



# Security Council

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## Children and armed conflict in Yemen

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the fourth report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Yemen and covers the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2023.

In the report, the Secretary-General documents the effects of conflict on children in Yemen, highlighting trends and patterns of the six grave violations against children, namely the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, attacks on schools, hospitals and protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals,<sup>a</sup> the abduction of children and the denial of humanitarian access. Where available, the report contains information on perpetrators. It also outlines the progress made in addressing grave violations against children, including through dialogue with parties.

The report includes a series of recommendations to all parties to the conflict for ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening child protection in Yemen.

<sup>a</sup> For the purposes of the present report, the phrase “protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals”, used in Security Council resolutions [1998 \(2011\)](#), [2143 \(2014\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#) as well as in the statements by the President of the Security Council of 17 June 2013 ([S/PRST/2013/8](#)) and 31 October 2017 ([S/PRST/2017/21](#)), refers to teachers, doctors, other educational personnel, students and patients.



## I. Introduction

1. The present report is prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict and covers the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2023. It is the fourth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Yemen to be submitted to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The report highlights trends and patterns of grave violations committed against children by parties to the conflict in Yemen and provides details on the progress made to end and prevent such violations since the previous report ([S/2021/761](#)) and the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in Yemen ([S/AC.51/2022/1](#)). It also contains information on progress and challenges in the engagement with parties to the conflict and the implementation of action plans and road maps. Where possible, parties to conflict responsible for grave violations are identified.

2. In annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/78/842-S/2024/384](#)), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and pro-government militias, including the Salafists and popular committees, remained listed for the recruitment and use of children. The Security Belt Forces remained listed for the recruitment and use of children and the Houthis (who call themselves Ansar Allah) remained listed for recruitment and use, killing and maiming and attacks on schools and hospitals. The Houthis were also listed as a party that has concluded an action plan with the United Nations.

3. The information contained in the present report was verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in Yemen. Challenges relating to insecurity in and access to conflict-affected areas, including due to access restrictions imposed by parties to conflict, constrained the documentation and verification of grave violations against children. Therefore, the information contained in the present report does not represent the full extent of grave violations committed against children in Yemen during the reporting period; the actual number of violations is likely to be higher. Where incidents were committed earlier but verified only during this reporting period, the information is qualified as relating to an incident that was verified at a later date.

## II. Overview of political, security and humanitarian developments

4. In 2021 and the first quarter of 2022, there were 52 active front lines and an escalation in armed conflict in Ma'rib, Bayda', Ta'izz, Hudaydah, Hajjah and Shabwah Governorates, including due to cross-border attacks and increased aerial bombardment. Shifts in the front lines and changes in territorial control were reported. In the first quarter of 2021, the Houthis launched drone and missile attacks on an oil facility and an international airport in Saudi Arabia. They continued their offensive to take the Ma'rib Governorate and, in October 2021, took control of the Harib and Abdiyah districts. Later, following the withdrawal of the forces of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, government-affiliated forces (Amaliqah Brigades) launched an offensive to relieve the pressure on Ma'rib. In November 2021, the Houthis took control of vacated areas in the city of Hudaydah, Durayhimi and Bayt al-Faqih districts and most of the areas under the control of government-affiliated forces in Tuhayta' district and Aden and Shabwah Governorates.

5. The deteriorating security situation, including increased civilian casualties, resulted in a catastrophic humanitarian situation, with waves of displacement and increased vulnerabilities for children, including grave violations against children.

Children living in Ma'rib, Hudaydah, Ta'izz, Sa'dah, Hajjah, Dali', Shabwah, Jawf and Bayda' Governorates were the most affected. Most displaced households came from the Governorates of Ma'rib, Hudaydah, Ibb, Ta'izz, Sana'a and Shabwah.

6. On 2 April 2022, parties to the conflict agreed to a truce agreement under the auspices of the United Nations for an initial period of two months. The truce was subsequently renewed for a two-month period, twice, and formally ended on 2 October 2022. On 7 April 2022, in line with the Riyadh Agreement, the President of Yemen delegated his "full powers" to a new eight-person Presidential Leadership Council.

7. Since the beginning of the truce in 2022 and continuing into 2023, levels of conflict-related displacement and violence and the number of violations of child rights significantly decreased. Efforts by the Government of Yemen and the Houthis to implement commitments under action plans and road maps to end and prevent grave violations against children also contributed to the reduction of violence. A stable supply of fuel to the north of the country improved the day-to-day life of the civilian population.

8. In the south of Yemen, Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula increased its activities, especially in Bayda', Abyan and Shabwah Governorates. In 2023, armed conflict between the government-affiliated forces and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula was recorded.

9. In 2023, 5.7 million boys and 5.4 million girls required humanitarian assistance.<sup>1</sup> During the reporting period, currency depreciation, prevalent violence and insecurity, the oil export blockade imposed by the Houthis and heavy rains and floods exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. Several years of armed conflict had a serious effect on the humanitarian situation and on the protection of civilians, which occurred in parallel to economic collapse and a breakdown in national systems, including social services, health and education systems, thereby threatening the authorities' ability to sustain vital public services. In addition, unexploded ordnance became an issue of greater concern since the truce and during the de facto truce period, particularly due to increased civilian movement; there was a rise in civilian casualties, with children and humanitarian aid operations primarily affected.

10. Humanitarian agencies continued to operate in an increasingly challenging environment characterized by bureaucratic impediments, insecurity, attacks, arbitrary arrest and detention, as well as the enforcement by the Houthis of the mahram restrictions, which require women to travel with a male family member or "guardian" and limits freedom of movement for women, including humanitarian staff. In addition, humanitarian agencies had to scale down their operations due to funding gaps. At the end of the reporting period, two United Nations personnel were still being held in detention by the Houthis in Sana'a. Five United Nations personnel who had been detained in 2022 by unknown armed groups in Abyan Governorate were released in 2023.

11. Since October 2022, parties to the conflict have continued to engage with the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen to renew the truce and engage in talks towards the resumption of an inclusive political process to end the conflict. At the end of the reporting period, despite sporadic clashes and the expiration of the truce agreement, there was the longest lull in active fighting in the country since 2016. The territorial control exercised by parties to the conflict remained unchanged since 2022. In December 2023, parties to the conflict committed to a set of measures to implement a nationwide ceasefire and prepared for the resumption of an inclusive political process under the auspices of the United Nations.

<sup>1</sup> See <https://yemen.un.org/en/259542-yemen-humanitarian-needs-overview-2024-january-2024>.

12. At the end of 2023, there were growing concerns regarding the spillover effect of the conflict in the Gaza Strip on Yemen, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation, particularly the transport of commodities. The continued attacks and threat of attacks by the Houthis on maritime vessels and the launch of air strikes targeting the Houthis in Yemen risked further escalating regional tensions with grave potential political, economic and humanitarian ramifications.

### **III. Grave violations against children**

13. During the reporting period, the country task force verified 5,539 grave violations against 2,422 children (1,997 boys, 425 girls). Of these children, 193 were victims of multiple violations. The denial of humanitarian access continued to be the most verified violation (2,806), followed by killing and maiming (1,941) and recruitment and use (564); other grave violations accounted for 228 of the total. The de facto truce and commitments by parties to the conflict, including the implementation of the action plans with the Government of Yemen and the Houthis, led to a 50 per cent decrease in the number of verified grave violations in 2023 (809) compared with 2022 (1,596).

14. Most verified grave violations were attributed to the Houthis (2,850, 51 per cent), unidentified perpetrators (1,499, 27 per cent), the Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated armed forces and groups (1,000, 18 per cent) and the Coalition (183). The greatest number of violations was committed in the Governorate of Amanat al-Asimah (838), followed by Hudaydah (754), Sa'dah (698), Aden (503), and other governorates combined (2,746).

15. The number of verified violations represents a significant decrease compared with the previous report, which covered a shorter period of two years and during which 8,526 grave violations affecting 3,503 children had been verified. The six-month truce under the auspices of the United Nations (2 April to 2 October 2022) and the continued implementation of the truce thereafter, as well as progressive efforts in implementing commitments under the action plans and road maps to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children signed by the Government of Yemen in 2014 and the Houthis in 2022 contributed to reducing grave violations against children. Between 2021 and 2023, the number of violations that involved killing and maiming of children decreased by 40 per cent, attacks on schools and hospitals by 20 per cent, abductions by 90 per cent and the denial of humanitarian access by 95 per cent. It is important to mention that, during the same period, the United Nations faced access and security restrictions and that communities continued to remain in fear of reporting grave violations due to the risk of retaliation.

16. Furthermore, during the reporting period, the country task force verified 250 grave violations that had occurred in previous reporting periods (before 1 January 2021): recruitment and use (78 boys); killing and maiming (112 boys, 46 girls); sexual violence (4 boys, 4 girls); and abduction (4 boys). Violations were attributed to the Houthis (107), the Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated groups and forces (57) (Yemen Armed Forces (46), Security Belt Forces (9), Border Guard Brigade (1), Amaliqah Brigades (1)), unidentified perpetrators (51), the Coalition (30), Da'esh (3), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (1) and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Yemen (1).

#### **A. Recruitment and use**

17. The country task force verified the recruitment and use of 564 children (560 boys, 4 girls) between the ages of 8 and 17 in 2021 (259), 2022 (132) and 2023 (173). The total represents a significant decrease compared with the total of 861 in the previous

report. Violations were attributed to the Houthis (345, 61 per cent), Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated armed forces and groups (210) (Yemen Armed Forces (86), Security Belt Forces (51), Southern Transitional Council (10), 5th brigade (10), Southern Resistance Forces (2), Thunderbolt Forces (2), Shabwani Elite Forces (14), Amaliqah Brigades (9), National Shield Forces (8), Shabwahi Defence Forces (6), Tareq Saleh's National Resistance Forces (commonly referred to as the Guardians of the Republic) (5), pro-government militia (4), Border Guard Brigade (2) and Support and Backup Brigades (1)), unidentified perpetrators (8) and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Yemen (1). Most children were recruited and used in the Governorates of Sa'dah (86), Lahij (71), Hajjah (56), Dhamar (53), Jawf (57), Bayda' (34) and Raymah (34).

18. A total of 293 children were recruited and used in combat, of whom 27 were under 15 years of age, in support roles (187), including as guards at military checkpoints, informants and drivers, and in unknown roles (84). As of the end of the reporting period, 33 children had been released, had escaped or had been returned voluntarily or under family pressure; 228 children remained associated with parties to the conflict. A total of 79 children had been killed as a result of direct participation in hostilities. The situation of other children remained unknown. For example, in January 2021, a 15-year-old displaced boy was recruited by the Yemen Armed Forces in Jawf Governorate and sent to a military camp in Ma'rib Governorate to participate in hostilities.

19. Poverty, unemployment and limited access to education, vocational training and livelihood opportunities remained key drivers of child recruitment. In many cases, children sought to provide financial support for their families. Social factors, such as cultural norms, ideologies, and peer pressure, including encouragement by family members and local leaders, further influenced behaviours and contributed to recruitment. Parties to the conflict also used propaganda and abduction as means to recruit children.

20. Children recruited and used by the Houthis were often sent to military training camps to learn how to use weapons before being sent out to fight. The recruitment and use of children was frequently connected to other grave violations. Some children were killed and maimed while being used in hostilities. For example, in January 2022, in Sa'dah Governorate, the Houthis recruited a 16-year-old boy to undergo military training. The child was then deployed in the Ma'rib front lines, where he was killed during hostilities.

21. In addition, the United Nations verified the recruitment and use of 81 boys in the years prior to the reporting period by the Houthis (54), Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated groups and forces (25) (Yemen Armed Forces (22), Security Belt Forces (2), Amaliqah Brigades (1)), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (1) and an unidentified perpetrator (1).

#### **Deprivation of liberty of children for their alleged association with armed forces or armed groups**

22. A total of 32 children (31 boys, 1 girl) between 12 and 17 years of age were deprived of their liberty for their alleged association with opposing parties to conflict, with detention periods ranging from 24 hours to 4 years. Among those detained were 5 boys who were handed over by the Houthis to civilian authorities, in line with the 2020 handover protocol. A total of 10 cases of deprivation of liberty were verified in 2021, 6 in 2022 and 16 in 2023. The children were held by the Yemen Armed Forces (19) and the Houthis (13). At the end of the reporting period, 24 of these children had been released; 8 remained in detention. Due to limited access to detention centres and military sites, the country task force was unable to ascertain certain facts, therefore

the actual number of children detained by parties to the conflict for alleged association with armed groups or forces could be higher.

23. For example, in July 2021, in Shabwah Governorate, two 17-year-old boys were arrested separately on suspicion of affiliation with the Southern Transitional Council. They were interrogated, tortured and later released.

## **B. Killing and maiming**

24. The country task force verified the killing (535) and maiming (1,406) of 1,941 children (1,554 boys, 387 girls) between 6 months and 17 years of age. Of these children, 799 were killed or maimed in 2021, 663 in 2022 and 479 in 2023.

25. Violations were attributed to the Houthis (370), the Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated armed forces and groups (278) (Yemen Armed Forces (147), Security Belt Forces (94), Amaliqah Brigades (20), Southern Transitional Council (10) (including 5th brigade (1), Southern Resistance Forces (2), Thunderbolt Forces (1)), Yemeni police (4), Islah (2), Hadrami Elite Forces (1)), the Coalition (156), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (3) and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Yemen (1). A total of 1,133 child casualties were attributed to unidentified perpetrators, including 805 from explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices and 134 from crossfire between various parties, mainly between the Houthis and the Yemen Armed Forces (105) and between the Security Belt Forces and the Houthis (13). Child casualties were verified in 20 of the 22 governorates, including in the Governorates of Hudaydah (345), Ta'izz (336), Ma'rib (269), Dali' (148), Hajjah (141), Jawf (135), Bayda' (115) and Sa'dah (114).

26. Child casualties were mainly caused by: explosive ordnance (1,352), including mortar and artillery shelling (387); air strikes, including drones (160); ground fighting (390); and military vehicles running over children or colliding with civilian vehicles (165). Compared with the previous reporting period, the number of children killed and maimed by explosive ordnance, including mortar and artillery shelling, and by air strikes and other aerial attacks decreased by over 22 per cent. The number of child casualties caused by ground fighting decreased by 38 per cent. The number of children killed and maimed by military vehicles increased by 36 per cent.

27. Explosive ordnance accounted for 69 per cent of children killed (396) and maimed (956), mostly by unidentified perpetrators. The use of such means was most prevalent in the Governorates of Hudaydah (345), Ta'izz (229), Ma'rib (174), Hajjah (149), Jawf (116) and Sa'adah (114). The protracted conflict, floods and heavy seasonal rains in the summer of 2022 caused displacement of populations, increasingly exposing vulnerable communities to increased risks of explosive ordnance. For example, in June 2022, in a residential area of Jabal Habashi district, Ta'izz Governorate, an explosion of unexploded ordnance killed two brothers aged 12 and 16.

28. Ground fighting (390) accounted for the second main cause of child casualties (20 per cent) and was prevalent mainly in the Governorates of Ta'izz (103), Ma'rib (51) Dali' (32) and Sa'dah (29) and along active front lines.

29. The killing and maiming of children due to military vehicles either running over children or colliding with civilian vehicles affected 165 children and was the third main cause of child casualties (8.5 per cent). Violations were mainly attributed to the Yemen Armed Forces (59) and Security Belt Forces (38). Most incidents occurred in the Governorates of Dali' (48), Ma'rib (26), Aden (25), Abyan (17) and Ta'izz (15).

30. The country task force verified the killing (58) and maiming (100) of 158 children (112 boys, 46 girls) that occurred in previous reporting periods. The violations were attributed to the Houthis (46), the Coalition (30), Yemen Armed

Forces and affiliated groups and forces (27) (Yemen Armed Forces (21) and Security Belt Forces (6)) Da'esh (3), Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (1) and unidentified perpetrators (51).

### **C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence**

31. Girls and boys continued to be vulnerable and at risk of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and forced child marriage. The country task force verified sexual violence against 46 children (22 boys, 24 girls) between the ages of 5 and 17. A total of 13 violations occurred in 2021, 9 in 2022 and 24 in 2023. Violations were attributed to the Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated armed forces and groups (30) (Yemen Armed Forces (16), Yemeni police (6), Amaliqah Brigades (2), 5th brigade (2), Special Forces Brigade (1), Security Belt Forces (1), Shabwahi Defence Forces (1) and Hadrami Elite Forces (1)), the Houthis (12), unidentified perpetrators (3) and jointly to the Security Belt Forces and the Yemen Armed Forces (1). Some of the child survivors were raped multiple times and had been subjected to threats so as to prevent them from reporting the violations and seeking support. Most cases were verified in the Governorates of Hajjah (12), Aden (9), Hadramawt (6), Ta'izz (5), Abyan (3), Lahij (3), Amran (2) and Dali' (2). For example, in June 2022, a soldier affiliated with the Yemen Armed Forces kidnapped and raped a 16-year-old girl on the coast of Hadramawt.

32. Sexual violence continued to be severely underreported due to stigmatization, the fear of reprisals, harmful social norms, the absence or lack of access to services, impunity and safety concerns, as also reported in the reports of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence ([S/2021/312](#), [S/2022/272](#), [S/2023/413](#), [S/2024/292](#)). In addition, the United Nations faced challenges when verifying cases of sexual violence due to difficulties in contacting, meeting with and interviewing victims.

33. The United Nations verified 8 incidents of sexual violence affecting 4 boys and 4 girls that occurred during the previous reporting period. Violations were attributed to the Houthis (6) and the Yemen Armed Forces (2).

### **D. Attacks on schools and hospitals**

34. The country task force verified 118 attacks on schools (56) and hospitals (62), including on protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals. A total of 46 attacks took place in 2021, 35 in 2022 and 37 in 2023. Schools and hospitals were attacked, destroyed and/or looted. Protected persons in relation to schools and hospitals were threatened, intimidated and detained.

35. The country task force verified two attacks on hospitals by the Houthis (1) and the Security Belt Forces (1) that had occurred during previous reporting periods.

#### **Attacks on schools and protected persons in relation to schools**

36. A total of 56 attacks on schools and protected persons in relation to schools were verified in the Governorates of Ta'izz (18), Hudaydah (9), Hadramawt (7), Lahij (6), Ma'rib (3), Ibb (3), Bayda' (2), Dali' (2) Shabwah (2), Amanat al-Asimah (1), Hajjah (1), Raymah (1) and Sa'dah (1). Most incidents were attributed to the Houthis (27), followed by the Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated forces and groups (14) (Yemen Armed Forces (7), Security Belt Forces (3), Amaliqah Brigades (2), Southern Transitional Council (2)) and the Coalition (4), and/or resulted from crossfire between the Shabwani Elite Forces and the Yemen Armed Forces (1), the Houthis and the Yemen Armed Forces (2), the Houthis and the Security Belt Forces (1) and unidentified perpetrators (7).

37. Most attacks on schools were caused by aerial bombardment and shelling, resulting in damage to, or the destruction of, educational facilities and classrooms (32). For instance, in January 2022, in Shabwah Governorate, the Amaliqah Brigades partially damaged a primary school while firing a mortar shell at the Houthis positioned behind it, preventing 1,400 children from attending the school for seven days.

38. Parties to the conflict attacked, intimidated, threatened and detained 16 protected persons in relation to schools. In one incident, in August 2022, the Houthis entered a school in Sa'dah Governorate and threatened, assaulted and arrested a teacher for refusing to pay them money.

### **Military use of schools**

39. A total of 158 cases of the military use of schools were verified, including 49 in 2021, 77 in 2022 and 32 in 2023. Most incidents were attributed to the Houthis (133), followed by the Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated groups and forces (21) (Yemen Armed Forces (9), Security Belt Forces (2), Joint Forces (also known as National Resistance Forces) (2), 5th brigade (1), Amaliqah Brigades (1), Hadrami Elite Forces (1), Islah (1), Shabwahi Defence Forces (1), Shabwani Elite Forces (1), Tareq Saleh's National Resistance Forces (1), Thunderbolt Forces (1)), and unidentified perpetrators (4). Most affected schools temporarily suspended their activities. Incidents were most prevalent in the Governorates of Sa'dah (34), Raymah (32) and Amran (24). For example, on one day in May 2021, in Sa'dah Governorate, the Houthis used a primary school as a prison and held African migrants there.

40. There are continued concerns over reports of the organization by the Houthis of "summer camps" for children, exposing them to military content.

41. The country task force verified the military use of 11 schools (10) and a hospital (1) that had occurred in previous years. The schools and the hospital were vacated before the start of the reporting period.

### **Attacks on hospitals and protected persons in relation to hospitals**

42. The country task force verified 62 attacks on hospitals in Lahij (13), Amanat al-Asimah (10), Ta'izz (10), Shabwah (6), Ibb (4), Hajjah (3), Ma'rib (3), Dali' (2), Hudaydah (2), Mahwit (2), Hadramawt (2), Jawf (1), Bayda' (1), Raymah (1), Amran (1) and Aden (1) Governorates. These incidents were attributed to Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated armed forces and groups (32) (Yemen Armed Forces (13), Security Belt Forces (11), Amaliqah Brigades (2), Southern Transitional Council (2), Yemeni police (2), Thunderbolt Forces (1), and jointly to Yemen Armed Forces and Shabwani Elite Forces (1)), the Houthis (16), the Coalition (12) and unidentified perpetrators (2). Attacks involved the destruction of hospital buildings and medical equipment (38), intimidation of medical personnel and patients (10), attacks on protected persons in relation to hospitals or patients (7), other interference (6), the abduction of protected persons in relation to hospitals (4) and looting or theft (2).

43. Most attacks came in the form of aerial bombardment and artillery shelling, destroying hospital buildings and medical equipment and leading to the temporary suspension of medical services. For example, in December 2021, in Amanat al-Asimah, in a densely populated area, air strikes by the Coalition damaged two medical facilities and one school, among other buildings, as well as injuring nine civilians.

44. In other incidents, protected persons in relation to hospitals were assaulted, detained and threatened. For instance, in October 2022, in Ma'rib Governorate, the



Yemen Armed Forces stormed a health clinic and detained a health worker for her relatives' alleged association with the Houthis.

### **Military use of hospitals**

45. The country task force verified the use of 13 hospitals for military purposes by the Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated groups and forces (7) (Yemen Armed Forces (5), Amaliqah Brigades (1) and Security Belt Forces (1)), and the Houthis (6) in Ta'izz (4), Shabwah (3), Lahij (3), Raymah (2) and Sa'dah (1) Governorates. For example, in August 2023, the Houthis closed a hospital and used it as a residence for supervisors and armed escorts involved in the organization of a mobilization and propaganda ceremony. Medical personnel were obliged to participate in the ceremony.

## **E. Abduction**

46. The country task force verified the abduction of 64 children (53 boys, 11 girls), some as young as 8 years old. The number of verified abductions decreased during the reporting period, with 43 violations verified as having occurred in 2021, 17 in 2022 and 4 in 2023. The Houthis were responsible for 48 per cent of all cases (31), followed by the Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated forces and groups (21) (Security Belt Forces (12), Yemen Armed Forces (5), Hadrami Elite Forces (2), Amaliqah Brigades (1) and Border Guard Brigade (1)), unidentified perpetrators (9) and Salafists (3). Most abductions were verified in the Governorates of Aden (11), Shabwah (10), Sa'dah (10), Hajjah (3), Lahij (3) and Ta'izz (3).

47. Of the 64 children abducted, 14 were abducted for recruitment and use purposes; 4 were victims of sexual violence. At the time of reporting, 20 had been released, 5 remained in captivity, 4 were still associated with armed forces and groups, and 2 had been freed following negotiations by their families. The status of the remaining children is unknown. For example, in April 2021, the Security Belt Forces arrested a 14-year-old boy during a raid in Aden Governorate. They searched the boy's house and his body and then took him to a military camp in Lahij Governorate, where he was detained for 10 days before being released, following mediation by community leaders.

48. The country task force verified the abduction of 4 boys during previous reporting periods, attributed to the Houthis (3) and the Yemen Armed Forces (1). All 4 boys were released prior to the reporting period.

## **F. Denial of humanitarian access**

49. The country task force verified 2,806 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access, which made it the most prevalent violation. Of these cases, 1,813 were verified as having occurred in 2021, 901 in 2022 and 92 in 2023. The Houthis were responsible for 75 per cent of incidents (2,049), followed by the Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated groups and forces (409) (Yemen Armed Forces (399), Security Belt Forces (6) and Amaliqah Brigades (4)), unidentified perpetrators (337) and the Coalition (11). Most incidents took place in the Governorates of Amanat al-Asimah (791) Sa'dah (484), Hudaydah (386), Aden (374) and Hajjah (164).

50. All parties to the conflict continued to impose bureaucratic impediments on projects and the movement of humanitarian staff. Monitors faced ongoing challenges when attempting to move freely between Governorates to document and verify grave violations against children.

## IV. Progress and challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children

### Dialogue with the Government of Yemen

51. The country task force continued to engage with the Government of Yemen to facilitate the implementation of the 2014 action plan and the road map adopted in 2018 on ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children. In 2021, the Government of Yemen reactivated its interministerial Joint Technical Committee. In July 2021, during a workshop, the Joint Technical Committee identified six priority activities with respect to expediting the implementation of the action plan and road map.

52. In 2022, in Aden, the country task force met with key ministries, including the Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Defence. It also provided technical and capacity-building assistance to members of the Joint Technical Committee as they sought to implement the six priorities. In March 2023, the Joint Technical Committee appointed and trained 80 military focal points from the Yemen Armed Forces and affiliated forces and groups, including the Security Belt Forces and Amaliqah Brigades. These focal points were tasked with supporting the institutionalization of the rights of the child and the protection of children and civilians, and implementing capacity-building and training on the action plan and child protection, among other areas. In 2023, the Joint Technical Committee organized meetings to review progress in the implementation of the action plan and conducted field visits to military units in Aden, during which no children were found in the ranks of the Security Belt Forces.

53. With the support of the country task force, members of the Joint Technical Committee conducted verification visits to five facilities in five military regions in the south of the country in May 2022. In 2023, they visited a facility operated by the Security Belt Forces to deliver copies of the executive orders and military directives banning child recruitment, to monitor the recruitment process and to discuss the appointment of child protection focal points. Members of the Joint Technical Committee reported having conducted over 100 visits to military facilities, police stations and military checkpoints to verify that no children were being used, as well as visits to prisons and detention centres to verify that no children were being detained for their alleged association with opposing parties to the conflict. They reported that, during these visits, they had not identified any children being used or detained.

54. In May 2022, a delegation from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict visited Aden to review progress in the implementation of the action plan and road map, to launch the Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict campaign<sup>2</sup> and to train members of the Joint Technical Committee on fundamental principles of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, with a focus on the prevention of grave violations. In Sana'a, the delegation met with the Joint Technical Committee to advocate improved child protection and assess challenges on the ground.

55. In October 2023, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict visited Yemen to exchange views on the implementation of the action plan, including pending activities. In Aden, she met with Government ministries and the Joint Technical Committee. She advocated that unhindered access be granted to United Nations personnel to visit barracks and other military facilities in order to verify that children

<sup>2</sup> Running from its global launch in 2019 to 2023, the Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict campaign, using the hashtag #ACTtoProtect, was part of the global advocacy work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The campaign was conducted in eight countries on the children and armed conflict agenda, including Yemen.

were not being recruited. She also discussed the commitment of the Security Belt Forces to implementing the 2014 action plan and 2018 road map and emphasized the importance of maintaining the high-level interministerial Joint Technical Committee to ensure the sustainability of measures through a national prevention strategy.

56. The country task force strengthened its engagement with the interministerial Joint Technical Committee, including the Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Defence in Aden, to facilitate and advocate the implementation and finalization of pending activities as well as to further prevent and mitigate grave violations against children. Pending activities include the training and establishment of child protection units within the Yemen Armed Forces and the adoption of handover protocols for the transfer of children arrested and/or detained for their alleged or actual association with parties to the conflict to civilian child protection actors.

### **Dialogue with the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen**

57. Under the memorandum of understanding signed in March 2019, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict continued to engage with the Coalition to strengthen child protection measures and implement the programme of time-bound activities endorsed in January 2020. Her office held regular meetings with Coalition representatives and the countries that are members of the Coalition to review and discuss progress and agree on priority activities. Agreed activities were implemented and the Coalition submitted progress reports throughout the reporting period. The Coalition continued to investigate incidents involving child casualties.

58. The Coalition continuously engaged with the Special Representative, including during her visit to Riyadh in October 2023. The 2019 memorandum of understanding and related programme of time-bound activities were completed.

### **Dialogue with the Houthis**

59. In April 2022, the Houthis signed an action plan to prevent and end grave violations against children, including the recruitment and use of children, the killing and maiming of children, and attacks on schools and hospitals. Within this framework, the Houthis cooperated with the country task force to implement their commitments throughout the reporting period.

60. In that context, the Houthis adopted a detailed road map and appointed senior military and civilian focal points, as well as a high-level Joint Technical Committee to oversee the implementation of the action plan. In addition, the Houthis issued two military directives to prohibit child recruitment and use and to end and prevent attacks on schools and hospitals. Furthermore, the Houthis issued a political directive instructing the civilian authorities to play a supporting role in the implementation of the action plan. Moreover, the Houthis developed and endorsed standard operating procedures for age determination to prevent the recruitment and use of children and to identify children in the ranks of their military, as well as for the provision of interim care services to such children. Subsequently, with the support of the country task force, the Houthis trained their military units on the standard operating procedures related to determining the age of recruits.

61. The country task force and members of the Joint Technical Committee organized a workshop in December 2023 to accelerate the implementation of the action plan, resulting in the development of a time-bound and detailed implementation plan.

62. In January 2023, members of the Joint Technical Committee visited Hajjah Governorate and met with civilian and military leaders to communicate the content of the action plan and related commitments. Also in January 2023, they facilitated the

release of five children detained for their alleged association with the opposing parties to the conflict, under the handover protocol of April 2020.

63. The Joint Technical Committee and the country task force conducted joint visits to military recruitment centres and a “summer school” in Sana’a. Furthermore, the Joint Technical Committee conducted visits to conflict-affected locations and held discussions with local authorities, including the military, on the action plan and its commitment to preventing grave violations against children in Yemen.

64. In 2023, the Houthi political leadership publicly reiterated its commitment to prohibiting the recruitment and use of children among its military ranks.

65. In 2023, the Special Representative visited Yemen to accelerate the implementation of the remaining activities of the 2022 action plan. During her visit, she held meetings in Sana’a with the Houthi leadership and members of the high-level Joint Technical Committee to promote the implementation of the recommendations from the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

## **V. Observations and recommendations**

66. While the number of grave violations has decreased, I remain concerned by the continued recruitment and use of children. I urge all parties to the armed conflict to release all children and I encourage all parties to facilitate the socioeconomic reintegration of children affected by the conflict.

67. I remain alarmed by the high number of children killed and maimed, including by landmines and explosive remnants of war, mortar and artillery shelling, air strikes, gunshots and crossfire between armed forces and groups, as well as instances of children being run over by military vehicles, especially in 2021 and during the first quarter of 2022.

68. I am particularly alarmed by the persisting high number of children killed and maimed by explosive ordnance. I urge all parties to refrain from the use of explosive weapons, and to maintain and intensify constructive dialogue on access for United Nations personnel; it is also vital to scale up mine action efforts, including explosive ordnance risk education, victim assistance and the mapping of contaminated areas and clearance. I urge Yemen to become a Party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and the protocols thereto, and to fully implement the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. I urge international donors to provide financial and technical assistance to address the issue.

69. I remain concerned about the high number of incidents of the denial of humanitarian access, which remains the most prevalent grave violation. I urge all parties to the conflict to facilitate safe, timely and unrestricted humanitarian access. I reiterate my call for all parties to take the necessary steps to remove restrictions on the movement of commercial and humanitarian goods into the country and on their distribution throughout the country, in order to reach the entire civilian population. I emphasize the importance of allowing children to have immediate access to healthcare and education services, nutrition and immunization assistance.

70. I am deeply concerned about the reinforced constraints and restrictions imposed by parties to the conflict on the movement of monitors. I encourage the Government to support and promote monitoring mechanisms to protect children.

71. I welcome the de facto truce, which followed the six-month nationwide truce under the auspices of the United Nations that parties to the conflict agreed upon, as the first national pause in hostilities since 2016. I urge parties to support the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire and to engage in preparations for the resumption of an inclusive political process, including child protection commitments.

72. I welcome the continued engagement of the Government in the implementation of the 2014 action plan and 2018 road map to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, as well as the hosting of the Special Representative in 2023. I further welcome the resumption of activities by the interministerial committee and the training sessions conducted on child protection. I note the engagement of the Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Defence to support the implementation of the action plan. I welcome the facilitation of visits to military installations to verify and promote the directives to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, the appointment and training of 80 military focal points, and the separation of children from fighting forces.

73. I welcome the participation of the Security Belt Forces and the Amaliqah Brigades in activities under the action plan and road map and I call for the full commitment of groups affiliated with the Presidential Leadership Council to the action plan and road map. I call upon the Government to adopt a handover protocol on the release of children arrested or detained for their alleged or actual association with parties to the conflict to civilian child protection actors, and to implement the Safe Schools Declaration.

74. I welcome the continued engagement of the Coalition with the Special Representative, including during her visit to Riyadh in 2023, and I welcome the completion of the 2019 memorandum of understanding and the related programme of time-bound activities.

75. I welcome the adoption of an action plan by the Houthis in 2022, the significant progress made in its implementation and the group's continued engagement with the United Nations, including during the visit of the Special Representative. I further welcome progress towards the issuance of military and political directives in support of the implementation of the action plan, as well as initiatives to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and attacks on schools and hospitals. I note the endorsement of standard operating procedures and training on age assessment and the visit of the United Nations to military recruitment centres and a "summer school". I remain concerned by reports of the organization by the Houthis of "summer camps" for children, exposing them to military content. I call upon the Houthis to continue to prioritize the implementation of the 2020 handover protocol to release children encountered and/or detained during military operations to civilian child protection actors.

76. I call upon all parties to the conflict to allow the unimpeded access of United Nations personnel to children held in detention facilities of any kind, including recruitment centres and military barracks, as part of efforts to verify, release and reintegrate them into their families. Children should be treated primarily as victims; they should be detained only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period of time, and alternatives to detention should be pursued in accordance with obligations under international law and in line with international standards, including the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, endorsed by Yemen.