

16 March 2023

52nd Session Item 3 Interactive Dialogue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict¹

Joint NGO statement

Mr. President,

We welcome the annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG).

Despite the protection that should be afforded to children by international law, armed conflict places them in situations of extreme vulnerability and risk. Children's voices from conflict zones, increasingly remind us of their dreams, which are no different from those of any other child: have access to school and education, be protected from violence, among other concerns². Deprivation of liberty is one of the most harmful forms of violence against children.

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.³ Over 30,000 children are currently deprived of liberty in northeast Syria as alleged Islamic State (ISIS) suspects or family members. The majority are under 12.⁴ Because 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 on Children Deprived of Liberty in the implementation of the Global Study's recommendations and the identification of non-custodial measures.⁵ We are also concerned with the massive number of children deprived of liberty in other conflict zones, such as Yemen, CAR, Libya, Ukraine and Palestine.

The NGO Panel, in partnership with the UN Task Force and the two SRSGs, organised on 8-9 November 2022 in Mauritania a Global Forum on Children Deprived of Liberty⁶. The Global Forum worked on a **Roadmap for Action**⁷ to accelerate implementation of the Global Study's recommendations, three years after its presentation to the UN General Assembly.

We call upon all parties to armed 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 according to agreed handover protocols, with access to age and gender appropriate child protection, MHPSS, education and livelihoods support and services within communities that also contribute to their acceptance...

¹ This is a joint statement of the [NGO Panel on Children Deprived of Liberty](#) (170 CSOs). This statement is co-sponsored by Child Rights Connect, Human Rights Watch & Save the Children

² https://defenceforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Children-and-Armed-Conflict-Report.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0viTEYJ_KWqdPDKIDoOvjvT4T61grzmxVEPyXpg12WfBTskr0NjibOyM

³ <https://childrendeprivedofliberty.info/>

⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/15/syria-repatriations-lag-foreigners-alleged-isis-ties>

⁵ <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/>

⁶ [Global Forum on Justice for Children and Deprivation of Liberty – www.childrendeprivedofliberty.info](https://www.childrendeprivedofliberty.info)

⁷ [ROADMAP FOR ACTION LINK](#)

- To adopt and implement standard operating procedures for the immediate and direct handover of children from military custody to appropriate child protection agencies (in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2427);
- To recognise that children who are detained for actual or perceived association with armed groups are first and foremost victims of grave abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law, and prioritise their recovery and reintegration (in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2427 of 2018 as well as with the Paris Principles and Commitments); and

We call on all UN member states with nationals detained in northeast Syria for alleged association with the Islamic State to repatriate their nationals as a matter of urgency, giving priority to children, their mothers, and the most vulnerable.

Signatories:

1. Child Rights Connect
2. Human Rights Watch
3. Save the Children