



UNAMA LAUNCHES BOOKLET ON PROTECTING AFGHAN CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

KABUL, 12 May 2014 – The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) today launched a booklet on the obligations of all parties to the country’s armed conflict to respect and promote the rights of children under international law and Islam.

The booklet also highlights the complementarity of the teachings and fundamental tenets of Islam with international human rights and international humanitarian law.

“The conflict has exposed children to armed groups that prey on their vulnerability and exploit them, and who use children to participate in active hostilities or as messengers and delivery boys – further exposing children to the dangers of war,” said the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, Ján Kubiš, at the launch.

“War destroys the lives of children. It leaves them scarred physically and psychologically,” he added. “It truly shocks me when I meet children in this county who have known nothing but war and violence.”

The conflict in Afghanistan has left children dead and injured, including without limbs. It has too often denied children basic human rights such as access to education and adequate healthcare, and has impeded even the most basic economic development, fuelling poverty and further vulnerability of children.

UNAMA documented 1,694 child casualties – 545 killed and a further 1,149 injured – in 2013. The leading cause of death and injury of children was improvised explosive devices, which do not distinguish between combatants and civilians and are the biggest killer of civilians in Afghanistan.

The booklet – entitled ‘Protecting Afghanistan’s Children in Armed Conflict,’ with editions in Dari, Pashto and English – was launched in the Kabul office of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. It is the result of a series of discussions and collaboration between UNAMA and respected Afghan religious leaders, scholars and experts representing different religious and academic institutions.

Focusing on the six grave violations of child rights in armed conflict, namely: the killing and maiming of children, recruitment, use and association of children with armed forces and armed groups; the abduction of children; attacks against schools and hospitals; rape and other forms of

sexual violence against children, and the denial of access to humanitarian assistance, the booklet examines each violation under Sharia law, international human rights law, international humanitarian law and the national laws of Afghanistan.

“The booklet will serve as a resource and advocacy tool for all child protection partners and promote dialogue on critical and sensitive issues,” said Mr. Kubiš. “Ultimately, the aim is to protect Afghan children from the scourge of war and support the efforts of Afghan civil society and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.”

Today’s event follows the recent launch at UN Headquarters in New York of a campaign, ‘Children – Not Soldiers,’ which seeks to mobilize support to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by national security forces by 2016. The campaign, jointly initiated by the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), is supporting eight countries in this effort, including Afghanistan.

“I particularly welcome the Government of Afghanistan’s endorsement of this campaign and its commitment to take further action to ensure that children are not recruited into the ranks of the Afghan national security forces,” Mr. Kubiš said.

During the campaign, the UN’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF will work with their UN and non-governmental partners to reinforce efforts to support and strengthen their engagement with the eight countries aimed at reaching the goal of ending and preventing recruitment and use of children in their country’s security forces.

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