

# **Advancing the Protection of Children in Armed Conflict: A Strategic Approach for the Political Affairs Officer**

**Prepared for AHMED OSMAN**

## **Introduction: The Critical Role of Political Affairs in Protecting Children**

The devastating impact of armed conflict on children remains one of the most pressing challenges facing the international community. The United Nations, through the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC), is at forefront of efforts to protect children from the horrors of war. The Political Affairs Officer within the UN Analysis and Outreach Hub on Children and Armed Conflict in Doha, Qatar, plays a pivotal role in this mission. This position demands a sophisticated understanding of political dynamics, a commitment to rigorous analysis, and the ability to translate policy into tangible improvements in the lives of children.

This publication outlines a strategic framework for a Political Affairs Officer, AHMED OSMAN, to effectively contribute to the OSRSG-CAAC mandate. It draws upon the core responsibilities of the role, the established UN frameworks for child protection, and the latest data on grave violations against children. The aim is to present a forward-looking approach that combines robust political analysis, effective outreach, and a solutions-oriented mindset to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict, particularly with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, as relevant to the Doha Hub.

## **Understanding the Mandate: The OSRSG-CAAC Framework**

A thorough understanding of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC) is fundamental for any Political Affairs Officer working within this sphere. This mandate, established by General Assembly Resolution A/RES/51/77 following Graça Machel's seminal 1996 report,

"Impact of Armed Conflict on Children," provides the bedrock for all UN efforts to protect children in war.

The core role of the Special Representative is to serve as the leading UN advocate for the protection and well-being of children affected by armed conflict. This involves strengthening protection mechanisms, raising global awareness, promoting robust information gathering on the plight of children, and fostering international cooperation to enhance their safety and recovery. The OSRSG-CAAC reports annually to the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, and critically, brings the challenges faced by children in conflict to the attention of key political bodies like the UN Security Council. This engagement is vital to maintain urgency and secure the necessary political and diplomatic will for action.

Since 1999, the Security Council's systematic engagement has solidified the issue of children and armed conflict as a matter of international peace and security. This has led to a strong framework and specific tools to respond to violations against children.

## The Six Grave Violations

The cornerstone of this framework is the identification and monitoring of **six grave violations** affecting children in times of conflict. These are:

1. **Recruitment and use of children** by armed forces and armed groups.
2. **Killing and maiming of children.**
3. **Sexual violence against children.**
4. **Attacks on schools and hospitals.**
5. **Abduction of children.**
6. **Denial of humanitarian access** to children.

These violations serve as triggers for listing parties to conflict in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict.

## Security Council Mandated Actions

To address these violations, the Security Council has mandated the UN to:

- **Gather and verify information:** Systematically collect and confirm data on how and where children are affected by armed conflict.
- **Report to the Security Council:** Utilize this verified information in the Secretary-General's annual report.
- **List perpetrators:** Name parties to conflict responsible for committing the grave violations.

- **Engage in dialogue for Action Plans:** Initiate dialogue with listed governments and armed groups to develop time-bound Action Plans aimed at halting and preventing violations against children. These Action Plans are written, signed commitments outlining concrete measures for prevention, release and reintegration of children, and accountability for perpetrators.

An effective Political Affairs Officer must be adept at leveraging this mandate, understanding its nuances, and utilizing its tools to advocate for children, support the development and implementation of Action Plans, and contribute to the broader political strategies aimed at preventing and ending grave violations.

(Source: Adapted from OSRSG-CAAC official website: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/about/the-mandate/>)

## The Current Landscape: Grave Violations Against Children in 2023

The 2023 Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict paints a grim picture of the realities faced by children in war zones. Understanding these trends is critical for a Political Affairs Officer to effectively target advocacy and intervention efforts.

### Key Statistics from 2023:

- **Overall Violations:** A staggering **32,990 grave violations** against children were verified by the UN.
- **Children Directly Affected:** At least **22,557 children** were directly affected by the four individual violations (recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence, and abduction). Of these, 15,847 were boys and 6,252 were girls.
- **Geographic Scope:** These violations occurred across **25 country situations** and one regional monitoring arrangement (Lake Chad Basin).
- **Detention:** **2,491 children** were detained for their actual or alleged association with parties to conflict.
- **Most Prevalent Violations:** The highest numbers of verified violations were for **killing and maiming (11,649 children)**, followed by **recruitment and use (8,655 children)**, and **denial of humanitarian access (5,205 incidents)**.
- **Alarming Increase:** There was a **21% overall increase** in the total number of grave violations compared to the previous year.
- **Hotspots of Escalation:** The most dramatic increases in violations were recorded in **Sudan (480%)**, **Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (155%)**, and **Myanmar (123%)**.

- **Gender Disparity:** While boys constituted the majority of victims for some violations like recruitment, **1 in 4 victims overall were girls**. Girls were particularly affected by killing and maiming, abduction, and sexual violence.
- **Reintegration Efforts:** Despite the challenges, **10,600 children** formerly associated with armed forces or groups received protection or reintegration support.

## **Infographic: Children and Armed Conflict: Grave Violations in 2023 - A Snapshot**

(This section will embed the infographic created: /home/ubuntu/infographic\_grave\_violations\_2023.png)



# CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT GRAVE VIOLATIONS IN 2023

## A SNAPSHOT

**32,990**

TOTAL VIOLATIONS



**22,557**

13,847 boys

6,292 girls



**25** countries +  
± 1 regional  
situation



**2,491**

children  
detained



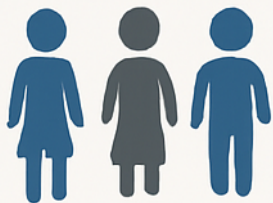
**2,491** children  
detained



Denial of  
humanitarian  
access

**↑ 21%**

OVERALL INCREASE  
in violations



**10,600**

children received  
rehabilitation  
support

**1 in 4**



WEE girls  
WERE GIRLS

Highest increases

Sudan **480%**

Israel/OFT **155%**

Myanmar **123%**

**10,600**

children received

These statistics underscore the urgent need for robust political action. The Political Affairs Officer must analyze the drivers behind these trends, identify opportunities for engagement with parties to conflict, and support the development of strategies to prevent future violations and ensure accountability.

(Data sourced from the Summary of the 2023 Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict.)

## Strategic Approaches for the Political Affairs Officer

Given the complexities of protecting children in armed conflict and the specific responsibilities outlined for the Political Affairs Officer (JID: 254451), a multi-faceted strategic approach is required. This approach must be grounded in robust analysis, proactive outreach, and effective programme support, always prioritizing the best interests of the child and leveraging the OSRSG-CAAC mandate.

### 1. Deepening Political Analysis and Early Warning:

- **Contextual Understanding:** Continuously analyze the political, security, and humanitarian situations in relevant countries, particularly within the MENA region, to identify emerging threats and opportunities for child protection. This includes monitoring conflict dynamics, the roles of various actors (state and non-state), and their impact on children.
- **Trend Analysis:** Utilize data on grave violations (such as the 2023 statistics) to identify patterns, hotspots, and specific vulnerabilities of children. This analysis should inform targeted advocacy and intervention strategies.
- **Briefings and Reports:** Prepare high-quality analytical reports, background papers, concept notes, and talking points for the Head of the Hub and OSRSG-CAAC leadership, providing actionable insights and recommendations for political engagement.
- **Visual Idea:** A dynamic dashboard concept (mock-up or description) showing how various data points (conflict incidents, displacement, violation statistics, political stability indicators) can be tracked for a specific country or region to provide early warning for child protection risks.

### 2. Enhancing Outreach and Advocacy:

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Liaise and facilitate consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including UN agencies (UNICEF, UNHCR, OHCHR), international and local NGOs, academic institutions, foundations, and importantly, member states. Build and maintain strong networks to foster collaboration.

- **Representing the Hub:** Act as a deputy to the Head of the Hub, confidently representing the OSRSG-CAAC at meetings, conferences, and forums, articulating the mandate and advocating for child protection priorities.
- **Targeted Messaging:** Tailor communication and advocacy messages to different audiences, using evidence-based information and compelling narratives (including anonymized case studies where appropriate) to influence policy and action.
- **Supporting Action Plan Dialogue:** Provide substantive support to dialogue processes with parties to conflict aimed at developing and implementing Action Plans to end and prevent grave violations.

### 3. Strengthening Programme Implementation and Policy Development:

- **Project Cycle Management:** Participate actively in the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of assigned projects aimed at strengthening child protection. This includes reviewing project documents, identifying challenges, and proposing corrective actions.
- **Policy Input:** Assist in policy development by reviewing and analyzing emerging issues and trends in child protection in armed conflict, contributing to evaluations and research studies that can inform global and regional policies.
- **Capacity Building:** Undertake outreach activities, including conducting training workshops and seminars for partners (e.g., government officials, peacekeepers, civil society) on child protection standards, the OSRSG-CAAC mandate, and monitoring and reporting of grave violations.
- **Field Mission Support:** Participate in or lead field missions to gather firsthand information, provide guidance to partners, and support the implementation of protection activities. This includes drafting mission summaries and follow-up actions.
- **Budget and Funding Coordination:** Coordinate activities related to budget and funding for specific programmes/projects, including the preparation of proposals, progress reports, and financial statements.

### 4. Promoting Accountability and International Norms:

- **Advocacy for Justice:** Consistently advocate for accountability for perpetrators of grave violations against children, supporting efforts to strengthen national and international justice mechanisms.
- **Mainstreaming Child Protection:** Work to ensure that child protection considerations are integrated into broader peace and security processes, including peace negotiations, ceasefire agreements, and security sector reform.

By strategically combining these approaches, the Political Affairs Officer can make a significant contribution to reducing the suffering of children in armed conflict and advancing the OSRSG-CAAC agenda.

## **Conclusion: A Principled and Effective Advocate for Children**

The role of a Political Affairs Officer within the OSRSG-CAAC Doha Hub is both challenging and profoundly rewarding. It demands a unique blend of analytical acuity, diplomatic skill, programmatic understanding, and an unwavering commitment to the rights and protection of children caught in the crossfire of conflict. By leveraging the robust UN mandate, utilizing data-driven insights, fostering strong partnerships, and championing accountability, AHMED OSMAN can be a principled and effective advocate, making a tangible difference in the lives of the most vulnerable.

This strategic approach, focusing on deepened political analysis, enhanced outreach, strengthened programme support, and the promotion of international norms, provides a roadmap for contributing meaningfully to the OSRSG-CAAC's vital mission. The ultimate goal is to create a world where children are shielded from the horrors of war, where their rights are respected, and where they have the opportunity to reach their full potential, even in the most challenging circumstances.

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