

UNAMA**United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan**

Strategic Communication and Spokespersons Unit, Kabul, Afghanistan

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United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan
Ján Kubiš

Remarks at the launch of the booklet 'Protecting Afghanistan's Children in
Armed conflict'

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(as prepared for delivery)

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for joining us here today to launch this very important body of work: *'Protecting Afghanistan's Children in Armed Conflict'*. And of course my sincere gratitude to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and the Commission's Head, Ms. Sima Samar, for hosting today's event.

Allow me to start by reflecting on the impact the on-going armed conflict has had in Afghanistan. It has exacted a devastating toll on the lives of Afghan children. Actions of the parties to the armed conflict continue to result in the death of hundreds of children every year – I could provide a long list of statistics which UNAMA compiles regularly, but I think we all know the picture is extremely bleak.

Just a snapshot, in 2013 alone UNAMA documented 1,694 child casualties (545 killed and a further 1,149 injured). The leading cause of death and injury was the detonation of improvised explosive devices, which by their very nature fail to distinguish between combatants and civilians. The conflict has left children killed, maimed and injured. It has too often denied

children fundamental human rights such as access to education and adequate healthcare, and has impeded even the most basic economic development, fuelling poverty and further vulnerability.

The conflict has exposed children to groups that prey on their defenselessness and exploit them, groups who brainwash children to act as suicide bombers, who use children to partake in active hostilities or be associated with armed groups in other ways as messengers and delivery boys – further exposing children to the dangers of war.

War destroys the lives of children. It leaves them scarred physically and psychologically. It is truly shocking - generations of children have lived in Afghanistan affected by war, violence and extreme poverty.

We all have both legal and moral obligations to protect children in situations of armed conflict and to robustly promote their rights. It is in this spirit that we are gathered here today to launch this booklet, which not only stresses the obligations of all parties to the conflict under international law to respect and promote children's rights, but, importantly, highlights the complementarity of the teachings and fundamental tenets of Islam with international law.

The booklet focuses 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, 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. Each violation is examined in terms of Sharia law, international human rights law, international humanitarian law and the national laws of Afghanistan.

I am pleased to note that this booklet is the result of a series of discussions, roundtable meetings, and collaboration between UNAMA and a number of respected Afghan religious leaders, scholars and experts representing different religious and academic institutions. It therefore truly represents a meaningful partnership to combat egregious human rights violations against children.

I would like to personally thank all the individuals involved in the production of this excellent advocacy booklet. Many of you are here today. I know it was no easy task and that it required

hours of discussion and research. Rest assured, your tireless efforts will serve to advance the protection of children in armed conflict.

I also hope that this fruitful partnership will not end with the production of this booklet, but will continue, enabling us to jointly carry the crucial messages in the booklet to all parties to the conflict in an effort to prevent grave violations of child rights, foster accountability of perpetrators, and promote the rights of children in armed conflict.

I am certain the booklet will serve as an excellent resource and advocacy tool for all child protection partners and enable us to engage in dialogue on critical and indeed sensitive issues. Ultimately, its aim is to protect Afghan children from the scourge of war and support the work undertaken by Afghan civil society and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

I would also like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to a campaign that was recently launched at the United Nations headquarters in New York. Entitled '*Children – Not Soldiers*', the campaign aims to ensure that no State will permit the recruitment of children aged under 18 into their security forces by the year 2016. I particularly welcome the Afghan Government's endorsement of this campaign and the commitment to take further measures to ensure that no children are recruited into the ranks of the Afghan national security forces.

Again, I commend all those involved in the production of this booklet, which is being launched today in Dari, Pashto, and English. I encourage you to use it in all your advocacy efforts focused on advancing the rights of Afghan children in armed conflict.

Thank you.
