



Security Council

Distr.: General
14 June 2024

Original: English

Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

Conclusions on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan

1. The members of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict recall that during the formal meeting held on 7 September 2021, the Working Group examined the fifth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan (S/2021/662), covering the period between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2020. In this regard, the Working Group remains cognizant that it made no recommendations to the Security Council on possible measures to promote the protection of children affected by armed conflict pursuant to S/2021/662. The Working Group therefore decided to proceed with the review and recommendations concerning the latest report of the Secretary-General, covering the new reporting period. Its members will study future reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan and work towards ensuring that recommendations to the Council on possible measures to promote the protection of children affected by armed conflict are consistently made, in line with its mandate as set out in Security Council resolution 1612 (2005).

2. During a formal meeting held on 20 December 2023, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict examined the sixth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan (S/2023/893), covering the period between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2022, which was introduced by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations also addressed the Working Group (see annex).

3. The members of the Working Group noted that the reporting period bridges a major transition encompassing the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August 2021, after which the international coalition's presence ended. They condemned the high number of the six grave violations committed against children, particularly the continued high number of children killed and maimed, the staggering increase in the denial of humanitarian access, the recruitment and use of children, and the perpetration of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, including forced marriage, and including cases of sexual violence against boys involving *bacha bazi*, as well as attacks on schools and hospitals; they expressed grave concern at the reversal of child protection policies. In this context, the members also expressed their concern at the edicts that can impede the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) assisting children, including by limiting access to them, and recalled the obligations of Afghanistan under international law in this regard; they further expressed their concern at the lack of quality education for all children in Afghanistan, and the suspension of girls' secondary and tertiary education, and the lack of resources to



maintain the educational system in the country; the members reiterated their support for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on reporting and on the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

4. The members of the Working Group welcomed the report of the Secretary-General. Further to the meeting, and subject to and consistent with applicable international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions [1612 \(2005\)](#), [1882 \(2009\)](#), [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2068 \(2012\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#), [2225 \(2015\)](#), [2427 \(2018\)](#) and [2601 \(2021\)](#), the Working Group agreed to the direct action as set out below.

Public statement by the Chair of the Working Group

5. The Working Group agreed to address the following message to all parties in Afghanistan mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General covering the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2022, in particular the Taliban forces, including the Haqqani Network; as well as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-KP), and Hizb-i Islami Gulbuddin:

(a) Strongly condemning all violations and abuses against children by all parties in Afghanistan, particularly the high level of killing and maiming of children; and urging all parties to immediately end and prevent all violations of international law involving the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access, and to comply with their obligations under international law;

(b) Calling upon all parties to implement the previous conclusions of the Working Group on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan ([S/AC.51/2020/2](#), [S/AC.51/2016/1](#), [S/AC.51/2011/3](#) and [S/AC.51/2009/1](#));

(c) Expressing concern about monitoring and verification constraints, which impacted the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, in particular after the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021, and that as noted in the report of the Secretary-General, the information contained therein does not reflect the full impact of armed conflict on children in Afghanistan during the reporting period, and in this regard urging parties to the conflict to ensure that United Nations personnel have safe, unhindered, timely access to territories under the control of those parties, including for advocacy and monitoring and reporting purposes;

(d) Stressing the importance of accountability for all violations and abuses against children in armed conflict and stressing that all those responsible must be brought to justice and held accountable, in accordance with international law, including through timely, systematic, impartial and independent investigations, and, as appropriate, prosecution and conviction;

(e) Expressing deep concern at the high number of children killed and maimed, including by explosive ordnance, such as landmines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, ground engagement, air strikes, targeted killings and suicide attacks; urging all parties to immediately take all preventive and mitigating actions necessary to avoid and minimize harm and better protect children, including from the risks and effects of explosive ordnance; and urging parties to refrain from the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons that cause death or injury to children; calling upon State Parties to abide by the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (Protocol V), to which Afghanistan is a State party, which includes measures to ensure the protection of civilians, explosive ordnance clearance,

explosive ordnance risk education, and encouraging parties to continue to follow up on reports of the killing and maiming of children, to improve operational practice and ensure accountability, as well as to ensure adequate and effective reparations;

(f) Condemning the recruitment and use of children by all parties to the armed conflict to fulfil various roles, including combat and support roles, such as in suicide attacks and in the making and transporting of explosive devices; noting that the Taliban was responsible for the majority of recruitment and use during the reporting period; noting that the dire economic and humanitarian situation, the absence of birth registration coverage and the falsification of national identity documents put children at risk of recruitment and use, and strongly urging all parties to immediately and without conditions release all children associated with them and to end and prevent the further recruitment and use of children under 18 years of age and to respect the obligations of Afghanistan under international law, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the declaration made by Afghanistan upon accession thereto in 2003;

(g) Noting the adoption by the Taliban of a decree and a code of practice prohibiting and preventing the recruitment and use of boys without signs of puberty within security ranks, and welcoming the demobilization of 635 children during the reporting period; calling upon all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities as needed, to define a child as every human being below the age of 18 years, develop standardized age assessment guidelines, establish child protection units at recruitment centres and respect the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, to which Afghanistan is a State party;

(h) Expressing concern at the deprivation of liberty of children for their actual or alleged association with opposing parties and urging all parties to release all those children and support their full reintegration through specialized child protection programmes that are age-appropriate and gender-sensitive and inclusive for children with disabilities, including equal access to health care, psychosocial support and education programmes, to provide access to the United Nations to all detention centres for monitoring and protection purposes and to humanitarian partners for the delivery of basic services; urging that children associated or allegedly associated with parties to conflict be treated primarily as victims of recruitment and use and that detention should be considered only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, in line with the best interests of the child and guided by the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles), which were endorsed by Afghanistan; and urging all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities as needed, to re-establish the specialized juvenile justice system to ensure children's fair trial guarantees and their access to justice, as well as the development of standardized age assessment guidelines;

(i) Expressing concern at the lack of sufficient programmes for reintegration and support for children formerly associated with parties and children released from detention facilities and underlining that long-term, sustainable and timely rehabilitation and reintegration programmes and opportunities for children affected by armed conflict that are age-appropriate and gender-sensitive and inclusive for children with disabilities, including equal access to health care, psychosocial support and education programmes, as well as raising awareness and working with communities to avoid stigmatization of these children, are essential to facilitate their return and minimize the risk of re-recruitment;

(j) Expressing deep concern at the cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, including forced marriage, and including cases of sexual

violence against boys involving *bacha bazi*, and at the lack of measures to end and prevent sexual violence against children; strongly urging all parties to take immediate and specific measures to put an end to and prevent the perpetration of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children; noting with concern that the scale of rape and other forms of sexual violence is believed to be underreported owing to the fear of stigmatization and reprisals, weak rule of law and impunity, a lack of accountability, the absence of adequate support services for victims and survivors, and security concerns, and stressing the importance of accountability for those responsible for sexual and gender-based violence against children and of providing victims and survivors of such acts with adequate protection, appropriate assistance and reliable recourse to justice;

(k) Strongly condemning attacks on, and threats of attacks against, schools and hospitals in violation of international law, as well as protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals as such; calling upon all parties to comply with international law and to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals as such, including their personnel, and to end and prevent disproportionate or indiscriminate attacks or threats of attacks against those institutions and their personnel, as well as the military use of schools and hospitals in violation of international law, in line with the Safe Schools Declaration, which was signed by Afghanistan in May 2015, stressing in this regard the importance of implementing resolution 2601 (2021) and further calling upon all parties to safeguard, protect, respect and promote the right to education; expressing concern at the significant increase in the military use of schools and hospitals during the reporting period and stressing the importance of accountability for attacks in violation of international law against those institutions;

(l) Strongly condemning the abduction of children, with the majority of cases attributed to the Taliban in 2021, and calling upon all concerned parties to cease the abduction of children and immediately release all abducted children to the relevant civilian child protection actors;

(m) Strongly condemning the sharp increase in incidents of the denial of humanitarian access, the majority of which are attributed to the Taliban during the reporting period, including interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities, restriction of movements, threats and violence against humanitarian assets and personnel, including assault, detention and killing of humanitarian personnel, and calling upon all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities as needed, and all parties to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access to children, consistent with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, as well as the United Nations guiding principles of humanitarian emergency assistance, to respect the exclusively humanitarian nature and impartiality of humanitarian aid and respect the work of all United Nations agencies and their humanitarian partners, without adverse distinction, as well as recognizing the need for strengthened efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in Afghanistan;

(n) Expressing grave concern at the restrictions on Afghan women working with the United Nations and humanitarian organizations, among others, which negatively affect the provision of life-saving assistance to the population, including children and girls in particular, and calling upon all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities as needed, to reverse these restrictions;

(o) Calling upon all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities as needed, to lift the suspension on girls' secondary and tertiary education and ensure that all children, boys and girls, can access all levels of

quality education that is free from violence, threats, closures and attacks, in line with Security Council resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#);

(p) Demanding that parties continue to facilitate safe and unhindered access for United Nations monitoring and reporting personnel for monitoring and reporting purposes;

(q) Urging all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities as needed, to engage with the United Nations, pursuant to Security Council resolution [1460 \(2003\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, to adopt concrete measures to end and prevent the six grave violations against children;

(r) Calling upon all parties to the conflict to enter into a dialogue with the United Nations for the purpose of developing and implementing an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the six grave violations against children affected by armed conflict;

(s) Calling upon all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities as needed, Member States, United Nations entities and other concerned parties to ensure that the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict are fully incorporated into and prioritized in all post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, programmes and strategies, as well as in efforts on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and to encourage and facilitate consideration of the views of children in these processes.

6. The Working Group agreed to address a message, through a public statement by the Chair of the Working Group, to community and religious leaders:

(a) Emphasizing the important role of community and religious leaders in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict;

(b) Urging them to strengthen community-level protection and to publicly condemn and continue to advocate ending and preventing violations and abuses against children, notably those involving the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks and threats of attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions and the denial of humanitarian access, and to engage with all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities as needed, the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders to support the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict in their communities, including by raising awareness to prevent the stigmatization of those children.

Recommendations to the Security Council

7. The Working Group agreed to recommend that the President of the Security Council transmit a letter to the Secretary-General:

(a) Requesting the Secretary-General to ensure that relevant United Nations entities and agencies, in line with their respective mandates, continue their engagement and efforts to address violations and abuses committed against children in Afghanistan;

(b) Requesting the Secretary-General to continue to support the child protection activities and capacity of UNAMA, in line with its mandate, and to continue to include in his future reports information and analysis on children in Afghanistan, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions;

(c) Requesting the Secretary-General and relevant United Nations entities and agencies to ensure the continuation of efforts to engage with all relevant Afghan political actors and stakeholders, including relevant authorities as needed, for the

purpose of developing and implementing an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the six grave violations against children.

8. The Working Group agreed to recommend the following to the Security Council:

(a) To ensure that the protection of children in Afghanistan continues to be taken into account by the Security Council when discussing the mandate of UNAMA and its activities;

(b) To ensure the continuation of and support for the child protection activities and capacities of UNAMA, in line with its mandate, including monitoring and reporting on violations and abuses committed against children in Afghanistan;

(c) To communicate the present document to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1988 \(2011\)](#).

Direct action by the Working Group

9. The Working Group agreed to send letters from the Chair of the Working Group to donors:

(a) Emphasizing the importance of international support to the people of Afghanistan and, in this regard, calling upon the donor community to provide flexible, timely and sufficient funding and support to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including by:

(i) Supporting the sustainable release and reintegration of all children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, emphasizing the importance of interim care, long-term psychosocial recovery and community-based social and economic reintegration of children formerly associated with parties to conflict, as well as viable and sustainable alternative livelihoods in order to prevent the re-recruitment of children;

(ii) Supporting the rebuilding of social infrastructure and the provision of psychosocial support, health care, education and vocational training of children formerly associated with parties to conflict, including children who are victims of sexual violence;

(iii) Supporting humanitarian mine clearance action and risk education and providing victim assistance, including life-saving medical interventions and mine-risk education activities.

Annex**Statement of the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the United Nations before the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict¹**

Madam Chair and distinguished delegates,

At the outset, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to H.E. Ambassador Vanessa Frazier, Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, for convening this crucial meeting. I also extend my deepest appreciation to the Working Group for their significant efforts and meticulous work in examining the sixth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, covering the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2022. The insights and recommendations provided in the Conclusions on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan are both comprehensive and invaluable and we welcome it. I am particularly grateful for the time and efforts made by the Working Group during the consultation process, and for the thoroughness and dedication demonstrated in addressing the complex issues faced by Afghan children. I would like to thank you for the adoption of these Conclusions and for your continued collaboration in our shared mission to protect and promote the rights of children affected by armed conflict.

Madam Chair,

We commend the Working Group for strongly condemning all violations and abuses against children by all parties in Afghanistan. Afghan children have borne the brunt of the conflict, falling victim to manipulation, coercion, and forced involvement in conflicts and violence perpetrated by the Taliban and other armed groups. We join the call for all parties particularly the Taliban to immediately end and prevent all violations of international law involving the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access. Compliance with these obligations under international law is vital to protect the most vulnerable.

I also wish to commend the emphasis on accountability for all violations and abuses against children. Bringing perpetrators to justice through systematic, impartial investigations is vital for upholding international law and ensuring justice for victims. Accountability is critical in a context where impunity remains widespread, and many violations go unpunished, eroding trust in the rule of law.

We share the condemnation of child recruitment and use by all parties and we strongly urge Taliban to immediately and without conditions release all children associated with them and to end and prevent the further recruitment and use of children. We fully endorse the call for defining a child as any individual under the age of 18, and creation of standardized age assessment guidelines and the establishment of Child Protection Units at recruitment centers. These measures are vital for preventing the exploitation of children and ensuring their rights are fully protected. These measures were already established and in effect, however Taliban have reversed and undone all the progress Afghanistan made in the past two decades.

It is crucial to urge the Taliban to re-establish the specialized juvenile justice system. This will ensure that children receive fair trial guarantees and have access to justice.

¹ The present annex is being issued without formal editing.

I highlight the deep concern at the cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, including forced marriage, and instances of sexual violence against boys involving *bacha bazi*.

Noting with concern that the scale of these heinous acts is believed to be underreported due to fear of stigmatization and reprisals, a weak rule of law, impunity, lack of accountability, inadequate support services for victims and survivors, and security concerns, I stress the call on the Taliban to take immediate action to end and prevent the perpetration of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.

Madam Chair,

We welcome and support the call for the lifting of the suspension on girls' secondary and tertiary education and ensuring that all children have access to quality education.

Education is a fundamental right that must be protected. Since the Taliban's return to power, the suspension of girls' education has deprived millions of girls of their right to learn, with long-term negative impacts on their futures and the country's development.

I commend the emphasis on allowing and facilitating safe, timely, and unhindered humanitarian access to children. Respecting humanitarian principles and the work of UN agencies is essential for providing necessary aid.

Humanitarian operations in Afghanistan face significant obstacles, including threats and violence against aid workers, which impede the delivery of critical assistance. I appreciate the grave concern over restrictions on Afghan women working with humanitarian organizations and the impact on life-saving assistance. Restrictions on women's participation severely limit the reach and effectiveness of humanitarian efforts, particularly in areas where cultural norms require female staff to interact with women and children.

I applaud the Working Group's emphasis on the vital role of community and religious leaders in this mission. The decision to address a message to these leaders is a crucial step. Their advocacy for condemning violations and supporting the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration of affected children is not just commendable—it is essential.

Finally, I emphasize the importance of international support to the people of Afghanistan and call on the international community for timely funding to strengthen child protection, support reintegration, rebuild social infrastructure, and provide psychosocial support, healthcare, education, and vocational training. The future of Afghan children depends on these actions.

In conclusion, the insights and recommendations provided by the Working Group are instrumental in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Afghan children affected by armed conflict. We reiterate our heartfelt gratitude to the Working Group for their tireless efforts and comprehensive approach in crafting these Conclusions.

I call on the Taliban as well as the international community, to act on these recommendations with urgency and dedication. By doing so, we can ensure that Afghan children are protected from the atrocities of war and are given the opportunity to heal, grow, and thrive. Let us continue to work together in our shared mission to safeguard the rights and well-being of every child in Afghanistan.

Thank you.