



UNSC Arria-formula meeting

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict

Friday, 7 May 2021 at 2:00-5:00 PM EST

1. Objective:

The objective of the meeting is to assess, one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on grave violations against children affected by armed conflict: both the trends in violations that can be attributed to the pandemic, its impact on the capacity for monitoring these violations, as well as on the engagement with parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations against children. It will also analyse the lessons learned and good practices for the future to ensure better protection of children.

The meeting will launch the study prepared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict on the [“Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict”](#).

2. Description:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact across the world, in particular on those affected by conflict, with a disproportionate negative impact on children, as recognised by Security Council resolution 2532(2020). While the full effect of the pandemic on children affected by conflict still needs to be analysed in-depth once more data will be available, it is important to assess its impact to date in order to draw lessons learned that would help inform monitoring and response to violations, including to enhance the engagement with parties to conflict, in the long run.

The UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict (MRM) has been severely affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, there has been a decrease in documenting and verifying grave violations. This has been mainly due to lack of access to communities by MRM field

staff that was re-deployed to work remotely, threats and intimidation by armed groups who gained control over territories with weak or no state presence of communities, and the interruption of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) activities for children released by armed forces and armed groups.

Nevertheless, Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs) have successfully found ways to overcome some of these challenges and ensure that the MRM activities could continue despite the pandemic according to the same standards as previously. The adaptation of the MRM activities was key for this.

Main trends in COVID-19 impact on violations: Since the start of the pandemic, the monitoring and verifying the recruitment and use of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and abductions was particularly difficult due to the sensitive nature of these violations. Due to media attention and the availability of sources to be interviewed, it was easier to monitor and verify killing and maiming of children as well as attacks against schools and hospitals. The pandemic has also severely affected the monitoring and verification of the denial of humanitarian access for children.

The country task forces' total figures for 2020 do not yet allow to draw final conclusions on trends, mostly due to the unknown number of missed allegations in the months immediately following the beginning of the pandemic and to the large number of backlogged verifications. However, some emerging patterns can be identified. There was an increase in killing and maiming incidents by parties to the conflict enforcing containment measures. The closure of schools and loss of family income as well as the withdrawal of state and humanitarian actors from certain areas may increase children's vulnerability to recruitment and use. The pandemic has increased the vulnerability of children, in particular girls, to rape and other forms of sexual violence, while at the same time the suspension of services, reduced mobility, and increased isolation have likely prevented survivors from coming forward. There are reports of increased attacks on education in certain areas, such as the Central Sahel.¹ In its presidential statement S/PRST/2020/8 the Security Council noted the heightened risk for children in armed conflict of not resuming their education following school closures, particularly girls, making them more vulnerable to child labor, child recruitment as well as forced marriage. Measures taken by governments to stop the spread of the virus and protect the population have resulted in reduced movement of humanitarian goods and personnel, both nationally and internationally, and significantly reduced children's timely access to humanitarian assistance.

The impact on the engagement with parties to conflict to end and prevent violations was mostly affected by restrictions in movement and a reduced presence of field staff. Remote meetings could not be an option considering many armed groups are based in areas with poor internet connection, mobile coverage and even electricity. The pandemic had a strong impact on the efforts to identify, release and provide reintegration support to children associated with armed forces or groups.

The COVID-19 pandemic is threatening to undo gains with respect to protection, human rights and development. Its impact on children affected by armed conflict is likely to be multi-faceted and long lasting, with particular risks for girls, children with disabilities, refugee and internally displaced children and children formerly associated with parties to conflict. The impact of the pandemic has also underscored the importance of the sufficient capacity and resources for child protection actors. Child protection needs to be prioritized in the allocation of emergency response funds to ensure the continuity of child

¹ Global Coalition to Protect Education under Attack, *Briefing Paper: Supporting Safe Education in the Central Sahel* (2020): <https://protectingeducation.org/publication/supporting-safe-education-in-the-central-sahel>

protection activities. The United Nations and civil society actors have a key role in designing and implementing child protection response programs.

The implementation of the call by the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire, as well as the Security Council Resolution 2565, is crucial for the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

The in-depth impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict still needs to be analysed on the basis of further and broader data.

3. Guiding questions:

- What are the mid- and long-term effects of the pandemic on grave violations against children? Are there new vulnerabilities that emerged from the pandemic?
- What are the mid- and long-term effects on the monitoring of and response to violations, as well as on the engagement with parties to conflict to end and prevent violations, and on the implementation of action plans and other commitments?
- What are the key lessons learned by the country monitoring task forces and how can these be shared across the UN and other entities?
- Are there any lessons learned about the capacity of the child protection actors to overcome the obstacles imposed by the pandemic so to further improve their response in similar situations in the future? How to ensure the availability of sufficient funding to address the needs on the ground?
- How can information technologies assist in this regard to support the documentation and verification of grave violations as well as in enhancing the engagement with parties to conflict to end and prevent violations? How can these technologies facilitate the work of community-based organisations and improve access to victims and survivors?
- What can the Security Council, Member States, the UN and civil society actors do to factor in and respond to the impact of the pandemic on violations against children? What can the UNSC Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict do to support and address the impact on the MRM and the implementation of the mandate?

4. Briefers:

- Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba
- Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Protection and Operations Khassim Diagne, MONUSCO
- Fiona Frazer, Chief of Human Rights Service, UNAMA
- Manuel Fontaine, Director of Emergency Programmes, UNICEF
- Philippe Adapoe, Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Save the Children

5. Format:

H.E. Sven Jürgenson, the Permanent Representative of Estonia will open and chair the virtual meeting, which will take place on Friday, 7 May 2021 at 2:00-5:00 PM (EST).

The meeting will hear from the briefers, co-sponsors, and the Security Council members. We request the Security Council members to limit their interventions to *three* minutes.

Non-Security Council Member and Observer States are invited to submit written statements no later than the day of the meeting, 7 May to eeunsc@mfa.ee for inclusion in a compilation.

While the Arria meeting time is limited, an effort will be made to accommodate a limited number of speakers from among the non-Security Council Member and Observer States.

Please note that due to time restraints we are not able to accommodate all requests for the floor. Those non-Security Council Member and Observer States wishing to speak are kindly requested to return the attached speaker registration form by 4 May 2021, COB (NY time) to: eeunsc@mfa.ee.

A compilation of statements will be prepared by the chair.

The meeting will take place in English without simultaneous interpretation. It will be broadcast via UN web TV, YouTube, Facebook and the homepage of the Permanent Representation of Estonia to the UN. Further technical details will follow.

For any questions and to submit the registration form, please use the following email address: eeunsc@mfa.ee.