



**Video Message by
Ms. Leila Zerrougui, SRSG for Children and Armed Conflict**

**Official launch of the Office of the Prosecutor's Policy Paper on Children
The Hague, 16 November 2016**

Dear Madame Prosecutor, dear colleagues, dear friends,

I regret that I cannot be with you today, but I am grateful to be able to send this video message for this important event.

The launch of this Policy Paper is not only a recognition that children are deeply affected by the crimes committed in today's conflicts; it is also an acknowledgement that working for and with children is a multifaceted endeavour. Clear policy and procedural guidance is required in order to ensure that children's best interests are prioritised at all stages of legal proceedings.

For nearly 15 years, the International Criminal Court has had a strong legal framework to address crimes including the enlistment, conscription and use of children under the age of 15 years, forcible transfer and child trafficking as well as attacks on schools and hospitals. In that time, there have been important jurisprudential developments related to child protection, particularly regarding the use of child soldiers and reparations.

While these are welcome advances, enhancing accountability is still one of the greatest challenges we face to protect children from conflict. I am convinced that this Policy Paper will build upon the previous work of the Court and institutionalise a focus on children in the work of the Office of the Prosecutor. The document will aid the inclusion of crimes in indictments where the evidence permits, as well as enhancing the Court's interactions with children as victims and witnesses.

I hope that the broad consultation you have undertaken to produce the document, including with my Office, will also improve our collective work to pursue justice for children. In this regard, the guidance is not just pertinent to the ICC, it sets out important principles for all of us who have a role in ending impunity for crimes against children during armed conflict.

The Policy notes that cooperation is crucial to the Prosecutor's Office and the Court in carrying out their mandate. Cooperation is crucial to all our work. My Office has worked with the Court for many years and will continue to do so in the implementation of this document. We will use this opportunity to work more closely together to enhance accountability in situations where the ICC has jurisdiction and that are on the children and armed conflict agenda. I also anticipate that other international organisations as well as civil society organisations that work on child protection will take the opportunity to enhance their collaboration with the Court.

The implementation of the Policy Paper should also aim to encourage and support national efforts to hold persons accountable for crimes against or affecting children. The Rome Statute recalls the duty of every State to exercise its criminal jurisdiction over those responsible for international crimes.

They are the key to ending impunity; but national authorities affected by conflict often need help and support. For instance, in the DRC, following the example of the ICC and with the support of the United Nations, the Government has strongly pursued prosecutions for both commanders of its armed forces and members of armed groups who have committed grave violations against children. The Policy Paper is a new tool that can provide guidance for the Prosecution in its interaction with national authorities that demonstrate the same resolve to protect children from armed conflict.

The preamble of the Rome Statutes highlights the international community's determination to put an end to impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes and thus prevent such crimes. It is my hope to see this Policy Paper used extensively to support and guide our work towards that goal in relation to children.

Thank you