Beat: News

Efforts to Protect Children from Armed Conflict Must be Sustained

UN-OSRSG Children and Armed Conflict

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Third Visit of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in South Sudan

New York/Juba, 25 May 2022 – The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, completed an official visit to South Sudan in which she notably co-opened the National Conference on Children and Armed Conflict.

“The National Conference on Children and Armed Conflict gives us a unique opportunity to reflect on and assess the progress made as part of the Comprehensive Action Plan to end and prevent all grave violations against children and discuss the challenges we faced and are still facing. But also, importantly, it is a chance for us all to come together and jointly imagine what a better future can be for children in South Sudan,” said Virginia Gamba in her opening remarks.

This visit, her third to the country since she took office, was also an opportunity to engage with key stakeholders, take stock of the implementation of the Comprehensive Action Plan to end and prevent grave violations against children, and agree on priority activities going forward. Virginia Gamba welcomed the opportunity to meet with H.E. President Salva Kiir Mayardit, H.E. First Vice-President Dr. Riek Machar, H.E. Vice-President Rebecca Nyandeng Garang de Mabior, cabinet ministers, United Nations partners, including the Head of UNMISS and the Co-Chairs of the Country Taskforce on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), and members of the Group of Friends of children and armed conflict in South Sudan, including representatives of the diplomatic community and of international NGOs.

The National Conference was organized by the Government of the Republic of South Sudan as part of their commitment to better protect children from hostilities, with support by UNMISS and UNICEF. The Conference was supported by the highest authorities, including H.E. Vice-President Rebecca Nyandeng Garang de Mabior, who opened the event on behalf of President Salva Kiir Mayardit. Representatives of local and national authorities from all regions of South Sudan, civil society representatives as well as children and other partners participated in the conference.

Since the signature of the Comprehensive Action Plan in February 2020, thousands of members of the armed forces of South Sudan have been trained, hundreds of children have been released, and grave violations have decreased compared to just a few years ago. “These are steps in the right direction,” Virginia Gamba emphasized. “But efforts must be sustained as all six grave violations against children continue to be committed by parties to conflict in South Sudan,” she added.

She especially called on the authorities to address impunity, which remains rampant, including by reforming the justice system as envisioned in the revitalized peace agreement. “Without accountability, victims of grave violations are not only robbed of a childhood in peace, safety, and dignity, but they also experience at an early age the tragedy of injustice. This, we must change,” she stressed. She further called for the establishment of a child protection focal point within the Ministry of Justice to assist prosecutors with any training to better implement the existing laws criminalizing the six grave violations.

The Special Representative called for a renewed engagement in the completion of the Comprehensive Action Plan to end and prevent all grave violations against children in South Sudan. In doing so, she insisted on the inclusion of the voices of children themselves, as “they are the ones who know exactly what is needed to improve their lives and their future.”

Furthermore, the SRSG called on all partners to increase their support for reintegration efforts and assistance programmes, including

through community centres to better support education, psycho-social assistance, and the provision of community services allowing for more comprehensive and sustained approaches to reintegration. “These facilities should be developed in as many regions of South Sudan as possible, as a fundamental peacebuilding exercise on behalf of the children of South Sudan and their families,” she added.

She thanked the leadership and teams of UNMISS and UNICEF, including the co-chairs of the CTFMR, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Ms. Sara Beysolow Nyanti, and the UNICEF Representative, Ms. Hamida Lasseko, and all partners for the support to her mission and the continued cooperation.

She highlighted the need for innovative models of prevention and reminded that, ultimately, peace is a pre-requisite for development and prosperity and remains the best and most sustainable shield for children from hostilities. She further agreed with the South Sudanese government concern that prevention of grave violations against children and armed conflict and the prevention of the trafficking in persons, particularly children are vital elements to ensure a prosperous and safe South Sudan. She called on the international community and all potential partners of South Sudan to assist in efforts to support reintegration, education, and peacebuilding in the country. “It is time to make sure that this generation has a future to look forward to. It is time for peace and for unity. I am convinced that the authorities in South Sudan share this vision and goal and I call on them to continue to put in place measures to better protect children in South Sudan,” she concluded.

Note to the editors:

The Comprehensive Action Plan to end and prevent all grave violations against children in South Sudan was signed on 7 February 2020 by the South Sudan People’s Defense Forces and endorsed by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement in Opposition, both listed in the Annexes of the Secretary-General Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict

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