

United Nations Human Rights Council
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**Interactive Dialogue with
the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict**

Joint statement by Save the Children, Defence for Children International, Child Rights Connect, Child Rights International Network, Plan International, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and World Vision International

This is a joint statement.

In **2020** the UN reported the **highest-ever number of verified grave violations against children**, with more than 26,000 incidents verified in the previous year¹. Children continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts across the world, notably where the denial of humanitarian access is most acute.

In light of this, the members of the Human Rights Council should **clearly prioritise the investigation, documentation and reporting of violations and crimes affecting children** in accountability mechanism mandates and resolutions, including by encouraging **the adoption of deliberate strategies, policies, and operational guidance supported with dedicated child rights capacity**.

Sexual violence in conflict is a weapon, whether used tactically or opportunistically, and affects women, girls, men and boys in different ways. An estimated **72 million children, or one in six children, live 50 kilometres or closer to conflicts where armed groups or forces have perpetrated sexual violence against children during the last year**. The number of children at risk of sexual violence in conflict has increased nearly tenfold since 1990². The scale and gravity of sexual violence against children in armed conflict **call for immediate and concerted action by the international community**. We need to **strengthen and coordinate data collection on sexual violence against children in conflict**, disaggregated by age, gender, and disability, **develop improved survivor-centred monitoring, reporting and verification protocols**, and end impunity for these egregious acts.

Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to restore the **credibility of the list of perpetrators in the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict**, as a critical means for holding warring parties accountable for grave violations against children. The list should be grounded in evidence collected and verified by the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, rather than political considerations, and the listing and de-listing criteria, as defined in the 2010 CAAC Annual Report, must be consistently applied to all parties responsible for grave violations in all armed conflicts.

¹ [15-June-2020 Secretary-General Report on CAAC Eng.pdf](#)

² [Weapon of War: Sexual violence against children in conflict | Resource Centre \(savethechildren.net\)](#)

Finally, we are deeply concerned with the **impact of policies to counter terrorism on children's rights in armed conflict**. In accordance with international standards, criminal responsibility related to children's participation in armed conflict should lie primarily with the recruiter, not the **child, who is first and foremost a victim**. Safeguards should be in place to guarantee counterterrorism measures, including sanctions, do not cause or contribute to violations of children's rights. **The detention of children should be a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period**. For children implicated in serious, internationally recognized crimes during their association, prosecution should be in line with internationally recognized standards of juvenile justice