Following a request of the Human Rights Council the UN Human Rights Office will submit a report on children’s rights to the 2021 global review of the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The report will address the situation for children in relation to the review theme: “*Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, that promotes the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: Building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.*”

**All interested organizations are invited to submit inputs on the status of children’s rights in relation to ‘*sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic*’, and relevant goals under review. Submitters are requested to address the most urgent challenges and noteworthy good practices in this regard.**

**Please send submissions to Gina Bergh: gbergh@ohchr.org by the deadline of 30 November 2020**.

ü *Please limit your input to a maximum of 5 pages*ü *Please include any relevant data and references*ü *All submissions will be made publicly available on the OHCHR website unless requested otherwise* ü *Reports developed for other purposes will be accepted*ü *If you can support our efforts to consult directly with children please contact* *gbergh@ohchr.org*

**OSRSG CAAC – Input**

The COVID-19 pandemic has added to the despair of conflict-affected children and has rendered boys and girls living amidst hostilities even more vulnerable. Since the onset of the pandemic, restrictive measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 often had an adverse effect on children as well as on the ability of child protection actors to carry out vital work to monitor, end and prevent grave violations against children, including by greatly reducing opportunities for engagement with parties to conflict, facilitating the release of children associated with parties to conflict and providing appropriate response to children affected by armed conflict. COVID-19 restrictions also disrupted children’s access to education, healthcare and social services and placed an additional stressor on parents, guardians, and caregivers. The closure of schools made children at increased risk of being recruited and used, or abducted by parties to conflict while stigma and discrimination related to COVID-19 increased children’s vulnerability to violence and psychosocial distress.

Children in detention for actual or alleged association with armed groups, including groups designated as terrorist by the United Nations, or detained on national security reasons have faced increased vulnerabilities, in particular risk of violence, including sexual violence, and exposure to the Covid-19 pandemic. While some countries have released children detained for offences as a response to the pandemic, children detained for alleged association or on national security have often not benefited from such measures in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. In Iraq and Syria, the pandemic exacerbated an already adverse protection environment for children, especially those living in internally displaced people camps and in detention.

Continuing attacks on schools and hospitals, including healthcare personnel, are particularly egregious, especially considering the heavy burden the pandemic places on healthcare facilities and the fragile state of health systems in countries affected by conflict.

In Afghanistan, indiscriminate attacks on schools, universities and other educational facilities are taking place despite the opening of historic peace talks. In Libya, the few functional health facilities able to respond to the pandemic in Tripoli and Benghazi were repeatedly hit and damaged by shelling. In Burkina Faso and Cameroon, attacks on schools resulted in the killing and maiming of several children as well as teachers. In Mali, attacks on hospitals and related protected personnel as well as denial of humanitarian access led to the death of children who could not reach health care in time. In Somalia, attacks on schools and hospitals by Al-Shabaab continue at an alarming rate, often in conjunction with other grave violations, such as the abduction and recruitment of children.

Further, in some situations it has been reported that armed forces and groups take advantage of COVID-19 restrictions, particularly the closing of schools and other civilian infrastructure, by occupying and using such facilities for military purposes.

Providing humanitarian assistance, including to children, has become even more difficult in the COVID-19 context, as movement restrictions and a reduced field presence of humanitarian and protection actors exacerbate challenges in already adverse protection environments marked by continuing attacks against aid workers and the looting of supplies. This development comes after 2019 had already seen a rise of more than 400 per cent in incidents of denial of humanitarian access in country situations on the children and armed conflict agenda.

The developments described above negatively impact on the realization of several sustainable development goals under review, including the goals to eradicate poverty (SDG 1), end hunger (SDG 2) and ensure healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages (SDG 3) as well as SDG 8 – Decent work and economic growth, specifically targets 8.6 (substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training) and 8.7 (secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms). It further negatively impacts fulfilment of SDG 16 – Peace, justice and strong institutions, specifically targets 16.1 (significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere), 16.2 (end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture of children) and 16.3 (promote the rule of law and access to justice). Although not under review, it should be noted that realization of SDG 4 – quality education - is also significantly impacted both by the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as by continuing grave violations against conflict-affected children.

Despite the challenges, some good practices were observed. Country task forces on monitoring and reporting coped by using and reinforcing reliable networks and resources to continue the monitoring and verification of grave violations committed against children. For example, in the Central African Republic the United Nations developed radio messages targeting armed groups, communities and children on protection concerns to reduce the vulnerability of children to violations and COVID-19. In Mali, since the implementation of Covid-19 prevention measures, the United Nations has been working with partners to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on conflict-affected children and facilitate greater protection for them.

To limit the impact of COVID-19 on children and to enable the realization of the SDGs going forward, it is imperative to ensure that restrictions put in place to contain the pandemic take into account the particular vulnerability and needs of children, especially those affected by conflict. Member States must ensure that child protection services can continue amid the pandemic, including by enabling unimpeded access to children, guaranteeing a safe environment for child protection actors to operate in and allocating adequate resources to child protection. Emphasis should further be placed on the need for all parties to conflict to immediately halt hostilities, in line with the Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire issued in March 2020, as well as to take all necessary measures to end and prevent all grave violations against children. In particular, parties to conflict must respect the civilian nature of schools, health infrastructures and related protected persons. Peace, ceasefire and security sector reform processes must be seized as opportunities to strengthen mechanisms to protect children.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict continues her advocacy efforts in this regard and has repeatedly called on parties to conflict, governmental forces and non-State actors alike, to adhere to the call for a global ceasefire and fully comply with international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law, including to prevent attacks against education and health facilities and other civilian infrastructure. She further reminds all States who have not done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, and to enact national legislation and policies to prohibit and criminalize the recruitment and use of children as well as all other grave violations by armed forces and groups.