

Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence The Hague



Children in Armed Conflict (CAAC): A CCOE Fact Sheet

Introduction:

Children are involved in and affected by conflict in different ways, they are always victims and need to be protected, even when they may be perpetrators of crimes.

“In order to advance the goal of protecting children during armed conflict and ending the impunity of perpetrators, the United Nations Security Council identified six categories of violations – the so-called six grave violations, and are the basis of evidence-gathering. These violations are:¹ Killing and maiming of children; Abduction of children; Recruitment or use of children; Rape or other grave Sexual violence; Attacks on schools and hospitals; Denial of humanitarian access.”²

The violations are not ranked on importance, some of the violations will have more direct impacted on the mission, depending on the environment. CIMIC personnel and Commanders need to be aware of these violations in order to mitigate any negative outcome towards the mission.

MISSION IMPLICATIONS

Apart from the legal implications noted below, CAAC can also affect the Commander’s mission more directly.

It can be mentally difficult or even damaging for armed forces to face child soldiers (recruitment or use of children). It can also have demoralizing effects. When the CIMIC officer suspects their present in his AOO, the Commander needs to be notified, so that the proper education and psychological support can be provided. Soldiers should also be prepared on how to deal with the other five violations.

The Commander should also be made aware of the presence of hospitals and/or schools in his AOO, so that he may plan around these appropriately.

Finally awareness of CAAC and its incorporation in planning in different phases of the conflict is important to establish legitimacy for the force. Both with the affected local population, as well as with the population back home.

“The protection of children from armed conflict is an important aspect of a comprehensive strategy towards resolving conflict and building a durable peace. It is thus a legal obligation and a matter of peace and security.”

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¹ The Watchlist website is useful and has apps for iOS and Android devices that are useful guides to Children and Armed Conflict. Watchlist is supported by a coalition of NGOs including Save the Children, Human Rights Watch and others, and this resource is used by many actors <http://watchlist.org/caac-smartphoneapp/overview.html> useful

² [The Six Grave Violations | United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict](#)



Responsibilities in CMI

Different branches outside of J9 like PSYOPS, PAO and INFOOPS have a responsibility regarding CAAC. J2 provides analysis on presence of CAAC in the AOO. J3 and J5 have to include CAAC considerations into plans and operations.

J-MED has to make sure there is proper psychological support for soldiers dealing with CAAC. The LEGAD has to provide advice on CAAC within International Law, and the obligations this entails. J7 has to provide pre-deployment training on how to deal with CAAC on a mission.

Cross-Cutting Topics

CAAC is interlinked with several of the other CCTs. Firstly, it fits under the broader issue of Gender. Gender deals with women, men, boys, and girls, and thus with CAAC. Addressing CAAC issues with this disaggregated view – seeing the children as boys and girls, and adolescent boys and girls - who might be affected differently by armed conflict - is therefore imperative when dealing with CAAC. For example, in some conflicts, boys might be more susceptible to recruitment by an armed force or armed group while girls may be more susceptible to child marriage.

Secondly, CAAC is also one part of Protection of Civilians (PoC). PoC is broader in that it deals with all civilians, and protecting children is a part of this responsibility.

Thirdly, as the legal protections provided to children require a working Rule of Law system. The threat of prosecution can also inhibit the harming of children in conflict.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

CAAC is extensively covered in international law. Recruitment is prohibited under international law conforming to international human rights, and offenders can be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court (ICC). Violence against civilians, including children, is prohibited under the Geneva Conventions. This is universally applicable and is binding for government and non-government military actors. When confronted with child soldiers, military personnel may legally defend themselves, but have to take into account the principle of proportionality. The Commander needs to be aware of these prohibitions.

Armed forces/ persons committing one or more of the six grave violations can be prosecuted, it is imperative that these violations, when observed, are reported. These reports can later be used as evidence within the ICC.

ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

CAAC should be included in the CIMIC estimate¹, and on assessments throughout all levels.

The assessments should include the role and situation of children in the civil society as well as the various organizations working on the topic. Special attention should be given to the presence of Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (CAAFAG) child soldiers² in the AOO. In addition the presence of hospitals and schools in the AOO has to be included.

Because a large part of the responsibility to deal with CAAC lies with IO's and NGO's, it is wise to share information collected on CAAC with these non-military actors. In reverse IO's and NGOs' will be able to provide in-depth information on CAAC in the mission area, and how best to protect them.

¹ BI-SC Civil military (CIMIC) Functional planning guide

² Often described as child soldiers, CAAFAG includes children who may participate fighting, cooks, porters, couriers, spies, sexual slaves and so on. The list is not exhaustive and armed forces and armed groups in the AOR may be recruiting children for use in other ways.

LEADING ORGANIZATIONS

Within the UN Cluster approach, CAAC falls firstly under the Protection Cluster, led by the UNHCR with NGOs like Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, War Child as well as other UN agencies like UNICEF also represented. The Education Cluster is also important, co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children.

Outside of the Clusters, UNOCHA, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other relevant UN/EU or AU can provide information and assistance.



Points of Contact during Mission:

IOs and NGOs will have the best view on the presence of CAAC in the area. Therefore policy officials of the different leading organisations and project leaders of important NGOs in the AOO, like World Vision and Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict should always be contacted.

The IOs and NGOs can also explain in what way they are engaged with the local populace. If they are not in contact with local administrators responsible for schools and hospitals, contact should be established by the CIMIC unit.



Sources of Additional Information:



<https://www.savethechildren.net/>



<http://www.unicef.org/>



<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/>

References:

- United Nations, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict
<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/effects-of-conflict/six-grave-violations/>
- Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (2013), *The Six Grave Violations Against Children During Armed Conflict: The Legal Foundation*.
- Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence (2014), CIMIC Messenger 6(3)
- Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities (2002), *Child Soldiers: Implications for US Forces*

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The “Do’s” and “Don’ts”:

Do’s

- Observe and report violations of international law.
- Refer children whose rights are being violated to the appropriate IOs and NGOs in the AOO.
- Understand and respect the mandates of present humanitarian organizations.
- Support IOs and NGOs in the AOO who have experience with working with CAAC in the mission area.
- Appoint CAAC focal points within branches and/or units.

Don’ts

- Do not ignore the proportionality principle when forced to engage child soldiers.
- Do not cause damage to schools and hospitals, avoid and discourage the use of schools and hospitals by armed forces and armed groups (other than for humanitarian reasons, where they are injured and no longer participating in hostilities and need to seek life-saving assistance, for example). Apply the guidelines on protecting education from attack.
- Do not leave the Commander and the force unprepared for possible encounters with children.
- Do not allow the use of children as support for military forces, i.e. as cooks or porters, this is also identified as using child soldiers under IHL.



CIMIC Tasks:

- **Liaising** with non-military partners to gather information on CAAC and closely cooperate with these same actors in dealing with CAAC.
- **Enabling** the sharing of information concerning CAAC, for example CIMIC assessments, with IOs and NGOs in the AOO.
- **Teaching** military personal how to properly engage with children in the mission area according to legal obligations.
- **Providing** information on the civil situation, which includes considering the situation of children as bystanders in the conflict and/ or as active participants in the conflict.
- **Identifying** civil key indicators and sensitive factors regarding CAAC which may critically impact the conduct of operations as well as the impact of military activities on the civil environment.
- **Help** with the identification of child soldier recruitment zones.
- **Advice** on offering protection for released¹ child soldiers against revenge seeking locals and/or rebel forces to recruit.

¹ Children shouldn't be referred to as being demobilised, as that in some way legitimises the recruitment.

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