

Universities Network
for promoting the rights and the protection of children involved in armed conflict (Universities
Network for Children in Armed Conflict-UNETCHAC)

CONCEPT NOTE

“GIVING HOPES TO GIRL CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT: A JOINT COMMITMENT FROM THE ACADEMIC SYSTEM”

Children are the most vulnerable persons affected by the tremendous consequences of armed conflict. During armed conflict, children are particularly subject to widespread and systematic violations of their human rights with physical, mental, emotional and material repercussions. These violations include recruitment, rape and abuses, killing and maiming, abduction, denial of humanitarian assistance, attacks on schools and hospitals, forced removal from families, illegal detention,

According to the Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, published in June 2020, in 2019 still about 25,000 children were involved in armed conflicts and many of them are victims of the six grave violations identified by the United Nations. These violations acquire specific forms when directed to girls and girl children. In fact, they are victims not only of sexual violence, slavery, sexual exploitation, rape, but also violations on a gender base, such as enforced pregnancies, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation and child and early forced marriages and forced childbearing.

In this context, there is urgent need to put an end to all these grave sufferings with an extraordinary effort not only from the international community but also from the academic system. The Academia institutions, in fact, can give an additional value in promoting awareness both at national and international levels on the importance to preventing and combating these violations with a view to guaranteeing the security and the rights of children also in situations of armed conflict.

On the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), the Universities Network for children in armed conflict has been promoted by the Department of Philosophy and Social, Human and Educational Sciences of the Perugia University (Italy) in cooperation with the Istituto di Studi Politici Internazionali “S. Pio V” and the International Institute of Humanitarian Law (Sanremo). More than 30 universities and research centers of different countries from Europe, Middle East, Africa, North and Latin America have already joined the *Network*, and more will join. The *Network* aims to promote analysis and research activities with a view to enhancing the social and legal protection of boy and girl children involved in armed conflict. The *Network* will also provide activities aimed at increasing the awareness of the spreading phenomenon of the consequences for children involved in armed conflict both when they are direct victims and also when they are affected indirectly by violations to their families and communities (i.e. early school leaving).

With the aim to give children the concrete hope of a better and safer future, in particular through education, the two Conferences organized by the *Network* are specifically focused on the protection of girl children as affected by specific gender-based violations in armed conflict. The Conferences are organized with the aim to promote and increase a dialogue within the academic community both at the national and the international level, with a view to contributing to enhance the protection of girl children.

The Opening Conference, which will be held on November 16, 2020, is aimed at answering the question “Where are we now”, focused on the analysis of the state of art in the protection of girl children. The current pandemic has also pointed out the social risks that girl children are facing. Considering all these factors, the main purpose of the Conference is to identify the international

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instruments that should be used and the legal instruments that can strengthen the protection of girl children and provide a gender empowerment for them through education in the reintegration processes.

The Closing Conference, which will be held on November 20, 2020, will offer an overview of the future perspectives in preventing systematic gender-based violations against girls and girl children. “Future perspectives” should focus on the need, on one hand to strengthen the judicial protection of girl children affected by armed conflict, and on the other hand to acknowledge the key-function of the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325 on WPS in protecting and empowering girl children in armed conflict.

As a link between the Opening and the Closing Conference, the latter should provide a better understanding of the gender dimension of the violations against children in order to protect them from their commission against them. In connection to the prevention, best practices should be discussed in order to draw guidelines for a future and constructive work of the Network.