

Situation in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan

Brief prepared for the Foreign Affairs Committee

Save the Children Canada

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Context overview

All three countries have alarming levels of grave violations against children in conflict, representing a failure of the international community to protect some of the world's most vulnerable girls and boys from extreme violence. Children are being made to suffer these violations in contexts where conflict and displacement already create volatile conditions that undermine children's basic rights to survival, protection and education.

Official reporting on grave violations against children in these contexts relies on a specific UN-led monitoring and reporting process, undertaken by trained child protection experts who are often underfunded within UN missions and relevant UN agencies. Despite this limitation, the UN has reported the following instances of grave violations in South Sudan, Somalia and the DRC:

- **Killing and maiming**: In 2017 the UN reported over 1,350 instances of killing and maiming of children in Somalia, South Sudan and the DRC, with close to 70% of these occurring in Somalia, which also had verified instances of children being publicly executed by Al-Shabaab¹.
- **Attacks on schools and hospitals**: Across Somalia, South Sudan and the DRC, the UN reported 486 attacks on schools in 2017 – of which over 80% were in the DRC – and 153 attacks on hospitals². These attacks occurred despite all three countries having endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration³.
- **Sexual violence**: In 2017, the UN reported incidents of sexual violence against total of 564 girls and 3 boys in the three countries, including 13 girls who were gang-raped in South Sudan. In Somalia – by far the largest incidence recorded of the three countries with 330 girls directly affected by sexual violence – rape was perpetrated particularly in IDP camps or when girls went to collect water or firewood⁴.
- **Abduction**: In Somalia, abductions of children in 2017 almost doubled compared to 2016: 1,634 children were abducted, 98 per cent of them by Al-Shabaab (1,608), who sent children as young as 9 to their madrasas or training camps. In South Sudan, the UN reported the abduction of 29 children, including 9 girls. Among these were children abducted for recruitment as child soldiers. In the DRC, a total of 143 girls and 277 boys were abducted⁵.
- **Recruitment and use as child soldiers**: In South Sudan, the UN reported the recruitment and use of 1,221 children, including 164 girls, and in the DRC, the UN reported new recruitment and use of 1,049 children (including 128 girls). In the DRC, almost one third of children newly recruited were under the age of 15 at the time of their recruitment. In Somalia, the UN reported a total of 2,087 boys and 40 girls as being recruited and used as child soldiers, the majority of these by Al-Shabaab⁶. Recruitment continues to be a concern throughout 2018, with NGOs reporting at least

¹ UN Security Council and UN General Assembly, 16 May 2018, *Annual Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict*. Accessed at <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/document/children-and-armed-conflict-report-of-the-secretary-general/> on 11 October 2018.

² Ibid

³ Global Coalition to Protect Education From Attack (GCPEA), 4 September 2018, *Safe Schools Declaration Endorsements*. Accessed at <http://www.protectingeducation.org/guidelines/support> on 24 October 2018.

⁴ Annual Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, 16 May 2018.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

300 boys being recruited on one day alone in September, with additional reports indicating communities had been asked to identify 2,500 more children within the next 30 days⁷.

- **Denial of humanitarian assistance:** South Sudan, Somalia and the DRC are among the most dangerous contexts for humanitarian aid workers⁸, endangering the provision of humanitarian assistance and further putting at risk the survival and dignity of populations already in severe need as a result of conflict, displacement, and climate-related disaster. In addition to generalized insecurity, the UN has reported specific incidents where humanitarian assistance was denied to children. In Somalia and South Sudan, these have been perpetrated by both armed forces and armed groups, whereas in the DRC cases, these were perpetrated by unidentified armed militia. These include multiple instances of targeted attacks on aid workers⁹.

Against this heightened level of continued need to protect girls and boys in these conflicts, the level of funding both for the overall humanitarian response in these countries, as well as specifically for child-focused interventions in child protection and education, has remained inadequate, often being considered not to be life-saving, which can be the exclusive focus of some countries' humanitarian assistance contributions. According to the UN Financial Tracking System (FTS):

- Somalia's 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan remains only 41.4% funded; and within those funds allocated, education and protection remain among the most underfunded sectors, compared to health, nutrition, food security, water and sanitation, and logistics; and in the case of protection, also behind shelter and non-food items. Protection remains the most underfunded area of response of all sectors within an overall response that itself is badly underfunded. It is important to note that child protection accounts for only one part of overall protection needs, which also include sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)¹⁰.
- The 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan for the DRC is even less funded, at only 40%. Within this crisis, over 75% of protection needs remain unmet, and an alarming 90% of education needs remain unmet. This places education behind food security, health, nutrition, protection, water and sanitation, cash-based interventions, and interventions for refugees not specific by sector¹¹.
- Of the three countries, South Sudan has received the highest percentage of funding in relation to its appeal (which is 53.3% funded), however within this crisis, protection funding again trails other sectors including nutrition, food security and livelihoods¹².

⁷ Somalia NGO Consortium, 24 September 2018. "Civil Society Groups condemn target on schools and children in Somalia." Accessed at <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/aid-agencies-condemn-target-schools-and-children-somalia> on 11 October 2018.

⁸ Stoddard, A., Harmer, A. & Czwarno, M., August 2018. Aid worker security report: Figures at a glance. Humanitarian Outcomes. Accessed at <https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/publications/figures-glance-2018> on 12 October 2018.

⁹ Annual Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, 16 May 2018.

¹⁰ UN FTS, Somalia 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan. Accessed at <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/644/clusters> on 25 October 2018.

¹¹ UN FTS, Democratic Republic of Congo 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan. Accessed at <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/652/clusters> on 25 October 2018.

¹² UN FTS, Republic of South Sudan 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan. Accessed at <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/646/clusters> on 25 October 2018.

Opportunities for Canadian action

Canada has demonstrated leadership in stepping up to protect children from being recruited and used by armed forces and armed groups through the launch of the [Vancouver Principles](#), and to help ensure access to quality education in conflict and crisis, particularly for girls, through the G7 [Charlevoix Declaration on Quality Education for Girls, Adolescent Girls and Women in Developing Countries](#) (Charlevoix Declaration). These efforts build on the Government of Canada's commitment to protect education from attack, expressed through Canada's endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration¹³.

Likewise, Canada has demonstrated leadership in stepping up to protect women and women human rights defenders through its feminist foreign policy, and through critical initiatives like the Elsie Initiative. These interventions have been welcome and must include young women and adolescent girls, who often face double discrimination and exclusion as a result of their gender and age. Canada's current efforts to update its guidelines on protecting human rights defenders is welcome, and should include recognition and protection of children as human rights defenders, including through ensuring their protection in conflict and crisis.

Building on these initiatives and on Canada's longstanding role chairing the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, Canada should ensure that in its interventions in all three countries, children's protection is prioritized, including but not limited to protection from the six grave violations against children in conflict. This includes:

- prioritizing accountability for crimes committed against children, including by working to ensure ongoing and future investigations into rights violations include child-specific as well as gender-specific expertise, such as through deployments of specialist investigators; contributing to the development of tools and training for investigators to develop appropriate and relevant capacity in safely and thoroughly investigating crimes committed in relation to children; and supporting UN efforts to verify documented crimes committed against children, allowing perpetrating parties to be listed in official reports;
- ensuring child protection is adequately funded in humanitarian responses, peace operations, post-conflict reconstruction efforts, and in fragile contexts, through systematic inclusion of gender sensitive child protection in implementation of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP);
- supporting monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children, including through:
 - advocating for the inclusion of sufficient Child Protection Advisor (CPAs) posts when budgets are negotiated for MONUSCO, UNMISS, UNSOM (alongside similar advocacy on other UN missions), recognizing critical role CPAs play in documenting, reporting and verifying violations, and in developing and following up implementation of UN Action plans with parties to conflict listed in the Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict on the basis of credible reporting of violations. This should not be at the expense of funding for dedicated and trained gender and Women Protection Advisors, who must also receive adequate funding within these and other missions;

¹³ Global Affairs Canada, 21 February 2017. "Canada endorses Safe Schools Declaration." Accessed at https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/02/canada_endorses_safeschoolsdeclaration.html on 25 October 2018.

- ensuring sufficient budget is allocated to the work of trained, dedicated Child Protection Officers with UNICEF in these and other countries, recognizing the important role CPOs play in documenting, reporting and verifying violations;
 - supporting capacity building efforts of expert civil society organizations to train relevant child protection and child rights actors in these countries on contributing to the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), particularly where capacity within UN missions and agencies does not permit for adequate reporting or where UN access to certain areas may be limited;
 - continuing to voice support for the UN-led MRM and the Secretary-General to ensure credible and accurate listing of perpetrators in the annexes to his annual reports on children and armed conflict based on credible, UN-verified data; and
 - ensuring that child protection expertise within UN missions and UN agencies tasked with reporting and verifying grave violations, are using gender-sensitive approaches to monitoring and verify these violations, and that civil society partners conducting training on the MRM are consistently incorporating gender-sensitive approaches into training
- encouraging endorsement of the Vancouver Principles by all three countries; endorsement of the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles) by South Sudan; and implementation of the commitments under the Paris Principles by Somalia and the DRC. This should include further progressing Canada's own implementation of commitments made under the Vancouver Principles and Paris Principles, allowing Canada to act as a role model in its implementation of policy commitments made
 - encouraging full and consistent implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict (Guidelines), by all three countries, with a view to decreasing the alarming level of attacks on schools, teachers and students, particularly in the DRC which had 486 attacks on schools verified out of a total of 1,000 reported attacks on schools and hospitals (noting not all were able to be verified to the standard required)¹⁴. This should include prioritizing Canada's full implementation of the Guidelines, allowing Canada to act as a role model in this regard.

Recognizing the acute challenges in humanitarian access in these contexts, the Government of Canada should use its available diplomatic assets to protect and promote humanitarian access, including through:

- contributing to collective action by humanitarian community to overcome both systemic and localized access issues in these countries;
- partnering with trusted organizations with rich experience in high-risk locations, and with robust risk mitigation and management capacity,
- seeking to further build risk management capacity among both local and Canadian partners operating in these countries; and

¹⁴ Annual Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, 16 May 2018.

- liaising with national authorities in countries of concern to secure access for UN child protection experts to enter affected areas in countries of concern in order to document and verify violations to have a comprehensive picture of reality on the ground for the UN Security Council.

Within its international assistance efforts, the Government of Canada should increase current levels of international assistance to Somalia, South Sudan and the DRC. This funding should include:

- Multi-year funding dispersed through responsive mechanisms that allow for multiple humanitarian responses within one country (such as Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, East Kasai and West Kasai, within the DRC); as well as flexible funding to allow for changing contexts and evolving needs, including the specific needs of children; and funding that addresses the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, including considering implications on ways of working across different branches of Global Affairs Canada;
- Development funding in countries with chronic crises, including Somalia which does not currently have a development portfolio. This would help address chronic issues that require multi-year solutions, and address elements of fragility that may lie outside traditional humanitarian action. This should include initiatives that allow for longer-term education and protection needs of children, such as the welcome funding commitment that accompanied the Charlevoix Declaration.
- Funding both the mainstreaming of child protection into all relevant interventions in relation to conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict contexts within these countries, as well as targeted and sustainable child protection interventions including but not limited to gender-sensitive mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) for girls and boys impacted by conflict, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2427¹⁵.
- Funding for Canadian partners that understand the Government of Canada's priorities within international assistance, have capacity to design and implement quality programs that meet Canada's full ambitions including those outlined in the FIAP, and have deep contextual knowledge and local capacity to program in these countries.

Recognizing in particular the high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against girls and boys in these contexts, the Government of Canada should prioritize age-appropriate gender-transformative programming as part of its humanitarian, fragility and development funding, in accordance with the FIAP. This should include:

- funding dedicated efforts to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, including gender-sensitive and/or gender-transformative and age-sensitive approaches to mental health needs of girls and boys affected by SGBV.
- providing life-saving health and nutrition services, including comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and maternal, newborn, adolescent and child health and nutrition, including for child and youth survivors of grave violations and for children born of rape

¹⁵ United Nations Security Council, 9 July 2018. UNSC Resolution 2427 on Children and Armed Conflict. Accessed at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2427> on 24 October 2018.

- As with all areas of assistance, ensuring partners have the capacity to systematically consult women and girls, men and boys in program design, implementation, and monitoring. This must include effective accountability mechanisms to ensure programs implemented remain responsive to need and to emerging or ongoing concerns of the communities in which they operate.
- Fully developing the systems and capacity required within Global Affairs Canada to fulfill Canada's ambition of human-rights based and feminist approaches to international assistance, including training on child-rights based approaches to international assistance.

As with other crises Canada responds to, the Government of Canada should commit to ensure that the views of crisis affected girls and boys are consistently taken into account at every stage of planning, response, recovery and reconstruction, including throughout the conflict cycle; and that these views and needs expressed are prioritized at every intervention and in every strategy relating to conflict prevention, response and recovery, including peacebuilding and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) efforts, as recommended in UN Security Council Resolution 2427.

In implementing the FIAP, ensure a consistent focus on sustainable opportunities for age-and-gender-sensitive reintegration and rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict, including in Somalia, South Sudan and the DRC. In line with UN Security Council Resolution 2427, this should include access to education, health, and child protection including psychosocial support interventions, as well as community engagement to help prevent stigmatization of children returning to their communities.

About Save the Children

Save the Children Canada is a member of the global Save the Children network, consisting of 30 member organizations that operate programs, advocate for children's rights, and raise funds for our work domestically and internationally. The members of this network join together as a federation to pool resources, establish common positions on issues, jointly advocate for children's rights, and strengthen our capacities to carry out life-saving and sustainable projects at scale.

Save the Children International is the world's leading independent organization for children. Operating in 120 countries, we strive to give children an environment in which their human rights and needs are respected and protected, so they can realize their fullest potential. To achieve this, our program and policy efforts focus on child rights and protection, health and nutrition, clean water, education, sustainable livelihoods, emergency relief and survival.