



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1495 Vienna, 7 November 2024**

#### **EU Statement in response to the intervention of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Children and Armed Conflict**

1. The European Union thanks Ms. Virginia Gamba for her intervention and expresses its strong support for the mandate of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC).
2. Children are disproportionately affected by, and often the primary victims of, armed conflicts. We deeply value your work to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict, to raise awareness, to collect information on their plight, and to foster international cooperation to enhance child protection.
3. The EU is particularly active in protecting children's rights in conflict or crisis situations, and in providing protection, assistance and support. We have significantly contributed to the development of the UN's CAAC agenda and the development of its global mandate.
4. Recently, the EU adopted a significant update to its own CAAC Guidelines, which serve as an operational framework for all Member States and EU institutions and as a comprehensive toolbox for EU action on child protection in armed conflict, encompassing conflict prevention, humanitarian aid, political engagement, long-term peacebuilding efforts, and crisis management missions and operations. We also updated the Checklist for the Integration of Protection of Children Affected by Armed Conflict into our Common Security and Defence Policy missions and

operations, providing practical guidance for planning and conducting activities across our more than twenty crisis management missions.

5. Your intervention today, along with the recent UN Secretary-General's report on Children and Armed Conflict, paints a deeply concerning picture, as violations against children in armed conflict are on the rise worldwide. We are gravely concerned by the significant increase in all six grave violations affecting children the most in times of war: killing and maiming, recruitment and use as soldiers or in other non-combat roles, abductions, rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access. In today's evolving landscape of armed conflict, the emergence of new threats and actors has exacerbated these impacts on children.
6. We remain deeply alarmed by the devastating impact on children of Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine. We appreciate your visit to Ukraine last year and your continuous engagement with Ukrainian authorities to strengthen the protection of children. The recent UN SG's report on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as the reports under the OSCE Moscow Mechanism and those of ODIHR, highlight a range of violations. Over 2,200 children have been killed or injured since the beginning of Russia's full scale invasion, according to the UN OHCHR. Many have lost family members, been displaced, or face additional risks from disrupted health services and limited access to education. Countless children spend endless hours in bomb shelters due to indiscriminate attacks, inflicting stress and severely impacting their wellbeing and development. The grave violations committed by Russia against children in Ukraine have exacerbated their need for protection, mental health and psychological support, food, healthcare, education, and sanitation.
7. Russia's war has profoundly disrupted education, with long term consequences for children's development. According to UNICEF, thousands of schools across Ukraine have been damaged or destroyed by

Russia, with many deemed unsafe to use. Daily power shortages and air raid alarms further disrupt education. Many schools in the territories temporarily occupied by Russia have become dysfunctional due to a lack of teachers, as stated in ODIHR report. According to ODIHR's findings, Russia appears to have failed to uphold its obligations to ensure the continuity of children's education in occupied territories, in violation of IHL and IHRL.

8. Access to health-care services has also been limited due to damaged health facilities and displaced health workers, severely impacting children's health. In July, Ukraine's largest children's medical centre, Okhmatdyt Hospital, was hit, resulting in the deaths of at least two people, injuries to dozens of children, parents and medical staff, as well as significant damage. We reiterate that deliberately directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects constitutes a war crime, and all those responsible must and will be held to account.
9. The EU remains committed to ensuring that Russia and its leadership are held fully accountable for waging this war of aggression against Ukraine and for other crimes under international law, as well as for the massive damage caused by Russia's war. The EU continues to strongly condemn all the atrocities committed in Ukraine and remains firmly committed to ensuring victims' rights to justice and reparation, as well as guarantees of non-repetition. To this end, we will continue to make full use of all relevant OSCE tools and mechanisms, and explore avenues with all relevant international organisations.
10. We also remain deeply concerned about the fate of all Ukrainian children forcibly transferred by Russia within the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine or unlawfully deported to Russia and Belarus. We condemn the military re-education and indoctrination, as well as the violation of these children's rights to their Ukrainian nationality, identity, name and family relations by Russia, as documented by the May 2023 dedicated Moscow Mechanism report and other international monitoring mechanisms. The EU

reiterates its urgent call on Russia and Belarus to immediately ensure their safe return to Ukraine.

11. We recall the six arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court, including against President Putin for the war crime of the unlawful deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children. All States Parties to the Rome Statute are under the obligation to execute arrest warrants issued by the ICC.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ALBANIA\*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA\*, and GEORGIA, the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

\* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.