

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergiy Kyslytsya,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations,
at the UN Security Council Arria-formula meeting “Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on
violations against children in situations of armed conflict”.**

(7 May 2021)

Mr. Chair,

Ukraine appreciates the initiative of Estonia to hold this Arria-formula meeting as its topic is highly relevant to the task of maintenance of international peace and security. We thank all briefers for their presentations and commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict for presenting the study on the issue.

By the example of Afghanistan, CAR, Colombia, the DR of the Congo and Sudan, this document testifies that children remain one of the most vulnerable groups in the situations of armed conflict. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated existing problems of their insecurity and exposure to be recruited by the armed groups.

The pandemic has also deepened acute nutrition crisis in different regions. The DR of the Congo, northeast Nigeria, the Central Sahel, South Sudan and Yemen were listed by UNICEF as a matter of utmost concern.

We share a point from the concept note that the full effect of the pandemic on children affected by conflict still needs to be analysed in-depth. We hope that the next Secretary General’s report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict will provide us with substantial update on the matter.

As follows from the abovementioned research, hostile environment along with COVID-related restrictions has been a serious obstacle to the monitoring on the ground. According to an explanation, included to the study, “where armed groups have moved into communities, populations are probably not reporting violations for fear of reprisals”.

This is the common concern with regard to many situations, including the Russian war against Ukraine. Incidents and crimes against children in the occupied parts of Ukraine remain unreported or used for disinformation purposes.

In April a 5-year-old boy was killed in the occupied part of Donbas due to detonation of explosive item kept in home by his relative. This tragedy was used by Russian propaganda to accuse the Ukrainian forces of killing this child by a drone attack. Needless to say, that local residents’ evidence in social networks as well as geographical place of the incident proved to untenability of the propaganda version.

Interruption of school education and pandemic-related restrictive measures have made it easier for armed groups to recruit children. The Special Representative Gamba mentioned Afghanistan and Colombia as examples in her recent report to the HRC. At the same time pandemic has not stopped the armed groups from militarization of education, which is particularly relevant for the occupied part of Ukraine.

That’s why I would like to reiterate the need to include the reference to the situation of Ukrainian children, living in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, in future relevant UN thematic reports and studies.

I would like to thank the UNICEF and other UN agencies for their work in this area and urge to strengthen

cooperation to promote the protection of children in compliance with international humanitarian law, despite the COVID-19 pandemic challenges.

I thank you, Mr. Chair