

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 12 June 2024 from the Permanent Representative of  
the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the  
President of the Security Council**

I have the honour to transmit herewith the concept note for the Security Council open debate on the theme “Children and armed conflict: how to advance our collective norms towards protecting children and ending all grave violations”, to be held on Wednesday, 26 June 2024, at 10 a.m. (see annex).

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

*(Signed)* Joonkook **Hwang**  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations



**Annex to the letter dated 12 June 2024 from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council**

**Concept note for the Security Council open debate on the theme “Children and armed conflict: how to advance our collective norms towards protecting children and ending all grave violations”, 26 June 2024**

During its Security Council presidency, the Republic of Korea will organize an open debate on children and armed conflict on 26 June 2024.

The open debate will provide an opportunity for Member States to consider the findings from the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict covering January to December 2023 (A/78/842-S/2024/384), pursuant to Security Council resolution 2427 (2018). The open debate will also offer a timely occasion to further advance the children and armed conflict agenda as our collective norms to protect children in armed conflicts are being challenged, given the current dismaying trends and patterns of grave violations against children.

**1. Trends and patterns in 2023**

The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict indicated disturbing trends of grave violations against children in armed conflict in 2023 in the 25 country situations and 1 regional monitoring arrangement, covering the Lake Chad basin, currently on the children and armed conflict agenda.

The United Nations verified over 32,900 grave violations against children in situations on the children and armed conflict agenda, representing a shocking 21 per cent increase compared with 2022. It is particularly unprecedented that the number of killing and maiming incidents increased by 35 per cent, with more than 11,600 children affected as a result of conflicts, in Israel and Palestine, notably in the Gaza Strip, as well as in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen.

This alarming increase in grave violations may be attributed to various factors including: (a) the changing nature, complexity, expansion and intensification of conflicts; (b) the blatant disregard by armed forces and non-State armed groups of international humanitarian law and international human rights law; (c) the use of explosive weapons in populated areas; (d) deliberate or indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including children, and civilian objects; (e) the advent of new armed groups; and (f) acute humanitarian emergencies.

Gender played a key role in the exposure of children to grave violations in 2023. While boys were more frequently subjected to recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and abduction, girls experienced a disproportionately higher incidence rate of conflict-related sexual violence. In general, factors including gender, age, ethnicity, race, displacement status and disability played critical roles in adversely shaping the vulnerability of children to these grave violations.

Echoing the worrying trends described in the annual report of the Secretary-General, this year’s open debate should focus on three themes: (a) the denial of humanitarian access; (b) the drawdown of peacekeeping operations and special political missions; and (c) attacks on schools and hospitals.

*Denial of humanitarian access*

In 2023, the United Nations verified some 5,200 incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children, demonstrating a dramatic increase compared with 2022. The denial of humanitarian access deserves special attention, in view of its enduring adverse impacts in many contexts on children's development, as well as physical and mental health, including by limiting access to education, food and health care. Denial of humanitarian access particularly exacerbates hunger and famine, which constitute grave risks to children.

International law stipulates that States and non-State armed groups are obligated to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian assistance to civilians in need, including children. Children affected by armed conflicts are also entitled to special protection, according to international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Since the adoption of Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#), which endorsed the monitoring and reporting mechanism proposed by the Secretary-General, the denial of humanitarian access has been monitored and verified as one of the six grave violations against children, although it is not a trigger for listing parties in the annexes to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

As we witness serious humanitarian crises in various parts of the world in recent years, concerted international efforts are now needed more than ever to actively identify ways to facilitate and ensure humanitarian access to civilians in need, particularly children. The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is currently developing a guidance note on denial of humanitarian access, which will be launched in the third quarter of 2024.

*Drawdown of peacekeeping operations and special political missions*

Currently, nine United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions cover child protection in their mandates or support national efforts related to child protection, and it is crucial to ensure that all pertinent operations' and missions' mandates include child protection measures and capabilities from the outset.

The transition from peacekeeping operations and special political missions to United Nations country teams often takes place in the context of complex political dynamics, peace and security challenges, and protracted humanitarian crises often linked to climate insecurity.

Therefore, it is fundamental to develop comprehensive child protection strategies for the aftermath of missions to ensure their successful transitions by building on previous experiences. Sustained political involvement is essential, both during and after a mission's withdrawal, to uphold crucial child protection priorities.

The establishment of a follow-up mechanism, equipped with dedicated personnel, is important to ensure that child protection capacity is preserved and transferred, in particular within the offices of the resident coordinators, but also within United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. The allocation of adequate resources is also critical in addressing foreseeable challenges and maintaining essential services such as explosive hazard education, victim assistance and efforts to reduce armed violence.

*Attacks on schools and hospitals*

In 2023, the United Nations verified 1,650 incidents of attacks on schools and hospitals, posing significant threats to children's right to education and health care, as well as exposing them to heightened risks of other grave violations.

The use of schools and hospitals for military purposes erodes their integrity and neutrality, rendering them targets of attacks and further violence. This endangers the safety of children and teachers, as well as their education.

Attacks on schools and hospitals have an immediate detrimental impact on children's physical and psychological well-being and cast long-term severe consequences on their educational trajectories and health security, as well as lasting impacts on communities, including socioeconomics.

Therefore, it is imperative that the international community continue to condemn attacks on schools and hospitals, as well as develop and fully implement more effective measures to protect educational and health facilities during armed conflicts, in line with international humanitarian law and Security Council resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#).

## **2. Children and armed conflict in the Security Council over the past 25 years and the way forward**

Since the Security Council's adoption of landmark resolution [1261 \(1999\)](#) on children and armed conflict 25 years ago, children and armed conflict has developed into a pioneering framework for preventing and responding to the six grave violations against children in armed conflict, including through the provision of tangible tools with which to engage parties to conflict.

The Security Council has adopted a series of resolutions, inter alia, (a) endorsing the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#)); (b) requesting to list parties to armed conflict that commit five out of the six grave violations against children (resolutions [1882 \(2009\)](#), [1998 \(2011\)](#) and [2225 \(2015\)](#)); (c) requesting listed parties to engage with the United Nations to develop concrete, time-bound action plans (resolution [1539 \(2004\)](#) and subsequent resolutions); and (d) strengthening mechanisms to prevent grave violations (resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#)).

As a result of United Nations advocacy based on the children and armed conflict framework, more than 200,000 children have been released from armed groups and armed forces since the inception of the children and armed conflict mandate. Hundreds of commitments have been made by parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations against children, including more than 40 action plans, of which 21 are currently under implementation.

Some 15 parties to conflict have fully complied with their commitments and were subsequently delisted. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict has also played a vital role in ensuring that children and armed conflict tools work properly, including by producing recommendations on many specific countries.

In addition to the development of the children and armed conflict agenda, a series of key initiatives reinforcing the normative frameworks for child protection in armed conflict emerged. These include the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), of the International Labour Organization; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000); the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (2007); the Safe Schools Declaration (2015); and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (2017). In addition, regional organizations such as the African Union have integrated child protection in their peace and development strategies.

There have been ongoing efforts by the Security Council to advance child protection tools in country-specific arrangements with dedicated child protection mandates and designated child protection advisers, as well as in thematic resolutions. In addition, seven United Nations sanctions regimes also include designation criteria

related to children and armed conflict, such as recruitment and use and attacks on schools and hospitals.

The expanded efforts to hold perpetrators accountable have been exemplified, not only through domestic jurisdiction mechanisms adopting age- and gender-sensitive approaches, but also by international bodies, such as the International Criminal Court, in its adoption of a revised child policy in 2023.

Now, in 2024, the children and armed conflict agenda stands at a critical juncture as the world is facing ever more complex and multifaceted conflicts in the context of elevated disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Furthermore, increasing impunity must be tackled and the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations should be reinforced and supported as a key tool.

During the open debate, Member States are encouraged to share their best practices and insights with a view to advancing our collective norms towards protecting children and ending all grave violations, building upon the achievements to date. As such, they should consider the following guiding questions in formulating their interventions.

### **3. Guiding questions**

- What measures can be implemented to protect children from grave violations when armed conflicts break out or rapidly escalate?
- In the light of the serious access constraints witnessed globally in recent years, including in 2023, what international efforts are required to facilitate humanitarian access to those in need, particularly children? What measures can be promoted to reinforce the neutral, impartial and independent nature of humanitarian aid in different conflict settings?
- What aspects of the capacity gaps should be prioritized during the withdrawal of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions, and what kind of assistance can be provided to support these situations?
- What can be done to effectively deter parties to conflicts from attacking schools and hospitals, and how can we provide quality education to children in armed conflict?
- What can be done to more effectively hold perpetrators of grave violations against children accountable and stamp out impunity?
- What can be done to protect and support children who were mobilized by armed groups, including ways to help their reintegration into communities and prevent them from being reinvolvement in armed conflicts or terrorist acts?

### **4. Format, briefers and participation**

The open debate will be chaired by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, Joonkook Hwang.

We are honoured to have the following speakers brief the Security Council:

- Eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy Chair of The Elders, Ban Ki-moon
- Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
- Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund
- Civil society briefer

Member States wishing to participate in person should inscribe their names on the list of speakers through the eSpeakers module of e-deleGATE. The inscription for the list of speakers will open at 9.30 a.m. on the third working day preceding the date of the meeting (26 June). A letter addressed to the President of the Security Council, duly signed by the Permanent Representative or the Chargé d'affaires a.i., requesting to participate, in accordance with rule 37 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, must be uploaded to the eSpeakers module of e-deleGATE. In order to guarantee the participation of as many Member States as possible, statements should not exceed three minutes and group statements are encouraged.

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