



Security Council

Formula Arria meeting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict
07 May 2021

Your Excellency,

Brazil commends the organizers of this Arria Formula meeting, which focuses on a current and overlooked concern on the CAAC agenda: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict. The severe movement restrictions created an additional layer of complexity to monitor and prevent violations. Brazil commends the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict for the detailed study on this matter.

As the study points out, the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting faced considerable hurdles to their activities due to the lack of in-person contacts in the field. While remote communication was a necessary work adjustment, it will hardly replace the human connection needed to monitor and verify more sensitive violations against children, such as sexual violence or recruitment and use as child soldier. Potential underreporting might in turn lead to additional challenges to design policies aimed at preventing and redressing violations.

Brazil notes with concern the negative impact of the pandemic on family tracing and reunification, as well as on reintegration activities of children separated from armed forces and groups. Another worrying factor is the increased risk of infection in prison settings, which only reinforces the need to treat children primarily as victims and to prioritize non-judicial measures as alternatives to their detention.

It is important to continue to adapt current strategies to the limitations brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. It goes beyond resorting to online interaction, but also means adopting measures to mitigate the risks of infection in the field. It may also include developing partnerships to ensure continued local engagement when necessary. Whenever possible, for instance, community-based organizations should be trained and empowered to assist in the efforts to report violations.

The heavy toll of armed conflicts on children is aggravated by the pandemic, whose consequences will be felt in the long run. When seeing the situation through a COVID-19 lens, as proposed by the present study, one must not ignore the need to promote universal and equitable access to safe, effective, quality and affordable vaccines to all. This will help to minimize vulnerabilities of children found in already extremely dire situations.

Your Excellency,

When further studying the impact of COVID-19 on violations against children, there is always a core legal and political distinction that needs to be taken into account between armed conflicts and situations of domestic law enforcement. While both categories are currently within the mandate of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, they pose entirely different challenges and must be addressed through different policies.

On the one hand, armed conflicts examined by the Security Council are subject to international humanitarian law, such as the obligation by all parties – including non-State actors – to spare children and other civilians. In these cases, diplomatic and legal measures to prevent further violence and ensure accountability for serious violations all have a role to play. On the other hand, cases of domestic law enforcement that do not represent a threat to international peace and security, and therefore fall outside the mandate of the Security Council, should be handled by Governments through national legislation and in line with international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Your Excellency,

Allow me, in conclusion, to once more underscore Brazil's enduring commitment to the Children and Armed Conflict agenda in the Security Council. We have ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and endorsed the Vancouver Principles, the Paris Commitments and the Safe Schools Declaration. Brazil will remain engaged with the United Nations system and our international partners to promote the safety, the security and the well-being of children affected by armed conflict around the world.

Thank you.