



## CANZ Statement

**United Nations Security Council Open Debate on:**

**“Children and Armed Conflict”**

5 July 2023

**Ambassador & Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the  
United Nations, New York, H.E. Ms Carolyn Schwalger**

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Thank you, Mr/Madam President,

I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of CANZ: Canada, Australia, and my own country, New Zealand.

I want to thank the Special Representative, Virginia Gamba, and her office, for their tireless work to protect and reintegrate children affected by armed conflict.

It is shocking to CANZ, as it should be to all of us, that 27,180 verified grave violations against children occurred in 2022.

In one year alone, 18,890 children around the world were recruited and used in conflict, killed and maimed, raped and subject to sexual violence, and abducted. Unfortunately, these figures probably only represent a fraction of the number of victims around the world.

A **112%** increase in the number of attacks on schools and hospitals in 2022 is unacceptable.

These numbers represent immense suffering for the children affected, their families and their communities.



The fundamental measures that protect all civilians, including children, involve respecting international humanitarian and human rights law.

The worsening statistics in this year's report on Children and Armed Conflict underline a serious disregard, especially by Government forces, of international humanitarian and human rights legal obligations, a trend which we must reverse.

**CANZ strongly condemns *all* grave violations committed against children by any State or party, and in any conflict.**

CANZ calls for **Russian** armed forces and affiliated armed groups and their leadership to be held accountable for the grave violations they have committed against children during their ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine. The **killing and maiming** of more than 1,386 Ukrainian children in 2022 is devastating. CANZ recalls guidance of the Secretary-General on contacts with persons who are the subject of arrest warrants or summonses issued by the International Criminal Court.

The **recruitment and use** of children in **Syria** is staggering. 1,696 children have been deprived of a childhood, instead being recruited by an array of State and non-State actors and used in combat. No childhood should be spent fighting.

CANZ condemns the high numbers of verified cases of **rape and sexual violence**. These are particularly concerning given the consistent underreporting of this grave violation. This demonstrates the use of sexual and gender-based violence as a weapon of war.

The **denial of humanitarian access** is another deeply worrying trend in many conflicts including Yemen, Mali, and Myanmar among others. We



call on all parties to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access.

To this end, CANZ underscores the SRSG's request that the Taliban immediately revoke their ban on women working for NGOs and the UN in **Afghanistan**.

Further, the 112% increase in **attacks on schools and hospitals**, including the 66 verified attacks committed by the **Myanmar** armed forces – along with unlawful **abductions** - adds to an already dire picture for vulnerable children living under abusive military regimes.

The protection International Humanitarian Law provides for civilian persons and civilian objects must be respected in all situations. In addition to our commitment to IHL, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have all endorsed the *Safe Schools Declaration*.

CANZ welcomes the inclusion of **Haiti** and **Niger** as situations of concern given the number of violations reported.

Mr/Madam President,

While the situation put forward in this year's report is alarming, CANZ wants to acknowledge the critical, positive steps taken to protect and reintegrate children in the last year.

**CANZ welcomes the signing of action plans** - firstly, by the Government of Iraq, to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces; and secondly, by the Houthis in Yemen to address a number of violations.



We also welcome commitments and developments in other listed countries with respect to prevention, accountability, national legislation, training and capacity building.

CANZ continues to support the engagement of the SRSO and her office to **protect and reintegrate 12,460 children** formerly associated with armed forces or groups in CAR, DRC, Nigeria and Syria.

Mr/Madam President,

Tackling impunity, through prompt investigation - and where appropriate - prosecution for war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity is needed to strengthen our response to grave violations against children. We implore States to cooperate with international justice mechanisms, in particular the **ICC**.

CANZ encourages this **Security Council** to ensure that child protection tasks and capabilities are included in all relevant peacekeeping and special political mission mandates, and that these are adequately resourced and maintained during transitions or reconfigurations.

More child protection expertise is needed to reinforce the CAAC Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) capacities. The demands on the system are greater than ever before, including due to a rise in both the number of grave violations and the situations in which they occur. All UN actors must dedicate resources for MRM in situations on the CAAC agenda and the international community must do better at supporting UN Country Teams to do so.

Canada, Australia and New Zealand are proud to underscore their support to both the *Vancouver Principles and the Paris Principles*. We call



upon countries that have not yet done so to endorse these important political commitments.

CANZ is a strong supporter of the CAAC mandate and urges all States and armed groups to engage proactively and constructively with the UN and the SRSB to strengthen the protection of children and respect for their rights in war.

Let's work together to protect our children – who are our future – from the scourge of war.

I thank you.

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