



ACERWC
African Committee of Experts on
the Rights and Welfare of the Child

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The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) expresses deep concern over the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in Goma, located in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The recent escalation of violence has led to significant civilian casualties, mass displacements, and egregious violations of children's rights.

The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), in its [1256th Emergency Ministerial Meeting Communiqué](#), strongly condemned the heinous attacks that have resulted in the loss of lives, injuries, and the displacement of civilians, particularly women and children. The ACERWC underscores that children are disproportionately affected by the ongoing conflict, facing heightened risks of kidnapping, recruitment by armed groups and vulnerability to both physical and sexual violence as well as severe psychological trauma. Many people have been forced to flee their homes, depriving them of access to education, healthcare, and basic necessities. Additionally, the United Nations has reported an alarming rise in children being separated from their families, increasing their vulnerability to other forms of child abuse such as child trafficking. The lack of safe shelter and limited access to food, water, and medical supplies further exacerbates the crisis for displaced children. The PSC has called for urgent and unhindered humanitarian access, emphasizing that immediate protection and support must be prioritized for children in need.

The ACERWC reaffirms that every child has an inalienable right to life, survival, and development, as well as the right to protection against child abuse and torture as enshrined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, a treaty ratified by the DRC. This right remains absolute, even during times of conflict. Protecting children is fundamental to lasting peace in the region.

Recognizing the effects of the ongoing conflict on children's rights and their welfare and the corresponding obligations under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the

Child, the ACERWC refers to Article 22 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which prescribes the protection of children in all conflict situations. Additionally, the ACERWC refers to its General Comment on Article 22 on children in conflict situations. The Committee echoes the PSC's call for strict adherence to International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, emphasizing that attacks on civilians, children included, constitute war crimes.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- **Calls on** all conflicting parties to uphold children's rights in accordance with the principle of the best interests of the child and to immediately cease all forms of violence against children. Most equally important the concerned parties should stop the war.
- **Emphasizes** the need for national and regional authorities to implement a comprehensive child protection framework that includes safe zones for displaced children, child-focused trauma recovery services, and strict measures to prevent child recruitment by armed groups.
- **Stresses** the urgency of unrestricted humanitarian access to reach children in need and provide essential services such as food, water, medical aid, and psychosocial support, and urges the international community to increase funding and logistical support for relief efforts.
- **Encourages** the Congolese authorities to work towards conducting prompt, impartial, and thorough investigations into attacks targeting civilians, children included, and prosecute those responsible for the attacks through fair judicial processes.

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child reaffirms its unwavering commitment to supporting the Democratic Republic of Congo in protecting and promoting children's rights.

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Jointly issued by

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