



LIECHTENSTEIN INSTITUTE  
ON SELF-DETERMINATION  
AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

# SUMMARY REPORT

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## Priorities for the UN's Children and Armed Conflict Agenda, 2020

### INTRODUCTION

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

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

The workshop consisted of three closed working sessions. The first session focused on ongoing challenges and concerns impacting the implementation of the CAAC agenda, featuring analysis from the OSRSG-CAAC, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in

the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and World Vision International. The second session focused on emerging concerns and trends for the CAAC agenda and included presentations from Human Rights Watch, UNICEF, and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA). The final session featured presentations from H.E. Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations and current chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (SCWG-CAAC), and H.E. Ambassador Richard Arbeiter, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, who spoke in Canada's capacity as chair of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. A wrap-up session summarized key discussion points and recommendations of the working sessions.

This 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.

## **ONGOING CHALLENGES TO THE CAAC AGENDA AND IMPLEMENTATION ON THE GROUND**

The first session of the workshop concentrated on implementation of the UN's CAAC 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 to CAAC; addressing persistent perpetrators; and child protection capacity on the ground, in peacekeeping including during mission drawdown and transitions, and in humanitarian action, highlighting the significant under-funding of child protection and gender-based violence prevention and response in global humanitarian response.

Workshop participants from the OSRSG-CAAC discussed ways to strengthen the Monitoring

and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), as well as how MRM data can inform country-level programming. Continuing challenges were raised regarding the collection of MRM data, engaging with both State security forces and non-State armed groups, and constraints to child protection capacity and access on the ground. The panelist 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 panelist 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.

Participants discussed (a) the relationship between the UN CAAC agenda and other thematic mandates, such as Sexual Violence in Conflict and Violence Against Children; (b) regional dynamics, particularly regarding escalating violence in the Sahel; and (c) how to better promote accountability for perpetrators.

## **EMERGING CONCERNS AND SITUATIONS FOR THE CAAC AGENDA**

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

Watchlist's Advisory Board chair presented key findings from a December 2019 joint policy note with Human Rights Watch on the military detention of children. Participants discussed (a) the detention of children on national security-related charges for real or perceived affiliation with armed groups, including designated terrorist groups; (b) inhumane conditions, mistreatment, and torture of children held in detention; (c) fail-

ure to uphold international standards of juvenile justice; and (d) the signing of handover protocols to prevent military detention and abuse of children in situations of armed conflict.

The panelist from UNICEF discussed concerns arising from efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism that conflict with best practices and core principles of child protection. Participants discussed (a) the increasingly common practice of screening children as “security threats,” rather than by child protection actors to assess their protection needs; (b) the impact of language choice on the stigmatization of children; (c) challenges created when counterterrorism policies contradict widely accepted norms and standards for the protection of children’s rights, both in national legislation and in UN resolutions; and (d) the implications of donor conditionality and other counterterrorism measures on principled humanitarian action.

The panelist from GCPEA presented new data on attacks on education and military use of schools in country situations not currently included in the UN’s CAAC agenda. GCPEA highlighted incidents impacting education in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, and Niger. Participants discussed data collection and under-reporting, as well as how to ensure that situations of concern are not excluded from the CAAC agenda.

Participants further discussed opportunities to engage on the UN’s counterterrorism agenda and remedy policies and rhetoric that undermine efforts to protect children’s rights, as well as how to mitigate efforts to politicize the CAAC agenda and ensure that all situations of concern are included in the narrative of the Secretary-General’s annual report on children and armed conflict.

### **THE ROLE OF MEMBER STATES IN ADVANCING THE CAAC AGENDA**

The third session of the workshop featured reflections by H.E. Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, and Dr. Annelies Verstichel, First Secretary of the Permanent

Mission of Belgium to the United Nations, on the first year of Belgium’s chairmanship of the SCWG-CAAC. H.E. Ambassador Richard Arbeiter, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, provided reflections on the role of non-Security Council Member States in supporting the CAAC 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 CAAC concerns.

Participants discussed (a) accomplishments and challenges of the SCWG-CAAC during the first year of Belgium’s chairmanship; (b) ways to promote the implementation of previously adopted Working Group conclusions, including video-teleconferences with Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs) and field visits; and (c) mainstreaming CAAC concerns throughout the work of the Security Council, including mandate renewals and sanctions committees, and calling for more regular briefings by the SRS-CAAC on country situations.

Participants also discussed the focus of the Group of Friends for the coming year, including: (a) addressing the financial implications of austerity measures on the UN’s capacity to monitor, report, and respond to grave violations against children; (b) counteracting efforts to politicize the agenda and the Secretary-General’s annual report on children and armed conflict; and (c) enhancing connections between the Group of Friends in New York and regional Groups of Friends.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations were proposed to strengthen the implementation of the CAAC agenda and the UN’s response to grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict:

- UN 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 offenses during the time of their association with parties to conflict, the prosecution should be in line with international juvenile justice standards.
- UN 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.
- UN Member States should review their national counterterrorism 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.
- UN Member States and CAAC experts within Permanent Missions should increase efforts to mainstream CAAC concerns throughout the work of the Security Council, including in mandate renewals, sanctions committees, and briefings by special envoys in specific country situations.
- CAAC experts should increase efforts to breakdown workstream silos within their delegations and ensure effective communication of CAAC concerns and recommendations with relevant country and thematic experts, including counterterrorism and security sector experts.
- The Group of Friends in New York and regional Groups of Friends should strengthen coordination, in particular to follow up on the implementation of SCWG-CAAC conclusions. The development of guidelines for local Groups of Friends, for example, could help to improve such cooperation.
- Retreats for UN Child Protection Advisers (CPA) should be held more frequently, and members of the SCWG-CAAC should have more opportunities to engage directly with CPAs, whether in-person (such as during field visits or while CPAs are in New York) or by video-teleconference.
- The CAAC community, including relevant UN agencies and offices, Member States, and civil society, should develop a "business case for CPAs" as an advocacy tool to demonstrate the value of child protection capacity in UN peacekeeping and special political missions and encourage appropriate budgetary allocation to sustain this capacity.
- The Security Council should ensure that key peace missions and other relevant UN child protection actors have the necessary financial and human resources to effectively monitor and report on grave violations against children, and call upon affected States to facilitate safe, unhindered access for the purposes of monitoring, verification, and response.



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