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# Module 4:

## ENGAGING WITH PARTIES TO CONFLICT

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### OVERVIEW

This module provides guidance for child protection staff on engaging with parties to conflict on child protection concerns, emphasizing the need to adjust approaches to each armed actor and context. If successful, this engagement can result in concrete positive outcomes for children, including the release and reintegration of children and parties' signing of action plans to end grave violations against children in the future. Yet, the stakes for such engagements can be high and underscore the need for child protection staff to undertake thorough preparatory work.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Describe preparatory steps needed before engaging with parties to conflict
- Discuss key considerations when engaging with parties to conflict, particularly on action plans and the release and reintegration of associated children

### ACTIVITIES

- Group discussion: Engaging with parties to conflict (20 min)
- Group discussion: Engaging on Action Plans (20 min)
- Group discussion: Release and reintegration of associated children (20 min)
- Group exercise: Engaging with parties to conflict (analysis and preparatory steps) (40 min)

## LEARNER HANDOUTS

- Handout: Dos and don'ts for supporting the release and reintegration of associated children
- Handout: Group exercise on preparing for engagement

## SESSION TIME

- 2 hours

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### SLIDE 1: INTRODUCTION



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ENGAGING WITH PARTIES TO  
CONFLICT

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### TRAINER NOTES

- This module provides guidance for child protection staff on engaging with parties to conflict on child protection concerns. If successful, this engagement can result in concrete positive outcomes for affected children, including the release and reintegration of children and parties' signing of action plans to end grave violations

against children. Yet, the stakes for such engagement are high. This is why we want to put an emphasis on the preparatory work needed for successful engagement.

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SLIDE 2: LEARNING OBJECTIVES

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, learners should be able to:

- Describe preparatory steps needed before engaging with parties to conflict
- Discuss key considerations when engaging with parties to conflict, particularly on
  - Action plans
  - The release and reintegration of associated children

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TRAINER NOTES

- It is important to recognize at the outset that this module will only cover some aspects of a highly complex subject. Engagement with parties to conflict requires highly specialized negotiations skills that go beyond the scope of this training.
- This module focuses on the key preparatory steps needed before engaging with parties to conflict on child protection concerns. We will also discuss some of the key considerations to keep in mind when engaging with parties to conflict, particularly when developing and implementing action plans and supporting the release and reintegration of associated children. At the end of this module, you should be able to:
  - Describe preparatory steps needed before engaging with parties to conflict

- Discuss key considerations when engaging with parties to conflict, particularly on action plans and the release and reintegration of associated children
- ☞ For additional resources on engagement with parties to conflict and related negotiation skills, see *Manual*, p. 68.

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SLIDE 3: GROUP DISCUSSION: ENGAGING WITH PARTIES TO CONFLICT

**Group discussion:**  
Engaging with parties to conflict

- What has been your experience engaging parties to conflict?
- Are you engaging with listed parties *only* or also with non-listed parties?
- What are the mission's objectives for engagement?
- Do other missions components engage with parties to conflict?

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TRAINER NOTES

**Y** **ACTIVITY: GROUP DISCUSSION: RELEASE AND REINTEGRATION OF ASSOCIATED CHILDREN**

**AIM:**

Learners will have an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences of engaging with parties to conflict and learn from others.

**TIME:**

20 Minutes

**ACTIVITY GUIDELINES:**

Discuss the questions on the slide. Remind learners that many of these questions will be discussed in more detail at a later stage of this module.

Some key points to highlight in the discussion are:

- Engaging with non-listed parties to conflict can be a preventative action
- Considering the mission's objectives for engagement and making sure that the child protection team's efforts are aligned with these essential steps.
- Being aware of engagement efforts of other mission components is important.

🗨 Engaging with parties to conflict is one of the most difficult and sensitive aspects of your work as child protection staff. What are some of the aspects of this role that you find particularly challenging in your mission context?

👉 Discuss some of these challenges before moving to the next slide.

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SLIDE 4: CHALLENGES FOR ENGAGING WITH PARTIES TO CONFLICT

## Challenges for engaging with parties to conflict

- Access constraints
- Designation of party as a “terrorist entity”
- Fragmentation in party’s chain of command
- Party refusing to engage on children
- Lack of coordination on release and reintegration of associated children



### TRAINER NOTES

🗨️ (As some of you have pointed out,) there are numerous challenges when engaging with parties to conflict. This may include:

- Access challenges, for example when child protections staff are not able to meet with non-State armed groups due to security constraints or government restrictions
- Designation of a party to conflict as a “terrorist entity”, which may pose legal and other challenges
- Fragmentation in a party’s chain of command and splintering of factions, which makes it more difficult to identify which commander(s) and at what levels to engage with
- Party refusing to engage on children, for example for fear of facing legal repercussions for having committed violations of international law
- Lack of coordination on the release and reintegration of children, in particular coordination between actors negotiating the release of children and those in charge of providing reintegration resistance. Inadequate or delayed reintegration programming can impede dialogue with parties to

conflict!

- ☞ Ask learners: What can they do to address anticipated challenges and mitigate anticipated risks? (For suggested actions to address these challenges, see *Manual*, Table 13, p. 66)

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SLIDE 5: WHY DO YOU NEED TO PREPARE?

## Why do you need to prepare?

- To focus on the right interlocutor(s)
- To adapt messages and approaches
- To comply with mission policies and practices
- To learn from the experience and coordinate approaches with the mission and partners

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TRAINER NOTES

- ☞ Review the reasons for investing in preparations for engaging with parties to conflict listed on the slide.

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SLIDE 6: PREPARATION MATTERS!

## Preparation matters!

| Expected engagement   | Unexpected engagement  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DDR process</li><li>• Action plan</li><li>• Peace process</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Armed actor surrendering without warning</li><li>• Large number of children seeking protection in UN compounds/bases</li><li>• Government not able or willing to support DDR process</li></ul> |



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### TRAINER NOTES

- 🗨️ There are two types of scenarios for engagement with parties to conflict:
  - Expected interactions where staff foresee and plan opportunities for engagement with parties to conflict on child protection concerns, such as DDR processes, negotiations on action plans and involvement in peace processes.
  - Unexpected interactions where staff need to engage with parties to conflict unexpectedly and without warning. For example, children may suddenly seek protection in UN compounds or bases after having left armed forces or groups.
- 👉 Ask learners: Do you think that preparation matters less/more if the engagement is unexpected (i.e. staff need to engage with parties to conflict unexpectedly and without warning)?
- 🗨️ In both instances, adequate planning and preparation, including contingency planning, are essential. For example, it is always useful to know the structure and motivations of the concerned party in advance.
- 🗨️ Let's take a closer look at some of the aspects to consider before engaging with

parties to conflict.

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SLIDE 7: KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

## Key considerations for engagement

- Attitudes/practices of mission leadership
- Rules and regulations on engagement
- Previous experiences with party to conflict
- Applicable legal framework
- Party to conflict's internal structure
- Party to conflict's motivations and interests

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TRAINER NOTES

- 🗨️ You can use these key considerations to analyse different parties to conflict in your mission context and inform your engagement strategy.
- 👉 Go over the key considerations listed on this slide and discuss with learners why it is important to analyse each of these aspects. For example, why is it important for them to know the party's internal structure or the mission leadership's attitudes and practices towards engagement with the concerned party? What other aspects should they consider when engaging with a party to conflict?  
  
Table 11 of the *Manual* (p. 59-60) lists additional aspects to consider before engaging with parties to conflict and explains the rationale for doing so.
- 🗨️ Now we will talk about two specific areas where child protection staff are most frequently engaging with parties to conflict:

- Developing and implementing action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children, as mandated by the UN Security Council;
  - Supporting the release and reintegration of girls and boys associated with armed forces and armed groups.
- 🗨️ For both of these areas, let's talk about your previous experiences and what additional aspects you should keep in mind moving forward.

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SLIDE 8: GROUP DISCUSSION: ENGAGING ON ACTION PLANS

**Group discussion:  
Engaging on Action Plans**

- What has been your experience engaging parties to conflict on action plans? What is working/not working?
- Why do parties to conflict agree to action plans? What aspects of action plans are worth emphasizing to them?



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TRAINER NOTES

**🗨️ ACTIVITY: Group discussion: Engaging on action plans**

**AIM:** Learners will reflect on their current approaches of engaging parties to conflict on action plans and options for improvement.

**TIME:** 20 Minutes

### ACTIVITY GUIDELINES:

Discuss the questions on the slide. Some of the focus of the discussion may depend on the status of action plans in the country where learners are deployed.

- If the training takes place in a country where an action plan is signed/ or implemented, make sure to explicitly refer to this as part of the discussion.
- If efforts are underway to have an action plan signed, or if efforts to sign an action plan have not been successful, encourage learners to discuss why this might be the case.

While facilitating this discussion, keep in mind that there are no right/wrong answers to these questions. It is important for learners to reflect on their practices and be more conscious of the motivations and interests of the party they are seeking to engage with, as well as of the relationships and dynamics within the mission regarding engagement with the party in question.

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#### SLIDE 9: KEY ASPECTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ACTION PLAN

### Key aspects for a successful action plan

- ✓ Political interest of party
- ✓ Consistent advocacy
- ✓ Unconditional access
- ✓ Effective coordination
- ✓ Context-specific action plan
- ✓ Regular monitoring of implementation
- ✓ Resources for implementation



## TRAINER NOTES

- 🗨 Here is an overview of some key requisites for successfully developing and implementing an action plan with a party to conflict. This includes:
  - Political interest of the potential signatory party in the action plan
  - Consistent and repeated advocacy of SRSG/Head of Mission (HOM), which may require advocacy within the mission
  - Unconditional access for the UN to barracks, military training centers, or camps of the party to conflict in question
  - Effective coordination, including
    - among CTFMR co-chairs
    - with party to conflict, for example through appointment of child protection focal points within the government or non-State armed group(s) to act as counterparts for the mission
  - Context-specific action plan, alongside an implementation plan
  - Regular monitoring on the implementation of the action plan by CTFMR
  - Financial and other resources to support the signatory party in implementing the action plan.
- 👉 Ask learners if they agree/disagree with these points or would like to add other points to this list.

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## SLIDE 10: GROUP DISCUSSION: RELEASE AND REINTEGRATION OF ASSOCIATED CHILDREN

**Group discussion:**  
**Release and reintegration of associated children**

- What are some common mistakes in engaging with parties on DDR for children? How can you avoid making them?



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## TRAINER NOTES

### **Y ACTIVITY: GROUP DISCUSSION – RELEASE AND REINTEGRATION OF ASSOCIATED CHILDREN**

#### **AIM:**

Learners will reflect on current approaches of engaging parties to conflict on the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups' options for improving this engagement.

#### **TIME:**

20 Minutes

#### **ACTIVITY GUIDELINES:**

- 1) Discuss the questions on the slide. If the training takes place in a country where there are formal or informal release and reintegration processes, make sure to explicitly refer to this as part of the discussion.
- 2) Share the handout (see below) with learners. Go over do's and don'ts and explain points that have not come up in the previous discussion. You may also want to share some examples with learners about your own experiences engaging with armed forces/groups on the release and reintegration of children – discussing what has worked or not worked and why.

- 📄 Handout: Dos and don'ts for supporting the release and reintegration of associated children

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SLIDE 11: GROUP EXERCISE: PREPARING FOR ENGAGEMENT

## Group exercise: Preparing for engagement

**Tasks:**

- 1) Identify a current child protection issue in your mission area that requires engagement with a party to conflict
- 2) Discuss the following question:
  - a) Are you engaging with the right person(s)?
  - b) What is the party's interest for engagement?
  - c) What are the mission's attitudes towards this party?
  - d) What approach would be best suited for engagement?

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TRAINER NOTES

 **ACTIVITY: GROUP EXERCISE: PREPARING FOR ENGAGEMENT**

**AIM:**

Learners will prepare a strategy for engagement with parties to conflict on a specific child protection issue relevant to their mission.

**TIME:**

40 Minutes

**ACTIVITY GUIDELINES:**

- 1) Divide learners into groups of 4-5 people.
- 2) Share the handout with them, go over the tasks listed on the slide/handout, and

give them 30 minutes for working on these tasks.

📄 Handout: Preparing for engagement

3) During the debrief, ask learners to share what they have learned from doing this exercise about engaging with armed forces/groups.

☞ This group activity is a good opportunity for learners to apply some of the learnings to their actual work in this area. Encourage learners to challenge their usual ways of engaging with parties to conflict in the mission and think “outside the box.”

SLIDE 12: TAKEAWAYS

## Takeaways

- Take advantage of your mandate and political space to engage with parties to conflict
- Know relevant parties to conflict in your mission area and the best person(s) within the party to talk to
- Avoid “one-size-fits-all” approaches
- Understand links between your engagement with a party to conflict and the mission’s engagement

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TRAINER NOTES

- ☞ Reiterate to learners that this session focused only on a few key pieces of engaging with parties to conflict and point them to other relevant resources on this issue, including those listed in the *Manual* (p. 68-69).