

Security Council, UNAMA condemn attack near Afghanistan's Supreme Court

8 February 2017 – The Security Council and the United Nations political mission in Afghanistan have joined Secretary-General António Guterres in condemning the deadly attack outside of the Supreme Court in Kabul.

This attack is nothing short of an atrocity. Those responsible for planning and carrying out this horrendous act must be brought to justice, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, said in a statement issued earlier today.

Mr. Yamamoto, who is the head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), noted that the attack fits a pattern of violence against judicial authorities in recent years. Since 2015, UNAMA documented at least 74 attacks, which killed 89 people and injured 214 others.

The Mission reminds all parties that judges and staff of civilian courts including the Supreme Court are civilians, the statement said. Attacks intentionally targeting civilians are tantamount to war crimes.

At least 20 civilians, mostly female employees of the Supreme Court, were killed yesterday when a suicide attacker detonated a device outside the Court. No person or group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

Calling the killings heinous and cowardly, the Council members late last night reiterated their serious concern at the threats posed by groups such as the Taliban, Al-Qaida, and the Islamic State (ISIL), on the local population, National Defence and Security Forces and the international presence in Afghanistan.

They also stressed that no violent or terrorist acts can reverse the Afghan-led process along the path towards peace, democracy and stability in Afghanistan, which is supported by the people and the Government of Afghanistan and by the international community.

PHOTO FEATURE: Twenty years of protecting children affected by conflict

7 February 2017 – Following an era in which graphic images of child soldiers

had become commonplace in the media, the United Nations General Assembly created a mandate dedicated to better protect children affected by armed conflict.

That was twenty years ago in December.

Leila Zerrougui recalls that in 2012, when she became the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, she inherited a mandate with a strong legal framework and mechanisms to generate positive change for these children.

The following story is based on her insights.



Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui with the Sudan Government technical committee in charge of implementing the Action Plan to end the use of children in national security forces, #ChildrenNotSoldiers. Photo: UN Photo: Stephanie Tremblay

In March 2014, Ms. Zerrougui and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign to turn the page on the recruitment and use of children by national security forces in conflict situations.

The campaign has helped to reach a global consensus among Member States that children should not be recruited and used in conflict, and that they should be protected from all grave violations.



Child soldiers guard a military base in the Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Photo: UNICEF LeMoyne

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a country that had become emblematic for its army of "kadogo," or child soldiers, the Government has taken tough action towards making its armed forces child-free, highlights Ms. Zerrougui.

The Government has also become a dedicated partner to fight the massive recruitment of child soldiers by dozens of armed groups that are active in the restive east of the country.

Recently, a DRC army general said that they have changed how they look at children and that they are no longer being recruited.



Recruited at age 13, this 15-years-old boy was recently released from an armed group in South Sudan. UNICEF estimates that 17,000 children have been recruited in the country since 2013.

Photo: UNICEF/ Rich

Over the past twenty years, crucial work to end the use of child soldiers has helped to lay the foundation to address other grave violations, such as curbing sexual violence in conflict.

There is also a strong international mobilization to protect schools and hospitals, including through preventing their military use. Additionally, children's special protection needs are increasingly being included in peace processes.



Many children who once worked for armed groups need reintegration help, according to children's rights NGOs. Photo: Naresh Newar/IRIN

In Colombia for example, this has led to an agreement between the parties to release all children associated with the FARC-EP and to provide them with specialized services to facilitate their return to a normal life in their communities.

According to Ms. Zerrougui, this agreement also illustrates how the protection of children, the universal desire to build a better future for boys and girls, can truly serve as an entry point to negotiate peace.



Displaced women and men in Chad celebrate 'circumcision' days for girls by dancing together. During that time, several 11-years-olds were mutilated. Photo: UNHCR/ Hélène Caux

In spite of the undeniable progress over the past twenty years, the UN Special Representative notes, daunting challenges remain. In countries like Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia and Iraq children face a variety of threats.

Dangers, such as violent extremism, mass detention, attacks on schools and indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in civilian neighborhoods are just a few of the perils faced each day.

Entering the third decade of this mandate, there are three areas of action that can directly impact the lives of thousands of children.



Taung Paw camp in Myebon, Myanmar, is cut off from any access to the outside world. Photo: UNOCHA/ David Ohana

Denying humanitarian access to civilians trapped in or displaced by conflict has increasingly become a tactic of war. It is imperative to combat this by strengthening the respect for international law, underscores Ms. Zerrougui.

The international community must collectively resolve to act in defense of

international humanitarian and human rights law.



Girls collect water at a pump station in the Dar es Salam camp in Chad. On 25 August 2016, UNICEF said more than 1.4 million Nigerian children had been uprooted by attacks by the terrorist group, Boko Haram. Credits: UNICEF/Sylvain Cherkaoui

The vast majority of parties responsible for grave violations against children are non-State actors. As the 2016 annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict lists 51 out of 59 parties to conflict as non-State armed groups, it is essential to exploit new opportunities to engage with these players.

According to the Special Representative, commanders of non-State armed groups are beginning to realize the legal and political risks associated with recruiting boys and girls, many of whom have reached out to her office and other UN entities for assistance to end the practice.



As part of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDR) process, former rebels in Liberia wait to exchange their weapons for cash. They will also attend training for reinsertion into civilian life. Photo: UNHCR/ H. Caux

Once a child soldier is released, the biggest challenge is to provide him or her with a new life. The trauma and stigma they carry often make it difficult for them to return to their communities and to begin or resume their education.

Although psychosocial assistance and help for them to reclaim their lives through educational and vocational opportunities are vital, ensuring sufficient resources and expertise for these services remains a challenge in every country, according to Ms. Zerrougui.

These children should be treated as victims and not security threats.



Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui (Centre) during a visit to Yola, Nigeria. Photo: UN Photo/ Andrew Esiebo

In the past two decades, the action generated by the General Assembly's mandate has represented a beacon of hope for millions of children.

Since 2000, more than 115,000 child soldiers have been released.

But more must be done, notes Ms. Zerrougui, including the improvement of how the international community works together. This will have a decisive impact

for the future of boys and girls who cannot wait any longer for the protection they have been promised.

Haitian Government, UN and partners launch two-year plan aimed at saving lives, building resilience

7 February 2017 – The United Nations together with relief organizations in Haiti have launched a two-year, \$291 million response plan with the Government to reach more than 2.4 million people across the island that was struck by a devastating hurricane last October.

With more than 98 per cent of Haitians exposed to two or more types of disasters, and over half of its population living in poverty, Hurricane Matthew has once more demonstrated Haiti's weakened ability to cope, recover and adapt to shocks from natural disasters,” noted Mourad Wahba, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Haiti, in the plan's foreword.

The two-year Haiti Humanitarian Response Plan, launched yesterday, is built on lessons learnt that the island that the transition from a relief-focused type of operation – like one that follows a disaster like an the earthquake – to a longer-term development approach in fragile countries should be seen as a convergence process rather than sequential since the humanitarian and development needs occur simultaneously.

According to estimates undertaken by the Humanitarian Country Team, some 2.7 million Haitians will require humanitarian, protection or early recovery assistance in 2017, of which 2.4 million will be targeted countrywide. The October hurricane severely exasperated pre-existing humanitarian, socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities and disparities.

Under the plan, humanitarian interventions with a focus on improving access to lifesaving services to those affected by Hurricane Matthew, cholera, and other diseases, as well as on protecting the most vulnerable will be scaled up.

At the same time, actions to promote resilience and access to durable solutions will be implemented, targeting those displaced due to the 2010 earthquake, Hurricane Matthew, as well as those repatriated or voluntarily returned from neighbouring Dominican Republic.

Also, the Humanitarian Country Team will continue to support Government-led efforts to strengthen disaster preparedness and response at the national and decentralized levels.

The specific objectives include:

- Strengthening affected population's resilience through timely life-saving assistance, improved access to basic services and immediate livelihood restoration;
- Ensuring a rapid and effective response to cholera outbreaks and other waterborne diseases;
- Ensuring protection and promotion of the achievement of durable solutions for persons coming back from the Dominican Republic, those displaced still living in camps and people affected by Hurricane Matthew; and
- Strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus and supporting local emergency preparedness and response capacity.

Afghanistan: UN condemns deadly suicide attack in Kabul near Supreme Court

7 February 2017 – The United Nations condemned today's suicide attack outside the Supreme Court complex in the Afghan capital, Kabul, and stressed that those behind the deadly bombing must be held to account.

"We express our condolences to the families of the victims and convey our solidarity to the Government and people of Afghanistan," said a statement issued by his spokesperson.

According to media reports, at least 20 people were killed and more than 40 were reportedly injured in the suicide bombing, which took place outside the Afghan Supreme Court complex.

"Indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including employees of the judicial institutions, are violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and cannot be justified," said the statement, adding: "Those behind today's bombing and other such despicable acts must face justice."

INTERVIEW: UN marks 20 years of work to improve protection of children

affected by conflict

7 February 2017 – The senior United Nations advocate for children caught up in conflict is reaching out to parents, elders, and the entire international community to keep children away from armies and militias – a UN role that over the past two decades has helped more than 115,000 child soldiers regain their youth.

“My role is to reach them, to try to convince them that they are the ones who can make a difference on the ground,” the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, told *UN News* on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of her office’s mandate.

Ms. Zerrougui noted that as a UN envoy, she could not advance the mandate without the support of the 193-member UN General Assembly, the Security Council, and regional organizations.

Just as important, however, has been the role of civil society actors, who are often on the frontlines of a conflict, working to aid communities and confronting the same difficulties.

“We can support initiatives, we can propose ideas, we can help, we can bring a voice, but we cannot solve the problem without those who are directly involved,” said Ms. Zerrougui. “Member States, civil society, fighting parties, and of course, those who can make a difference because they are supporting or they have the leverage.”

VIDEO: Marking #20YearsForChildren in Armed Conflict, UN envoy Leila Zerrougui underscores the importance of helping children affected by armed conflict. Credit: UN News

The Office of the Special Representative works to eliminate six grave violations: recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming of children, sexual violence against children, attacks on school and hospitals, abduction of children, and denial of humanitarian access.

Children laying down their guns

The greatest achievement of working on this mandate for the past 20 years is that “everyone is aware of the plight of children in armed conflict,” Ms. Zerrougui said.

Grave violations against children

- Recruitment and use of children
- Killing and maiming
- Rape and sexual violence in conflict
- Attacks on schools and hospitals

- Abduction of children
- Denial of humanitarian access

“Because people are aware that opened doors then to strengthen the protection, to prevent the violation, to put in place tools, mechanisms, a legal framework,” she noted. “That allowed us today to say, for example, that we have consensus that children should not be recruited, should not be used in conflict, particularly by government forces. And where we have this consensus, we have less and less Governments that use children.”

In fact, there are seven countries currently listed in the Secretary-General’s latest report that use child soldiers – Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen. Some militias and armed groups in those countries are also listed, as are some in the Central African Republic, Colombia, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, and Syria.



Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui in South Sudan meeting with children affected by the 2014 conflict. Photo: Office for Children and Armed Conflict/Stephanie Tremblay

Ms. Zerrougui’s office, in cooperation with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and other partners, is working with the Governments of those countries to end the practice. They are among the 27 Governments and non-State actors that have signed action plans with the UN to end recruitment.

In the DRC, where the recruitment of child soldiers known as “kadogo” is endemic, the Government has taken “robust action and is well on its way to making its armed forces child-free,” according to the Office.

“We have changed how we look at children. We don’t recruit them anymore, it’s in our blood. The change is irreversible,” an army general recently told the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC (MONUSCO).

In 2014, the Office and UNICEF launched the Children, Not Soldiers” campaign , which aims to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers by Government armies. Since 2000, the work of the Office and partners has led to the release of more than 115,000 child soldiers.

In addition to freeing child soldiers and ending their recruitment, the Office of the Special Representative has made progress in tackling the use of schools by the military, and stopping attacks on schools and hospitals.



Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui (centre) in Khartoum, Sudan, for the signing of an Action Plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in the Sudanese armed forces. Photo: Office for Children and Armed Conflict/Stephanie Tremblay

Children with their own children

Progress has also been made on tackling conflict-related sexual violence, a topic that the Office works on alongside the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura.

“Girls are always affected by conflict in each and every context,” Ms. Zerrougui said, noting the use of girls as sex slaves, bush wives, and domestic servants.

Until Ms. Zerrougui’s mandate, girls were largely invisible in conflicts because unlike child soldiers, who are predominantly boys, they did not have guns, and because rape and pregnancy were reasons for their communities to stigmatize them.

“We try to speak to those on the ground who are involved to not forget this issue,” she said. “To ensure that these victims are not victimized twice. Because they were themselves victims as girls. And also because they end up dealing with children. The most heartbreaking thing is when you see a girl that is still a child with her own children.”