

Statement by the Eminent Persons Group in Response to the Secretary-General's 2021 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict

June 22, 2021

As international child rights experts, we are deeply troubled that Secretary-General António Guterres' [2021 list of perpetrators](#) of violations against children in armed conflict has failed again to accurately reflect the very evidence documented by the United Nations. The new list continues a disturbing pattern where some parties are listed for egregious violations, while others – particularly government forces – are not.

In particular, we are gravely concerned that the Secretary-General has failed to list Israeli security forces, despite over 6,400 child casualties since 2015 and at least 302 in 2020; the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition, despite its responsibility for at least 194 child casualties in Yemen in 2020; and other forces responsible for a troubling number of violations, including dissident groups of the FARC-EP in Colombia for recruitment and use of children; Afghan and Congolese government forces for attacks on schools and hospitals; and US forces in Afghanistan and Congolese government forces for child casualties.

At the same time, we acknowledge the limited progress made to hold perpetrators in other conflicts accountable for abuses against children; namely, the listing of Somali government forces for rape and other forms of sexual violence against children and the Afghan National Army for killing and maiming children. We also welcome the re-listing of the Tatmadaw for recruitment and use of children in Myanmar – a necessary measure to correct the premature delisting of the Myanmar security forces for this violation last year.

As an Eminent Persons Group convened by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, we recently conducted a careful [review](#) of the annual list of perpetrators compared to the evidence of violations documented in the Secretary-General's own reports from 2010 to 2020 (reports documenting violations between 2009-2019). We identified alarming inconsistencies and dozens of cases in which armed forces or groups responsible for repeated and serious violations against children in war were omitted or prematurely removed from the annual list of perpetrators.

Our report urged the Secretary-General to hold all perpetrators of grave violations of children's rights to the same standard regardless of whether they are government security forces, a coalition of governments, armed non-state actors, or peacekeepers, in line with Security Council Resolution 1379 and subsequent resolutions.

The annual list requested by the Security Council is the lynchpin of UN accountability for violations against children. Listing of parties has served as an important and effective tool for the protection of children in armed conflict, as it provides the foundation for UN dialogue, the negotiation of action plans to end violations, and targeted measures against parties that fail to act to protect children. It is essential that this list be restored as credible, objective, and evidence-based to continue to serve as the powerful tool mandated by the Security Council to end grave violations against children in war.

Employing double standards in how the UN treats those responsible for egregious violations against children will only put children further at risk. For example, after Myanmar's armed forces, the Tatmadaw, was de-listed for recruitment and use of children, the number of cases of child recruitment and use surged from 205 in 2019, to 726 in 2020. Unequal treatment incentivizes violators to play politics, rather than undertaking good faith efforts to end grave violations of children's rights. We must hold parties accountable based on the facts of their conduct, not their political influence.

We urge the Security Council and other Member States to:

- Insist, in both public and private communications, that the Secretary General's annual list accurately reflects the UN's own evidence of violations;
- Call on the Secretary-General to immediately issue an amended report adding Israeli security forces and the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition to its annexes;
- Use appropriate legal, political, diplomatic, financial, and material measures to promote warring parties' compliance with international standards for the protection of children in armed conflict;
- Support the UN's children and armed conflict agenda, including the capacity of its Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM).

On behalf of the Eminent Persons Group:

Benyam Dawit Mezmur, former special rapporteur on children and armed conflict for the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and law professor at the University of the Western Cape

Allan Rock, former permanent representative of Canada to the UN and former chair of the UN "Group of Friends" on children and armed conflict

Yanghee Lee, former chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and former UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar