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***High-Level Side-Event***

**Ending and Preventing Child Recruitment: The Children and Armed Conflict Mandate and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict**

***14 March 2022, at 1.30 – 3.00 pm (CET), via Webex***

1. **Concept/Event**

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate and the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Committee on the Rights of the Child are organizing in the margins of the 49th Session of the Human Rights Council a High-Level side-event.

The event will be an opportunity to highlight the progress achieved over the past two decades to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by parties to conflict, but also to look forward and find innovative ways to address current challenges that arise from the evolving character of conflicts, and their disproportionate impact on children.

1. **Background and rationale**

The mandate of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was established by the UN General Assembly in December 1996 (A/RES/51/77) to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict, raise awareness, promote the collection of information about the plight of children affected by war and enhance international cooperation to ensure their rights are fulfilled.

The entry into force on 12 February 2002 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict marked a significant advance in the prohibition of the recruitment of children into armed forces and groups and their participation in hostilities. At present, [172 countries have ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-11-b&chapter=4&clang=_en). It is critical to ensure that all Member States become State parties and that those who are already comply with their obligations under the Optional Protocol and implement its provisions, including by submitting reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

With grave violations against children on the rise, and especially the recruitment and use of children by parties to conflict being the highest verified violation with 8,521 cases in 2020 only, the Optional Protocol as well as the tools created by the children and armed conflict mandate are critical, not only to improve the protection of boys and girls affected by armed conflict but also to break cycles of violence, in a collective effort to reach sustainable peace. The strengthening of prevention and reintegration, two key elements of the Optional Protocol are at the core of the children and armed conflict mandate. Upholding children’s rights and ensuring their future also means moving from legal frameworks towards concrete measures, and this requires a collective effort which must include children’s voices and participation.

1. **Objectives**

The event will allow participants to discuss how, building on past successes, the children and armed conflict mandate and the Optional Protocol can further contribute to the protection of children, and in particular what measures can be put in place to not only end the phenomenon of child recruitment and use by parties to conflict but to also prevent it. It will be an opportunity to reinforce partnerships and share best practices and lessons learned. The event will include concrete stories from the field, and it will be an opportunity to encourage all Member States to become State parties to the Optional Protocol and those who are already to comply with their obligations thereunder and implement its provisions.

1. **Format/Program**

This virtual event will be held in English via Webex. Member States, UN partners, civil society representatives and others who wish to take the floor in the Q and A part are invited to indicate so in the [registration form](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=2zWeD09UYE-9zF6kFubccONera9KRR1CoSnQ5f1_KeJURExWU1YyRE0yMFk0UlZVWVFLVUw4NUM5MC4u) or, if already registered, by contacting Anne Schintgen ([schintgen@un.org](mailto:schintgen@un.org)) by 7 March 2022. Interventions from the floor are limited to 2 minutes.

* Opening remarks by Norway
* Panel interventions
* Q&A Session
* Closing remarks by Belgium

This event will be moderated byMs.Brigid Kennedy PFISTER, Senior Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF.

1. **Speakers and Panellists**

* Ms. Tine MØRCH SMITH, Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations in Geneva;
* Ms. Virginia GAMBA, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict;
* Ms. Mikiko OTANI, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child;
* Hon. Robert Doya NANIMA, Member of the Committee, Special Rapporteur on Children and Armed Conflict, African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC);
* Salma BEN AISSA, Humanitarian Access Advisor in the Central African Republic, The Frontline project/EHAU, International Rescue Committee (IRC);
* Affected child/youth;
* Mr. Marc PECSTEEN DE BUYTSWERVE, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations in Geneva.