



MEETING BRIEF

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Protecting Children from Conflict and Strengthening Accountability of Armed Actors

On September 19th the UN Security Council called on member states to bring perpetrators of child rights violations to justice. To do so, Resolution 2068—adopted on the occasion of the annual Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict—emphasized the importance of national judicial systems and, where applicable, international mechanisms. This call to end impunity was one of the key conclusions of a roundtable discussion held at the International Peace Institute and co-organized with Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict on September 17th, just two days before the adoption of Resolution 2068.

The roundtable, held under the Chatham House rule of nonattribution, aimed to bridge the perspectives of New York-based global policymakers with those of Watchlist's grassroots partner organizations from Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Nepal. It focused on (1) how the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) established by Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005) has contributed to better protection of children from the effects of armed conflict and (2) ways to strengthen the accountability of armed actors who are violating children's rights.

The meeting produced four key messages for child protection actors and policymakers:

1. The MRM has been fundamentally important as a structuring framework for local organizations in the field. It allows for the implementation of action plans—concrete, time-bound commitments by parties to a conflict to halt violations of children's rights. But it also provides a strong framework for local NGOs to strengthen their capacities, document child rights violations in a consistent and systematic manner, and structure local advocacy work while amplifying local voices at the global level. This mechanism should be maintained, protected, and further strengthened to continue empowering local actors to better protect children.
2. Some serious shortcomings remain when it comes to addressing impunity and strengthening the accountability of armed actors. Member states, and primarily members of the UN Security Council, must be firmer on the question of accountability, as fighting impunity is necessary to ensure that violations will not recur. This implies strengthening existing tools (actions plans, local advocacy, and sanctions) to put an end to violations. As importantly, it also means assigning responsibility for such violations by reinforcing national judicial systems and, where necessary, international justice mechanisms.
3. Some experts pointed out that, while the MRM has been relatively successful in nurturing dialogue with governments about respecting children's rights, its record is more limited when it

comes to engaging nonstate armed groups. First, engaging with these groups is sometimes challenging—either because the groups are not willing to enter into a dialogue or because the national government concerned imposes restrictions that prevent negotiating action plans with these groups to end grave violations. One participant called for real alternatives to be devised when action plans are not possible due to a lack of dialogue with the parties to the conflict. Second, in today's conflicts, the distinction between armed groups and criminal groups is sometimes blurred. The MRM follows a strict interpretation of what type of armed actors should be monitored and/or listed in the “list of shame,” which has left some situations beyond the scrutiny of the Security Council. A more pragmatic analysis of the modus operandi of such groups and the real impact of their actions on children would ensure that all children receive equal levels of protection regardless of the “type” of group perpetrating violations against them.

4. Action plans, which are a central tool of the MRM, could benefit from more transparency. Understandably, this tool tends to be handled with confidentiality, and key local actors, including local NGOs who are members of MRM taskforces, may be excluded during the negotiation phase. But some transparency during negotiations would increase the inclusivity of the mechanism. After signing an action plan, wide publicity of the plan’s content would, some participants argued, help to hold perpetrators more accountable to their commitments by increasing scrutiny and pressure on them from the bottom-up.