



United Nations
Secretary-General

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Secretary-General's remarks to Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict [as delivered]

The global security landscape continues to change dramatically – but one grim reality does not: children still pay the highest price in wartime.

Young boys and girls are directly targeted – and conscripted.

They are tortured, maimed, imprisoned, starved, sexually abused and killed.

Their homes and schools are destroyed.

In places such as Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen, children suffer through a living hell.

And in many cases, it is getting even worse.

Thousands of Syrian children have been killed since the start of the conflict. Millions more are traumatized.

Last year, Afghanistan recorded its highest rate of child casualties since 2009.

In Somalia, recorded violations increased by 50 per cent from 2014 to 2015.

In South Sudan, children continue to pay the heaviest price for leaders' failure to commit to peace.

In Yemen, six times as many children were killed and maimed in 2015 compared to just one year before – and five times as many were recruited into fighting.

Violence continues to take a toll on Palestinian and Israeli children. My last report called on Israel to ensure accountability. This remains critical.

More than half of the world's refugees are frightened children.

We must urgently address the root causes of displacement.

At the same time, we have to confront this massive crisis.

On September 19th, we will hold a United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants. I urge all governments to bring ideas and commitments – with a special focus on protecting children.

Violent extremism is forcing people from their homes and communities.

Extremists are torturing, detaining and killing children... sending them on suicide missions... and selling them as sex slaves.

An effective response must place respect for human rights and humanitarian law at the centre.

That includes protecting children during and after military operations – regardless of their affiliation.

I am deeply concerned that more and more children are being arrested, detained or even killed in counterterrorism operations.

I am also alarmed by violations of international humanitarian law caused by aerial bombardments.

Even wars have rules. Hospitals and schools should be protected. Civilians should be spared. Children should not be used to fight.

Peacekeeping also has rules. We must end the outrage of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers, staff and non-UN forces.

I thank the Council for endorsing my decision to repatriate units when we have credible evidence against them.

But we all must do more to secure accountability, enforce standards, provide training, assist victims and achieve justice.

Once again this year, objections to the annual report forced me to make a difficult decision.

After very careful consideration, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition was removed from the annexes, pending the conclusions of a review.

I have held talks with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the highest level possible, including meetings in New York with the Deputy Crown Prince and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, to express my serious concerns about the situation on the ground and the devastating impact on children. My senior advisors were also intensely engaged.

I have since received information on measures taken by the coalition to prevent and end grave violations against children.

I still have very strong concerns about the protection of Yemeni children. They must always come first.

The forward-looking review continues – and the situation on the ground will be closely monitored.

We will continue our engagement to ensure that concrete measures to protect children are implemented.

But I want to repeat: the content of the report stands.

Let me be clear: the report and its annexes may cause discomfort, but that is not a goal in itself.

Our aim is to protect children in danger by ensuring concrete change.

Today I renew my appeal to every Member State and every party to conflict: If you want to protect your image, protect children.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the office of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict.

My Representative and her predecessors have made a meaningful difference for the youngest victims of war. Courageous and hard-working staff in the field have collected and verified information, sometimes at great personal risk. I fully support them.

This work – and my Special Representative – deserves the full political backing of all Member States.

We need resources – but much more than that, we need political will.

Commitment yields results. In 2015, more than 8,000 child soldiers were released. They are getting help to rebuild their lives. Many countries have also passed laws to add new safeguards for children against recruitment – with enforcement mechanisms.

The ultimate goal is to end these grave violations of the human rights of children. That demands ending conflicts and establishing peace.

I call on this Council and all countries to do everything possible to back their words with actions that protect children from the scourge of armed conflict now – and spare others in the future.

Thank you.