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Protecting children affected by armed conflicts

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A. Draft Resolution

1. Children across Europe and the world are affected by wars and armed conflicts. They are directly concerned by having life-threatening violence inflicted upon them or by witnessing such violence, by losing or being separated from their parents or other caregivers, by being deprived of basic social services, such as health care and education, or by being recruited as child soldiers and thus forced to take part in conflicts themselves.
2. From a European viewpoint, many of these children seem to be living in distant places and out of reach of European stakeholders, such as the children in the terrible conflict situations currently observed in Iraq, Syria, Yemen or Myanmar. However, many children also live in European areas marked by so-called unresolved or frozen conflicts or by post-conflict situations. Whatever the geographic location of conflicts, no European State can claim not to be concerned in some way or another, be it as a member of international organisations concerned, as a party to ongoing conflicts, as an economic partner of conflicting parties or as one of the countries receiving refugees arriving from conflict zones.
3. The Parliamentary Assembly is very concerned about the short- and long-term consequences of armed conflicts on children: they are directly affected in their daily lives, their healthy development and their trust in other human beings and public institutions. Many of them will subsequently be traumatised for their entire lives and see their life chances reduced. Children experiencing armed conflicts are also brought up in the understanding that violence is an acceptable means of settling conflicts with other countries or between ethnic or religious groups, and may reproduce it in their later lives.
4. International law is very clear about the protection of children – any person under the age of 18 – and the need to give primary consideration to their best interest in all circumstances (as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)). Children benefit from general protection to civilians and special protection granted by the 1949 Geneva Convention and its 1977 Additional Protocol, as recalled by Article 38(4) of the UNCRC calling on States Parties to “take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict”.
5. In the light of the evident gap observed between international obligations and their respect by all State Parties, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States to:
 - 5.1. invest in the prevention of conflicts and children’s involvement therein both through continuous political dialogue and negotiation, and by promoting and supporting the peaceful sustainable development of countries involved in ongoing conflicts or threatened by the outbreak of a conflict;
 - 5.2. intervene, wherever they have the power to do so, to put an end to ongoing conflicts by reminding conflict parties

and their partners of their international commitments, bilaterally or through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or the Council of Europe, and by promoting the peaceful resolution of conflicts in these contexts, thus avoiding further innocent victims among the civilian population, including children;

- 5.3. educate children and young people who have experienced traumatising armed conflicts on non-violent approaches to end aggression and conflict, in order to make them resilient to the trans-generational transmission of violence and allow them to grow up in a positive dialogue culture as a means of overcoming substantial differences between nationalities or ethnic groups, both through European initiatives taken by the Council of Europe or the OSCE and their field work with young people, but also through more bilateral approaches;
- 5.4. reinforce child protection and support mechanisms and action at all levels, by:
 - 5.4.1. developing welfare programmes and improving socio-economic conditions and opportunities for children and their families, both in conflict countries and in countries welcoming refugees;
 - 5.4.2. facilitating the work undertaken by international organisations and non-governmental organisations working in the field by providing political and financial support according to the actual needs and international standards (for example in terms of the number of carers guaranteed for a given number of children);
 - 5.4.3. ensuring access to children in need and continuity of programmes within conflict zones;
- 5.5. support and rehabilitate child soldiers and other children actively involved in conflicts by:
 - 5.5.1. treating them as children and not like adult offenders throughout all proceedings;
 - 5.5.2. handing them over to the care of child protection agencies instead of placing them in detention centres, thus facilitating their reintegration into society, including normal education systems, job markets and social life;
 - 5.5.3. involving them in peace-building action where appropriate to allow them to share their experiences with other young people (while avoiding re-traumatisation);
- 5.6. welcome and support children having left conflict zones by:
 - 5.6.1. providing specialised support to child refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons who have experienced violent and traumatising situations, and children and young people returning from territories controlled by Daesh, when arriving in safe destinations, including in different European countries;

Amendment 1
Tabled by the Committee on Social Affairs,
Health and Sustainable Development

In the draft resolution, at the end of paragraph 5.6.1, insert the following words: ", and in particular by giving them psychological help and support, with appropriate therapy for post-

- 5.6.2. training all professionals dealing with refugee children to avoid re-traumatising these children and breaking their natural protection barriers and to enable them to create new positive life experiences for them;

traumatic stress, as speedily as possible after their arrival in the host country".

Amendment 2
Tabled by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 5.6.2, insert the following paragraph:

"ensuring the children's access to the language of the host country through appropriate and specific language integration programmes put in place by the host country as soon as possible;"

Amendment 3
Tabled by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

In the draft resolution, after paragraph 5.6.2, insert the following paragraph:

"facilitating and encouraging specialised assistance to child refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons through vocational training when they arrive in safe destinations, including in European countries, in order ultimately to ensure their economic and social integration in the host country."

- 5.7. get involved in European activities surrounding children in armed conflicts and promote existing Council of Europe standards in this field, such as the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021), which calls for the protection of children against violence, including in armed conflicts, for the rebuilding of their trust after having experienced such violence and for the setting up of child-friendly procedures in various contexts.