



Children and Armed Conflict and COVID

Statement for Arria Meeting by Ambassador Brian Flynn

7 May 2021

Thank you Chair,

And we thank Estonia for arranging this timely Arria meeting, which Ireland is proud to co-sponsor. Thank you also to the briefers for bringing a field perspective to today's discussion, and to Special Representative Gamba and her office for this important study. Ireland aligns itself with the statements to be delivered by the EU and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Chair,

Let me begin by paying tribute to the monitors and child protection staff in UN country teams and peacekeeping missions. In the face of the upheaval caused by COVID-19, their tireless efforts to prevent and respond to violations and their ability to adapt have helped to keep children safe and have protected the integrity of the CAAC agenda. We have heard striking examples of

monitors putting themselves at risk because of their dedication to their work. Our role is to support them and their networks to work securely and without fear of reprisal. Child protection capacities must be adequately resourced and flexible to react to crisis needs. This Council has an obligation to follow through on the promises it makes in the establishment of mandates and just as importantly in the transition of UN missions.

Chair,

It has been a year since the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and the adoption of Resolution 2532. Yet we have seen conflict and violence surge globally, with devastating impacts on children.

In Myanmar, at least 53 children have been killed in the violence since the coup in February, and countless others have been injured or detained. In Ethiopia, horrific sexual violence has been reported, including against girls. Those responsible for grave violations against children must be held accountable.

COVID-19 has severely impacted upon monitoring, likely leading to an underreporting of violations. The unfortunate truth is that the very violations that we suspect have intensified during COVID-19, particularly recruitment and sexual violence, are the most

difficult to verify. We cannot allow truth and justice to become another victim of this pandemic. It is imperative that monitors have the sufficient time and resources to address verification gaps in order to prevent impunity, and ensure that service provision takes into account the likelihood of unmet need due to underreporting.

This report before us today is just the first marker in understanding the true extent of COVID-19's impact on children in armed conflict and we welcome plans for a follow-up study in 2022.

While verifications of the direct impact of COVID-19 on violations continue, we must also address the indirect and interconnected consequences for children affected by conflict. Communities and their children already grappling with scarcity and food insecurity, such as in Yemen and Afghanistan, face increased socio-economic pressure from the virus, exacerbated by accounts of denials of humanitarian access. Recent attacks on health care centres as well as healthcare workers in Syria, Myanmar and elsewhere wreak havoc on pandemic response and vaccine rollout ambitions. Deliberate targeting and use of schools by armed groups, including in Afghanistan and across the Lake Chad Basin, is compounding virus-related school closures. As we heard earlier

from Mr. Adapoe from Save the Children, the pandemic has disrupted the education of millions of children, which has decimated the progress made by many, especially adolescent girls who are most at risk of leaving school prematurely. We cannot accept this as a new normal. Nothing less than transformative investment is needed to get back on track and to ensure education is at the heart of our recovery policies.

We call on all States to sign the Safe Schools Declaration and reiterate the importance of the September 2020 PRST on attacks against schools.

Chair,

This year has marked Ireland's first opportunity to serve on the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. For us it is important to ensure that the Group's conclusions are anchored in the current realities of the country situations, translate into tangible improvements in the lives of children affected by conflict, and address the lasting impacts of COVID-19 on implementation, including on government actions, services for victims, and reintegration of children.

In an increasingly fragmented world, the pandemic sent us a universal warning: No one is safe until all of us are safe. Children

today and future generations are counting on us to take this opportunity to build back better. This begins with prioritising welfare over warfare.

Thank you.