



Every year, the United Nations reports an increase in the number of grave violations committed against children in armed conflict. According to the UN Secretary-General's [latest annual report on the situation of children in armed conflict](#), over 21,000 grave violations of children's rights have been verified by the United Nations from January to December 2017, an unacceptable increase from previous years (15,500 in 2016). In response, the UN decided to launch an #ACTtoProtect Children affected by armed conflict campaign in partnership with the European Union. The international community has identified the six most common grave violations against children in times of war: the recruitment and use of children directly in armed conflict, the killing or maiming of children, sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and hospitals, child abduction and denial of humanitarian access.

To launch the #ACTtoProtect campaign, the European Parliament's Coordinator on Children's Rights Anna Maria Corazza Bildt and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), Ms. Virginia Gamba, raised the importance of a comprehensive approach to these issues and the importance for the European Union and the UN to join forces to end violence against children. Over the next three years, the campaign aims to strengthen collaboration between the United Nations, civil society and the international community to support actions to end and prevent grave violations against children in conflict.

Several speakers took part in the debate on April 10, including Ms Setti (Commission Coordinator for the Rights of the Child), Ms Ragher (Head of Division of the European External Action Service), Ms Blanchet (UNICEF EU Director and Representative) and Ms Bundegaard (Save the Children EU Director and Representative). In addition, Ms Alhibrahim, a survivor of the Syrian conflict and a strong advocate for the protection of children, shared her story: “They have lost their joy, their innocence, their childhood has been stolen and they have invisible scars that they will keep for the rest of their lives”.

The conference-debate emphasised the importance of developing action plans and policies according to the reality on the ground. Indeed, the nature and rules governing conflicts have changed; conflicts are lasting longer and increasingly targeting children, while places considered safe (hospitals, schools) are increasingly vulnerable to attacks. The campaign also underlines the importance of acting not only during conflicts but also preventively, including the provision of psychological follow-up regarding the trauma experienced by the child.

To conclude, Ms Corazza Bildt and Ms Gamba stressed the importance of talking about children but above all talking with children and raising their voices to raise awareness. The aim is to fully involve children in reviews. Finally, the actions and policies put in place these last years to protect children affected by conflict are clearly not enough, according to Ms Gamba, hence the importance of launching this campaign and the need for a strong partnership with the EU and its institutions. “European Institutions have consistently put the issue of children and armed conflict high on their agenda and this additional commitment is crucial for the protection of children and for the mandate I represent. (...) European Institutions are key partners in several country situations on my agenda and their commitment to protecting civilians, their expertise and resources are multiplying UN efforts to end and prevent all grave violations from affecting children” said Ms Gamba.

For more information:

- <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>
- <https://undocs.org/s/2018/465>

