



Save the Children

THE UN MONITORING AND REPORTING MECHANISM ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN ARMED CONFLICT

Policy brief

HOW THE UN'S MONITORING AND REPORTING MECHANISM CAN BETTER PROTECT CHILDREN

In 2005, the UN Security Council established a groundbreaking new mechanism to monitor and report on grave violations of children's rights in conflict. This briefing outlines the results of Save the Children UK's research¹ into the impact the mechanism has had on children's lives and makes recommendations on how it could be improved.²

What is the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism?

The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) was established by the UN Security Council to keep under review six grave violations of children's rights by named parties to armed conflict:

- the killing or maiming of children
- the recruitment or use of child soldiers
- attacks on schools or hospitals
- rape or other grave sexual violence against children
- the abduction of children
- the denial of humanitarian access to children.

How does it work?

Although the MRM's remit is to protect children against all the violations defined above, the MRM is currently only activated in conflict situations where children are being recruited and used in armed forces. Once the MRM is 'triggered', UN agencies, NGOs and other organisations operating at the front line of humanitarian work gather incidents and trends involving all six grave violations. This information is then reported to a Security Council Working Group, which analyses the findings and issues a response. By 2007, the Security Council had considered 15 reports generated by the MRM, and had issued a number of conclusions and recommendations with the aim of reducing grave violations.

In several conflict situations, the MRM has led to the development of action plans to prevent and respond to the recruitment and use of child soldiers. These plans are developed jointly by the in-country MRM Task Force and the particular armed force or group, with technical assistance from the office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and other members of the UN country team. Progress is then monitored by a Security Council Working Group as part of the MRM.

What has been achieved so far?

The MRM has undoubtedly had a positive impact on the protection of children by raising the international profile of children and armed conflict. The Working Group's ongoing scrutiny of MRM reports has firmly integrated children's rights within the Security Council agenda, and provided a platform where the Council can demonstrate, and be assessed on, its commitment to ending all grave violations of children's rights in armed conflict. This has, in turn, improved political commitment to children in armed conflict in other forums.

The MRM also has great potential to link efforts to protect children in conflict on every level, from the individual child through to the political decisions of the Security Council. Children interviewed during our research were inspired – at times astonished – to learn that their experiences were heard by such a high-level decision-making body. They had great hopes that this connection would bring them better protection.

The MRM, and the higher profile it has given children and armed conflict, has led to the demobilisation of many child soldiers by, for example, the Forces Nouvelles in Côte d'Ivoire and armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Some armed groups, notably those in Sri Lanka and Myanmar (Burma), have sought legitimacy by engaging in the MRM and its associated action plan to demobilise child soldiers.

What needs to improve?

There is little evidence that the MRM has reduced rape and other forms of violence (listed above). For example, in Nepal, the DRC and Côte d'Ivoire, children continue to suffer grave violations, most of which are not reported to anyone. Perpetrators – who include members of armed groups and civilians – are rarely penalised.

The overwhelming majority of children and adults we spoke to cited rape and other forms of sexual violence as the most widespread grave violation against children. As well as a violation of children's rights, sexual violence causes severe and lasting problems for children, and makes peace building and development difficult to achieve.

Reporting levels of violence against children are, in places, chronically low.³ Monitoring and reporting procedures are ineffective, and fail to reach vulnerable groups. Children are often unable to participate in the MRM because they lack the resources and expertise to engage with it. Many victims and witnesses are afraid to report violations because their safety can't be assured.

One shortcoming of the MRM is its focus on reporting rather than on providing a response, because victims and their carers usually seek assistance only when they can expect practical help. For example, a girl who has been raped will often only come forward to get medical help, at which point she may be encouraged and supported to make an official complaint. It is a violation of children's rights, not to mention professional codes of conduct, to receive a report of a grave violation against a child and not to provide assistance.

What we're calling for

The following recommendations have been developed with child protection professionals across the humanitarian and development sectors, and with children and young people living in conflict.

- A new Security Council Resolution should be introduced to expand the 'trigger' for application of the MRM to all grave violations, especially sexual violence, so they are given similar status to child soldiering.
- Greater investment should be made in child protection programmes and services to increase the quality, coverage and levels of reporting within the MRM, as well as the assistance it offers to victims of violence. Child protection programmes and services are the foundation on which the MRM operates. They can inform children and adults about their rights, provide victims and carers with safe and confidential reporting pathways, ensure that practical assistance is on hand for victims, and prevent violations from ever taking place.
- Immediate responses to grave violations must be linked effectively with longer-term development agendas. As recognised within Security Council Resolution 1612, grave violations require long-term child protection responses within broader peace-building and development work. Information gathered through the MRM should inform longer-term investment in post-conflict settings. Development and humanitarian agencies should collaborate more effectively, and there should be more investment in building the comprehensive child protection systems and structures needed to tackle violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.⁴

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References

¹ K Barnett and A Jefferys (2008) 'Full of Promise: how the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism can better protect children' *Humanitarian Network Paper Number 62* Overseas Development Institute, London

² These conclusions are based on consultations with children and adults in Nepal, Cote d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), interviews with professionals across the humanitarian sector, and an extensive literature review.

³ During Save the Children UK's consultations with children and adults in the DRC, it was estimated that 85–95% of child rapes go unreported, while in Cote d'Ivoire and Nepal 40% and 75% respectively of all violations were thought to go unreported.

⁴ For more information please see Save the Children UK (2008) *A 'Rough Guide' to Child Protection Systems* and Save the Children UK (2009) *Child Protection Systems in Emergencies: a review of current thinking and experience*.