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Promotion and protection of the rights of children

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

Summary

The present report is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to its resolution [76/147](#) on the rights of the child, in which it requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to continue to submit reports to the Assembly on the activities undertaken in the fulfilment of her mandate and on the progress achieved in advancing the children and armed conflict agenda. In the report, which covers the period from August 2022 to July 2023, the Special Representative describes trends, issues of concern and progress made. She also provides information on raising global awareness and building partnerships, including her engagement with regional and subregional organizations and international partners. She outlines challenges and priorities on the children and armed conflict agenda and concludes with recommendations to enhance the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

* [A/78/150](#).



I. Introduction

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

2. In line with that mandate, and as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 76/147, in the present report, the Special Representative provides information on current trends regarding children affected by armed conflict and gives an overview of emerging issues and challenges. She also highlights the ongoing engagement with parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations, as well as efforts undertaken with a broad range of actors to raise global awareness and catalyse action on the issue. She furthermore highlights the risks and vulnerabilities of children displaced owing to conflict and reiterates the importance of upholding the Convention on the Rights of the Child to address and prevent violations and abuses.

II. Global overview of trends, emerging issues and challenges

A. Trends in grave violations

3. Multidimensional conflicts, including across regions, chronic crises and new armed actors have had an adverse impact on the protection of children living in conflict areas. In 2022, the United Nations verified an overall number of 27,180 grave violations against children, including 2,880 that had occurred prior to 2021 but were only verified in 2022. A total of 18,890 children (13,469 boys, 4,638 girls, 783 sex unknown) were victims of at least one of the four grave violations affecting individual children: recruitment and use; killing and maiming; rape and other forms of sexual violence; and abduction. At least 2,330 children were victims of multiple violations. The situations with the highest numbers of children affected were in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel and the State of Palestine, Somalia, Ukraine and the Syrian Arab Republic.

4. Killing and maiming and the recruitment and use of children, followed by abduction and the denial of humanitarian access, continued to be the highest verified violations in 2022. A total of 8,631 children (5,987 boys, 2,209 girls, 435 sex unknown) were killed and maimed by parties to conflict, with the deadliest conflicts being in Ukraine, Israel and the State of Palestine, Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The use of explosive ordnance, including explosive weapons and remnants of war, improvised explosive devices and landmines, represented over 25 per cent of the causes of the killing and maiming of children. Mine action operations were jeopardized and disrupted by insecurity and restrictions on movement and access. Child survivors often experienced lifelong impairments, such as amputation, paralysis, loss of vision or of hearing and long-lasting trauma, and they were likely to face discrimination and stigma as a result.

5. A total of 7,622 children were recruited and used, and 3,985 children (2,256 boys, 1,379 girls, 350 sex unknown) were abducted, with the highest numbers verified in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Burkina Faso and Myanmar. The

number of girls abducted increased by over 30 per cent in 2022 compared with the previous year.

6. Attacks on schools and hospitals and their protected personnel increased by 112 per cent in 2022 compared with the previous year, making such attacks the violation with the greatest increase in 2022. A total of 1,846 schools (1,193) and hospitals (653) were affected. Schools and hospitals were bombed, destroyed or damaged by shelling, looted or used for military purposes and were consequently temporarily or permanently closed. Protected persons in relation to schools and hospitals were abducted, threatened, detained, injured or killed. The highest figures were verified in Ukraine, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Israel and the State of Palestine. Hundreds of thousands of children saw their education disrupted.

7. Rape and other forms of sexual violence decreased by 10 per cent, with 1,166 children (1,155 girls, 11 boys) affected. Sexual violence continued to be vastly underreported, owing to stigmatization, fear of reprisals, harmful social norms, the absence or lack of access to services, impunity and safety concerns. The highest number of sexual violence incidents were verified in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by Somalia, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Nigeria.

8. Denial of humanitarian access remained very high, with 3,931 verified incidents. The highest figures were in Israel and the State of Palestine, Yemen, Afghanistan and Mali. While the number slightly decreased in 2022 compared with 2021, the situation is expected to worsen in 2023, owing to the adoption of restrictive laws, administrative decrees and regulations increasing control over humanitarian work and workers in several countries.

9. Gender norms shape the exposure of children to grave violations. Boys continued to be more affected by recruitment and use, killing and maiming and abduction, while girls were disproportionately affected by conflict-related sexual violence. Gender, age and disability are among the many factors shaping the vulnerability of children to grave violations.

B. Understanding risks to and vulnerabilities of children displaced owing to conflict

10. Armed conflict causes human casualties and physical destruction but also massive displacement of civilian populations, including children. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recently estimated that an unprecedented 108.4 million people around the world had been forced from their homes, of which 43.3 million were children, including 1.9 million children who were born as refugees.¹ Displacement has a critical impact on children, as parties to conflict take advantage of the vulnerability and concentration of displaced populations to recruit children in camps and commit other violations and abuses, such as abduction, rape and other forms of sexual violence, including forced marriage, and trafficking in persons.

11. The Office of the Special Representative has observed through the reports of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict that the vulnerability of displaced children is particularly enhanced when staying in camps where they are exposed to attacks by armed groups. In the Lac Province in Chad, for instance, armed groups targeted displaced persons, including children, and killed multiple civilians. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, United Nations workers received serious allegations of conflict-related sexual violence in camps for internally

¹ See www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/.

displaced persons around Goma perpetrated by armed men. The perpetrators particularly targeted women and girls as they attempted to return to their homes or as they carried out their daily livelihood activities, including collecting firewood, food or water. Furthermore, many displaced persons are detained while moving along migration routes. As shown by the study conducted by the Office of the Special Representative on strengthening responses to conflict-related sexual violence against boys deprived of their liberty in situations of armed conflict, published in November 2022, child detainees are highly vulnerable to a wide range of human rights violations and abuses, including rape and other forms of sexual violence.² In Libya, for instance, acts of violence, including arbitrary detention, sexual violence, torture and slavery, continued to be carried out against child migrants and refugees in detention centres.³ These risks are further increased if displaced or returning children are in areas contaminated by mines and explosive remnants of war, including the risk of killing and maiming, such as in the case of Ethiopia, Iraq, Ukraine and Yemen. Lastly, climate shocks in areas affected by conflict further exacerbate displacement, thereby increasing risks of other violations and abuses of children.

12. The vulnerability of displaced children to violations and abuses is increased by additional factors that intersect with their status as displaced minors. Disability acts as a contributing factor in shaping the experiences of particularly vulnerable children who face increased risks of violations, including killing and maiming. According to UNHCR, some 51,700 unaccompanied or separated children, who are among the most vulnerable displaced children, lodged new asylum applications in 2022.⁴ They are vulnerable to trafficking, as well as to sexual and other forms of grave abuse, including forced marriage, and they lack access to food, health services and education. The recruitment of children into armed groups is a particular risk for children separated from their families in displacement.⁵ In Nigeria, for example, the movement of civilian populations, including unaccompanied children, from Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad-controlled areas in Borno State to government-controlled areas continued, leading to heightened protection concerns, such as concerns about sexual violence, affecting mostly girls. In addition to being unaccompanied, many displaced children do not have documentation, which also makes them more vulnerable to violations and abuses, especially recruitment and use by armed groups and trafficking.

13. To more comprehensively understand the specific risks to children in displacement situations and their vulnerabilities to the violations monitored through the children and armed conflict agenda, the Office of the Special Representative is conducting three dedicated studies in 2023 on disability, trafficking and climate insecurity. They will build on a paper the Office published in September 2010 on the rights and guarantees of internally displaced children in armed conflict and will touch on concrete ways that displacement acts as a driver of violations and abuses and how to tailor prevention efforts accordingly. In 2023, the Office of the Special Representative has partnered with the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society alongside the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children to determine, in consultation with children and young people who were displaced, a model of reintegration into receiving societies.

² See <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ASP-briefing-paper-V1.pdf>.

³ See <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/344/71/PDF/N2234471.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁴ See www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022.

⁵ See https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/10-08849-Rights-Guarantees-Internally-Displaced-Children-Armed-Conflict_WP_2_Cover02_Web.pdf.

III. Upholding the rights of children as all persons under 18 years of age

14. In article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is clearly stipulated that the rights contained therein are applicable to all persons under 18 years of age, while it is underlined in article 3 that the best interests of children should guide all actions concerning them. 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, status, country of origin or location. This includes children's right to identity, birth registration and civil documentation, which are essential for claiming and preventing violations of their rights.

15. The recent erosion of international protection frameworks jeopardizes children's full enjoyment of their rights and protections provided for by the Convention. The age group between 14 and 18 years is particularly vulnerable, as seen, for instance, in the treatment of children above a certain age 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. Children need to be treated in a manner that observes their rights and respects their dignity, in accordance with applicable international law. The particular vulnerability of this age group to many violations points to the need to apply an age and gender differentiation lens to any measures to prevent violations, while emphasizing at all times that children as persons under 18 years of age are entitled to special rights and protections.

16. While there is sufficient understanding of recruitment and use based on age and gender differentiation, more information is needed to understand the other violations monitored through the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, with a view to better informing monitors on the ground and decision-making bodies at the global and regional levels. To achieve this, more data analysis based on age and gender differentiation is needed, as well as sufficient capacity to analyse which children are at most risk for each type of violation across situations.

17. Better protecting children before, during and after conflict, and prioritizing their differentiated needs on the basis of such an analysis, would require integration into the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and efforts to prevent conflict. This could be achieved through a dedicated United Nations conference to collect all existing tools and initiatives related to children and armed conflict into a comprehensive international framework to unify the elements of this agenda that would result in the best solution for protecting children and preventing violations of their rights, including by delivering on improved reintegration of children and sustaining peace.

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

A. Addressing grave violations against children by government forces

18. In Burkina Faso, 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.

19. In the Central African Republic, with United Nations support, the Government continued to work on a draft national strategy for a national plan to prevent grave violations against children.

20. In Colombia, the Ministry of Defence announced in August 2022 that it was suspending all aerial bombardment of armed groups' camps where children were

present and stressed that children recruited and used by armed groups were victims. Also in August 2022, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace held a hearing of 21 former members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo as part of its handling of case 07, which deals with the recruitment and use of children, with the participation of 265 victims. In November 2022, the Government adopted the Safe Schools Declaration to protect education from attack. The Truth Commission in Colombia organized several events to disseminate the findings and recommendations contained in its final report, which includes a chapter on children, at the local, national and international levels.

21. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with United Nations support, the Government continued to implement the 2012 action plan through monthly meetings of a joint technical working group on children and armed conflict, regular screenings of troops and capacity-building for the armed and security forces at the national and provincial levels. At least seven elements from the armed forces, one element from the national police force and one person affiliated with the Allied Democratic Forces were convicted for crimes against children, including sexual violence, killing and recruitment and use.

22. In Ethiopia, the Government engaged in dialogue with the Special Representative during her visit to the country in June 2023. Discussions were focused on strengthening the country's ongoing efforts to minimize the impact of conflict on children, including through child-sensitive demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programmes, mine action and assistance programmes. The visit culminated in an agreement to formalize cooperation through an exchange of letters between the Government and the United Nations, in which immediate and long-term protection and prevention measures would be addressed.

23. In India, the Government continued its constructive engagement with the Special Representative and the United Nations, including through a workshop on strengthening child protection, held in Jammu and Kashmir in November 2022 by the Government with the participation of the United Nations. This led to the identification of protection measures, in consultation with the United Nations, which included: training armed and security forces on child protection; prohibiting the use of lethal and non-lethal force on children, including by ending the use of pellet guns; ensuring that children were detained as a last resort, for the shortest appropriate period of time, preventing all forms of ill-treatment in detention; and fully implementing the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

24. In Iraq, the Government signed an action plan with the United Nations on 30 March 2023 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces. The Government repatriated Iraqi families, including 804 children, from Hawl camp in the Syrian Arab Republic.

25. In Israel and the State of Palestine, the Israeli authorities and Palestinian armed groups continued their engagement with the Special Representative to prevent violations against children, including during her visit to Israel and the State of Palestine in December 2022 to identify the main prevention and protection commitments that parties could adopt, including timebound activities to better protect children. The United Nations exchanged letters with Israel and identified practical measures, including those related to the killing and maiming of children, accountability, denial of humanitarian access and its attacks on, and interference with, health care and education.

26. In Mozambique, the Government established child protection focal points in the Mozambique Defence Armed Forces and commenced training them on child protection. During the Special Representative's visit in April 2023, the Government

discussed further prevention measures, including the adoption of a handover protocol for children associated with armed groups who were identified and separated during military operations.

27. In Nigeria, in September 2022, the Government signed a handover protocol with the United Nations for children encountered in the course of armed conflict in Nigeria and the Lake Chad basin.

28. In Somalia, with United Nations support, the Somali National Army child protection focal points conducted screening exercises to prevent the enlistment of children by its security forces. An interministerial committee on children and armed conflict was established, and the Ministry of Internal Security, with United Nations assistance, established a child protection screening unit to support and enhance the handover of children. As a result, the Government transferred a total of 341 children to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for reintegration support.

29. In the Sudan, the implementation of the 2021 road map on the basis of the 2016 action plan to end and prevent child recruitment and use commenced with the United Nations conducting age assessments of members of armed forces and armed groups in North Darfur in October 2022.

30. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Government and the United Nations deepened their dialogue to finalize an action plan covering all six grave violations against children.

31. In Yemen, the Government and the United Nations continued dialogue on the implementation of the 2014 action plan and the 2018 road map to end and prevent child recruitment and use, including the establishment of child protection units in all military regions, and the conduct of field visits to disseminate directives banning child recruitment and verify the absence of children from military ranks.

32. In Ukraine, the Government appointed a focal point on children and armed conflict and established an interministerial working group comprising all line ministries and other government entities. During the Special Representative's visit to Ukraine in May 2023, the Government made a commitment to develop with the United Nations a plan to prevent grave violations against children in armed conflict. The finalization of the draft document outlining the commitment is ongoing. During the Special Representative's visit to the Russian Federation in May 2023, the Government discussed with her practical measures to protect children as set out in paragraph 340 of the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/77/895-S/2023/363](#)).

33. Training sessions for armed and security forces on child protection and children's rights were conducted with United Nations support in several situations, including those in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Mozambique, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan.

B. Addressing grave violations against children by armed groups

34. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mai-Mai Machine signed a unilateral commitment to protect children. Following the direct engagement of the United Nations with armed groups, 272 children were voluntarily released by armed group commanders in 2022.

35. In Israel and the State of Palestine, letters were received from Palestinian Islamic Jihad and from Hamas identifying practical measures, including those related to the killing and maiming and the recruitment and use of children.

36. In Mali, with United Nations support, the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Platform coalition of armed groups adopted separate road maps to accelerate the implementation of their respective action plans addressing grave violations against children.

37. In Nigeria, the Civilian Joint Task Force continued the implementation of its action plan on recruitment and use of children and, with United Nations support, trained 27 child protection units on child rights and child protection.

38. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the opposition Syrian National Army and the Army of Islam identified focal points for their engagement with the United Nations. In October 2022 and May 2023, workshops were held between listed factions of the opposition Syrian National Army and the United Nations on the adoption of an action plan to address grave violations against children by the parties. The Syrian Democratic Forces continued implementing their 2019 action plan, resulting in the release of 33 children and the screening of 219 children.

39. In Yemen, following the signing of an action plan in April 2022, the Houthis issued two military instructions to their forces to end and prevent the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children and to protect health and education facilities and their personnel.

V. Raising global awareness and building partnerships

A. Awareness-raising, advocacy and country visits

40. The Special Representative continued to use her voice as the leading United Nations advocate for the protection of conflict-affected children, including through the issuance of more than 40 press releases and statements, some jointly with partners. For example, in November 2022, the Special Representative and the Qatar Fund for Development issued a joint statement on their collaboration regarding the 2022 FIFA World Cup and their participation in the Generation Amazing Youth Festival 2022. In December 2022, to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the Special Representative issued a joint statement with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In March 2023, she issued a press release with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Special Representative on Violence against Children stressing the need to ensure the application of child rights in the course of countering terrorism and implementing national security measures. In April 2023, she issued a joint statement with the Special Representative on Violence against Children on the rapid escalation of hostilities in the Sudan.

41. The Special Representative sought to inform and engage media in advocacy efforts, including through national and international media outlets, such as the Associated Press, the Luxemburger Wort and Radio Mozambique.

42. The Special Representative continued to raise awareness through participation in high-level events. In September 2022, the Special Representative spoke at a high-level event on negotiating humanitarian access to protect children affected by armed conflict, organized by Luxembourg, the Niger and Geneva Call. Also in September 2022, the Special Representative spoke at a high-level event to commemorate the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, co-organized by Qatar, Education Above All, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNICEF. In November 2022, on Universal Children's Day, the Special Representative shared a video message for a side event in Geneva regarding

child recruitment and use, co-organized by Morocco and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

43. In January 2023, the Special Representative attended a conference on strengthening human rights in the crisis of peace and security, co-organized by Finland and Switzerland, as well as Wilton Park, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In February 2023, also in the United Kingdom, her Office co-organized with Norway, UNICEF, Save the Children, War Child International and Wilton Park a conference on the reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups. In May 2023, during Protection of Civilians Week, the Office of the Special Representative co-organized a side event with Colombia, Liechtenstein, Malta, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the All Survivors Project on ensuring the protection of and responses for all survivors, with a focus on gender-responsive measures to meet the needs of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, and she participated in a side event organized by Luxembourg, Malta, Japan, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack on education in armed conflict, with a focus on protection, prevention and access. In June 2023, the Special Representative attended an international conference on protecting children in armed conflict, hosted by Norway together with UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Save the Children International.

44. In November 2022, the Special Representative launched a campaign entitled, “Let them play: a child’s place is on the football field, not the battlefield” to raise global awareness on the need to stop the use and abuse of children in armed conflict. The campaign was launched during the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar and included social media content and a video message supported by Mohamed Sidibay and Sonia Gisa, children and armed conflict advocates. The photo exhibit entitled “From despair to hope: children beyond armed conflict”, featuring stories of conflict-affected children through portraits taken by photojournalist Paddy Dowling, was featured in Doha on the margins of the 2022 FIFA World Cup. In March 2023, the exhibition was inaugurated at the United Nations Office at Geneva with the support of Belgium, Luxembourg, Malta and Uruguay.

45. The ACT to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict campaign, which will end in December 2023, continued to support the global advocacy efforts of the Office of the Special Representative and remained a strong part of its global communications strategy. The development of a new public awareness campaign that is aimed at putting the voices of children at the centre of all the Special Representative’s work and the work of her Office will be launched in 2024. This campaign will be child focused and will include children’s participation, their views and their voices to better respond to their concerns.

46. 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 report on the virtual summer school was launched in May 2023 during a side event on strengthening child protection capacity by increasing the knowledge, competencies and skills of actors contributing to the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda, co-sponsored by Belgium, Malta, Mozambique, the Republic of Korea, the United Arab Emirates and Uruguay, as well as the European Union. To build the capacity of Member States in the Third Committee, in April 2023 the Office of the Special Representative conducted a training session on children and armed conflict, held in a hybrid format both in New York and online, co-organized with the delegation of the European Union and Uruguay.

47. Amplifying the voices of conflict-affected children continued to be central to the work of the Special Representative. In February 2023, on the occasion of the special briefing of the Security Council under the presidency of Malta on preventing grave violations against children, the Office of the Special Representative, in collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative on Violence against Children, supported the virtual participation of Divina, a youth activist from Cameroon. At the Security Council annual open debate on children and armed conflict, held in July 2023, the Office of the Special Representative, alongside Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and Save the Children, supported the participation of a 17-year-old female activist from Colombia. Stories about conflict-affected children were included in the summary of the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

48. During the reporting period, the Special Representative travelled to Argentina, Belgium, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Mozambique, Norway, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Uruguay and the State of Palestine, to advocate the protection of children affected by conflict at the national and regional levels.

49. In December 2022, the Special Representative visited Colombia to attend an event organized by Norway on the implementation of the conclusions of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and to engage with the Government 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.

B. Building and supporting global alliances

50. The Special Representative actively engaged with Member States and other stakeholders to build and support global alliances aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children. She continued to encourage Member States to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. In January 2023, Solomon Islands became the 173rd State party to the Optional Protocol. She also encouraged Member States to endorse 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). During the reporting period, Australia, Colombia, the Congo and Guyana endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. The Office of the Special Representative continued to participate in the Paris Principles Steering Group.

51. The Special Representative and her Office held regular exchanges with Groups of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in New York and Geneva and in the countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. In September 2022, the United Nations Liaison Office for Children and Armed Conflict (Europe) 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 co-chairs of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in the country. In January 2023, a joint videoconference was held between the Groups of Friends in New York and in Yemen. In March 2023, the Special Representative met with the Brussels-based and the Geneva-based Groups of Friends, and in June 2023 the Special Representative met with the New York-based Group of Friends.

52. As a member of the United Nations inter-agency task force on the global study on children deprived of liberty, the Special Representative has supported the follow-up to the recommendations resulting from the study. In November 2022, she shared a video message for a global forum on justice for children and deprivation of liberty organized in Nouakchott by the Office of the Special Representative on Violence against Children, Defence for Children International and Terre des Hommes International Federation.

53. The Office of the Special Representative has continued its collaboration with the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, including by delivering in June 2023 a presentation to its annual meeting on understanding the impacts of climate insecurity on children and armed conflict.

54. The Office of the Special Representative continued to develop initiatives on the basis of the research conducted by the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers. In March 2023, her Office held consultations in Nairobi with representatives of 20 civil society organizations consisting of or representing children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, which led to the issuance of a list of 200 recommendations to inform reintegration programming and policy at the national and international levels. That same month, her Office established a financing innovation forum for child reintegration, which published an analysis of the child reintegration financing and prevention landscape, with plans to disseminate the recommendations contained in the document in 2024. In addition, a reintegration research group was established consisting of practitioners and members of academia.

C. Building partnerships with regional and subregional organizations

African Union

55. In August 2022, the Special Representative, represented by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union, delivered a statement on children affected by armed conflict at an open session of the African Union Peace and Security Council. 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, at a meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council on the prevention of recruitment of children in conflict situations.

56. 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 to discuss cooperation on implementing African Union policies on mainstreaming child protection in the African peace and security architecture and on child protection in African Union peace support operations, as well as joint initiatives on children and armed conflict. In June 2023, the Special Representative held a meeting in Addis Ababa with the Special Envoy on Youth of the African Union to discuss the situation of conflict-affected children and young people and explore opportunities for joint action. Her Office further engaged with the African Union and partners at a technical level on strengthening the partnership between the United Nations and the African Union.

European Union

57. In September 2022, the Special Representative held a discussion by phone with the European Union Special Envoy for Afghanistan. That same month, she was a keynote speaker at the fourteenth European Forum on the rights of the child and met with the European Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography. In February 2023, on the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, the Special

Representative published a joint statement with the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Vice-President of the European Commission. In March 2023, at the European Humanitarian Forum organized by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations and Sweden, the Special Representative spoke at a session on stepping up the commitment to conflict-affected children, with a focus on working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and held a joint meeting with the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, the Executive Director of UNICEF and the Queen of Belgium. The Special Representative delivered remarks at an event on education in emergencies, with a focus on investing in safe and quality education for every child, co-hosted by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations and UNICEF. In Brussels, she also held meetings with the European Union Special Representative for Human Rights and other high-level officials from the European External Action Service, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

58. The United Nations Liaison Office for Children and Armed Conflict (Europe) provided information on children and armed conflict to interested stakeholders and followed relevant policy discussions. In October 2022 and July 2023, the Office of the Special Representative briefed cabinet members of several European Commissioners and of the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on children and armed conflict issues. The United Nations Liaison Office for Children and Armed Conflict (Europe) provided a briefing in March 2023 at a workshop on the contribution of Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations to the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda, and in June 2023 at the annual meeting of Common Security and Defence Policy human rights and gender advisers.

Council of Europe

59. In March 2023, the Special Representative met with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe on Migration and Refugees, and in May 2023 she met with the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

60. In October 2022 and June 2023, the Special Representative met with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary-General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security. In November 2022, the United Nations Liaison Office for Children and Armed Conflict (Europe) supported the NATO-led annual human security in operations training event in Sibiu, Romania.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

61. In September 2022, under the Belgian chairpersonship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Forum for Security Co-operation, the Special Representative participated in a security dialogue panel on children and armed conflict. In March 2023, the Special Representative met with the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. In June 2023, the United Nations Liaison Office for Children and Armed Conflict (Europe) provided a briefing to the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, established in December 2022.

League of Arab States

62. In September 2022, the Special Representative addressed the eighteenth session of the League of Arab States' Committee on Violence against Children, and in October 2022 she delivered a virtual briefing to the League's Committee on Ending Violence against Children. Also in October 2022, the Special Representative delivered virtual remarks at the Arab Girls' Summit, hosted by Jordan.

63. In May 2023, the Office of the Special Representative and the League of Arab States jointly organized a regional conference in Doha on the prevention of grave violations against children in armed conflict. The conference was hosted and presided over by Qatar in its capacity as Chair of the forty-second meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs, and it brought together Arab Ministers for Social Affairs, regional United Nations entities and Education Above All. Participants discussed child protection challenges in the Arab world, including attacks on education and the heightened vulnerability of children with disabilities and of refugee children and internally displaced children. They agreed on the importance of providing comprehensive and sustainable reintegration and assistance programmes to children across the region and of operationalizing the League's comprehensive plan to end child recruitment in armed and terrorist conflicts, and on creating a concerted regional push towards prevention. The League of Arab States adopted an outcome document following the event.

D. Building partnerships with civil society and academia

64. Enhancing partnerships with civil society organizations and academia continued to be a priority for the Special Representative. She remained engaged with New York-based and Europe-based non-governmental organizations, her engagement with the latter being facilitated through the United Nations Liaison Office for Children and Armed Conflict (Europe), as well as with civil society partners during her field visits. The Special Representative participated in dozens of events organized by civil society organizations, and dozens more were attended by representatives of her Office.

65. In November 2022, the Special Representative participated in a workshop on not only recognizing but also responding to conflict-related sexual violence against boys, organized by Norway, the All Survivors Project and Princeton University. That same month, she 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 in Nairobi by Save the Children, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the African Child Policy Forum, in association with the African Union. Also in November 2022, she spoke at a conference on children in armed conflict focused on how they can be protected in a multilevel international framework, organized in Luxembourg by the Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflict and the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights at the University of Luxembourg. That same month, the Special Representative addressed a high-level panel on children and armed conflict at John Cabot University in Rome. In May 2023, she delivered opening remarks at the Network for Children in Armed Conflict advanced training course on international criminal jurisdiction and children in armed conflict, and her Office delivered a training session as part of that course.

66. In January 2023, the Special Representative took part in a policy workshop on children and armed conflict organized by Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs at Fordham University. In March 2023, she provided a video statement for an event on trafficking in persons in

armed conflicts and in post-conflict situations organized by Caritas Internationalis, Secours Catholique – Caritas France and the Sovereign Order of Malta, with the support of COATNET.

67. In May 2023, the Special Representative provided a video message for a panel discussion on achievements and challenges regarding the responsibility to protect and the protection of children as part of the sixth biennial academic conference on the responsibility to protect in theory and practice, organized by the University of Ljubljana. In June 2023, she provided a video message for the ninth Institut Francophone pour la Justice et la Démocratie-Institut Louis Joinet summer university programme on children and transitional justice.

E. Building partnerships within the United Nations system

68. The Special Representative continued to work closely with the Security Council and its relevant subsidiary organs. She held 13 meetings with the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which included briefing its members on country-specific situations. In December 2023, the Office of the Special Representative held an induction session for the incoming members to build their capacity on children and armed conflict. The Secretary-General issued country reports on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2022/745), Iraq (S/2022/46), Mali (S/2022/856), Nigeria (S/2022/596), the Philippines (S/2022/569), Somalia (S/2022/397), South Sudan (S/2023/99) and the Sudan (S/2022/627). Four global horizontal notes were issued to the Working Group. The Special Representative briefed the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014). The Office of the Special Representative supported the Working Group in the organization of its field visit to Nigeria in July 2023.

69. In February 2023, the Special Representative, alongside the Special Representative on Violence against Children, briefed the Security Council under the Maltese presidency on the importance of prevention efforts in ensuring the best protection for children in armed conflict situations.

70. The Special Representative pursued her cooperation with other United Nations entities, including UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. Her Office continued to contribute to the ongoing review of the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards with regard to principles on the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups, and to provide guidance on security sector reform. 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. In December 2022, the Special Representative delivered a video message at the annual specialized United Nations military training course on child protection organized by the Department of Peace Operations. She coordinated two task forces at the principal level for the preparation of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, encompassing various United Nations partners that contribute to the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict.

71. The Office of the Special Representative continued to cooperate with the International Labour Organization, the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNHCR regarding their participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism. In May 2023, the Special Representative met with the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection and with the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. In June 2023, she met with the Executive Director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme.

72. In September 2022, the Special Representative signed a memorandum of understanding with UNESCO for the purpose of collaboration and exchange of expertise on education in the reintegration of conflict-affected children. That same month, she spoke at the Transforming Education Summit leader's day spotlight session on education in crisis situations, with a focus on partnership for transformative actions, co-hosted by Qatar, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education.

73. In April 2023, for the Mine Action Service symposium on the theme "Mine action cannot wait", the Special Representative delivered remarks on the impact of mines and unexploded ordnance on children.

74. The Special Representative continued her cooperation with the Special Representative on Violence against Children and the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, as mentioned above. In September 2022, the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict participated in a joint 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. The Special Representative continued to serve on the Steering Committee of United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, and in April 2023 she participated in a principal-level meeting of the Committee, chaired by the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. In June 2023, she and the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict co-hosted with Argentina a commemorative event on the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. To discuss increased cooperation, in late 2022, the Special Representative met with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, and representatives of her Office met with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect.

75. Cross-cutting issues relevant to the children and armed conflict mandate remained an important entry point for mainstreaming child protection concerns. The issue of sexual exploitation and abuse was a priority for the Special Representative, and her Office actively participated in the work of the system-wide working group on sexual exploitation and abuse. In October 2022, she held a meeting with the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. In December 2022, the Special Representative took part in the meeting of the High-level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse.

76. The Office of the Special Representative continued its engagement as part of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, including through participation in its annual principals meeting and the joint call for action launched on that occasion. The Office of the Special Representative also joined the United Nations system-wide practice group on trafficking in all its forms. In March 2023, the Special Representative and her Office participated in an expert group meeting on conflict-related trafficking and accountability organized by the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children and the Duke University School of Law International Human Rights Clinic. In June 2023, she provided a video statement for a side event on the prevention of trafficking in the context of international displacement, refugee protection and statelessness, which was organized by the Special Rapporteur.

77. The Office of the Special Representative actively participated in the development of the guidance note on child rights mainstreaming being drafted by the United Nations. The Office was actively involved in the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights initiative, including proactive participation in the team tasked with developing the Agenda for Protection.

78. Regular communication with the Human Rights Council regarding child rights violations in situations of conflict continued. In March 2023, the Special Representative presented her annual report to the Council (A/HRC/52/60). Her Office continued to support the universal periodic review process by providing information on the six grave violations and on progress made by countries on the children and armed conflict agenda. The Special Representative continued her cooperation with the Council's special procedures mandate holders and engaged with nine of its special rapporteurs and independent experts on common areas of concern.

79. The Special Representative and her Office also exchanged with United Nations mandated commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and investigations, including the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine.

80. Cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of the Child continued, including in the form of input on the Committee's country-specific concluding observations. In October 2022, as well as in March and May 2023, 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. In February 2023, the Office provided feedback on the Committee's draft general comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change. In March 2023, the Special Representative, together with the Special Representative on Violence against Children, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Colombia, Japan, the Geneva-based Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, War Child International, Save the Children and Child Rights Connect, organized a side event in Geneva on strengthening child participation and accountability through a child's rights approach to the implementation of the tools of the children and armed conflict mandate.

81. In November 2022, the Special Representative shared a video message for a round table on crimes against children, organized by the International Criminal Court with non-governmental organizations, and for the Trust Fund for Victims campaign commemorating 16 days of activism to end violence against women and girls. In May 2023, the Office of the Special Representative participated in the public consultations launched by the Office of the Prosecutor to renew its policy on children.

VI. Recommendations

82. The Special Representative remains deeply concerned by the scale and severity of the grave violations committed against children, including killing and maiming and the recruitment and use of children, the abduction of children and the denial of humanitarian access, which continued to be the violations verified in the highest numbers. She urges all parties to immediately end impunity and prevent the occurrence and reoccurrence of those violations; take all the necessary measures to achieve that aim, including the adoption and implementation of legislation criminalizing violations and abuses against children; and strengthen accountability.

83. The Special Representative is concerned by the continued trend of killing and maiming of children by explosive weapons and remnants of war, including the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area, including in populated areas, improvised explosive devices, landmines and bombs. She calls upon Member States to sign and fully implement international legal instruments pertaining to those weapons, including anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, and to comply with international humanitarian law. Armed groups must also refrain from their use. The

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

84. 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 humanitarian law and international human rights law, including 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 efforts to ensure the recognition of all persons under 18 years of age as children and their right to special protection as such, and to apply an age and gender differentiation lens to all efforts concerning them, and she encourages the international community to endorse and support the dissemination of her new campaign.

85. The Special Representative calls upon parties to conflict to allow and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access, as well as access by children to services, assistance and protection, and to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and assets. She expresses concern about the increasing instrumentalization of schools as part of hostilities and stresses that it is fundamental to preserve their civilian character. She urges Member States to do their utmost to protect schools, students and teachers, as well as hospitals, health-care institutions and health workers. She further calls for the implementation of special measures to ensure the continuous education of girls.

86. The Special Representative calls upon all Member States to ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and to endorse and implement the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.

87. The Special Representative calls for long-term holistic, gender-sensitive and age-sensitive reintegration programmes for children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, specifically calling upon Member States and other reintegration actors to provide sustainable support for such efforts across the humanitarian-development-peace spectrum, and she invites all of them to join the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers.

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

89. The Special Representative calls for increased capacity-building for providing technical support and advice on the children and armed conflict agenda to relevant national, subregional, regional and international partners, including Governments, military personnel, the United Nations and civil society, and invites Member States to support this process.