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Women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence in conflict and children born of sexual violence in conflict

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 18 of Security Council resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#), in which the Council requested me to report on the specific needs of women and girls who become pregnant as a result of conflict-related sexual violence, and of the children born of such violence, as well as the connected, distinct, sometimes life-threatening risks and harms they face in conflict-affected settings. These harms include physical injuries, psychological trauma, socioeconomic marginalization, statelessness, discrimination, stigma, and legal barriers, all of which impair the realization of women's and children's rights and correlate with the outbreak or escalation of conflict. The Council further urged States to recognize in their national legislation the equal rights of all individuals affected by conflict-related sexual violence, including survivors and children born of rape, consistent with their obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2. War has long been fought through the bodies of women and girls, robbing them of bodily autonomy; yet the experience of survivors who become pregnant and children born of rape came to the fore of public debate only in the 1990s. In Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere, parties to armed conflict perpetrated conflict-related sexual violence as part of genocide, "ethnic cleansing", war crimes and crimes against humanity. Armed groups and forces used rape as a tactic of war to displace and dehumanize communities and forcibly impregnate women and girls. Such strategies, fuelled by entrenched gender inequality in predominantly patriarchal societies, treat children born as a result of conflict-related rape as the next generation of an armed political, ethnic or religious movement. As a result, survivors and children born of rape are often perceived as affiliated with the parties to the conflict, provoking stigma and in some cases abuse, infanticide, abandonment or other grave violations. Tragically, these trends continue to be documented today in conflict-affected settings such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. In some cases, survivors, who may be children themselves, and the children born of such violence have been rendered vulnerable to abduction, recruitment and use by armed groups and forces and to conflict-driven trafficking and sexual



exploitation. If left unaddressed, the gendered impacts of violence and marginalization compound over time. These abiding challenges deepen transgenerational grievances and have been shown to undermine social cohesion, which can in turn destabilize peace and development processes, sparking further cycles of violence and revenge.

3. The present report focuses on recent history, starting in the 1990s, and builds on my annual reports on conflict-related sexual violence presented to the Security Council since 2009, which have consistently documented patterns and trends relating to children born of conflict-related rape. The report describes complex peace, security, human rights, socioeconomic and humanitarian challenges, affecting survivors and children born of conflict-related rape. In accordance with resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#), the report was prepared by the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict in coordination with the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and with relevant United Nations system entities. In July 2018 and February 2020, the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict signed frameworks of cooperation with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, respectively. That collaboration led to a joint statement by the committees, issued on 19 November 2021,¹ outlining States' obligations under both conventions with respect to survivors who become pregnant as a result of conflict-related rape and children born of such violence, which has informed the report's analysis and recommendations. A questionnaire guided the collection of qualitative and quantitative information and was completed by 24 United Nations field presences in consultation with national authorities, local civil society organizations, survivors' networks and international organizations involved in preventing and eliminating gender-based violence and in the provision of child protection services. The report outlines relevant United Nations interventions, with a view to strengthening operational and programmatic approaches in support of these often invisible victims.

4. In line with my annual reports, the term "conflict-related sexual violence" refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. This link may be evident in the profile of the perpetrator, who is often affiliated with a State or a non-State armed group, which includes terrorist entities or networks; the profile of the victim, who is frequently an actual or perceived member of a persecuted political, ethnic or religious minority, or targeted on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; the climate of impunity, which is generally associated with State collapse; cross-border consequences, such as displacement or trafficking; and/or violations of the provisions of a ceasefire agreement. The term also encompasses trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual violence and/or exploitation, when committed in situations of conflict.

5. The present report does not address incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel. In this connection, I wish to reiterate my commitment to improve the way in which the Organization prevents and addresses sexual exploitation and abuse. In my annual report on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse ([A/75/754](#)), I provided information on efforts to support victims, such as through livelihood and educational assistance, and the resolution of paternity and child support claims for children born of sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as efforts to ensure full implementation of the zero-tolerance policy.

¹ Available at www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRC/Statements/Joint-CEDAW-CRC-joint-Statement-on-Children-Born-of-Rape.doc.

II. Emerging patterns, trends and critical concerns

6. United Nations monitoring, reporting and analysis demonstrates that over the past three decades, a range of non-State armed groups, as well as State forces or associated militia, have committed acts of conflict-related sexual violence resulting in pregnancy. These crimes have been perpetrated in localized, subnational conflicts, sparking cycles of violence in areas in which State presence, including the reach of rule of law institutions, is weak or ineffective. While monitoring is not systematic, some information exists in the framework of small-scale programmatic initiatives. In Mali, between 2016 and 2021, the United Nations received information concerning 134 cases of children born of conflict-related rape in the context of gender-based violence programming. In Nigeria, 621 children were documented in the course of their mothers receiving livelihood and psychosocial assistance. In the Sudan, the Government's Unit for Combating Violence against Women and Children collected more than 3,000 cases of children born of rape in South and East Darfur since 2015. Nonetheless, these figures do not represent the scale and scope of the issue. Multiple security, humanitarian and cultural barriers lead to underreporting. Furthermore, while there are significant obstacles for any survivor of conflict-related sexual violence with respect to reporting the crime, for those who become pregnant as a result of rape, pregnancy may be seen as proof of association with an armed group, "fraternization with the enemy", or a loss of "honour", thereby exacerbating stigma and endangering victims and their children.

7. Since the early 1990s, these crimes have remained a pernicious feature of conflict, impeding international peace and security. In Rwanda, rape was a brutal tool of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, with sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls, resulting in between 2,000 and 5,000 pregnancies (E/CN.4/1996/68), figures that are widely understood to be underestimated. During the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, women were held captive in "rape camps", and were only released when it was no longer safe or possible to terminate the pregnancy. During the conflict in northern Uganda, thousands of young girls were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and, to replenish the group's forces, forced to bear children before their reproductive systems had matured, resulting in long-term physical and psychological harm; an estimated 8,000 children were born as a result. During the civil war in Sierra Leone, the widespread use of sexual violence against women and girls resulted in an estimated 20,000 children born of rape. During the conflict in Timor-Leste, the perpetration of sexual slavery against women and girls, within or outside military installations, resulted in an untold number of pregnancies and children born of these violations. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as a result of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls by local and foreign armed groups, as well as State forces, thousands of babies have been born of rape in the context of identity and resource-based conflicts. Similarly, in South Sudan, women and girls have also been subjected to widespread abduction, sexual slavery, forced marriage and forced pregnancies, resulting in children being born, including in captivity. Nonetheless, the significant and enduring hardships experienced by survivors and children born of conflict-related rape remain largely overlooked, despite their being exacerbated in settings affected by continued armed conflict, terrorism and related displacement.

8. In the context of conflict-driven trafficking, terrorism, violent extremism and transnational organized crime, sexual violence presents heightened political and security challenges for survivors and children born of rape, as articulated in Security Council resolution 2331 (2016). Da'esh and Al-Shabaab, as well as Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups, have integrated the use of sexual violence into their recruitment strategies and incentive structures, using forced marriage and rape as a

form of compensation for its members and simultaneously to destroy and displace ethnic or religious communities. Grappling with long-term physical injuries and psychological trauma sustained in captivity, survivors and children born of rape also face indefinite stays in internally displaced persons sites, unable to return to their communities or countries of origin owing to insecurity, discriminatory birth registration laws that prevent children from obtaining citizenship, and their alleged association with non-State armed groups. Hawl camp in the Syrian Arab Republic, where security and humanitarian conditions remain deplorable, hosts close to 57,600 people, 94 per cent of them women and children (S/2021/1029), a number of whom arrived pregnant, in 2019, as a result of systemic sexual violence perpetrated by Da'esh and other parties to the conflict. Even after leaving, escaping or being rescued from an armed or terrorist group, survivors and children born of sexual violence are at risk of revictimization, as well as of continued long-term health and psychosocial impacts. For instance, former abductees of Boko Haram splinter groups in north-east Nigeria have reported being raped during their exit and rehabilitation process. Iraqi Yazidi survivors face multiple legal and cultural barriers to maintaining custody of their children and, in some cases, remain separated from them indefinitely. Once in their communities of origin or host communities, survivors and their children continue to grapple with immense unmet needs. In Somalia, the United Nations, together with civil society organizations, conducted household surveys in Baidoa, Kismaayo and Mogadishu, and determined that over 2,600 women who had escaped, been rescued or defected from Al-Shabaab remained in urgent need of support. The specific stigma of a perceived affiliation with a terrorist group can dramatically affect the lives of survivors and their children, reducing their prospects for social acceptance, integration and economic survival.

9. Displacement, migration and refugee settings render women and girls vulnerable to sexual violence and present additional obstacles to the realization of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. In many contexts, women and girls who have become pregnant faced obstacles in seeking and accessing confidential and safe abortion services. In Myanmar, in the wake of atrocities perpetrated by the Tatmadaw in 2017, including widespread sexual violence targeting Rohingya women and girls, some 800,000 civilians fled to Bangladesh, where access to sexual and reproductive health and mental health services remains limited for survivors, including those who have given birth to children as a result of rape (CEDAW/C/MMR/CO/EP/1). Displaced, migrant and refugee women and girls also face heightened socioeconomic exclusion as a result of conflict-related rape. In Somalia, a woman residing in a displacement camp was gang raped in 2020 by nine men, some of them uniformed, while collecting firewood. She became pregnant as a result of the rape and gave birth, exacerbating the stigma she faced and worsening her level of economic insecurity, which led to depression and a deterioration in her physical health owing to multiple injuries sustained during the rape. Migrant, refugee and displaced women and girls are also at heightened risk of sexual violence in detention settings in conflict-affected countries. In Libya, the United Nations verified reports of 39 women and 59 children from a range of conflict-affected settings who were arbitrarily detained in various detention facilities for over five years on the basis of a perceived affiliation with Da'esh; some of the women were subjected to sexual violence, including rape. These cases illustrate the protection gaps facing displaced, migrant and refugee women and the cascading harms that follow in the wake of pregnancy resulting from rape.

10. In several post-conflict settings, the pace of justice for sexual violence is painfully slow. In Nepal, under the terms of the Comprehensive Peace Accord signed between the Government and the Unified Communist Party of Nepal in 2006, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons were established. Fifteen years later, the commissions

have yet to resolve a single case, while truth-telling initiatives and reparations, and efforts to identify the perpetrators of these crimes, have been limited (S/2020/487). In Timor-Leste, despite a national in-depth documentation process conducted between 2001 and 2005 on all forms of sexual violence, it was not until 2017 that an institution was created to begin to address these crimes. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, survivors and children born of sexual violence during the conflict have struggled to achieve recognition as legitimate victims of the war and to gain access to reparations and redress (S/2021/312), and as these children reach adulthood their needs have, in many cases, been compounded by long-term trauma. Dealing with the legacy of sexual violence and responding to the needs of the victims and of children born as a result of that violence, is an important indicator of the consolidation of peace and the transition to an inclusive democracy.

A. Risks and harm faced by women and girls who become pregnant as a result of conflict-related sexual violence

11. The deep and abiding harm inflicted on women and girls who become pregnant as a result of conflict-related rape can create a downward spiral that shatters lives and livelihoods. In Mali and Nepal, the United Nations reported that survivors are often unable to find work or engage in income-generating activities owing to gynaecological injuries, sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV/AIDS, and psychological trauma. In Nigeria, some survivors, in particular abductees, have endured multiple pregnancies, giving birth in insecure areas, where services are absent, and as a result have suffered from a wide range of severe reproductive health problems, including vesicovaginal fistula and/or obstetric fistula. In Colombia, within the former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), female fighters were forced to comply with a birth control plan and undergo multiple abortions, which many cited as the main reason for their defection. In most conflict-affected contexts, the full range of sexual and reproductive health services is not available, or services may be non-existent in rural or remote areas. Unsafe or clandestine attempts to terminate pregnancies, in the absence of adequate services, are a leading cause of maternal mortality and morbidity. Across all contexts, survivors also battle with psychological trauma and mental health challenges, including suicidal thoughts. Left unaddressed, psychological and physical harm impedes healing and socioeconomic reintegration.

12. Stigma exacerbates structural gender inequality, discrimination and conflict dynamics to further marginalize and disempower victims. In South Sudan, survivors held in protracted captivity are subsequently distrusted by community members, who perceive them as spies or killers, while former abductees in Nigeria are often viewed with suspicion by security personnel. In the Central African Republic, survivors experienced increased intimate partner rejection when the perpetrator of the sexual violence to which they had been subjected was from a foreign armed group or an armed group member with a different ethnic or religious profile. Harmful social norms, often reinforced by discriminatory laws, further affect survivors. For instance, pregnancy may be used as proof of adultery, which is prosecuted as a criminal offence in several countries, such as Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen.

13. Discriminatory nationality laws and practices, for instance in Iraq, Libya, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and elsewhere, often require the involvement of fathers in conferring birth or identity papers and prevent women from transmitting their citizenship and/or nationality to their children, thereby barring the child from receiving basic services. Likewise, legislation and practices related to inheritance and land ownership, which discriminate against women and girls, further marginalize survivors and their children. In Nigeria, survivors face economic

hardship owing to customary laws that prevent women from owning or inheriting land. Similarly, in Myanmar, though the law provides equal rights for women and men to enter into land-tenure contracts, in practice, the customs of different ethnic groups provide privileged, or sometimes exclusive, land rights to men over women. In addition, only citizens can own land, rendering it extremely difficult for displaced and stateless persons, including Rohingya women survivors, to achieve land restitution or transmit land to their children. The economic isolation of survivors exacerbates their vulnerability to exploitation, including to conflict-driven trafficking. In Mali, survivors who flee to another locality lose their community support networks and become particularly vulnerable to trafficking, sometimes by a previous exploiter. In Colombia, representatives of a survivors' network with 3,000 members, many of whom gave birth as a result of rape, described the cycle of abuse, poverty and rejection from society. The stigma surrounding rape does not only cause severe psychological harm, but also gives rise to extreme social isolation and economic destitution.

14. Girls are often specifically targeted for sexual violence and face distinct risks and harm following pregnancy as a result of rape. During the civil war in Sierra Leone, rebels forced girls between the ages of 12 and 15 into sexual slavery. Many suffered vesicovaginal fistula, which is clearly identified as a result of rape and childbearing when their bodies are still immature, which can become a permanent condition without surgical intervention to reseal the tissues ([E/CN.4/2002/83/Add.2](#)). Survivors may choose adoption for their children, but in some cases are forced to do so, particularly when they are still children themselves. Such age-specific factors can deeply affect the ability of girls to gain access to education, develop earning potential, care for themselves and their children, and to fully exercise their civil and political rights.

B. Risks and harm faced by children born of conflict-related sexual violence

15. For children born as a result of conflict-related sexual violence, conflict dynamics and structural gender inequality often combine to bar them from essential cultural and familial networks. In Colombia, even children who are not told of their origins may be stigmatized for phenotypic traits and unknown paternity. Such discrimination is illustrated in patterns in many country contexts of prejudicial naming practices. In Mali, children born as a result of rape were called “rebel’s child” or “jihadist’s child”. In the Central African Republic, the community referred to children born of rape perpetrated by rebel fighters as *tonkotonko*, a local term for the Lord’s Resistance Army ([S/2017/249](#)). Though some names express grief, translating as “I’m at a loss” or “Only God knows why this happened to me” and “I am unfortunate” in names observed in Rwanda and Uganda, most names serve to associate children with the perpetrators, such as “little killers” and “devil’s children”, found in Rwanda. These practices can provide a pretext for violence, leading to further vulnerability. In South Sudan, the United Nations was informed of two cases in which survivors’ husbands allegedly killed or attempted to kill children born of rape. Infanticide and abandonment have been reported in several contexts, including in the Central African Republic, the Sudan, Yemen and elsewhere. Community members often refuse to care for children born of rape, thereby solidifying social rejection, which affects children’s living conditions. In Nepal, some children were forced to migrate from their homes, rendering them vulnerable to sexual violence by extended family members and/or traffickers.

16. Children born of conflict-related rape contend with intergenerational trauma in the home, where survivors may find it difficult to raise them, sometimes leading to

violence and neglect. The long-term effects of psychological trauma suffered by children born of conflict-related sexual violence include depression, violence, and drug or alcohol dependence. Moreover, in some contexts, some children born of rape are HIV positive, as documented in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and elsewhere. Children may have lived in situations of captivity where they witnessed the brutal treatment of their mothers and in some cases were exploited themselves, as in Nigeria or South Sudan, where the United Nations has reported that some children display violent behaviours, likely imitating the armed group setting into which they were born. Others may be placed in shelters or orphanages, or may be abandoned, rendering them vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups.

17. The situation of children born of conflict-related rape is often further complicated by socioeconomic marginalization, underpinned by discriminatory birth registration policies. In Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, they frequently lack access to health care, education, housing and employment owing to a lack of civil documentation. In the Sudan, while children have the right to a name, nationality and birth registration, in practice this is rendered difficult by cumbersome procedures for access to nationality through the maternal line. Against this backdrop, children's inheritance and property ownership is often barred or contested. In Uganda, family members objected to the return of survivors, particularly when accompanied by children born of conflict-related rape, and in extreme cases, have killed survivors and their children owing to fears of losing land ownership to members of armed forces or groups who perpetrated rape. Entrenched patriarchal norms bar children from essential networks, resulting in social and economic exclusion.

18. As marginalized children reach adolescence and adulthood, risks and harm are compounded and evolve. Many become adults without having benefited from basic education and are burdened by trauma, which affects their health and livelihood opportunities and renders them vulnerable to recruitment and use by armed forces or groups (S/2019/280). Some become parents themselves, facing complicated questions of identity. Others are not considered eligible for marriage owing to the social exclusion they faced as children and continue to face as adults. More longitudinal studies are required in this regard, in order to inform programmatic, policy and peacebuilding responses.

III. Legal, policy and operational responses

19. Critical peace, justice and humanitarian interventions often overlook survivors and their children. Despite legitimate fears of the risk associated with breaking protective silence, small-scale programming demonstrates that assistance can be provided in a way that respects safety and confidentiality, rooted in the principle of "do no harm", so as not to exacerbate stigma. States can offer further protection by promoting in law and practice the human rights of survivors and children, including those born as a result of rape, and by eliminating discrimination against women and girls, for instance with respect to conferring nationality. However, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women recognized that in Nigeria, survivors and their children born as a result of rape and sexual slavery committed by Boko Haram insurgents are subject to stigma and social isolation, and that comprehensive assistance remains inadequate (CEDAW/C/NGA/CO/7-8). Similarly, in Rwanda, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern at the stigma and persistent discrimination faced by persons born as a result of rape during the genocide (CRC/C/RWA/CO/3-4).

20. Emphasizing the importance of upholding these rights in policy and programmatic interventions, the two Committees identified a number of priority

actions in a joint statement issued on 19 November 2021. The actions include the protection of women and children against conflict-related sexual violence; access to health care, education and childcare, as well as justice and accountability; the identification of children and the right to nationality; efforts to combat stigma and social exclusion; rehabilitation and reintegration for victims and survivors; and participation in decision-making processes. On 22 November 2021, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland launched a call to action to ensure the rights and well-being of children born of sexual violence in conflict. The call to action, endorsed by the Special Representatives on Sexual Violence in Conflict and for Children and Armed Conflict, stressed the importance of providing space to survivors and children born of sexual violence in debates affecting them, strengthening legal and policy frameworks and encouraging child-sensitive approaches.

21. While these priorities align with cross-country analysis and consultations conducted by the United Nations with survivors' networks, national and international strategies to address the issue remain scarce, yet there are some promising examples. In Rwanda, the school curriculum was revised after the 1994 genocide to include specific discussion of children born of rape so as to offset peer discrimination and harassment. In Nepal, the second national action plan on women and peace and security is focused on victims of the conflict, including survivors and children born of rape, and is currently pending approval. In addition to Government engagement, civil society advocacy has proved essential to ensuring that legal, administrative and policy frameworks effectively respond to actual needs. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, more than two decades since the war ended, an association focused on the rights of persons born of rape launched the "Name of one parent" campaign, which led to a change in administrative forms in several municipalities requiring only one parent's name for the issuance of identification documents. Such approaches highlight the importance of capturing related good practices in peace and security initiatives, justice and accountability measures and service provision.

A. Reinforcing protection through peace and security initiatives

22. Over the past decade, while peace agreements have increasingly included provisions on conflict-related sexual violence, few refer specifically to the challenges facing survivors who become pregnant or their children. The Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, signed in Colombia in 2016, was exceptional in its integration of specific provisions for social services for family members of former fighters, in particular children, as well as for including affirmative measures to respond to female victims of sexual violence and in calling for their participation and representation. More specific modalities are needed to support the early, safe and voluntary participation of survivors and their children as part of inclusive peace and political processes. Cross-country reporting suggests that such engagement will contribute to more comprehensive, gender-responsive, age-appropriate and conflict-sensitive agreements and help to ensure that interventions, such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, are designed to safely and appropriately meet the needs of women and girls, including those who became pregnant and/or gave birth while a member of or associated with an armed group.

23. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes have largely overlooked survivors of sexual violence and their children. Girls associated with armed groups tend to be characterized as dependants, without considering their possible status as abductees and children born of sexual violence. The possibility that female dependants or combatants may also be victims of sexual violence, pregnant or raising children under extremely challenging circumstances, is often unrecognized. Nonetheless, a number of small-scale projects have been initiated. Tailored

programmatic interventions in Colombia have included United Nations support for sexual and reproductive health services to female former fighters as part of the national reintegration strategy. Stigma, leading to socioeconomic isolation, has been identified as a key barrier to successful reintegration. Efforts to eliminate stigma have in some cases engaged ethnic and religious leaders. In Nigeria, for example, a United Nations-supported project promoted structured dialogues organized by trained community and religious leaders to facilitate truth-telling and non-harmful cultural rites, which resulted in beneficiaries noting increased social acceptance and support for their reintegration. Overall, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes often lack adequate referral pathways to programmes and services that are equipped to address the distinct needs of survivors and children born of conflict-related rape.

24. Similarly, survivors of incidents of conflict-related sexual violence, including those committed by terrorist groups, struggle to gain access to services and socioeconomic support. Moreover, accountability for crimes of sexual violence perpetrated by terrorist groups remains appallingly low, as counter-terrorism trials have failed to consider sexual violence, thereby hampering the possibility of survivors receiving holistic support, including reparations and redress. Some survivors of abduction have been arbitrarily detained with their children; others remain in displacement sites, for example in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. In support of Member States' efforts, the United Nations has created a Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees to provide coordinated support for the protection, voluntary repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals with alleged links to Security Council-designated terrorist groups returning from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, among whom are many survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and children born as a result of rape.

25. Reintegration requires multisectoral services, including for survivors and children who may have lived, often for most of their lives, in captivity or displacement settings. In 2016, a United Nations study on returning abductees and children in Nigeria found that mental health and reproductive health care were among the most in-demand types of service, yet the provision of such services remains lacking. In Somalia, the Government, in partnership with the United Nations, opened two rehabilitation centres that provide female former abductees of Al-Shabaab with support outside of their communities of origin, resulting in over 600 women and girls receiving medical care and specialized counselling. In one case, support was provided to an adolescent girl who had been abducted and forcibly married to a member of Al-Shabaab and had given birth before finally escaping. Another initiative, developed by the United Nations, the Government of Somalia and women's organizations, supported the rehabilitation and reintegration of 200 women formerly associated with Al-Shabaab to become active contributors to sustainable peacebuilding in their communities. Such interventions represent emerging good practices, which could be strengthened and replicated as part of efforts to provide multisectoral support to survivors of sexual violence committed by members of terrorist groups and children born as a result thereof.

26. National anti-trafficking efforts include the adoption of judicial measures and the implementation of programmes to build the resilience of at-risk individuals and communities against trafficking. In Mali, where the United Nations reported that survivors who become pregnant as a result of rape are more vulnerable to trafficking, a national strategy to fight all forms of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, was adopted. A similar strategy is in place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to combat gender-based violence, including all forms of conflict-related sexual violence. In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, multisectoral services

were provided, even during the height of the pandemic, by United Nations partners in support of Rohingya refugees at risk of trafficking. Yet, in many contexts, authorities continue to prosecute female survivors of sex trafficking, which renders victims less likely to come forward and seek access to life-saving services, and indicates a need for clear procedures in applying the non-punishment principle.

B. Reinforcing justice and accountability

27. Crimes of sexual violence cause severe and enduring harm to survivors and reverberate through the lives of children born of sexual violence, who are often abused and discriminated against in related and distinct ways. Such complex dynamics require an interconnected and interdependent application of judicial and non-judicial measures in line with international standards and in coordination with peace and political processes. Yet, transitional justice provisions rarely include survivors and children born of conflict-related rape. Processes relating to truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition may come years after the conflict, if at all. In Uganda, more than a decade after the height of the attacks by LRA, a national transitional justice policy was adopted in 2019 providing for interim and long-term reparations, though these efforts were disrupted by the pandemic. In Iraq, the Yazidi Survivors Law, adopted on 1 March 2021, provides for transformative support to survivors of sexual violence perpetrated by Da'esh, for survivors from Yazidi, Turkmen, Christian and Shabak communities, but stops short of providing recognition or benefits for children born of rape. Two ministerial decrees issued in 2014 in Libya offering remedies to survivors and children born as a result of rape remain unimplemented to date. In Colombia, the Victims and Land Restitution Act recognizes victims of conflict-related sexual violence, including children born of rape. The law provides for reparations to indigenous people, persons of African descent and other ethnic communities. While progress is to be commended, including through monetary compensation, implementation of the law remains uneven. Sustained support is required to ensure such measures are transformative and include medical care and psychosocial support.

28. Recent developments in national and international judicial processes and reparations programmes signal progress, albeit modest. In December 2019, the Colombian Constitutional Court recognized, in the final decision of a case brought on behalf of a female combatant forcibly recruited into FARC-EP at the age of 14, that members of armed groups who are subjected to forced contraception and forced abortion are victims of sexual violence under international law. To date, reliable data on violations of sexual and reproductive health rights remain rare, with concerns left largely unaddressed (A/HRC/39/26). February 2021 saw the first international conviction of the charge of forced pregnancy as a war crime and crime against humanity in the case of *Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen*, a high-ranking LRA commander (case No. ICC-02/04-01/15). In March 2021, as part of the Reparations Order in the case of *Prosecutor v. Bosco Ntaganda*, also at the International Criminal Court (case No. ICC-01/04-02/06), children born out of rape and sexual slavery were deemed to be direct victims of these crimes and eligible for reparations. In Mali, in 2021, in consultation with women and youth, including survivors across the country, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission elaborated a proposal for the Government with respect to reparations, prioritizing survivors of sexual violence for compensation for physical injuries and a confidential registration mechanism for children born as a result of sexual violence.

29. A number of elements are crucial for bolstering progress in this regard: a robust legislative framework; clear lines of responsibility; engagement with civil society; full compliance with survivor safety and confidentiality standards; and dedicated

funding. Accordingly, the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict has developed model legislative provisions and guidance on the investigation and prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence, which include specific provisions on children born of rape. A framework for legislation on rape (A/HRC/47/26/Add.1) developed by the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on violence against women, its causes and consequences, also outlines relevant language to assist Member States in bringing legislative frameworks in line with international standards. In order to coordinate international and national efforts, in Uganda, the International Criminal Court Act (2010) provides for the application of reparations orders issued by both the International Criminal Court and domestic courts. Globally, funding for reparations remains lacking, while at the national level, key options remain largely unexplored, such as the link between development cooperation and States' obligations to ensure access to urgent interim support and relief, pending longer-term programming. At the same time, initiatives such as the Global Survivors Fund, established by Nobel Peace Prize laureates Dr. Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad, represent a breakthrough in providing redress opportunities for victims. Ultimately, designing, funding and implementing transitional justice measures to recognize the harm caused to victims and provide transformative victim/survivor-centred compensation contributes to the broader goals of conflict recovery, reconciliation and peacebuilding.

C. Adapting and improving service provision, in line with the survivor-centred approach

30. A survivor-centred approach recognizes that survivors are unique individuals and empowers them by prioritizing their distinct needs as well as recognizing their capacity to guide interventions to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence. Currently, structural, cultural, social and economic barriers and gender-based discrimination, coupled with insecurity and a lack of awareness, curtail access by survivors to life-saving multisectoral services and information, including for those who become pregnant as a result of rape. These trends, which are particularly pronounced for displaced, migrant and refugee women and girls, have deepened during the pandemic, in the light of movement restrictions and the closure of facilities. Patterns in many country contexts indicate that when survivors and children born of conflict-related rape access services, it is usually as part of programmes that target broader conflict-affected populations, including vulnerable women and children, an approach that helps to increase access and minimize stigma. In South Sudan, the Government runs a facility, with the support of international and national partners, that provides shelter, psychological support and recreational activities for vulnerable children, including children born of conflict-related rape. In the Central African Republic, some victims who became pregnant as a result of rape participated in projects whereby they were provided with pre- and postnatal medical support. More tailored programming was developed with funding from international donors for United Nations interventions in South Sudan's greater Equatoria region in collaboration with a local organization, during which at least 80 survivors, including pregnant women and girls and their children were provided medical care, trauma counselling, leadership training and livelihood support. Consultation with and the involvement of survivors and civil society organizations is key to informing the design and provision of services. While comprehensive mental health services and specialized expertise are often unavailable to address trauma, support is required for survivors in managing how and when they disclose their children's origin to them. In Colombia, since 2019, the national authorities have been expanding the provision of psychosocial assistance to women and girls who become pregnant as a result of conflict-related sexual violence and their children. Nonetheless, across a range of

contexts, urgently needed psychosocial support and health care, including comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, remain severely underresourced.

31. While all children, regardless of how they were conceived, have the same rights in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children born of conflict-related rape may have specific needs requiring additional support to ensure their equitable access to services and the full enjoyment of their rights without prejudice. In the Sudan, national authorities, with the support of the United Nations, are working to facilitate access to birth registration for marginalized children, including those born of rape, including in the context of displacement sites, which will enable them to benefit from health and education services. Where children born of rape are separated from their families, abandoned, or left in the care of extended family members, additional complications arise. While orphanages have been among the limited examples of concrete support in many settings, family-based alternative care arrangements are preferred, owing to the negative impact that residential care and other institutional arrangements can have on children's well-being and development.

32. Lessons learned point to the importance of funding immediate humanitarian relief in conflict-affected settings and sustaining that support over the medium to long term, including by building national capacity for effective survivor-centred service delivery. In too many contexts, service provision is donor-dependent and ends with time-bound projects and programmes, which cannot meet the scale of the needs. Civil society actors in Mali have recommended that the integration of children born as a result of rape be pursued through schools at the community-level to ensure that they are not marginalized, recruited by, or pressured to join armed groups, noting that such programming should be sustained where sexual violence continues to be used as a tactic of war. In programmes supported by the United Nations in South Sudan, survivors stressed that their main priorities were rehabilitation through medical support, becoming financially independent and combating stigma. That type of support can be considered within national strategies to address gender-based violence, national action plans on women and peace and security and on youth and peace and security, in addition to peacebuilding plans, through which survivors and children born of conflict-related rape could receive support as part of programmes aimed at broader populations in order to minimize stigma. Critically, their meaningful participation in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmatic efforts aimed at supporting them is the bedrock of a survivor-centred approach.

IV. Concluding observations and recommendations

33. The hardships experienced by survivors and children born of conflict-related rape bring into focus the full range of corrosive political, security and socioeconomic ramifications of these crimes. I strongly condemn all acts of sexual violence in conflict and call for greater support for survivors and for children born of rape, with greater efforts to be made to ensure their rights are upheld and perpetrators are brought to justice. Accountability for sexual violence in conflict is essential. Any failure to close this protection gap will deprive survivors and generations of children born of conflict-related rape of the dividends of peace, fuelling conflict and generating further cycles of violence. The United Nations will therefore continue to pursue a system-wide, coordinated and cross-pillar approach to deliver intersectional interventions, which are gender-, age- and disability-inclusive, in line with the survivor-centred approach. To this end, the United Nations system, including peacekeeping operations, special political missions and country teams, will:

(a) Incorporate the rights and needs of survivors who become pregnant, and of children born of sexual violence, into survivor-centred programming, including through the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network; ensure that approaches to service provision are adapted to each context so as to avoid stigmatization; and assist the national authorities in providing support to longer-term reintegration assistance to survivors and children born of conflict-related rape;

(b) Engage with and support the work of survivors' networks and women-led organizations at the global, regional and national levels, to address conflict-related sexual violence and assist children born of such violence, through targeted programmatic, policy and advocacy support, including by fostering peer support and solidarity networks;

(c) Continue fostering synergies through joint advocacy and action between the Special Representatives on Sexual Violence in Conflict and for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as human rights mechanisms, to promote the rights of all individuals affected by conflict-related sexual violence, including through the implementation of the frameworks of cooperation between the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Committees on the Rights of the Child and on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;

(d) Build partnerships among donors and peacebuilding actors to support victim assistance and interim relief initiatives to meet the immediate needs of survivors in the absence of national reparations programmes or until such programmes are established;

(e) Support host governments in tackling structural gender-based inequality and discrimination as root causes of conflict-related sexual violence, including through legal reform to eliminate discrimination that is codified into legislation; aligning laws and policies with international standards; preventing instances of the conflation of rape with adultery; and enhancing procedural safeguards for victims and witnesses, thereby removing barriers for survivors and children born as a result of conflict-related rape to access justice, reparations and redress.

34. The recommendations below to the Security Council, Member States, donors, regional and intergovernmental organizations, in conjunction with the above recommendations to the United Nations system, represent a consolidated platform for action.

35. **I recommend that the Security Council:**

(a) Urge parties to conflict to immediately cease all forms of conflict-related sexual violence in compliance with relevant Security Council resolutions; to ensure unimpeded access for humanitarian actors and human rights monitors; and to release survivors who were abducted or recruited and used by parties to conflict, and their children, from military bases, cantonment sites and detention facilities;

(b) Support the efforts of the Special Representatives on Sexual Violence in Conflict and for Children and Armed Conflict, the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, women's protection advisers, child protection advisers, and other relevant United Nations actors, including special representatives and envoys in missions, to engage in dialogue with State and non-State parties to conflict to adopt time-bound commitments to end conflict-related sexual violence and other grave violations;

(c) Streamline into all relevant country-specific resolutions, mandate authorizations and renewals of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, provisions to strengthen the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence and grave violations against children, and allocate sufficient human and financial resources, including through the deployment of specialized and dedicated expertise;

(d) Call upon States to ensure that national legislation is in compliance with international standards and reflects the human rights and needs of all individuals affected by conflict-related sexual violence; also call upon States to ensure women's equal rights with men in relation to the transmission of nationality to children, in line with article 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and to ensure their sexual and reproductive health rights, including regarding the safe termination of pregnancies resulting from rape; and further call upon States to ensure that legislation guarantees the rights of the child, including the right to a legal identity and protection from all forms of discrimination, violence and sexual abuse, in line with articles 2, 12 and 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(e) Ensure that survivors and children born of sexual violence committed by terrorist and violent extremist groups are recognized as victims and referred to specialized support services for addressing gender-based violence, child protection and socioeconomic needs;

(f) Continue to incorporate, as a stand-alone designation criterion for sanctions, sexual violence, including forced pregnancy, sexual slavery and forced marriage, and ensure coherence between the parties listed in the annual reports on conflict-related sexual violence and on children and armed conflict, as well as the individuals and entities designated by sanctions committees; ensure that expert groups and monitoring teams of all relevant sanctions committees are equipped with dedicated expertise on gender and sexual violence in order to monitor patterns and trends; and continue to invite the Special Representatives on Sexual Violence in Conflict and for Children and Armed Conflict to share relevant information with sanctions committees.

36. I recommend that Member States, donors and regional and intergovernmental organizations:

(a) Ensure that national legislation and policies are designed to uphold the rights of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and children born of such violence, through their meaningful participation in the design and delivery of rule of law, security sector reform and transitional justice initiatives;

(b) Ensure adequate funding for comprehensive and quality multisectoral assistance for survivors of sexual violence, namely medical, psychosocial and legal services, sexual and reproductive care, including access to emergency contraception, safe termination of pregnancy resulting from rape, and HIV prevention, awareness and treatment, as well as for socioeconomic reintegration support for survivors and their dependants, and ensure that these services reach rural and remote areas;

(c) Ensure survivors and children are protected against all forms of discrimination by consistently upholding their rights in all policies, programmes and projects without singling out these individuals in a way that could compromise their safety or create secondary harm;

(d) Ensure that any information-gathering, documentation or registration process undertaken in order to uphold the rights of sexual violence survivors and

their children is conducted in a safe, ethical and non-stigmatizing way, in line with global standards;

(e) Ensure that expertise on addressing sexual violence informs the design and implementation of cessation of hostilities agreements, and/or related agreements; encourage the inclusion of provisions in peace, ceasefire, cessation of hostilities, and/or subsequent agreements prohibiting conflict-related sexual violence and supporting increased access to redress and reintegration for survivors and children born of rape, as well as accountability for these crimes;

(f) Ensure that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes specifically address the distinct needs of women and girls associated with armed forces or groups, including those who become pregnant and those who have children, while preventing their exposure to stigma and providing gender and age-specific support, including childcare, to enable survivors to fully participate in reintegration strategies;

(g) Develop national plans aimed at mitigating stigma suffered by survivors and children born of conflict-related rape and facilitate their reintegration, in partnership with community, traditional and religious leaders, as well as women-led civil society organizations and survivors' networks; develop national campaigns with traditional and social media to counter hate speech, misogyny and incitement to violence, to alleviate stigma and shift harmful social norms;

(h) Develop policies in settings affected by conflict and terrorism, in which survivors and children born as a result of rape perpetrated by parties to conflict, including Security Council-designated terrorist groups, can access measures that support their return, rehabilitation and reintegration (where relevant); ensure women and children have appropriate identity documentation, and in no circumstances, by act or omission, implement policies that render survivors and/or children stateless, including cases in which a child is born of sexual violence perpetrated by a foreign terrorist fighter, in which case domestic law should safeguard the right of the child to acquire nationality irrespective of the acts, beliefs or affiliations of his or her parents; and ensure full respect for the principle of non-refoulement, as well as the reintegration of survivors and their children based on informed consent and the best interests of the child, and where relevant, in line with the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees;

(i) Ensure protection from conflict-driven trafficking, including for the purposes of sexual exploitation, by providing adequate documentation and comprehensive services, as well as implementing the non-punishment principle at all stages of the criminal justice process, to safeguard the rights of victims;

(j) Develop gender and age-sensitive, adequately budgeted reparations schemes that meet the needs of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and children born of such violence, which can include collective and symbolic measures, rehabilitation and guarantees of non-repetition, and address pre-existing gender-based inequalities, including through the participation of survivors and women's civil society organizations;

(k) Integrate the plight and rights of women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence and children born of such violence into national strategies to address gender-based violence, national action plans on women and peace and security, and on youth and peace and security, in addition to peacebuilding priority plans;

(l) Foster coordinated, multisectoral support to survivors and children born of conflict-related rape, in particular through the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network, which is chaired by the Special Representative, and allocate sustained and predictable funding for interventions in this area through the conflict-related sexual violence multi-partner trust fund.
