On 15 July 2014, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University will convene a workshop on Children and Armed Conflict. The objective of this workshop is to bring together actors engaged in mediation on the one hand, and the UN’s Children and Armed Conflict on the other hand, with the aim to discuss specific strategies and concrete actions that can be taken to promote child protection in the course of peace processes, and dialogue.

Since it adopted its first thematic resolution on children and armed conflict, S/RES/1261 (1999), the UN Security Council has repeatedly called on parties to ensure that the protection of children is taken into account during peace negotiations. As recently as March 2014, the Council unanimously reconfirmed this notion with resolution 2143, which urges Member States, United Nations entities and other parties concerned to ensure that child protection provisions, including those relating to the identification, release, and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, are integrated into all peace negotiations and peace agreements.

In her 2013 report to the UN General Assembly, Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, highlights the need to mainstream children’s concerns in the peacemaking process: “Incorporating specific commitments in political settlements, ceasefire arrangements, peace agreements and relevant implementation mechanisms can provide important opportunities and entry points for the rapid release of children from armed forces and groups and their reintegration. Early consideration of children’s issues in peacemaking processes also facilitates planning and resource mobilization.”

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The 15 July workshop intends to build on and complement existing efforts towards the mainstreaming of child protection in conflict mediation. It will explore the policy linkages between the UN’s Children and Armed Conflict mandate and conflict mediation. It will chart the opportunities and challenges inherent to peace processes and dialogue, and their respective capacity to advance child protection issues.

The workshop consists of two main working sessions: (1) an overview of the latest developments in the fields of child protection and mediation, and (2) an exchange of participants’ practical experiences at the intersection of child protection and mediation and/or dialogue.

The aim of the first part of the workshop is to introduce participants from both professional communities to the potential crossroads of child protection and conflict mediation. As part of this session, the organizers will provide the participants with a preliminary overview of existing child protection commitments in ceasefire and peace agreements. This includes specific commitments in ceasefire arrangements, peace agreements and relevant implementation mechanisms, as well as more localized, humanitarian commitments towards child protection as declared by armed groups.

The aim of the second part of the workshop is to encourage participants to identify the practical opportunities, risks and obstacles associated with dialogue and peace processes, and their capacity to address child protection issues. This will be done through the use of specific country case studies, and a round table exchange of participants’ practical experiences at the intersection of child protection and mediation and/or dialogue.

Throughout each of these sessions, participants will be asked to reflect on strategies that can be devised to promote commitments to child protection in the context of dialogue and/or peace processes and their operationalization.

A wrap-up session will summarize the findings of the workshop and will consider how they can be taken forward throughout 2014 and 2015, in particular in the context of the multi-year project “promoting child protection in conflict mediation,” funded by the Swiss government, and implemented by Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination, as well as within the respective participants’ organizations, institutes and agencies.

Expected participants include representatives of UN Security Council Members, other UN Member States, relevant UN departments and offices, and civil society (NGOs and academics). On the side of the UN’s Children and Armed Conflict agenda, participants may include Luxembourg, as Chair of the Security Council’s Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, DPKO, and the nine non-governmental organizations members of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. On the mediation side, invitees could include Norway and Switzerland, given their role as third party-negotiators, the Mediation Support Unit and its Standby team of Mediation Experts at the UN Department of Political Affairs, NGOs from the mediation support network, and members of the Academic Advisory Council on Mediation.