTFMR verified that 196 boys were recruited & used by parties to the conflict, mainly Taliban, more than triple the number verified during the previous year. In addition to the verified incidents of recruitment and use of children by the Taliban, the CTFMR has received an increase in reports of recruitment and use of children by the Afghan national security forces across various regions of Afghanistan. The CTFMR is working to verify these reports while following the child protection principles.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the President of Afghanistan issued a series of Presidential Decrees, the first in March 2020, which saw the release of prisoners, including children from the Juvenile Rehabilitation Centres, as a measure to reduce congestion of detention facilities to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, children facing allegations of being associated with armed groups or on national security related charges were excluded from these decrees, leading to their continued detention, and resulting in their greater risk of contracting COVID-19.

Turning to potential mid- and long-term effects of the pandemic, and new vulnerabilities that may have emerged from the pandemic, we see several issues. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as in so many other parts of the world, exacerbated poverty in Afghanistan. Many schools remain closed and children who were not in school may have been more prone to being recruited and used by parties to the conflict, especially as with increased poverty, many children face pressure to help provide for their families rather than stay in school.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the suffering that children already faced due to the armed conflict: with children resorting to hard labour in order to feed family members, girls facing early marriage, and many other challenges, all of which require long-term responses, including

psychosocial support, counselling support, reintegration, rehabilitation, livelihood opportunities to return back to their communities as active citizens.

The CTFMR also observed a number of attacks against hospitals and healthcare personnel – of particular concern considering the fragile state of Afghanistan’s healthcare system and the heavy burden it has carried during the COVID-19 pandemic and amidst the continued armed conflict. UNAMA published a special report on this in June 2020, highlighting the egregiousness of the attacks, as well as the short- and long-term implications for medical care.

The impact of COVID-19 also led to the cancellation of polio vaccination campaigns in July 2020, depriving millions of children from being vaccinated.

With the current COVID-19 situation in neighbouring countries, there are real worries as to how the people of Afghanistan may be further affected by COVID-19, and we need ensure that child friendly and child-centred approaches are considered in all aspects of the continued response.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns, government measures, and UN policies required the Afghanistan CTFMR to change the way it worked, especially in relation to in-person meetings. For example, from April to August 2020, government ministries were largely closed or on remote-working arrangements, so the CTFMR could not conduct in-person meetings during this time. Along a similar timeline, in accordance with UN COVID-19 safety measures, the CTFMR had to convert most of its communications to either telephone or internet-based calls.

Many national staff were forced to work from home, without the benefit of reliable internet connection or mobile phone service - a problem across Afghanistan - not only for the CTFMR, but also for the contacts they are trying to reach. These factors made MRM work and advocacy particularly challenging. For example, the special committee established by the Attorney General’s Office to investigate alleged sexual violence against children in Logar province, was stalled for several months due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and related protection concerns.

With many staff facing movement restrictions, the CTFMR continued to be innovative, changing strategies and using different methods to monitor, follow up, and verify incidents. This included strong collaboration with communities, contacting interlocutors via telephone, conducting online

training and capacity building, and for sensitive and confidential cases, inviting individual interlocutors for meetings outdoors.

The CTFMR continued to engage with parties to the conflict on child protection issues, including virtual and in-person meetings with armed opposition groups. It remained actively engaged with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the secretariat for the Action Plan for the Prevention of Underage Recruitment and Use and the annexes on killing and maiming and sexual Violence against Children and the Road Map to Compliance.

Excellencies

Some of the key lessons learned by the Afghanistan CTFMR include how necessary it is to work hard to exhibit flexibility, patience, and creativity. It is also critically important to prepare contingency plans, remain ever aware of different cultural sensitivities, engage in trust building with communities (especially in times where physical meeting are not possible), and to find creative ways to continue collaboration among the members of the CTFMR, UN country team, and government when restrictions are in place. Moreover, it is quite clear that better mobile phone network access, coverage, and increased overall access to internet would greatly facilitate MRM work in Afghanistan, as it would allow interlocutors to communicate with the CTFMR in a safe manner, both in terms of the pandemic and in the situation of ongoing armed conflict.

Looking to what the Security Council, Member States, the UN, and civil society actors can do to factor in, and respond to, the impact of the pandemic on violations against children – in Afghanistan there is a very simple starting point: the CTFMR needs additional human resources in order to continue its now more difficult and complicated work. Last year, the UNAMA mandate was expanded, yet it still has not received any additional human resources to respond to this increase in expected work/output.

As I close, I would like to make some brief recommendations for your consideration:

We must ensure that decision making bodies on the COVID-19 response in Afghanistan, including task forces, crisis management teams, legislative, policy and budgetary working groups and other

relevant national and local government institutions, are child focused and putting children a priority in all aspects of their works.

As Afghanistan looks to many changes in the post-COVID world, we need to make sure that emphasis is placed on quality education, social protection services and better economic opportunities, so that children and their families will be better equipped for future challenges.

We must have active referral options ready, and efforts to raise awareness around child marriage and other negative economic coping mechanisms should be intensified. More support and funding for social workers is needed, with additional social workers recruited locally.

Finally, particularly during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, much more needs to be done to protect children from the irreversible physical and psychological harm of recruitment and use. We will continue to encourage the Government to use the Child Protection Units more proactively in monitoring for use of children at checkpoints, and to work with armed opposition groups to commit to ending child recruitment, including looking for opportunities to raise these issues as peace negotiations continue.

I thank you.

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Security Council Arrria Formula Meeting:
Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict

Statement by Mr. Manuel Fontaine

Director, Office of Emergency Programmes, UNICEF

7 May 2021

Your excellencies, Special Representative Gamba, distinguished colleagues –

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important and timely issue. As the world's leading humanitarian agency for children – and a key actor in the roll-out of the COVAX initiative for equitable vaccine distribution – at every level of the organization, UNICEF has been responding to the pandemic. That includes in our work to support children affected by armed conflict – not just by monitoring and reporting on grave violations but also by staying and delivering lifesaving responses to children who are most in need.

Even outside conflict situations, the pandemic's impact on children is alarming. The world is witnessing a horrifying surge in gender-based violence, with girls particularly at risk. 920 million children globally remain affected by school closures, many without access to remote learning. Confinement, isolation, and loss of livelihoods has exacerbated violence against children and increased mental health and psychosocial needs, while economic insecurity has increased the risk of child labour and child marriage. Conflict-affected children face all of these vulnerabilities and more.

As the SRSG's report indicates, we don't yet fully understand the impact the pandemic has had – or will have – on trends in grave violations. But our child protection specialists are worried about the compounding impact COVID-19 may be having in situations of armed conflict.

In Colombia, for example, school closures in areas where armed groups are present appears to have exposed children to heightened risk of recruitment and use. And the socio-economic challenges faced by families due to the pandemic only serve to exacerbate this risk.

In West Africa, our specialists are concerned that heightened socio-economic insecurity may lead to increased use of abduction of children for ransom – an incredibly alarming trend if verified.

And I recently learned of two eleventh grade boys in another context whose teacher only discovered that they had been forcibly recruited by an armed group when they stopped showing up to school to pick up their remote schooling guides. The teacher believed that at least ten other boys faced the same risk of recruitment given circumstances fostered by the pandemic.

In addition to these heightened risks for children, the pandemic has created access challenges for monitoring and verification as others have highlighted. While verification standards remain as

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robust as ever and the UN continues to be able to identify general trends, it will take some time for colleagues to verify the backlog of reported cases. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, I want to take this opportunity to highlight the resiliency of the UN teams on the ground who found ways to stay and deliver on the children and armed conflict mandate.

In Myanmar, pre-COVID conflict dynamics and existing access restrictions meant that the UN was already well-versed in adapting to shifting access dynamics and had built the community-based networks necessary to facilitate the remote work required during the pandemic. The CTFMR was even able to leverage COVID-19 impediments into opportunities with the signing of the first-ever Joint Action Plan with a non-state armed group, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army. The establishment of online communication with the group enabled regular and smooth negotiations, which may have been more cumbersome to achieve through physical meetings given the group's location.

In Yemen, the CTFMR was able to accelerate the release of almost 70 formerly associated children detained in a military facility due to the urgency created by the pandemic and an additional 95 children held in an interim care centre in the country were swiftly reunified with their families before lockdown took effect. Although case management has adapted to movement restrictions, as was the case in many countries, protection actors faced challenges in supporting certain aspects of release and reintegration programmes that required travel or are difficult to replicate through virtual platforms.

In the Philippines, colleagues managed to continue a number of important programmatic interventions, despite COVID, including sustained engagement with parties to conflict on prevention frameworks as well as technical assistance and capacity building to more than 200 government stakeholders on the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Law through virtual platforms.

And in Somalia, UNICEF ensured that reintegration centres remained open for recently released children by implementing strict social distancing and hand washing measures in addition to the provision of PPE to staff and children, reaching over 1,500 children in 2020 alone.

Through these experiences – many of which are ongoing – UNICEF has learned a few important lessons:

- Funding for monitoring and reporting capacity and response programming is more crucial than ever. The COVID experience has only underscored what we already knew – monitoring and reporting and required programmatic responses are inherently human resource intensive activities. Without sufficient resources, the work cannot continue.
- Access to internet and digital communication services must be scaled up in conflict affected settings. It's critical for monitoring and reporting to continue in the face of a crisis like COVID, but it's also fundamental to ensuring the most vulnerable children have access to education, which is why it is a core tenet of case management adaptation as well as UNICEF's Reimagine Education initiative.

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- The value of building strong networks and partnerships cannot be overstated. These networks allowed monitoring work to continue safely and robustly in the countries that had them.
- Remote or virtual engagement can be leveraged to create opportunities to advance the protection of children, but in such sensitive work that relies so heavily on the building of trust, it can never fully replace face-to-face engagement with survivors, witnesses, and parties to conflict.

Your excellencies, we continue to count on your support. While the situation may be improving here in New York, conflict affected children will be dealing with the lingering impact of the pandemic for the foreseeable future. We must remain vigilant in our joint efforts to protect the children most impacted by the pandemic.

Thank you.

Statement by Mr. Philippe Adapoe
Regional Director for West and Central Africa
Save the Children
United Nations Security Arria Formula Meeting on the
Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of
armed conflict

7 May 2021

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

- Thank you very much to the Permanent Mission of Estonia and the Office of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict for hosting this meeting today to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on violations against children in armed conflict. I am grateful for the opportunity to share experiences from Save the Children's work in the Sahel to contribute to this important and timely discussion.
- Even before the outbreak of COVID-19, the Sahel region has been facing an unprecedented crisis as escalating violence, rising levels of food insecurity and ongoing displacement, are creating one of the most severe humanitarian emergencies in the world. With 50% of the Sahelian population under 15, this is very much a children's crisis.
- Grave violations of children's rights unfortunately, are widespread in the Sahel. In 2020 2.3m children were in need of protection assistance across the Sahel. COVID-19 has only exacerbated the challenges facing children in the Sahel.
- Nowhere has this been more prominent than on children's access to education.
- The number of schools forced to shut in the region as a direct result of insecurity and attacks on school infrastructure, has increased sixfold since 2017, forcing around 4,000 schools to close by early 2020.
- The COVID-19 pandemic tipped an existing education crisis to breaking point.
- At the height of the pandemic, school closures across Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso to limit the spread of the virus affected the education of approximately 13 million children. Even with schools now re-opening, nearly 4,000 schools continue to be closed due to insecurity, which is affecting 700,000 children across the 3 countries.
- In conflict and humanitarian settings, schools provide a safe environment for children, protecting them from physical dangers as well as ensuring they have access to lifesaving food, water, health care and hygiene supplies.

- When children are not in school, we know they are at greater risk of violations and rights abuses including recruitment by armed groups, sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage, child labour and other forms of exploitation and abuse.
- In the Sahel we have been concerned that school closures due to COVID-19, alongside the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic and ongoing conflict, have created conditions in which children are more vulnerable to recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups.
- While data on these potential trends is still to come, we have seen the recruitment of children and their association with armed groups become a growing concern in the Sahel. The conditions which drive children and parents to consider children joining armed groups, including insecurity, lack of prospects whether in education or employment, and poverty, have all been direct consequences of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- “In front of us, they killed my grandparents and two of my brothers. This is what made me go where I shouldn't have gone.” Abdoulaye, Gao
- I also want to bring attention to an often-overlooked issue, which is the specific consequences of attacks on schools, school closures and economic insecurity driven by COVID-19, for girls.
- The gendered nature of attacks on schools, including targeting of girls' schools for abductions and attack, as we have seen in recent incidents in NE Nigeria, as well as sexual violence in and around schools or along school routes, is driving girls out of school.
- Attacks on schools that result in girls leaving or being taken out of school even for relatively short periods, greatly increases the risk of child marriage and permanent loss of education. Niger currently has the highest rate for child marriage in the world, with 76% of girls married before their 18th birthday,
- In humanitarian crises, and as we have seen, crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as families face even greater hardship, child marriage can also be seen as a coping mechanism.
- It is crucial therefore to both tackle the underlying challenges facing children and their families, including long-term underdevelopment, lack of access to education and opportunities, alongside taking concrete steps to end conflict, and ensure parties to conflict uphold their obligations to the protection of children in conflict while it still rages.
- The governments of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger alongside others in the Sahel region, have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration – committing to the protection and continuation of education in armed conflict. There is good evidence that states are implementing the commitments and that this is having a positive effect. This is an important step and we hope that momentum on this issue will continue as we look to the Fourth International Conference on Safe Schools which will be hosted in Nigeria later this year.
- The risks I have laid out above require specialized support and resourcing to address. But reports consistently show that humanitarian child protection interventions are chronically underfunded, unpredictable, and do not match actual need. In 2019 for example, Mali received only 0.1% share of total estimated child protection funding.

- Alongside the impact of chronic underfunding of child protection, the ability of humanitarian organizations to address the protection needs of children has been compromised by worsening conflict and insecurity and measures which, while necessary to stop the spread of the virus, further impeded timely access to humanitarian assistance for children.
- While it is hard to say whether COVID-19 restrictions have been systematically used as a cover for deliberate restriction of access, what we do know is that humanitarian workers are increasingly targeted by non-state armed groups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, meaning vulnerable communities cannot access humanitarian assistance and the monitoring of harm against civilians, including children, is being compromised.
- Despite this, child protection actors, including those engaged in the MRM and tasked with implementing the UN Security Council's CAAC agenda, are playing a critical role.
- Throughout the pandemic we have seen child protection actors adapt to new challenges and continue to support children and families who have experienced serious rights violations, for example through remote case management services, and efforts to strengthen community-based protection.
- Continued efforts to monitor and verifying grave violations, analyze root causes, and engage in dialogue with parties to conflict in order to end and prevent grave violations is also critical for improved accountability to children and communities, and to support more timely and appropriate programmatic interventions and services.
- I want to close today with five key recommendations:
- The first is that the UN Security Council must call on parties to conflict to immediately cease violations against children, including unlawful attacks and threats of attacks against students, teachers and schools and urge and support all parties to implement the Safe Schools Declaration and its Guidelines for Military Use, as well as the Paris Principles and Commitments. Perpetrators of violations must be fully held to account, including through ensuring a credible list in the Annual Report of the Secretary General on CAAC.
- Second, a greater emphasis and resource must be placed on facilitating dialogue between states, the UN, NGOs and non-state armed groups to better protect children from grave violations.
- Third, the UN Security Council must also ensure multilateral peacekeeping and political missions have adequate dedicated senior child protection expertise to ensure strengthened monitoring and reporting of violations against children and effective engagement with parties to conflict. The G5 Sahel defense and security committee must ensure the integration of the Safe Schools Declaration and its guidelines for military use into its security strategy and facilitate access to troops for training on respect for the Safe Schools Declaration and its guidelines.
- Fourth, the international community must also prioritize and support well-resourced and inclusive, gender-sensitive child protection services across the Sahel, and work to promote humanitarian access and the safety of humanitarian workers to reach all children in need of

protection support to deliver such services. This includes ensuring counter-terrorism efforts do not restrict impartial humanitarian organizations from delivering aid.

- Finally, all States should support government efforts to keep education alive in times of crisis including through commitment to providing multi-year and flexible funds to support education in emergencies.

Arria: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children

Statement by Permanent Representative Mona Juul, Permanent Representative of Norway, in the Arria Formula-meeting 'Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict', 7 May 2021.

07. May 2021

I would like to thank Ambassador Jurgenson and other contributors for setting the stage for today's meeting, which we are proud to co-sponsor. We also welcome the SRSGs timely study. And affirm our strong support for her mandate, and the 'UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict' (MRM) - to which greater both political and financial support is needed. Their work is instrumental in ensuring that the members of the Council - and indeed all of us - can get a better understanding of the situation for children caught in armed conflict.

We commend the work of the 'UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations against Children'. And we value that they were able to resume their work shortly after the outbreak of COVID-19.

We are at the same time deeply concerned that the monitoring of the Six Grave Violations has become more difficult, and that the pandemic has affected the capacity of the Country Task Forces, and their partners, to respond to such violations.

This is particularly troubling against the backdrop of the pandemic, which is threatening to undo gains on the protection of children. For example, the socioeconomic effects of the pandemic have been a push factor for the recruitment and the use of children in armed conflicts.

In Colombia, OCHA has reported a 113% increase in armed groups' forced recruitment of children from 2019. And this from January to June 2020 only. A highly worrying trend. And while the reasons are complex and many, the pandemic is undoubtedly a catalyst.

It has also increased the vulnerability of children- in particular girls- to rape and other forms of sexual violence. Our efforts to protect and respond to conflict-related sexual violence must be stepped up, and perpetrators held to account.

Colleagues,

Attacks on healthcare both hampers the COVID-19 response, and hinders access for children to healthcare. We call on all parties to swiftly implement Resolution 2286.

We have seen also the increased vulnerability of children being out of school. Since the start of the pandemic SRSG Gamba has warned us that schools - more than ever - are viewed as strategic military assets. Preventing military attacks against schools, and ensuring their civilian character must be a priority. The Safe Schools Declaration is an

important tool. And we warmly welcome our dear Mexican colleagues' endorsement of the declaration and call on others to follow their example.

We are pleased to see also steps taken by the African Union to prioritise protection of children in conflict situations. And encourage closer cooperation between the UN and the AU - together with other regional organisations - on CAAC.

Chair, Colleagues,

This year's 25th Anniversary of the CAAC mandate is an opportunity to take stock and strengthen the tools and mechanisms available for the mandate.

We have a responsibility to recommit to ensuring all children are safe in conflict.



**MISSION PERMANENTE DU NIGER
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**Remarks by Ambassador Mr. Abdou Abarry
Permanent Representative of Niger to the UN**

United Nations Security Council Arria Formula Meeting

**Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against
children in situations of armed conflict**

New York, 07 May 2021

– Check against delivery –

Excellences, Dear Colleagues,

It is clear what the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating, and not least for children in situations of armed conflict.

Addressing the plight of children affected by armed conflict is, therefore, particularly salient in the context of this pandemic. Children in already dire situation now face even more acute difficulties in all aspects of their lives, well-being, protection, mental health, and access to education.

We commend the office of the Special representative on children and armed conflict for this important study and the UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs) as well as local actors that continued the work of monitoring and reporting despite the challenging circumstances. We also thank Estonia and all co-sponsors for convening today's Arria meeting.

Excellences, Dear Colleagues,

The pandemic has further pushed under the shadow grave violations against children that we know were already underreported, due to their particularly sensitive nature, namely rape and sexual violence, recruitment and use, and abductions.

Additionally, as all briefers have underscored, the MRM systems were severely affected due to measures implemented to combat the pandemic. Children in armed conflict, as a result, face compounded degrees of marginalization and vulnerability: they are deprived of essential protection services, often insufficient, just as violations increase, subjected to violations, and for some, they are confined and trapped in unsafe spaces.

With the acute economic precarity that many households experience, we fear an increase in violations such as child labor, re-recruitment,

– Check against delivery –

child marriage with its impact on access to education, particularly for young girls who, in armed conflict situations, are less likely to return to school following school closures.

We wish to further emphasize the importance of the PRST on attacks against schools, adopted last September during Niger's presidency of the Security Council, and of the Safe Schools Declaration as an important instrument for the protection of education in armed conflict.

Niger underscores the need to further pay attention to the breadth and depth of these violations – the trends in the number of children facing violations but also how every affected child may experience varying degrees of violations.

Excellences, Dear Colleagues,

We cannot afford to fail children especially those in armed conflict settings who find themselves in dire situations, for no doing of their own. We share the concerns about the medium- and long-term impacts of the pandemic on violations against children.

To this effect, my delegation wishes to make the following recommendations:

1. There is need to establish and strengthen monitoring networks in communities and ensure good internet connectivity in order to facilitate swift reporting. While it is established that no technology can replace the critical in-person visits for some aspects of verification, technology can play a role in mitigating the effects of potential disruptions.
2. We underscore the need to increase human and financial resources to child protection in situations of armed conflict. Several missions

– *Check against delivery* –

and situations of concern suffer from understaffing in the area of child protection, and child protection is often the first area to suffer cuts in times of budgetary austerity. These concerns increase today with the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. More than ever before, it is critical to strengthen prevention and early warning systems. This entails paying particular attention to regions where grave violations against children are on the rise. We emphasize the importance of working across sectors and integrating an understanding of how the multiple intersecting crises exacerbate vulnerabilities, as some briefers have rightly noted.
4. We insist on the continuation of comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programs, that are gendered sensitive, for children formerly associated with armed groups including education support and training. Children formerly associated with armed groups face a great risk of relapse and of being doubly victimized anytime essential protection services are interrupted.
5. It is clear the findings presented today that, there is need for a follow-up study that would assess the impact of COVID19 on the MRM systems. We recommend an assessment that goes beyond a geographical focus to account for situations of heightened vulnerability such as that of forcibly displaced children, refugees, and children undergoing reintegration processes.
6. In the context of current surges in infection and deaths in many parts of the world, we call on the full implementation of Security Council resolution 2565 to facilitate equitable and affordable access to COVID19 vaccines in armed conflict situations, post-conflict situations and complex humanitarian emergencies. The announcement by the United States to wave vaccine patents is noteworthy, and will certainly accelerate, as resolution 2565 stipulates, the scaling up the manufacturing and distribution

– Check against delivery –

capabilities in various parts of the world. This is not only a measure to face today's challenges, but it would prepare our global community to prevent the next pandemic.

The current health crisis has already become a child rights crisis for too many. When health systems collapse on such a massive scale so do protection mechanisms and many other prevention measures. The suspension of key vaccination campaigns may lead to the emergence of preventable diseases with consequences on children.

7. Lastly, **Colleagues**, Niger firmly believes that there is the need to respect and uphold the fundamental rights for access to education of all children – as a pillar of conflict prevention but also because it is simply the right, just, and human thing to do. There is no substitute to access to quality education especially for children in armed conflict. This can open doors of learning, opportunities, and hope of a better future.

To conclude, we pay tribute to child protection actors working under challenging circumstances to complement the important work to ensure that children in situations of armed conflict receive the care and protection that they need.

I thank you for your attention.



THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM
PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT

By H.E. Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy
Permanent Representative of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam
To the United Nations
At the Security Council Arria Formula Meeting on
Children and Armed Conflict
New York, 07 May 2021

Mr. Chair,

At the outset, let me join other colleagues in thanking Estonia for organizing this meeting. I would also like to thank SRSG Virginia Gamba for launching a new study on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Children Affected by Conflict and other briefers for their insightful remarks.

Mr. Chair

In any war or conflict, children are the biggest sufferers of loss and grief. It is heart-breaking to learn that in the last ten years, nearly ten thousand children have been killed or maimed in conflicts. Millions of children in armed conflict have had no access to school and other essential services due to the destruction of civilian infrastructure. As a result, they have been increasingly recruited and used by armed groups.

Moreover, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this situation and caused more difficulties for the monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM). It has interrupted the United Nations-led verification process.

Against this backdrop, I wish to highlight the following points:

First, States bear the primary responsibility to protect their civilians, especially children affected by armed conflict. They should spare no effort in preventing violence against children, providing children with full access to basic needs and complying with international humanitarian and human rights laws. In addition, we call on States who have not done so to become parties to key international frameworks on the protection of children and education, including the Safe School Declaration and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

Second, education empowers children and tackles the root causes of conflicts by cultivating and promoting the culture of peace in their heart and mind. We urge parties concerned to ensure education continuation for children in armed conflicts. In this connection, we call on parties to armed conflict to immediately prevent and end all attacks on schools including on their personnel.

Third, to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 on the implementation of national, regional and the United Nations agendas on children, we call for greater efforts and cooperation by all member states, relevant stakeholders and the whole UN system in monitoring these impacts and taking timely measures to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict. In this connection, funding for children protection and MRM activities is essential.

I thank you./.



بالعثة لئلا يفلت من يدي
لدى من ظمة الهمم المتحدة
نبيويورك

Mr. President,

We are all aware, every child needs Stability, Safe and secure surroundings, good education, nutritious food, wellbeing, peaceful and Healthy living environment and appropriate guidance and discipline. This means they should not be in situations of armed conflicts, violence, and hostilities.

This already dire situation of children victims of such violations, has been exacerbated and worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased their vulnerabilities and will have devastating short, medium and long-term consequences on their physical and mental health, protection, education, and their future in general.

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Violations such as rape and other forms of sexual violence, forced recruitment by State and non-State actors and use of children because of schools' closures, loss of family income or the withdrawal of state, abductions and attacks on schools and hospitals are generally under-reported due to their nature, and due to access restrictions and inability of the MRM staff to interview survivors of grave violations and witnesses.

In the same vein, many of these children are in detention for actual or alleged association with parties to conflict and are under high risk of contamination due to the lack of hygiene and medical care in detention facilities.

The pandemic has also challenged the ability of Child Protection staff deployed in situations on the CAAC agenda to work with parties to the conflict on developing and implementing commitments to end child rights violations

As we renew our appreciation of the valuable study prepared by the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, and the commendable role of the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs) despite the big challenges imposed by the pandemic, we would like to stress the urgent need to give greater attention to violence against children as a **PRIORITY**, and to put prevention and response to violations against children on the top of the political agenda in the context of recovery planning.

In the same context, donors should prioritize the allocation of funding for broader child protection activities, including flexible funding to address operational challenges encountered in the framework of the engagement with parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations.

Children have a key role to play in building a present and a future where peace will prevail. It is our responsibility to enable them to be such agents of change

and not the main victims of the devastating impacts of the pandemic the armed conflicts.

It is therefore important to conduct a follow-up study in 2022 to determine the overall impact of COVID-19 on the MRM and on the engagement with parties to conflict to end and prevent violations.

In conclusion, as we recall the SG call for a global ceasefire and resolution 2532, we do believe that the most urgent priority to protect children and put an end to their suffering is ending conflicts and hostilities and making peace.

Thank you very much



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA
UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL
2021-2022**

**ARRIA FORMULA MEETING ON THE "IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON
VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN SITUATIONS OF ARMED CONFLICT"**

FRIDAY, 7TH MAY 2021 (02:00 PM)

STATEMENT BY AMB. MARTIN KIMANI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

1. Thank you, Sven, for giving me the floor. I commend you and your team for organising this Arria Formula meeting.
2. I also thank the briefers for their perspectives.
3. The negative impact of the pandemic on children in armed conflict has been well articulated by the briefers, and further highlighted in the study prepared by the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict.
4. The pandemic and its attendant counter measures have increased violations and deprivations against children in many ways including:
 - a. The disruption of essential services such as child protection;
 - b. The closure of schools has increased the exposure of children to abusers;
 - c. The interruption in the prevention plans and services intended to prevent violations against children.
5. We also note with great concern the continuing acts of terrorism in different regions.
6. Terrorist groups such as the Al-Shabaab and Islamic State Central African Province (ISCAP) are killing and maiming civilians. They continue to launch

attacks that do not discriminate against targeting children, and sometimes are directed against schools, hospitals and other infrastructure critical to children.

7. They continue to radicalise and recruit children and youth, which I consider to endanger their victim's mental health and long-term safety and security.
8. In order to ensure that children's rights in conflict situations, especially in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, are secured, let me lay out six imperatives:
 - i. Ceasefire and peace negotiations must be seized as opportunities to strengthen mechanisms to protect children. Parties to conflict are called upon to adhere to the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire. The Security Council should seek to increase the costs to parties who do not heed the calls for a ceasefire.
 - ii. The multilateral system should do more to ensure universal access to COVID-19 vaccines. Lacking this, the countries that are in situations of conflict may be overwhelmed by the pandemic and its impact on the economy and public health systems. This will further deteriorate the safety of children.
 - iii. Child protection officers and organisations should be considered essential personnel and prioritised for vaccine access.
 - iv. More tools to protect student safety and security should be designed while schools are in recess, and teachers trained so that they are deployed once there is reopening. In conflict situations, the scope of humanitarian assistance should partner with technology companies to deliver affordable and accessible digital solutions for schools and families.
 - v. Member States should incorporate child protection concerns when designing and enforcing measures to contain the pandemic. And they should ensure that child protection services can continue safely and unimpeded.
 - vi. To address the increased threat from online abusers, recruiters and radicalisers, states should deploy digital reporting platforms and increase training of children and families in digital safety and security.
9. Let me conclude by reaffirming Kenya's commitment to the protection of children in conflict situations.

I thank you.

Remarks at a UN Security Council Arria-Formula Meeting on the Impact of COVID-19 on Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict

Trina Saha
Deputy Political Coordinator
New York, New York
May 7, 2021

AS DELIVERED

Thank you to Estonia for convening us to discuss this important issue. I'd also like to thank SRSG Gamba and her team, who've been working to finalize the CAAC report, and for sharing the challenges they faced in their work.

While we've all been impacted by this pandemic, the work of the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting has faced particular challenges. Their work tracking human rights violations and abuses against children has always been difficult, sensitive work. As we heard from the briefers, health precautions, teleworking, and changing dynamics on the ground have all affected the ability to collect vital data this past year. We applaud the CTFMRs in their efforts to work around these challenges and use innovative solutions to complete their work, particularly to track attacks on schools and hospitals, and to identify trends regarding violations and abuses despite missing data.

Unfortunately – as is so often the case with the second order effects of this pandemic – it's the most vulnerable children, who pay the biggest costs. This year, we will have an incomplete understanding of how armed conflict has impacted children, with abuses and violations occurring in the shadows. While the world continues to battle COVID-19, we must consider how we can simultaneously protect children, despite communication and access challenges. We urge states to take greater ownership for providing child protection services and demand that parties to conflict abide by their international legal obligations. This pandemic cannot be used as an excuse to violate human rights, unlawfully deny humanitarian access, block information sharing, or avoid transparency. Children in communities struggling with violence already struggle to access educational and medical facilities. The impact of the pandemic has only further deepened the divide between those with means and those without. This is

especially true of children belonging to minority groups, such as children with disabilities.

In addition to ongoing CAAC concerns in armed conflicts on the UN Security Council agenda, we also urge the international community to focus on emerging conflicts in which children face acute protection challenges, and how child protection efforts can be activated quickly in these crises. In the Tigray region of Ethiopia, for example, thousands of children have been forced from their homes, separated from their families, and have even fallen victim to sexual violence.

The United States remains fully committed to the UN's work in ending the impact of armed conflict on children whenever possible. The United States, under the Biden-Harris administration, has prioritized global COVID-19 relief, with over \$4 billion pledged to COVAX over this year and next. We know that our global COVID-19 assistance program will be a critical element in addressing the multitude of factors impacting children in violent conflict.

I'll end with a question for the briefers. What do you see as the most crucial need for children who are facing unprecedented challenges this year, and what more can the Security Council do to enable the UN to overcome these difficult challenges?

Thank you.



Children and Armed Conflict and COVID

Statement for Arria Meeting by Ambassador Brian Flynn

7 May 2021

Thank you Chair,

And we thank Estonia for arranging this timely Arria meeting, which Ireland is proud to co-sponsor. Thank you also to the briefers for bringing a field perspective to today's discussion, and to Special Representative Gamba and her office for this important study. Ireland aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the EU and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Chair,

Let me begin by paying tribute to the monitors and child protection staff in UN country teams and peacekeeping missions. In the face of the upheaval caused by COVID-19, their tireless efforts to prevent and respond to violations and their ability to adapt have helped to keep children safe and have protected the integrity of the CAAC agenda. We have heard striking examples of

monitors putting themselves at risk because of their dedication to their work. Our role is to support them and their networks to work securely and without fear of reprisal. Child protection capacities must be adequately resourced and flexible to react to crisis needs. This Council has an obligation to follow through on the promises it makes in the establishment of mandates and just as importantly in the transition of UN missions.

Chair,

It has been a year since the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and the adoption of Resolution 2532. Yet we have seen conflict and violence surge globally, with devastating impacts on children.

In Myanmar, at least 53 children have been killed in the violence since the coup in February, and countless others have been injured or detained. In Ethiopia, horrific sexual violence has been reported, including against girls. Those responsible for grave violations against children must be held accountable.

COVID-19 has severely impacted upon monitoring, likely leading to an underreporting of violations. The unfortunate truth is that the very violations that we suspect have intensified during COVID-19, particularly recruitment and sexual violence, are the most

difficult to verify. We cannot allow truth and justice to become another victim of this pandemic. It is imperative that monitors have the sufficient time and resources to address verification gaps in order to prevent impunity, and ensure that service provision takes into account the likelihood of unmet need due to underreporting.

This report before us today is just the first marker in understanding the true extent of COVID-19's impact on children in armed conflict and we welcome plans for a follow-up study in 2022.

While verifications of the direct impact of COVID-19 on violations continue, we must also address the indirect and interconnected consequences for children affected by conflict. Communities and their children already grappling with scarcity and food insecurity, such as in Yemen and Afghanistan, face increased socio-economic pressure from the virus, exacerbated by accounts of denials of humanitarian access. Recent attacks on health care centres as well as healthcare workers in Syria, Myanmar and elsewhere wreak havoc on pandemic response and vaccine rollout ambitions. Deliberate targeting and use of schools by armed groups, including in Afghanistan and across the Lake Chad Basin, is compounding virus-related school closures. As we heard earlier

from Mr. Adapoe from Save the Children, the pandemic has disrupted the education of millions of children, which has decimated the progress made by many, especially adolescent girls who are most at risk of leaving school prematurely. We cannot accept this as a new normal. Nothing less than transformative investment is needed to get back on track and to ensure education is at the heart of our recovery policies.

We call on all States to sign the Safe Schools Declaration and reiterate the importance of the September 2020 PRST on attacks against schools.

Chair,

This year has marked Ireland's first opportunity to serve on the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. For us it is important to ensure that the Group's conclusions are anchored in the current realities of the country situations, translate into tangible improvements in the lives of children affected by conflict, and address the lasting impacts of COVID-19 on implementation, including on government actions, services for victims, and reintegration of children.

In an increasingly fragmented world, the pandemic sent us a universal warning: No one is safe until all of us are safe. Children

today and future generations are counting on us to take this opportunity to build back better. This begins with prioritising welfare over warfare.

Thank you.



**IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN
IN SITUATIONS OF ARMED CONFLICT
STATEMENT BY MR. NICOLAS DE RIVIERE,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE TO THE UNITED NATIONS
SECURITY COUNCIL
ARRIA FORMULA MEETING**

New York, 07 MAY 2021

Mr Chair,

Like colleagues before me, I wish to thank Estonia and our briefers. I also want to thank SRSG Gamba and her teams for her report and its valuable recommendations.

We share the concerns regarding the impact of the Covid pandemic on children.

First, Covid-related restrictions have limited our capacity to monitor and respond to grave violations. The only thing worse than violations against children, are violations occurring in silence and impunity. We express our deep gratitude to all child protection actors that have ensured the continuation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. We also pay tribute to the important role of civil society.

Second, socio-economic consequences of the pandemic and school closures put children further at risk of domestic violence, rape and other forms of sexual violence, hunger and either not enrolling or dropping out of school. School closures can increase the risk of recruitment and use as well as child labor. Girls also have specific vulnerabilities, in particular to early and forced marriage. Inequalities between children increase in every part of the world. In this regard, we look forward to the Coalition to support school feeding worldwide, spearheaded by the World Food Program.

We are also concerned by growing impunity. Violators must be held accountable and we welcome in this regard the role of the International Criminal Court.

The pandemic reminds us we must do more to implement the framework created by Resolution 1612. MRM actors must receive political and financial support to operate safely and securely. We must also continue to make the best use of our tools. I am mainly referring to:

- the adoption of Action plans and their swift implementation by parties ;
- the importance of the "list of shame", whose integrity we must defend;

- the adoption of conclusions by the working group, that must be robust and up to date. In this regard, we pay tribute to Sweden and Belgium as previous chairs and to the work of Norway since January.

For its part, France will continue to play an active role:

- Promoting the universal endorsement of the Paris Principles and Commitments ;
- And on the ground, supporting projects that ensure access to education in emergency situations, including the Education Cannot Wait Fund. For example, through the Global Partnership for Education, France is financing an 11 million dollar project in Niger to mitigate the impact of the epidemic on the education system.

This Council must remain mobilized, not only through its working group but also in all its actions. Finally, I commend the efforts of the Secretary-General, his Special Envoys and SRSG Gamba to ensure that the issue of child protection continues to be addressed with parties to conflict.

Thank you



**Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
to the United Nations**

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Statement

by

H.E. Dr. Halimah DeShong

Second Deputy Permanent Representative

**Arria Formula – Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violations against
Children in Situations of Armed Conflict**

Security Council

07 May 2021

New York

Check against delivery

Thank you Chair

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines thanks Estonia for organising this meeting on the Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children in situations of armed conflict, and we welcome the opportunity to reflect on the findings of this important study by the Office of the SRSG. Thanks as well to our distinguished panellists for their important insights.

Existing data indicate that the social, economic and health effects of the pandemic have resulted in increased recruitment and use, and abduction of children, closures of schools and child friendly spaces, and reduced disarmament, demobilization and reintegration actions.

We are concerned that 2020 reports of sexual violence against children currently match those for 2019, even as there remains a significant number of unverified reports. When this is assessed against the general trend of underreporting sexual violence, we can certainly infer that the problem is far more serious than current figures suggest. The pandemic has also reduced the capacity of national, regional and international actors to engage in prevention, and protection work, and to provide psychosocial support for children affected by sexual violence.

While there remains a significant number of unverified sensitive violations, the pandemic has clearly heightened the dangers to which children in situations of armed conflict are exposed. COVID-19 containment measures, specifically in the second and third quarters of 2020, have seriously disrupted verification by Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms, as well as the overall prevention, capacity-building and support work of the various Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting. This situation was further compounded as Task Force funding was redirected toward pandemic response efforts.

Notwithstanding these challenges, we note the agility of some missions that were able to improve and consolidate their data collection in the final quarter of 2020, by remote-monitoring, consulting with Women Protection Advisors on sexual violence affecting children, and by training members of NGOs and community-based organisations to leverage their networks for increased reporting. Indeed, these are strategies that can be more fully pursued for possible streamlining in future. There is urgent need to build Task Force capacity to conduct remote monitoring, through the use of ICTs, in order to maintain their child protection and data collection services.

In closing, we wish to add that

- Sustained and flexible funding is necessary to support education, reintegration, and sexual violence prevention and response. Actions to this end must be both child- centred and gender responsive.
- Follow-up analysis is required to further explore the true impact of the pandemic, as more data on 2020 and 2021 verifications become available. This will allow the CTFMRs to update the Security Council, and the wider UN system, on this ever-evolving situation. It will also facilitate appropriately streamlined and joint-up actions.
- Finally, gender-aware child protection priorities must be mainstreamed across national, regional and international pandemic response, as it relates to funding, containment measures, vaccinations and economic recovery plans.

Thank you.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Statement
Children and Armed Conflict Arria format meeting, 7 May 2021

Check against delivery

- Good Afternoon, it is a pleasure to join you all today. Thank you to all our hosts for bringing us together to discuss this important topic, and to all the panellists for sharing their insights on the impact of COVID-19 on violations against children in conflict.
- The UK is committed to protecting and promoting children's rights in conflict situations. And we share the concerns of everyone here today about the impact COVID-19 has had on the most vulnerable in society. It is vital we – the international community – remain alive to emerging threats and adapt our approaches to ensure the rights of children continue to be fully respected and protected.
- That is why the UK welcomes this timely report on the impact of COVID-19 on children in conflict. The report provides useful information, experience and insights from the pandemic so far as well as anticipating the challenges that lie ahead as we collectively look to build back better.
- While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is yet to be fully determined, it is clear from the findings of this report that the effects on children thus far have been devastating and threaten to undermine the hard-fought progress we have collectively achieved in this space.
- Mass school closures and deteriorating socio-economic conditions have increased the vulnerability of children to recruitment and use. Restricted movement and access for child protection actors has limited the delivery of life-saving provisions and engagement with parties to conflict on the implementation of critical child protection measures. Reduced capacity and suspension of essential services, limited mobility and increased isolation has reduced children's access to vital information and increased their risk of exposure to violence,

abuse, neglect and exploitation. Of particular concern is the noted increase in allegations of rape and other forms of sexual violence, which disproportionately affect girls.

- These are but a few of the known effects. The stark reality remains however that the lives of children have been completely upturned by conflict and COVID-19 but we will not truly know the full extent of the impacts for quite some time.
- That is why the continued and enhanced monitoring, reporting, collection of data and response to grave violations is paramount. Child protection actors and mechanisms like the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) play a critical role.
- The CTFMR's work is essential for the continued protection of children affected by conflict and in further assessing the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on children. Their work documenting the challenges faced, and solutions implemented, and in supporting the development of new and targeted ways of working to better protect children and hold perpetrators to account will be vital.
- We welcome the report's recommendations and commend the steadfast commitment, resilience and creativity of the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting as they quickly adapted to the challenges of the pandemic to continue their vital work.
- The UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict also has an important role to play here and the UK will continue to work collaboratively with member states to ensure child protection remains central to UN operations and is integrated across the conflict-cycle.
- It is essential that we also consider both the immediate and longer-term impacts of COVID-19 and commit to working together to use all the tools we have at our disposal to ensure children rights are respected and protected in conflict, especially in times of crisis. We welcome the intent to conduct follow up research to this report

once more conclusive data is available. This research must then inform the Working Group's next steps on country conclusions.

- Children's rights are not negotiable in times of conflict or crisis. The monitoring, reporting, collection of data and response to grave violations is essential, not only to protect children's rights, and bring perpetrators to account, but also to giving children the support they need to return to school, to rebuild their lives, and ultimately, to restore their faith in the future.
- As this report demonstrates, we have the means to adapt and better protect children in conflict and crisis. So let's work together – as a coalition of the concerned from international organisations, governments and civil society – to collectively strengthen and ensure the rights of children continue to be fully respected and protected in conflict during the pandemic and beyond.

Canada

Statement by the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict

UN Security Council Arria-formula meeting: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict

7 May 2021

I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, an informal, cross-regional network of 47 Member States and the European Union, as well as 12 observers from the UN and civil society.

Thank you to Estonia and the co-sponsors for convening today's Arria-formula meeting. We welcome the study published by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), and thank SRSG Gamba in particular for amplifying the plight of children affected by armed conflict amidst the pandemic.

Mr. Chair, the Group of Friends acknowledges and expresses our deep appreciation to all child protection actors, in particular from the United Nations and civil society, who often work at great risk to themselves to protect children and support their resilience and recovery during periods of conflict and violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these risks. This makes it all the more incumbent upon us to support dedicated child protection capacities. There is no substitute for the specialized expertise of child protection actors, as our briefers today have demonstrated.

The Group of Friends reiterates our appeal to ensure the adequate resourcing of child protection capacities, including within UN peace operations and country teams, and at the Secretariat. The current session of the Fifth Committee is an opportunity for Member States to consider how to support these crucial capacities.

Mr. Chair,

More than one year into the pandemic, the Group of Friends remains deeply concerned with the multi-faceted impacts of COVID-19 on children affected by armed conflict, including those forced to flee or living in detention.

The protection of children must be central in the ongoing response to the pandemic, including through the continuity of child-centered services that include mental health and psychosocial support, comprehensive reintegration programs that are gender- and age-sensitive, and rapid, safe, and unimpeded humanitarian access to all children in need.

The denial of humanitarian assistance to children affected by armed conflict – a grave violation – is particularly egregious in the context of a global pandemic. We are deeply concerned about ongoing reports of denial of humanitarian assistance affecting children, particularly in contexts like Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen, as well as the rising number of verified incidents of this grave violation globally.

The Group of Friends is also alarmed by attacks against schools and hospitals that have taken place during the pandemic, including in Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Myanmar, among other situations.

The pandemic is causing the largest disruption to education in history, as well as stretching health systems to their breaking points. This is disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable children and youth affected by armed conflict. Girls are particularly vulnerable, and face a heightened risk of rape and other forms of sexual violence.

Attacks against schools and protected personnel will only exacerbate these impacts on children. And attacks against hospitals, such as the recent bombing of the Al Atareb surgical ward in Syria, destroy or disrupt essential health services at a time when already-vulnerable children need them most.

Mr. Chair, it is imperative that parties to armed conflict fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, human rights law, and refugee law, and prevent and end grave violations against children once and for all.

The Group of Friends encourages parties to conflict to implement concrete, time-bound, and effective protection measures for children in armed conflict, such as action plans, road maps, and command orders, among other measures

Finally, we urge the Security Council and parties to armed conflict to fully implement all Council resolutions on the protection of children in armed conflict, as well as resolutions 2532 and 2565 on ceasefires and facilitating equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines in armed conflict situations, post-conflict situations, and complex humanitarian emergencies.

This would bring much-needed respite to conflict-affected children and their families at this particularly critical moment in our collective effort to bring an end to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you.



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Intervention of

H.E. Philippe KRIDELKA, Permanent Representative of
Belgium to the United Nations

Security Council Arria-formula Meeting: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict

New York, 7/5/2021

Mr. President,

I thank the briefers for their time and their insightful remarks. Belgium aligns itself with the statements of the **European Union** and the **Group of Friends** of Children and Armed Conflict. We are proud to cosponsor today's Arria.

Mr. President,

I wish to make **three points on behalf of Belgium** and as former chair of the CAAC Working Group in 2019-2020. They concern (1) the urgency of mitigating the pandemic's impact on children affected by armed conflict, (2) the importance of dedicated child protection capacity in UN missions and (3) a reflection on the impact of COVID-19 on our own working methods.

First, the urgency of **mitigating the pandemic's impact on children** affected by armed conflict. Child protection and reintegration services have suffered immensely from the pandemic and need to be rapidly ramped up. Schools, closed on a massive scale since last year, need to reopen quickly and safely. Humanitarian access, often reduced to contain the virus, is essential. And engagement with parties to conflict through action plans and dialogue must be intensified with a view to ending and preventing violations. In doing so we need to pay specific attention to vulnerable groups of children, such as girls, children with disabilities, refugee and internally displaced children and also children formally associated with parties to conflict.

Countries in conflict often lack the means to ensure this and therefore the international community must step up its efforts. This brings me to my second point, the importance of **dedicated child protection capacity in UN missions**. We expect the Security Council to pay due attention to child

protection in its mandating decisions and we expect the Fifth Committee to follow through by providing the necessary resources.

On our side, child protection will continue to be a **horizontal priority for Belgium**. We are proud to support the Office of the SRSG for CAAC to fulfill its essential mandate. We also support UNICEF's CAAC Monitoring and Reporting activities, on top of our core funding to UNICEF which amounts to 15 mio EUR/year. This will assist the documentation and verification of grave violations. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism represents the eyes and ears of the mandate and without this courageous work we would all be flying blind. And finally we are mobilizing our diplomatic network in conflict affected areas to raise awareness and improve the follow up of CAAC priorities by local partners.

My third point concerns lessons for our **working methods** in implementing the CAAC mandate. Rapid global changes have underlined the importance of frequent country CAAC reports. This increases their relevance and allows the CAAC Working Group to adopt more timely conclusions. Furthermore, even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism proved its metal, monitoring grave violations. In doing so it provides an fact-based evidence that allows for accountability for all grave violations committed against children.

I conclude by expressing my **deepest gratitude to SRSG Gamba, and to all child protection actors**, be it within the UN system, national authorities or civil society, for their dedication to protecting children in these unprecedented times.

Thank you.

Swedish statement at the Arria: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children

07 MAY 2021

Statement by Permanent Representative Anna Karin Eneström in the Arria Formula-meeting 'Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict', 7 May 2021.

(Check against delivery)

Mr. Chair,

Thank you for convening today's Arria-formula meeting which Sweden is proud to be co-sponsoring. I would like to thank all the briefers for their invaluable, yet worrying, insights, and in particular SRSG Gamba for presenting the study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Government of the United Kingdom for its support to the study.

Having served as chair of the Security Council's working group on children in armed conflict in 2017-18, we are encouraged and grateful to see how the UN membership continues to push for the safety and protection of children in situations of armed conflict.

We have since we left the Council continued to fund and support child protection programs in countries all over the world, including in CAR, the DRC, Sudan, and Afghanistan, just to mention a few examples highlighted in the study presented today.

I want to briefly highlight two examples.

In February, Sweden jointly with Belgium, Canada, Norway and other partners co-hosted a meeting in Kinshasa, DRC, on children in armed conflict. Given the pandemic, great efforts were made to involve as many actors as possible through digital tools, not least from civil society. While to a large extent successful, it also illustrated how much-needed awareness-raising of these critical issues risks being severely hampered due to the pandemic.

In Afghanistan, Sweden co-chairs together with UNAMA the local Group of Friends on children in armed conflict. Our Embassy in Kabul was proud to co-host, with my dear friend Bob from Canada, the first joint meeting between this group and the Group of Friends in New York last year. It was a very useful way to share information and lessons learned. Given that the pandemic has restricted access to information on violations, we would encourage similar meetings be organized between New York and local Groups of Friends in more countries.

Mr. Chair,

The clear negative effects of the pandemic on monitoring and reporting, and on the ability to work with parties to conflicts on developing and implementing commitments to end child rights violations, are very worrying.

It is therefore crucial that vaccination efforts in the countries on the CAAC agenda are intensified – Sweden has in this regard pledged

280 million US dollars as well as one million vaccine doses to the COVAX initiative. We truly hope that this will also facilitate a faster resumption of the efforts to prevent, monitor, report and respond to violations against children.

We warmly welcome the intention of the Office of the SRSG to do a follow-up to this study, given that the pandemic is still on-going, and in some cases worsening.

To conclude, I want to underline that we highly value the close cooperation with our partners, including civil society organizations, in our joint efforts to continue to protect children, despite the huge challenges stemming from the pandemic.

Thank you.



May 7, 2021

Statement by Ambassador Günter Sautter at the UN Security Council VTC Arria meeting on Children and Armed Conflict, May 7

It is a great sign that we have a record number of co-sponsors for this Arria meeting today. There are so many issues on which countries in the Security Council are not on the same page. I think there is a high degree of consensus here, and this is extremely valuable.

Thank you so much, SRSG Gamba, for your report. This is an important document. I encourage you to keep up this work and to continue with another report next year. Thanks also to the excellent briefers who have highlighted the severity of the situation that we are dealing with.

COVID-19 has had profound consequences for the health and the well-being of children. It has increased their vulnerability to grave violations. We have seen the widespread closure of schools and of health centers. We have received reports of child recruitment, sexual and gender based violence, particularly against girls, and the continued detention of children associated with armed groups. The problem continues to be very serious. I thank the UN country teams, the UN missions, UNICEF and civil society representatives for your hard work.

One area of great importance is documentation. We must set this as a priority. We must continue to speed up our efforts to document violations. We must also work on the reporting backlog of violations that have occurred over the past year. We also need to put an emphasis on child protection. This has a financial dimension and a political dimension. We need to make sure that we strengthen monitoring in the field reporting, response, prevention of grave violations in the post-pandemic recovery.

We also need to bolster and support child protection staff on the ground. Germany will actively contribute to all these aspects. Lastly, as the SRSG's study has pointed out, there is a need for more personnel, more training, more financing for child protection. We must ensure that peace operations are adequately equipped with stand-alone child protection advisors. We also need protection of civilian personnel, youth focal points and gender advisors.

In this context, I would like to remind you that last July, Germany organized the first-ever Security Council meeting on peace operations and human rights. One dimension of this is better training for peacekeepers' work on child protection. We want to continue to work on this. We are currently preparing an important event on this issue, which we will organize this summer under the framework of the United Nations.

One last important point: during our Security Council term in 2011-2012, as chair of the CAAC Working Group, we worked on the issue of listing. The listing of parties to the conflict that commit grave violations against children is one of the most important instruments at our disposal. I believe this continues to hold true. In our view, it is imperative that the findings of the SG Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict are consistently reflected in the listing proposals included in the annexes of that report. Let's all keep in mind that this is an important element of our work on this subject.

Thank you very much.

Statement by India**United Nations Security Council Open Arria Formula meeting****“Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict”****7 May 2021****Mr. President**

At the very outset, I would like to thank the delegation of the Estonia and all the co-sponsors for organizing this meeting. I also thank the briefers for sharing their insights on this issue. Our reservations on the Arria format of meetings are well known and on record.

Mr. President

Mahatma Gandhi had said and I quote *"If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children."*

Children constitute one third of the humanity, but they make all of its future. It is our common and primary responsibility to protect them as they remain most susceptible to suffering and vulnerable to volatilities.

Over the last two decades the UN Security Council has actively engaged in this pursuit and significant progress has been achieved to protect children in armed conflict situations. However, grave violations against children persist and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the challenges that children in conflict situations are faced with.

Mr. President

The pandemic has exacerbated the complex challenges for protection of children in armed conflicts which calls for determined actions by the Member States. In this regard my delegation wishes to submit the following suggestions for Council's consideration:

First, protecting the rights of the child, as mandated under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is the primary responsibility of every government. The Security Council must do all that is possible to support efforts of governments in this regard.

Second, school closures due to the pandemic have made children vulnerable to radicalization and indoctrination to violent extremist ideologies by terrorists and other non-state actors. An increase in the recruitment and use of children by these actors is imminent. This poses a severe security threat

and calls for a greater attention by the Council to take measures to check this phenomenon.

Third, there is a need for a coordinated approach to child protection agenda and counter terrorism. Terrorist outfits and individuals proscribed by the Council are directly or indirectly responsible for abusing child rights. Member States need to demonstrate the greater political will to hold the perpetrators of terrorism and their sponsors to account, to fulfil Council's child protection obligations.

Fourth, the pandemic has demonstrated the power of technology which enabled us to continue with our efforts to monitor, report and prevent grave violations against children. The digital revolution for example has to be pressed into service for the protection of the child. The international community must seize this momentum to use the full potential of technology to fulfil hitherto unkept promises to the children.

Fifth, we need a more inclusive approach to provide protection to child victims of armed conflicts. Children who grow up in conflict and post-conflict situations often need a fresh start. Support to national governments to strengthen legal and operational tools for child protection is important in this context.

Last but not the least, we need to provide children with hope. Those children caught in the pandemic as victims and nowhere to turn to, need to be reassured about their future and that their hopes and aspirations are not being lost forever in the pandemic. It's the role of the governments and civil society to work in concert to ensure this.

Mr. President

In conclusion, I would like to commend the UN agencies, peacekeeping missions and other partners for their efforts in mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and in facilitating humanitarian assistance. Protection of children must continue to receive priority in responding to the pandemic in armed conflicts.

India reaffirms its firm commitment and steadfast support to UN endeavours to protect children in armed conflicts.

I thank you, Mr. President



Statement of Mexico in the Arria meeting on “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict”

Check against delivery

New York, 7 May 2021

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mexico wishes to thank Estonia and the other co-sponsors for convening this meeting, as well as the briefers for their presentations, in particular the report by SRSG Gamba. I wish to recognize the UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting for the way they have resiliently adapted their working methods related to verifying grave violations against children.

As we face recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must be mindful that distribution of vaccines and other medical supplies has been particularly difficult in conflict settings. We stress that vaccines should be a global public good as called by the Secretary-General, the World Health Organization, and numerous other entities. We welcome recent announcements that will allow for wider accessibility and affordability of the vaccines and to fulfill the implementation of all aspects of resolution 2565.

We should strive to ensure an equal distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines to those living in conflict-related areas. When deemed safe for children, the vaccines should be made readily available to them. Until vaccines reach everyone, including in conflict and post-conflict situations, we will not be able, Mr. President, to assert that COVID has been defeated. Other vaccination campaigns that stalled due to COVID must also be restarted.

The Security Council should support the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations to provide aid and promote access to vaccines in areas where access remains challenging.

Addressing the impact on the well-being of millions of children, especially girls, should be a priority. The pandemic has severely affected access to basic services such as education, health, food and water. Some of the most negative consequences of the pandemic involve its impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children, with our collective need to avoid trauma for younger generations.

The SRSG's report stressed that COVID-19 pandemic has affected the UN's capacity to monitor and verify grave violations against children in armed conflict and hampered ongoing efforts to engage parties to conflict to end and prevent them. We encourage

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Member States and regional organizations with the support of humanitarian actors and civil society to focus on the reintegration of children into their families through tailored programs based on their needs.

States must consider the best interest of the child while enforcing measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 and ensure that child protection services continue despite the pandemic.

Mexico expresses its deep concern of the increased vulnerability of young women and girls to rape, and other forms of sexual violence exacerbated by the suspension of services, including sexual health and reproductive services. We also regret the sexual violence faced by boys and teenagers. We must work to eliminate stigma surrounding these cases by addressing them openly.

School closures have made children even more vulnerable to recruitment and use and sexual violence. Children in refugee camps or internally displaced are further at risk.

A particular vulnerable group are orphans, not only because of mental health impacts, but because of the recurring insecurity that leads to greater risk of being recruited by armed groups.

Consequently, we wish to emphasize that hospitals, other medical facilities and schools must remain safe at all times. That is why Mexico recently endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and calls on others to join.

Finally, Mr. President, we reiterate our support to the call of the Security Council to respect the ceasefire promoted by the Secretary-General to address the pandemic, prevent attacks on hospitals and medical staff and grant access to humanitarian and healthcare assistance in accordance with resolution 2532.

Thank you.

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STATEMENT
by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation
Mr. Gennady Kuzmin
at the VTC Security Council Open Arria Formula meeting
“Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in
situations of armed conflict”

7 May 2021

Mr.Chair,

I thank you for organizing today’s Arria. Many thanks to our briefers.

No doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected those, who are the most vulnerable and need special protection. National governments play a paramount role in protecting and rehabilitating children in armed conflict, while the actions undertaken by the bodies of the United Nations system must seek to support and complement national efforts.

My congratulations to the Office of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict for work done with the generous support, as I understand, of the United Kingdom. The Study on the Impact of the

COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children, prepared by the Office, can be very helpful. The Study will be thoroughly studied.

The document, as I understand, focuses on five countries on the CAAC agenda: Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Colombia, DRC, and Sudan. But I'll tell you what struck me couple days ago.

On May 4, next day after publishing the Study, the spokesman of the Secretary-General Mr. Dujarric gave some update on COVID situation in Syria with specific emphasis on the northeast area, outside the Government control. In particular, he expressed serious concern about the situation of the estimated 60.000 people who remain living in Al Hol camp. He said “more than 31.000 children live in Al Hol camp – that’s over half of the camp population – and are under the age of 12”. Six deaths due to the COVID have already been reported at Al Hol. A wider outbreak could be devastating to the already vulnerable camp population.

We appeal to international community to undertake practical measures to defend lives of innocent children. Let me remind that states have the duty under international law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to repatriate their nationals and to take steps to prevent children of their nationals from becoming stateless. States should assume primary responsibility to protect these children and ensure their safe return home.

Russian authorities are actively engaged in returning children from countries in armed conflict, including those that were recruited or from families, where parents were recruited by terrorists. Despite restrictions

and additional challenges posed by COVID-19, 145 minors were repatriated from Middle East within a year. While since 2017 in total 274 children aged from 2 to 16 years old have been returned to motherland from Iraq (122) and Syria (152).

Mr. Chairman,

When we are talking about children, we do not have a right to politicize agenda, we do not have a right to draw a line between to-say our children and other people's children; children having good and bad parents; children living in Syria government controlled territories and thus subjected to unilateral sanctions and other young Syrians. We need to do more to protect our children, much more. And we are committed to work together with our colleagues at the Council towards a better fate for children in armed conflict.

Thank you.

**Counsellor XING Jisheng's Remarks at Arria Formula
Meeting on "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violations
against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict"**

Mr. Chair,

I thank all guest speakers for their informative and insightful remarks. China appreciates their works on protecting children in armed conflicts. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed children to the increased risks of violations. Although the overall impact on trends of violations is still yet to identify, the current findings are already very worrying. Children cannot wait longer, we must act now.

First and foremost, we need to make more efforts for ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. This is the fundamental approach to protect children from the harm of armed conflict compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. We call upon all warring parties to respond to Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire and enable the safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian assistance to children. We are encouraged that the field staff of the UN monitoring and reporting mechanism has been working creatively to engage with parties to the conflict on developing and implementing commitments to end children rights violations. Confinement measures can never be used as the excuse for violations against children.

Second, we need to guarantee children's basic needs to health and education and prioritize the continuity of child-centred services. Children affected by conflicts are experiencing increasing threats to their safety and wellbeing as schools are locked down and services are suspended. The international community with the help of UNICEF and other children protection actors should provide practical support to countries concerned to maintain the continuity of services for children while respecting the national ownership. Digital technology is a useful means to minimize the negative impact of school closure. We should help the Global South to scale up the digital literacy for the benefit of children.

Last but not the least, we need to adapt the monitoring and response to violations against children to the new normal. Global coordination is urgently needed to prevent this health crisis from becoming a protection crisis. In this regard, the recommendations presented in the study conducted by the Office of SRSG Gamba is timely and thought-provoking. For example, increase and diversify the monitoring channels, and upgrade IT tools. We hope these measures can be integrated into the field work of the UN monitoring and reporting mechanism to fulfil their mandate as efficiently and safely as possible.

I thank you, Mr. Chair.



**Permanent Mission of Ecuador
to the United Nations**

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Cristian Espinosa
Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations,

Arria Formula meeting of the Security Council on:

**"The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on violations against
children in situations of armed conflict"**

7 May 2021- 2pm

AS DELIVERED

Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen

1. I thank Estonia and all the cosponsors for organizing this Security Council Arria Formula Meeting. I also thank the briefers for their presentations.
2. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the situation of children all over the world and this has happened in any context.
3. Millions of children have been pushed back into poverty, often extreme poverty.
4. A serious learning crisis in education with a massive closure of schools across countries exacerbated the digital divide with remote learning being out of reach for over 500 million children, increasing the exposure to violent extremism in fragile zones.
5. As on everything else, conflict amplifies the situation and exacerbate the dire circumstances plays an amplifier role.
6. In one hand the Covid-19 pandemic has deteriorated the situation of those leaving in conflict zones and on the other hand it has affected the capacity of States, Civil Society and International Organizations –including the United Nations- to monitor and respond.
7. The capacity and capabilities to monitor are vital.
8. The challenges are huge, however as we have listen from the briefers we are not starting from scratch.
9. In 2019 we marked the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the child. Last year (in 2020) in the midst of the pandemic we commemorated the 15th anniversary

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of the adoption of the Security Council Resolution 1612 on Children and armed conflict. This year (2021) we are commemorating the 25th anniversary of the report on the “Impact of armed conflict on children”.

10. We have a framework in which we can develop a stronger response. And the best way to commemorate all these anniversaries is through implementation and by remaining deeply committed to combat and prevent all forms of violence against children, including sexual violence, as well as the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Excellencies,

11. The study prepared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict on the “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict” is a valuable tool to better understand the challenges on the ground and to strengthen our efforts in the field.
12. I would also like to recall that in our joint declaration of support to the UN Secretary-General’s appeal for a global ceasefire we alerted that the continuation of hostilities in various parts of the world would have a devastating impact on children.
13. Today I reiterate the need to ensure the implementation of Security Council’s resolutions 2532 and 2565.
14. In concluding I wish to adhere myself to the statement delivered by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and I join those who called upon the Security Council to ACT.

Thank you very much,

**United Nations Security Council Arria-Formula Meeting on
Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in
situations of armed conflict**

Friday, 7 May 2021, 2:00 – 5:00 PM (New York time)

Ambassador Permanent Representative of SPAIN

Agustín Santos Maraver

- I thank Estonia, the Office of the Special Representative (SRSG) for Children in Armed Conflict (CAAC) and the other co-sponsors of United Nations Security Council Arria Formula for convening this Meeting, on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict.
- Spain fully aligns with the statement of the EU and the statement delivered by Canada on behalf of the CAAC Group of Friends.
- The latest report of the Office of SRSG Virginia Gamba on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in five country situations (Afghanistan, CAR, Colombia, DRC and Sudan) clearly shows that when protection officers cannot be deployed violations against children increase. Non state armed groups occupy their space and it becomes even more difficult for victims to denounce violations of their rights.
- The negative consequences of war in children, compounded with COVID-19 pandemic, have also increased the level of suicide in young girls; as we have unfortunately seen in Syria.

The lack of support and hope for a better life is ending lives.

- The rapid increase in sexual and gender-based violence during the pandemic is alarming. The situation in Tigray must alert us to remain vigilant, to condemn violations and to call for justice and reparation for victims.
- The closure of schools in the Sahel region during the pandemic had a terrible effect on children, most of them will never return to education.

Additionally, economic hardship and food insecurity has forced children to work, to early marriage or to recruitment by non-state actors.

- Attacks to healthcare are just too many. The fear of the pandemic has provoked an increase in attacks to medical convoys and practitioners. In Colombia, in 2020, more than 300 attacks occurred, the biggest number in 20 years.

- The recovery of COVID-19 will require all our efforts to finance and equip protection and human rights officers. We need to advocate for strong protection mandates and strong protection clusters.
- Member States, we should also explore how to continue strengthening the partnership between CAAC, UNICEF and the Department of Peace Operations; as well as the important role of NGOs working on child protection in the field.
- I want to conclude by saying that it is a humanitarian imperative to change the conduct of parties in armed conflict, to prevent violations of children's human rights and to comply with International law, including Human Rights law, Refugee Law and International Humanitarian Law.
- I thank you.

UNSC Arria-formula meeting – 7 May 2021

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict

- The State of Qatar fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.
- At the outset, I would like to thank Estonia, France, Ireland, Niger, Ireland, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sweden and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict for organizing this important Arria-formula meeting on the Impact on the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict.
- Thank you to all of the briefers for their comments and insights today. They were particularly poignant, given the terrible issues faced by children in these circumstances.
- The State of Qatar welcomes the study prepared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict on the same topic.
- In this regard, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting for the continued monitoring of violations and for overcoming some of the challenges brought by the pandemic - despite the lack of access to communities by the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict.
- We are extremely concerned that among some of the emerging patterns are an increase in killing and maiming incidents by parties to the conflict, and an increase in children's vulnerability to recruitment, rape and other forms of sexual violence.
- As the world fights to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, children and youth in conflict zones remain among the most vulnerable to its devastating impact. The State of Qatar is deeply worried with the impact of the closure

of schools and reports of increased attacks on education, making children more vulnerable to child labor and child recruitment - destroying the hopes and ambitions of whole generation of children. Education can be a life-saver.

- The State of Qatar has often urged the international community to unite to protect education from attack. Moreover, we have called for enhanced monitoring, reporting and investigation of attacks so the perpetrators can be held to account.
- In July 2010, the State of Qatar introduced landmark resolution 64/290 calling on States to ensure right to education for affected populations in all phases of emergency situations. Adopted by consensus, Resolution 64/290 was the first of its kind.
- A year ago, the General Assembly adopted by consensus Resolution 75/275, again presented by the State of Qatar - following a call to action by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Education Above All Foundation and UN Sustainable Development Goal Advocate - proclaiming 9 September the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. The International Day is a global platform for decision-makers to focus on safeguarding education in conflict and building peace, and a key annual benchmark to assess progress on an issue that is threatening a fundamental human right for every child.
- In September 2020, Qatar's based Education Above All Foundation, launched the Unite to Protect Campaign to create global awareness on the need to protect education, and to halt the continuous culture of impunity for education-related violations of international law and built on global justice, bringing the need to strengthen mechanisms for the protection of education to all agendas.
- As we fast approach the second anniversary of this landmark resolution, we would like to reiterate our call that it is crucial to strengthen law and

policy mechanisms for the protection of children and education from attack.

- We must unite to protect children and the right of education of children in situations of armed conflict.
- Thank you very much.



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BULGARIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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UN Security Council Arria Formula meeting “*The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against Children in situations of armed conflict*”

Delivered by Ambassador Lachezara Stoeva, Permanent Representative

New York, Friday, 7 May 2021

Mr. President,

I would like start by thanking Estonia and all the co-sponsors for this timely Arria formula meeting and for bringing to the attention of the UN Security Council an issue of such importance. I would also like to commend the efforts of all stakeholders who have contributed to the protection and promotion of children's rights around the world, especially of those affected by conflicts. The work of the Special Representative of the UNSG on Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG), UNICEF, as well as the role of civil society, are indispensable, especially when facing the challenges posed by the pandemic.

In May 2020, the Group of Friends of Children and SDGs, which Bulgaria is co-chairing, presented a Joint Statement with the EU and GRULAC on children's rights in the context of the COVID-19, which was endorsed by a total of 172 countries. The statement aimed to raise awareness about the adverse effects that the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to have on children's well-being, development and protection, including their access to education, food, safety and health, particularly those in vulnerable situations.

One year later, the Office of the SRSG is presenting a detailed study on the effects of the pandemic on the violations against children in situations of armed conflict. The study could not have been more timely. The findings are rather

alarming and sobering. However, its conclusions might help us deal with this crisis and possibly with future ones.

The consequences of the pandemic not only disproportionately impact children, and especially girls, in vulnerable situations but also affect our ability to monitor and respond to their needs. The COVID-19 pandemic is threatening to undo recent progress in the fields of protection and human rights by exposing children and their families to risks like economic insecurity and poverty, as well as exposure to exploitative and hazardous relationships and reduced access to services and humanitarian assistance. Bearing in mind that violations are interdependent, we share the view that our responses should be coordinated and complementary and not in silos.

Bulgaria is convinced that a child-centered approach should be followed in all policies related to the response and recovery from COVID-19 by the UN and conflict affected countries.

Bulgaria also welcomes the recommendation of the study that resources should be made available for critical issues like child protection, including within UN field offices, while funds to support COVID-19 prevention and response interventions should not be diverted at the expense of child protection initiatives.

Last but not least, according to the study by the SRSG, the socioeconomic ramifications of the pandemic will continue to affect children in the coming years. Violations against the special status of schools and hospitals, as well as persons inside them, continue to be deeply concerning. School closures due to COVID-19 might have long-lasting consequences as many children do not have access to distance learning leading to dropping out. Therefore, one of our first objectives should be to ensure the access to education, as stated in the Safe Schools Declaration.

Thank you!



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALTA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**HE Ambassador Vanessa Frazier, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Malta
to the United Nations**

Arria Formula Meeting

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Violations Against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict

7 May 2021

New York

Mr President,

I begin by thanking Estonia and the co-sponsors for convening this Arria Formula Meeting. Malta welcomes the new study published as well as its recommendations, by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), and thank SRSG Gamba for all her work and efforts in seeking to address the plight of children affected by armed conflict amidst the pandemic.

We also thank today's briefers for sharing their valuable insights.

Malta aligns itself with the statements by the European Union and the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict.

Malta remains fully committed to the protection of children and their right to education. If entrusted to serve as an elected member of the Security Council in 2023-24, Malta will give importance to education, literacy, and digital technology.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact across the world, particularly those affected by conflict, with a disproportionate negative impact on children. While we are already aware that the pandemic has severely impacted the monitoring and reporting of grave violations towards children in conflict zones, we will only become privy to the medium to long-term effects of the pandemic on children in armed conflict, once data becomes available. The pandemic has likewise hampered ongoing efforts to engage parties to conflict to end and prevent violence. We thereby echo the UNSG's call for a global ceasefire. An end needs to be brought to conflicts taking place world-wide to the detriment of innocent victims, including children. As stated in the report, a long-term, collaborative approach is needed to identify and respond to trends and patterns of violations resulting from this unprecedented pandemic, as its full impact on children's rights is likely to last for years to come, bearing in mind the most vulnerable, displaced and refugee children, girls and children with disabilities.

Malta is deeply concerned about the ongoing reports of denial of humanitarian assistance - a grave violation - affecting children in Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen, as well as the attacks against schools and hospitals in Syria, Ethiopia and Myanmar.

The roles of both the UN and civil society to protect children from conflict and violence cannot be overlooked. Both have a key role in designing and implementing child protection response programs, and need to work hand in hand, to make child protection a priority

Malta continues to support the global call for peace made by the UN Secretary-in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and further underlines the need to implement the provisions in Resolution 2532. Furthermore, the protection of children, including through comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programs that are gender-sensitive, must be central in our ongoing response to the pandemic.

Thank you.

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**Statement by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations,
Ambassador Mathu Joyini, on the Security Council Arria Formula meeting on the
“Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed
conflict”**

7 May 2021

Thank you Chair,

We thank Estonia and the co-hosts for convening this important meeting, which gives us an opportunity to address the increased violations against children in situations of armed conflict during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We also thank the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for *the Study Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict*, which addresses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children affected by armed conflict and on monitoring and reporting capacities to further assess the long-term impact on children's rights and to ensure appropriate responses.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on children's lives, limiting their access to healthcare, food, education and protection. This pandemic has exacerbated children's vulnerability to grave violations in situations of armed conflict and restricted the realisation of their rights. The pandemic and related control measures have further increased the vulnerability of children to recruitment and use because of school closures, and the withdrawal of state and humanitarian actors in some conflict areas.

Chairperson,

South Africa believes that children need special protection because they are amongst the most vulnerable members in society. Lack of protection for children in conflict situations exposes children to further threats. This vulnerability has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, exposing children in conflict situations to further threats.

In this context, part of the protection of children in armed conflict includes the provision of equitable distribution, and access to COVID-19 vaccines. We therefore wish to reiterate the Secretary-General's statement that “it is in the interest of everybody to make sure that as soon as possible and in a fair way, everybody gets vaccinated everywhere and that vaccines are considered to be a truly global public good”. It is only through equitable collective action that we

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will be able to ensure that the most vulnerable in our societies, including children are protected from the virus.

It is in this context that we wish to propose the following for Member States to consider when protecting children in conflict situations during the Covid-19 pandemic:

Firstly, we urge all the parties to conflict to endorse the appeal of the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire. This creates a conducive environment to put mechanisms in place to manage and protect children in conflict situations;

Secondly, parties to conflict, whether Governmental forces or non-State armed groups should adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law and ensure that Schools and hospitals are kept safe and not used for military purposes. The protection and safety of schools is of particular importance as it forms the backbone of any peacebuilding effort, which enables future development, growth and sustainable peace;

Lastly, we urge the international community to continue funding appeals for child protection across all humanitarian and refugee response plans, in order to holistically address context-specific needs and to strengthen systems weakened by the pandemic.

Chairperson,

Despite the challenges, we also note the progress that has been made to end and prevent grave violations against children, notably in the Central African Republic, where the Child Protection Code promulgated in June 2020 criminalised most of the grave violations, including recruitment and use of children, and enshrined the concept that children associated with armed forces and groups are to be considered primarily as victims.

We wish to commend the strong and resilient role played by the United Nations Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting, in ensuring the protection of conflict-affected children in the face of additional challenges posed by the pandemic.

I wish to conclude by underscoring that the protection of children is of outmost importance as the world addresses the COVID-19 pandemic. Children are positive agents of change and are fundamental to the future of peaceful and prosperous societies in all corners of the world. In view of the fact that the long term impact of the pandemic will be most keenly felt by children, it is imperative that we partner globally, regionally and nationally to accelerate efforts to strengthen institutions and services for children, including justice, education and health services.

I thank you.



الجمهورية الجزائرية الديمقراطية الشعبية
REPUBLIQUE ALGERIENNE DEMOCRATIQUE ET POPULAIRE

Security Council open Arria-formula meeting
7 May – 14h -17h

**“on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in
situations of armed conflict”**

Statement by H.E Sofiane MIMOUNI
Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations

Madame the President,
Excellencies,

Let me at the outset thank the Permanent Mission of Estonia and the co-sponsors for leading our discussions today. My sincere thanks go to Mrs Gamba and to the other panelists for their presentations.

As clearly outlined by the panelist, the Covid-19 pandemic had a devastating impact across the world with a disproportionate impact on children. While the full effect of the pandemic on children affected by conflict still needs to be fully analyzed, we have already witnessed a scourge in the numbers of killings, maiming of children, and recruitment of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence and abductions as well as attacks against hospitals. The attacks against schools by non-State armed groups have worsened during pandemic, putting children at the risk of being further abused and enrolled.

This tragic situation requires collective actions to address the multi-faceted and long-lasting consequences of the pandemic on children affected by conflict. The following measures should be prioritized, in this regard:

1. Ensure interaction between all areas of intervention, from effective reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups in society to

the inclusion of the protection and well-being of children into all peace processes and peace agreements.

2. Ensure that peacekeeping missions receive the necessary training and requisite resources to effectively protect children and collect the necessary data. The importance of vaccination campaign for the staff of the peacekeeping mission is crucial, to ensure that they can perform their duties while remaining safe in the midst of the pandemic.
3. Include specific provisions on the protection of children in armed conflict in the context of peacekeeping processes, as provided in the peace and reconciliation agreement in Mali, signed in Algiers, which contains specific provisions related to the protection of children. Such provisions should inspire all ongoing peace processes.

**Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,**

Let me take the opportunity of our discussions today to underline the strong commitment of Algeria to the protection of children. My delegation firmly believes that regardless of the situation, any child who is in an armed conflict is by definition a victim, and that the place of children is in school and not in armed conflicts.

It is in this spirit, that Algeria has acceded to numerous international and regional legal instruments relating to the rights of the child and the protection of children in armed conflicts. In March 2021, Algeria has endorsed the Safe School Declaration, as an additional step to strengthen our commitment to protect children in situation of armed conflicts.

Despite of our commitment and that of the international community, it is truly aberrant that while we speak today, thousands of children are still trapped in armed conflicts all over the world. During 2019, the UN verified more than 7000 children, as having been recruited and used in situations of armed conflict.

That is why, prevention strategies are required. In fact, I do believe that the prevention of violation against children in armed conflicts starts with tackling the root causes of such conflicts and forced displacement. It should also start with strengthening the human right mandate of UN peacekeeping Missions in conflict affected areas, allowing them to report on human rights violation, especially violation of children's rights.

The coordination and cooperation between the UN and the regional organizations, especially the African Union, is also an important element of the prevention strategy, to ensure a regional ownership in addressing the root causes of those conflicts and to strengthen the protection of children.

Let me conclude, Excellency, by reiterating my country's support for the work being done to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict and to advocate for the promotion and the well-being of all children and civilians.

I thank you.

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergiy Kyslytsya,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations,
at the UN Security Council Arria-formula meeting “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on
violations against children in situations of armed conflict”.**

(7 May 2021)

Mr. Chair,

Ukraine appreciates the initiative of Estonia to hold this Arria-formula meeting as its topic is highly relevant to the task of maintenance of international peace and security. We thank all briefers for their presentations and commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict for presenting the study on the issue.

By the example of Afghanistan, CAR, Colombia, the DR of the Congo and Sudan, this document testifies that children remain one of the most vulnerable groups in the situations of armed conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated existing problems of their insecurity and exposure to be recruited by the armed groups.

The pandemic has also deepened acute nutrition crisis in different regions. The DR of the Congo, northeast Nigeria, the Central Sahel, South Sudan and Yemen were listed by UNICEF as a matter of utmost concern.

We share a point from the concept note that the full effect of the pandemic on children affected by conflict still needs to be analysed in-depth. We hope that the next Secretary General’s report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict will provide us with substantial update on the matter.

As follows from the abovementioned research, hostile environment along with COVID-related restrictions has been a serious obstacle to the monitoring on the ground. According to an explanation, included to the study, “where armed groups have moved into communities, populations are probably not reporting violations for fear of reprisals”.

This is the common concern with regard to many situations, including the Russian war against Ukraine. Incidents and crimes against children in the occupied parts of Ukraine remain unreported or used for disinformation purposes.

In April a 5-year-old boy was killed in the occupied part of Donbas due to detonation of explosive item kept in home by his relative. This tragedy was used by Russian propaganda to accuse the Ukrainian forces of killing this child by a drone attack. Needless to say, that local residents’ evidence in social networks as well as geographical place of the incident proved to untenability of the propaganda version.

Interruption of school education and pandemic-related restrictive measures have made it easier for armed groups to recruit children. The Special Representative Gamba mentioned Afghanistan and Colombia as examples in her recent report to the HRC. At the same time pandemic has not stopped the armed groups from militarization of education, which is particularly relevant for the occupied part of Ukraine.

That’s why I would like to reiterate the need to include the reference to the situation of Ukrainian children, living in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, in future relevant UN thematic reports and studies.

I would like to thank the UNICEF and other UN agencies for their work in this area and urge to strengthen

cooperation to promote the protection of children in compliance with international humanitarian law, despite the COVID-19 pandemic challenges.

I thank you, Mr. Chair



**PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK**

NEW YORK, 07 MAY 2021

SECURITY COUNCIL - ARRIA-FORMULA MEETING ON 'IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN SITUATIONS OF ARMED CONFLICT'

STATEMENT BY GEORG SPARBER, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

PERMANENT MISSION OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Excellency,

Thank you for convening this meeting. Many have called the COVID-19 pandemic an 'x-ray' for inequalities in society. But we would contend that for those that are already marginalized, the conditions created by the pandemic may further obscure their suffering and stifle opportunities to provide assistance and accountability. We appreciate your effort to make us focus on violations against children in situations of armed conflict and to discuss good practices that can better protect children in the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant further undermining of the right to education in conflict situations – already one of the most gravely affected human rights during conflict. Lockdowns across the world have led schools to close; in too many cases children will never return. The socio-economic effects of an early end to education in conflict areas will lead to heightened vulnerabilities for child labour, recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups, and forced marriage, human trafficking and modern slavery. Depriving children of access to education has a devastating long-term impact on sustainable development, in particular SDG 4, and inflicts irreparable damage on children, families, communities and societies.

Excellency,

Liechtenstein remains concerned about the impact that COVID-19 has had on the ability of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism to record violations, while we compliment the SRSG and the UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations against Children for resuming their work after a few months with some adjustments. This being said, Liechtenstein notes the particular difficulty in monitoring more sensitive violations, such as recruitment and use and sexual violence. Data assessing the prevalence of these violations have always been difficult to gather given their sensitivity, in particular with regard to sexual and gender-based violence. The additional constraints created by COVID-19 exacerbate the power dynamic that perpetrators look to exploit.

Quarantine, curfews and other restrictions on movement are weakening protection mechanisms and heightening risks of domestic and sexual violence for women and girls as well as men and boys in crisis affected communities. We reiterate our strong support for the work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict to shed more light on marginalized victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, in line with Security Council Resolution 2467.

Going forward, it is vital that training is made available to allow all monitoring staff to carry out remote verification of incidents of violence where necessary. In addition, we reiterate that the protection of the SRSG's independence and integrity is crucial to its effectiveness and credibility, which also includes the objective, consistent and transparent practice of listing parties that have committed grave violations against children.

I thank you.

*The Permanent Mission
of the Kingdom of Morocco
to the United Nations
New York*



البعثة الدائمة للمملكة المغربية
لدى الأمم المتحدة
نيويورك

STATEMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

**AT THE ARRIA MEETING ON:
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CAAC**

MAY 7, 2021

Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to thank Estonia for organizing this highly important meeting, dedicated to the impact of COVID-19 on children in armed conflict, and which will, undoubtedly, allow for a continuous international mobilization to protect children, prevent them from being attacked, enrolled or sent into combat. I thank all the briefers for their presentations.

The Kingdom of Morocco would like to highlight the following elements:

- * Although the full effects of COVID-19 are not yet entirely known, the pandemic has had disproportionate and profound, and most likely long-lasting, consequences on the health, well-being and education of children, in particular children in situations of armed conflicts.

- * The fundamental rights of children, particularly those living in situations of armed conflict, must be respected, protected, affirmed, recognized and considered as a priority in every response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and in post recovery efforts.

- * We would like to stress once more the importance of the Secretary-General's Appeals aimed at saving lives, protecting societies and better recovering, inviting Member States to give priority to education, food, health and safety of vulnerable people, including children in situations of armed conflict, amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

- * In the midst of this global health crisis, the International Community needs to reaffirm once again the political commitment and the will to guarantee the rights of all children, in all circumstances, and to protect them from violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, early and forced child marriage and other harmful practices, as well as guarantee their rights to education, mental and physical health and well-being and ensure their full potential and development.

- * The most vulnerable children who need specific protection are particularly those living in conflict situations, in refugee camps, in detention, in slums or on the streets, as well as the homeless, the migrants, the internally displaced children, the minorities, the poorest and those living with a disability.

- * If the impact of COVID-19 on children, especially those impacted by armed conflict, is not addressed immediately, the global efforts and the positive results made so far to protect and improve the lives of millions of children around the world would be at stake.

- * Also, it is important to ensure that children in situations of armed conflict benefit from the COVID-19 vaccination. They cannot be left behind.

- * In addition, Member States and civil society actors, including NGOs, and National Human Rights Institutions should work together and draw lessons from the experiences of COVID-19 crisis, in order to develop plans that guarantee the continuity of essential protective services in potential future crises and ensure monitoring, reporting and responding to serious violations against children.

- * As a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three optional protocols, as well as the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles, the Kingdom of Morocco is, and will remain, fully committed to the protection and promotion of all children's rights, and will use every opportunity to reaffirm this unwavering commitment.

- * Finally, we thank the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF as well as all UN governmental and non-governmental entities that endeavor in difficult situations to promote and protect the right of children in armed conflict.

I thank you for your attention.

Security Council - Meeting in Arria Formula on “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict”

2021-05-07

**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations,
Ambassador Stefano Stefanile,
at the Security Council meeting in Arria formula on
“Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed
conflict.”**

I would like to echo other colleagues in welcoming this debate, commending the promoters and thanking the briefers.

I also wish to refer to the written statement of the EU, with which we align, and to the statement made by Canada on behalf of the pertinent Group of Friends, which we were pleased to join.

Mr. Chair,

In times of crisis, children are always the most vulnerable. In situations of armed conflict, they are particularly exposed to the risk of experiencing harsh and brutal forms of violence, which can have long-lasting impact on their physical and psychological development and undermine their future. The state of insecurity produced by conflicts prevents thousands of children from accessing appropriate food resources, education and health care, while schools and hospitals continue to be targeted.

As clearly emerged from the briefers' interventions, this is even more critical in Covid-19 times, where school closures and limitations in accessing social and health services expose children to greater risks than usual. These include subsequent non-return to school, child pregnancies, child labor, risks of being recruited by armies and militias and the exacerbated vulnerability, especially for girls, to violations and abuses, including harmful practices as child, early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation.

In this particularly challenging context and phase, Italy reaffirms its commitment to the protection of children affected by armed conflicts and fully shares the objectives to put an end, as soon as possible, to the worst forms of violations against them. The protection of the rights of the children is also among the priorities of Italy's current mandate on the Human Rights Council.

Last year we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the First Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. It is absolutely important to continuously promote the universal ratification of the Protocol as it represents a fundamental tool to avoid that children be recruited by armed forces or otherwise involved in armed conflicts. We urge all the Countries that have not ratified the Protocol yet, to do so as soon as possible, to enact national legislation and policies to prohibit and criminalize the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups, and to endorse instruments to improve the protection of conflict-affected children, in particular the Safe Schools Declaration, which Italy strongly supports.

However, signing and ratifying international instruments is clearly not enough. Tangible actions must follow and many important measures have been outlined by today's briefers. We must ensure that children are freed from the threat of being used as soldiers, slaves, military shields or targets. And we have to make sure that they are also provided with options to enjoy a better future. In order to secure a positive, long-lasting results for the protection of the rights of children involved in armed conflicts, Italy presented an "open pledge" on the occasion of the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent in December 2019. We committed to undertake all the appropriate and necessary actions to reduce the impact of wars on the life of children, actions that are as important as ever considering the Covid-19 pandemic.

Italy will also continue to support - both financially and politically - key global actors such as UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, the Global Partnership for Education, the Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunization and other partners with a view to ensuring that no child is left behind.

We hope that together we can take more and more concrete actions to safeguarding the rights of children during armed conflicts, to protect them from abuse and violence, and to ensure their rightful life prospects.

Thank you.

As delivered

STATEMENT OF TURKEY
Delivered by
Deputy Permanent Representative of Turkey, Ms. Bilge Kocyigit Grba,
at
UNSC Open Arria Formula Meeting on Children and Armed Conflict
“Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of
armed conflict”
7 May 2021

Mr. Chair,

I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Estonia and all other co-sponsors for organizing this important meeting. We also extend our appreciation to the briefers for their valuable contributions.

We also welcome the study on “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict” prepared by the Office of the SRSG Gamba. This is exactly the type of useful contribution that we expect from the Office.

Turkey supports UN’s efforts in taking the Children and Armed Conflict agenda forward and commends efforts to ensure that everything is being done to provide children with better prospects for their future.

Mr. Chair,

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact across the world, in particular on those affected by conflict, with a disproportionate negative impact on children. The effects are long-term and manifold. As underlined by the new study, children are expected to feel the various repercussions of the pandemic through years to come.

The closure of schools and loss of family income as well as the withdrawal of state and humanitarian actors from certain conflict-affected areas increased children’s vulnerability to grave violations. At the same time, preventive measures taken to mitigate the pandemic severely affected the monitoring and verification functions, which led to a decrease in proper documentation and verification of these violations.

We need to step up our efforts to ensure that the UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations against Children have adequate resources to fulfill their mandate, which has become even more challenging in the context of the pandemic.

Mr. Chair,

Meeting the fundamental humanitarian needs of children in conflicts and emergencies, including the provision of health and education services must be one of our main priorities. Turkey, on its part, takes all necessary measures to alleviate the suffering of children fleeing armed conflict in its region and beyond.

For the Syrian children who are under temporary protection in Turkey, we have succeeded to constantly increase the school enrolment rate. I would also like to note that health services are provided free of charge for all Syrians including children in Turkey. This has been particularly crucial during the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic on the health systems worldwide.

As for the children living in northwest Syria where schools and hospitals have been indiscriminately targeted, Turkey plays a vital role as the only corridor for the delivery of UN's cross-border humanitarian aid where more than 4 million people live, 80 percent of whom are women and children.

These people struggle to survive with aid arriving through Bab al Hawa crossing point. Now, the vaccine roll-out is also underway thanks to the cross-border mechanism. Around 50.000 vaccines were transferred into the region last week. It is estimated that by next year, 20 percent of the population in the northwest will receive vaccines through cross-border assistance.

The continuation of the UN cross-border assistance mechanism, which provides uninterrupted and unhindered humanitarian access is crucial for children living in this region. We urge all Council members to work in this direction in the months to come.

Last but definitely not least, Mr. Chair, I would like to underline the continuing plight of children at the hands of terrorist organizations. We should unequivocally condemn crimes committed by all terrorist groups regardless of their ideology.

In this vein, I would like to highlight the horrific treatment of children in Iraq and in Syria at the hands of PKK and its Syrian offshoot YPG. Despite all the evidence of their ongoing war crimes, it is regretful that this terrorist entity, hiding behind the name of "Syrian Democratic Forces" (SDF), is considered a legitimate counterpart by several among us today.

In concluding, Mr. Chair, I would like to reiterate Turkey's unwavering support to all international and regional efforts related to the protection of children and thank you once again for your leadership on this issue.



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SECURITY COUNCIL ARRIA FORMULA MEETING
“IMPACT OF THE **COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON VIOLATIONS**
AGAINST CHILDREN IN SITUATION OF ARMED CONFLICT”.

MAY 7TH, 2021
STATEMENT OF POLAND

Poland commends Estonia and other co-sponsors for convening this meeting. We would like to express our appreciation to Special Representative Virginia Gamba for her statement and a valuable report as well as all to other briefers for their insightful and inspiring remarks.

Poland aligns itself with the statements delivered by the European Union as well as by the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We would like to use this opportunity to reaffirm our strong support for the mandate of Special Representative Gamba.

The CAAC agenda gathers unparalleled support and engagement from the international community. Unfortunately, due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, instead of consolidating gains from the agenda's implementation, we need to explore how and where to act so as to protect the progress that has been made.

Since its establishment, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism has proven a strong and useful tool that allows to monitor and expose grave violations as well as engage in preventive actions with the parties to the conflict. For that reason, we are deeply concerned with the drastic limitations to its monitoring and verification capacities experienced when movement constraints and other control measures have been introduced. The COVID-19 pandemic has in particular exacerbated the tabus regarding rape and other forms of sexual violence, recruitment and use of children, and abductions that are considered particularly sensitive and generally under-reported due to their nature. We are pleased to learn from the report that newly implemented protocols and procedures have already improved the situation and we do hope that this progress will be continued.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on grave violations against children both in the short- and the long-term. We are particularly disturbed by the attacks on hospitals and restricted access to schools and healthcare facilities. Without safe access to those services, children's quality of life will continue to deteriorate. In addition, systematic deprivation of access to education make children more susceptible to recruitment and use by armed and terrorist groups. As a Member of the Steering Committee for the Global Coalition for Reintegration we want to stress that closures of interim care centers for children separated from armed forces or groups put in jeopardy the reintegration programs.

Last but not least, let me also bring to the attention the dire plight of those most vulnerable in the situations of conflict, including children with disabilities as well as children born of sexual violence. With the detrimental consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic they are at an even greater risk of abuse, abandonment, and rejection. Moreover, we are concerned that children with disabilities, who have already been marginalized before the COVID-19 outbreak, are not always included in the strategies of distance learning.

The current pandemic is threatening to undo many recent gains in the fields of child protection, human rights and development. Many violations are interdependent and interlinked, so if we want to avoid a vicious circle of powerlessness towards a deteriorating situation of children affected by armed conflict, urgent action with a more holistic approach is needed.

(Draft)

Statement by Mr. MAGOSAKI Kaoru
Minister, Social Affairs, Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations
Security Council Arria-Formula Meeting: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations
against children in situations of armed conflict
7 May 2021

Mr. Chair,

I thank Estonia and the co-sponsors for convening this Arria-Formula meeting. I would also like to thank all the briefers, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, for their briefings.

Japan is deeply concerned about the aggravating impact of COVID-19 on children under already fragile situations, including those who are refugees, internally displaced or in conflict affected areas. Girls also need special attention. The international community must step up its efforts to minimize the impact of the pandemic on these vulnerable children affected by armed conflict.

The denial of humanitarian assistance to children affected by conflict is of particular concern during the pandemic. Essential healthcare and protection services for children must be maintained. Relevant medical facilities and access to medical service must be protected from attacks and destruction. Japan welcomes the unanimous adoption of the Security Council Resolutions 2532 and 2565 on COVID-19. Japan urges all parties to armed conflict to immediately respond to the call for a ceasefire and ensure safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access to children in need.

Mr. Chair,

Japan is committed to actively contributing to the protection of children in armed conflict. For example, in March, Japan contributed approximately USD 4.5 million to UNICEF's operations in Syria, including the reconstruction of water and sewage systems to improve access to safe water and sanitation for the population of Eastern Ghouta. It also supports health clinics for women and children by providing medical equipment.

Japan is determined to make every effort to protect and promote children's rights and to ensure human security for all children and their families. Japan looks forward to working closely with the United Nations in this endeavor.

I thank you.



Security Council

Formula Arria meeting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict
07 May 2021

Your Excellency,

Brazil commends the organizers of this Arria Formula meeting, which focuses on a current and overlooked concern on the CAAC agenda: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict. The severe movement restrictions created an additional layer of complexity to monitor and prevent violations. Brazil commends the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict for the detailed study on this matter.

As the study points out, the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting faced considerable hurdles to their activities due to the lack of in-person contacts in the field. While remote communication was a necessary work adjustment, it will hardly replace the human connection needed to monitor and verify more sensitive violations against children, such as sexual violence or recruitment and use as child soldier. Potential underreporting might in turn lead to additional challenges to design policies aimed at preventing and redressing violations.

Brazil notes with concern the negative impact of the pandemic on family tracing and reunification, as well as on reintegration activities of children separated from armed forces and groups. Another worrying factor is the increased risk of infection in prison settings, which only reinforces the need to treat children primarily as victims and to prioritize non-judicial measures as alternatives to their detention.

It is important to continue to adapt current strategies to the limitations brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. It goes beyond resorting to online interaction, but also means adopting measures to mitigate the risks of infection in the field. It may also include developing partnerships to ensure continued local engagement when necessary. Whenever possible, for instance, community-based organizations should be trained and empowered to assist in the efforts to report violations.

The heavy toll of armed conflicts on children is aggravated by the pandemic, whose consequences will be felt in the long run. When seeing the situation through a COVID-19 lens, as proposed by the present study, one must not ignore the need to promote universal and equitable access to safe, effective, quality and affordable vaccines to all. This will help to minimize vulnerabilities of children found in already extremely dire situations.

Your Excellency,

When further studying the impact of COVID-19 on violations against children, there is always a core legal and political distinction that needs to be taken into account between armed conflicts and situations of domestic law enforcement. While both categories are currently within the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, they pose entirely different challenges and must be addressed through different policies.

On the one hand, armed conflicts examined by the Security Council are subject to international humanitarian law, such as the obligation by all parties – including non-State actors – to spare children and other civilians. In these cases, diplomatic and legal measures to prevent further violence and ensure accountability for serious violations all have a role to play. On the other hand, cases of domestic law enforcement that do not represent a threat to international peace and security, and therefore fall outside the mandate of the Security Council, should be handled by Governments through national legislation and in line with international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Your Excellency,

Allow me, in conclusion, to once more underscore Brazil's enduring commitment to the Children and Armed Conflict agenda in the Security Council. We have ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and endorsed the Vancouver Principles, the Paris Commitments and the Safe Schools Declaration. Brazil will remain engaged with the United Nations system and our international partners to promote the safety, the security and the well-being of children affected by armed conflict around the world.

Thank you.



Statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States

at the Security Council Arrria Open Debate on

**“Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against
children in situations of armed conflict”**

”

**United Nations
New York
Friday, 7 May 2021 at 14:00-17.00 EST**

Madame President,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The EU thanks Estonia and the co-sponsors for convening today's Arria-formula meeting.

Children do not only suffer from the devastating impacts of armed conflict but are also at the highest risk of suffering further devastating losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The concomitance of both scourges has indeed exacerbated their multi-faceted impacts on children. We welcome the timely meeting today, as well as the study published by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) and thank the briefers for shedding light on the plight of the impacted children.

Children in conflict situations continue to face gross violations of their human rights with impunity, particularly girls. Conflict affected countries are not sufficiently equipped to protect children against the consequences of the pandemic. Public health systems do not have sufficient capacities to provide critical lifesaving services. Conflict has led to the destruction of civilian infrastructure, limiting children's access to basic services, such as education, health, access to clean water and sanitation and protection. Conflict also leads to family separations, harshly affecting children, especially girls. In some situations, parties to the conflict have exploited the pandemic, increasing grave violations, despite calls for a global ceasefire. In this context, the specific needs of girls, as well as those with disabilities, pose a particular challenge and require a special attention.

In addition, restrictions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 hamper efforts to prevent, monitor, report and respond to violations. Some of these measures impact the timely and effective delivery of humanitarian aid. School closures lead to the suspension of education, as many children do not have access to remote learning opportunities. This increases the risk of dropouts, recruitment, including forced labour and use by armed groups and forces as well as the exposure to other forms of violence such as gender-based violence, including child, early and forced marriage.

The EU will continue to put a strong focus on supporting child protection and education in situations of armed conflict as well as access to education for girls in humanitarian contexts.

We also note with great concern an increased risk of military occupation of education facilities, which makes it more difficult for children to resume their studies: and the longer children are out of education, the more likely they will not return, especially girls. Integrating education as a priority into the humanitarian-development-peace nexus can help to overcome the challenges. Access to education as a key way to break cycles of poverty and to build peaceful societies, must be preserved at all times.

The spread of COVID-19 has challenged the UN working methods to prevent and end the violations against children in armed conflict. At the same time, any response to COVID 19 has to put the protection of children at the center. The rights of the child is the primary consideration when addressing their needs, especially in reintegration efforts.

Peace operations must also be adequately resourced. The distinct role of child protection advisors must be preserved and strengthened – their inputs are unique and provide decisive added value. We also urge members of the Security Council to ensure mainstreaming of the CAAC agenda across the work of the Council, invite SRSG Gamba to brief on country situations, raising CAAC issues including on child protection during Security Council visits, and ensure that child protection is addressed in relevant mandate discussions of all UN missions and through SRSGs activities, reports and briefings at the Security Council.

The EU has reacted quickly to address the impact of COVID-19 by supporting the strengthening of local child protection systems, especially in countries affected by civil war or conflicts, and countries hosting children fleeing armed conflict such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, and Uganda. Child protection aspects are also taken into account in the EU's civilian and military missions and operations. For example, the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine organised a human rights campaign focusing on the challenges created by the pandemic for children who are under the police surveillance in the Kyiv region.

The EU's political engagement further expresses itself in the implementation of projects focusing on the prevention of and the response to violence, with a particular

focus on gender-based violence, the prevention of the recruitment and use of children by armed forces, family tracing and reunification, demobilisation, release and comprehensive and successful reintegration through long-term interventions, education support, mental health and psychosocial support and alternatives forms of care for unaccompanied and separated children, and more.

In a context where millions of children are affected by armed conflicts, advocating and ensuring respect for international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law remains a necessity. It is crucial that governments facilitate access for all frontline medical and humanitarian workers to ensure continued provision of humanitarian aid to vulnerable groups, including children.

The protection of children through humanitarian assistance and development programmes requires sufficient financial resources. Children make up the majority of beneficiaries of EU-funded humanitarian operations. For example, the EU currently funds UNICEF's work in Syria, Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Chad that offer support to children in armed conflict.

In such critical times, all stakeholders must continue the challenging and essential task of monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in armed conflict, as well as other child protection concerns. In conflict-affected countries, where movement of essential personnel is allowed, this essential personnel should include those responsible for monitoring, reporting, and responding to these grave violations.

But foremost, the international community, governments and civil society should remain steadfast in its commitment to conflict prevention. In the recovery phase of the pandemic we must ensure that the rights of the child are of paramount consideration in the proactive and coordinated measures taken to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on children.

I thank you.

H.E. Ambassador Cho Hyun

Permanent Representative

UNSC Arria-Formula Meeting on “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict”

7 May 2021

New York

Mr. Chair,

I would like to first thank you for convening today’s timely Arria-formula meeting. I also take this opportunity to reiterate my delegation’s full support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and we welcome her new study on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children affected by armed conflict.

My delegation is deeply concerned over the multifaceted negative effects of the pandemic on the rights of children.

The pandemic has caused a major disruption in education, health, and the well-being of children, with disproportionately significant impacts on those in armed conflict situations. Schools are closed, and family income has decreased. Humanitarian assistance is

hindered and reintegration programs for former child soldiers have been interrupted. The UN's ability to monitor, prevent, and end violations against children are undermined. The most worrying of all is that these negative impacts are likely to have long-lasting consequences.

Mr. Chair,

Against this troubling backdrop, while aligning myself with the statement delivered by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, I would like to raise the following points in my national capacity.

First, Security Council resolutions 2532 and 2565 must be fully implemented. We call on all parties to conflict to respond to the demand of the Council for a general and immediate cessation of hostilities, which is vital for a successful response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as for ensuring the safe and unhindered distribution of vaccines. We fully support the efforts of the Secretary-General in this regard, particularly his urgent appeal for an immediate global ceasefire.

As stipulated in the aforementioned resolutions, full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access to children in armed conflict must be ensured to address the negative impacts of the ongoing

pandemic. As Co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Solidarity for Global Health Security, the Republic of Korea is working with the member countries to scale up efforts to ensure pandemic preparedness and response, drawing on humanitarian aspect. We also highlight that denial of humanitarian access is a grave violation against children, as defined in the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Second, we need to urgently strengthen our efforts to provide quality education to children in situations affected by conflict. Education is a right, and it is one of the surest ways to achieve sustainable peace and security.

In this regard, we need a coherent and coordinated approach that fully takes into account the triple nexus of peace, development, and humanitarian efforts. Education is inherently a long-term project that requires a cross-sectorial approach, and it is thus essential that various UN bodies across the three pillars work as one. As a member of the Steering Committee of the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, we have consistently called for the need to ensure inclusive, equal access to education for all children affected by armed conflict, thereby helping them build resilience for breaking the cycle of violence.

Third, we strongly support the role of UN peacekeeping operations

in facilitating a protective environment for children affected by armed conflict. We emphasize the importance of its child protection mandates and the need to provide peacekeepers with adequate pre-deployment training on child protection issues.

Particularly, we highlight the crucial role of child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions and believe that they should be provided with adequate resources. We look forward to furthering our discussions on protection of civilians including children at the upcoming Peacekeeping Ministerial to be held in Seoul in December of this year.

Last but not least, we must ensure accountability for all violations against children. Indeed, strengthening accountability and ending impunity is the key to ending the six grave violations against children and preventing recurrence. We should also support and strengthen our tools to document and address violations, including the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, the Security Council Working Group, and the Secretary-General's Annual Report.

Mr. Chair,

The Republic of Korea reaffirms its driving commitment to working with the UN, as well as all Member States, with a view towards

**better protecting children in situations affected by armed conflict
from the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Thank you. /END/



PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT

by

H. E. Mr. Michal Mlynár

**Permanent Representative of Slovakia
to the United Nations**

**Arria-formula meeting of the Security Council
on**

**Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations
of armed conflict**

**7 May 2021
New York**

Mr. President,

Slovakia aligns itself with the statements of the European Union and of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We commend the organizers of this Arria Meeting and we thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba for preparing and publishing New Study on Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Children Affected by Conflict that clearly shows the importance of supporting United Nations and partners on the ground to address the CAAC agenda.

More than a year after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are in a position to look back and do a preliminary assessment of its impact on violations against children in situations of armed conflict. However, due to the backlogs in the verification process, we may get the full picture only later, or distorted as some violations are underreported due to their sensitive nature.

As outlined in the SRSG's Study, the pandemic exacerbated the already dire situation. In addition to the denial or limitation of humanitarian assistance, it puts millions of children at risk with possible long-lasting negative effects, extending beyond this generation and erasing decades of progress, while hitting those vulnerable the hardest.

Pandemic-related school closures increased military occupation of education facilities, or risks of such behaviour, making it more difficult for schools to reopen and for children to resume education activities. And if not because of the pandemic, then the attacks on schools contributed to the largest disruption to education in history affecting 1.6 billion learners world-wide.

Due to the extreme poverty, children were pushed in higher numbers to join armed groups and could remain recruited in their ranks for a long time. Girls, due to school closures, faced an increased risk of sexual violence, forced labour, child, early and forced marriage and may never return to school even when those will reopen.

To address all these issues, it is of utmost importance, that the UN Peace Operations and UN Country Offices have necessary personal resources, with child protection advisors at their centre and adequately funded. Their specialized expertise is

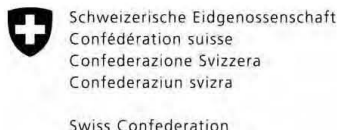
irreplaceable, and they also require sufficient support capacity from the UN headquarters. CAAC agenda must be mainstreamed into mission mandates and make part of all UN SC efforts and discussions. In addition to the violations, children may face the long-term effects of the pandemic and therefore would need psychosocial support.

Mr. President,

We once again reiterate our call for all parties to armed conflict to fully respect international humanitarian law and human rights law, and to end violations against children. Accountability for all of these crimes must be ensured, and perpetrators punished.

Having ratified Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, endorsed the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration as well as the Vancouver Principles, Slovakia calls on others to follow in this regard.

Thank you.



Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Check against delivery

Conseil de sécurité

Réunion selon la formule Arria (VTC)

Impact de la pandémie COVID-19 sur les violations contre les enfants dans les conflits armés

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict

New York, le 7 mai 2021

Déclaration soumise par l'Ambassadrice Pascale Baeriswyl,
Représentante Permanente de la Suisse

Monsieur le Président,

Je remercie l'Estonie et les co-sponsors pour l'organisation de la réunion virtuelle d'aujourd'hui, ainsi que les intervenantes et intervenants pour leurs contributions.

Nous saluons l'étude publiée par le Bureau de la Représentante spéciale du Secrétaire général pour le sort des enfants en temps de conflit armé, et remercions la RSSG Gamba pour ses inlassables efforts. En tant que membre, la Suisse s'associe à la déclaration du Groupe des amis sur les enfants et les conflits armés, et se fait l'écho de ses préoccupations et recommandations, en particulier la pleine mise en œuvre des résolutions 2532 (2020) et 2565 (2021).

Je souhaite mettre en avant deux points :

Premièrement, les enfants affectés par les conflits armés doivent accéder rapidement à l'aide humanitaire et à la protection, avant, pendant et après la pandémie de COVID-19. Comme le montre l'étude du Bureau de la RSSG, les mesures visant à stopper la propagation du virus et à protéger la population ont eu pour conséquence de réduire l'accès aux enfants. Les filles sont particulièrement exposées aux risques et aux conséquences de la pandémie. Nous notons avec inquiétude que le suivi effectué dans le cadre du Mécanisme de surveillance et de communication de l'information de l'ONU sur les violations graves contre les enfants dans les conflits armés est entravé par les mesures prises contre la pandémie. Les États membres doivent s'assurer que toute réponse d'urgence à la pandémie respecte le droit international, et que toutes les mesures prises pour lutter contre le virus sont légales, nécessaires et proportionnées.

Deuxièmement, nous devons investir davantage pour contrer les effets durables de la pandémie. Plus d'un milliard d'enfants risquent d'être mis de côté en raison de la fermeture des écoles. En Syrie, la pandémie et une situation économique difficile ont exposé les enfants à des risques accrus: mariage précoce, travail des enfants, recrutement forcé par des groupes armés, pour n'en citer que quelques-

Mission permanente de la Suisse auprès des Nations Unies
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uns. La Suisse soutient la création d'un environnement éducatif sûr pour les enfants partout en Syrie afin d'assurer leur protection et leur accès à l'éducation. Nous appelons le Groupe de travail sur les enfants et les conflits armés à prendre en considération les impacts à long terme de la COVID-19 dans son travail sur les contextes géographiques à l'ordre du jour du Conseil.

En conclusion, nous appelons le Conseil à renforcer son engagement en faveur de la protection des enfants dans les conflits armés, y compris tous les efforts de surveillance et de vérification des violations. En protégeant les enfants, nous leur donnons les moyens de contribuer à un monde plus pacifique.

Je vous remercie.

Unofficial translation

Mr. President,

I thank Estonia and the co-sponsors for organizing today's virtual meeting, as well as the speakers for their valuable briefings.

We welcome the study published by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and thank SRSG Gamba for her tireless efforts. As a member, Switzerland joins the statement of the Group of Friends of CAAC and echoes its concerns and recommendations, in particular the full implementation of resolutions 2532 (2020) and 2565 (2021).

I would like to highlight two points:

First, conflict-affected children need timely access to humanitarian assistance and protection - before, during and after COVID-19. As the study by the Office of the SRSG shows, measures to stop the spread of the virus and protect the population resulted in reduced access to children. Girls are particularly exposed to the risks and consequences of the pandemic. We note with concern that the monitoring in the framework of the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Armed Conflict is hampered by measures against the pandemic. Member States must ensure that any emergency response to the pandemic respects international law and rights, and that all measures to fight the virus are lawful, necessary and proportionate.

Second, we need to invest more to counter the long-lasting impacts of the pandemic. More than 1 billion children are at risk of falling behind due to school closures. In Syria, the pandemic and a difficult economic situation have exposed children to increased risks: child marriage, child labour, forced recruitment by armed groups, to name but a few. Switzerland therefore supports the creation of a safe learning environment for children across Syria in order to ensure their protection and access to education. We call on the Working Group on CAAC to apply a specific lens on the long-lasting impacts of COVID-19 in its work on the geographical items on the agenda of the Council.

To conclude, we call on the Security Council to strengthen its commitment to protecting children in armed conflicts, including all efforts to monitor and verify violations. Protecting children empowers them to contribute to a more peaceful world.

I thank you.

Mission permanente de la Suisse auprès des Nations Unies
Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations

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