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including the right to development**

Children and armed conflict

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

Summary

In the present report, which covers the period from December 2021 to December 2022, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict explores challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against and strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict. She outlines the activities carried out in discharging her mandate, and the challenges faced and progress achieved in addressing grave violations against children. The Special Representative also lays out her advocacy activities, including through her focus on lessons learned and best practices. She provides information on her field visits and efforts to build partnerships, including with regional organizations and international partners. At the end of her report, the Special Representative outlines priorities and makes recommendations to enhance the protection of children affected by conflict.



I. Introduction

1. The present report covers the period from December 2021 to December 2022 and is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/147, in which the Assembly requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to submit a report to the Human Rights Council on the activities undertaken in the fulfilment of her mandate, including information on her field visits and the progress achieved and the challenges remaining on the children and armed conflict agenda. The Special Representative further elaborates on her activities regarding the request of the Assembly in its resolution 72/245 to increase her engagement with States, United Nations bodies and agencies, and regional and subregional organizations, and to increase public awareness activities, including by collecting, assessing and disseminating best practices and lessons learned. In the report, the Special Representative outlines the multidimensional vulnerabilities of children to grave violations in armed conflict and the need for compliance with international law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

II. Working with United Nations human rights mechanisms

2. To achieve the universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Special Representative continued to advocate with Member States. In October 2022, the Special Representative, together with the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, published a press statement to encourage the universal ratification of the Optional Protocol and calling on Member States to recognize and protect all persons under 18 years of age in situations of armed conflict.

3. Regular communication with the Human Rights Council regarding violations of the rights of conflict-affected children continued, with the Office of the Special Representative systematically providing background information on children and armed conflict for thematic or country resolutions relevant to the mandate. In March 2022, the Special Representative presented her annual report to the Council.¹ Her Office continued to support the universal periodic review process by providing information on the six grave violations against children in armed conflict and progress made by the countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. During the reporting period, the Special Representative provided input for the universal periodic reviews of India, Israel, Lebanon, Mali, Pakistan and the Philippines. Her Office also shared recommendations from the universal periodic review process pertaining to countries on the children and armed conflict agenda with the United Nations on the ground.

4. The Special Representative enhanced her engagement with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council to exchange information and identify common areas of concern. She met, among others, with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material, and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and discussed with them common areas of concern. In June 2022, on the margins of the fifteenth Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Special Representative co-organized a side event with the Special Rapporteur on disability on

¹ [A/HRC/49/58](#).

protecting the rights of children with disabilities in armed conflict. Her Office also provided input for the reports of special rapporteurs.

5. The Special Representative enhanced exchanges with United Nations mandated commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and investigations, and she met with the Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan.

6. The Committee on the Rights of the Child continued to raise the situation of children affected by armed conflict during the reviews of States parties' implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Office of the Special Representative continued to cooperate with the Committee in that regard and to work with the United Nations on the ground to support the implementation of recommendations pertaining to countries on the children and armed conflict agenda, including by providing input to the Committee's country-specific concluding observations. Furthermore, in February 2022, the Office of the Special Representative made a submission towards the development of a new general comment by the Committee on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change. In March 2022, the Office of the Special Representative and the Committee co-organized a high-level side event entitled "Ending and preventing child recruitment: the children and armed conflict mandate and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict". In June and October 2022, the Special Representative met with the Chair of the Committee and, in September 2022, her Office briefed Committee members on the children and armed conflict mandate.

7. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to be an important partner for the Special Representative, including through its field-level participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. The Office of the Special Representative also contributed to OHCHR reports on the rights of the child and family reunification² and on the impact of arms transfers on human rights.³ The Special Representative's Liaison Office in Brussels facilitated her engagement with the Geneva-based mechanisms and institutions.

III. Challenges, trends and progress in ending and preventing grave violations

A. Progress in ending and preventing grave violations

8. During the reporting period, thousands of children endured horrific conditions in conflict zones. Conflict escalation, the multiplication of armed actors, the use of mines, improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war and explosive weapons in populated areas, intensified humanitarian crises and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law had a severe impact on the protection of children. Cross-border conflicts and intercommunal violence, in particular in the central Sahel and Lake Chad basin regions, affected children, while coups and takeovers aggravated their situation. The first nine months of 2022 were marked by a sustained high number of grave violations against children, which was further underscored by the decision of the Secretary-General to add three new situations of concern in his latest report on children and armed conflict⁴ – namely in Ethiopia, Mozambique and Ukraine. Of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict, the highest number of verified cases were for recruitment and use of children, followed by killing and maiming and abduction. Attacks on schools and hospitals continued to increase and verified attacks were particularly high in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar. While cases of sexual violence continued to be underreported, 2022 saw a sustained high number of verified incidents of sexual

² [A/HRC/49/31](#).

³ [A/HRC/51/15](#).

⁴ [A/76/871-S/2022/493](#).

violence affecting girls and boys. The number of incidents in which humanitarian access was denied continued to be high due to conflict escalation, the multiplication of armed actors, political instability and restrictions related to coronavirus disease (COVID-19). These challenges have also hampered the monitoring and verification of grave violations against children.

9. In Afghanistan, following the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban on 15 August 2021, the country task force on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in armed conflict faced serious safety and security challenges, especially impacting Afghan and female staff, and this insecurity was compounded by a lack of child protection advisers. Reporting by the monitoring and reporting mechanism was temporarily suspended from 15 August until 31 December 2021 owing to a lack of access to monitor and verify violations. Reporting resumed in January 2022.

10. Following advocacy by the United Nations, a code of practice on child recruitment was published in May 2022. The code aims to prevent the recruitment of boys with no signs of puberty in military units and led to the release of hundreds of boys from various military units in various provinces of Afghanistan. However, the code of practice is not aligned with the internationally agreed definition of a child, as contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

11. In Burkina Faso, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin has been listed for the recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and abduction of children in the Secretary-General's most recent report on children and armed conflict. In September 2022, the transitional authorities signed a handover protocol with the United Nations for the transfer of children allegedly associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors. Engagement has been made more challenging by the September 2022 military coup.

12. In the Central African Republic, the United Nations conducted advocacy with the Government to prevent the recruitment and use of children. In April, the President of the Central African Republic signed a national action plan against trafficking in children with a particular focus on preventing the use of children by the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic, and the minister of defence and reconstruction of the army issued a circular prohibiting the presence of children around military bases, including those of national defence and security forces and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). The circular includes disciplinary measures against soldiers who allow children to be present in or around military bases. In June 2022, the United Nations supported the organization of a workshop by the ministry for the promotion of gender, the family and children to finalize the handover protocol regarding children arrested for their actual or alleged association with armed groups. The protocol will ensure that arrested children are diverted from the judicial process by being transferred to social affairs and child protection actors.

13. In Colombia, the United Nations continued to engage with the Government, civil society organizations and the international community for the prevention of and response to grave violations against children. Eight reports related to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, the forced disappearance of children, the killing and maiming of children and the displacement of children were submitted by victims to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace for investigation. In February, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace publicly released its methodology for the hearings of former Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) members indicted in case 07 on for the recruitment and use of children. Among other proceedings, seven collective hearings were organized between May and August 2022 with the participation of child victims. In May and June 2022, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace conducted four hearings with victims accredited to case 07 to inquire about sexual and gender-based violence, as well as forced disappearance. FARC-EP dissident groups were listed for the recruitment and use of children in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

14. In Iraq, the United Nations continued to engage with the Government, including with the interministerial committee on grave violations of the rights of the child, to enhance collaboration on child protection and discuss an action plan to prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces.

15. In Israel and the State of Palestine, the Special Representative continued her engagement with the Israeli authorities and Palestinian armed groups in accordance with the request of the Secretary-General in his last report on children and armed conflict, as well as with Palestinian authorities, to prevent any more violations against children and to adopt clear and time-bound commitments. A technical visit by the Office of the Special Representative took place in October 2022 to identify the main prevention and protection commitments that the parties mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General could adopt, including timebound activities to better protect children, to dialogue with parties to the conflict and to prepare the Special Representative's visit.

16. In Mali, the United Nations continued to engage with the transitional authorities and with armed groups signatories to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali to end and prevent grave violations against children. In February 2022, the United Nations, jointly with the National Directorate for the Advancement of Children and Families, discussed the implementation of the protocol of 2013 on the release and transfer of children associated with armed forces and groups to child protection actors with the prosecutor of the anti-terrorism court and the heads of the specialized investigation and anti-terrorism brigades. Additionally, in July 2022, as part of the follow-up to the action plans of the two factions of the Platform and Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA), capacity-building workshops and strategic meetings for focal points of the Platform and CMA were held by the United Nations in Bamako. The workshops helped strengthen the capacity of the participants with regard to the child protection standards, highlighted the impact of the armed conflict on children and identified best practices in the implementation of the action plans. A key milestone from the meetings is the adoption of six-month road maps to speed up implementation.

17. In Myanmar, the Special Representative continued to engage and advocate with the Myanmar armed forces (Tatmadaw Kyi, including integrated border guard forces) for the implementation of the joint action plan of 2012 on the recruitment and use of children, and for the signature of an action plan to end and prevent the killing and maiming of children and the perpetration of sexual violence against them. In May 2022, the United Nations met with the interministerial committee on prevention of underage recruitment for the first time since the military takeover to discuss the implementation of the joint action plan of 2012. The United Nations engaged with the Arakan Army in January 2022 to advocate for the prevention of grave violations against children. The Special Representative also shared messages on the prevention of grave violations against children with ethnic armed organizations and with representatives of the National Unity Government.

18. In the Philippines, with the support of the United Nations, the final agency-specific protocols to the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act were completed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police and the Commission on Human Rights. In March 2022, as part of the implementation of the United Nations-Armed Forces of the Philippines strategic plan, the Armed Forces of the Philippines Center for the Law of Armed Conflict presented the features of the Armed Forces of the Philippines protocol on the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act.

19. In Somalia, in February 2022, the Somaliland Lower House of Representatives adopted a child rights act. Despite advocacy by the United Nations to ensure that the age of majority was maintained at 18 years in the new law, the act that was adopted provides a definition of a child to be anyone below the age of 15 years. Additionally, in June 2022, the United Nations held a meeting in Mogadishu with members of the interministerial committee on children and armed conflict to establish a joint process to monitor the implementation of the road map of 2019 on ending and preventing the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children and other grave violations against children in conflict situations. It was agreed that the Federal Government would take the lead in promoting accountability for grave violations identified and for the sharing of the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child with key ministries, to enable a coordinated approach to their implementation at the federal and federal member state levels.

20. In South Sudan, the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF), including the Taban Deng-allied South Sudan People's Defence Forces, have been delisted for the violation of attacks on schools and hospitals in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on

children and armed conflict, following the signature of an action plan in 2020 to end and prevent all grave violations against children and the progress made in its implementation, including a decrease in such violations. On 11 June 2022, the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, issued a decree establishing the national human rights council, responsible for advocacy and human rights promotion. The council provides a direct link between the Office of the President and the two high-level committees that were established to spearhead the implementation of the comprehensive action plan, thereby elevating the children and armed conflict agenda. In May 2022, the Government, with support from the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and UNICEF, organized a national conference on children and armed conflict, in which the Special Representative participated.

21. In the Sudan, a road map based on the action plan of 2016 on ending and preventing child recruitment and use, including prevention elements, was endorsed by the technical and high-level committees (national structures that had been instrumental in implementing the action plan) together with standard operating procedures and a reintegration strategy to be carried out under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the support of the United Nations. Further to the endorsement, the United Nations will be able to resume key activities, such as the verification, release and reintegration of children.

22. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Government and the United Nations continued the dialogue to prevent grave violations, in particular through the organization of a joint workshop on child protection in March 2022, which led to the ongoing development of a draft comprehensive action plan to strengthen the protection of children. Progress by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the implementation of the action plan of 2019 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children continued: age-assessment screenings were conducted at recruitment centres and children were demobilized and reunited with their families in the first half of 2022. However, the number of verified cases of recruitment and use of children by SDF increased. In addition, the United Nations continued to engage constructively with local authorities in the north-west of the country, including representatives of the opposition Syrian National Army (SNA), through an exchange of letters aiming at the development of an action plan. The opposition SNA issued a statement in September 2021 on the measures it was taking to comply with international humanitarian law to protect children, including the prohibition of child recruitment and use.

23. In Yemen, the Government forces, including the Yemen Armed Forces, have been delisted for the violation of recruitment and use of children owing to progress in the implementation of their action plan and to the significant decrease in the number of cases of this violation. In addition, the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen continued to implement the programme of time-bound activities endorsed in January 2020. In April 2022, the Houthis who call themselves Ansar Allah (hereafter “the Houthis”) signed an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and other grave violations. In this context, the Houthis issued two military instructions to their forces in July 2022 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and to end and prevent the killing and maiming of children, as well as to protect health and education facilities and personnel. The Office of the Special Representative conducted a visit to Aden and Sana’a in May 2022 to assess the situation of children affected by armed conflict and engage with the Government and the Houthis on the implementation of their respective commitments to protect children.

B. Multidimensional vulnerabilities and the need for compliance with international rules and standards

24. Several of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict can relate to other violations, particularly of international humanitarian and human rights law, including the violation of the rights of the child, as recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This points to the multidimensional nature of the risks and vulnerabilities to which children who live in or around armed conflict situations are exposed.

Reinforcing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict

25. In recent years, the increasing failure to uphold international humanitarian law and international human rights law around the world, compounded by significant challenges posed by pandemics, complex humanitarian emergencies and climate-related crises, has been eroding international protection frameworks and jeopardizing the rights of the child. There is also concern over the impact of counter-terrorism measures on children, and Member States should ensure that such measures are consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children above a certain age are treated as adults or as “young” adults, often under the cover of traditional or cultural values or counter-terrorism or national security responses, with dramatic implications for the full enjoyment by children of their rights and protections provided by the Convention.

26. The Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out a clear range of human rights applicable to all persons under 18 years, within the context of its article 1, underlining that the best interest of the child should guide all actions concerning them. As such, Member States have the primary responsibility to protect, respect and fulfil children’s rights, including in situations of armed conflict, regardless of their age, gender or status, country of origin or location. This includes children’s right to identity and birth registration, which are essential for claiming other rights and preventing the violation of other rights.

27. The recruitment and use of children continues to rank among the highest reported violations against children in situations of armed conflict, despite progress over the past 25 years to release over 180,000 children from armed forces and groups and the normative shift away from the use of children for military purposes. February 2022 marked the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The 172 States who ratified the Optional Protocol committed to ending, preventing, and criminalizing the recruitment of children, and those who have not yet done so should follow suit. To avoid re-recruitment, children released from armed forces and groups should receive long-term, sustainable and tailored reintegration programmes.

Addressing the use of explosive weapons and remnants of war

28. Explosive remnants of war and anti-personnel landmines and the surge in improvised explosive devices continue to affect children in a disproportionate manner, leaving permanent physical and psychological harm, as well as long-term contamination of large areas. Physical and psychological harm associated with these weapons includes lifelong impairments, such as amputation, paralysis and loss of vision or hearing, educational hurdles and social exclusion for child survivors, among many other impacts. Furthermore, the use of explosive weapons in densely populated urban areas is another manifestation of eroding norms. Over the first 25 years of the mandate, the Secretary-General’s annual reports on children and armed conflict have signalled a steady increase in killing and maiming and attacks on schools and hospitals, partially as a result of the increased use of explosive weapons, including landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices.

29. Over time, attacks on schools and hospitals, linked to an increasing use of airstrikes and explosive weapons in populated areas, have become another trend that places children directly at risk. The number of attacks on schools continues to rise, including attacks on students and educational personnel, as well as the military use of schools, depriving children of their right to education and reducing the availability of safe and child-friendly spaces, thus jeopardizing children’s future and their access to essential services and making children more vulnerable to other violations.

Denial of humanitarian access a precursor to other grave violations

30. The inherently interconnected nature of the six grave violations monitored through the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict can particularly be seen in the context of the denial of humanitarian access. This violation is often intertwined with increases in other grave violations against children, such as their recruitment and use in armed conflict and sexual violence, among others. In his latest annual report on children and

armed conflict, the Secretary-General cited 3,945 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access, and reported that at least 1,600 children were victims of multiple violations.

31. The denial of humanitarian access has long-lasting effects on children's well-being and development and may lead to the violation of their basic human rights, including the right to life, education and the highest attainable standard of health. The Convention on the Rights of the Child contains several provisions requiring the facilitation of humanitarian relief to children in need; the denial of humanitarian access to children and attacks against humanitarian workers assisting children are also prohibited under international humanitarian law and may constitute a war crime and a crime against humanity.

32. The engagement of the United Nations with parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations against children and to aid children in need is guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Dialogue with the parties to a conflict, whether these are State forces or non-State armed groups, is key to recall their legal obligations and to engage with them on actions they should take. To this end, reliable information on the nature, scope and perpetrators of violations is essential. Data on the denial of humanitarian access is critical to provide a strong basis for dialogue with the parties to a conflict. For this reason, and in response to the requests made by Member States during the Security Council open debate on children and armed conflict in July 2022, the Office of the Special Representative aims to develop a guidance note on the denial of humanitarian access, in collaboration with UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and in consultation with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Trafficking in children linked to grave violations

33. The risks to and vulnerabilities of children living in or around conflict situations increase because of displacement, including due to climate-induced shocks, and may link to trafficking in children. A child abducted and trafficked may become subject to recruitment and use or other forms of exploitation, including forced labour, forced marriage and sexual exploitation and slavery, among others. The motivations of the perpetrators are as varied as the types of violations, and the impact on children is differentiated, intersecting with factors related to gender, race and ethnicity, and disability. Refugee, displaced and stateless children are particularly at risk in conflict situations, as are indigenous children and children of minorities.

34. The complex nature of recent conflicts, which are often protracted, take place across borders and impact upon children differently depending on their age, gender, disability and other key factors, is of concern. The Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children has also pointed out that trafficking in children is closely linked to the six grave violations in armed conflict situations, including the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, rape and sexual violence and the denial of humanitarian assistance.⁵ In April 2022, the Office of the Special Representative, in cooperation with UNICEF, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations, published a guidance note on the monitoring and reporting of abduction of conflict-affected children. The guidance note was officially launched in July at a high-level event co-organized with Italy and in coordination with the Special Rapporteur on trafficking.

35. To enhance knowledge of the linkages between trafficking in children and the six grave violations against children in armed conflict, the Office of the Special Representative aims to conduct a research study dedicated to this issue in collaboration with the Special Rapporteur on trafficking. A better knowledge of the situation should lead to stronger accountability for and prevention of these violations.

⁵ See [A/76/263](#).

IV. Raising awareness, mobilizing global action and building partnerships

A. Awareness-raising, including through field visits

36. As the leading advocate of the United Nations for the protection of children affected by armed conflict, the Special Representative continued to use her voice to publicly raise awareness on the need to increase efforts to protect the rights and needs of children before, during and after conflicts. During the reporting period, the Office of the Special Representative issued more than 40 press releases and public statements, some jointly with partners, including other high-level United Nations officials and external partners, to highlight issues related to the mandate. For example, in February 2022, the Special Representative published a statement on the situation of children in Ukraine jointly with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. The same month, she issued a joint statement with the Committee on the Rights of the Child to mark the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. To mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities in December 2022, the Special Representative issued a joint public statement with the Special Rapporteur on disability and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

37. The Special Representative continued to inform global and national audiences about her work and mandate through diverse media outlets, including in Germany, Iraq, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and the United States of America. She further continued to engage with Department of Global Communications partners and participated in dozens of radio and television interviews in French, English and Spanish.

38. The Special Representative resumed her official travel during the reporting period and, in 2022, visited Brussels, Cairo, Doha and Paris, as well as Andorra, Colombia, Italy, Israel, Luxembourg, Malta, South Sudan, Uruguay, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the State of Palestine, among other places, to advocate for the protection of children affected by conflict at the national and regional levels and to expand her advocacy effort to reach a broader audience. In May 2022, the Special Representative travelled to South Sudan, where she participated in a national conference on children and armed conflict organized by the Government and the United Nations. She also met with key stakeholders, including the President, the First Vice-President and Vice-President of South Sudan, as well as cabinet members, United Nations partners, the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict based in South Sudan and members of civil society, including children, to assess progress made in the implementation of the comprehensive action plan to end and prevent all grave violations against children. In May 2022, the Office of the Special Representative conducted a technical visit to Yemen. In December 2022, the Special Representative visited Colombia to attend an event organized by Norway on the implementation of the conclusions on children and armed conflict in Colombia adopted by the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict⁶ and to engage with the Government of Colombia on child protection issues, in particular in the context of the resumed peace dialogue with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional and the Government's decision to sign and implement the Safe Schools Declaration, as well as to develop a national prevention plan on children and armed conflict.

39. The Special Representative visited Israel and the State of Palestine in December 2022 to meet senior government representatives and exchange on the situation of children affected by armed conflict in Israel and the State of Palestine, building on a technical visit by her Office in October 2022. In particular, the Special Representative followed up on the call of the Secretary-General in his last annual report on children and armed conflict for all parties to continue to engage with her and the United Nations to end and prevent grave violations against children and to better protect children and respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Furthermore, the Special Representative interacted with

⁶ [S/AC.51/2022/2](#).

representatives of the Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad brigades specifically mentioned as parties in the Secretary-General's report.

40. The Special Representative continued to take part in high-level events to raise awareness. In March 2022, she provided a video message for an international seminar on the protection of children in humanitarian crisis organized by the National Commission on International Humanitarian Law of Morocco. In September 2022, the Special Representative was a speaker at a high-level event on negotiating humanitarian access to protect children affected by armed conflict, organized by Luxembourg, the Niger and the non-governmental organization Geneva Call. Also in September, the Special Representative was a speaker at the virtual high-level event to commemorate the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, co-organized jointly by Qatar, the Education Above All Foundation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNICEF. In November 2022, on the occasion of the World Children's Day, the Special Representative provided a video message for a side event in Geneva on child recruitment and use, co-organized by Morocco and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

41. In May 2022, to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the children and armed conflict mandate, the Special Representative inaugurated a photo exhibit entitled "From despair to hope: children beyond armed conflict" at United Nations Headquarters, with support from France, Kazakhstan, Iraq, Malta, Norway, Qatar and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The exhibit featured stories of conflict-affected children through portraits taken by the photojournalist, Paddy Dowling. In June 2022, the exhibit was featured at the Photoville festival in New York City. In November 2022, the exhibit was featured in Doha, on the margins of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

42. In November 2022, the Special Representative launched the campaign, "Let Them Play: A child's place is on a football field, not a battlefield" to raise global awareness on the need to stop the use and abuse of children in armed conflict and to help boys and girls living in conflict areas regain their right to be children. The campaign was launched during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, and included social media content and a video message supported by children and armed conflict advocates, Mohamed Sidibay and Sonia Gisa. In addition, the Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict campaign continued to support the global advocacy efforts of the Special Representative's Office and remained a strong part of its global communications strategy. Almost four years after its official launch, the campaign has been rolled out in eight locations, including New York, Brussels and Bangkok, as well as the Central African Republic, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and, in 2022, Yemen. The campaign came to a close at the end of 2022.

43. Amplifying the voices of conflict-affected children continued to be central to the Special Representative's work. In March 2022, to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the children and armed conflict mandate, the Office of the Special Representative released testimonials from partners and friends of the mandate, as well as of children, as part of an online initiative entitled "Speaking up for children: 25 voices for conflict-affected boys and girls". At the Security Council annual open debate on children and armed conflict in July 2022, the Special Representative's Office alongside War Child UK supported the participation of Patrick Kumi from South Sudan to speak about his experience as a child affected by conflict. The inclusion of stories about boys and girls affected by conflict in the summary of the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict brought their experience to the attention of world leaders.

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

44. Collecting, assessing and disseminating best practices and lessons learned, as mandated by the General Assembly,⁷ remained a key priority for the Special Representative.

45. In June 2022, the Special Representative inaugurated an analysis and outreach hub in Doha to contribute to building institutional knowledge on current and future child protection

⁷ Resolution 72/245, para. 18.

efforts. The hub will play a role in operationalizing the “Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict”, published by the Office of the Special Representative in February 2020, and promote efforts towards including child protection provisions in peace processes, as well as build institutional knowledge on current and future child protection efforts, with a particular emphasis on research on education for reintegration.

46. The Office of the Special Representative, together with Norway, organized a virtual high-level event to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the children and armed conflict mandate. The Office also published a study on the evolution of the children and armed conflict mandate from 1996 to 2021, which was launched in January 2021 at a high-level side event co-organized with Norway, during its presidency of the Security Council. The study was an opportunity to reflect and recognize the progress made for children affected by conflict over the past 25 years through collective efforts, and an occasion to look ahead and explore ways in which the mandate could be further strengthened, paving the way for the years to come. The study demonstrated that some emerging as well as existing areas of concern require increased attention to better take into account the needs and vulnerabilities of specific groups of children and ensure that no child is left unprotected in the face of armed conflict. To address these areas of increased concern, in 2023, the Office of the Special Representative will prioritize research on the impact of grave violations on children with disabilities, the impact of climate insecurity on conflict-affected children and the interlinkages between trafficking and the six grave violations against children in armed conflict.

47. In May 2022, the Office of the Special Representative published a study on the gender dimensions of grave violations against children in armed conflict. The paper was launched at a high-level side event co-organized by Malta and the United Kingdom. The paper outlines an analytical framework to better understand the gendered aspects of grave violations against children, lists challenges faced by country task forces for monitoring and reporting to conduct such analyses, and proposes suggestions on how to overcome them.

C. Building and supporting global alliances

48. The Special Representative actively engaged with Member States and other key stakeholders to build and support global alliances aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children. She also encouraged Member States to endorse political commitments, such as the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles), the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (Vancouver Principles). As a member of the Paris Principles Steering Group, the Office of the Special Representative continued to promote reintegration standards and to encourage Member States to commit and share best practices in implementing relevant international standards.

49. In December 2021, the Special Representative shared with Member States on the children and armed conflict agenda the children’s manifesto on safe education entitled “We do not want to be scared any longer” and published it on the website of her Office. In November 2022, the Office of the Special Representative contributed to shaping the commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the Vancouver Principles, organized by Canada in consultation with her Office.

50. The Special Representative and her Office continued to have regular exchanges with Groups of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in New York, Geneva and in other countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. In March 2022, the Special Representative briefed the Geneva-based Group of Friends. In May and July 2022, the Special Representative and her Office briefed the New York-based Group of Friends. In May 2022 during an official visit to South Sudan, the Special Representative had the opportunity to directly engage with the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in the country. In June 2022, the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict for the European Union was launched in Brussels by Belgium and Italy, in the presence of the Special Representative. In July and September 2022, the Special Representative’s Liaison Office in Brussels provided

training to the Brussels-based and Geneva-based Groups of Friends. In December 2022, during an official visit to Colombia, the Special Representative directly engaged with the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in the country.

51. The Special Representative continued to implement the recommendations of the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers launched in 2018 by her Office together with UNICEF. The so-called Nairobi process has been further developed by consulting stakeholders directly and using their input to inform future reintegration efforts. Throughout 2022, discussions organized locally across 15 countries were held with children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups and national partners of the Nairobi process, including non-governmental organizations, community leaders and reintegration experts. The Nairobi process will culminate in an international symposium in Nairobi in the Spring of 2023.

52. In 2022, a financing innovation forum organized by the Office of the Special Representative and the World Bank worked towards setting up a platform for the child reintegration community to explore innovative financing and funding modalities for adequate, long-term and more sustainable child reintegration support. The Office of the Special Representative conducted extensive research and interviews of key reintegration stakeholders to establish an evidence base for future work. The research provides a panoramic snapshot of the trends across key thematic, geographic and demographic priorities related to reintegration needs and thematic areas driving child recruitment. Special attention was given to existing and potentially innovative longer-term financing sources.

53. As a member of the United Nations inter-agency task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty, the Special Representative remained committed to supporting the follow-up to the recommendations of the study. In November 2022, the Special Representative shared a video message for the global forum on justice for children and deprivation of liberty organized in Nouakchott by Defence for Children International and Terre des Hommes International Federation, as co-Chairs of the non-governmental organizations panel on children deprived of liberty, and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, as coordinator of the United Nations task force on the global study of children deprived of liberty.

54. Following the implementation of the action pledge submitted for the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, the Special Representative and her Office, as a member of Alliance 8.7, continued to share advocacy messages to support the ratification and implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the implementation of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

55. In December 2022, the Office of the Special Representative participated in the annual meeting of principals of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons and joined the joint call for action launched on that occasion.

56. Furthermore, the Office of the Special Representative has continued its collaboration with the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, including by delivering a presentation to its annual meeting on how to ensure accountability for violations against children in conflict situations in June 2022.

57. From 29 August to 9 September 2022, the Office of the Special Representative organized a virtual summer school on child protection in armed conflict in collaboration with the Government of Malta, and with the support of the University of Malta. The 42 participants were professionals contributing or likely to contribute in various capacities to child protection in armed conflict and related issues, such as government officials, representatives of United Nations entities, regional and subregional organizations and civil society organizations, legal professionals, communication officers, military personnel and academics. As this training was a pilot project, its implementation is being documented and evaluated at the time of reporting. The lessons learned and recommendations for a possible future training opportunity will be published at the beginning of 2023.

D. Building partnerships with regional and subregional organizations

African Union

58. The African Union remained a key partner and the Special Representative and her Office continued to engage closely with African Union counterparts. In August 2022, the Special Representative delivered a statement on children affected by armed conflict at an open session of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. In October 2022, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union delivered a statement, coordinated with the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, to a meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council on the prevention of recruitment of child soldiers in conflict situations. In June 2022, to commemorate the Day of the African Child, the Special Representative and the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security issued a joint statement focusing on the protection and reintegration of conflict-affected children.

59. In November 2022, the Office of the Special Representative participated in the annual meeting of the African Union coordination group on children in situations of conflict, held in Arusha, the United Republic of Tanzania, in particular to discuss cooperation on the implementation of the recently adopted African Union policies on mainstreaming child protection in the African Peace and Security Architecture and on child protection in African Union Peace Support Operations.

European Union

60. The partnership between the Office of the Special Representative and the European Union continued. In January and September 2022, she had a call with the Special Envoy of the European Union to Afghanistan. In March 2022, as part of the European Humanitarian Forum, the Special Representative participated in a humanitarian talk on addressing the drivers and consequences of child recruitment and use, co-organized by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, UNICEF, Save the Children International and World Vision International. In June 2022, in Brussels, the Special Representative briefed the Political and Security Committee and had meetings with the European Union Commissioner for Crisis Management, the Special Representative for Human Rights and a member of the European Parliament. In July 2022, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict shared a video message for the second annual high-level conference on the global state of human rights, organized by the European Parliament and the Global Campus of Human Rights. In September 2022, the Special Representative was a keynote speaker at the fourteenth European forum on the rights of the child. The same month, she met with the Vice-President for Democracy and Demography of the European Commission.

61. The Special Representative's Europe Liaison Office based in Brussels provided information on children and armed conflict to relevant stakeholders and closely followed discussions on European Union policy documents relevant to the children and armed conflict mandate. In June 2022, in the context of the European Union-United Nations Annual Dialogue on Prevention, Stabilization and Peacebuilding, the Office of the Special Representative co-organized, with the European External Action Service and UNICEF, a session on how to address child reintegration from a humanitarian development-peace nexus lens. In July and October 2022, the Office of the Special Representative briefed members of the cabinets of several European Commissioners and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission on issues relating to children and armed conflict.

League of Arab States

62. The Special Representative maintained her engagement with the League of Arab States within the framework of the cooperation agreement signed with her Office in 2014. In June 2022, the Special Representative visited Cairo and held discussions with the Secretary General of the League and the Assistant Secretary General for social affairs on the protection of children in armed conflict, following the adoption by the League of a comprehensive plan

to prevent the recruitment of children. The Office of the Special Representative held technical round-table discussions with the League secretariat, in particular on cooperation to prevent grave violations against children and the Safe Schools Declaration. In September 2022, upon its invitation, the Special Representative addressed the committee on combating violence against children.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

63. The Office of the Special Representative continued its partnership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In October 2022, the Special Representative met with the Special Representative of the Secretary General of NATO for Women, Peace and Security to discuss the work of NATO on children and armed conflict. In November 2022, the Special Representative's Liaison Office in Brussels supported the NATO-led annual Human Security in Operations Training in Sibiu, Romania.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

64. The Office of the Special Representative reinvigorated its cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In September 2022, in the context of the annual OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation, the Special Representative participated in a panel of the security dialogue on children and armed conflict, organized under the Belgian chairpersonship of the Forum.

E. Building partnerships within the United Nations System

65. The Special Representative continued working closely with the Security Council and its relevant subsidiary organs. Her Office supported the organization of the Council's annual open debate on children and armed conflict, held in July 2022 under the presidency of Brazil. The Special Representative briefed the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Al-Shabaab, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2206 (2015) concerning South Sudan and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) (concerning the situation in Yemen).

66. The Special Representative held 11 meetings with the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, including to brief its members on country-specific situations. The Secretary-General issued country reports on children and armed conflict in Colombia,⁸ the Democratic Republic of the Congo,⁹ Iraq,¹⁰ Mali,¹¹ Nigeria,¹² the Philippines,¹³ Somalia¹⁴ and the Sudan.¹⁵ Four global horizontal notes were issued to the Working Group.

67. In December 2021, the Special Representative was a speaker at an Arria-formula meeting on the protection of education in conflict, organized by the Niger and Norway. In May 2022, in the framework of the Protection of Civilians Week, the Special Representative was a keynote speaker at a side event on the protection of children in urban warfare co-organized by Norway, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Norwegian Red Cross.

⁸ [S/2021/1022](#).

⁹ [S/2022/745](#).

¹⁰ [S/2022/46](#).

¹¹ [S/2022/856](#).

¹² [S/2022/596](#).

¹³ [S/2022/569](#).

¹⁴ [S/2022/397](#).

¹⁵ [S/2022/627](#).

68. In October 2022, the Special Representative presented her annual report to the Third Committee of the General Assembly, during the Assembly's seventy-seventh session.¹⁶ The report highlighted in particular the gendered impacts of armed conflict on children and set out ways to enhance efforts to prevent violations and abuses against children.

69. The Special Representative continued her cooperation with the Special Representative on Violence against Children and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. She continued to serve on the Steering Committee of United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict and, in June 2022, participated in a principal-level meeting of the Committee, chaired by the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. The same month, she co-hosted, with the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Argentina, an event to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. The Office of the Special Representative contributed to the report of the Secretary-General on women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence in conflict and children born of sexual violence in conflict,¹⁷ prepared by the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. In September 2022, the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict participated in a joint virtual debriefing meeting on Ukraine with the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Special Representative on Violence against Children and the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children. To discuss increased cooperation, in October 2022, the Special Representative met with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and, earlier, in September 2022, her Office met with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect.

70. The Special Representative pursued her cooperation and engagement with other United Nations entities, including UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. The Office of the Special Representative participated in a workshop for child protection advisers and focal points held in New York from 28 June to 1 July 2022, organized by the Department of Peace Operations. The Special Representative met bilaterally with participants on the margins of the workshop. In July 2022, the Special Representative was a keynote speaker at an event hosted by Norway and Sierra Leone to launch the UNICEF report "25 years of children and armed conflict: Taking action to protect children in war". In November 2022, the Office of the Special Representative together with the Department of Peace Operations held a joint launch for the updated module on children and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards and organized a multi-stakeholder discussion. In December 2022, the Special Representative delivered a video message at the closing session of the annual specialized United Nations military training course on child protection organized by the Department of Peace Operations.

71. The Office of the Special Representative continued to cooperate closely with ILO, the World Health Organization and UNHCR regarding their participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. In March and May 2022, the Special Representative met with the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection of UNHCR. In March 2022, she met with the Director General of the ILO and, in May, she participated remotely in the fifth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour, as part of a thematic panel entitled "Sustaining peace and climate resilience through the elimination of child labour", and through the #RaiseYourHandForKids campaign. In July 2022, together with UNESCO, the Office of the Special Representative co-organized a virtual high-level side event on the margins of the high-level political forum on sustainable development held under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, entitled "Protecting education from attack: a call for improving data monitoring and policy response", at which the Special Representative delivered opening remarks. Also in September 2022, the Special Representative provided closing remarks at the Transforming Education Summit leaders day spotlight session entitled "Education in crisis situations: a partnership for transformative actions". The session was co-hosted at United Nations Headquarters by Qatar, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education.

¹⁶ A/77/143.

¹⁷ S/2022/77.

72. In September 2022, on the margins of events to commemorate the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, the Special Representative signed a memorandum of understanding with UNESCO for the purpose of collaboration and the exchange of expertise on education in the reintegration of conflict-affected children.

73. Collaboration between the Special Representative and the International Criminal Court was sustained. In February 2022, the Special Representative had a call with the Prosecutor. The United Nations, on behalf of the Office of the Special Representative and other United Nations entities, submitted a joint amicus curiae brief in the reparations phase of the case of *The Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen*. In November 2022, the Special Representative shared a video for a thematic round table on crimes against children organized by the International Criminal Court with non-governmental organizations. The Special Representative also shared a video message in November 2022 for the Victims Trust Fund campaign commemorating 16 days of activism to end violence against women and girls.

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

F. Building partnerships with civil society and academia

75. Civil society organizations and academia continued to be key partners for the implementation of the children and armed conflict mandate and engagement with them remained a priority for the Special Representative and her Office. The Special Representative continued to have regular interactions with non-governmental organizations based in New York and in Europe, facilitated through the Liaison Office in Brussels, and with civil society partners during her field visits, such as in South Sudan. The Special Representative and her Office participated, in person or virtually, in dozens of events organized by civil society organizations and partners.

76. In December 2021, the Special Representative signed a partnership agreement with the All Survivors Project Foundation for the implementation of a project on the reintegration of boy survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. In January 2022, the Special Representative took part in a policy workshop on children and armed conflict organized by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs at Fordham University.

77. In November 2022, the Special Representative participated in a workshop entitled “Conflict-related sexual violence against boys: from recognition to response” organized by the All Survivors Project, Norway and Princeton University. The same month she provided a video message for the fourth annual general meeting of the Association internationale de la mutualité. Also in November, the Special Representative delivered a keynote address at the fourth annual Knowledge for Prevention Symposium in Montevideo organized by Uruguay, the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security and Dalhousie University. The Special Representative also provided a video message for a conference on children and armed conflict organized in November 2022 by Save the Children, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the African Child Policy Forum in association with the African Union in Nairobi.

78. Engagement with academia remained a central focus of the Office of the Special Representative. In December 2021, the Special Representative and her Office were awarded a prize by the Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflict for her institutional commitment, as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to the protection of conflict-affected children. In June 2022, she delivered opening remarks at the Network’s advanced training course entitled “International criminal jurisdiction and children in armed conflict”, and her Office delivered a training session. In November 2022, she was a keynote speaker at a conference entitled “Children in armed conflict: How can they be protected in a multi-level international framework?” organized in

Luxembourg by the Universities Network and the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights at the University of Luxembourg.

79. In June 2022, as a guest speaker at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar, the Special Representative emphasized that the protection of conflict-affected children was a central pillar of the human rights, peace and security, peacebuilding, development and humanitarian agendas. Entitled “Mediation to protect children in situations of armed conflict”, the event was a collaboration between Hamad Bin Khalifa University’s Colleges of Public Policy and Law. In July 2022, the Special Representative provided a video message for students of Newcastle University. In November 2022, the Special Representative addressed a high-level panel on children and armed conflict at the John Cabot University of Rome.

V. Recommendations

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

81. **The Special Representative reminds all Member States that they must respect and ensure the rights of children, independently from their parents or guardians, and that children are entitled to special protection under international human rights law, particularly under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. She calls on Member States to recognize all persons under 18 years of age as children and to provide them with special protection. The Special Representative calls upon the international community to increase its advocacy towards ensuring the recognition of all persons under 18 years as children and their right to special protection as such.**

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

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

84. **The Special Representative encourages Member States and other relevant stakeholders to adopt a holistic approach towards tackling the complex challenges facing children affected by armed conflict and violence before, during and after conflict. She calls particular attention to the risk of trafficking in children in the context of armed conflict, including the need to further policy research to examine the links between trafficking in children and grave violations against children in armed conflict.**

85. **The Special Representative is concerned by the continued trend of killing and maiming of children by explosive weapons and remnants of war, including improvised explosive devices, landmines and bombs. She calls on parties to conflict to end the use of indiscriminate explosive devices that cause the death of or injury to civilians, including children. She calls upon Member States to join and fully implement international instruments pertaining to those weapons, including anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. She also calls on armed groups to refrain from their use. The**

promotion of mine clearance and the clearance of explosive remnants of war, mine-risk education programmes for children, victim assistance and stockpile management and destruction should also be prioritized, including prior to any movement of internally displaced persons back to contaminated areas.

86. The Special Representative urges parties to conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and to take all necessary measures to protect children during military operations, in line with the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, and to avoid confrontations, where possible, in areas where civilians and children are present. The military use of schools or health facilities should be avoided by all parties to conflict, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

87. The Special Representative encourages the Human Rights Council to maintain the practice of including recommendations on the protection of children affected by armed conflict when considering or adopting resolutions on country-specific situations or thematic issues, and in the universal periodic review process, with particular attention paid to the implementation of such recommendations. The Special Representative also encourages the Human Rights Council to continue to include references to child rights violations and conflict-affected children in its resolutions establishing or renewing the mandates of special procedures, commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and investigations, and to foresee in those resolutions dedicated expertise on child rights. The Special Representative further encourages Member States to ensure that dedicated child protection resources and capacity are allocated in relevant budgetary provisions.

88. The Special Representative welcomes the continued attention paid to the impact of armed conflict on children in reports of States to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee. She urges relevant Member States to include, as appropriate, specific references to information on grave violations against children, gaps in their applicable legal and policy frameworks and accountability initiatives in their submissions to those bodies.
