

**Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict -  
Statement**

**Global IHL Initiative - Workstream 3 on IHL and Peace**

**4<sup>th</sup> round of State consultations**

**Statement**

We thank the ICRC and the co-chairs of Workstream 3 for preparing a comprehensive and well-structured draft outcome document. At the outset, we strongly support the central message of the document that respect for IHL is not only a legal obligation, but also a strategic investment in sustainable peace. The document rightly emphasizes what happens before and during armed conflict shapes the pathway for recovery and long-term peace.

From the perspective of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, we particularly welcome the integration of child protection across all phases of armed conflict—before, during, and after. Investing in children is fundamentally an investment in sustainable peace. Children affected by armed conflict are too often treated as an afterthought in peace efforts, seen only through the lens of vulnerability, yet they are also the ones who will carry forward recovery, reconciliation, and the long-term implementation of peace. Ensuring their protection, reintegration, and full participation in society is therefore not only a humanitarian and legal imperative but also a strategic peacebuilding priority.

At the same time, we would like to highlight a few key areas where we believe further refinement would strengthen both the clarity and impact of the document.

First, on child protection, we encourage more precise and consistent language. References to children should clearly reflect that children associated with armed forces or armed groups must be released as a matter of priority, be separated and transferred to civilian child protection actors as a priority.

Second, we recommend ensuring that references to protection and reintegration fully reflect a child rights-based approach. Reintegration support should not be framed narrowly in terms of preventing a “return to violence,” but rather be grounded in children’s rights to recovery, development, and participation, in line with international legal standards.

Third, we welcome the inclusion of a dedicated checklist on Child Protection and reintegration as well as the checklist on Institutional coordination and participation for post-conflict implementation, which outlines measures to ensure the safe, voluntary, and age-appropriate participation of children. However, we would like to underscore the importance of mainstreaming child-centered, gender-responsive, and disability-inclusive child-protection frameworks into the other checklists as well.

Fourth, at a more general level, we encourage continued efforts to ensure that the document remains operational, particularly for those engaged in mediation and peace processes, is grounded in existing normative frameworks, and focuses on implementation through clear, actionable commitments that states can realistically take forward.

Finally, we hope that the protection of children affected by armed conflict will also be explicitly reflected in the political outcome document of the Global Initiative, as this would send a clear political signal at the highest level.

We will share our statement as well as concrete language suggestions for this outcome document in writing afterward.

Thank you.