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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
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including the right to development**

Children and armed conflict

Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

Summary

In the present report, which covers the period from December 2020 to December 2021, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict explores challenges in ending and preventing grave violations and in strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict. She outlines the activities undertaken in discharging her mandate and the challenges faced and progress achieved in addressing grave violations against children. In addition, the Special Representative lays out her advocacy activities, including through her focus on lessons learned and best practices. She provides information on her efforts to build partnerships, and outlines priorities and makes recommendations to enhance the protection of children affected by conflict.



I. Introduction

1. The present report covers the period from December 2020 to December 2021 and is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 74/133, in which the Assembly requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to submit a report to the Human Rights Council on the activities undertaken in the fulfilment of her mandate, including information on the progress achieved and the challenges remaining on the children and armed conflict agenda. The Special Representative further elaborates on her activities with regard to the request of the Assembly in its resolution 72/245 to increase her engagement with States, United Nations bodies and agencies, regional organizations and subregional organizations, and to increase public awareness activities, including by collecting, assessing and disseminating best practices and lessons learned. In the light of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict mandate, the Special Representative also elaborates on topics expected to have an impact on the mandate in the years to come and on areas of work that will need to be emphasized to reinforce the protection of conflict-affected children.

II. Progress and challenges in ending and preventing grave violations

A. Progress in ending and preventing grave violations

2. Unprecedented challenges for the protection of children living in conflict zones arose in 2021. The first nine months of the year were marked by a sustained high number of grave violations against children. The killing and maiming of children remained the highest verified violation, followed by the recruitment and use of children, and the denial of humanitarian access. Child abduction continued to increase, and verified cases were particularly high in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Lake Chad basin. Compounded by political, security and climate emergencies, the repeated waves of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continued to increase children's vulnerability and to pose challenges in terms of the monitoring and verification of grave violations, as well as engagement with parties to conflict. Nevertheless, the mandate contributed to developing and strengthening policies and systems, including in the area of national justice, to protect children either through action plans or through engagement, advocacy and technical support to parties to conflict.

3. The control of Kabul by the Taliban from August 2021 and the de facto disintegration of the former Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, including the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, jeopardized the policies, procedures and legislative gains on child protection put in place by the former Government. At the time of reporting, although the monitoring of grave violations by the United Nations continued, challenges related to the verification of violations were numerous and included constraints in safe and secure verification processes for child protection monitors, especially for Afghan and female staff.

4. Prior to these events, between January and June 2021, the Ministry of Interior Affairs prevented the recruitment of at least 98 children into the Afghan National Police. In June 2021, within the framework of the 2011 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Afghan National Police, including the Afghan Local Police, a policy on the protection of conflict-affected children, developed with United Nations support, was launched by the Office of the National Security Council. Following an increase in child casualties in Afghanistan, the Afghan National Army was listed in the most recent annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict for this violation.¹ The Afghan National Police was delisted for the violation of recruitment and use of children.

¹ [A/75/873-S/2021/437](#).

5. In the Central African Republic, the United Nations initiated a dialogue with the minister responsible for primary and secondary education and the advisory minister to the President on child protection concerns. The aim was to address the military use of schools by armed groups, by the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel, and attacks by the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement against schools used as polling stations during the December 2020 elections. The ministry was regularly provided with a list of schools used for military purposes to enable action. The United Nations pursued dialogue to address verified grave violations against children attributed to the Armed Forces and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel. Continued engagement with armed groups led in September 2021 to the verification and separation of more than 130 children associated with the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique and the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique.

6. In Colombia, the United Nations continued to engage in dialogue with the Government, civil society organizations and the international community, for the prevention of and response to grave violations against children. In January 2021, the Office of the Presidential Advisor for Human Rights and International Affairs announced a strategy for the local implementation of the policy to prevent the recruitment and use of children and sexual violence against children, issued in November 2019. Furthermore, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace progressed on Case No. 07, which focuses on the recruitment and use of children and other related violations affecting children during armed conflict. In February 2021, the Colombian Family Welfare Institute submitted to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace a report including 3,878 cases of children recruited and used by the former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army) (FARC-EP). Over 18,000 individual cases of children recruited and used by the former FARC-EP were identified, and as of July 2021, 274 victims were accredited to participate in the judicial proceedings of the case.

7. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, following United Nations advocacy to continue child protection services in Ituri and North Kivu Provinces after the state of siege declared by the President, Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, in May 2021, the Minister of Defence issued a military order recalling child protection commitments made under the 2012 action plan to end recruitment and use of children and other grave violations. Accountability efforts continued, as illustrated by the trials of commanders of Nyatura and the Force de résistance patriotique de l’Ituri for the recruitment and use of children, which were, however, suspended, and the sentencing in September 2021 of the commander of Mai-Mai Chance to life in prison for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including child recruitment and use. Twenty elements of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and one from the Congolese National Police, convicted for the rape and killing of children, were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 6 months to 20 years.

8. In Iraq, the parliament passed the Yazidi Women Survivors Law in March 2021, creating a reparation and rehabilitation framework for crimes committed by Da’esh (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) against women and girls from Yazidi, Turkmen, Shabak and Christian minority groups and recognizing those crimes as crimes against humanity and genocide. The law did not, however, include male survivors or children born of rape. In June 2021, a draft law on child protection was submitted to the Council of Representatives, with the aim of protecting children from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, in addition to criminalizing child trafficking, enslavement, coercion to work and involvement in armed conflict. The United Nations supported the provision of juvenile justice services for children in conflict with the law, including children in detention for their alleged association with parties to conflict, including Da’esh.

9. The Special Representative and the United Nations in Mali continued to engage with the Government and with armed groups signatories to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali to end and prevent grave violations against children. In March 2021, the national technical monitoring committee on the Safe Schools Declaration transmitted a draft bill on the protection of education from attacks to the minister of education. In June 2021, the committee organized a regional forum on the Safe Schools Declaration with United Nations participation, resulting in the adoption of a plan of action reinforcing community protection initiatives, and raising awareness among armed groups on preventing the military

use of schools. The United Nations continued to advocate the development by the Government of a national plan to prevent grave violations against children. In August 2021, following United Nations advocacy, the Platform coalition of armed groups signed two action plans addressing the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations. The United Nations and the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad continued to assess the progress made and challenges faced in the implementation of the 2017 action plan to end the recruitment and use of and sexual violence against children. In August 2021, follow-up activities were identified, including capacity-building of elements of the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and United Nations visits to its bases to verify the absence of children.

10. In Myanmar, until the end of January 2021, the Special Representative accelerated her engagement with the Government, led by the National League for Democracy, and the Tatmadaw on ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children. The Tatmadaw issued four military directives prohibiting the use of children, and developed, with United Nations support, a road map to end and prevent this practice. The Special Representative continued to urge the Tatmadaw to maintain their engagement and to sign a joint action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the killing and maiming of children, and rape and other forms of sexual violence against children.

11. Dialogue between the Special Representative and the Tatmadaw was halted after the military takeover on 1 February 2021. Thereafter, the ability of the United Nations to monitor and verify grave violations has been hampered. In March 2021, the de facto authorities announced their intention to revise the July 2019 Child Rights Law, which includes provisions on children and armed conflict, thereby risking an erosion of current protection standards. In the most recent annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, the Tatmadaw, including the integrated border guard forces, was relisted for the recruitment and use of children, following its failure to end and prevent the ad hoc use of children in non-combat roles.

12. In Nigeria, the Civilian Joint Task Force was delisted in the most recent annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict following a significant decrease in the recruitment and use of children through the continued implementation of its action plan, which had been signed with the United Nations in 2017 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The United Nations continued to support the Civilian Joint Task Force in this regard, including through monitoring of the implementation of the remaining activities. The Civilian Joint Task Force, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, continued to carry out awareness-raising programmes on grave violations against children with a focus on zero tolerance of the recruitment and use of children.

13. In the Philippines, the Government and the United Nations developed a strategic plan, adopted in June 2021, focusing on the prevention of violations against children by the armed forces. It is the first national plan to realize the prevention aspects of Security Council resolution 2427 (2018).

14. In Somalia, the United Nations continued to advocate enhanced child protection with its Government counterparts, including the national working group on children affected by armed conflict, composed of ministries of the federal Government and of the federal member states. The United Nations also implemented awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, such as a radio campaign on child protection in coordination with the Somali National Army and the Child Protection Unit of the Ministry of Defence in Banaadir, South-West State, Hirshabelle and Jubbaland. Over 600 children formerly associated with armed forces and groups benefited throughout the year from reintegration programmes supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

15. In South Sudan, in June 2021, in line with the 2020 comprehensive action plan to end and prevent all grave violations against children, the South Sudan People's Defence Forces launched a mobile general martial court in Jonglei and Upper Nile States to commence the trials of 60 suspected perpetrators of crimes against civilians, including children. In addition, the United Nations delivered several child protection training sessions, including in May 2021 for 38 military justice personnel and in September 2021 for 60 senior military officers. Furthermore, in June 2021, the United Nations supported the enrolment of 100 children (63

boys and 37 girls) released from parties to conflict in 2019 in a vocational training centre in Yambio, Western Equatoria State.

16. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction, following United Nations engagement, issued in January 2021 a command order prohibiting the recruitment of children and adopted standard operating procedures for age assessment. In March 2021, the Rapid Support Forces shared with the United Nations a command order prohibiting the recruitment and use of children, adopted following United Nations advocacy. United Nations engagement with armed groups in Central Darfur, notably with the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan Liberation Movement-Transitional Council, resulted in the identification and release of children from these groups. The United Nations continued to liaise with the transitional Government on its compliance with the 2016 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. In August and September 2021 respectively, the transitional Government reactivated high-level and technical committees for the continuous implementation of its provisions. However, the military coup in the Sudan on 25 October 2021 put these gains at risk.

17. In the Syrian Arab Republic, following United Nations advocacy, the Government reactivated an existing interministerial committee to address grave violations against children and a series of high-level meetings were held between the Government and the United Nations. As a result, the Government agreed to organize a high-level workshop with the United Nations on children and armed conflict. Progress by the Syrian Democratic Forces in the implementation of the 2019 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children continued, and 71 children were demobilized and reunited with their families in the first half of 2021. In addition, the Syrian Democratic Forces notified the United Nations that 242 boys had been identified through age-assessment screening at recruitment centres and prevented from joining. The Syrian Democratic Forces also adopted new guidelines for the release and exclusion of children from their ranks and from those of the Internal Security Forces, as well as special procedures and safeguards for children detained for their alleged association with Da'esh. Furthermore, the United Nations raised child protection concerns with local authorities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, including access to children deprived of liberty. In May 2021, the United Nations met with armed actors active in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic, including representatives of the different factions of the opposition Syrian National Army.

18. In Yemen, the Government pursued the implementation of its 2014 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and the related 2018 road map. The Special Representative engaged actively with the Government of Yemen, including through a virtual ministerial-level meeting in March 2021. The Special Representative supported the United Nations in Yemen to develop an action plan with the Houthis (who call themselves Ansar Allah) to end and prevent grave violations against children. In March 2021, her Office organized a training course on child protection for the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen. In May 2021, her Office organized a high-level event on the prevention of violations for representatives of the Coalition. The Coalition continued to implement the time-bound programme of activities agreed upon in 2020.

B. 25 years of the children and armed conflict mandate: ongoing and emerging challenges

19. The creation of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict by the General Assembly 25 years ago was a critical milestone for the protection of conflict-affected children and highlighted the need to prioritize this issue on the international agenda to ensure sustainable development and maintain global peace and security. To provide an in-depth account of the evolution of the mandate since its inception, the Office of the Special Representative initiated in March 2021 a study developed through a consultative process with Member States, United Nations partners and civil society organizations. The study was further informed by a survey shared with country task forces on monitoring and reporting and their equivalents in situations where no monitoring and reporting mechanism was in place, and by 29 age-appropriate focus group discussions and consultations with 181 children and youth representing refugees, internally displaced and

host-community children in situations currently and formerly on the agenda. The study will be published in January 2022.

20. The past 25 years have witnessed an evolution of armed conflicts and of the actors directly and indirectly involved in them. While some of the challenges and concerns in protecting conflict-affected children are not new, some emerging areas of concern require further attention.

Impact of the pandemic

21. Almost two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the lives of children living in conflict-affected countries continued to be negatively affected and grave violations remained high. The pandemic adversely affected public health systems and led to school closures. In addition, the socioeconomic crisis resulting from the measures to combat the pandemic pushed families and children to increasingly resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as joining armed groups or performing other forms of exploitative labour, including sexual exploitation. In this regard, it is critical to invest in early warning and preventive action and develop new and creative preparedness measures to prevent grave violations. These could include the development of prevention plans and capacity-building of local actors to safely identify and report grave violations to relevant child protection focal points in a manner more conducive to their immediate protection.

22. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic made engagement with parties to conflict more difficult, owing to constraints on the United Nations on the ground. Related activities, such as training, awareness-raising and screening exercises, were also partially hampered. Finding creative solutions to continue engaging with parties to conflict must be prioritized, including by further exploring opportunities offered by innovative technologies. Investment in data analysis to better assess the overall impact of the pandemic on conflict-affected children in order to find new ways to address similar situations, including through a more gender-sensitive approach, will be imperative. The Office of the Special Representative will in 2022 undertake a follow-up study on the medium- to long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against conflict-affected children.

Children with disabilities

23. Children with disabilities, including those with physical, intellectual, psychosocial and sensory disabilities, are among the most marginalized and vulnerable members of societies and thus disproportionately affected by armed conflict. In conflict-affected countries, children with disabilities often face abandonment, violence and lack of access to essential services. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these threats to children with disabilities and made them even more vulnerable. In its resolution 47/15, entitled “Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls with disabilities”, the Human Rights Council expressed deep concern about the particular risk of segregation, exclusion, abuse and violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, against persons with disabilities of all ages, especially in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict.

24. Barriers for children with disabilities to full participation in daily life are further intensified and compounded when infrastructure is destroyed, and services and systems are compromised and made inaccessible because of conflict. This often results in a loss of access to schooling, health and psychosocial support. When systems and services break down and safe spaces shrink, children with disabilities are also more likely to fall victim to grave violations. On the other hand, grave violations such as recruitment and use, maiming or sexual violence can lead to long-term impairments and different forms of disability, posing additional challenges to children’s recovery and reintegration. The specific needs linked to a child’s disability must be considered when designing reintegration opportunities for these children, as highlighted by the Security Council in its resolutions 2225 (2015), 2427 (2018) and 2475 (2019), and by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 43/23, on awareness-raising on the rights of persons with disabilities, and habilitation and rehabilitation.

25. More needs to be done to eliminate discrimination against and the marginalization of children with disabilities and to increase their visibility and inclusion across the peace

continuum. In its resolution 2475 (2019), the Security Council recognized the need for timely data and information on, and analysis of, the impact of armed conflict on persons with disabilities. In its resolution 2601 (2021), the Council further underlined the importance of providing sustainable, timely, appropriate, inclusive and accessible assistance to children with disabilities who were affected by armed conflict, including reintegration, rehabilitation and psychosocial support, to ensure that their specific needs were effectively addressed.

26. To adequately analyse the impact of armed conflict on children with disabilities, understand their specific needs and inform protection responses, it will be important to consider disability, and factors that intersect with it, in the framework of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, resources permitting. The Office of the Special Representative will reach out to the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities during the next reporting period to discuss common areas of concern.

Mental health and psychosocial support

27. The mental health and well-being of millions of boys and girls around the world living in war zones continue to be severely affected. For children to develop their full potential, they need to feel safe, be cared for, be surrounded by a protective environment and have their basic needs met, including health care and education. The experience of growing up in war-affected areas and of living in fear can result in high levels of distress and affect boys' and girls' social and emotional development. It can lead to self-harm and suicide attempts, among others, and, if left untreated, children's mental and physical health can be impaired for the rest of their lives. Additionally, in war zones or displacement settings – compounded further by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic – there are often barriers to access to caregiver, mental health and psychosocial support, while funding for mental health and psychosocial support programmes is still frequently short-term, meaning that children might not receive the sustainable support that they need.

28. The Security Council, in its resolution 2225 (2015), recognized the importance of providing psychosocial support as part of reintegration assistance for children, and, in its resolution 2427 (2018), specifically stressed the importance of long-term and sustainable funding for mental health and psychosocial programming in humanitarian contexts and encouraged donors to integrate mental health and psychosocial services in all humanitarian responses. The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 37/20, entitled "Rights of the child: protection of the rights of the child in humanitarian situations", also specifically highlighted those aspects.

29. The need for long-term mental and psychosocial support has further been highlighted in a paper on gaps and needs for the successful reintegration of children associated with armed groups or armed forces, published by the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers. Within the framework of the academic advisory group on child reintegration set up by the Office of the Special Representative and referred to below, specific working groups on reintegration, resilience and prevention of re-recruitment and on physical and mental recovery will be set up to further reflect on the issue of mental health and psychosocial support and to produce relevant policy papers on the issue.

Terrorism and counter-terrorism

30. Terrorist activity and counter-terrorism measures have a deep impact on children. Terrorist attacks disproportionately target civilians and often occur in places such as schools, hospitals, markets and other public spaces.

31. The security response to terrorism raises protection challenges for children. Children caught in the middle of counter-terrorism operations have been killed and maimed, while others have been arrested and detained for their alleged association with parties to conflict, including those groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations. Children encountered in security operations are often treated systematically as security threats rather than victims. Many are arrested and detained, often for extended periods of time and without due process provisions, in violation of international standards on juvenile justice, and risk facing further violations of their rights such as torture, physical and sexual violence and deprivation of access to health and education. Some have even been tried by military courts.

32. When responding to terrorism, Member States should ensure that their rules of engagement consider that children might be associated with those groups and might have been placed on the front line, either in combat or as human shields. Efforts to counter violent extremism must be carried out in full compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law. Furthermore, the effective reintegration of children who are allegedly associated with groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations must be the primary response. In circumstances where children are accused of a crime, any legal process should be conducted in compliance with due process, fair trial standards and international juvenile justice standards. Accordingly, the detention of children should always be a last resort, for the shortest time possible and guided by the best interests of the child. Those principles have been reaffirmed on multiple occasions by the Security Council and by the General Assembly, including in the Assembly's latest resolution on the rights of the child (resolution 76/147).

33. The Special Representative used every opportunity to remind Member States of those principles and call on them to develop and implement handover protocols to expeditiously hand over children who are captured or who surrender during military operations to civilian child protection actors to reintegrate them into their communities. The Office of Special Representative also continued to actively participate in the United Nations inter-agency task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty, and to closely cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism.

Climate emergency

34. The adverse effects of the climate emergency on conflict as a risk multiplier is clear and broadly recognized. Climate change exacerbates the risks of instability and conflict, whether by intensifying the scarcity of resources and sharpening competition for them, accelerating desertification, affecting crops or forcing population displacement, including due to extreme weather events. Tackling the climate emergency can contribute to building peaceful and resilient communities and thereby to protecting conflict-affected children. Taking decisive action on climate change and ending and preventing grave violations against children go hand in hand with preventing the emergence of conflict in the first place.

35. As recognized by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 48/14, on the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, the human rights implications of the adverse impact of climate change most acutely affect, among others, women, children, persons with disabilities, those living in conflict areas and those already in vulnerable situations. The Special Representative will reach out to the Special Rapporteur during the next reporting period to discuss common areas of interest. In a press release issued during the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Special Representative expressed concern that the climate emergency was exacerbating the vulnerabilities of conflict-affected children.

36. As international and regional organizations increase their engagement and activities on climate security, it will be important to consider the specific needs of conflict-affected children in their discussions. Consequently, the Special Representative is encouraging research on the nexus between climate change and grave violations against children in conflict-affected countries.

III. Raising awareness, mobilizing global action and building partnerships

A. Awareness-raising

37. The Special Representative continued to use her voice as the leading United Nations advocate for the protection of conflict-affected children to call for their increased protection, including by issuing some 40 press releases and public statements, several of which were published jointly with other high-level United Nations officials, as detailed in the present

report. The Special Representative also sought to inform and engage the media in advocacy efforts. For instance, in November 2021, the Special Representative, jointly with the Director General of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Chief Executive Officer of War Child UK, published an op-ed on ending child recruitment and use in conflict. In December 2021, to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict mandate, the Special Representative published an article in the *UN Chronicle*.

38. Participation in high-level events continued to be central to the Special Representative's efforts to raise awareness. In February 2021, she shared a video message for the T20 Italy Virtual Inception Conference, organized within the framework of the Group of 20. The same month, she was a speaker at the virtual opening of an exhibition entitled "Rebel lives: photographs from inside the Lord's Resistance Army", organized by Belgium. In March 2021, she was a speaker at a virtual event entitled "Violence against girl children in armed conflicts and the role of the international criminal justice system", co-organized by Italy and El Salvador and co-sponsored by Sierra Leone, Liechtenstein and Luxembourg as part of the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. In September 2021, the Special Representative was a speaker at the virtual high-level event to commemorate the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, co-organized by Qatar, the Education above All Foundation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNICEF. In November 2021, the Special Representative shared a video message for the launch of the call to action to ensure the rights and well-being of children born of sexual violence in conflict, organized by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

39. The campaign entitled "Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict" continued to support the Office's global advocacy efforts and remained a strategic part of its global communications strategy. Campaign material was made available in all official United Nations languages and the hashtag #ACTtoProtect continued to be widely used. The Office assessed the campaign in early 2021 in anticipation of its second anniversary and to inform its next phase, scheduled to last until the end of 2022. An Instagram account was launched on the campaign's second anniversary to widen the online reach of the Office.

40. To make the voices of conflict-affected children heard, the development and sharing of stories from the field was prioritized, while at the same time highlighting the work done by partners such as the Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative and War Child. Stories about boys and girls affected by conflict were included in the summary of the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. In November 2021, within the framework of the fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration and with the support of Save the Children International, the Special Representative held a virtual interaction with children on the Safe Schools Declaration. They presented a children's manifesto entitled "We do not want to be scared any longer". In December 2021, the Special Representative shared the manifesto with Member States on the children and armed conflict agenda and published it on her Office's website.

41. Within the framework of the twenty-fifth anniversary of creation of the children and armed conflict mandate, the Office started compiling testimonies from partners and friends of the mandate as part of an online initiative called "Speaking up for children: 25 voices for conflict-affected boys and girls". The messages, including some from conflict-affected children, will be featured on the website of the Office in the coming months.

B. Collecting, assessing and disseminating best practices and lessons learned

42. Collecting, assessing and disseminating best practices and lessons learned, as mandated by the General Assembly, remained a key priority for the Special Representative.

43. Between 2018 and 2020, the Special Representative and UNICEF, with the support of the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, organized a series of four regional consultations with country task forces on monitoring and reporting and country teams, with a view to fostering exchanges and sharing lessons learned on the monitoring and reporting mechanism and on the engagement of the United Nations with parties to conflict. The main recommendations from the consultations

were compiled and published in October 2021 in a report entitled “Consolidated recommendations from the regional consultations on children and armed conflict”. A roll-out plan will be developed to implement these recommendations in cooperation with country task forces and country teams. The Special Representative and UNICEF agreed to encourage the organization of similar consultations every five years.

44. The Office of the Special Representative conducted a study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict. The study was launched in May 2021 during an Arria-formula meeting co-organized by the Special Representative and Estonia and co-sponsored by 14 other Member States. At the request of Member States, the Office will conduct a follow-up study on the mid- and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on conflict-affected children, due to be published in 2022.

45. Grave violations against conflict-affected children have long-term negative effects on children’s future livelihood opportunities. To further assess this problem and to contribute to tailored and sustainable reintegration programmes, the Office of the Special Representative is developing an analytical paper on the impact of grave violations on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The paper is due to be published in 2022.

46. Analysis of the gender dimension of grave violations against children is crucial for the implementation of the children and armed conflict mandate. It is particularly relevant to inform a gender-sensitive programmatic response by organizations operating on the ground for survivors of grave violations and their communities, as well as to inform advocacy efforts and develop appropriate tools to prevent violations. The Office of the Special Representative has therefore been working on a discussion paper on increasing the gender-responsiveness of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, scheduled to be published in 2022.

47. *The Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict*, published by the Office of the Special Representative in February 2020 and already available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish, was translated into Chinese and Russian in 2021.

48. To further support lessons learned and best practices, the Office of the Special Representative established a research hub in Doha that will be operational as of 2022. It will contribute to building institutional knowledge around current and future child protection efforts, with particular emphasis on child reintegration, and will work on operationalizing the *Practical Guidance*, including rolling out training for mediators on its use.

C. Building and supporting global alliances

49. The Special Representative actively engaged with Member States and other key stakeholders to build and support global alliances aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children. She also encouraged Member States to endorse political commitments such as the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles), the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (Vancouver Principles). In February 2021, the Special Representative co-organized with Jordan, France, the European Union, UNICEF and Save the Children International a virtual high-level event to announce the endorsement by Jordan of the Paris Principles. In March 2021, her Office gave a presentation at the virtual technical cooperation training on implementing the Safe Schools Declaration, co-organized by Spain and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. In October 2021, the Special Representative shared a video message for the fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration, held in Abuja and hosted by the Government of Nigeria, together with the Governments of Argentina, Norway and Spain and the African Union Commission and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack.

50. As in previous years, the Special Representative and her Office held regular exchanges with the Groups of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict based in New York, Geneva and the countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. In March 2021, the Special Representative briefed the Somalia-based Group of Friends; in June and November

2021, she and her Office briefed the New York-based Group of Friends; in September 2021, she briefed the Yemen-based Group of Friends; and in October 2021, she briefed the Geneva-based Group of Friends.

51. The Office of the Special Representative continued to spearhead the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, launched in 2018 together with UNICEF. Three briefing papers published in the framework of this initiative in 2020 were launched at a high-level event in July 2021.² As part of the second phase of this initiative, an academic advisory group on child reintegration was established, bringing together global academics to identify and research issues to improve child reintegration efforts. The so-called Nairobi Process will be launched to solicit the perspectives and advice of children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, culminating in 2022 in the organization of a symposium in Nairobi and the launch of a survivors' network. A financing innovation forum will also be organized together with the World Bank to look in greater depth into the financing modalities for reintegration programmes.

52. As a member of the United Nations inter-agency task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty, the Special Representative continued to support the follow-up to the recommendations of this study. Her Office contributed to the development of a United Nations system common position on incarceration and the drafting of advocacy messages for the protection of children deprived of liberty in situations of armed conflict. In November 2021, in the margins of the World Congress on Justice with Children, the Special Representative spoke on a virtual panel on promoting alternative solutions to deprivation of liberty in follow-up to the global study on children deprived of liberty, organized by Defence for Children International and the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Panel on Children Deprived of Liberty.

53. As a member of the Board of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, the Special Representative continued to engage on Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 on ending all forms of violence against children by 2030.

54. In April 2021, the Office of the Special Representative became an official partner of Alliance 8.7. In May 2021, the Special Representative participated in a webinar organized by Alliance 8.7 and War Child on ending child recruitment and use by 2025, and submitted an action pledge for the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour.

D. Working with United Nations human rights mechanisms

55. With a view to achieving the universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Special Representative continued to advocate with Member States. In March 2021, Fiji became the 171st State party to the Optional Protocol, and in November 2021, Suriname became the 172nd State party.

56. Regular communication with the Human Rights Council regarding violations of the rights of conflict-affected children continued, with the Office of the Special Representative systematically providing background information on children and armed conflict for thematic or country resolutions relevant to the mandate. In March 2021, the Special Representative made a virtual presentation of her annual report to the Council.³ Her Office continued to support the universal periodic review process by providing information on the six grave violations against children and progress made by the countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. In 2021, the Special Representative provided input for the universal periodic reviews of the Sudan, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Her Office also shared advance written questions for the reviews of Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

² The three briefing papers are entitled "Reframing child reintegration: from humanitarian action to development, prevention, peacebuilding and beyond", "Gaps and needs for the successful reintegration of children associated with armed groups or armed forces" and "Financing support for child reintegration: issues and options study".

³ [A/HRC/46/39](#).

57. The Special Representative continued her engagement with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council to exchange information and identify common areas of concern. The Office of the Special Representative also provided input for reports of special rapporteurs and independent experts and collaborated with commissions of inquiry on situations of mutual interest. In February 2021, her Office participated in an online consultation on the application of the non-punishment principle, organized by the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and provided input for the Special Rapporteur's report on that topic. In October 2021, the Special Representative provided a briefing at a virtual side event on the theme "Women, peace and security: human rights-based responses to human trafficking in the context of terrorism and conflict", organized by the Special Rapporteur, Ireland and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The same month, the Special Representative co-organized a side event, with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, on addressing the plight of children allegedly associated with armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations. In November 2021, the Special Representative met with the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons to discuss common areas of concern. The Special Representative and her Office also interacted with the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.

58. The Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee continued to raise the situation of children affected by armed conflict during the reviews of State parties' implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Special Representative continued to cooperate with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and will continue to work with the United Nations on the ground to support the implementation of recommendations pertaining to countries on the children and armed conflict agenda.

59. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to be an important partner for the Special Representative, including through its field-level participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. The Office of the Special Representative also contributed to the upcoming report of OHCHR on the rights of the child and family reunification. Engagement by the Special Representative with Geneva-based mechanisms and institutions was facilitated through her Liaison Office in Brussels.

E. Building partnerships with regional and subregional organizations

African Union

60. The African Union remained a key partner and the Special Representative and her Office continued to engage closely with African Union counterparts. In December 2020, the Special Representative remotely participated in the African Union high-level retreat on the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa. In June 2021, to commemorate the Day of the African Child and the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Special Representative and the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security issued a joint statement.

61. In the context of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly, the Special Representative held a meeting with a representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment, to discuss strengthening cooperation on child protection. In November 2021, the Office of the Special Representative participated virtually in the third meeting of the African Union coordination group on children in situations of conflict. Her Office also supported the development of child protection policies for African Union peace support operations and the African Peace and Security Architecture.

62. The Office of the Special Representative increased strategic coordination with United Nations partners based in Addis Ababa, including the United Nations Office to the African Union and the UNICEF Office to the African Union. Similar efforts were made at the subregional level with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

European Union

63. The partnership between the Office of the Special Representative and the European Union continued. The Special Representative had virtual meetings with several European Union officials, including the Commissioner for International Partnerships, the Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management and the European Commission's Vice-President for Democracy and Demography in charge of the new comprehensive European Union strategy on the rights of the child. In January 2021, the Special Representative shared a video message for the consultations between the European Union and the United Nations on conflict prevention, peace and stability to highlight the links between the children and armed conflict agenda and the humanitarian, development and peace and security agendas. In February 2021, on the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, she published a joint statement with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission. In October 2021, the Special Representative provided a briefing at a virtual seminar on the plight of children in conflict-affected areas and the need for the reintegration of children, organized by the European Parliament Intergroup on Children's Rights. In November 2021, the Special Representative met in New York with members of the European Parliament.

64. The Special Representative's Liaison Office in Brussels provided information on children and armed conflict for European Union human rights dialogues and members of the European Parliament, and closely followed discussions on European Union policy documents relevant to the children and armed conflict mandate, including the European Union strategy on the rights of the child and the European Union integrated strategy for the Sahel. On the International Day of la Francophonie, a representative of the Liaison Office spoke at an event on children and armed conflict organized by Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Luxembourg and Romania. In July 2021, the Office of the Special Representative provided a briefing on children and armed conflict to members of the cabinets of several European Commissioners. The Liaison Office also facilitated the engagement of the Special Representative with the Human Rights Council and Geneva-based United Nations partners, and with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

League of Arab States

65. The Special Representative increased her engagement with the League of Arab States within the framework of the cooperation agreement signed with her Office in 2014. In July 2021, the Special Representative, together with the League and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, organized a virtual event to discuss the protection of children against violence in the Arab region and cooperation regarding the 2021–2022 priorities of the League's Committee on Violence against Children. A joint press release was issued after the event.

66. In September 2021, the Special Representative addressed by video link the seventeenth session of the League's Committee on Combating Violence against Children and outlined recommendations for consideration by participating member States. The Special Representative and the League's Assistant Secretary-General held an exchange in November 2021 to discuss the implementation of key recommendations emanating from these high-level engagements. In December 2021, the Office of the Special Representative delivered a presentation on the inclusion of child protection in mediation and peace processes at a training course for the Arab Women Mediators Network co-organized by the League and the Cairo International Centre for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

67. The Office of the Special Representative continued its partnership with NATO, including by cooperating closely with the Senior Focal Point on Children and Armed Conflict at NATO headquarters. In February 2021, the Special Representative shared a video message for the NATO workshop on children and armed conflict, organized as part of the NATO conference on human security. In September 2021, the Special Representative's Liaison Office in Brussels supported the 2021 training for NATO focal points on children and armed conflict, in Izmir, Turkey.

F. Building partnerships within the United Nations system

68. As in previous years, the Special Representative worked closely with the Security Council and relevant subsidiary organs. Her Office supported the organization of the Council's annual open debate on children and armed conflict, held in June 2021 under the presidency of Estonia. The Special Representative briefed the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2206 (2015) concerning South Sudan, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) concerning Yemen. The Special Representative held more than 15 meetings with the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, including meetings to brief the Working Group on specific country situations. The Secretary-General issued country reports on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan,⁴ the Central African Republic,⁵ Colombia, Myanmar,⁶ South Sudan,⁷ the Syrian Arab Republic,⁸ and Yemen.⁹ Four global horizontal notes were issued to the Working Group. The Office of the Special Representative supported the organization of six videoconferences between the Working Group and the co-chairs of country task forces on monitoring and reporting.

69. In February 2021, the Special Representative co-organized with Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation an Arria-formula meeting on the theme "Children and armed conflict, repatriation of children from conflict zones: from camps to homes, call for action". In December 2021, the Special Representative was a speaker at an Arria-formula meeting on the protection of education in conflict, organized by the Niger and Norway.

70. In October 2021, the Special Representative presented 2021 her annual report to the Third Committee of the General Assembly, during the Assembly's seventy-sixth session.¹⁰ In the margins of the Assembly, the Special Representative spoke at a virtual high-level event on the theme "Protection of children: invisible victims of armed conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic", organized by Belgium, the Niger, the European Union and Save the Children International.

71. The Special Representative continued her outreach with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. In December 2020, the Special Representative released, together with the Special Representative on Violence against Children, a joint statement on the protection of children affected by the unfolding situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. In March 2021, the Special Representative released, together with the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Representative on Violence against Children, a joint statement on escalating violence against civilians, including women and children, in Mozambique. The same month, she participated in a meeting of the Steering Committee of United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, chaired by the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. In June 2021, she co-hosted, with the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Argentina, an event to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. In August 2021, the Special Representative released, together with the Special Representative on Violence against Children, a joint statement calling on the Taliban to respect the rights of children, including girls. In October 2021, the Special Representative released, together with the Special Representative on Violence against Children and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, a joint statement calling on all parties in Myanmar to stop child rights violations.

⁴ [S/2021/662](#).

⁵ [S/2021/882](#).

⁶ [S/2020/1243](#).

⁷ [S/2020/1205](#).

⁸ [S/2021/398](#).

⁹ [S/2021/761](#).

¹⁰ [A/76/231](#).

72. The Special Representative pursued her cooperation and engagement with other United Nations entities, including UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. Her Office continued to contribute to the ongoing review of the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards, regarding principles on the release and the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups, and guidance on security sector reform. In December 2020, Belgium, Canada and the Niger, in partnership with the Special Representative, the Department of Peace Operations and the Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security, organized an event on the theme “Child protection through United Nations peacekeeping operations: safeguarding dedicated capacities, protecting children’s rights”. In January 2021, she shared a video message for the closing round table of the sixth annual specialized course on child protection for the United Nations military. In August 2021, the Special Representative delivered a joint video message with UNICEF to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of the report by Graça Machel on the impact of armed conflict on children.¹¹ In October 2021, the Special Representative spoke at an online course on child protection for the United Nations military, organized by the Department of Peace Operations and the Swedish Armed Forces International Centre.

73. The Office of the Special Representative cooperated closely with ILO, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees regarding their participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. In May 2021, her Office participated in an event, co-organized by Norway and WHO, to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) on attacks on health care.

74. Cross-cutting issues relevant to the children and armed conflict mandate remained an important entry point for mainstreaming child protection concerns. The issue of sexual exploitation and abuse was a priority for the Special Representative, and her Office actively participated in New York in the work of the working group on sexual exploitation and abuse. In December 2021, the Special Representative took part in the meeting of the High-Level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse.

75. The Special Representative continued to promote the protection of children’s rights while countering terrorism and to reiterate concerns relating to children deprived of their liberty in situations of conflict. In March 2021, the Special Representative spoke at an event entitled “Violence against children recruited by terrorist groups: the cycle of victimization”, organized by the Working Group on Children Recruited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups as part of the fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. In May 2021, she was a speaker at an event co-organized by Spain and the Office of Counter-terrorism entitled “Dialogue with human rights and civil society partners on building a better paradigm to prevent and counter terrorism”.

76. To better capture the interlinkages between trafficking and grave violations against children, the Special Representative enhanced collaboration with the UNODC, among other organizations. In July 2021, her Office became a member of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, and in November 2021, the Special Representative participated in the annual meeting of principals.

77. Collaboration between the Special Representative and the International Criminal Court was sustained, and her Office joined other United Nations partners to submit amicus curiae observations in the reparations phase of the case *The Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen*, pursuant to a decision of Trial Chamber IX of the International Criminal Court.¹²

G. Building partnerships with civil society and academia

78. Building and maintaining strong partnerships with civil society organizations and academia remained a priority for the Special Representative. In addition to regular

¹¹ See [A/51/306](#).

¹² Case No. ICC-02/04-01/15, Decision, 17 June 2021. Available at https://www.icc-cpi.int/CourtRecords/CR2021_05527.PDF.

interactions with New York-based NGOs, she engaged with NGOs based in Europe, including in Geneva, facilitated through her Liaison Office in Brussels.

79. The Special Representative participated virtually in dozens of events organized by civil society, and dozens more were attended by representatives from her Office. In December 2020, the Special Representative shared a video message for the launch of the technical note on girls associated with armed forces and groups, drafted by UNICEF and Plan International. The same month, she also participated in a webinar entitled “Children and armed conflict: the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on conflict dynamics”, organized by Sweden and Save the Children International.

80. In January 2021, the Special Representative took part in a policy workshop on children and armed conflict organized by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs at Fordham University. In February 2021, she was a speaker at an event entitled “Conflict-related sexual violence in detention: putting principles in action”, organized by the All Survivors Project, the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at the University of Princeton and the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard Law School.

81. In April 2021, the Special Representative participated in a webinar on preventing and ending the recruitment and use of children associated with non-State armed actors, organized by Fight for Humanity and Independent Diplomat, with Belgium, Liechtenstein and the United Kingdom as co-sponsors. The same month, she also participated in an online summit organized by Keeping Children Safe to discuss the main child protection challenges faced by organizations in Latin America and beyond. In November 2021, the Office of the Special Representative presented at a webinar entitled “Preventing child recruitment and strengthening reintegration: launch of the ‘Growing strong together’ parenting resource package”, organized by the International Rescue Committee, the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and the United States Agency for International Development.

82. Also in November 2021, the Special Representative recorded a video for the international plenary of the World Congress on Justice with Children organized by Terre des Hommes, Penal Reform International, the International Institute for the Rights of the Child and the International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates. Within this framework, her Office also participated in a workshop on effective child and youth participation in peacebuilding processes in sub-Saharan Africa.

83. Collaboration between the Office of the Special Representative and academia was further reinforced. In March 2021, the Special Representative spoke at a Human Rights Council side event, organized by the Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflict and Italy, on safeguarding the right of conflict-affected children to education and ensuring the safety of schools. In May 2021, her Office participated in a panel organized by the Folke Bernadotte Academy on the subject of children and youth and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. In September 2021, the Special Representative participated in a webinar on ethical decision-making and moral dilemmas, organized by Leiden University in collaboration with the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security at Dalhousie University. In October 2021, the Special Representative delivered the opening remarks at the Autumn School organized by the Institute of Political Studies “S. Pio V” and the Universities Network on building competencies and awareness on the international protection of children, particularly girls, affected by armed conflict. Her Office also delivered a session on the children and armed conflict mandate at the Autumn School.

84. In December 2020, the Office of the Special Representative was awarded the Sapienza Human Rights Award 2020 by Sapienza University of Rome. In December 2021, the Special Representative was awarded a prize by the Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflict for her institutional commitment as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to the protection of conflict-affected children.

IV. Recommendations

85. The Special Representative remains deeply concerned by the scale and severity of grave violations committed against children and calls upon all parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law, and to immediately end and prevent grave violations. She also calls upon the Human Rights Council and States Members of the United Nations to take all available measures to prevent violations from occurring.

86. The Special Representative expresses concern about the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on conflict-affected children. She calls upon all Member States to ensure that child protection concerns are central to the design of COVID-19 response measures and recovery programmes. She further calls upon Member States to ensure that services and child protection actors are safeguarded and have enough resources despite shrinking economies.

87. The Special Representative calls upon Member States and other relevant stakeholders to take effective and appropriate steps to facilitate the protection and safety of children with disabilities in situations of armed conflict. She urges Member States and other relevant stakeholders to address the needs and specific vulnerabilities of children with disabilities in their planning, response and recovery action in conflict and post-conflict situations in order to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers to ensuring their safety; and to mobilize adequate, timely and predictable resources in order to operationalize their commitment to emergency preparedness and response in a way that is inclusive of, tailored to and accessible to children with disabilities.

88. The Special Representative reminds Member States and regional and subregional organizations that the sustainable reintegration of children is crucial to ensuring sustainable peace and security and to breaking cycles of violence. The Special Representative calls upon Member States and other reintegration actors to provide sustainable political, technical and financial support for such efforts, including for the provision of mental health and psychosocial services.

89. The Special Representative calls anew upon Member States to treat children allegedly associated with armed groups, including groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, primarily as victims, prioritize their reintegration, and address the especially detrimental impact of stigma on their reintegration. She further reminds Member States that, if a child is accused of a crime during his or her association or alleged association, internationally recognized juvenile justice principles must be adhered to, including in relation to the minimum age of criminal responsibility and to ensuring that detention is used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period of time, as well as due process and international fair trial standards. The Special Representative calls upon the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies and relevant special procedure mandate holders to focus closely on the impact of violent extremism on children, including the issue of children with links to groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations.

90. The Special Representative encourages Member States and other relevant stakeholders to consider the specific needs of conflict-affected children in discussions related to climate security, and encourages research on the nexus between climate change and grave violations against children in conflict-affected countries.

91. The Special Representative calls anew upon Member States that have not done so to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and to enact national legislation and policies to prohibit and criminalize the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations by armed forces and groups. She also calls upon Member States to endorse instruments improving the protection of conflict-affected children, such as the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles.

92. The Special Representative welcomes national and international efforts to achieve accountability for perpetrators of grave violations against children and

encourages Member States and donors to enhance support to national justice systems in conflict and post-conflict situations by providing sufficient resources and technical capacity for investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of grave violations against children.

93. **The Special Representative encourages the Human Rights Council to maintain the practice of including recommendations on the protection of children affected by armed conflict when considering or adopting resolutions on country-specific situations or thematic issues, and in the universal periodic review process, with particular attention paid to the implementation of such recommendations. The Special Representative also encourages the Human Rights Council to continue to include child rights violations in its resolutions establishing or renewing the relevant mandates of special procedures.**

94. **The Special Representative welcomes the continued attention paid to the impact of armed conflict on children in reports of States to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee. She urges relevant Member States to include, as appropriate, specific references to information on grave violations against children, on gaps in their applicable legal and policy frameworks and on accountability initiatives in their submissions to those bodies. She further encourages relevant United Nations entities to use the recommendations of those bodies as advocacy tools with the Member States concerned.**
