

Review on the Future of All Forms of UN Peace Operations

Submission from the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

This submission has been compiled by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, drawing up the technical expertise and experiences of its diverse membership.

*It also integrates emerging findings from ongoing research on the ‘**Collaboration between peacekeeping and child protection actors for the prevention of child recruitment, facilitation of release and reintegration of children**’. This research is being conducted by UNICEF and Plan International, on behalf of the Alliance in Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan, with funds from Global Affairs Canada. The findings have been validated, and the final report is currently being prepared.*

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Background on the role of peacekeeping operations in child protection

In nearly all the world’s conflict zones children represent as much as half of the affected population. Children are disproportionately affected by and are primarily victims of armed conflicts. Their protection, recovery and reintegration are essential to long-term peace and security as well as sustainable development.

Since resolution 1261 (1999), the Security Council has formally acknowledged that the protection of children in armed conflict is a fundamental peace and security concern. By including child protection in the Security Council’s peace and security agenda, it created a role for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions (hereafter “missions”) on this issue. In resolution 1379 (2001) and subsequent thematic resolutions, the Security Council specifically called for the inclusion of child protection provisions in mission-specific resolutions of United Nations peace operations and for the deployment of Child Protection Advisers (CPAs). Subsequent mission-specific resolutions mandating and renewing United Nations peace operations reiterated the request for the deployment of child protection capacities in specific mission settings. The protection of children in situations of armed conflict forms an inherent priority within the broader obligations of the United Nations to promote the protection of civilians and to put protection at the centre of peace and security efforts.¹

Child protection advisors have been deployed to missions since 2001 to address child protection concerns at the political and operational levels and contribute to the implementation of the Security

¹ [1. protection - 3 child protection policy 0.pdf](#)



Council-mandated Children and Armed Conflict Agenda (CAAC) with the goal to contribute to ending, preventing and responding to grave violations against children in armed conflict. To that end they advise mission leadership and ensure mainstreaming of child protection in all mission areas; monitor and report on the six grave violations under the Security Council-mandated monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM); negotiate with armed forces and armed groups to end and prevent grave violations; build the capacities of national counterparts on child protection and raise awareness about the issue amongst other tasks. Importantly, the mission leadership (Special Representative of the Secretary-General/Head of Mission) co-chairs with the UNICEF Representative the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting on the six grave violations, and their equivalents in situations of concern, which are the organizational structures for the implementation of the CAAC agenda at country level.

Especially in contexts where insecurity and limited access are major challenges, including where roads are poor, non-existent or too unsafe, missions also provide critical logistical support to ensure monitoring and reporting, access to armed actors and the transport of children from locations where they receive the care and services they need.

With their wide presence on the ground, missions—through their Child Protection Units and in collaboration with other mission components like human rights and civil affairs—monitor, verify and report on grave violations against children and thus inform, amongst others, the work of the Security Council via the the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict, the Secretary-General's country specific reports on children and armed conflict and the quarterly Global Horizontal Notes. This reporting is critical to inform decision making, programming, advocacy, prevention and response efforts and to hold parties to conflict accountable.

Missions are often central to negotiating with armed actors. Their political leverage and security presence enable them to push for UN Security Council-mandated action plans and other child protection commitments to end and prevent grave violations, including recruitment and use. These negotiations are complex and sensitive, and it is often difficult for humanitarian or child protection actors to undertake them independently.

Further, especially in contexts where insecurity and limited access are major challenges, including where roads are poor, non-existent or too unsafe, missions also provide critical logistical support to ensure monitoring and reporting, access to armed actors and response efforts such as transporting children released or separated from armed forces and armed groups to safe locations where they receive the care and services they need.

Recommendations:

1. Place children and their protection at the centre of current and future missions

- Bearing in mind the disproportionate impact of conflict on children and that their protection is central to long term peace and security and sustainable development, ensure in line with CAAC



Security Council resolutions that mission mandates explicitly recognise the core responsibility to protect children in armed conflict and allocate dedicated child protection resources to that end.

- Ensure that mandates are matched with dedicated child protection resources in the General Assembly Fifth Committee.
- Ground all child protection efforts in international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), international humanitarian law, international criminal law, existing Security Council resolutions on CAAC, political engagements (Paris Principles, Safe Schools Declaration, Vancouver Principles and EWIPA), and other international protection norms. Use technical guidance and standards based on this legal framework to guide operational decisions (examples of these are provided at the end of the document).
- Implement the CAAC agenda at field level, including by co-chairing the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting grave violations, and their equivalents in situations of concern. This requires dedicated and trained child protection staff and close and continued coordination with humanitarian and specifically child protection actors.
- Implement robust measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), in line with the Secretary-General's Bulletin on Special Measures for PSEA, ensuring survivor-centred responses to allegations.

2. Invest in and integrate gender sensitive child protection capacity throughout every mission

- Embed child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) considerations into all operational decisions, activities, and processes, guided by a Do No Harm approach.
- Provide mandatory, comprehensive pre-deployment and in-mission training for all mission staff on child protection, gender based violence, child safeguarding and PSEA.
- Deploy dedicated gender and child protection experts within missions to strengthen prevention and response capacity.
- Ensure budgets allocate adequate and predictable resources for child protection advisers, safeguarding measures, capacity-strengthening, and community-based protection mechanisms.
- Equip missions to support survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, with training that addresses the distinct vulnerabilities and experiences of males and females, children of all ages, and adults.

3. Prevent and respond to grave violations against children, including child recruitment and use in armed forces and armed groups

- Facilitate safe and timely access for children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG) to safe locations where they can receive the child protection support and services they need, including those associated with armed groups designated as terrorist organisations (AGDTO).
- Use political leverage and security presence to support negotiations with parties to conflict for ending and preventing grave violations including the release and reintegration of children as well as the development and implementation of action plans and other child protection commitments. Note that the action plans can play a critical role in the prevention of grave violations against children, including new or re-recruitment .
- Implement international legal instruments, relevant Security Council resolutions as well as non-binding engagements such as the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, the Paris Principles and Commitments the Safe Schools Declaration and EWIPA, including through systematically integrating them into in-mission training, planning, and operational practice as well as in capacity building efforts with national counterparts
- Establish clear rules of engagement and codes of conduct recognising children associated with armed forces and armed groups primarily as victims and systematise and support (with robust, updated referral mechanisms) their transfer to child protection actors for appropriate support services including through the signature of handover protocols with host states.
- Ensure that those children are not detained on the basis of their association with armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups. Ending the criminalisation and punitive treatment of these children must be prioritised.
- Maintain a central role, alongside UNICEF and other child protection actors, in handover negotiations, carefully assessing comparative advantages, operational risks, and alignment with international best practice.

4. Preserve child protection capacity during mission transitions and withdrawals through early planning and responsible transfer to child protection actors

- Implement all Security Council resolutions on CAAC in particular resolution 2764 (2024) by ensuring strengthened coordination amongst the heads of UN peace operations, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Co-Chairs of the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting, as well as relevant government/authorities, to ensure the continuity, effectiveness, and sustainability of child protection activities, and in cases of mission transitions or withdrawals ensuring a smooth and

responsible transfer of the mission responsibilities on child protection, including the transfer of core child protection tasks to the UN country team;

- Ensure that when core child protection tasks are transferred from the mission to the UN Country Teams, CAAC expertise is embedded in the Resident Coordinator's Office, as co-chair of the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting and that capacities of other Country Task Force members are strengthened, including with the support of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.
- Maintain the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism at full operational capacity post-withdrawal, by strengthening the composition and capacities of United Nations Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), and its equivalent in situations of concern, , allocate resources to sustain MRM functions, and end and prevent grave violations, including the release of children, and mitigate risks such as explosive ordnance.
- Ensure the continued signature and implementation of Actions Plans to end and prevent grave violations against children and of other protection commitments, including handover protocols for the swift and safe referral of CAAFAG to appropriate child protection actors, is maintained during and beyond transitions.
- Secure multi-year, predictable funding for child protection capacities to avoid gaps in monitoring, reporting, prevention, and response during and after transitions.

5. Strengthen critical partnerships to protect children in conflict

- **Humanitarian partnerships:** Collaborate with humanitarian actors, including coordination mechanisms, to strengthen child protection. This includes coordinating with agencies that have broad humanitarian mandates and operational presence to support integrated protection efforts, enable information-sharing, and ensure timely responses to child protection risks.
- **Specialised child protection actors:** Coordinate with specialised child protection actors, for example UNICEF, and national and international NGOs with specific child protection expertise, to ensure a safe and protective environment for children in conflict. As aforementioned, collaboration can include establishing handover protocols in accordance with international standards, and alignment of referral pathways to appropriate child protection actors.
- **National civil society organisations and communities:** Engage local organisations and communities to enhance culturally appropriate, sustainable child protection, identifying children at risk and supporting community-based mechanisms. Community-based women's associations and female leaders are critical for identifying and protecting girls associated with armed groups.
- **Host State governments, diplomatic and donor communities and regional organisations:** Advocate with host State governments, diplomatic and donor communities, and regional



organisations on ending and preventing grave violations and raise awareness with them on children affected by armed conflict including by ensuring participation of child protection advisors and child protection staff in relevant bilateral and multilateral fora such as local Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict. Especially with regard to regional organisations and arrangements involved in peace and security efforts in host states, such as the European Union, the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities in Africa or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, ensure cooperation and exchange of lessons learned and best practices on child protection issues and leverage each other's comparative advantages in this regard.

Please find the following technical reference documents:

- [*Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, and the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action \(2022\). Operational Guidance on Negotiating and Implementing Handover Protocols for the Transfer of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups.*](#)
- [*The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019 Edition, 2019.*](#)
- [*The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Technical Note, Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups: Lessons Learnt and Good Practices on Prevention of Recruitment and Use, Release and Reintegration. 2020*](#)
- [*Vancouver Principles on peacekeeping and the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers*](#)
- [*UN Security Council Resolution 2764 \(2024\)*](#)
- [*1. protection - 3 child protection policy 0.pdf*](#)