

Update on children in armed conflict: oral report background note

1. The impact of conflict on children is multifaceted as war violates all rights of children. Displacement, unlawful recruitment in armed forces and armed groups, sexual violence, killing and maiming, separation from family, trafficking are some of the direct consequences of war on children. However, the indirect consequences of conflict, such as the loss of basic services including water, sanitation, health and education, as well as the rise of poverty, malnutrition and disease, also have a horrific impact on children.

2. The year 2007 saw a number of milestones furthering the agenda for the care and protection of children in armed conflict. UNICEF played a key role in three major initiatives, with significant implications for the future work of the organization: the Paris Conference “Free Children from War” and its outcome documents; the Machel + 10 Strategic Review; and the significant progress in the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism under Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005).

I. Paris Conference

A. Description of achievements

3. In spite of extensive ratification of treaties preventing the recruitment and use of children in conflict, and the commitment made by Heads of States and Governments through the Millennium Declaration to spare no effort in the assistance to, and the protection of, children affected by armed conflict, the incidence of child soldiering in contravention of applicable international law shows little sign of diminishing. In 2007, UNICEF partnered with the Government of France to organize a conference in Paris, and a follow-up event in New York, to define ways to honour commitments of the Millennium Declaration, and Security Council-resolution 1612/2005, and address the root causes of this unacceptable practice can be addressed.

4. The impetus for the Paris Conference was an extensive review process, which led to the call for two documents: one concise document¹, the Paris Commitments, consistent with existing international legal standards and addressed to States, defines measures to protect children involved in hostilities to help them reintegrate into their families and communities; and a complementary document, The Paris Principles², provides detailed programme guidance.

* E/ICEF/2008/1.

¹ The Paris Commitments to Protect Children Unlawfully Recruited or Used by Armed Forces or Armed Groups.

² The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups.

5. To date, 66 States have endorsed the Paris Commitments, which now gives UNICEF and partners additional leverage to advocate for preventing recruitment and for supporting the release and reintegration of affected children. Since February 2007, concrete progress has been made towards reflecting the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles in a number of negotiated settlements, including in Chad and Sudan.

B. Implications for UNICEF

6. The widespread endorsement of the Principles among the main partners of UNICEF will increase programmatic coherence by providing sound and consistent technical guidance to all States and practitioners. Donor commitments will allow consistent and predictable support for field activities. Key principles affecting UNICEF programming include:

(i) **Prevention of recruitment:** to identify opportunities for developing broad-based, inclusive child protection strategies addressing underlying causes of recruitment;

(ii) **Rights-based approach to release and demobilization:** to advocate that the release or demobilization of all children recruited unlawfully shall be sought at all times, even in the absence of a peace agreement and formal demobilisation programme;

(iii) **Sustainable reintegration:** to implement inclusive and long-term reintegration programmes, reliant on flexible funding mechanisms, during unstable periods and sustained over the long term;

(iv) **Addressing the specific situation of girls:** to work with partners to better address the specific needs of girls and young women in prevention and reintegration advocacy and programming;

(v) **National and transitional justice mechanisms:** to ensure that children are treated in accordance with international standards on justice for children.

II. Machel + 10 Strategic Review

A. Description of achievements

7. The 10-year Strategic Review of the Graça Machel report, “Impact of Armed Conflict on Children”, was co-convened by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF. Its purpose is to draw attention to the range of issues affecting *all* children in *all* situations of armed conflict. It provides a platform for the care and protection of children. The review has specific objectives: highlight key progress and shortfalls; update the children and armed conflict agenda in view of current global policy and United Nations reform; identify emerging challenges and priorities; and develop comprehensive strategies for the next decade.

8. The review featured an extensive consultation process involving Member States, United Nations entities, civil society organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and independent experts. A special consultation process reached more than 1,000 children and youth through focus groups in 18 war-affected countries and through an online survey from another 91 countries. The review was presented to the General Assembly (A/62/228) on 17 October 2007.

9. The review highlights the changing and devastating impact of conflict on children and notes that children continue to be at high risk of recruitment by armed forces and armed groups and of being exploited, sexually abused, injured and killed. It also notes that diverse forms of political and armed violence have created new threats and that conflict poses significant obstacles to the achievement of the targets of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals.

10. The review shows much progress in the development of norms and standards and programmatic guidelines, such as the Paris Principles, as well as remaining gaps and challenges in the application, implementation and monitoring of these protective measures. It urges the international community to take concrete actions to end violations of children's rights in armed conflict.

B. Implications for UNICEF

11. The review has highlighted the need to expand current efforts and the importance of accounting for the changing nature of conflict. UNICEF will prioritize the following recommendations, in partnership with governments, United Nations actors, the World Bank and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to:

(i) **Promote justice for children**, through legal empowerment of communities to improve access to justice and to redress violations of children's rights. In addition, Member States will be encouraged to uphold international standards and norms and United Nations agencies and partners will be encouraged to adhere to guidelines on juvenile justice;

(ii) **Strengthen monitoring and reporting and analysis on child rights violations**, including the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1612;

(iii) **Improve the delivery of basic services**, including health and education, ensuring that these are aligned with government systems and sustained throughout all phases of the conflict; in addition, provide necessary support to non-State providers for the delivery of services;

(iv) **Implement the Paris Principles** to ensure that all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes are designed to improve the quality of care and protection for children;

(v) **End gender-based violence by increasing support within the framework of the UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict initiatives** to (a) provide support at country level for comprehensive and inter-agency responses; (b) advocate at global and national levels for an end to sexual violence; and (c) support efforts for an inter-agency knowledge base on sexual violence and responses in conflict;

(vi) **Strengthen knowledge and partnerships by working** with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other partners, using the knowledge base and established benchmarks to ensure that child protection concerns are adequately integrated and mainstreamed in system-wide policies, priorities and programmes;

(vii) **Facilitate the participation of children and youth in conflict prevention and peace-building** by empowering adolescents to diminish the culture of violence; promote adolescent engagement in national- and local-level governance, in peace processes, and in justice, truth and

reconciliation processes. Good practices on engaging children and youth in these processes will be documented.

III. Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism for Security Council Resolution 1612/2005 (MRM 1612)

A. Achievements of the Mechanism

12. Security Council Resolution 1612 was adopted on 26 July 2005. The Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict developed its own terms of reference, which were adopted in 2006. The first report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Working Group was on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in July 2006.

13. Since then, 11 situations of armed conflict have been considered by the Working Group. These are Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Uganda.

14. Country Task Forces on monitoring and reporting have been established in all 11 countries, led by the highest United Nations entity (Resident Coordinator or Special Representative of the Secretary-General), and co-led by the UNICEF Representative.

15. UNICEF, in collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, supported a number of capacity-building initiatives for staff and partners from all countries involved in the inter-agency initiative. This effort will continue in 2008.

16. The awareness created by the efforts related to the MRM 1612 initiative, although nascent, has provided results. Countries that have already presented a second report to the Working Group have shown a decrease in some of the violations reported so far. In addition, improved monitoring and reporting is also progressively being translated into more appropriate programme response for survivors and more efficient prevention programmes. Finally, concerns related to children in armed conflict have been included systematically in Security Council Resolutions, suggesting greater political commitment to addressing these concerns.

B. Implications for UNICEF

17. UNICEF appreciates the concerted efforts of the Security Council, through its Working Group, to dedicate capacity and attention to the violations of children rights in situations of armed conflict. UNICEF, which has a long tradition of monitoring the situation of children in all conflict situations around the world, has been and will remain supportive of the process. This support requires the involvement of the concerned UNICEF country offices, regional offices and headquarters, and the whole UNCT at both country and global level.

18. The information gathered through the mechanism has proved important in further improving programme planning and implementation, by government services, UNICEF, United Nations and NGO partners.

19. UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict have been the driving forces behind the implementation of the system. There is a

need for a progressively greater involvement of other United Nations agencies at the country and global levels.

20. UNICEF will continue its important work in relation to children in armed conflict as a core part of the organization's child protection efforts. As reflected in the proposed Child Protection Strategy and based on the CRC, these concerns have a high priority.
