

JOINT STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF A3+1

(Niger, South Africa and Tunisia) and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Delivered by H.E. Dr. Halimah DeShong

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Nations

Open VTC on Children and Armed Conflict

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3:00 PM

Security Council Chamber

Thank you Mr. President,

It is my honour to deliver this statement on the behalf of the A3+1: Niger, South Africa, Tunisia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. We express sincere thanks to SRSO Virginia Gamba and UNICEF's Executive Director, Henrietta Fore, for their insightful briefings. They say a child shall lead us. Mariam, to you we extend a special word of gratitude for your courage, guidance and wisdom. Ensuring children's participation matters, because solutions crafted with and for them, are more likely to succeed.

Mr. President

As the United Nations Security Council marks the 15th anniversary of the passing of resolution 1612 (2005), the A3+1 welcomes this opportunity to reflect on key developments and priority actions toward the protection and empowerment of children globally.

Notwithstanding the challenges with collecting data on the six grave violations against children, we have registered significant progress in the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism processes. These improvements supported the emergence of evidence-informed, country specific action plans on child protection, national child-focused legislation, and child-centred policies. Moreover, mechanisms for collaboration across the United Nations system and the wider international community, underpin a number of important initiatives, including the Presidential enactment of the Child Rights Protection Law prohibiting bacha bazi, and the recruitment and use of children in Afghanistan; the adoption of the Child Protection Code in February 2020, criminalizing the recruitment and use of children in the Central African Republic; cooperation on the protection of children during military operations in the Sahel; and widespread inclusion of child protection actions within the various United Nations' peacekeeping and special political missions' mandates. The protection of children in armed conflict should be addressed at all levels, including through preventive

diplomacy, mediation in peace processes, at all stages of peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and as a key dimension of the protection of civilians' mandate. We wish to recognise the work, commitment, advocacy and overall contribution of UNICEF, and local civil society organisations, toward these developments.

As we continue to witness worrying levels of recorded violations against children, coordinated leadership among global governance institutions, regional and sub-regional organizations, national governments, and civil society, will continue to prove crucial in ending these unconscionable harms, globally. In this regard, the A3+1 recognises the Child Protection programme in the African Union's Peace and Security Department, in collaboration with the Office of the UN SRSG on Children and Armed Conflict, and the commitment made by AU leaders to eradicate the burden of conflict from affecting future generations and to focus on prevention efforts, as part of the "Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020" and the wider Agenda 2063.

In addition, we appeal for full compliance with internationally recognised juvenile justice standards, focused on the release, rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims. We regard the indiscriminate criminalization and incarceration of children, particularly those recruited and used by violent extremist groups, as compounding their victimization. Educational and vocational training, as well as psychosocial and socio-economic support by the international community, the state, local communities and families, should form part of wider actions to protect and support children in these contexts.

AU's Youth Envoy Aya Chebbi reminds us that "education is the most powerful instrument for peace," and that the success envisioned under "Silencing the Guns in Africa," requires quality education for children, with a specific focus on girls' education. Internally displaced children and refugees, who are made particularly vulnerable, also deserve access to a quality education. The A3+1 denounces attacks on education and urge all parties to conflict to adhere to their obligations under international law to protect children, educators and educational institutions from

violence and destruction. We also call for an end to impunity by extremist armed groups, and other perpetrators of such attacks, including kidnapping and gendered and sexual violence in schools or along school routes, where girls are particularly targeted. We support the enactment of existing commitments under the Convention of the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocols on Children and Armed Conflict, and related national and regional child protection legislation and policies. We strongly urge all parties to cease their occupation of educational institutions for military purposes, and to adhere to the call to ensure schools remain “zones of peace and places where intellectual curiosity” and an appreciation for social justice are cultivated.

Access to meaningful education, healthcare, and key socio-economic protections remain seriously compromised for children and their families affected by protracted conflict. In addition to direct violence, the devastating effects of preventable illnesses associated with malnutrition and poor sanitation, in conflict affected countries, continue to ravage communities, acutely affecting children. Children are also the most affected by the security crisis in the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin and other regions affected by the triple threat of conflict, COVID-19 and climate change, with adolescent girls, in particular, suffering the egregious consequences of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. We encourage governments in armed conflict situations to do all they can to institute a culture of respect for women and children among their armed forces. We also call for improved age- and gender-responsive actions to prevent abuses, provide reparation and psycho-social support for victims and survivors, and promote positive shifts in consciousness regarding childhood and gender. Further, we encourage our friends and partners in the international community to renew efforts to support the socioeconomic development of these regions, in line with national needs and priorities and in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Excellencies,

In closing, we wish to reiterate that long-term, strategic, child-centred and focused interventions must be supported by immediate measures to address children, rendered most vulnerable in conflict settings. With the numbers of displaced persons on the rise globally, the majority of whom are women and children, parties to conflict must comply with international humanitarian law, and international refugee law. As noted by the Secretary-General, the cross-border dynamics of conflict, intercommunal violence, and military processes associated with counter-terrorism operations, have all hindered access for child protection actors. We urge parties to ensure unimpeded access, in line with international law, for the delivery of critical life support supplies and access to healthcare by children and their families to save lives and sustain child development. We appeal to members to strengthen their political commitment to the children and armed conflict agenda, and for organisations to remain committed, especially in light of further budgetary constraints, occasioned by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Children represent a significant proportion of populations globally, a figure much higher in countries ravaged by armed conflict. They are owed a more fruitful inheritance. Nothing short of global, national, local and individual transformation will deliver the change they deserve.

We thank you Mr. President