

# NATO and Children in Armed Conflict



U.S. Marines protect an Afghan man and his child after Taliban fighters opened fire in the town of Marjah.

## Policy framework

The nature of contemporary warfare has created significant threats against children. They are frequently the victims of indiscriminate attacks and they are subjected to sexual violence. NATO is taking steps, as part of the wider international community, to confront this issue.

The **protection of children in armed conflict** in NATO-led operations and missions was first addressed by Heads of State and Government at the 2012 Chicago Summit where NATO decided to develop practical, field-oriented measures to address violations against children during armed conflict.

As a result, NATO adopted its first **Military Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict** later that year, outlining a broad framework to integrate United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1612 and related resolutions into operational activities and into education and training. Soon thereafter, the North Atlantic Council also appointed the Assistant Secretary General for Operations as the **Senior NATO Focal Point on Children and Armed Conflict**, in charge of maintaining a close dialogue with the UN on this topic.

To better prepare our deployed troops to address this important issue, NATO has produced an **e-learning module on child protection**. Developed in cooperation with the UN in 2013, this online tool is available to all Allies and partner nations and provides an overview of the six grave violations against children identified by the UN Secretary General and the relevant legal frameworks for the protection of children in armed conflict.

At the Wales Summit in 2014, Heads of State and Government decided that NATO would ensure it is sufficiently prepared whenever and wherever children in armed conflict are encountered. In response, and in close cooperation with the UN, NATO prepared the policy document **‘The Protection of Children in Armed Conflict-Way Forward’**. Agreed by the North Atlantic Council in March 2015, the policy provides additional guidance to further integrate UNSCR 1612 and related resolutions into the Alliance’s military doctrine, education, training and exercises, as well as NATO-led operations and missions. Its main priorities include, for example:

- Supporting UN efforts to monitor instances of grave violations committed against children affected by armed conflict.
- When participating in NATO-led operations or missions, military leadership and personnel are trained to recognize and respond to possible grave violations identified by the UN Secretary General.
- When training local forces, NATO ensures that the protection of children affected by armed conflict is given the right attention; NATO also promotes adequate reporting and monitoring mechanisms focussing on the six grave violations.
- The development of standard operating procedures for reporting violations.

## NATO action contributes to the protection of children from the effects of armed conflict

Standard procedures for **monitoring** and **reporting** on the six grave violations in NATO-led missions and operations have been developed in consultation with relevant NGOs/IOs partners. In Afghanistan, the reporting system already in place is being updated to improve information sharing with the UN.

Children and Armed Conflict is being incorporated into NATO military **exercise scenarios**. This means that NATO Commanders receive training to respond to situations where the six grave violations committed against children are encountered.

**Focal points for Children and Armed Conflict** have been appointed throughout the NATO Command Structure. The focal points support the integration of the Military Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict into training opportunities, exercises, and mission planning.

In cooperation with our relevant NGOs/IOs partners, focal points are trained on child protection, human rights, including children's rights, and have knowledge of UNSCR 1612 and related resolutions.

In **Afghanistan**, NATO's Resolute Support Mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) actively supports the UN and the international community's efforts to address the issue of protection of children.

The Resolute Support Mission has recently reviewed its **training on Children and Armed Conflict** to ensure that the ANDSF are aware of their obligations to protect children. To this purpose, a specialized **Children and Armed Conflict Adviser** was deployed in April 2016, for the first time in a NATO-led mission, as part of the Resolute Support Mission. NATO officials continue to use opportunities to raise the issue of protection of children in their political and military engagements with senior Afghan officials.



UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, visited NATO Headquarters on 25 January 2016

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