

# 20 YEARS AFTER OPAC

## PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM ARMED CONFLICT

Tuesday, 29 September 2020 | 6:30-8:00 PM  
University of Geneva (Piaget Auditorium, 600 seats)



### A COMMEMORATIVE EVENT AS A CALL FOR ACTION

2020 marks 20 years since the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC). Ratified by 170 States, OPAC is an indispensable complement to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). This high-level commemorative conference aims to provide renewed momentum to a fundamental notion: to protect every child from armed conflict.

The distinguished keynote speakers and members of the discussion panel will address the current state of children caught up in armed conflict (whether carried out by State or non-State actors) and what civil society and international organizations, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child, can do to better intervene and protect these children.

A significant objective is to identify which initiatives should be supported going forward both on the ground to protect children and with regard to possible adjustments made to international human rights mechanisms and mandates.

### SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is beyond doubt that, more than any other social group, children are disproportionately affected by armed conflict. Worldwide, millions of children are trapped in conflict zones generated by adults. Many children are killed or maimed. Too many are enticed or forcefully recruited into armed forces and used and abused. All are traumatized, their development jeopardized, their schooling interrupted. They are scarred by hunger, by dis-

placement and robbed of their basic need for safety. Phenomena, such as attacks against schools and children in the process of learning, not only constitute violations of children's fundamental right to life and their right to education, but they also impact the long-term development of their communities as a whole. The international community strongly and relentlessly condemns all acts of violence that victimize children as well as their instrumentalization as perpetrators of armed conflict.

Over recent decades and on all continents, the situation of children affected by armed conflict has generated unparalleled attention from every corner of society and mobilized humanitarian organizations and governments, civil society, scholars and revered human rights defenders.

In fact, the very notion of children's rights, and the inspiration for the Declaration on the Rights of the Child (1924), was partially born out of Eglantyne Jebb's indignation with regard to the plight of children during and in the aftermath of World War I, the so-called "war to end all wars". More recently, in 1996, the momentum came from Graça Michel's seminal United Nations report, Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, and the creation of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Shortly thereafter, in May 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict or OPAC. Widely ratified or signed, so far only 17 States have not taken action regarding its adoption. 20 years later there is a need to provide a new impetus to OPAC and to bring together leading scholars, mandate holders, human rights advocates and treaty body members to identify what the international community needs to accomplish to continue protecting children.

### Speakers (tbc):

- **Gordon Brown**, former Prime Minister, United Kingdom
- **Shaheed Fatima QC**, barrister and lead author Protecting Children in Armed Conflict (2018, Hart Publishing)
- **Virginia Gamba**, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict
- **Peter Maurer**, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross
- **Renate Winter**, member (former Chair), UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

### Organizers:

- University of Geneva (via its Center for Children's Rights Studies)
- Committee on the Rights of the Child
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Free of charge, this public conference will draw participants from international organizations, non-governmental organizations, the academic community, students, and the public at large.