18 July 2022
10:00 – 11:30 am EST
Conference Room 8, United Nations Headquarters / virtual

1. Concept / Event

In 2015, through the adoption of its resolution 2225, the UN Security Council formally recognized the importance of holding parties accountable for abducting children. Since that date, more attention has gone into understanding and raising awareness around this complex violation linked to other grave violations against children in armed conflict, in particular recruitment and use and sexual violence. In recent years, a significant increase in abduction of children in the situations on the children and armed conflict agenda – a 90 percent increase of verified incidents of abduction in 2020 – whether to terrorize communities, target specific groups, or to force the participation of children in hostilities, signaled an urgent need to ensure that all those monitoring, reporting and advocating are equipped with strong tools to end and prevent the abduction of children, in line with the Security Council request.

As a step towards strengthening monitoring, reporting and response to the abduction of children, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF published in April 2022 a Guidance Note on Abduction. This event offers a platform for presenting the guidance while taking stock of progress since the adoption of resolution 2225 (2015) and for directly engaging relevant UN partners who are contributing to monitoring and reporting on
the ground to discuss risks and vulnerabilities to children they witness in their settings, as well as efforts to prevent and end abduction as a grave violation.

2. Background And Rationale

In its resolution 2225 (2015), the UN Security Council expressed grave concern over the abduction of children in situations of armed conflict and recognized that abductions of children precede or follow other abuses and violations of applicable international law against children, including recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and rape and other forms of sexual violence against children. Resolution 2225 (2015) thus added abduction as a trigger violation for the inclusion of parties in the annexes of the Secretary-General’s annual reports on children and armed conflict. Furthermore, the UN Security Council resolution 2331 (2016) underlined an emerging issue of cross-border abduction of children, in which girls are particularly vulnerable to trafficking.

In the Secretary-General’s 2021 annual report on children and armed conflict, 14 parties are listed for this violation whereas only six were listed in 2016, the year after the trigger was pronounced. While 13 of the listed parties comprise non-State armed groups, the South Sudan People’s Defense Forces, including Taban Deng-allied South Sudan People’s Defense Forces (SSPDF), is the only State security force that is listed. The UN’s “Comprehensive Action Plan to end and prevent all grave violations against children in South Sudan” signed in February 2020 by SSPDF encompasses measures to end and prevent the abduction of children.

In her latest report to the UN General Assembly (A/76/231) reporting on trends in grave violations, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict reported 3,202 child abductions, a staggering 90 percent increase from the previous reporting year making it the greatest exponential increase in 2020 of the six grave violations committed in the situations covered through the children and armed conflict agenda. Furthermore, the Secretary-General’s 2022 annual report on children and armed conflict (A/76/871-S/2022/493) shows that abductions increased by over 20 per cent in 2021 as compared to 2020. Ongoing reporting through the UN’s Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) maintains the highest numbers of abductions in Somalia, closely followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lake Chad Basin, and Syria.

The United Nations’ ongoing efforts to strengthen monitoring and advocacy of this violation contributed to raising awareness of abduction as a tactic of war used by armed groups such as Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and ISIL since 2015. The decision to specifically use abduction as a listable violation and highlight the damaging effects of this grave violation on children contributed to creating a space for dialogue with some parties engaging in child abductions. The emerging evidence of linkages with other violations and abuses with abduction warrants continued attention and monitoring by UN actors on the ground.

The UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children has pointed out that child trafficking is closely linked to the six grave violations in armed conflict situations and that in such situations, the recruitment and use of children nearly always constitutes trafficking in light of the presence of two required elements: i) the action (recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt); and ii) the purpose (exploitation) – for forced marriage or sexual exploitation, forced labour including child recruitment and use also designated by the ILO Convention 182 as
constituting worst forms of child labour, or forced criminality. Abduction is frequently the means used by armed groups. In her 2021 report to the UN General Assembly (A/76/263), in recognition of this link, the Special Rapporteur has called upon States to strengthen child protection systems and ensure protective environments for children prioritizing rehabilitation, specialized assistance and protection for child victims, including sexual and reproductive health care. In specific country cases such as Nigeria, the Special Rapporteur expressed concern regarding mass abductions of children that increases their vulnerability to trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

Going beyond the scope of the children and armed conflict mandate in the Security Council and addressing the human rights and development agendas, it must be noted that more than 1 billion children—half of all children in the world—are exposed to violence every year. They face violence in many forms and in many places, whether they are online or offline. A child can be the target of violence, can witness it directly, or be otherwise exposed to it. The continuum of violence as noted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children needs to see its root causes addressed. Poverty is a driver of child trafficking, sexual exploitation, and recruitment of children into criminal gangs, as well as into armed groups and forces.

Resulting from the high-level and technical regional consultations in 2018-2020 encompassing Country Task Forces for Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs), their equivalents in non-MRM countries including UN Country Teams, and the Regional Offices of UN entities, a Technical Reference Group (TRG) on the MRM at the headquarters level took up a recommendation to increase guidance on children and armed conflict in form of developing practical and user-friendly guidelines for UN entities participating in the monitoring and reporting of grave violations at the field level to complement or address emerging trends and needs. To this end, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF published in April 2022, with the support of Italy, a Guidance Note on Abduction, aimed at strengthening the implementation of resolution 2225 (2015) including monitoring and reporting and advocacy and dialogue with parties to conflict.

3. Objectives

On the occasion of this event, participants are invited to:

- Take stock of the impact since the adoption of resolution 2225 in 2015 with regards to reporting and accountability around abduction as a grave violation,
- Examine the linkages between the abduction of children in armed conflicts, including cross-border abduction and child trafficking, as well as examine broader risks and vulnerabilities to children of abduction in a variety of settings, including in situations of displacement and across the conflict continuum (pre-, during and post-conflict); and
- Propose concrete solutions to closing protection gaps in collaboration across mandates and settings with the view to strengthening monitoring, reporting and response to the abduction of children.
4. **Format**

This 1.5-hour event will take place in a hybrid format at the United Nations Headquarters in Conference Room 8 and virtually and will include a presentation of the “Guidance Note on Abduction” by the Special Representative, high-level panel interventions, and an interactive component.

5. **Program**

**Moderator:**

**H.E. Ambassador Mr. Maurizio Massari**, Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations

**Welcoming Remarks:**

**H.E. Senator Mr. Benedetto Della Vedova**, Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Italy

**H.E. Ambassador Ms. Gilda Motta**, Director of the Department for International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil

**Opening Remarks / Framing:**

**Ms. Virginia Gamba**, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

**Mr. Omar Abdi**, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

**Panel Interventions:**

**Ms. Najat Maalla M’jid**, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

**Ms. Siobhán Mullally**, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children

**Mr. James Christopher Swan**, United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia

**Ms. Gillian Triggs**, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR

**Ms. Victoria Ward**, Regional Director, Latin America and the Caribbean, Save the Children

*Video testimony with voices of children*

*Statements from the floor (additional co-sponsors will speak first)*