

43^o session of the Human Rights Council

High level mainstreaming panel: Thirty years of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: challenges and opportunities.

24 February 2020

Statement of the Group of Friends on CAAC

Delivered by Hon. Michael Falzon, Minister for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity of the Republic of Malta, on behalf of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict

Ms. President,

It is my pleasure to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict in Geneva, comprised of 26 States¹ and co-chaired by Belgium and Uruguay.

We welcome the celebration of this panel on the context of the 30^o anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and we share the need of advancing the mainstreaming of children's rights within the whole UN system. Cross-pillar collaboration is particularly important to implement the Convention successfully. A child rights-based approach across the UN system is essential to achieve the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda and to ensure that no girl or boy is left behind.

2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, adopted by the General Assembly on 25 May 2000 with the view to protect children from recruitment and use in hostilities. On this occasion, we consider fundamental to reaffirm and strengthen the global commitment to the protection of the security and the rights of children during armed conflicts.

In 2020, and despite all our joint efforts, we regret that 415 million children worldwide are living in a conflict zone, which subjects them to multiple forms of intersectional risks and vulnerabilities, endangering the enjoyment of their human rights.

Indeed, our group remains deeply concerned about the scale and severity of the grave human rights violations and abuses committed against children in the context of armed conflicts, in particular their killing and maiming, the recruitment and use of children by parties to conflict, all forms of sexual violence committed against children, denial of humanitarian access and the abduction of children by armed groups.

We also condemn all attacks on schools and hospitals in violation of international humanitarian law and their unlawful use for military purposes, and we call all parties to respect their sanctity as safe spaces and to refrain from any action that could endangered children rights to access to education and health. We are particularly concerned on the

¹The Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict includes the following States: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Guatemala, Hungary, Italy, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, Malta, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, France, United Kingdom, Uruguay.

repercussion of attacks against schools, which can be long lasting, risking the future of entire generations.

Our Group of Friends also takes advantage of this opportunity to call on States to take further steps to bring perpetrators of all violations of international law, including the six grave violations as defined in the Children and Armed Conflict mandate by the Security Council, to justice. We also urge States to bear in mind that in armed conflicts, children should be regarded primarily as victims and treated as such, to focus on rehabilitation and reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups, and to ensure that international juvenile justice standards and due process are applied to any criminal proceedings involving a child allegedly or actually associated with armed groups. In addition, States should use children detention only as a last resort.

We commend the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, recognizing the fundamental role of the guidance of its mandate to both the States and the UN System.

We renew our unwavering support to the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, emphasizing its absolute necessity in the current context and we commend the hard and reliable work carried out each year by the UN Country Task Forces to collect information on grave violations, in spite of difficult working conditions on the ground, as well as the activities carried out by Civil Society engaged in that field.

In that regard, we would like to ask the panelists what further steps can be taken to make full use of national and international criminal mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable in regard to child victims?

Thank you.