

*As delivered*

**STATEMENT OF TURKEY**

**Delivered by**

**Deputy Permanent Representative of Turkey, Ms. Bilge Kocyigit Grba,  
at**

**UNSC Open Arria Formula Meeting on Children and Armed Conflict  
“Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of  
armed conflict”**

**7 May 2021**

Mr. Chair,

I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Estonia and all other co-sponsors for organizing this important meeting. We also extend our appreciation to the briefers for their valuable contributions.

We also welcome the study on “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict” prepared by the Office of the SRSG Gamba. This is exactly the type of useful contribution that we expect from the Office.

Turkey supports UN’s efforts in taking the Children and Armed Conflict agenda forward and commends efforts to ensure that everything is being done to provide children with better prospects for their future.

Mr. Chair,

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. The effects are long-term and manifold. As underlined by the new study, children are expected to feel the various repercussions of the pandemic through years to come.

The closure of schools and loss of family income as well as the withdrawal of state and humanitarian actors from certain conflict-affected areas increased children’s vulnerability to grave violations. At the same time, preventive measures taken to mitigate the pandemic severely affected the monitoring and verification functions, which led to a decrease in proper documentation and verification of these violations.

We need to step up our efforts to ensure that the UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations against Children have adequate resources to fulfill their mandate, which has become even more challenging in the context of the pandemic.

Mr. Chair,

Meeting the fundamental humanitarian needs of children in conflicts and emergencies, including the provision of health and education services must be one of our main priorities. Turkey, on its part, takes all necessary measures to alleviate the suffering of children fleeing armed conflict in its region and beyond.

For the Syrian children who are under temporary protection in Turkey, we have succeeded to constantly increase the school enrolment rate. I would also like to note that health services are provided free of charge for all Syrians including children in Turkey. This has been particularly crucial during the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic on the health systems worldwide.

As for the children living in northwest Syria where schools and hospitals have been indiscriminately targeted, Turkey plays a vital role as the only corridor for the delivery of UN's cross-border humanitarian aid where more than 4 million people live, 80 percent of whom are women and children.

These people struggle to survive with aid arriving through Bab al Hawa crossing point. Now, the vaccine roll-out is also underway thanks to the cross-border mechanism. Around 50.000 vaccines were transferred into the region last week. It is estimated that by next year, 20 percent of the population in the northwest will receive vaccines through cross-border assistance.

The continuation of the UN cross-border assistance mechanism, which provides uninterrupted and unhindered humanitarian access is crucial for children living in this region. We urge all Council members to work in this direction in the months to come.

Last but definitely not least, Mr. Chair, I would like to underline the continuing plight of children at the hands of terrorist organizations. We should unequivocally condemn crimes committed by all terrorist groups regardless of their ideology.

In this vein, I would like to highlight the horrific treatment of children in Iraq and in Syria at the hands of PKK and its Syrian offshoot YPG. Despite all the evidence of their ongoing war crimes, it is regretful that this terrorist entity, hiding behind the name of "Syrian Democratic Forces" (SDF), is considered a legitimate counterpart by several among us today.

In concluding, Mr. Chair, I would like to reiterate Turkey's unwavering support to all international and regional efforts related to the protection of children and thank you once again for your leadership on this issue.