**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLEDGE PRESENTED BY ITALY AT THE 33RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT (2019)**

January 2024

At the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Italy undertook, through a pledge open to membership of other countries (so-called "open pledge"), to take the necessary actions to **reduce the impact of armed conflicts on children’s lives**, ensuring respect for their fundamental rights in the field of military training and decision-making, access to education in situations of armed conflict, restoration of educational facilities in post-conflict times, and planning of humanitarian action. Italy's pledgewas the most supported of those presented at the 33rd Conference and was signed by 27 States and 18 humanitarian organizations.

To implement this pledge, Italy carries out awareness-raising initiatives, both bilaterally and multilaterally, on the importance of preventing **the recruitment** and employment of children during armed conflicts, and ensuring the release of child soldiers and their reintegration through long-term interventions, encouraging the widest possible ratification of the **First Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child** on the recruitment of children, which sets the minimum age for mandatory recruitment at 18 years old and requires States to prevent persons under 18 from taking part in hostilities. The Protocol has so far been ratified by 173 countries.

Italy also promotes **universal adherence to the "Safe Schools Declaration",** a declaration aimed at guaranteeing the right to education during armed conflicts, and at limiting the repercussions on students, educational staff and infrastructure. In October 2021, **the fourth international conference "Safe Schools"** was held in Nigeria. Italy participated at the political level, to enhance the great commitment made and to underline our country’s attention to the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In fact, the **Fourth National Plan of Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security"** (2020-2024) includes a special focus on the protection of children, and in particular girls, in conflict and post-conflict areas.

Moreover, various initiatives in favour of children living in conflict or post-conflict situations are funded by the **Italian Cooperation**, especially through the humanitarian channel. These initiatives aim to ensure assistance in the areas of protection, health and food security, as well as the continuity of education services in emergency contexts, through direct education activities, teacher training, rehabilitation of destroyed school buildings, and meal distribution programs in school canteens. In collaboration with civil society organisations, Italy also carries out regular **training sessions** for national military forces on the rights of children in armed conflict.

Italy works to counter all other forms of violence against children during armed conflicts, including sexual violence, by encouraging States to adopt, develop and implement **legal and administrative measures** to ensure that violations against children are criminalised and that offenders are brought to justice, in accordance with the provisions of relevant international instruments.

To achieve the objectives set out in the pledge, Italy regularly makes specific recommendations to individual States on the occasion of the **Universal Periodic Review**, co-sponsors **resolutions and declarations in the Human Rights Council and the UN Third Committee** on the subject, and promotes the inclusion of **specific references** tothe protection of children in situations of armed conflict in these and any other relevant multilateral document. Italy has also co-sponsored the UN General Assembly resolution establishing **the International Day for the Protection of Education from Attack** (on the 9th of September), proposed by Qatar.

Italy's widespread awareness-raising action takes also place within the framework of the **United Nations Commission on the Status of Women/CSW.** In this context, in March 2011, our country promoted **a side event** on violence against girls in armed conflict and the international criminal justice system, which was also attended by the UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC), Virginia Gamba.

Italy **actively supports the mandate of the SRSG CAAC** and regularly co-sponsors UNGA’s resolutions renewing the mandate of the Special Representative. In addition**,** Italy **finances the** "**Trust Fund for Children and Armed Conflict",** which is crucial to ensure the implementation of the mandate of the RS, both in terms of research activities related to the impact of violations perpetrated on children in armed conflicts and to enable the RS's field visits and participation in international meetings. Italy allocated €15,000 to the fund in 2022 and €250,000 in 2023. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation also finances the assignment of a **Junior Professional Officer (JPO)** to the RS Office in Brussels. Finally, Italy has promoted the drafting by the RS of a *vademecum* on the fight against the abduction of children by armed groups ("Guidance Note on Abduction"), presented at a **side** **event of the Security Council High-Level Debate** on Children and Armed Conflict, held in New York in July 2022.

In 2022, with a contribution of € 8,333.33, Italy funded the international academic network for the protection of children in **armed conflicts (UNETCHAC/Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflict**), promoted by the University of Perugia, the Italian Red Cross and *Save the Children*. In March 2021, the Permanent Mission of Italy in Geneva organized a UNETCHAC event, **on the sidelines of the 46th session of the Human Rights Council**, on safeguarding access to education in situations of armed conflict. Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation have also intervened at various other events of the Network, such as the launch of the *Autumn School* and an international conference on the situation of children in Iraq.

In order to strengthen cooperation and dialogue in the **Mediterranean area** on the topic, Italy organized two events in the 2020 and 2021 editions of the **MED Dialogues**: the panels "*Child protection in armed conflict: establishing a Mediterranean Dialogue of the right of the child*" and "*Protecting Children in Armed Conflict and the Safe Schools Declaration. A Mediterranean Perspective*".

In 2022, Italy, which is already a member of the ***Groups of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict* (CAAC)** established **in New York, Geneva and the OSCE,** launched together with Belgium the ***Group of Friends* CAAC *for the European Union***, with the support of the UN *Liaison Office on CAAC* Brussels and UNICEF. Among the initiatives carried out by the Group, it is worth mentioning the organization of the European Humanitarian Forum, a two-day workshop on the contribution of the Common Foreign and Security Policy to the implementation of the CAAC agenda, a virtual summer school on CAAC promoted in partnership with Malta, and an online training course on children and armed conflicts, developed together with the Staff College of the United Nations System in Turin.

Finally, as part of the *Group of Friends CAAC for the European Union*, Italy has presented some proposals to make **the new "EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict",** which should be approved under the Belgian Presidency during the first half of 2024, more effective. The proposals include: a greater emphasis on children as autonomous subjects of international law and on their right to be consulted in any decision that concerns them; the need to take gender issues into account; the need to highlight the six serious violations referred to in the 1999 UN Security Council resolution (recruitment, sexual violence, abduction, killing and injury, attacks on schools and hospitals, denial of humanitarian assistance); a greater focus on access to justice; a reference to the signing of the First Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the "Safe School Declaration"; the introduction of provisions to support the repatriation of deported and missing minors, and of the registration of all minors; and the provision of statistical research on violations of children's rights in armed conflicts.