

UNGA 78 High-level side event: *'Breaking the Chains, Building futures'*, 21 September 2023

Malta Statement delivered by The Honourable Dr Ian Borg
Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, and Trade of the Republic of Malta

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

I welcome you to this today's high-level event on "Breaking Chains, Building Future: Ending the Detention of Children in Armed Conflict" on the margins of the 78th session of the General Assembly. I thank the United States of America, UNICEF, War Child UK, and Children in Conflict for co-hosting with us.

We are gathered here today to discuss a pressing issue, namely, how to deal with children linked to armed groups in the aftermath of conflict. It is a matter that needs to be dealt with, with sensitivity and caution, but with the right of children at the forefront of all our actions. Together, we need to discuss ways of how to protect children– we can either stomp their growth through punitive measures including detention, turning them into victims once again, or find ways to sustainably reintegrate children back into their communities.



We must not forget that children linked to armed groups, regardless of their degree of involvement, have and still continue to suffer both psychologically and socially long after their release from armed groups. We must not underestimate the long-lasting impact recruitment can have on children. Support towards these children should be age-sensitive, gender transformative, disability inclusive and should take into account the actual needs of children. We also need to find ways of ensuring that restorative measures, rather than punitive measures, are found. Such measures would enable these children to begin their path to recovery and allow them to become agents of change and peace in their own right. We need to ensure that children are treated primarily as victims, rather than as perpetrators of offences against international law.

Malta will continue to do its part, including within the Security Council and not least as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. In its resolution 2427, the Council has urged Member States to consider non-judicial measures as alternatives to prosecution and detention that focus on the rehabilitation and reintegration for children. Such measures include the signing of handover protocols by Governments with the United Nations to ensure that children are not punished for their circumstances.



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I augur that today's discussion will increase Member States' awareness about the scale and consequences of child detention and renew our resolve to finding policy recommendations and solutions.

We cannot afford to lose other generations of children.

Thank you.