

# CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS **from** THE REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS **on** CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

— New York • October 2021 —



Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for  
**CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT**

**25**  
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# Background on the Regional Consultations on Children and Armed Conflict



Carrying her 2 year-old sister, Heba\* was 3 years-old when she fled a violent attack on her village with her family in Basa, Jabel Mara, Sudan. She remembers gun shots, fires, screams and people and donkeys fleeing.

\* NAME CHANGED

PHOTO: UNICEF/  
UNI238391/Noorani

In light of the common challenges around the implementation of the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate, including complex political and security situations as well as changing conflict dynamics and methods of warfare, **the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC), Ms. Virginia Gamba, and UNICEF Deputy Executive Director for programmes, Mr. Omar Abdi, identified the need for High-Level and Technical consultations at regional level**

with Country Task Forces for Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), their equivalents in non-Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) countries, including United Nations Country Teams (CTs), and the Regional Offices of UN entities to discuss strategic and political engagement on the CAAC mandate and provide a forum to exchange confidentially among senior UN officials and technical experts on best practices and lessons learned in its implementation.

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**Four consultations, covering all situations in the Secretary-General’s annual report on CAAC across the various regions on the agenda, brought together principals and CAAC experts to discuss the situation in:**

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- Middle East and North Africa (Amman, November 2018), including Iraq, Israel/ State of Palestine, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Yemen;
- East Africa and African Great Lakes Region (Nairobi, January 2019), including Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan;
- South and Southeast Asia (Bangkok, August 2019), including Afghanistan, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, and Thailand;
- West and Central Africa, and Colombia (Dakar, January 2020), including Central African Republic, Mali, Nigeria, and Colombia.

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**With the aim of strengthening the implementation of the CAAC mandate, the main objectives of these consultations were to:**

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- **Strengthen a “One-UN approach”** to the implementation of the CAAC mandate, including by seeking broader UN-system participation in CTFMRs and CTs through commitments from UN agencies in these countries and regions to contribute to the MRM or corresponding CAAC monitoring where there is no MRM in place.
- **Foster cross-learning** among CTFMRs and CTs on shared challenges, lessons learned, good practices and issues of common concern in relation to documentation, verification, evidence-based advocacy, and engagement with parties to conflict.
- **Achieve clearer articulation** regarding the political support needed by CTFMRs and CTs from SRSG CAAC, in particular on dialogue with parties to conflict and agreement on priority areas for CAAC engagement in the CAAC situations existing in all regions with actionable recommendations.
- **Reach agreement** on key issues, including strengthening information exchange between CTFMRs, CTs and the Office of the SRSG CAAC (OSRSG CAAC), the use of harmonized language, methodology and verification terminology, and discussions on how the UN system can strengthen advocacy on CAAC based on MRM data at country, regional and global level.
- **Identify MRM/CAAC capacity building needs** for CTFMRs and CTs in the respective regions, for follow-up country-tailored training workshops to be conducted jointly by OSRSG CAAC, UNICEF, the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA).

# Format of the Consultations

These regional consultations, first of their kind, were composed of a high-level segment, followed by a technical-level workshop. The participants convened at a mutually agreed regional hub to allow for full participation and engagement in the consultations.

The high-level meetings, co-chaired by the SRSG CAAC and UNICEF, included strategic level discussions in plenary, as well as separate bilateral country-specific meetings, and discussions dedicated to the regional aspects of the CAAC mandate where relevant, notably in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin regions. The consultations brought together the OSRSG CAAC and UNICEF global management teams, Regional Directors, Deputy Regional Directors and senior staff of UNICEF and other UN entities involved in the implementation of the CAAC agenda, the co-chairs of the CTFMRs and, whenever applicable, the co-leads of the CTs in the region under consultation. Participants discussed strategic and political engagement around the CAAC mandate; current good practices and progress; and challenges and possible ways forward to address them, including by strengthening the UN-wide contribution to the mandate.

The ensuing technical-level consultations brought together subject matter experts and practitioners from OSRSG CAAC, UNICEF and other UN entities and INGOs, whenever relevant and concerned with the implementation of the CAAC mandate in the respective regions. They included discussions in plenary and bilateral discussions between the technical-level co-chairs of the CTFMRs and co-leads of CTs, the technical staff of UN entities at regional-level, and headquarters (HQ) technical counterparts: UNICEF, OSRSG CAAC, DPO and DPPA. The technical-level consultations provided an opportunity to deepen the discussions on what works and what would need to be improved and generated a set of specific, concrete and actionable recommendations to strengthen the implementation of the CAAC mandate in the region based on the High-level meeting decisions.

The meetings were held under Chatham House Rules to encourage open discussions.

In this respect, the information contained in this document does not reflect the views of respective entities - or their representatives - having participated in the process of consultations but should be regarded as the collective outcome of this process for the purpose, only, of informing and strengthening the implementation of the CAAC mandate and the protection of conflict-affected children.

## Key Findings

The agenda of these consultations revolved around four common and complementary themes:

- 1 UN system-wide contribution to the implementation of the CAAC mandate
- 2 Monitoring, documentation, verification and reporting on grave child rights violations in situations of armed conflict
- 3 Engagement with parties to conflict and other actors
- 4 Advocacy, use of the MRM/CAAC data and its linkages with humanitarian response

The following sections highlight some key common findings linked to each session, across all regions. Recommendations formulated below are addressed to relevant UN entities – as specified – with a stake in the implementation of the CAAC mandate, whether in HQ or in the field (CTFMRs and CTs as applicable).



# 1. UN system-wide contribution to the implementation of the CAAC mandate

Participants in the four consultations unanimously agreed that broader, more effective and strategic participation of UN entities involved in the implementation of the CAAC mandate (through the CTFMRs or their equivalent in non-MRM countries) would be beneficial and, to this end, brought forward several recommendations:

- a) **Increased guidance from the technical reference group (TRG)** on MRM CAAC at HQ – which brings together OSRSG CAAC, UNICEF, DPO and DPPA – through:
  - i. The development of a **briefing package<sup>1</sup>** for the CTFMR co-chairs/CT co-leads appointed to a country with a functioning MRM or a situation of concern;
  - ii. Increased **training and capacity-building initiatives** to UN entities and partners participating in the implementation of the CAAC mandate in the field; and
  - iii. The development or update of **practical and user-friendly guidelines** for UN entities participating in the monitoring and reporting of grave child rights violations in the field, to complement existing ones or to address emerging trends and needs.
- b) **High-level engagement at HQ with Heads of relevant UN entities** to secure their commitment to mainstream the CAAC agenda on both protection and prevention and translate this commitment through instructions to their field offices for increased involvement and cooperation on CAAC issues in their operations at country and, where applicable, regional level.
- c) Encourage CTFMRs/CTs to hold **periodic strategic retreats** (similar to these consultations) bringing

together UN entities participating in the monitoring and reporting mechanism, with the support of HQ.

- d) Develop a **workplan** based on the country situation and the specific contexts, mandates and resources of each participating UN entity, with the support of HQ.
- e) Develop avenues to facilitate the exchange of lessons learned and best practices, tools and reference documents. **Promote linkages with human rights mechanisms** such as Commissions of Inquiry and **exchanges of information between the MRM/CAAC monitoring and other UN monitoring systems** (such as the *Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements* (MARA) on sexual violence in conflict and the *Surveillance System of Attacks on Healthcare* (SSA) of the World Health Organization). In this regard, the technical note on *UNHCR's Engagement in the Implementation of the Protection Mechanisms Established by Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1960* (MRM and MARA) has been identified as a good practice, which could be replicated by other UN entities.
- f) Strengthen the **linkages between the MRM analysis and programmatic response** at the country level, including in the field of sustainable development (through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for example) where relevant, and for use in prevention measures and mitigation of push and pull factors affecting children in situations of concern and/or situations where a CTFMR is already established.
- g) **Enlarged participation in the MRM TRG at HQ** of relevant UN entities involved in the implementation of the CAAC mandate.
- h) **Greater involvement of UN Resident Coordinators' Offices** in the field, including in-country situations where a CTFMR is in place, to enhance UN system-wide participation and coordination.

<sup>1</sup> This briefing package for co-Chairs/co-Leads is in the process of being developed by the CAAC TRG at HQ and is expected to be finalized in the course of 2022.

## 2. Monitoring, documentation, verification and reporting on grave child rights violations in situations of armed conflict

Participants agreed on the importance of maintaining a set of clear harmonized verification standards - as identified in the MRM guidelines and field manual. However, participants also raised the challenges particularly posed, among others, by the lack of capacity, the frequent turn-over of dedicated staff, and access constraints faced by UN entities to implement the MRM methodology and standards, as well as by severe and growing threats to monitors' safety. To address these challenges, several avenues were explored:

- a) The **identification of capacity gaps** to undertake monitoring and documentation of grave child rights violations in the respective CTFMRs/CTs and the development of corresponding specific **capacity building plans**, which – as highlighted in the first theme – would be matched by **increased and targeted training and capacity building initiatives** delivered by HQ.
- b) The continuously changing conflict environment, including the means and methods of warfare, as well as the complexities of parties engaged in the hostilities such as the fragmentation of groups, the establishment of new and dissolution of old alliances, the direct and indirect involvement of international actors, calls for a continued conversation over verification standards and ongoing guidance by HQ. In this context, **reviewing the verification standards section of the MRM field manual<sup>2</sup>** on grave child rights violations would be supportive to the work of teams on the ground.
- c) The **review, update or development by the MRM TRG of technical guidance on the documentation of the six grave child rights violations** to address identified challenges and limitations in current

documentation practices. In this respect, additional recommendations were formulated with regards to some of the six grave child rights violations:

- i. **ABDUCTION:** in order to harmonize existing practices of monitoring and strengthen the collection of information with regards to abduction, a **technical guidance note on abduction** was suggested.
- ii. **DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS (DHA):** in view of the rising number of cases of denial of humanitarian access as well as the complexity and sensitivity surrounding this violation, the development of a **technical guidance note on DHA** was suggested.
- iii. **KILLING AND MAIMING:** the development of a **technical guidance note on killing and maiming** by MRM TRG would help clarify the more complex monitoring, documentation and reporting of "maiming".
- iv. **ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS:**
  - **SCHOOLS:** strengthen the **collaboration between the CTFMRs/CTs and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attacks.**
  - **HOSPITALS:** as local and international health workers have increasingly been the target of threats and attacks (notably in the MENA and Central Asian region), attacks on health facilities and personnel should be given additional attention, notably to develop measures of prevention and response<sup>3</sup>. To this end, **synergies and complementarities between the CAAC's MRM and the WHO's SSA** should be explored.
- v. **RAPE AND OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE:** in line with the recommendation formulated in the first theme, **synergies and complementarities between the CAAC's MRM and the MARA on sexual violence in conflict** should be further explored.

<sup>2</sup> The review of the verification standards section of the MRM field manual has been undertaken by the MRM TRG at HQ.

<sup>3</sup> This aspect is all the more relevant in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the current roll-out of the vaccination campaign, and will be the object of particular scrutiny in 2021 and beyond.



**d) Strengthen engagement with civil society organizations**, including local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as they are strategic partners in the monitoring of grave child rights violations. They normally have extensive local networks, have built a relationship of trust with the civilian population and have direct access to victims and witnesses of grave child rights violations. However, considering the reprisals that NGOs may be exposed to, this engagement should be coupled with **regular risk assessment, capacity building**, and identification and implementation of **measures to support partners** in their duty of care responsibilities, while continuing to rely on the systematic verification of data by UN Officials on the basis of MRM standards.

**e) To strengthen linkages between monitoring and reporting** on the one hand **and response** on the other hand, combine the monitoring and reporting of grave child rights violations with **service provision to survivors and witnesses**, including through **enhancement of referral mechanisms**.

**f) To prevent/minimize harm to child rights monitors and improve their safety**, conduct thorough **risk analysis** and develop **risk mitigation plans** at CTFMRs/CTs level, while conducting **high-level advocacy for the safety of monitors** using the political leverage of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

### 3. Engagement with parties to conflict and other actors

Drawing on their experience, participants reflected upon challenges they faced in engaging with parties to conflict and good practices in advocating with them to commit to concrete measures to end and prevent grave child rights violations in situations of armed conflict. This discussion resulted in the formulation of several recommendations:

- a) Develop comprehensive CAAC engagement strategies** at the national level (CTFMRs/CTs) in cooperation with HQ, including conflict analysis, potential entry points and the mapping of actors such as member states, regional/sub-regional organizations and civil society organizations who can influence parties to conflict. These strategies should also be an opportunity to **foster more coordination between engagement efforts at UNHQ, regional, sub-regional and local levels**.
- b) Develop guidance for the integration of child protection issues into peace negotiations** and processes by mediation actors<sup>4</sup>.
- c) Use the political influence of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict** as leverage to support country-level engagement efforts - if and as requested by the CTFMR co-chairs and CT co-leads where no CTFMR is established - to shield operations on the ground and protect child protection actors.
- d) Develop strategic engagement with non-listed parties and governments in situations of concern** for the implementation of measures to prevent grave child rights violations at the national level (CTFMRs/CTs), to contribute in the long term to conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts.

<sup>4</sup> In this regard, a *Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict* was launched in February 2020 and has been widely disseminated since then.

## 4. Advocacy, use of MRM/CAAC data and analysis, and its linkages with humanitarian response

Participants discussed ways to strengthen advocacy efforts on CAAC, notably through an increased and more (visually) accessible use and analysis of MRM/CAAC data, as well as the necessity to use such information to inform wider UN response, including humanitarian response and advocacy. These exchanges yielded several suggestions:

- a) SRSG-CAAC to regularly engage with the CTFMR co-chairs and CT co-leads on **advocacy with Permanent Missions representatives, UNSG and UN Political and Security pillar in New-York, based on the Global Horizontal Notes (GHNs)**. It is recommended to identify modalities to ensure the GHN conveys key issues of concern to inform SRSG CAAC New York advocacy.
- b) Strengthen **close cooperation and coordinated and strategic approaches to advocacy on CAAC grave violations** across the various relevant actors involved in the implementation of the CAAC mandate at several levels (HQ, regional, sub-regional, national), in support of UN-wide advocacy efforts on CAAC coordinated by the SRSG CAAC.
- c) Strategically **use the political role of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict for advocacy** purposes at regional, sub-regional and country levels, including through field visits and written correspondence with parties to conflict at high-level.
- d) **Strengthen partnerships with non-UN actors** such as regional and sub-regional organizations, civil society organizations and community leaders, media and Groups of Friends on CAAC to amplify advocacy efforts. To this end, encourage the **creation of local CAAC Groups of Friends** or increase support to the existing ones at regional, sub-regional and national levels.
- e) In coordination with OSRSG CAAC, **present MRM/CAAC data and analysis in a more user-friendly manner**, through infographics and more systematic use of data visualization tools and make greater use of these data and analyses to inform awareness campaigns.
- f) Increasingly **use training, conferences, and workshops with relevant armed forces and armed groups as channels to support CAAC objectives**, including with multinational military coalitions.
- g) **Use MRM/CAAC data and analysis to inform the Humanitarian Needs Overviews/Humanitarian Response Plans** and other relevant UN system-wide humanitarian documents, as a contribution to the understanding of the protection environment and the specific impact of conflicts on children.
- h) Develop, with relevant regional and sub-regional bodies, **regional and/or sub-regional strategies and coordination mechanisms** for cooperation on child protection concerns to prevent grave child rights violations.
- i) Develop **advocacy tools towards parties to conflict, governments, and the general public** to call attention to the six grave child rights violations in all regions affected by armed conflict, including through **awareness-raising campaigns**.
- j) Strengthen and amplify advocacy to **support UNICEF and other relevant actors in their efforts to improve long-term reintegration programs for children** released from conflict as a tool to prevent re-recruitment and contribute to ending the cycle of violence.

# Way Forward



In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), children jump rope as part of activities offered by the Congolese NGO AJEDEC (Youth Action for the Environment and Community Development) at a UNICEF Child-Friendly Space (CFS) in Drodro, Ituri Province.

PHOTO: UNICEF/UN0377401/LeMoyné

These unprecedented consultations brought together child protection actors at the principal and technical levels from a wide range of fields of expertise to exchange views, draw lessons learned from their experiences and identify best practices in a **ONE-UN coordinated approach to end and prevent grave child rights violations in situations of armed conflict**. They identified concrete steps to strengthen the collective efforts in implementing the CAAC mandate, which have been compiled in this report and will be disseminated to participants and others.

Members of the Technical Reference Group on the CAAC monitoring and reporting mechanism at HQ have already begun translating some of the key findings outlined in this document into action: a **new GHN format** was developed to ensure that key issues of concern are highlighted and conveyed to inform New York level advocacy. A **new campaign dedicated to all six grave child rights violations** in situations of armed conflict – “ACT to Protect Children Affected by Conflict” – was launched in 2019 and will run until 2022; a **Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict** was published in

February 2020; and both the development of a **briefing package for co-Chairs/co-Leads** and the **review of the verification standards section of the MRM field manual** have been initiated and are expected to be finalized in 2022. Similarly, **two technical guidance notes**, respectively on abduction and on the denial of humanitarian access, are in preparation.

Beyond these measures and to ensure the comprehensive implementation of all the recommendations formulated in these consultations, a **roll-out plan with concrete and time-bound steps** will be developed by the MRM TRG and shared with CAAC focal points of all UN entities involved in the monitoring and reporting of violations against children in CTFMRs and CTs. Progress in the implementation of this plan will be **assessed on a regular basis**.

Finally, to build on the success of this participatory and co-creative experience and to ensure that the MRM remains sufficiently agile, effective and relevant, the organization of similar consultations will be encouraged **every 5 years or earlier upon consensual agreement by the TRG members**.

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**Over 30 United Nations entities and other key partners were represented at these consultations.**

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**The Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict & UNICEF would like to thank them for their contribution and active participation.**

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