



## **Statement by the Conveners of the UN General Assembly 74<sup>th</sup> Session High Level Side Event “How are we going to stop the war on children?”**

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On September 23, 2019, Belgium, Cote d’Ivoire, France, Germany, Indonesia, and South Africa, together with the European Union and Save the Children, convened a High Level meeting entitled “How are we going to stop the war on children?”

Belgium, the Chair of the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (2019-2020), played a prominent role with interventions by His Excellency Alexander de Croo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Development Cooperation, as well as Her Majesty Queen Mathilde, Queen of the Belgians, also in her role as a Sustainable Development Goals Advocate.

The event was a high-level platform for governments to share their solutions for ending grave violations of children’s rights in conflict, in symbolic commemoration of the 100-year anniversary of Save the Children’s founding, an international organization born to respond to the plight of children affected by war.

Eglantyne Jebb who co-founded Save the Children 100 years ago said, “Every war is a war against children” and a century on, the world is still failing the most vulnerable from the horrors of conflict.

Ms. Nadia Murad, Nobel Laureate and founder of Nadia’s Initiative delivered a keynote address at the event. She noted, “I know this topic is about all children who are at risk or have become victims of wars and internal conflicts, but the case of Yazidi children is an example of how children become weapons of war and how much we fail to protect children or help them after they become victims.”

Representatives of the co-conveners, H.E. Marlene Schiappa, Secretary of State for Gender Equality of France, H.E. Puan Maharani, Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Cultural Affairs of Indonesia, H.E. Jackson Mthembu, Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation of South Africa, H.E. Maria Flachsbarth, Parliamentary State Secretary of Germany, and H.E. Christos Stylianides, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management of the European Union, delivered statements.

The following heads of UN agencies and relevant offices engaged in the discussion regarding protection, accountability, and recovery for children in conflict: Ms. Virginia Gamba, the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations; Ms. Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner for Human Rights; and Mr. Omar Abdi, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF.

Two child advocates directly shared theirs and their peers’ experiences of conflict in the Middle East region, a boy who is Palestine refugee from Syria and a girl who is Palestine refugee living in Jordan. Both

stressed the importance of maintaining their ability to have safe access to education during conflict. In their words, “To us, education is a basic human right and we want this right to apply to us. Education keeps us alive. It gives us a horizon. It is the responsibility of the adult world to protect it.”

Nine governments intervened outlining concretely what they are doing to protect children in conflict, namely Chad, Denmark, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. A civil society organization War Child UK, and a corporate partner Fundación ProFuturo also intervened demonstrating broad stakeholder ownership of the issue of children affected by armed conflict.

The conveners united to urgently show the need for the highest level of international attention to protecting children from the scourge of war.

Currently, 420 million children are living in situations of conflict. Twenty-three years since Graça Machel detailed the impact of armed conflict on children in the first ever study commissioned by the UN on this topic, children continue to be recruited and used by armed groups, killed and maimed, sexually exploited, abducted, and denied humanitarian aid, with their schools and hospitals attacked.

In order to end grave violations, governments must lead on upholding the international rules-based order, holding perpetrators to account, and providing practical action to protect children in conflict and rebuild their lives. Until children are effectively rehabilitated into society and their mental health needs are adequately addressed in the aftermath of conflict, there will be no end to the cycle of violence.

From this event, it was evident that more needs to be done to end what appears to be a war on children.