



**Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
to the United Nations**

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Statement

by

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**Arria Formula – Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violations against
Children in Situations of Armed Conflict**

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Check against delivery

Thank you Chair

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines thanks Estonia for organising this meeting on the Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children in situations of armed conflict, and we welcome the opportunity to reflect on the findings of this important study by the Office of the SRSG. Thanks as well to our distinguished panellists for their important insights.

Existing data indicate that the social, economic and health effects of the pandemic have resulted in increased recruitment and use, and abduction of children, closures of schools and child friendly spaces, and reduced disarmament, demobilization and reintegration actions.

We are concerned that 2020 reports of sexual violence against children currently match those for 2019, even as there remains a significant number of unverified reports. When this is assessed against the general trend of underreporting sexual violence, we can certainly infer that the problem is far more serious than current figures suggest. The pandemic has also reduced the capacity of national, regional and international actors to engage in prevention, and protection work, and to provide psychosocial support for children affected by sexual violence.

While there remains a significant number of unverified sensitive violations, the pandemic has clearly heightened the dangers to which children in situations of armed conflict are exposed. COVID-19 containment measures, specifically in the second and third quarters of 2020, have seriously disrupted verification by Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms, as well as the overall prevention, capacity-building and support work of the various Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting. This situation was further compounded as Task Force funding was redirected toward pandemic response efforts.

Notwithstanding these challenges, we note the agility of some missions that were able to improve and consolidate their data collection in the final quarter of 2020, by remote-monitoring, consulting with Women Protection Advisors on sexual violence affecting children, and by training members of NGOs and community-based organisations to leverage their networks for increased reporting. Indeed, these are strategies that can be more fully pursued for possible streamlining in future. There is urgent need to build Task Force capacity to conduct remote monitoring, through the use of ICTs, in order to maintain their child protection and data collection services.

In closing, we wish to add that

- Sustained and flexible funding is necessary to support education, reintegration, and sexual violence prevention and response. Actions to this end must be both child-centred and gender responsive.
- Follow-up analysis is required to further explore the true impact of the pandemic, as more data on 2020 and 2021 verifications become available. This will allow the CTFMRs to update the Security Council, and the wider UN system, on this ever-evolving situation. It will also facilitate appropriately streamlined and joint-up actions.
- Finally, gender-aware child protection priorities must be mainstreamed across national, regional and international pandemic response, as it relates to funding, containment measures, vaccinations and economic recovery plans.

Thank you.