Better Protecting Children with Disabilities in Armed Conflict

Launch Event to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Thursday 07 December 2023, 3:00-4:30pm, Conference Room 12, United Nations Secretariat Building, New York

Co-Sponsors: Colombia, Italy, Malta, Mexico, Slovenia, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNICEF

Concept Note

Background

In June 2023, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General published his annual report on children and armed conflict (CAAC) covering the year 2022¹, and in October 2023 his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC) presented her latest annual report² to the 3rd Committee of the UN General Assembly. These reports illustrate once again the devastating impact of armed conflict on children and the appalling number of grave violations³ committed by parties to conflict against them in the conduct of hostilities. In 2022, 27,180 grave violations against children were verified by the United Nations through the CAAC Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM).

While the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that nearly 240 million children—or one in 10 children worldwide—have disabilities⁴, with indications that a

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¹ A/77/895 S/2023/363
² A/78/247
³ The six grave violations against children in armed conflict identified by the Security Council are: the recruitment and use of children; the killing and maiming of children; sexual violence against children; the abduction of children; attacks against schools and hospitals; and the denial of humanitarian access to children.
significantly higher number of children with disabilities live in situations of armed conflict\(^5\), it remains unclear how many children with disabilities count among the victims of these grave violations and how they were impacted by them. Indeed, the impact of armed conflict on children with disabilities is vastly underreported and understudied, with children with disabilities remaining largely invisible in data collection – including for the purpose of the MRM –, a lack of attention given to the unique barriers and challenges they face in armed conflict, and inadequate consideration given to their distinct requirements in the delivery of assistance. These shortcomings were identified as part of a broader study on the evolution of the CAAC mandate\(^6\) published in 2022 by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG CAAC) to mark the 25th anniversary of the mandate adding to previous calls for the availability of critical data to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities in armed conflict are protected and their needs are addressed.\(^7\)

In response, seeking to better understand the impact of armed conflict on children with disabilities, the Office of the Special Representative researched and published in 2023 a discussion paper on *The CAAC mandate and Children with Disabilities in Armed Conflict: Towards Greater Inclusion*. This paper examines the distinctive ways in which children with disabilities are victims of grave violations and formulates recommendations for making the CAAC agenda more inclusive of children with disabilities. It also outlines international legal provisions that are specific to children with disabilities in situations of armed conflict, for the purposes of raising awareness; breaking the silos between disability inclusion and child protection; and promoting a rights-based approach to disability inclusion in the protection of children in armed conflict. Building on the outcome of this discussion paper, three companion reports will follow in 2024 to examine the situation of children with disabilities in three conflict-affected countries.

**Purpose of the event**

Marking the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, this event presents an opportunity to discuss the main conclusions of the discussion paper published by the OSRSG CAAC on *The CAAC mandate and Children with Disabilities in Armed Conflict* and garner support from child protection practitioners involved in the CAAC agenda for the implementation of its recommendations at global, regional and local levels. Seeking to bridge the gap between child protection and disability inclusion actors, it will provide a platform for policy discussions and encourage dialogue and information exchange for the effective protection of children with disabilities in armed conflict. In line with this objective, it will offer an opportunity to reinforce partnerships and share best practices for mainstreaming a human rights-based approach to disability inclusion in the CAAC agenda. Finally, building on the recommendations of the discussion paper, it will provide a space to think about concrete

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\(^5\) Those indications include factors such as the devastating impacts of armed conflict on children; correlating factors such as poverty, lack of access to health care, nutrition, sanitation, and hygiene, and high rates of sexual violence, all of which could potentially heighten the likelihood of long-term impairments; as well as the existing challenges of data collection in countries affected by armed conflict; and the impact of discrimination and stigma which often prevents families from registering children with disabilities with government authorities or humanitarian organizations.


avenues for making the framework of child protection in armed conflict more disability-inclusive, for example in the design of prevention strategies, the conduct of mediation efforts, or the programming of reintegration services for children formerly associated with armed forces or groups.

Logistics

The event will take place on December 7th, 2023, from 3:00pm to 4:30pm, in Conference Room 12 of the United Nations Secretariat Building, New York. Sign language interpretation and closed captioning will be provided. The event will be broadcasted on UN Web TV (https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1t/k1t5p0w2t6).

RSVP by 04 December via: https://tinyurl.com/hfhxhbkv

Tentative Programme (90 mins)

Chair/Moderator : H.E. Mr. Samuel Žbogar, Ambassador, Representative of Slovenia to the Security Council, Permanent Mission of Slovenia to the United Nations (3 min.) (confirmed)

- Introductory Remarks :
  - H.E. Ms. Alicia Buenrostro Massieu, Ambassador, Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations (5 min.)
  - Ms. Francesca Maria Gatt, Chargé d'Affaires a.i., Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations (5 min)

- Video Messages
  - Mr. Giles Duley, Global Advocate for persons with disabilities in conflict and peacebuilding situations (3 min.)
  - Testimony of a representative from Sudan of youth with disabilities, facilitated by the International Disability Alliance (3 min.)

- Panel discussion (30 min.):
  - Ms. Virginia Gamba, Under Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
  - H.E. Ms. Leonor Zalabata Torres, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations, Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations
  - Ms. Sheema Sen Gupta, Director Child Protection, UNICEF
  - Ms. Heba Hagrass, Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities (video recording)

- Q & A (20 min)

- Closing remarks: H.E. Mr. Maurizio Massari, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations (5 min)