

43rd session of the Human Rights Council
Annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming

Remarks for ASG Oscar Fernandez-Taranco on *Thirty years of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Challenges and Opportunities*

24 February 2020, Geneva

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to be here today to share perspectives on ways peacebuilding support has mainstreamed child rights, and what more can we do collectively.

In the Peacebuilding Support Office, within the United Nations peace and security pillar, we are committed to advancing human rights, paying special attention to children and youth.

I am always inspired by the words of wisdom conveyed by children – who are often more skilful in translating the ideals we all aspire to into simple language.

As recently said by a 17-year old girl peacebuilder in the Western Balkans as part of a peacebuilding initiative, “We all know that if we do not have human rights, we do not have peace.”

As a key component of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) is supporting interventions that promote a child rights-based approach to programming at the field level and contribute to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Let me highlight four areas where the PBF has supported, noting positive experiences and good practices.

- (1) Creating space for inclusive participation of children in political and peacebuilding processes;

- (2) Having children’s voices count in disengagement and reintegration processes;
- (3) Protecting children’s rights; and,
- (4) Transforming systems of exclusion and discrimination through education and a culture of peace, as essential elements of a prevention agenda.

First, children’s views and inclusive participation make a difference in political and peacebuilding processes. Children play an active role in mobilizing their communities to address forms of violence and put forward solutions from their unique perspective.

For example, in **The Gambia**, a new PBF initiative was launched last year which engages children and young people on governance systems to promote their active participation and amplify their voices. Through support to the recently established Children National Assembly, children are engaging in dialogue and collaborating with national authorities to implement solutions proposed by them.

In **Guinea**, the PBF supported the establishment of local youth councils in municipalities in several regions to open the space for participation and prepare the ground for children’s future political engagement. The councils, where 36% of the participants are girls, are elected directly by young people to work with municipal councils.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, as part of the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 25 children and young people from across the country intervened in a parliamentary session putting forward issues that concern them.

Second, the implementation of peace agreements continues to be a high priority for the Fund. This has also been included in the new 2020-2024 PBF strategy.

At the recent Security Council briefing on children and armed conflict on 12 February, the Secretary-General underscored the importance of “integrating specific measures to protect children into peace processes [by which] we can achieve concrete results for children, and for peace.”

One way we are contributing to this objective is by **supporting disengagement and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict**.

For example, in **Somalia**, where child recruitment remains a challenge, the Fund is contributing towards improving the lives of conflict-affected boys and girls through the provision of services and facilitating their reintegration.

Similarly, in **Colombia**, a PBF project supporting children of former FARC members following the peace agreement led to the release and reintegration of over hundred children. The project also supported adolescents and youth reestablish their identities, which is an essential element to children's full enjoyment of their rights.

In efforts to achieve sustaining peace, particularly through enhanced system-wide coherence, the Peacebuilding Support Office has been working with the **Global Coalition on Child Soldiers** to reframe reintegration of children and link our joint efforts to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These challenges can most effectively be addressed through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in the longer-term, including through education, health and employment.

Third, the protection of rights is a critical foundation for sustaining peace. Applying a human rights framework to peacebuilding support helps us identify and address those being "left behind."

For example, issues related to the right to acquire a nationality have featured in **Côte d'Ivoire**, where advocacy on and access to birth registrations in areas of high migration was pursued as a strategy to promote awareness around citizenship and increase protection of children born in the country, but potentially from foreign parents.

Fourth, it cannot be stressed enough the **transformative role education** can have in promoting a culture of respect for human rights and inclusion, as a foundation for the construction of a peaceful society. This is also recognized in SDG 4 on education.

For example, in **Northern Mali**, nearly hundred thousand children were engaged in peace education initiatives alongside their teachers and parents, including through sporting events which created the space to promote social cohesion through positive messaging related to peaceful cohabitation and reconciliation across communities.

In another initiative in **Guatemala**, the UN, Government and civil society came together to promote a national citizenship training strategy for schools at all level which integrates the history lessons and memories related to the past conflict.

Communication for peace is yet another powerful and effective tool in promoting peace values among children and their wider communities. In **Colombia**, a successful campaign entitled “Respira paz” reached more than 32,000 children, youth and adults, increasing awareness on the peace process by using inclusive and engaging approaches, such as mobile cinema and radio dramas.

I cannot end this intervention without referring to the role of **Youth, Peace and Security**, and the remarkable ways young people are contributing to peacebuilding and sustaining peace, which was recognized in Security Council resolutions 2250 and 2419.

Investing in young people’s capacities and initiatives, addressing structural barriers that limit their meaningful participation and prioritizing collaborative action and equal partnerships are critical strategies to provoke a paradigm shift from remedial responses to a preventative approach, leading to more resilient, peaceful and inclusive societies.

While much has been achieved, more can be done to intentionally integrate children’s rights in prevention and peacebuilding approaches.

The ongoing 2020 review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture offers an opportunity to build on good practices and lessons learned worldwide, and to put forward recommendations that bring the United Nations pillars together more coherently and efficiently around this objective.

Indeed, the aspirations of children and the younger generation will help guide us as a system on our next steps forward.

Thank you.