

Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict
Briefing Under the Arria Formula to the United Nations Security Council
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Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom for inviting me here today to represent the International Save the Children Alliance in this important discussion. Save the Children is a global network of 27 independent Save the Children organizations working to ensure the well-being and protection of children in more than 110 countries.

I would like to start by seconding and strongly supporting the remarks of my colleague from Oxfam. Since 1990 over two million children have died as a direct result of armed conflict. At least 6 million children have been permanently disabled or seriously injured and more than one million have been orphaned or separated from their families.

Despite progress that has been made, signaled by the adoption of several Security Council Resolutions on the protection of children, there is evidence that overall humanitarian response efforts too often remain blind to the **specific needs** of children, as we talk about the protection of civilians. The Security Council can play an important role in highlighting these particular gaps and the specific need for greater action in the field. I will conclude my presentation with some specific recommendations for how this can be done. But first, I will share with you some of my experience in protecting children from the effects of armed conflicts over the last ten years and particularly my experience from Liberia, my homeland.

My personal experience and work with Save the Children have brought me face to face with some of the harshest realities of the impact of armed conflict on children and communities. Not only have I been a refugee and internally displaced myself, but also I have seen and worked with girls and boys separated and torn from families and communities, recruited and misused in fighting forces, girls turned into mothers, abducted and used as sex slaves. In 2003, in Monrovia, the image of a five year old girl whose right hand was blown away by shells still haunts me. I was 17 in high school when Liberia's war started. Had my community not given priority to education I would have ended up a school drop out and into one of the many armed groups. There are many examples of stories of real children and real communities that would not have been told, had timely action been taken to protect innocent civilians caught in that conflict. In Liberia, things are turning around now, but it still represents a failing that was characterized by international inaction in the face of civilian suffering in conflict.

There are two things I would like to draw upon from these experiences:

First, the importance of the responsibility to protect: The best interest of children as enshrined in the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child should supersede all other considerations. Direct timely action should be taken to end violence against children and communities caught in armed conflict.

Secondly, there is a protective nature of education. Children caught up in conflict should not have to wait for the end of conflict to fulfil their right to education. Resources and space should be provided within our emergency responses for

education of boys and girls – education that is relevant to prevailing realities; education that will provide an alternative and hope.

Recommendations:

Incorporate Children’s Protection into Systems/Structures: Children’s protection cannot be seen as a separate issue divorced from protection of the broader community of which they form such a significant part.

We recommend that all Peacekeeping Mandates must include

- specific provisions to protect and assist children;
- International, regional and national security forces should not only be trained in child protection, but be accountable for their success in protecting children under this mandate.
- Child Protection Advisors should be part of every UN mission.

Save the Children is Concerned about the Sexual and Gender based Violence Risks that Occur in Conflict

Impunity must be ended through increased and effective national and international prosecution for gender-based violence against children perpetrated by both local and regional armed actors, peacekeepers and civilian staff. Furthermore, UN Security Council Members must lead by example by taking a zero tolerance approach and ensuring that all staff, both military and civilian, working in UN operations, are held accountable for gender-based violence and exploitation, and violators are referred to criminal courts for prosecution. Accountability needs to follow staff and peacekeepers home.

Save the Children sees the Peacebuilding Commission and UN Reforms as important future tools for protection

The Peacebuilding Commission must take an holistic approach to peacebuilding to better protect civilians from recurrent armed conflict and should include local adults and children in the design of civil society peacebuilding initiatives. The shortfall in funding for the reintegration of children in DDR processes must be addressed in a way that benefits whole communities instead of simply individuals. You may be surprised to learn that projects specifically targeted towards children are often not as well funded as general assistance. On average donors have provided 73% of funding requested for all projects in the CAP, but only 60% of funding requested for children’s projects over the same period of time.¹ Initiatives to improve funding consistency across emergencies, such as the UN Central Emergency Response Fund, and the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, will be meaningless unless they are, at their core, set up to be responsive to children’s needs in conflict.

Education in armed conflict:

Finally, and this is my most urgent point, despite the fact that in emergency after emergency, children and their families prioritise restarting of schools as an emergency and crisis response priority - and as one of the surest ways of protecting children now and in the future - and despite the fact that, finally, emergency education is being taken seriously by those in touch with children and communities, it is still consistently undervalued as a protection mechanism and tool. We strongly believe in the protective elements in education and skills training, both to women and children,

¹ See Save the Children Alliance Policy Brief on Child Protection in Emergencies

having seen for ourselves its protective, peace-building and developmental benefits. This is a vital part of prevention and will provide for continued protection into the future.

A child who receives quality education regains a sense of normalcy and hope. The provision of education in conflict protects children against the risks of recruitment and sexual exploitation; it teaches life skills such as land mine awareness and knowledge of how to protect oneself from HIV/AIDS. And it gives the community hope and a focus on rebuilding.

We seek your endorsement of the protective benefits of education and stress the importance of this underutilized tool for protection, peacebuilding and for breaking the vicious cycle of armed conflict.

I thank you, Mr. President.