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Agenda item 66****Promotion and protection of the rights of children****Security Council  
Seventy-fifth year****Letter dated 13 May 2020 from the Permanent Representative of  
Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to submit to you the report of the workshop on children and armed conflict convened by the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University and the non-governmental organization Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict on 29 January 2020 at the Princeton Club of New York, supported by Sweden (see annex).

I would be grateful if you could issue the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 66, and of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* Anna-Karin **Eneström**  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative



## **Annex to the letter dated 13 May 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

### **Report of the workshop on children and armed conflict**

29 January 2020, New York City

#### **I. Introduction**

1. The non-governmental organization (NGO) Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University convened a workshop on 29 January 2020, at the Princeton Club of New York in New York City. The workshop brought together representatives of States Members of the United Nations, including members of the Security Council, staff from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Department of Peace Operations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), academics and NGOs to discuss priorities for the United Nations children and armed conflict agenda in 2020, as well as actions that could be taken to strengthen the agenda and the United Nations response to grave violations committed against children. This was the sixth annual policy workshop co-sponsored by the Institute and Watchlist since 2013.

2. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, opened the workshop with reflections on the actions taken by her office to promote the protection of children in armed conflict. These included engaging with parties to conflict to develop and sign action plans, producing country-specific reports on a two-year interval and launching the Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict (#ACTtoProtect) campaign in various countries and at the regional level. The Special Representative also highlighted concerning trends and positive developments for children in armed conflict.

3. The workshop consisted of three closed working sessions. The first session was focused on ongoing challenges and concerns affecting the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda, featuring reflections from the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and World Vision International. The second session was focused on emerging concerns and trends with implications for the children and armed conflict agenda and included presentations from Human Rights Watch, UNICEF and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. The final session featured presentations from Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations and current Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of the Security Council, and Ambassador Richard Arbeiter, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, who spoke in his capacity as Chair of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. In a wrap-up session, participants summarized key discussion points and recommendations of the working sessions.

4. The present report summarizes the discussions in these sessions and provides recommendations for Security Council action on violations and abuses against children in situations of armed conflict in 2020.

## **II. Children and armed conflict agenda: ongoing challenges and implementation on the ground**

5. The first session of the workshop was focused on the implementation of the United Nations children and armed conflict agenda, including effective monitoring, reporting and response to grave violations on the ground; engagement with listed State and non-State armed actors on the protection of children; the development and signing of action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children; strengthening the prevention lens of the children and armed conflict agenda; addressing the issue of persistent perpetrators; and child protection capacity on the ground, in peacekeeping, including during mission drawdown and transitions, and in humanitarian action, highlighting the significant underfunding of child protection and gender-based violence prevention and response in global humanitarian responses.

6. Workshop participants from the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict discussed ways to strengthen the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, as well as how data from the mechanism could inform country-level programming. Continuing challenges were raised regarding the collection of such data, engaging with both State security forces and non-State armed groups and constraints to child protection capacity and access on the ground. The panellist from World Vision International discussed child protection programming by civil society actors in situations of armed conflict, including risks for field staff participating in data collection. Joining via teleconference, the panellist from MINUSCA presented trends in grave violations of children's rights in the Central African Republic, as well as key challenges in implementing the child protection mandate.

7. Participants discussed the relationship between the children and armed conflict agenda and other thematic mandates, such as sexual violence in conflict and violence against children; regional dynamics, in particular regarding escalating violence in the Sahel; and how to better promote accountability for perpetrators.

## **III. Uncharted territory: emerging concerns and situations with implications for the children and armed conflict agenda**

8. The second session of the workshop was focused on emerging thematic concerns and country situations with implications for the children and armed conflict agenda. These included the military detention of children in the context of armed conflict and the impacts on children of efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism, attacks on education and their links to other grave violations, and emerging situations of concern. Participants discussed the implications of these situations and how the agenda could address the evolving needs of children caught up in armed conflicts.

9. The Chair of the Advisory Board of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict presented key findings from a December 2019 joint policy note with Human Rights Watch on the military detention of children. Participants discussed the detention of children on national security-related charges for real or perceived affiliation with armed groups, including designated terrorist groups; inhumane conditions, mistreatment and torture of children held in detention; the failure to uphold international standards of juvenile justice; and the signing of handover protocols to prevent the military detention and abuse of children in situations of armed conflict.

10. The panellist from UNICEF discussed concerns arising from efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism that conflicted with best practices and core principles of child protection. Participants discussed the increasingly common practice of

screening children as “security threats”, rather than having them screened by child protection actors to assess their protection needs; the impact of language choice on the stigmatization of children; challenges created when counter-terrorism policies contradicted widely accepted norms and standards for the protection of children’s rights, both in national legislation and in United Nations resolutions; and the implications of donor conditionality and other counter-terrorism measures on principled humanitarian action.

11. The panellist from the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack presented new data on attacks on education and the military use of schools in country situations not currently included in the United Nations children and armed conflict agenda. The panellist highlighted incidents affecting education in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali and the Niger. Participants discussed data collection and under-reporting, as well as how to ensure that situations of concern were not excluded from the children and armed conflict agenda.

12. Participants further discussed opportunities to engage on the United Nations counter-terrorism agenda and remedy policies and rhetoric that undermined efforts to protect children’s rights, as well as how to mitigate efforts to politicize the children and armed conflict agenda and ensure that all situations of concern were included in the narrative of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

#### **IV. Role of Member States in advancing the children and armed conflict agenda: Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict**

13. The third session of the workshop featured reflections by Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, and Annelies Verstichel, First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations, on the first year of Belgium as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of the Security Council. Ambassador Richard Arbeiter, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, provided reflections on the role of non-member States of the Security Council in supporting the children and armed conflict agenda through the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in New York, as well as through regional groups of friends. Participants discussed the Working Group’s priorities, working methods and the effective use of its toolkit, as well as how to overcome challenging negotiations and leverage broader Member State engagement on concerns regarding children and armed conflict.

14. Participants discussed accomplishments and challenges of the Working Group during the first year of Belgium as Chair; ways to promote the implementation of previously adopted Working Group conclusions, including videoconferences with country task forces on monitoring and reporting and field visits; and mainstreaming concerns on children and armed conflict throughout the work of the Security Council, including in mandate renewals and the work of the sanctions committees, and calling for more regular briefings on country situations by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

15. Participants also discussed the focus of the Group of Friends for the coming year, including addressing the financial implications of austerity measures on the capacity of the United Nations to monitor, report and respond to grave violations against children; counteracting efforts to politicize the agenda and the annual report

of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict; and enhancing connections between the Group of Friends in New York and regional groups of friends.

## V. Recommendations

16. In the final session, participants summarized the key discussion points and recommendations from the workshop. The following recommendations were proposed to strengthen the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda and the United Nations response to grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict:

(a) Member States, security actors and additional relevant stakeholders should recommit to protecting core principles for the protection of children's rights, in particular that children recruited and used by armed actors should be treated primarily as victims of serious violations who should be provided with rehabilitation and reintegration, as appropriate. Criminal prosecution should focus on the adults who recruit and use children. If children have been implicated in serious criminal offences during the time of their association with parties to conflict, the prosecution should be in line with international juvenile justice standards;

(b) Member States involved in situations of armed conflict should commit to ending the military detention of children by adopting and effectively implementing a formal handover protocol that ensures the swift transfer of children from military custody to civilian child protection authorities;

(c) Member States should review their national counter-terrorism legislation and ensure that such legislation is consistent with international obligations, in particular child rights and core child protection principles, including the primacy of the best interests of the child;

(d) Member States and experts on children and armed conflict within permanent missions should increase efforts to mainstream concerns on children and armed conflict throughout the work of the Security Council, including in mandate renewals, the work of the sanctions committees and briefings by special envoys on specific country situations;

(e) Children and armed conflict experts should increase efforts to break down workstream silos within their delegations and ensure effective communication of concerns and recommendations on children and armed conflict with relevant country and thematic experts, including counter-terrorism and security sector experts;

(f) The Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in New York and regional groups of friends should strengthen coordination, in particular to follow up on the implementation of the conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of the Security Council. The development of guidelines for local groups of friends, for example, could help to improve such cooperation;

(g) Retreats for United Nations child protection advisers should be held more frequently, and members of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict should have more opportunities to engage directly with child protection advisers, whether in person, such as during field visits or while advisers are in New York, or by videoconference;

(h) The children and armed conflict community, including relevant United Nations agencies and offices, Member States and civil society, should develop a "business case for child protection advisers" as an advocacy tool to demonstrate the value of child protection capacity in United Nations peacekeeping and special

political missions and encourage appropriate budgetary allocation to sustain this capacity;

(i) The Security Council should ensure that key peace missions and other relevant United Nations child protection actors have the necessary financial and human resources to effectively monitor and report on grave violations against children and should call upon affected States to facilitate safe, unhindered access for the purposes of monitoring, verification and response.

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