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### **Promotion and protection of the rights of children: promotion and protection of the rights of children**

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

### *Summary*

The present report is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to its resolution [76/147](#) on the rights of the child, in which it requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to continue to submit reports to the Assembly on the activities undertaken in the fulfilment of her mandate and on the progress achieved in advancing the children and armed conflict agenda. In the report, which covers the period from August 2021 to July 2022, the Special Representative describes trends, issues of concern and progress made. She also provides information on raising global awareness and building partnerships, including her engagement with regional and subregional organizations and international partners. She outlines challenges and priorities on the children and armed conflict agenda and concludes with recommendations to enhance the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

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\* [A/77/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 76/147, the General Assembly requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to continue to submit reports to it and to the Human Rights Council on the activities undertaken in the fulfilment of her mandate, including on progress achieved and challenges remaining on the children and armed conflict agenda. The request stemmed from the mandate given by the Assembly in its resolution 51/77, in which it recommended, *inter alia*, that the Special Representative raise awareness and promote the collection of information about the plight of children affected by armed conflict and foster international cooperation to ensure respect for children's rights.

2. In line with that mandate, and as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 76/147, in the present report, the Special Representative provides information on current trends regarding children affected by armed conflict and gives an overview of emerging issues and challenges. She also highlights the ongoing engagement with parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations, as well as efforts undertaken with a broad range of actors to raise global awareness and catalyse action on the issue. She furthermore highlights the gendered impacts of armed conflict on children and sets out ways to enhance efforts to prevent violations and abuses against children.

## II. Global overview of trends, emerging issues and challenges

### A. Trends in grave violations

3. Cross-border conflicts, intercommunal violence, coups and takeovers, as well as disregard for international humanitarian and human rights law, led to continued challenges for the protection of children living in conflict zones. In 2021, the United Nations verified an overall number of 23,982 grave violations against children, including 1,337 that had occurred prior to 2021 but were only verified in 2021. A total of 19,165 children (13,633 boys, 5,242 girls, 290 sex unknown) were victims or survivors of at least one of the following four grave violations affecting individual children: recruitment and use; killing and maiming; rape and other forms of sexual violence; and abduction.

4. The recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children, closely followed by the denial of humanitarian access and the abduction of children, continued to be among the highest verified violations in 2021. More than 6,310 children (5,707 boys, 603 girls) were recruited and used by parties to conflict, with the highest numbers verified in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia and Mali. A total of 8,070 children (5,499 boys, 2,303 girls, 268 sex unknown) were killed and maimed, with Afghanistan, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Somalia and Yemen having been the deadliest conflicts for children. Children were particularly affected by explosive weapons and remnants of war, including improvised explosive devices, landmines and bombs. Child survivors often experienced lifelong impairments, such as amputation, paralysis, loss of vision or loss of hearing, or long-lasting trauma, and were likely to face educational hurdles and social exclusion. The attribution of incidents of killing and maiming caused by explosive weapons and remnants of war is particularly challenging.

5. The violation with the greatest increase in 2021 was the abduction of children, which increased by 20 per cent, with 3,459 children (2,399 boys, 1,038 girls, 22 sex unknown) abducted. The abduction of girls alone has increased by 40 per cent. Almost all abduction incidents were attributed to armed groups, with the highest numbers

verified in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, the Lake Chad basin and Burkina Faso. Rape and other forms of sexual violence increased by 20 per cent, with 1,326 children, including 28 boys, affected. Most incidents of sexual violence occurred in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, the Central African Republic and Nigeria. Rape and other forms of sexual violence against boys and girls continued to be used as a tactic of war, but remained chronically underreported owing to protection concerns, fear of reprisal or rejection, stigma, weak rule of law and lack of appropriate response and services, among other factors.

6. Attacks on schools (475) and hospitals (397) continued to severely undermine children's access and right to education and health and remained particularly high. The highest figures were verified in Mali, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Schools and hospitals were bombed, destroyed or damaged by shelling, looted and/or used for military purposes and were consequently temporarily or permanently closed. Protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals were abducted, threatened, detained, injured or even killed, with the situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. In general, as in previous years, grave violations affected boys and girls differently. Whereas 85 per cent of children recruited and used were boys, 83 per cent of sexual violence was perpetrated against girls. Grave violations affecting boys decreased compared with the previous year, while killing and maiming, sexual violence and abduction targeting girls increased in 2021.

8. In the first quarter of 2022, armed confrontations, intercommunal conflict, military operations, insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a heavy impact on conflict-affected children. While a slight decrease in the overall number of verified grave violations was observed in the first quarter of 2022, cases of abduction continued to increase at a concerning rate compared with the last quarter of 2021. The highest numbers of abductions continued to be verified in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by Burkina Faso and Somalia. The killing and maiming of children was the most-verified grave violation during that period, followed by recruitment and use and the denial of humanitarian access to children, all of which continued to be of significant concern.

## **B. Addressing gendered impacts of armed conflict on children**

9. Since the inception of the children and armed conflict mandate twenty-five years ago, strong and recurrent evidence across conflict situations has shown that boys and girls experience conflict differently. Among other identity factors, such as age, ethnicity and race, the gender inequality context and harmful social norms play a determining factor in how children are exposed and subjected to violations and abuses by parties to conflict. Children's vulnerabilities to conflict-related violence vary depending on socioeconomic norms and practices, resulting in distinct impacts for girls and boys and, consequently, requiring distinct protection and prevention responses. Analysing the gender dimension of grave violations against children is thus crucial for the implementation of the children and armed conflict mandate. Not only is it relevant, in order to inform the reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, but it is critical, in order 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 guide advocacy efforts and develop appropriate tools to prevent violations. The Office of the Special Representative therefore launched a study, in 2021, on the gender dimensions of grave violations against children in armed conflict.

10. The report on that study, issued in May 2022, indicates, inter alia, that, although boys are targeted disproportionately, girls are also recruited and used by armed groups and armed forces. The study also showed that, while sexual violence disproportionately affects girls, boys are affected too. When in detention for their actual or perceived association with armed groups, both boys and girls are subjected to different forms of sexual violence, including rape and strip-searches during interrogations, often leaving male survivors with feelings of emasculation, powerlessness and failure. Furthermore, data analysis pointed to an overwhelming impact of killing and maiming on boys, given their greater exposure to a variety of risks.

11. The study showed that the monitoring and reporting mechanism has become increasingly effective at collecting sex-disaggregated data on the six grave violations against children and that there is further scope for applying a more systematic gender-sensitive approach to data collection and a more consistent analysis of causal drivers and gender- and age-differentiated risk factors. Underreporting or biased reporting, insufficient capacities (time, expertise and resources) and a lack of systemic support, both in-country and at the Headquarters level, were identified as further challenges. Moreover, despite the undeniable progress made in breaking down violations by sex, sex-disaggregation remains a particular challenge for collective violations.

12. It is important to recognize that children, regardless of gender, are exposed to any type of violation in the context of conflict, as it involves complex factors, such as social, political, economic, environmental and security issues, and a gender analysis of the grave violations must take those issues into account and entail an understanding of how risks are exacerbated owing to gender stereotypes and complex elements related to each violation. For instance, girls' education in particular has been targeted for attack on the basis of harmful cultural norms and attitudes.

13. In the report, it was stressed that, in order to address the challenges identified, country task forces on monitoring and reporting need to be given the means to systematically integrate gender into their work. To that end, and as a first step, the Office of the Special Representative and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) will deliver gender analysis training to country task forces on the basis of the findings identified through the study. Furthermore, it is recommended that a gender expert be appointed within country task forces to provide systematic guidance on the topic. The findings of the study led to the conclusion that integrating a gender perspective into the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism would contribute to better scrutinizing how unseen gender norms and bias can affect the protection of children and provide an opportunity for the monitoring and reporting mechanism to be more context-specific and inclusive of diverse population groups.

### **III. A forward look at enhancing efforts towards the prevention of violations and abuses against children**

14. In many regions around the world, children are growing up amid conflict and violence facing socioeconomic and political distress compounded by the medium to long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the follow-up study conducted by the Office of the Special Representative on the impact of the pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict (report forthcoming), it was found that the interruption of economic activities and school closures pushed millions of children into extreme adversity, forcing them to resort to harmful coping mechanisms. That dire situation was aggravated by the scaling down of public services and humanitarian assistance, which also allowed armed groups, in many situations, to expand and exert their influence over new territories, thus exposing children to even

higher levels of violence. Although there were often other factors at play, countless children were forced into dangerous and/or exploitative work, including in armed groups, which increased their vulnerability to grave violations. Other children ended up on the street, exposed to similar risks.

15. To address the risks to children of the current pandemic and future pandemics and the ongoing violence and distress, all leading to their increased vulnerability, it is critical to invest in early warning and preventive action and to develop new and creative preparedness measures to prevent grave violations. These measures could include the development of prevention plans and building the capacity 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. Generally, a cohesive plan or strategy needs to be put in place for bringing the various children and armed conflict initiatives together in order to offer a holistic approach to tackling the challenges facing children affected by conflict and violence, and which COVID-19 magnified.

16. The impact of the international community's collective actions has been significant for children, altering norms and practices of parties to conflict on the ground over the past 25 years. A cohesive plan would serve to further amplify those collective impacts and would contain recommendations on best practices, legislation and norms to be put in place to better protect children in situations of armed conflict and prevent violations from occurring early on, thereby unifying various elements from the children and armed conflict agenda across the General Assembly, the Security Council and the wider work of the United Nations Membership, and taking into account key themes, such as reintegration, education, early warning and national legislation, as well as other relevant themes, focused on solving the plight of children in armed conflict. Lastly, to enhance national, subregional and regional capacities for prevention and protection, the United Nations could leverage its technical resources and build on them through the development of deployable capacities and stronger collaboration throughout the system.

#### **IV. Dialogue, action plans and commitments with parties to conflict**

##### **A. Addressing grave violations against children by government forces**

17. In the Central African Republic, the Government adopted interministerial plans to implement its Child Protection Code. In March 2022, Maxime Jeoffroy Eli Mokom Gawaka was surrendered to the International Criminal Court on account of a Court warrant of arrest. Mr. Mokom is suspected of being responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including the enlistment of children under the age of 15 years and their use to participate actively in hostilities, allegedly committed in various locations in the Central African Republic, between at least 5 December 2013 and at least December 2014.

18. In Colombia, the Government continued to apply a strategy launched in January 2021 for the local implementation of its policy to prevent the recruitment and use of children and sexual violence against children. With United Nations support, the programme "Súmate por mí" (Join up for Me) also continued in 209 municipalities, aimed at preventing child recruitment and use by armed groups. A total of 180 children (126 boys; 54 girls) who were separated from armed groups entered the protection programme of the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, and training on child rights by the latter was provided to the Colombian armed forces.

19. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with United Nations support, the Government continued to implement screening mechanisms to prevent the enlistment of children by its security forces. At least 13 elements from the country's armed forces, 1 element from the Congolese National Police and 1 element from the armed group Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain were convicted for crimes against children, including recruitment and use, sexual violence and killing and maiming, were sentenced to prison terms of over 10 years.
20. In Iraq, the Government and the United Nations deepened their dialogue on the possible signature by the Popular Mobilization Forces of an action plan on recruitment and use of children. The adoption of the Law on Support to Female Yazidi Survivors is a positive development. The Government repatriated a total of 336 Iraqi families, including 858 children, from Hawl camp in Syria, while a further 223 children were repatriated from Iraq to their countries of origin.
21. In Mali, the transitional Government and the United Nations worked on the establishment of a framework between the United Nations and the Malian defence and security forces to address grave violations against children by the latter. The United Nations also continued its advocacy with relevant judicial authorities to ensure the full implementation of the 2013 Protocol on the Release and Handover of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups.
22. In Nigeria, a bill on child rights was signed into law by the Governor of Borno State in January 2022. The new law provides a legal framework for the protection of children against recruitment and use and other forms of violence and exploitation.
23. In the Philippines, the United Nations continued to support the Government in its efforts to strengthen children's protection. In June 2021, the Philippines National Police issued a child protection policy incorporating provisions of the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act (Republic Act No. 11188) and its related protocol, to prevent grave violations against children. A total of 3,139 child protection actors were trained by the Government on the Act and its protocol. The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao incorporated the protection of children in situations of armed conflict into the Bangsamoro Children's Code in 2021.
24. In Somalia, with United Nations support, the authorities in Jubbaland State of Somalia and Hirshabelle Interim Administration established sub-working groups on children and armed conflict to support the implementation of the Federal Government's 2012 action plans to end and prevent the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children, signed with the United Nations, and the related 2019 road map, also signed with the United Nations.
25. In South Sudan, the Government continued to implement the 2020 Comprehensive Action Plan to End and Prevent all Grave Violations against Children, in particular through the provision of increased access to the United Nations for age screening. In May 2022, the Government and the United Nations in South Sudan organized a national conference on children and armed conflict, in which the Special Representative also participated.
26. In the Sudan, continued dialogue between the United Nations, the transitional Government and the signatories to the Juba Agreement for Peace in the Sudan led to the adoption, in December 2021, of a road map based on the Government's 2016 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children.
27. In the Syrian Arab Republic, pursuant to United Nations advocacy, the Government reactivated an existing interministerial committee to address grave violations against children and issued Act No. 21/2021, on the rights and protections afforded to children. Engagement with the United Nations was strengthened, and a

joint high-level workshop on children and armed conflict was organized in March 2022, so as to identify avenues for strengthening the protection of children.

28. In Yemen, with the support of the United Nations, the Government identified priority activities with regard to implementing its 2014 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and the related 2018 road map. In July 2021, the Government reactivated the interministerial committee on children and armed conflict and organized training sessions on child protection throughout the reporting period. With the support of the Office of the Special Representative, including through principal- and technical-level meetings with States members of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, the Coalition continued to implement the time-bound programme of activities agreed upon in 2020. A team from the Office of the Special Representative visited Aden and Sana'a from 22 to 30 May 2022, to get first-hand information on and an assessment of the situation of children affected by armed conflict and engage with both the Government of Yemen and the Houthis on the implementation of their respective commitments on children and armed conflict.

29. In Cameroon, including in the North-West and South-West Regions, the United Nations trained police officers on child protection. In Chad, the United Nations trained military officers from the Chadian defence and security forces on international humanitarian law and children's rights, including the six grave violations. In India, the Government continued its constructive engagement with the Special Representative and the United Nations, including through an interministerial meeting in November 2021, a technical visit by the Office of the Special representative to India in July 2022 and the appointment of a national focal point.

## **B. Addressing grave violations against children by armed groups**

30. In the Central African Republic, the United Nations engaged with the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique, the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique and the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique to accelerate the implementation of their action plans signed in 2018 and 2019. Dialogue by the United Nations with the latter two groups led to the release of 134 children associated with the groups. Engagement by the United Nations with a Lord's Resistance Army splinter group continued, including on the release of children.

31. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in September and November 2021, three armed group commanders signed a unilateral commitment and road map to end and prevent child recruitment and use, sexual violence and other grave violations. Following United Nations engagement, at least 162 children were released by armed groups who had previously signed similar commitments.

32. In Nigeria, following the delisting of the Civilian Joint Task Force in the previous annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)), the United Nations continued to support the Task Force in the consolidation of the gains made under the action plan it signed with the United Nations in 2017 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children.

33. In Mali, 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 for elements of the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and United Nations visits to its bases to verify the absence of children.

34. In the Syrian Arab Republic, United Nations support for the Syrian Democratic Forces in the implementation of the 2019 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children continued, and 111 children were disengaged. In addition, 326 boys were identified through age-assessment screening and prevented from joining. Factions of the opposition Syrian National Army engaged with the United Nations on the development of an action plan to end and prevent recruitment and use, as well as other grave violations against children. The opposition Syrian National Army also issued a statement, in September 2021, on compliance with child protection provisions under international law, including the prohibition of child recruitment and use under 18 years of age.

35. Engagement by the Special Representative and the United Nations in Yemen with the Houthis (who call themselves Ansar Allah) led, in April 2022, to the signing of an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment, use, killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and other grave violations. In May 2022, the Office of the Special Representative conducted a technical mission to Yemen to support the implementation of the action plan.

## **V. Raising global awareness and building partnerships**

### **A. Awareness-raising, advocacy and country visits**

36. The Special Representative continued to use her voice, as the leading advocate of the United Nations for the protection of conflict-affected children, to publicly call for the respect of their rights and needs before, during and after conflict, including through the issuance of more than 40 press releases and statements, some jointly with partners, including other high-level United Nations officials. For example, in August 2021, the Special Representative released, together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, a joint statement calling on the Taliban to respect the rights of children, including girls. The same month, she also issued a joint press release on rising levels of sexual violence in Somalia, with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. In October 2021, the Special Representative, together with the Special Representative on Violence against Children and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, issued a joint statement calling on all parties in Myanmar to stop child rights violations. In February and March 2022, the Special Representative published statements on the situation of children in Ukraine, the first jointly with the Special Representative on Violence against Children.

37. The Special Representative sought to inform and engage the media in advocacy efforts, including through a variety of national and international media outlets, such as Reuters, *The Guardian*, Voice of America, *El País* and Al-Hurra. For example, 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 in November 2021 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 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 (UNESCO) and UNICEF. The same month, she 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.

39. In November 2021, the Special Representative shared a video message on the occasion of 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. In May 2022, she was a keynote speaker at an event entitled “Protection of children in urban warfare” organized by Norway, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Norwegian Red Cross.

40. In March 2022, in honour of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict mandate, the Office released testimonials from partners and friends of the mandate, as part of an online initiative entitled “Speaking up for children: 25 voices for conflict-affected boys and girls”. In May 2022, to celebrate that anniversary, the Special Representative inaugurated a photo exhibit at United Nations Headquarters, with support from France, Kazakhstan, Iraq, Malta, Qatar and the United Kingdom, entitled “From despair to hope: children beyond armed conflict”. The exhibit featured stories of conflict-affected children through portraits taken by the photojournalist, Paddy Dowling. In June 2022, the exhibit was featured at the Photoville festival in New York City.

41. The campaign entitled “Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict” continued to support the Office’s global advocacy efforts and remained a strong 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. Three years after its official launch, the campaign has been launched in eight locations, including New York, Brussels and Bangkok, as well as the Central African Republic, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and, most recently, Yemen.

42. 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, World Vision International and War Child UK. Stories about boys and girls affected by conflict were also included in the summary of the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/76/871-S/2022/493).<sup>1</sup> In November 2021, in the context 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, at which 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 the website of her Office.

43. The Special Representative resumed her official travel during the reporting period and, in 2022, visited Brussels, Cairo and Doha, as well as Andorra, South Sudan and the United Kingdom, among other places, to present the findings set out in the report on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the children and armed conflict mandate, advocate in favour of the protection of children affected by conflict at the national and regional levels and expand her reach with a broader audience.

44. On 23 and 24 May 2022, the Special Representative visited Juba, where she jointly opened the national conference on children and armed conflict and met with key stakeholders, including the President, First Vice-President and Vice-President of South Sudan, as well as cabinet members, United Nations partners, the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict based in South Sudan and members of civil

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Summary-of-the-Annual-Report-of-the-Secretary-General-on-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-2021-3.pdf>.

society, including children, to assess progress made in the implementation of the Comprehensive Action Plan.

## **B. Building and supporting global alliances**

45. The Special Representative actively engaged with Member States and other stakeholders to build and support global alliances aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children. She continued to advocate with Member States for the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. In November 2021, Suriname became the 172nd State party. 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 November 2021, Mongolia endorsed the Paris Principles. During the reporting period, the Office of the Special Representative also participated in the Paris Principles Steering Group. 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, the African Union Commission and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack.

46. As in previous years, the Special Representative and her Office held regular exchanges with Groups of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in New York and Geneva and in the countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. In September 2021, the Special Representative gave a briefing to the Yemen-based Group of Friends. In October 2021 and March 2022, she briefed the Geneva-based Group of Friends. In November 2021 and May and July 2022, the Special Representative and her Office briefed the New York-based Group of Friends. In June 2022, the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict to the European Union was launched in Brussels by Belgium and Italy, in the presence of the Special Representative.

47. As a member of the United Nations inter-agency task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty, the Special Representative remained committed to supporting the follow-up to the recommendations of the study. In November 2021, on the margins of the World Congress on Justice with Children, the Special Representative spoke as part of 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.

48. Following the implementation of the action pledge submitted for the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, the Special Representative and her Office continued to share advocacy messages to support the ratification and implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the implementation of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), of ILO.

49. In November 2021, the Special Representative participated in the annual meeting of principals of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons. Furthermore, the Office of the Special Representative has continued its collaboration with the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, including by delivering, in June 2022, a presentation to its annual meeting on how to ensure accountability for conflict-affected children.

50. The Special Representative's Office continued to develop new initiatives based on the research conducted by the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, launched in 2018, and UNICEF. As part of the second phase of that initiative, an academic advisory group on child reintegration was established, bringing together global academics to identify and research issues to improve child reintegration efforts. A financing innovation forum will be organized together with the World Bank, to seek financing modalities for reintegration programmes. Furthermore, in October 2021, the Office of the Special Representative started a dialogue with national partners from 15 countries that were on, or had previously been on, the children and armed conflict agenda, in order to solicit the perspectives and advice of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups. The so-called Nairobi process will culminate, in 2022, in the organization of a symposium to be held in Nairobi, gathering all stakeholders involved in reintegration programming, including affected children.

51. In June 2022, the Special Representative inaugurated an analysis and research hub in Doha. The hub will contribute to building institutional knowledge around current and future child protection efforts, with a particular emphasis on child reintegration, and will work on operationalizing the *Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict*.

## **C. Building partnerships with regional and subregional organizations**

### **African Union**

52. The Special Representative continued her strong partnership with the African Union. In November 2021 and in April and May 2022, her Office participated virtually in the African Union coordination group on children in situations of conflict. 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 April 2022, her Office and the United Nations Office to the African Union conducted a two-day coordination and capacity-building training session on child protection, with the participation of African Union entities. In June 2022, to commemorate the Day of the African Child, the Special Representative and the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security issued a joint statement.

### **European Union**

53. The partnership between the Office of the Special Representative and the European Union continued. In October 2021, the Special Representative gave 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, and, in January 2022, she had a call with the European Union Special Envoy for Afghanistan. In March 2022, as part of the European Humanitarian Forum, the Special Representative participated in a humanitarian talk on addressing the drivers and consequences of child recruitment and use, co-organized with the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, UNICEF, Save the Children International and World Vision International. In June 2022, in Brussels, the Special Representative briefed the Political and Security Committee and had meetings with the Commissioner for Crisis Management, the Special Representative for Human Rights and a member of the European Parliament. In July 2022, the Special Representative shared a video message for the second annual high-level conference

on the global state of human rights, organized by the European Parliament and the Global Campus of Human Rights.

54. The Special Representative's Liaison Office in Brussels provided information on children and armed conflict to relevant stakeholders and closely followed discussions on European Union policy documents relevant to the children and armed conflict mandate. In June 2022, in the context of the European Union-United Nations Annual Dialogue on Prevention, Stabilization and Peacebuilding, the Office of the Special Representative co-organized, with the European External Action Service and UNICEF, a session on how to address child reintegration from a humanitarian-development-peace nexus lens. The Liaison Office also facilitated the engagement of the Special Representative with the Human Rights Council and Geneva-based United Nations mechanisms and partners.

#### **North Atlantic Treaty Organization**

55. The Office of the Special Representative continued its partnership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In September 2021, the Special Representative's Liaison Office in Brussels supported the training of NATO focal points on children and armed conflict in Izmir, Türkiye.

#### **League of Arab States**

56. The Special Representative continued her engagement with the League of Arab States. In September 2021, the Special Representative addressed, by video link, the seventeenth session of the League's Committee on Violence against Children and outlined recommendations for consideration by participating member States. The Special Representative and the Assistant Secretary-General of the League 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. In June 2022, the Special Representative and her Office held meetings and workshops with the League of Arab States in Cairo, focused on child protection, including the prevention of grave violations against children, the Safe Schools Declaration and peace processes.

### **D. Building partnerships with civil society and academia**

57. Enhancing partnerships with civil society organizations and academia continued to be a priority for the Special Representative. She remained actively engaged with New York-based NGOs and further engaged with NGOs based in Europe, facilitated through the Liaison Office in Brussels, as well as with civil society partners during her field visits. The Special Representative participated, in-person or virtually, in dozens of events organized by civil society organizations, and dozens more were attended by representatives from her Office.

58. In November 2021, the Office of the Special Representative gave a presentation 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.

59. 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 fédération internationale, Penal Reform International, the

International Institute for the Rights of the Child and the International Association of Youth and Family Judges and Magistrates. In December 2021, the Special Representative signed a partnership agreement with the All Survivors Project Foundation for the implementation of a project on the reintegration of boy survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. In January 2022, 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.

60. As part of her engagement with academia, the Special Representative participated in a webinar in September 2021 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, she delivered opening remarks at the Autumn School, organized by the Institute of Political Studies “S. Pio V” and the Universities Network on Children and Armed Conflict, on building competencies and awareness on the international protection of children, in particular girls, affected by armed conflict. Her Office also delivered a session on the children and armed conflict mandate at the Autumn School. In December 2021, the Special Representative was awarded a prize by the Universities Network for her institutional commitment, as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to the protection of conflict-affected children. In June 2022, she delivered opening remarks at the Network’s advanced training course entitled “International criminal jurisdiction and children in armed conflict”, and her Office delivered a training session.

61. The Office of the Special Representative collaborated with the Government of Malta to set up a pilot virtual summer school on child protection in armed conflict, with the aim of providing state-of-the-art training on the topic and bringing together partners from relevant professional backgrounds.

## **E. Building partnerships within the United Nations system**

62. The Special Representative continued working closely with the Security Council and its relevant subsidiary organs. Her Office supported the organization of the Council’s annual open debate on children and armed conflict, held in July 2022 under the presidency of Brazil. The Special Representative gave briefings to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [2127 \(2013\)](#) concerning the Central African Republic, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1533 \(2004\)](#) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution [751 \(1992\)](#) concerning Somalia, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [2206 \(2015\)](#) concerning South Sudan, and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [2140 \(2014\)](#) concerning Yemen. The Special Representative had 12 meetings with the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, including to brief its members on country-specific situations. The Secretary-General issued country reports on children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic ([S/2021/882](#)), Colombia ([S/2021/1022](#)), Iraq ([S/2022/46](#)), Somalia ([S/2022/397](#)) and Yemen ([S/2021/761](#)). Four global horizontal notes were issued to the Working Group. The Office of the Special Representative supported the organization of four videoconferences between the Working Group and the co-chairs of the country task forces on monitoring and reporting.

63. 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.

64. 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, with regard to principles on the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups, and to guidance on security sector reform. In August 2021, the Special Representative delivered a video message jointly with UNICEF, to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of the report prepared by Graça Machel on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306 and A/51/306/Add.1). 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. The same month, the main recommendations from a series of four regional workshops held with country task forces on monitoring and reporting and country teams between 2018 and 2020 and organized by the Special Representative and UNICEF, with the support of the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, were published in a report entitled “Consolidated recommendations from the regional consultations on children and armed conflict”. It was also decided that similar consultations would be organized every five years. A roll-out plan will be developed to implement the recommendations, in cooperation with country task forces and country teams. The Office of the Special Representative participated in a workshop for child protection advisers and focal points, held in New York from 28 June to 1 July 2022 and organized by the Department of Peace Operations. The Special Representative met bilaterally with participants on the margins of the workshop. The Special Representative coordinates two task forces for the preparation of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, encompassing various United Nations agencies and offices that contribute to the monitoring and reporting mechanisms at the field level.

65. In April 2022, the Office of the Special Representative, in cooperation with UNICEF, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations, published a guidance note on the abduction of conflict-affected children. The guidance note was officially launched in July, at a high-level event co-organized with Italy.

66. The Office of the Special Representative continued to cooperate closely with ILO, the World Health Organization and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) regarding their participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. In March and May 2022, the Special Representative met with the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection of UNHCR. In March, the Special Representative also met with the Director General of ILO, and, in May, she participated remotely in the fifth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, as part of a thematic panel entitled “Sustaining peace and climate resilience through the elimination of child labour”, and through the #RaiseYourHandForKids campaign. On 7 July, together with UNESCO, the Office of the Special Representative co-organized a high-level event on the margins of the high-level political forum on sustainable development held under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, entitled “Protecting education from attack: a call for improving data monitoring and policy response”, at which the Special Representative delivered opening remarks.

67. 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. The Office of the Special Representative also contributed to the report of

the High Commissioner on the rights of the child and family reunification ([A/HRC/49/31](#)) and to her forthcoming report on good practices, lessons learned and challenges faced by States in preventing, mitigating and addressing the diversion of arms and unregulated or illicit arms transfers.

68. The Special Representative continued her cooperation with the Special Representative on Violence against Children and the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, as mentioned above. The Special Representative serves on the Steering Committee of United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict and, in June 2022, participated in a principal-level meeting of the Committee, chaired by the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. The same month, she co-hosted, with the latter and Argentina, an event to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. The Office of the Special Representative contributed to the report of the Secretary-General on women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence in conflict and children born of sexual violence in conflict ([S/2022/77](#)), prepared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

69. 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 system-wide 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.

70. 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 October 2021, 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.

71. To better capture the interlinkages between trafficking and grave violations against children, the Special Representative enhanced collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), among other organizations. In October 2021, the Special Representative gave 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," co-organized by the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ireland and UNODC.

72. Regular communication with the Human Rights Council regarding child rights violations in situations of conflict continued. In March 2022, the Special Representative presented her annual report to the Council ([A/HRC/49/58](#)). Her Office continued to support the universal periodic review process by providing information on the six grave violations and on progress made by countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. The Special Representative continued her cooperation with the Council's special procedure mandate holders, including the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, on common areas of concern. For instance, in June 2022, on the margins of the fifteenth Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Special Representative co-organized, with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, 10 Member States and various

United Nations entities and NGOs, a side event entitled “Protecting the rights of children with disabilities in armed conflict”. Her Office also provided inputs for reports of special rapporteurs and independent experts and collaborated on situations of mutual interest.

73. The Special Representative and her Office interacted with the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.

74. Cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of the Child continued. In March 2022, the Office of the Special Representative and the Committee co-organized a high-level side event entitled “Ending and preventing child recruitment: the children and armed conflict mandate and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.” In June 2022, the Special Representative met with the Chair of the Committee.

75. Collaboration between the Special Representative and the International Criminal Court was sustained. In February 2022, the Special Representative had a call with the Prosecutor. The Office of the Special Representative and other United Nations entities submitted a joint amicus curiae brief during the reparations phase of the case entitled *The Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen*.

## VI. Recommendations

**76. The Special Representative remains deeply concerned by the scale and severity of the grave violations committed against children and is especially troubled by the high increase in the abduction of children, in particular girls. She urges all parties to immediately end impunity and prevent the occurrence and reoccurrence of those violations; take all the necessary measures to achieve that aim, including the adoption and implementation of legislation criminalizing violations and abuses against children; and strengthen accountability.**

**77. The Special Representative is concerned by the continued trend of killing and maiming of children by explosive weapons and remnants of war, including improvised explosive devices, landmines and bombs. She calls upon Member States to sign and fully implement international legal instruments pertaining to those weapons, including anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, and to comply with international humanitarian law. Armed groups must also refrain from their use. The promotion of mine clearance and the clearance of explosive remnants of war, mine-risk education programmes for children, victim assistance and stockpile destruction should also be prioritized, including prior to any movement by internally displaced persons back to contaminated areas.**

**78. The Special Representative encourages a stronger gender perspective and analysis in the implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism to make it more context-specific and inclusive of diverse population groups. To that end, she recommends embedding technical expertise on gender into country task forces on monitoring and reporting and encourages Member States, United Nations partners and non-governmental organizations to support such efforts.**

**79. The Special Representative proposes, under the leadership of the General Assembly, the development of a comprehensive strategy bringing together existing initiatives on children and armed conflict and outlining a holistic approach to tackle the challenges facing children affected by conflict and violence. She encourages Member States to enhance their national, subregional and regional capacities for prevention and protection and to leverage, to that end, the technical resources of the United Nations, building on those resources**



through the development of deployable capacities and stronger collaboration throughout the system.

80. The Special Representative calls upon parties to conflict to remove all impediments to humanitarian access to children and enable unimpeded access to education for conflict-affected children. She expresses concern about the increasing instrumentalization of schools as part of hostilities and stresses that it is fundamental to preserve their civilian character. She urges Member States to do their utmost to protect schools, students and teachers, as well as hospitals, health-care institutions and health workers. She further calls for the implementation of special measures to ensure the continuous education of girls.

81. The Special Representative calls upon all Member States to ratify and implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and ILO Convention No. 182, and to endorse and implement the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.

82. The Special Representative calls for long-term holistic reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, specifically calling upon Member States and other reintegration actors to provide sustainable political, technical and financial support for such efforts, and invites all of them to join the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers.

83. The Special Representative underlines the importance of data analysis and data management for the prevention of grave violations and encourages the Security Council, the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, as well as donors, to ensure that child protection priorities are concretely translated into the budgeting and staffing resources necessary to support data analysis, data management, monitoring and reporting.

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