Child consultations – children’s right to make their voices heard

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To give children an opportunity to have their voice heard by decision-makers, civil society organisations and other adults, Sweden has partnered with UNICEF, Plan International, Save the Children, Fryshuset and others to hold child consultations in six different countries with six different contexts around the world. Children have shared their experiences, needs and dreams with the hope of guiding politicians to make the right decisions. These are the results of the child consultations, including their recommendations.
Child consultation in Sweden

The children’s recommendations from the Child Forum on 22 March 2018 to Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström on efforts regarding children and armed conflict:

  Comment: Adults need to listen to children, respect the Convention on the Rights of the Child and cooperate on these issues – whether in times of peace or armed conflict.

- The UN must ensure that children under the age of 18 are not recruited into armed forces or made to participate in conflicts.  
  Comment: When countries and groups recruit child soldiers, other countries must speak out. Being a soldier is very dangerous. It deprives children of a normal childhood and can have an adverse impact on them in the future.

- In an armed conflict, a ‘global hotline’ should be activated (telephone line).  
  Comment: A global hotline will give children the chance to easily report on what is happening, and to seek help and guidance. It can also be useful to have a trusted adult close by, and preferably someone who has had similar experiences.

- Ensure that displaced families are not separated. If this happens, ensure that children and parents are reunited.  
  Comment: Children should not have to be alone during a war. Trusted adults could be their ‘parents’. It is also important that there are places where families can assemble, for example a camp.

- In the event of a possible armed conflict, ‘survival kits’ should be provided to all households.  
  Comment: A survival kit is a kind of first aid kit, containing useful items in time of war, such as filters, a GPS device and water.

- Teach children about children’s rights and train staff in e.g. refugee camps on the rights of the child.  
  Comment: All children are entitled to education and it is the responsibility of states and local governments alike to ensure that education is provided.
• Guarantee education, ‘hopefulness centres/child-friendly spaces’ and hope-inducing activities.
  
  **Comment:** Children should not have to forfeit their childhood. In a hopefulness centre, schools are needed, but physical and mental care is also important for children affected by armed conflict.

• Ensure that all children have the right to speak and to be heard.
  
  **Comment:** Adults can come to hopefulness centres and ask the children how they are doing; the children’s thoughts and ideas should guide UN work in this area.

• Train a global task force of ‘Teachers without borders’ that can quickly be sent to a conflict setting and to teach refugee children.
  
  **Comment:** All children have the right to education and ‘Teachers without borders’ should also be able to award grades that children can take with them out into the world.

• Girls and boys and women and men should be guaranteed equal treatment.
  
  **Comment:** Equal treatment may be even more important in conflict situations when people are already in a vulnerable position; it is therefore important that everyone is treated equally.

• Protect schools and hospitals from attacks.
  
  **Comment:** Hospitals and schools where children are located should never be attacked, as these are exactly the places where people should feel safe.

• Children under the age of 18 should not be forced to marry (stop forced and childhood marriages).
  
  **Comment:** People should make their own decisions about who they marry.

• Demand more severe punishments for rape and child abuse; ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their crimes.
  
  **Comment:** Children cannot defend themselves in the same way adults can; punishment for these crimes should therefore be more severe.

• Make children and parents aware of the risks associated with social media particularly in recruitment, trafficking and exploitation of children.
  
  **Comment:** Information must be provided to children and parents in different ways. For example, compulsory information at school at a certain age can be followed up at a later stage.

• Have a permanent childhood advisory committee at the UN Security Council.
  
  **Comment:** Adults cannot only talk about children and what matters to them, they must talk to children to understand their needs.
Child consultation in Lebanon with refugee children from Syria and Palestine, and Lebanese IDPs

• Awareness-raising activities for parents on the importance of taking their children’s life and education choices into consideration, so as not to force them to do things they do not want to do.

• The laws regarding custody must be amended and account must be taken of children's opinions in divorce cases.

• Awareness-raising activities must be held for all vulnerable and marginalised children on their right to participation and to express their views.

• More attention must be given to implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

• Awareness-raising activities must be held with children on their rights and how to protect themselves from abuse, including abuse while using social media.

• Awareness-raising activities must be held with parents to call attention to the places where their children spend time.

• Parents’ attention must be drawn to online exploitation so they can monitor their children's access to websites and social media.

• Awareness-raising activities must be held with parents on the effects of moral and physical abuse on children.

• Awareness-raising activities must be held with parents on the importance of education and registering births.

• The most important thing about laws protecting children from abuse and exploitation is to apply them, not only to enact them.
• People who commit crimes against children must be prosecuted.

• Families in need must have access to social services so they do not have to send their children out to work.

• Marriage before the age of 18 must be forbidden.

• Games and shows that target children must be monitored.

• Awareness-raising activities must be held on drug abuse and its effects on children.

• Armed groups that target children must be accountable.

• Specialised childcare centres must be established for street children and children at risk.

• A child protection policy to protect children from all forms of abuse at school must be established and implemented, and signed by all teachers and school staff.

• Mandatory and free education must be available.

• The condition that Syrian children must have grades in order to enrol in schools in Lebanon must be abolished.

• Grades for Syrian children must be provided.

• Secondary level schools must be established in Palestinian camps where only elementary level education is provided.

• Teachers must have training on active learning techniques, and implementation of these techniques must be ensured.

• Support must be given to children in the form of education to prevent their recruitment to armed groups.

• Classes in music, drawing, sports, etc. must be added.
Child consultation in Colombia

- After more than 50 years of war, we deserve to live in our territories in stable and enduring peace with social justice in the affected regions of the country.

- Girls and boys who have been victims and affected by the conflict, and their families, must be able to enjoy their rights and receive timely support and care in the areas needed.

- The Colombian state and its institutions should generate policies and actions that guarantee the effective realisation of all the rights of boys and girls, with special attention to children affected by the conflict.

- There must be more opportunities to access education and to use free time in productive and innovative ways.

- The voices of girls and boys must be listened to and account must be taken of them when decisions affecting them are made.

- There must be more investment in projects and actions that teach us and prepare us to strengthen our knowledge, and more partnerships must be sought in other countries that may want to invest in children and young people in our country.

- Employment opportunities must be generated to prevent young people from becoming associated with groups that operate outside the law.

- Natural resources must be respected in our territories to prevent further conflicts and violence.

- There must be equal opportunities for boys and girls, children and young people so that everyone can enjoy their rights.

- Efforts must be made so that this peace becomes a reality in our hearts, our families, our territories and our country.
Child consultation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

We, as advocates of the rights of our child peers forming a community structure of children’s participation in the protection and promotion of their rights, have noticed that one of the problems deriving from the war is one that urgently requires your contribution as responsible parents for all the children of this country: that of the armed conflict.

In view of the above, we propose the following:

• Strengthen the security system in our country by fighting against the recruitment of children into armed groups.

• Accompany the affected children where they are being recruited into the armed groups so that they can return from the jungle.

• Support various outreach activities to reduce the rate of child recruitment to armed groups in our province.

We believe and are sure that by achieving a lasting peace in our country, children will fully enjoy their rights and a solution will be found to the various problems listed above. The children gave the same recommendations: peace and security, schooling, food and hope that they can get a job in the future.

• The children need food to survive, and lack of food often drives children to armed groups.

• The children want peace so they can return to their families and return to school.

• They want access to free schooling, to which they can travel under safe conditions.

• They do not want to risk their school being occupied by armed actors or being destroyed as a result of the conflict.

• The children also want to feel hope for the future – a future where they can work and support their family.
Child consultation in Yemen

- The Security Council should urge the parties involved in the process to demobilise child prisoners and exchange prisoners.
- The Security Council should urge the parties to prevent the recruitment of children.
- UN offices should work on recovery, capacity-building and outreach programmes.
- UNICEF should respect children’s participation as a fundamental principle in accordance with the rights of the child.
- The Security Council should work with UN offices to deliver humanitarian assistance to IDPs and Yemenis.
- The UN Security Council – and the UN as a whole – should work with the Office of the UN Special Envoy in Yemen and cooperate and listen to the voices of children.
- The Security Council should exert pressure to stop the war.
- The Security Council should lift the siege on airports and ports.
- The Security Council should act as a commission of inquiry into crimes against children.
- The Security Council must urge the payment of salaries.
Child consultation in Bangladesh with Rohingya refugee children

During the talks, it emerged that the most basic needs are not being met. At night, for example, there are no helpers from international organisations at the site, except for some healthcare professionals who are in the clinics that have been set up. Instead, there are special camp guards on patrol, but these are said to be very few, and the patrols do not take place on foot, which means that large parts of the camps are left unattended during night. These are the children's recommendations:

• Lighting on the route to toilets. The girls said that they did not dare go to the toilet at night for fear of being subjected to abuse.

• Better access to food and clean water. It emerged that there is a huge shortage of clean water, which in turn means that diseases can spread easily. The children also mentioned that there is a lack of food (about 24 per cent of the children are malnourished).

• Child-friendly spaces. The children mentioned that they lack places to play and need clothing, shoes and other necessary items.

• Access to education. Education was emphasised throughout the consultations – by children, their parents and staff.

• Rohingya children did not want to be forgotten.