



# Security Council

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## Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

### Conclusions on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan

1. At its 85th meeting, on 16 September 2019, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of the Security Council examined the fourth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan ([S/2019/727](#)), which covers the period from 1 January 2015 to 31 December 2018 and was introduced by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations also addressed the Working Group.
2. The members of the Working Group welcomed the report of the Secretary-General, in accordance with Security Council resolutions [1612 \(2005\)](#), [1882 \(2009\)](#), [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2068 \(2012\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#), [2225 \(2015\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#), and took note of the analysis and recommendations contained therein.
3. The members of the Working Group expressed grave concern at the deteriorating situation of children affected by the armed conflict in Afghanistan, particularly at the significant increase in the number of children killed and maimed, the continuing recruitment and use of children, the perpetration of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, including sexual violence involving *bacha bazi*, as well as attacks on hospitals and schools, including the election-related attacks in 2018; they welcomed the progress made by the Government of Afghanistan in implementing its Action Plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by its security forces; they discussed work on prevention; and they acknowledged the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on reporting and protection of children affected by armed conflict, including its engagement with the Government of Afghanistan.
4. Further to the meeting, and subject to and consistent with applicable international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions [1612 \(2005\)](#), [1882 \(2009\)](#), [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2068 \(2012\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#), [2225 \(2015\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#), and in particular resolution [1261 \(1999\)](#) and subsequent resolutions in which the Council identified and condemned the six grave violations against children affected by armed conflict, the Working Group agreed to the direct action as set out below.

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

5. The Working Group agreed to address the following message to all parties to the armed conflict in Afghanistan, in particular non-State armed groups, such as the



Taliban forces and affiliated groups, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP), the Haqqani Network and Hizb-i Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, as well as the Afghan National Police and Afghan Local Police, as mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General, through a public statement by its Chair:

(a) Expressing deep concern at the scale, severity and recurrence of grave violations and abuses endured by children in Afghanistan, particularly the high level of killing and maiming of children; strongly condemning all violations and abuses that continue to be committed against children in Afghanistan; and urging all parties to the conflict to immediately end and prevent all violations of applicable international law involving the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access, and to comply with their obligations under international law;

(b) Calling upon them to further implement the previous conclusions on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan of the Working Group ([S/AC.51/2016/1](#), [S/AC.51/2011/3](#) and [S/AC.51/2009/1](#));

(c) Stressing the importance of accountability for all violations and abuses against children in armed conflict and stressing that all those responsible must be brought to justice and held accountable, including through timely, systematic, impartial and independent investigations, and, as appropriate, prosecution and conviction;

(d) Expressing deep concern at the significant increase in the number of children killed and maimed, including as a result of military operations on the ground, improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war, aerial operations by the Government of Afghanistan and pro-government forces, and suicide and complex attacks, particularly by the Taliban and ISIL-KP; strongly urging all parties to reduce levels of violence and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction and proportionality and the obligation to take all feasible precautions to avoid and in any event minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects; and encouraging parties to continue to follow up on reports of the killing and maiming of children, to improve operational practice and ensure accountability, as well as to ensure adequate and effective reparations;

(e) Condemning the recruitment and use of children, both by armed groups, which are responsible for the majority of cases, with the Taliban remaining the main perpetrator, as well as by the Afghan security forces, in particular the Afghan National Police and the Afghan Local Police, and strongly urging all security forces and armed groups to immediately and without conditions release all children associated with them and to end and prevent the further recruitment and use of children under 18 years of age, consistent with their obligations under international law, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the declaration made by Afghanistan upon accession thereto in 2003, as applicable;

(f) Expressing concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their association or alleged association with armed forces and armed groups and urging all parties to the conflict to release all those children and support their full reintegration through specialized child protection programmes; urging that children associated or allegedly associated with parties to conflict must be treated primarily as victims and that detention should be considered only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, in line with international law and guided by the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles), which was endorsed by the Government of Afghanistan; and urging

the Government to ensure that, where children face prosecution for allegedly committing crimes, those prosecutions are carried out with respect for the rights of the child;

(g) Expressing deep concern at the cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, which are underreported, including cases of sexual violence involving *bacha bazi*, and at the lack of appropriate response and services for survivors; strongly urging all parties to the armed conflict to take immediate and specific measures to put an end to and prevent the perpetration of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children; and stressing the importance of accountability for those responsible for sexual and gender-based violence against children;

(h) Strongly condemning attacks on schools and hospitals in violation of international law, including attacks by armed groups on schools used as voter registration and polling centres, with the majority of attacks on schools, education personnel, hospitals and medical personnel attributed to armed groups, in particular the Taliban; calling upon all parties to the armed conflict to comply with applicable international law and to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals as such, including their personnel, and to end and prevent disproportionate or indiscriminate attacks or threats of attacks against those institutions and their personnel as well as the military use of schools and hospitals in violation of applicable international law, as guided by the Safe Schools Declaration, which was signed by the Government of Afghanistan in May 2015; and stressing the importance of accountability for attacks in violation of international law against those institutions;

(i) Strongly condemning the abduction of children, with the majority of cases attributed to armed groups, and calling upon all concerned parties to cease the abduction of children and immediately release all abducted children;

(j) Strongly condemning incidents of denial of humanitarian access, the majority of which are attributed to armed groups, in particular the Taliban, including attacks on humanitarian personnel, such as humanitarian deminers and vaccinators, and calling upon all parties to the armed conflict to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unhindered access to children, consistent with the United Nations guiding principles of humanitarian assistance, to respect the exclusively humanitarian nature and impartiality of humanitarian aid and respect the work of all United Nations agencies and their humanitarian partners, without adverse distinction;

(k) Expressing concern at the lack of sufficient programmes for reintegration and support for children formerly associated with parties to the conflict, children released from detention facilities and rejected underage applicants to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) and underlining that family and community-based reintegration of children formerly associated with parties to the conflict is essential for providing a future to those children and their families, as well as for preventing re-recruitment;

*To the Government of Afghanistan*

(l) Welcoming the progress and concrete steps taken by the Government of Afghanistan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by its security forces as part of the implementation of the Road Map to Compliance it endorsed in 2014 to complement and expedite the implementation of the Action Plan, including by enacting a law in 2015 criminalizing the recruitment and use of children in ANDSF, by adopting the 2017 revised Penal Code, which explicitly criminalizes the recruitment and use of children and the falsification of national identification cards (*tazkeras*), and the Child Act by presidential decree, and by endorsing the national age assessment guidelines in 2015; expressing concern that progress on screening mechanisms in the Afghan Local Police remains a challenge and that the implementation of the revised Penal Code and the prosecution of perpetrators for

recruitment and use of children, including for *bacha bazi*, is lacking; and urging the Government to intensify its efforts to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Afghan National Police and the Afghan Local Police, to put in place age screening mechanisms when operationalizing the Afghan Territorial Force and to ensure accountability for recruitment and use of children;

(m) Urging the Government of Afghanistan to prevent the recruitment of children when integrating former combatants of Hizb-i Islami, following the signing of the peace agreement between the Government and that armed group;

(n) Welcoming the 2016 Ministry of Interior directive prohibiting media exposure of children arrested on national security-related charges, the National Directorate of Security directive on the separation of children from adult detainees, and the 2018 amendment to the Criminal Procedural Code providing that children arrested on security-related charges should be referred to a Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre; urging the Government of Afghanistan to develop a national plan on children detained on national security-related charges and to put in place a solid response mechanism to address the needs of children formerly associated with parties to the conflict who have been released from detention facilities or rejected during formal recruitment processes, so as to help ensure their recovery, protection and reintegration, and prevent their further recruitment;

(o) Welcoming the endorsement by the Government of Afghanistan of the National Policy on Civilian Casualty Prevention and Mitigation and urging it to implement this policy;

(p) Commending the Government of Afghanistan for ratifying Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War (Protocol V) to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, in August 2017 and encouraging it to develop an implementation plan and to continue conducting awareness-raising programmes on the dangers of explosive remnants of war among communities in order to end and prevent the killing and maiming of children by explosive remnants of war;

(q) Welcoming the 2017 revised Penal Code, which explicitly criminalizes *bacha bazi*, and the Child Act, which includes provisions on sexual violence against children and should be adopted as soon as possible by parliament, and encouraging the Government of Afghanistan to improve the implementation thereof and the prosecution of perpetrators, in particular of *bacha bazi*, including government officials, and to provide response mechanisms for supporting and protecting victims and survivors of sexual violence;

(r) Recalling the endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration and welcoming the subsequent promulgation of two directives by the Ministry of Education to better protect schools and encouraging the Government of Afghanistan to continue to strengthen laws and policies to prevent the military use of schools;

(s) Welcoming the launch of the Child Protection Policy by the Ministry of Defence in 2017, which focuses on the prevention of the six grave violations against children affected by armed conflict and on the military use of education and health facilities and which is applicable to all personnel of the Afghan National Army;

(t) Underlining the importance of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and recognizing that a strong focus is needed on combating poverty, deprivation and inequality in Afghanistan to prevent and protect Afghan children from all violations and abuses, in particular in the context of armed conflict, and to promote the resilience of children, their families and their communities, and the importance of promoting education for all and peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development;

*To the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Resolute Support Mission*

(u) Welcoming the deployment by the NATO Resolute Support Mission of a Senior Child Protection Adviser since 2016, and encouraging it to continue to provide support in strengthening the child protection capabilities of ANDSF through its Train, Advise and Assist mandate, including in revising the ANDSF policies and by providing training on children affected by armed conflict and child protection;

*To the United States of America*

(v) Taking note with appreciation of the designation by the United States of a senior civilian within the Department of Defense responsible for developing, coordinating and overseeing compliance with policies relating to civilian casualties in United States military operations, including policies for assessing reports of civilian casualties, and of the further development of policy to guide its forces' efforts to minimize civilian casualties; and encouraging them to continue their efforts to protect children during military operations, and to continue to abide by their obligations under international law;

*To the Taliban and other armed groups*

(w) Expressing grave concern at the use of indirect fire systems and their effect on children, including in civilian-populated areas, and at the use of improvised explosive devices targeting civilians and civilian objects, as well as at the indiscriminate use of those weapons by the Taliban and other armed groups, and urging them to make a distinction between civilians and civilian objects, on the one hand, and military targets, on the other hand, and to take measures to protect civilians;

(x) Urging the Taliban and other armed groups to immediately end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, to issue military orders prohibiting the recruitment and use of anyone under 18 years of age and to immediately release all children from their ranks and support their reintegration into society;

(y) Urging the Taliban and other armed groups to immediately halt attacks against medical personnel and facilities, including during vaccination campaigns, as well as against schools and education personnel, including when the schools are used as voter registration and polling centres, and to stop the abduction of children for any purpose;

*To all those concerned*

(z) Calling upon all parties to the conflict listed in the annexes to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict that have not yet done so to enter into a dialogue with the United Nations for the purpose of developing and implementing an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the six grave violations against children affected by armed conflict;

(aa) Calling upon those who are or will be engaged in peace talks and agreements to ensure that child protection provisions, including the release and reintegration of children, as well as provisions on the rights and well-being of children, are integrated into all peace negotiations, ceasefire and peace agreements and in provisions for ceasefire monitoring, taking into account children's views, where possible, in these processes;

(bb) Calling upon the Government of Afghanistan, Member States, United Nations entities, including the Peacebuilding Commission, and other concerned parties to ensure that the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict are fully incorporated into and prioritized in all

post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, programmes and strategies, as well as in efforts on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and encourage and facilitate consideration of the views of children in these processes;

(cc) Demanding that parties to the conflict facilitate safe and unhindered access for United Nations monitoring and reporting personnel for monitoring and reporting purposes.

6. The Working Group agreed to address a message, through a public statement by the Chair of the Working Group, to community and religious leaders:

(a) Emphasizing the important role of community and religious leaders in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict;

(b) Urging them to strengthen community-level protection and to publicly condemn and continue to advocate ending and preventing violations and abuses against children, notably the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks and threats of attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions and denial of humanitarian access, and to engage with the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders to support the reintegration and rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict in their communities, including by raising awareness to prevent the stigmatization of those children.

#### **Recommendations to the Security Council**

7. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter addressed to the Government of Afghanistan:

(a) Expressing concern at the significant increase in the number of children killed and maimed, including as a result of aerial operations conducted by the Government of Afghanistan and pro-government forces, and urging the Government to take all measures necessary to prevent child casualties in the conduct of its operations;

(b) Welcoming the progress made and the concrete steps taken by the Government of Afghanistan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by its security forces in its implementation of the joint Action Plan it signed in 2011 and the Road Map to Compliance it endorsed in 2014, including by enacting a law criminalizing the recruitment and use of children in the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), in 2015, by adopting the 2017 revised Penal Code and the Child Act by presidential decree, by endorsing the national age assessment guidelines in 2015, by inaugurating 30 additional Child Protection Units in the Afghan National Police recruitment centres that now cover all 34 provinces, and by training its security forces; encouraging the Government to use the Child Protection Units to proactively monitor check posts and ensure that no children are present in such locations; expressing concern that progress on screening mechanisms in the Afghan Local Police remains a challenge and that the Government has not yet implemented the revised Penal Code or prosecuted perpetrators for the recruitment and use of children; and urging the Government to intensify its efforts to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by all ANDSF bodies, including the Afghan Local Police, to put in place age screening mechanisms when operationalizing the Afghan Territorial Force, and to ensure accountability for recruitment and use of children;

(c) Urging the Government of Afghanistan to prevent the recruitment of children when integrating former combatants of Hizb-i Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, following the signing of the peace agreement between the Government and that armed group;

(d) Welcoming the 2016 Ministry of Interior directive prohibiting media exposure of children arrested on national security-related charges, the National Directorate of Security directive on the separation of children from adult detainees, and the 2018 amendment to the Criminal Procedural Code providing that children arrested on security-related charges should be referred to a Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre; urging the Government of Afghanistan to develop a national plan on children detained on national security-related charges, including on the release from detention of children associated or allegedly associated with armed groups, guided by the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), and to put in place a solid response mechanism to address the needs of children formerly associated with parties to the conflict who have been released from detention facilities or rejected during formal recruitment processes, to ensure their recovery, protection and reintegration, and to prevent their further recruitment and use;

(e) Welcoming the endorsement by the Government of Afghanistan of the National Policy on Civilian Casualty Prevention and Mitigation and urging it to implement that policy;

(f) Commending the Government of Afghanistan for ratifying Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in August 2017 and encouraging it to develop an implementation plan and to continue conducting awareness-raising programmes on the dangers of explosive remnants of war among communities in order to end and prevent the killing and maiming of children by explosive remnants of war;

(g) Welcoming the 2017 revised Penal Code, which explicitly criminalizes *bacha bazi*, and the Child Act, which includes provisions on sexual violence against children and which should be adopted as soon as possible by parliament, and encouraging the Government of Afghanistan to ensure the implementation thereof and the prosecution of perpetrators, in particular of *bacha bazi*, and to provide response mechanisms for supporting and protecting victims and survivors of sexual violence;

(h) Recalling the endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration by the Ministry of Education and welcoming the subsequent promulgation of two directives by the Ministry of Education to better protect schools, and encouraging the Government of Afghanistan to continue to strengthen laws and policies to prevent the military use of schools;

(i) Welcoming the launch of the Child Protection Policy by the Ministry of Defence in 2017, which focuses on the prevention of the six grave violations against children affected by armed conflict and on the military use of education and health facilities and which is applicable to all personnel of the Afghan National Army, and calling for its full implementation;

(j) Calling upon the Government of Afghanistan to ensure that child protection provisions, including the release and reintegration of children, as well as provisions on the rights and well-being of children, are integrated, into all peace negotiations, ceasefire and peace agreements, and in provisions for ceasefire monitoring, and taking into account children's views, where possible, in these processes;

(k) Calling upon the Government of Afghanistan to ensure that the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict are fully incorporated into and prioritized in all post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, programmes and strategies, as well as in efforts for peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and to encourage and facilitate consideration of the views of children in these processes.

8. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter to the Secretary-General:

(a) Requesting the Secretary-General to ensure that the country task force on monitoring and reporting in Afghanistan and other relevant United Nations agencies continue their engagement and efforts to support the Government of Afghanistan to address violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict;

(b) Recognizing the importance of the monitoring and reporting of violations and abuses against children and supporting the implementation of the 2011 Action Plan and the 2014 Road Map to Compliance, further requesting the Secretary-General to ensure the continued effectiveness of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on violations and abuses against children in armed conflict in Afghanistan;

(c) Requesting the Secretary-General to continue to give priority to the child protection activities and capacity of UNAMA and to continue to include in his future reports information and analysis on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions;

(d) Requesting the Secretary-General to ensure that the country task force on monitoring and reporting in Afghanistan and other relevant United Nations agencies continue their efforts to engage with all parties to the conflict for the purpose of developing and implementing an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the six grave violations against children affected by armed conflict.

9. The Working Group agreed to recommend the following to the Security Council:

(a) To ensure that the situation of children affected by armed conflict continues to be taken into account by the Security Council when discussing the mandate of UNAMA and its activities;

(b) To ensure the continuation of and support for the child protection tasks of UNAMA, especially with regard to monitoring and reporting on violations and abuses committed against children in armed conflict, supporting the implementation of the Action Plan and the Road Map to Compliance, as well as continuing to engage with parties to the conflict, so as to end and prevent all violations and abuses, including through training on and the mainstreaming of child protection;

(c) To communicate the present document to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1988 \(2011\)](#).

#### **Direct action by the Working Group**

10. The Working Group agreed to send letters from the Chair of the Working Group to donors:

(a) Emphasizing the importance of international support to enhance the institutional capabilities of the Government of Afghanistan, and in this regard calling upon the donor community to provide flexible, timely and sufficient funding and support to the Government so as to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including through the full implementation of the Action Plan and Road Map to Compliance, as well as strengthening overall child protection efforts, including:

(i) Supporting the development and implementation of sustainable multisectoral release and reintegration programmes for all children formerly associated with ANDSF and armed groups, emphasizing the importance of



psychosocial support, reintegration and the need to support viable and sustainable alternative livelihoods in order to prevent the re-recruitment of children;

(ii) Supporting the development and implementation of sustainable programmatic responses in Juvenile Rehabilitation Centres to provide psychosocial support, health care, education, vocational training and income-generating schemes to children;

(iii) Supporting the provision of access to adequate health care and nutrition, as well as appropriate education and vocational training for all children affected by armed conflict in Afghanistan, particularly for girls, children with disabilities and children rejected from formal recruitment processes;

(iv) Supporting the strengthening of legal and governance mechanisms, particularly with regard to addressing impunity for violations and abuses against children;

(v) Supporting monitoring and reporting activities to identify priorities to strengthen the protection of children and to support the swift implementation of and compliance with the Action Plan and the Road Map to Compliance;

(vi) Supporting the efforts to implement the criminal provisions on the falsification of national identification cards (*tazkeras*) in the revised Penal Code as a means to prevent the recruitment and use of children in Afghanistan.

## Annex

### **Statement of the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations before the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict**

**16 September 2019**

I would like to first thank the Permanent Mission of Belgium, Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for convening this meeting. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report and commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and her team, for their sustained efforts and commitment to supporting children in conflict-affected countries.

Children are the primary victims in the ongoing armed conflict in my country. They continue to be brainwashed and forced to partake in the conflict as soldiers and suicide-bombers by the Taliban and other illegal armed groups. The cruelty of these groups, by putting children in situations of danger through their indiscriminate targeting of public institutions, such as schools and clinics, their use of children as human shields, and their recruitment as fighters and suicide attackers, constitutes nefarious war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law, and as such must come to an end.

The safety, security and well-being of all Afghan citizens, particularly children, are among the main responsibilities of my Government. Since the signing of the joint Action Plan in 2011 and the subsequent “Road Map Towards Compliance”, in 2014, Afghanistan has reaffirmed its commitment to this important matter through tangible and significant measures that have led to progress on the protection of children. This includes progress in the areas of ending and preventing the recruitment of child soldiers, ending and preventing sexual violence against children, addressing the situation of security of schools, hospitals and other public infrastructure, and overcoming the challenge of the denial of humanitarian access for children, upon which I will elaborate.

With regard to the recruitment of child soldiers, the Afghan Government is following a zero-tolerance policy. Our new Penal Code, which entered into force in 2018, and the Law on the Prohibition of Children’s Recruitment in the Security Forces, criminalized the recruitment of underage individuals and put strict punishments on perpetrators. Additionally, Child Protection Units were established in provincial police headquarters of all 34 provinces with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), as well as a joint commission on preventing the recruitment of children in police forces, including representatives of the General Directorate of Civil Registration, of the Ministry of Public Health and of Human Rights Units, in order to assess and identify the age of children, prevent recruitment of underage individuals, and reintegrate them with their families.

Moreover, the Afghan Ministry of Interior Affairs has adopted measures to prevent the recruitment and use of children, including the Policy for Prevention of Children’s Recruitment in the National and Local Police Forces; the Policy on Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children; the Policy on Educating Human Rights of Children in Armed Conflict; and the Policy on Humanitarian Law for Preventing Children’s Recruitment in Armed Conflicts.

These policies have been disseminated and distributed to all units and zone offices and police headquarters of the Ministry of Interior Affairs.

The results of our efforts have been noted in the Secretary-General's report and recent official reports from the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), which have indicated zero underage recruitments in 2018 as well as the prevention of the recruitment of 1,009 underage applicants in the Ministry of Defence and 315 in the Ministry of Interior. We hope that through our efforts, we will soon be able to delist the name of the Afghanistan National and Local Police from the shame-list, based on our noticeable progress in terms of finally putting an end to underage recruitment.

With regard to sexual violence against children, the previously mentioned new Penal Code addresses these concerns and for the first time sets punishments for those engaging in the act of Bacha Bazi. Since the institution of the code, our justice sector has worked tirelessly on its implementation and the Afghan Attorney General Office has already investigated over 10 cases, referring many of these cases to the courts for trial and punishment. Additionally, the Afghan Ministry of Defence, in 2018, also introduced new policies on the matter, and has already referred several cases to martial courts in Kabul.

In addressing the situation of attacks in schools, hospitals and other public institutions, the National Directorate of Security issued an order and adopted the National Policy on Civilian Casualty Prevention and Mitigation to avoid civilian casualties during military operations. This included incorporating first aid assistance in the operational teams and applying caution and rescue tactics, if civilians are used as shields. To ensure the protection of schools and health facilities, ANDSF strictly observes the order that all military operations should be conducted at a minimum distance of 460 metres from schools and health facilities. The protection of children around public institutions has also included the defusing of over 6,335 landmines and other explosives in 2018.

Finally, with regard to the humanitarian access for children, according to the Law on Juvenile Delinquency, the National Security entities do not have the right to keep children in detention units for more than 24 hours. The Afghan Ministry of Defence regularly monitors the presence of individuals under the legal age at the detention facilities in their headquarters and facilitates their transfer to Juvenile Rehabilitation Centres. Children arrested for crimes against internal and external security are immediately sent to the Juvenile Rehabilitation Centres after an initial inquiry and assessment of their age. Under no circumstances are children allowed to be kept in the detention centres of the National Directorate of Security in Kabul or the provinces. The Afghan National Directorate of Security also conducts regular training programmes and seminars in the capital and the provinces for personnel of the Directorate with regard to proper behaviour during the arrest and detention of underage individuals and observing their human rights.

In addition to these efforts, the Government of Afghanistan has also paid particular attention to the root causes behind why children are at times compelled to partake in violence. The nexus between security and development is also evident in this situation as we must ensure that poverty, hunger, the lack of quality education and decent employment do not come in the way of families that at times find themselves short of options.

I would like to highlight that my government, through the adoption of the National Priority Programmes and particularly the Citizens' Charter, has focused on enhancing quality education and improving health services, resulting in significant progress in these sectors. I am pleased to share that we have increased the number of children in schools to more than 9 million, with 40 per cent of them being girls. By the same token, mortality rates among children below the age of 5 were sharply

reduced to 55 per 1,000 children and in 2017, more than 9 million children under the age of 5 were covered in polio campaigns.

The Government of Afghanistan will continue to work closely with the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as the United Nations country-level task forces on monitoring and reporting and on the implementation of the joint Action Plan on Children and Armed Conflict, whose seventh annual report was presented last April. Additionally, we are currently preparing to further share our progress with the international community by presenting our report under the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

As I close, I would like to once again reiterate my Government's commitment to protecting the rights of children in conflict and on continuing to work together with the United Nations for the full implementation of the joint Action Plan on the matter and to delist our National Police Forces. We believe this to be of utmost importance along with the need to continue to pressure the Taliban and other terrorist groups to stop their heinous practices of child recruitment, as well as their senseless attacks on innocent lives.

Thank you.

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