



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Intervention of

H.E. Philippe KRIDELKA, Permanent Representative of
Belgium to the United Nations

Security Council Arria-formula Meeting: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict

New York, 7/5/2021

Mr. President,

I thank the briefers for their time and their insightful remarks. Belgium aligns itself with the statements of the **European Union** and the **Group of Friends** of Children and Armed Conflict. We are proud to cosponsor today's Arria.

Mr. President,

I wish to make **three points on behalf of Belgium** and as former chair of the CAAC Working Group in 2019-2020. They concern (1) the urgency of mitigating the pandemic's impact on children affected by armed conflict, (2) the importance of dedicated child protection capacity in UN missions and (3) a reflection on the impact of COVID-19 on our own working methods.

First, the urgency of **mitigating the pandemic's impact on children** affected by armed conflict. Child protection and reintegration services have suffered immensely from the pandemic and need to be rapidly ramped up. Schools, closed on a massive scale since last year, need to reopen quickly and safely. Humanitarian access, often reduced to contain the virus, is essential. And engagement with parties to conflict through action plans and dialogue must be intensified with a view to ending and preventing violations. In doing so we need to pay specific attention to vulnerable groups of children, such as girls, children with disabilities, refugee and internally displaced children and also children formally associated with parties to conflict.

Countries in conflict often lack the means to ensure this and therefore the international community must step up its efforts. This brings me to my second point, the importance of **dedicated child protection capacity in UN missions**. We expect the Security Council to pay due attention to child

protection in its mandating decisions and we expect the Fifth Committee to follow through by providing the necessary resources.

On our side, child protection will continue to be a **horizontal priority for Belgium**. We are proud to support the Office of the SRSG for CAAC to fulfill its essential mandate. We also support UNICEF's CAAC Monitoring and Reporting activities, on top of our core funding to UNICEF which amounts to 15 mio EUR/year. This will assist the documentation and verification of grave violations. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism represents the eyes and ears of the mandate and without this courageous work we would all be flying blind. And finally we are mobilizing our diplomatic network in conflict affected areas to raise awareness and improve the follow up of CAAC priorities by local partners.

My third point concerns lessons for our **working methods** in implementing the CAAC mandate. Rapid global changes have underlined the importance of frequent country CAAC reports. This increases their relevance and allows the CAAC Working Group to adopt more timely conclusions. Furthermore, even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism proved its metal, monitoring grave violations. In doing so it provides an fact-based evidence that allows for accountability for all grave violations committed against children.

I conclude by expressing my **deepest gratitude to SRSG Gamba, and to all child protection actors**, be it within the UN system, national authorities or civil society, for their dedication to protecting children in these unprecedented times.

Thank you.