

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.

£4m investment in major expansion by Dyfed Steels will create and safeguard 200 jobs in Llanelli

Despite the current crisis affecting the steel industry, MD David Thomas who founded the Llanelli based business 41 years ago, is currently turning away a significant volume of business annually due to lack of capacity.

By adding further value to their products Mr Thomas has identified expansion opportunities and with £750,000 support from the Welsh Government the investment will be undertaken at its Llanelli site, as opposed to another of its sites in England.

Dyfed Steels plans to redevelop an existing property adjacent to their site in Llanelli into a new processing centre to increase capacity, capability and efficiencies and will invest nearly £3m in new equipment to support the growth of the business increasing throughput by 10,000-15,000 tonnes per year.

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“Dyfed Steels is an indigenous Welsh company of considerable importance to both the economy of Llanelli and West Wales. It is the company's 41st year of trading and in that time it has achieved considerable success without the assistance of the public sector. It is now operating in what is an extremely difficult climate for the steel industry and I am delighted the Welsh Government is supporting its investment to safeguard their Llanelli operation.

“This major investment by an indigenous business in a critically important industry will safeguard and create new high value jobs and help the company increase capacity and grow its market share in more profitable processed work.

“As a major customer for both Tata and Celsa steel their expansion will also have a beneficial knock on effect for the wider steel industry in Wales.”

MD David Thomas said:

“We are very grateful for the support shown by the Welsh Government, which during a time of great concern for the Steel Sector in the UK, their support became a necessity. Dyfed Steels Ltd needs to remain competitive in order to continue its leading presence within a challenging market. We will now continue to strive to ensure not only the future of the business but to encourage growth, safeguard jobs and create as many new staff opportunities as possible. We aim with this additional support to increase our production capacity, attract new business opportunities and to continue as a growing, established family business in West Wales.”

The business services more than 2000 customers across a range of sectors including agriculture, construction and engineering and offers a complete range of processing services from the simplest cut bar to high volume sophisticated processing of the highest specification.

It currently employs 270 people across 10 sites across the UK, of which 173 are employed at its head office and main processing and distribution centre in Llanelli. Its Welsh operations are in Port Talbot, Newport and Newtown.

[News story: City of Rotterdam and Primula Seaways report published](#)

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Collision between the pure car carrier City of Rotterdam and the ro-ro freight ferry Primula Seaways on the River Humber.

MAIB's report on the investigation of the collision between the pure car carrier City of Rotterdam and the ro-ro freight ferry Primula Seaways on the

River Humber, UK on 3 December 2015 is now published.

The report contains details of what happened and the subsequent actions taken:

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.

China to introduce review commission on cyber security

A commission will be established to deliberate important policies on cyber security and organize reviews, according to a document released by the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) on Tuesday.

The document, on the security of Internet products and services, has just been released for public opinion. The CAC will establish the commission with other authorities.

The document proposed that Internet products and services related to national security and the public interests should undergo a security review.

According to the CAC, reviews will focus on whether the products or services are secure and sufficiently managed, and on assessing risks of illegal control, disruption or interruption.

The reviews will also evaluate risks of providers using their products or services to illegally gather, store, process or make use of user information.

In addition, unfair competition, monopolization or any other functions that may damage users' interests will be reviewed, according to the CAC.

Any service or product that fails the review will be blacklisted, making them off limits to all Communist Party of China (CPC) organs, government departments, and key industries.

HIGHLIGHTING PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

The review is neither a legal practice nor an administrative one, said an

official with the CAC, but is merely supervision of important Internet products and services.

The review will not hinder foreign products from entering the Chinese market, but will only to boost confidence in such products and services, the official said. Authorities will treat Internet products and services from home and abroad equally.

Zuo Xiaodong, vice president of the China Information Security Research Institute, a government think tank, said the regulation means that while products and services that fail the review will be blacklisted, it does not mean that all Internet products and services purchased by CPC organs, government departments and key industries will be reviewed.

LAW-BASED INTERNET REGULATION

China has introduced a number of Internet laws and regulations and is home to about 700 million Internet users, the world's largest online population.

In December, the CAC released a cyberspace security strategy, guaranteeing cyberspace sovereignty and national security, protecting information infrastructure and promising action against cyber terror and crime.

In November, a cyber security law stipulated that the government would take measures to "monitor, defend and handle cyber security risks and threats originating from within the country or overseas sources, protecting key information infrastructure from attack, intrusion, disturbance and damage."

In July 2015, China's top legislature adopted a new national security law highlighting cyber security and demanding the establishment of a coordinated, efficient crisis management system.

The law covers a wide spectrum of areas including defense, finance, science and technology, culture and religion.