

'Children's crisis' in South Sudan must be addressed, says top UN official calling for real accountability

Virginia Gamba, the United Nations Special Representative for [Children and Armed Conflict](#), on Friday called for much greater accountability and effort, to prevent grave violations against children across the world's youngest nation, South Sudan.

Speaking in the capital Juba, at the end of four-day mission to the country, she said that in 2017, close to 1,400 children had been directly affected, with thousands more bearing the brunt of conflict. Ms. Gamba called on those in authority to take concrete action to end the violations and prevent any recurrence.

"The UN stands ready to support the development and implementation of such [concrete actions](#), including through the joint development of a comprehensive Action Plan covering all six grave violations and the provision of technical assistance for implementation as required," she added.

The Security Council has officially cited "six grave violations": Recruitment and use of children by parties to conflict; rape and other forms of sexual violence; attacks on schools and hospitals; abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access.

Marking her first visit to South Sudan since she took office in April last year, Ms. Gamba emphasized that half of the country's population is below age 18, declaring that "the crisis in South Sudan is a children's crisis."

"My discussions with the authorities lead me to believe that the time is ripe to work with the Government and revise the existing Action Plans (drawn up in 2012 and 2015) so as to develop a comprehensive plan, addressing all six grave violations endured by the children of South Sudan," she stressed.

Ms. Gamba also called for violation-prevention plans to be included in any future peacebuilding initiative across the country.

The Special Representative was encouraged by the large number of children released this year by armed groups, and called for redoubled efforts to release every child being held against their will.

She also emphasized the Government's role in providing long-term support to released children, including psychosocial support to victims and communities.



UNMISS

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, is interviewed by the media on her arrival in Yambio on 7 September, 2018.

“In Yambio, I met children recently released and was moved by their stories, which unfortunately are not unique,” she recounted.

“It is crucial that each and every boy and girl released, benefits from reintegration programmes and the international community must take a strong step and support these children and their communities in a sustainable and comprehensive manner,” she added.

Government troops, together with forces loyal to senior politicians, Riek Machar, and Taban Deng, were cited as UN-verified violating parties in the 2017 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict in South Sudan.

Ms. Gamba also encouraged the criminalization of all grave violations against children in the review of the penal code, the full implementation of the Child Act and the swift signature into law of the Civil Registry Act, offering her full support to these processes.

Ms. Gamba thanked key child protection partners, including the UN [Children's Fund](#), UNICEF, the [UN Mission in South Sudan \(UNMISS\)](#) and non-governmental organizations for their “admirable work” in helping to improve children’s lives there.

“No time must be lost in protecting the children of South Sudan from being used and abused in, for and by armed conflict,” she stressed. “They are not only the future of South Sudan, but also its present.”