

Protecting Children in Armed Conflict: Addressing the Impact of Explosive Weapons in an era of evolving warfare

High-Level Event during the UN General Assembly

25 September 2026

Purpose of the event

As the international community marks the 30th anniversary of the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) mandate, the number of children killed and maimed in conflict has increased for the third year in a row, and civilian infrastructure and essential services are increasingly damaged and destroyed. The use of Explosive Weapons In Populated Areas (EWIPA) remains one of the gravest threats to children living in conflict zones. In 2025, killing and maiming remained the most devastating grave violation, with over 70% of child casualties caused by explosive weapons.

The high-level event will highlight the disastrous consequences of EWIPA for children, drawing on the latest data, evidence, programmatic and advocacy work, and explore how new and evolving means and methods of warfare are exacerbating harm. It will seek to galvanize political commitment for the endorsement and implementation of the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the humanitarian consequences arising from the use of EWIPA ("the EWIPA Declaration") and other avenues to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict.

Context

For the past three years, the report of the Secretary-General on CAAC has reported double-digit increases in the number of children killed and maimed in conflict. In 2025 alone, the UN verified more than 14,200 child casualties across 23 contexts. Whenever explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 96% of casualties are civilians, including children.

These trends are exacerbated by evolving means and methods of warfare. For instance, the use of drones has increased by 4,000 per cent between 2020 and 2024. Cheap and readily available, drones have proliferated and are increasingly the weapon of choice for the use of explosive weapons in diverse contexts like Ukraine, Democratic Republic of the Congo, State of Palestine and in the Central Sahel region. In Sudan, during the first quarter of this year, drone attacks accounted for nearly 80 per cent of all child casualties.

Armed drones have expanded the scope and reach of hostilities, exposing civilians who were previously unaffected by fighting to harm, and are having a deep psychological impact on children. Children in conflicts today describe how the pervasiveness of these drones- around their schools, homes and healthcare centres- makes them feel that no place is safe. And when drones and other weaponry are autonomous or guided by artificial intelligence (AI) - including to generate target lists - accountability for violations against children is challenging to establish.

Beyond the immediate death and injury of children, the profound mental health and psychosocial impact, and mass displacements they experience, the destruction and damage of civilian infrastructure by EWIPA, including of schools, hospitals, water and sanitation facilities, and supply routes—have devastating consequences for children's protection, survival and long-term development.

The EWIPA Declaration represents a significant opportunity to strengthen the protection of children, their families and communities from the devastating effects of armed conflict. To date, 91 Member States have endorsed the Declaration¹, demonstrating growing political recognition of the need to address the consequences of explosive weapons.

However, endorsement alone is not sufficient. Progress in translating political commitments into concrete policy and operational measures has been limited, and only a small number of endorsing States have demonstrated meaningful implementation.

¹ <https://ewipa.org/endorsement>

Outcomes

- **Build common understanding** of the scale and severity of the impact of EWIPA on children, by presenting quantitative and qualitative data and evidence on the violations of their rights and its effects on children's safety, physical and mental wellbeing, and the reverberating consequences of attacks on civilian objects and services that children rely upon.
- **Mobilize political support** for the Political Declaration on EWIPA and its implementation, including by providing a platform for Member States to commit to implementation of the EWIPA Declaration, integrate considerations in their policy or practice, or to champion the protection of children in humanitarian diplomacy and political engagement.
- **Elevate child and young people experiences and recommendations**, particularly of affected children and young people, to share their lived experiences, testimonies and calls to action at the event. Their perspectives will inform discussions, reinforce the need for child-specific implementation of the Political Declaration on EWIPA, and be amplified in the future events.
- **Support renewed political commitment to integrating Mental Health and Psychosocial Support** into humanitarian response and arms policy frameworks, ensuring that the silent wounds of explosive violence receive the same urgency as physical ones.
- **Spotlight the child rights impact of the evolving use of technology in conflict**, such as the prevalence of cheap and accessible drones, and weaponry that is autonomous or guided by AI - and the increased risks to children's protection in conflict and validate child-centred recommendations from Member States and other actors attending the event to mitigate these risks and strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict.
- **Build momentum for sustained engagement** beyond UNGA, including through Member State leadership, investment partnerships and follow-up actions to advance commitments on strengthening the protection of water and other essential infrastructure.

Format

The Member State-led event will feature a moderated panel discussion bringing together affected children, Member States, intergovernmental organisations, and humanitarian child protection actors. The panel will discuss topics including the impact of EWIPA on children; the effects of evolving warfare and technological developments; concrete actions Member States and stakeholders should take in strengthening the protection of children, enhancing accountability and in advancing implementation of the EWIPA Political Declaration and the Children and Armed Conflict agenda; and sustaining investment in child protection responses.

Member States will be invited to use the event as a platform to announce new commitments, including endorsement of the EWIPA Political Declaration, adoption of national policy measures, financial pledges to support protection for children in conflict, or other concrete actions to support implementation of the Declaration.

Audience

The high-level event will convene Member States (including endorsing and non-endorsing countries; EWIPA champions, and Member States affected by EWIPA, UN agencies, private sector actors, civil society including faith-based organizations, young advocates, humanitarian practitioners, and other stakeholders engaged in child protection, technology and humanitarian action.

Venue

Date: Friday, 25 September 2026

Time: 10:00-11:30am

Venue: ECOSOC Chamber

Hosts/organizers: The Republic of Malta, The Kingdom of Norway, SRSG-CAAC, UNICEF, War Child

Format: High-level panel discussion during the UN General Assembly