



DO NOT FORGET US! An URGENT call to action regarding the safety of children with disabilities living in areas of active armed conflict.

*(A statement from the REACH Partnership
in support of refugee children with disabilities: October 16, 2023)
<https://www.sfu.ca/reach.html>*

I. Significant numbers of children with disabilities exist within areas of active armed conflict.

Children with disabilities constitute an important yet often underrecognized segment within our communities. The precise statistics regarding their numbers can be elusive (Acar, Pinar-Irmak & Martin, 2019; Rodriguez, 2021; Williamson & Cetin, 2019), but it is estimated that roughly 15% of any displaced population experiences moderate to severe disabilities (Crock et al., 2017; WHO, 2011; Williamson & Cetin, 2019). Additionally, active armed conflict increases instances of acquired disability adding to already significant numbers. These children, often hidden in the margins of society, require special attention and support, especially in times of conflict. It is vital that their unique needs are considered in context and addressed to ensure their well-being and inclusion in humanitarian efforts.

II. Children with disabilities & their caregivers are extremely vulnerable when living in areas of active armed conflict.

Children with disabilities and their caregivers are confronted with extreme risks when exposed to active conflict. This substantial population is highly susceptible to gender-based violence (Marshall & Barrett, 2017), face challenges in accessing support services (Bartels et al., 2018; Garbern et al., 2020), and is at increased risk of abuse and neglect (Ellery et al., 2011). They are identified as the most vulnerable within an already highly vulnerable population (Harrison, 2020; Williamson & Cetin, 2019). Moreover, this population often experiences financial hardship even before conflict occurs. As a result, they reside in older shelters and buildings, often on the higher floors where evacuation during emergencies is particularly challenging. During active conflict, these children and their caregivers are often less able or even unable to quickly relocate to safer areas within buildings or their communities due to physical and psychological complexities, as well as infrastructure complications. (Besic, Paleczek & Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2018).

III. Children with disabilities have a right to protection.

International agreements, including but not limited to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically address the protection of children in times of conflict. International agreements play a pivotal role in safeguarding the rights and



well-being of children in conflict-affected regions. Notably, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) stands as a cornerstone in this regard. The UNCRC (1989) serves as a comprehensive treaty recognizing the inherent dignity and inalienable rights of all children. It emphasizes that children, irrespective of disability, should be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, and neglect, particularly in times of conflict (UNCRC, 1989). Other relevant agreements include the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, which establish principles for the protection of civilians, including children, during armed conflicts. Moreover, UN Security Council Resolutions, such as Resolution 1612 (2005), address issues related to children in armed conflict and call for their protection. These international agreements collectively emphasize the imperative of safeguarding the rights and well-being of children during conflict, ensuring that their vulnerabilities, especially those with disabilities, are not overlooked.

IV. *The REACH Partnership calls for URGENT action regarding the protection of children with disabilities living in areas of active armed conflict.*

“We, the REACH Partnership, fervently call upon all parties involved in conflicts to make the safeguarding of innocent children with disabilities, their families, and the caregivers who support them, an urgent and critical priority. This often-overlooked population of children with disabilities must not be forgotten in the tumult of armed conflicts. It is of utmost importance that their specific needs are meticulously considered and incorporated into evacuation protocols, ensuring their safe refuge during and after periods of conflict. As part of our collective responsibility, we must strive to ensure that these vulnerable children are not neglected and that their requirements are prominently featured in emergency response plans, reinforcing the notion that every child, irrespective of their abilities, deserves protection and care in times of crisis.”

IVa. *Партнерство REACH призывает к принятию СРОЧНЫХ мер по защите детей с ограниченными возможностями, проживающих в зонах активных вооруженных конфликтов.*

“Мы, Партнерство REACH, горячо призываем все стороны, вовлеченные в конфликты, сделать защиту невинных детей с ограниченными возможностями, их семей и опекунов, которые их поддерживают, неотложным и критически важным приоритетом. Эта часто пренебрегаемая группа детей с ограниченными возможностями не должна быть забыта в суматохе вооруженных конфликтов. Крайне важно, чтобы их особые потребности были тщательно продуманы и включены в протоколы эвакуации для обеспечения им надежного укрытия во время и после периодов конфликта. В рамках нашей коллективной ответственности мы должны стремиться к



тому, чтобы эти уязвимые дети не оставались без внимания и чтобы их потребности были ясно отражены в планах реагирования на чрезвычайные ситуации, укрепляя идею о том, что каждый ребенок, независимо от его способностей, заслуживает защиты и заботы во время кризиса".

IVb.

تتحدى شراكة REACH إلى اتخاذ إجراءات عاجلة لحماية الأطفال ذوي الإعاقة الذين يعيشون في مناطق النزاع المسلح النشط. نحن، في شراكة REACH، ندعو جميع الأطراف المشاركة في تلك النزاعات إلى إعطاء الأولوية العاجلة والمهمة لحماية الأطفال الأبرياء من ذوي الإعاقة وحماية أسرهم ومقدمي الرعاية الداعمين لهم. ويجب ألا ننسى هذه الفئة من الأطفال ذوي الإعاقة، التي غالباً ما يتم تجاهلها، في خضم الصراعات المسلحة، إذ أنه من المهم أن يتم النظر بدقة في احتياجاتهم الخاصة ودمجها في بروتوكولات الإخلاء، مما يضمن ملجأً آمن لهم أثناء فترات النزاع وبعدها. وكجزء من مسؤوليتنا الجماعية، يجب علينا أن نسعى جاهدين لضمان عدم إهمالهم وإدراج متطلباتهم بشكل بارز في خطط الاستجابة لحالات الطوارئ، مما يعزز فكرة أن كل طفل، بغض النظر عن قدراته، يستحق الحماية والرعاية في أوقات الشدة".

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