



# AUSTRALIA



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**UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL**  
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## **Children and Armed Conflict: Protecting children today prevents conflict tomorrow**

**Statement by H.E. Gillian Bird**  
**Ambassador and Permanent Representative**  
**of Australia to the United Nations**

*(Check against delivery)*

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Armed conflict takes a devastating toll on children.

The physical and psychological wounds of war, including the resulting displacement and disrupted education, illustrate why we must act.

Australia warmly commends the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, Ms Virginia Gamba.

The recent work of her Office to strengthen local child protection systems and advocate for the effective reintegration of children deserves high praise.

We also applaud the Special Representative's concerted efforts to engage with non-state armed groups and to commit these groups to action plans.

This is critical because – as the Secretary-General's report demonstrates – these groups are responsible for the majority of violations against children.

Within peacekeeping missions and UN Country Teams, child protection specialists are key to identifying grave violations and taking preventive action.

Together, these efforts reduce the risk of intergenerational harm.

Mr President

The Secretary-General's report highlights some positive developments, such as the release of children in South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

Nevertheless, the overall trend of increasing grave violations against children should alarm us all.

Unlawful attacks on schools and hospitals, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq and Syria, have had particularly grievous impacts on children.

Impeding the delivery of humanitarian assistance, instances of which are highlighted in the Secretary-General's report, is having an inordinate and unacceptable impact on children.

Mr President

We welcome efforts to ensure a longer-term approach is taken to reintegration for children affected by armed conflict.

When designing reintegration programs, the needs of girls must be taken into account, including to prevent the re-recruitment of former child soldiers.

There is strong evidence that gender-sensitive programming delivers better outcomes for girls, women and their communities.

Opportunities must also be taken to support the participation of youth in peacebuilding and peace processes.

By increasing their participation, we contribute to the protection of their rights, as well as setting a strong foundation for an inclusive, sustainable peace.

It is critical – for this and for future generations – that we redouble our efforts to protect children and prevent grave violations.

Thank you.