

**49th Session of the Human Rights Council– 15 March 2022**

**Item 3 Interactive Dialogue with Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict**

**Delivered by: Defence for Children International<sup>1</sup>**

**This is a joint statement.**

**Defence for Children International** delivers this statement in collaboration with *Child Rights Connect, ECPAT International, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes Federation, War Child, and World Vision International.*

We welcome the annual report of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and on Violence Against Children and celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Children and Armed Conflict Mandate and the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

The number of children affected by armed conflict worldwide has been increasing with currently around 200 million children living in high-intensity conflict zones<sup>2</sup> and another 7,5 million children at risk as we closely follow the dramatic deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation of civilians in Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> Here, once again, we are concerned about children caught up by conflict, getting killed, wounded, displaced, separated from their caregivers, and traumatized as schools, hospitals and orphanages are under fire and they lack access to basic services and assistance.

For conflict-affected children, ongoing fear and trauma is compounded by the daily uncertainty and hardship produced by the pandemic. For organizations that seek to access and support conflict-affected children, the pandemic has made monitoring and verification of violations increasingly difficult. Denial of access to humanitarian assistance continues to remain an issue of great concern, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on children living in conflict-affected countries.<sup>4</sup>

According to the UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty (GSCDL), every year at least 35,000 children are detained in more than 16 countries for alleged involvement with armed actors.<sup>5</sup> Given the fact that deprivation of liberty is directly linked to several grave violations, we welcome the continued involvement of the SRSG together with the UN Task force and the NGO Panel in the implementation of the Global Study's recommendations and to the identification of alternatives to deprivation of liberty.<sup>6</sup>

Inadequate support for children that have been recruited and/or used by armed groups, leaves children vulnerable to re-recruitment and secondary victimization through the detrimental impact of stigma for children returning to communities. Early warning and prevention efforts must be strengthened so that children do not experience such trauma in the first place, while child protection and family-focused community-based reintegration is needed for those who do experience.

In order to rehabilitate all children and reintegrate them back into society, the SRSG on CAC stresses: "the importance of long-term and sustainable funding for mental health and psychosocial programming in

<sup>1</sup> The statement is co-sponsored (ECOSOC status) by Defence for Children International, Child Rights Connect, ECPAT International, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes Federation, War Child, World Vision International

<sup>2</sup> Save the Children "Stop The War On Children: A Crisis Of Recruitment.", 30 November 2021, accessed 1 March 2022, p 21 [swoc-a-crisis-of-recruitment.pdf \(savethechildren.org\)](https://www.savethechildren.org/crisis-of-recruitment.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Save the children "Ukraine: Children and Mothers Distressed After Unsettling Journey To Romania.", 28 February 2022, accessed 1 March 2022, <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/ukraine-children-and-mothers-distressed-after-unsettling-journey-romania>

<sup>4</sup> War Child and World Vision "The Silent Pandemic: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Children in Conflict Affected Countries.", 27 April 2021, accessed 28 February 2022,

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/The%20Silent%20Pandemic\\_final.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/The%20Silent%20Pandemic_final.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://childrendeprivedofliberty.info/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://childrendeprivedofliberty.info/panel-discussion-on-promoting-alternative-solutions-to-deprivation-of-liberty-as-a-follow-up-to-the-global-study-on-children-deprived-of-liberty-immediate-priorities/>

humanitarian contexts”.<sup>7</sup> Thereby affirming that mental health care and psychosocial support is vital in ensuring that these children can develop to their full potential and take their place as peaceful members of society.

We will make 3 calls to action to States and the UN to improve the protection of children in armed conflicts.

**We call upon**

- **The Human Rights Council** to prioritize the investigation, documentation and reporting of violations and crimes affecting children in accountability mechanism mandates and resolutions and to ensure that humanitarian actors are given unimpeded access to children and their families, as the denial of humanitarian access is one of the six grave violations of the CAAC mandate.
- **All Parties to conflict** to end the detention of children for their actual or alleged association with armed actors and ensure that children victims of grave violations are swiftly transferred to child protection agencies for reintegration, with access to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), in line with international standards.
- **The United Nations** to strengthen early warning and prevention efforts and to ensure a dedicated sub-section on MHPSS in all humanitarian appeals (Humanitarian Response Plans, Refugee Response Plans) with set targets for children and other affected people, funding and reporting.

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<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Council, 'Children and armed conflict. Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.', 4 January 2022, accessed 2 March 2022, p.7  
[https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/HRC/49/58&Lang=E&Area=UNDOCUMENT](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/HRC/49/58&Lang=E&Area=UNDOCUMENT).