

EVAP Ep. 12: Adrienne Lapar

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SPEAKERS

Adrienne Lapar, Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 00:12

Welcome to Expert Voices on Atrocity Prevention by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. I'm Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Research Director at the Global Centre. This podcast features one-on-one conversations with practitioners from the fields of human rights, conflict prevention, and atrocity prevention. These conversations will give us a glimpse of the personal and professional side of how practitioners approach human rights protection and atrocity prevention, allowing us to explore challenges, identify best practices, and share lessons learned on how we can protect populations more effectively. Today, I'm joined by Adrienne Lapar, Director of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. Adrienne has previously worked with UNHCR and the UN Mission in South Sudan, as well as Nonviolent Peace Force and Human Rights Watch. Thank you for joining us today, Adrienne.

A Adrienne Lapar 01:04

Thanks for having me.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 01:05

This year, the Secretary General's report on R2P is on the impact of atrocities on children and youth, as well as their role in atrocity prevention. Since Watchlist works on issues very closely related to atrocity prevention and the children and armed conflict space, we thought this would be the perfect time to chat with you. So could you share a little about what Watchlist is and how the organization operates?

A Adrienne Lapar 01:26

Sure, thanks. So Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a network of human rights and humanitarian organizations that work to protect the rights of children affected by armed conflicts around the world. We currently have 14 member organizations, including the Global

Centre for R2P, who we work with to collect and disseminate information on grave violations and other abuses against children in countries affected by war, in order to influence international levels of policymakers to develop policies and programs to effectively protect children. We very strongly believe that by strengthening international institutions like the United Nations, and promoting international laws and norms for the protection of civilians and armed conflict - and specifically for the protection of children and armed conflict - we can ensure their effectiveness and impact and increase the costs of noncompliance. We believe that laws and norms must be implemented to be effective. So Watchlist plays a role in translating New York-based initiatives into real progress for children affected by armed conflict.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 01:26

Adrienne, I know you work directly on the UN's Children and Armed Conflict agenda. What is the history and purpose of the CAAC agenda?

A Adrienne Lapar 02:37

So in the 1990s, the UN General Assembly commissioned a study into the impacts of armed conflict on children. This two-year study, which was led by Mozambique's former Education Minister Graca Machel, was presented to the General Assembly in 1996 and it was a real eye opener for policymakers. It described terrible atrocities against children: the forced recruitment and use of children as soldiers and in other military support roles, their use as sexual slaves, senseless attacks that resulted in deaths and longlasting injuries, attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions, and the denial of access to humanitarian assistance. This really opened the eyes of policymakers - as I said - and led to the adoption of General Assembly Resolution 5177 in December 1996, which established the UN's Children and Armed Conflict mandate, and called for the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on this issue. It's really timely that we're talking about this today, actually, it's the 25th anniversary year of the mandate, and since its establishment, it has expanded and evolved to become one of the most significant, dynamic, and I'd say broadly supported multilateral initiatives within the UN system. It's also expanded into the work of the Security Council, which had its first resolution on Children and Armed Conflict in 1999, placing the children and armed conflict issue on its agenda as a matter of international peace and security. And to date, the Council has adopted 13 thematic resolutions on children and armed conflict, or CAAC, as it's commonly known. One of the very, I think, pivotal resolutions from the Security Council was Resolution 1612, which was adopted in 2005. That resolution established the UN's monitoring and reporting mechanism - or MRM as it's known - which is a global monitoring system to collect data on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, and channel reports on that information through the Secretary-General's Special Representative's Office to various parts of the UN system including the Security Council. Resolution 1612 also established the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict which is a subsidiary body of the Council, and it's one of the most active subsidiary bodies of the Council that meets regularly to discuss the situation of children and armed conflict in different countries around the world and provide recommendations for parties to conflict, governments, donors, and other actors, on ending and preventing grave violations against children.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 05:19

You just mentioned the six grave violations against children, which at times are warning signs of atrocities, and in many cases may constitute atrocities themselves. How are the six grave violations determined?

A Adrienne Lapar 05:30

Yeah, so the six grave violations against children were identified, first in that pivotal Graca Machel report that I mentioned, where she, over the course of two years, studied the impacts of armed conflict on children, and then later were identified as well by the Security Council. Those are the six grave violations that the Security Council continues to look at in its work on the CAAC agenda. For those who might not be familiar, maybe I'll mention, the six grave violations include the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, killing and maiming children, sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and hospitals, abductions against children, and the denial of humanitarian access.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 06:17

And since you mentioned it, the CAAC agenda is bolstered by a wide system of reporting within the UN, including the MRM, the SG's Annual report and list, and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Could you shed some light on how these processes either work together to enhance child protection or overlap? And are there any shortcomings in the process?

A Adrienne Lapar 06:41

Alright, so as I mentioned, with its Resolution 1612, the Security Council established the UN's monitoring reporting mechanism, the MRM, which is this unique global monitoring system for collecting and verifying information on the six grave violations against children in armed conflict. That information is collected directly by the UN and its partners on the ground, including civil society organizations and countries affected by armed conflict. And then it's channeled through the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, which produces a series of reports each year. These include annual reports to the General Assembly and to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, as well as the Secretary-General's Annual Report to the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict, which we're expecting in late June or early July of this year. The Office of the Special Representative also produces a series of country-specific reports on the situation of children and armed conflict, which are presented to the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. And that Working Group then deliberates upon them and develops a series of recommendations, as I mentioned, for parties to conflict, for governments that are engaged for example in peace processes or ceasefire agreements, the World Bank, and other donors, to address and prevent grave violations. So as you said, it's a complex ecosystem with many actors involved in a variety of reports and systems for handling that information. There's also actors that are engaged outside of this formal system, such as the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict - which is currently chaired by Canada - in New York. And over the years, there's also been the development of country-specific or regional Groups of Friends in many of the countries that are affected by armed conflict. And they also engage, for example, on channeling those conclusions of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed

Conflict at the country-level, meeting with the local governments & with local embassies to promote the dissemination of those conclusions and support their implementation. So there's a number of actors that are involved in this ecosystem, and are promoting different tools for protecting children in armed conflict. I want to say a little bit more also about the Secretary-General's annual report, because it's such a unique and powerful tool within the CAAC agenda. The Secretary-General's annual report currently includes information on 20 countries that are affected by armed conflict, as well as the Lake Chad Basin region. And in its annexes, the Secretary-General includes a list of parties to conflict who have committed a pattern of grave violations against children. And this has commonly become known as the Secretary-General's "list of shame", because no party to conflict wants to be included on this list. And that is really powerful because it creates incentive for parties to do what it takes to get off the list. So what does it take to get off the list? Well, in 2010, the Secretary-General at the time set out a list of specific criteria for steps that parties to conflict that are listed have to take to get off. These include the signing and implementation of an Action Plan to end and prevent the grave violations for which a party is listed, and then going a full reporting period - or a full year - without committing any new violations. But in recent years, we've seen some parties, some perpetrators, evading inclusion on the Secretary-General's list or being prematurely delisted despite evidence that they have continued to commit grave violations. And we are very concerned about this - we as Watchlist - and we've warned that it threatens to undermine the list's credibility and weaken its strength as a tool for promoting accountability and compliance with international law. We believe that all perpetrators of grave violations need to be held to the same standard, regardless of who they or their friends are. A party should be included in the Secretary-General's list for one reason alone, and that's committing a pattern of documented, UN-verified evidence that they've committed grave violations against children. Another important tool within the Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict is the inclusion of information about so called "situations of concern", which are new emerging situations of armed conflict, where there's credible information that the effective protection of children is of grave concern. There might not be sufficient evidence of the responsibility of particular parties to list parties in the Secretary-General's annexes, but still enough information to raise the attention of the Security Council to these situations. And over the years, Watch List has called for the early inclusion of "situations of concern" in the Report as an effective way to strengthen conflict prevention, early warning, and early action. As you mentioned, you know, the abuse of children is symptomatic of more complex issues within a society at large, including the breakdown of institutions and security. So in this sense, we believe that the inclusion of "situations of concern" is a real opportunity to draw the Security Council's attention to emerging situations where grave violations are happening. Watchlist, since 2017, has published an annual policy note where we make recommendations to the Secretary-General for the listing of perpetrators who we believe have committed a pattern of grave violations. But we also make recommendations for country situations that we think should be included in the report as "situations of concern." Since we've published that report, starting in 2017, we've made recommendations each year for the inclusion of the situation in Ukraine, previously due to the situation in eastern Ukraine, and this year we've made further recommendations given the escalation of hostilities in the country. So with the Secretary-General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict coming in the next few weeks, we really are pushing for the Secretary-General to include information on the situation in Ukraine, but also a number of other country situations such as Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Niger. We believe that the situation of children in these countries has been of grave concern for several years, and it's a pivotal opportunity for the Secretary-General to draw attention to the situation of children and armed conflict. And then this could lead to further actions to address those violations.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 13:37

In terms of the MRM and the so called "list of shame," what is the impact of being a perpetrator that is listed and monitored year after year? Is there any form of accountability for those perpetrators?

A Adrienne Lapar 13:48

It's important to note that the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism is a monitoring system. It helps to identify perpetrators. But it's a first step towards accountability when the Secretary-General names and shames parties to conflict in the annexes of his report. And then further steps need to be taken by policymakers to ensure that those listed parties are actually held accountable. So I think we need to be clear that it's not simply enough just for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism to do its important work and collect that information, channel that through the Council, and for the Secretary-General to name and shame those perpetrators. There needs to be a concrete follow up and repercussions for the actions of persistent perpetrators of grave violations.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 14:43

We've already touched on this a little but I know there have been a lot of concerns about the list in the past in terms of double standards and discrepancies. And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that.

A Adrienne Lapar 14:55

So as I've mentioned, the Secretary-General's Annual Report and its annex list of perpetrators are really powerful tools when they're applied evenly across all parties to conflict, whether they're governments, non-state armed groups, international coalitions, or even UN peacekeepers. They can exert pressure on those parties once they're listed to end and prevent violations in order to get off the list. But in some cases, due to political pressure, certain parties have avoided being listed. And we believe that this undermines the power of the list and its ability to influence parties to conflict and to prevent violations. Among some of the examples of this double standard that we've seen, have been the Secretary General's failure over the years to list Israeli forces for violations. They've never been listed, although they've been included in the Secretary General's Annual Report. In a particularly dire example, in 2016, Secretary General Ban Ki Moon listed the Saudi-led coalition for killing and maiming children and attacks on schools and hospitals in Yemen. Yet a few weeks later, he retracted that decision, and later it was reported in the press that this was due to threats from Saudi Arabia to withdraw UN funding. After his term, Ban Ki Moon was quoted in the press saying that this was one of the most difficult political decisions of his term. But I think it points to a really unjust move by Saudi Arabia, and one that we've seen from other parties to conflict, including Israeli government forces and some of their allies, to put pressure on the Secretary-General to avoid being listed in the Annual Report. Subsequently, in 2017, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres did list the Saudi-led coalition in his report for killing and maiming children, and attacks on schools and hospitals. Yet over the years, we've also seen changes in how that list has depicted the actions of Saudi Arabia. So for example, since 2017, the list has been split into two sections, section A

and B, for parties to conflict that have put in place measures to protect children, and those that have not. In the view of Watchlist and many of its member organizations, we believe that there should be a single list, all parties held to the same standards for grave violations against children. And last year, in 2021, a group of eminent persons, who are experts on children and armed conflict, did an independent study looking at the last 10 years of the Secretary-General's Annual Reports on Children and Armed Conflict from 2010 to 2020. And they systematically reviewed the information in the Secretary-General's Annual Reports with the lists. And they found a staggering number of inconsistencies, as well as some glaring omissions in the list: cases in which there were 10, 20, or even 100 grave violations documented by a single party to the conflict in a year, and yet, that party did not appear in the Secretary-General's list. So this kind of double standard really undermines the power of the list. And so year after year, Watchlist and its partner organizations continue to call on the Secretary-General to resist any political pressures from member states, and to apply the 2010 standards - or 2010 criteria, excuse me - across all conflicts and across all parties to conflict to ensure that all parties whether they're governments, nonstate armed groups, coalition's, peacekeepers, that they're held to the same standards. This also applies in situations of delisting of parties, where we believe parties should be delisted according to that 2010 criteria, being that they go a full year without any new violations, and that they fully implement an Action Plan with the UN. This was something we saw in 2020 with the premature de-listing of the Saudi-led coalition for killing and maiming children, despite the fact that it was responsible for nearly 200 violations that year, and also the delisting of the Tatmadaw in Myanmar for recruitment and use of children, also despite over 200 cases of recruitment and use. We believe that this further emboldens parties if they haven't fully carried out their commitments to end and prevent violations, and they should remain on that list until they've completed all the criteria.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 20:12

One of the most important things for us to keep in mind is what is the impact of these mechanisms? Particularly what is the impact of the CAAC agenda, the MRM, and the "list of shame" for populations on the ground at risk of grave violations?

A Adrienne Lapar 20:27

Right, so as I mentioned earlier, the UN's CAAC mandate has expanded over the past 25 years since its establishment, and it's become one of the most dynamic and broadly supported multilateral initiatives - something that's no small feat in today's increasingly polarized world. And it's had real impact for populations on the ground. It has led to the signing of more than 35 Action Plans between the UN and parties to conflict in several countries where children have been impacted by grave violations. And in 2020, the government of South Sudan became the first to sign a comprehensive Action Plan addressing all six grave violations against children. And I know that this is something that the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is really pushing - to try to get more comprehensive Action Plans and Prevention Plans to deal with grave violations before they start. Over the years, thirteen parties to conflict have fully complied with their commitments, leading to their delisting from the Secretary-General's Annual Report based on those criteria that I talked about earlier. There's also been parties that have been delisted after they demobilized and ceased to exist, including in countries that went through peace processes such as Colombia, Nepal, or Sri Lanka. And also, I should mention over the past 20 years, the UN supported the release of an

estimated 170,000 children from armed forces and armed groups. So really, we can see a lot of very concrete impacts that this agenda has had. And we even see this coming into other areas of the UN's work. For example, the Security Council more regularly mainstreams the protection of children in situations of armed conflict across its work in both armed conflict situations but also in post-conflict reconstruction. So there's dedicated child protection mandates in several peacekeeping missions, and also in special political missions. And in some limited cases, there's been an employment of sanctions and other targeted measures against individuals or parties that are responsible for committing grave violations against children.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 22:50

And in terms of the Action Plans and Protection Plans, you mentioned, what sort of follow up and monitoring is there in terms of ensuring implementation?

A Adrienne Lapar 22:59

Right, so I talked a little bit earlier about this kind of complex ecosystem that exists within the UN Children and Armed Conflict agenda. And that's an important part of the implementation, and specifically the follow up on these Action Plans. So UN country teams, who are there you know in the day-to-day engaging with the local governments, but they also have the mandate to engage with all parties to conflict, including non-state armed groups, to end and prevent grave violations. They're the ones who start that engagement with parties to conflict, to develop commitments that can then be framed in an Action Plan. And then the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is generally the representative that would sign an Action Plan with those parties. And then the UN country teams, as I said, continue the day-to-day to engage, to familiarize actors about the commitments under the Action Plan, to provide capacity-building - for example to security forces - and make those commitments within that Action Plan a reality. Also, there's the, in some cases, local Groups of Friends, which are other member states that have a stated commitment to supporting the Children and Armed Conflict agenda. And they may meet with the local government, for example, to further support the implementation of the Action Plan, partly through political pressure, but also potentially through financial support in some cases for capacity-building, strengthening rule of law, and governance. So those are a couple of the actors that are involved there. In some cases, there may be local Groups of Friends that are established by other countries that support the Children and Armed Conflict agenda. These countries will meet at the local level to support the implementation of the Action Plan, to follow up on country-specific conclusions of the Security Council Working Group on CAAC, and they can put political pressure on local actors to implement their Action Plan, and they can also provide other forms of support. Civil society also plays an important role through advocacy, also through capacity-building, and following up on parties' commitments. And I also should mention outside of the formal Action Plans and the kind of UN structure that we have here, there's also various sets of voluntary political commitments that governments can take to protect children in armed conflict. These include the the Paris Principles and Commitments, which speak about recruitment and use of children around conflict, and protecting children in that context; the Vancouver Principles, which look at the role of peacekeeping in preventing the recruitment and use of children; and then the Safe Schools Declaration, which is a political

commitment of governments to protect schools from attack, and also to refrain from using schools militarily, which can then unfortunately - the military use of schools - also can put students, teachers and school buildings in harm.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 26:32

When you were discussing earlier the situations of concern, you mentioned Ukraine, which is obviously a huge global headline right now, as well as Ethiopia. And I think what's interesting is that a lot of these cases are obviously atrocity cases. You know, as you noted, at the beginning, the Global Centre is a member of Watch List's network, and there are many reasons for that. So I'm wondering, Adrienne, as a child rights advocate, what do you think the atrocity prevention community should be doing more of to address unique risks faced by children?

A Adrienne Lapar 27:08

So, as you mentioned, and also I highlighted earlier, crimes against children are really symptomatic of society at large and breakdown of rule of law. And they can be indicative of other atrocities to come. So I think that the collecting of information on grave violations and other abuses against children is really important to inform prevention and early warning systems to prevent further atrocities from happening. Perhaps this is beyond the atrocity prevention community, but also accountability and justice for crimes against children I think is something that we need to continually strengthen to deter future crimes from happening and prevent future atrocities in other armed conflict contexts. The specific focus on crimes against children is something that I think the international justice community can do better: to have specific expertise on crimes against children and child-friendly justice, to make sure that crimes against children are addressed and to deter future crimes.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 28:41

What is the impact of the CAAC agenda being framed largely as a peace and security issue by the UN, since it's largely based in UN Security Council and UN General Assembly initiatives, as opposed to a human rights issue?

A Adrienne Lapar 28:54

This is an issue I think that we we face across many of the protection agendas of the UN, where there's a silo-ing between what's happening in New York political processes, and Geneva, and then also on the ground. But child rights are really core to the protection of children in armed conflict. And I don't think that there that we can separate them really. So I do think that closing those silos is really key to addressing some of the grave violations and abuses that we've talked about today, and also to ensure that children are not just protected from those violations, but that they're able to fully enjoy all their rights, to live in peaceful societies, have access to education, basic services, and the fulfillment of their full human rights, in order to lead to peaceful, prosperous societies. So I think that there's been an increased recognition of this - of the kind of the humanitarian development-peace nexus. And I think also looking at, for example, investing in the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and

armed groups, looking at children who have been recruited by armed forces and armed groups primarily as victims, and ensuring that the adults who have recruited and used them in their ranks are the ones that are being held accountable and brought to justice, and that those children are not being detained and instead are getting the reintegration and other support services that they need. So I think that there has been an increased recognition of this, but that we still need to do better to make sure that the response is holistic and addressing rights and protection together.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 31:03

If you'd like more information about the Global Centre's work on R2P, mass atrocity prevention, or populations at risk of mass atrocities, visit our website at globalr2p.org and connect with us on Twitter and Facebook at GCR2P.