



Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations

STATEMENT

BY

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Arria-formula Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations Against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict

7 May 2021

NEW YORK

(Please check against delivery)

I want to thank the Permanent Missions of Belgium, Canada, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Niger, Norway, Saint Vincent, and the Grenadines, Sweden, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Viet Nam, as well as the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for organizing today's Arria-formula meeting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict. I also want to thank the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for their thorough and comprehensive report which they have recently published on the matter. Finally, I want to thank our esteemed briefers and particularly pay tribute to Ms. Fiona Frazer and underscore the valiant and dedicated work of UNAMA in working with us to protect the children of Afghanistan from the horrors of conflict.

Mr. President,

Before the pandemic hit Afghanistan, the country had made great strides in ensuring the protection of Afghan children. We have implemented major legislation to upgrade the legal framework for the protection of children and taken concrete steps to ensure that they will never be used as elements in the conflict by Afghan forces. Improvements include an upgrade of the Penal Code in 2017 and the adoption of the Law on Protection of Child Rights through a Presidential decree by President Ghani in 2019. Some of the major steps taken by these legislations included the right of children to identity and registration, their right to education, and their recognition as children when below the age of 18.

The laws also include strict directives that no underage individuals can be recruited or used as part of the Afghan Security and Defense Forces and strict punishments for all violators. Additionally, directives and military orders have also been issued throughout the different departments of the Afghan security institutions to ensure that children are kept away from the barracks. Child Protection Units have been established in all provinces to assist in these efforts while also ensuring that children who are turned away can be reunited and reintegrated with their families.

Afghanistan has also reiterated its commitment to protecting the rights of children at the international level. This includes ratifying the Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, signing the Safe Schools declarations, and engaging with the United Nations, and more specifically the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNAMA and UNICEF to fulfill our international obligations. Especially noteworthy are our joint efforts under the "Road Map Towards Compliance" which has allowed us to reach our goal of no new child recruits to our Afghan National and Local Police Forces.

Despite our success in addressing the situation of children in armed conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic has reiterated to us that we cannot talk about the safety of our children in conflict until both sides are committed to this ideal. It has also shown us the worst side of conflict and how

barbaric terrorists and non-state armed groups can be in perpetuating their campaigns of violence in a time of crisis. In Afghanistan, a country where close to 50% of the population is below the age of 15, children have had to face the challenges associated with being away from school during lockdowns and the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic, while simultaneously fearing another attack.

When the UN Secretary-General issued his call for a Global Ceasefire to focus on ending the COVID-19 pandemic, we called on the Taliban to heed the call to help protect the safety of their Afghan brothers and sisters, and especially the children of Afghanistan. Rather than responding with a commitment for peace and the establishment of an environment conducive to humanitarian relief, the Taliban responded with bullets, explosions, and targeted attacks against civilian targets and infrastructure. Their refusal to heed the call has reinforced an environment of war and violence, as recently evidenced by the explosion at the guesthouse in Puli-e-Alam last week, which claimed students and children as part of a regretful list of casualties. We cannot allow these despicable actions to continue in our territory and they must immediately stop.

Mr. President,

The Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan paints a clear picture of how concerning the situation in the country has become. The number of people in need has doubled from 9.4 million to 18.4 million people. There are 7.4 million children in need, according to UNICEF. These numbers highlight the difficult reality for our children, who are among the most disproportionately affected victims of the conflict. We must redouble efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan and create an environment that provides hope to the children of Afghanistan. Our children deserve a brighter and better future. We, once again, reiterate our hope that the Taliban will heed what has been a united international call for a ceasefire and peace.

Finally, Mr. President, let me restate Afghanistan's commitment to safeguarding and protecting the rights of children and express our appreciation to UNAMA and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for their steadfast support for the rights of the children of Afghanistan. The Government of Afghanistan will continue our close cooperation and consultation in both Kabul and New York to ensure that we work together to enhance our impact despite the pandemic.

I thank you,