



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

*Provisional***9669**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 26 June 2024, 3 p.m.

New York

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*President:* Mr. Sangjin Kim . . . . . (Republic of Korea)

*Members:*

Algeria . . . . .	Mrs. Remaoun Noureddine
China . . . . .	Mr. Yuanzhou Xu
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Durán Medina
France . . . . .	Mr. Strehaiano
Guyana . . . . .	Ms. Hazlewood
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Ono
Malta . . . . .	Ms. Micallef
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Kumanga
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Kashaev
Sierra Leone . . . . .	Ms. Tangbe
Slovenia . . . . .	Mr. Slamic
Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Carpenter
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kriss
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Pine

## Agenda

### Children and armed conflict

How to advance our collective norms towards protecting children and ending all grave violations

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384)

Letter dated 12 June 2024 from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2024/468)

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*The meeting resumed at 3.05 p.m.*

**The President:** I would like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than three minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Flashing lights on the collars of the microphones will prompt speakers to bring their statements to a close after three minutes.

I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

**Mr. Elshandawily (Egypt)** (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt associates itself with the statement of the Group of Arab States, which will be delivered by the representative of the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We would like to add several points in our national capacity.

Egypt welcomes the convening of this meeting, especially as it coincides with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1261 (1999), which reiterated the demand for the protection of children in armed conflict and clearly condemned various violations against them.

Despite those important documents and other international instruments that formed the basis for the obligations of states to protect children from the scourge of armed conflicts, the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/384) before us includes alarming facts as it indicates that the United Nations, regrettably, documented more than 30,000 cases of violations against children in 2023.

The whole world is witnessing Israel's continued brutal and destructive war on the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the martyrdom of more than 37,000 Palestinian civilians, including 15,000 children who lost their lives as a result of an aggressive war that has also displaced, injured or made missing tens of thousands of others, in addition to those detained in Israeli prisons.

The report notes the multiple violations committed against children, including targeting their educational and health facilities, physical mutilation as a result of firing ammunition against unarmed children, in addition to the effects of preventing access to humanitarian and food aid, which led the United Nations to announce yesterday that 96 per cent of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are facing extremely dangerous levels of hunger, while UNICEF estimates that nine out of 10 children in the Gaza Strip face food poverty.

In that context, Egypt would like to emphasize the following points.

First, as the world commemorates the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1261 (1999), on children in armed conflict, and resolution 1265 (1999), on protection of civilians in armed conflict, Egypt underscores that confidence in the international system of justice and the system of international humanitarian law agreed upon by the world to avoid the scourge of war is being truly tested, and that the international community must rise to protect that system and apply it in a fair and comprehensive manner, devoid of double-standards, so as to protect civilians in armed conflicts, including children.

Secondly, Egypt calls on the international community to seriously assume its responsibilities to address the apparent double standards in dealing with international crises and violations of international humanitarian law. We also call on parties with influence to put pressure on Israel to stop its war on the Gaza Strip, lift its obstacles to the passage of aid, not obstruct the efforts of United Nations organizations, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, or target its staff, and immediately abide by Security Council resolutions and implement a comprehensive ceasefire to spare the region from further escalation.

Thirdly, Egypt reiterates its support for efforts to strengthen international cooperation aimed at ensuring respect for the provisions of international law and international human rights law relevant to the protection of children in armed conflict, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed Conflict. The best interests of the child must be a priority in all relevant international efforts, as stipulated in the Convention, and the implementation of the various international conventions on the need for children to grow up in a nurturing family environment should be an international goal for the protection of children in conflict situations.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

**Mr. Ćurić Hrvatinić (Croatia):** Croatia aligns itself with the statements to be made by the representative of European Union and by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed

Conflict. I would also like to make a few remarks in my national capacity.

I thank the Republic of Korea for convening this debate. I also thank former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; and Mr. Ted Chaiban, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, for sharing their valuable insights. I especially wish to thank the child briefer for bravely sharing his experience.

The expansion and intensification of armed conflicts, linked with pronounced erosion of respect for international humanitarian law, have caused devastating harm to children, exposing them increasingly to grave violations, with complete disregard for their fundamental human rights. The Secretary-General's report (S/2024/384) reveals alarming levels of killing and maiming of children, conflict-related sexual violence and child abductions.

It is particularly worrisome that Government forces were among the main perpetrators of attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian aid. We strongly condemn those serious violations and underline the importance of taking urgent action to prevent atrocity crimes. In that sense, it would be prudent to make better use of existing frameworks such as the responsibility to protect. All parties to conflict must respect international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Furthermore, we encourage States that have not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We also acknowledge the efforts of Member States that have endorsed the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Vancouver Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas.

As highlighted yesterday at the humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council, held under Croatia's chairmanship, impunity leads to further escalation of violence and widens existing trust gaps. Crimes involving violations against children, especially atrocity crimes, cannot go unpunished. We call on all States to ensure full implementation of accountability measures and to cooperate with

international justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court.

Conflict prevention is certainly one of the most efficient strategies for sustaining peace. In that respect, the Peacebuilding Commission can play an important role, including through addressing the root causes of conflict and supporting countries to develop and implement national child protection plans. Also, deploying the light-footprint civilian missions could assist transitions from peacekeeping to peacebuilding or prevent fragile countries from sliding into conflict in the first place. The review of the peacebuilding architecture next year provides us with an opportunity to further explore that possibility.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

**Mr. Szczerski (Poland):** Poland thanks the Republic of Korea for convening this debate and the briefers for their input.

We align ourselves with the statements to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

As a proponent of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we view the protection of children and ensuring their well-being as global priorities of the international community. We are glad to see the increasing importance of this topic at the United Nations, as well as in the context of a strategic approach to future challenges and the ongoing negotiations of the Pact for the Future.

We are deeply concerned, however, that the situation of children in armed conflict is deteriorating dramatically, especially in Ukraine, the Gaza Strip and some parts of Africa. We see civilian infrastructure being targeted and humanitarian access being limited or denied. That is a clear violation of international humanitarian law. Every such violation is a dangerous step towards a world without rules and principles. As a global community, we must do everything possible to stop that process and hold the perpetrators accountable.

As we have learned from the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/384), in 2023, the highest number of cases of serious abuses of children's rights was identified in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. While Poland fully supports Israel's right to self-defence and condemns the attacks by Hamas and its taking of hostages, we consistently reiterate our call

for respect for international law, including international humanitarian law. We cannot ignore the fact that half of Gaza's population consists of children and that their situation is dire owing to the severely limited access to humanitarian aid. We regret to see that the Israeli armed forces have been included for the first time on the list of shame of warring parties committing grave violations against children in armed conflict. We urge the Israeli Government to consider those factors.

In Ukraine, Russia continues its disgraceful practice of forcibly displacing Ukrainian children. That violates the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Genocide Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We note that the 2023 report continues to include Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups among the parties committing grave violations. We call on the international community to join Ukrainian initiatives aimed at facilitating the return of Ukrainian children to their homes, such as the Bring Kids Back UA initiative and the peace formula. We also welcome the report's emphasis on the vulnerabilities faced by children with disabilities in conflict zones. This year marks the fifth anniversary of resolution 2475 (2019) which underscores the need for inclusive measures to protect and support those children. Poland, as a proponent and a co-author of the resolution, hopes that the Secretary-General will continue to address their situation in his future reports.

Poland supports the United Nations efforts focused on children, as demonstrated by its voluntary contributions in past years. In 2024, we have already supported the World Food Programme and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, provided additional medical aid to Egyptian hospitals treating patients from Gaza and donated parachutes to Jordan for humanitarian airdrops to Gaza. Furthermore, we contributed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees regional refugee response plan for the Sudan, aimed at addressing the most urgent humanitarian needs of those forced to flee to neighbouring countries.

Poland supports the continued advancement of the children and armed conflict agenda. And we support the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in its advocacy for the endorsement and implementation of international standards and norms, such as the Principles and Guidelines on Children

Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe School Declaration. We also count on the good coordination within the United Nations system and with other international actors committed to protecting children.

To conclude, the international community cannot and should not accept the figures presented in this year's report. How we treat children today determines the world we will live in for decades to come.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

**Mr. Akram (Pakistan):** First of all, I would like to thank the delegation of the Republic of Korea and its presidency for organizing this annual debate on children and armed conflict. We also thank former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Deputy Executive Director of Humanitarian Action and Supply Operations of UNICEF and other briefers for their insightful and thoughtful statements.

Pakistan echoes the deep concern expressed in the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2024/384), which details 32,990 verified grave violations against children. In 2023, the world witnessed an unprecedented surge in violence against children, particularly in the Gaza war. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the number of children killed in international armed conflicts tripled in 2023.

Children living under foreign occupation are particularly vulnerable to human rights abuse and violence. The annual report's most glaring and persistent failure and example of double standards has been its selective omission of certain situations, most importantly the children of Palestine. It has taken the killing of 14,000 children in the Gaza war for Israel to be included in the report's list. Meanwhile, the plight of children in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, included in previous reports, has been unjustly omitted, despite their ongoing suffering under foreign occupation. Generations of Kashmiri children have grown up amid fear, violence and repression under foreign occupation. The humanitarian crisis for children in Indian-occupied Kashmir worsened significantly after India's unilateral actions of 5 August 2019 to consolidate its illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir. We vividly recall the heart-wrenching image

of a three-year old Kashmiri boy sitting in shock on his grandfather's lifeless body, just murdered by an Indian soldier. We remember 18-month-old Hiba, whose eyes were ruptured by pellet guns fired by security forces inside her home in Kapran village, Kashmir.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and several Special Rapporteurs of the Human Rights Council have asked for access to Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir in order to investigate reports of massive violations of human rights. None of them have been provided such access. I would like to inquire from the Special Representative whether she was able to go to Indian-occupied Kashmir during her visit to India. The Special Representative should investigate and report on the whereabouts and conditions of the 13,000 Kashmiri youth who were widely reported to have been "picked up" and detained by the occupation forces after 5 August 2019. It was also reported that many of them were tortured in order to extract confessions and deter them and their families from joining the Kashmiri liberation struggle.

In 2022, Pakistan provided the United Nations with a comprehensive dossier of 3,432 cases of war crimes, including crimes against women and children, committed by senior officers of the Indian occupying forces. Those violations were corroborated with audio and video evidence. Among them are numerous cases of crimes against Kashmiri children. My delegation will provide those cases to the Special Representative for appropriate reflection in future reports.

The Secretary-General's report last year (S/2023/363) rightly urged India to implement measures, including the prohibition of the use of lethal and non-lethal force on children, ending the use of pellet guns and preventing all forms of ill-treatment of children in detention, and protecting children from sexual offences. We strongly urge continued reporting on Jammu and Kashmir, illegally occupied by India, where human rights violations against children are, tragically, routine.

Pakistan supports the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to address situations of children in armed conflict. However, we believe that the legal parameters of her mandate, that is, reporting on situations of children in armed conflict, must be scrupulously respected. In that context, my delegation wishes to state that references to Pakistan in

the Secretary-General's reports are outside the mandate of the Special Representative.

As one of the earliest signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Pakistan is fully committed to implementing its provisions. We have adopted extensive legal, policy and operational measures to protect children. Last year, Pakistan established a national committee on child protection and appointed a national focal person. Pakistan has endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. Despite our principled position on the Special Representative's mandate, we will continue to engage with her Office to further strengthen child protection in Pakistan, in line with our national framework and international obligations.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

**Mr. Arbeiter (Canada) (spoke in French):** I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We welcome today's open debate, organized by the Republic of Korea, and thank the speakers for their statements. We would like to express our deep appreciation for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her Office, UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and all child protection actors within the United Nations and civil society.

The Group of Friends is deeply concerned about the scale and scope of the grave violations against children, as presented in the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2024/384). We are particularly alarmed by the increase in grave violations committed against children in 2023. The total number of grave violations presented in the report is the highest ever recorded by the United Nations. The staggering increases in verified grave violations in some of the situations of concern in the report are deeply troubling, and we are appalled by the devastating effects on children in all the situations addressed therein.

We take note of the listing decisions mentioned in the report's annexes and of the criteria underlying those decisions, as formulated by the Secretary-General. The Group of Friends calls on all parties listed in the annexes to immediately develop and implement action plans and other concrete, time-bound measures to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict. If such

measures are already in place, we ask that they be fully and effectively implemented by the parties listed.

Over time, the application of concrete, time-bound measures has helped to reduce grave violations against children in many situations of concern and has led to concrete, positive changes in children's lives. That is a testament to the positive impact of this mandate when a commitment is made to its implementation.

*(spoke in English)*

To strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict, the Group of Friends would like to make five recommendations.

First, we urge all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, and with international norms and standards for the protection of children.

Secondly, we call for full accountability for all grave violations through national and international justice mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court.

Thirdly, we encourage all United Nations Member States to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and to consider endorsing and implementing practical child protection instruments, such as the Safe Schools Declaration, the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Fourthly, we stress the importance of adequate resourcing for child protection specialists and activities across United Nations mechanisms and operations. We call for greater support for the full and effective implementation of child protection mandates by United Nations peace operations, including in contexts where they may be in transition.

Fifthly, we encourage Security Council members to systematically follow up on the conclusions adopted by the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We thank Malta for its efforts as Chair, and we stand ready to support the Working Group in that effort.

In conclusion, the Group of Friends would like to reiterate its commitment to the full implementation of the children and armed conflict mandate and agenda, as well as its full support for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism. We call upon the Secretary-General and the Special Representative to continue to uphold the independence, impartiality and credibility of the tools at their disposal to protect children in armed conflict. The system we have built together to better protect children in armed conflict is strong. The Group of Friends stands ready to ensure that it stays as robust as possible moving forward.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

**Mr. Nasir (Indonesia):** Indonesia appreciates the Republic of Korea for organizing this open debate. We thank the briefers for their presentations.

Sadly, our meeting today is taking place against a backdrop of a truly dark moment in history. Genocide is unfolding in Gaza, with children as the main victims. As stated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/384), Palestinian children are facing an unprecedented scale and intensity of grave violations and injustices. To date, more than 15,000 Palestinian children have been killed and more than 21,000 are missing. What is happening in Gaza, particularly to children, is inhumane. At this stage, while it is painful to say it, the children who have died may perhaps be the lucky ones, because those who survive remain in a living hell, many with no families, while the rest of the world, and the Council, seems unable to help. Regrettably, similar suffering is being faced by many children in Myanmar, the Sudan and other conflicts around the world.

The Security Council cannot continue to fail to address and resolve conflicts given their grave impact on children. The Council's failure will lead to generations of children trapped in the vicious circle of hatred and violence. Simply put, it is a death sentence for future generations. In that context, allow me to emphasize the following.

First, violence against children in armed conflict is among the gravest violation of human rights. Unfortunately, human rights are often in the eye of the beholder, and many seem to have turned a blind eye to the right to live of Palestinian children. We must stop the double standard in protecting children against grave violations of human rights. We must press hard and take action to stop the use of explosive weapons in

populated areas and stop indiscriminate attacks against civilians and critical infrastructure.

Secondly, safe, rapid and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance must be guaranteed in Gaza and other conflict areas. Collaboration and engagement with regional organizations and humanitarian actors are of great importance. In our region, Indonesia continues to support stronger engagement between Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management in ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including for children in Myanmar.

Thirdly, the Council must translate commitment into concrete action. Indonesia welcomes the efforts of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We call on the Working Group to produce action-oriented recommendations that ensure effective assistance and protection for children in armed conflicts, especially in Gaza. Its ability to do so will be a litmus test of whether our meeting today makes a difference.

Finally, we welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation to ensure that child protection be included in the relevant mandates of peacekeeping operations and special political missions. Ensuring the necessary support for resources and capacity is key to its effective implementation. Let us ensure that all children, everywhere, are entitled to live in peace and dignity.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Bulgaria.

**Ms. Stoeva (Bulgaria):** Bulgaria aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and with the one just delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. I would like to add a few points of priority for my country.

Allow me first to express my appreciation, Sir, for your and the Republic of Korea's outstanding work on this year's open debate. I would also like to thank the briefers for their presentations — they were both sobering and heart-wrenching.

I reiterate Bulgaria's unwavering support for the children and armed conflict mandate and for the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter. The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/384) underscores the

escalating urgency of the issue. The number of children affected by armed conflict is more than alarming. It has surged by 21 per cent since 2022, reaching 32,990 grave violations in 2023. That surge, particularly the 35 per cent increase in killings and maimings, highlights a severe disregard for children's rights, with significant incidents in Israel and Gaza, Burkina Faso, Myanmar, Somalia, the Sudan, Syria and Ukraine, to name a few places. Bulgaria strongly supports the children and armed conflict action plans and urges all parties to armed conflicts to implement them fully.

Since 7 October 2023, when Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel, followed by Israel's military response in Gaza, the United Nations has verified 8,009 grave violations, affecting 4,247 Palestinian children and 113 Israeli children. Every young life lost is one too many, and there is no justification for it. We call for the urgent and full implementation of resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024).

The United Nations has also verified 938 grave violations against 543 children in Ukraine, including killings, maimings, detentions, abductions and attacks on schools and hospitals, mainly attributed to the Russian aggressors. In addition, 122 children were abducted by Russian forces and affiliated groups. Bulgaria remains steadfast in its condemnation of Russia's unprovoked and illegal aggression against Ukraine and reiterates its call to the Russian Federation for the immediate return of all abducted Ukrainian children.

We are deeply concerned by the effects those conflicts have on children and are following with alarm the situation in the Sudan, Haiti and Afghanistan, where children are also severely affected. Bulgaria calls on all parties to fully respect international law and international humanitarian law at all times, to implement protocols for the handover of children to civilian child protection actors, not to use schools and hospitals for military purposes and to support the Safe Schools Declaration. We encourage adherence to the Vancouver Principles, ratification 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 Paris Principles. Parties should also refrain from using explosive weapons in populated areas at all times and endorse the relevant political declaration.

In conclusion, we must ensure zero tolerance for violations of international human rights law and

international humanitarian law, and perpetrators must be held to account. Bulgaria reaffirms its commitment to protecting children in armed conflict and emphasizes the critical role of education in preventing their recruitment and use by armed forces.

Allow me to end with the words of Nelson Mandela that remind us that there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children. It is our duty to ensure that we treat them right.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

**Ms. Rodríguez Mancia** (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Republic of Korea for convening this important debate, the Special Representative, the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, on behalf of The Elders, and the Congolese child briefer for their valuable contributions and tireless efforts.

We applaud the progress made in some contexts in the field of child protection. However, the findings and trends reported in the Secretary-General's latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) are alarming and heartbreaking. We deplore the fact that, despite the efforts of the international community to prevent all threats to children, grave violations against children by armed groups increased in 2023. We condemn those blatant acts of contempt for humanity.

Indiscriminate attacks against hospitals and schools and direct attacks against civilians by means of explosive weapons, landmines and chemical weapons, which cause the deaths of thousands of children, must be subject to strong sanctions by the Council. In that regard, the lack of humanitarian access to meet the needs of children is also of grave concern. We urge all parties to conflicts to allow and facilitate humanitarian aid, in accordance with international law.

We will therefore continue to advocate for conflict prevention, early warning, the responsibility to protect, disarmament, ceasefires, mediation and the establishment of good-faith peace talks that prioritize child protection. We consider the promotion and implementation of comprehensive approaches that tie peace and security to human rights to be of crucial importance. Access to justice; ensuring accountability; promoting truth, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition are also vital to combat and prevent grave violations against children. We call for child protection

capacities and monitoring and reporting mechanisms to be maintained after the withdrawal of peacekeeping operations in order to avoid increasing vulnerabilities and risks and, consequently, serious violations.

Before concluding, we call on those States that have not yet done so to consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration and the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. We reaffirm our full support for the children and armed conflict agenda, the mandate of the Special Representative and the New Agenda for Peace. We hope that the Security Council will redouble its efforts from a gender perspective, adopt a common position of zero tolerance for grave violations and allocate the necessary resources for both child protection and conflict prevention.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

**Mr. Pretterhofer** (Austria): Austria thanks the Republic of Korea for convening this open debate and aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union and the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. Today's topic, how to advance our collective norms to protect children and end all grave violations in armed conflicts, is of the utmost importance to Austria, and we would like to thank you, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity.

Children suffer immeasurably during armed conflict, whether they are injured or killed in attacks or lose their families and the loved ones responsible for their daily needs. We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2024/384) and commend the invaluable work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter. We are deeply disturbed by the extreme increase of 35 per cent per cent, as compared to the previous year's figures, in violence against children in armed conflicts around the world. The growing number of children being killed or maimed leaves families with gaps that can never be filled and children with physical and psychological scars for life. The verified 30,700 grave violations of international humanitarian law committed in 2023, affecting almost



22,600 children worldwide, is a shocking number. We must not forget: they are not merely statistics, they are individuals with hopes and dreams, rights and human dignity. In particular, the drastic increase in incidents of violations owing to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is alarming. Austria reiterates its strong commitment to implementing more concrete measures to protect children and all civilians during conflicts.

For Austria, it is clear that the protection of children in armed conflicts is not an option, it is a must. We call on all Member States, in particular parties to armed conflicts, to respect international law, including humanitarian law and human rights obligations, as well as international child protection norms, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol. Those responsible for grave violations against children must be brought to justice through prompt investigations, as no political difference or conflict can legitimize a violation of the norms protecting children in armed conflicts. In that regard, Austria reiterates its full and unwavering support for the International Criminal Court.

Many of us in this Chamber have children and, as parents, the thought of our children being harmed is our worst nightmare. That common understanding reminds us of our shared humanity and should strengthen our will to protect all children from the horrors of armed conflict. We all have a responsibility to ensure that children are protected and that their rights are upheld. Let me be clear: every violation is one too many. Austria stands ready to support all efforts to protect children in conflict zones, so that, when we meet again next year, the protection of children in armed conflicts will have improved significantly.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Greece.

**Mr. Sekeris (Greece):** At the outset, allow me to thank the Republic of Korea for organizing this open debate and our speakers for their thorough briefings.

Greece aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and would like to add the following in its national capacity.

First and foremost, I would like to thank in particular the eighth Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his invaluable contributions to

the children and armed conflict agenda, given that his mandate as Secretary-General coincided with the second, very productive and forward-looking period of evolution of the children and armed conflict mandate, which highlighted such initiatives as the Safe Schools Declaration.

As we heard today, over the past few years, violence against children in conflict situations has exploded, reaching alarming levels. In fact, according to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384), in 2023, grave violations against children increased by 21 per cent. As the Special Representative stated earlier this morning, there is no excuse for harming children. Greece unequivocally condemns those violations, especially killing and maiming, the denial of humanitarian access and attacks on schools and hospitals in conflict areas, which deprive children of their right to education and health care and expose them to heightened risks of other grave violations, such as abductions and sexual violence. Indeed, no one can deny that gender plays a key role in children's exposure to grave violations. Attacks on education and acts of sexual violence have a disproportionate direct impact on girls, as well as devastating consequences for their communities at large. Those violations, committed in total disregard for international humanitarian and human rights law, cannot be tolerated.

Greece therefore calls on all parties to conflict to allow and facilitate the rapid, safe and unimpeded access of relief personnel, as well as the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to all children, irrespective of their age, gender, disability or diversity characteristics. Moreover, we stress the need to protect civilians — women, children, girls and boys — as well as civilian infrastructure — hospitals and schools — and their personnel. Last but not least, it is of the utmost importance that all child protection provisions be incorporated into the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions, in particular during mission transitions.

In conclusion, allow me to thank the Secretary-General, his Special Representative, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and her Office for their dedication to the protection of children in conflict settings. As an incoming member of the Security Council, Greece would like to reaffirm its full commitment to supporting the children and armed conflict agenda, within the framework of our forthcoming Security Council

membership and in full alignment and coherence with the relevant agenda on women and peace and security.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

**Mr. França Danese (Brazil):** I thank the briefers for their important assessments.

Brazil was gravely concerned about the findings of the most recent annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384). A 21 per cent increase in the number of serious violations cannot be normalized. Concrete and urgent measures are needed. Brazil welcomes today's debate, proposed by the Republic of Korea, as it focuses on practical steps to reverse that trend. The reasons for the increase are not unknown. The expansion of conflicts and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas are some of the reasons mentioned in the Secretary-General's report. Civilians have long overtaken military personnel in the number of casualties. They have become targets of deliberate attacks in conflict zones.

We are witnessing blatant disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Under those circumstances, we should not only reinforce the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian aid, but also ask ourselves how to make parties to conflict understand that humanitarian action depends on those very principles to carry out its activities. Parties to conflict must comprehend that the denial of humanitarian access is a serious violation of international humanitarian law. It should be clear that subjecting civilians to starvation to serve military ends is a war crime.

Furthermore, the priority given to military gain is especially appalling when it affects an inherently vulnerable group, such as children. It does not need to be that way. The plans of action negotiated by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict with parties to conflict are proof that it is possible to maintain a minimum level of civility, even amid hostilities. Brazil commends Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter for her extraordinary work and for her courage in reaching out to all parties to conflict in dangerous circumstances. We must provide her Office with adequate resources and fully support her efforts in engaging with parties in conflict-affected countries to safeguard the best interests of children.

We must also ensure that transitions and drawdowns will not result in weaker child protection when there are risks to their safety. The Security Council must not neglect that need when it re-evaluates the mandates of peacekeeping and special political missions. Within that framework, sufficient resources must be directed towards maintaining child protection and its monitoring activities.

I could not conclude without voicing Brazil's deep concern over the ongoing situation in Gaza. The conflict in the region alone accounted for approximately a quarter of the grave violations verified last year, affecting more than 4,200 Palestinian children and 100 Israeli children. We must find practical measures to alleviate the suffering of those children. However, the most immediate way to protect children in the region is through a permanent ceasefire, peace negotiations and a genuine effort towards a two-State solution.

**The President:** I now give the floor to Mr. Lambrinidis.

**Mr. Lambrinidis:** I congratulate you, Mr. President, on organizing this meeting.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia, as well as Andorra, Monaco and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

The recent Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) paints a very concerning picture. It shows a significant increase in all six grave violations affecting children, with most being committed in times of war. We all know what they are, but let us take a moment to truly think about their implications for children's lives: killing and maiming, recruitment or use in armed forces and armed groups, sexual violence, abduction, attacks against schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access. It is impossible to imagine that anyone in this Chamber approves of such actions being committed against the youngest and most vulnerable members of our societies. Yet, we clearly struggle to put an end to those violations. That can no longer be acceptable. There must be zero tolerance for violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We call on States to hold those responsible to account and encourage cooperation with international

justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court.

Looking at the Secretary-General's report in more detail, Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups continue to be listed as responsible for committing grave violations against children. The report outlines a range of grave violations committed in the context of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, including in particular killing and maiming and abductions. We reiterate our call upon the Russian Federation to abide by its international obligations, to step up its efforts to protect children and to facilitate the immediate return of all Ukrainian children who have been abducted and are being held against their or their legitimate guardians' will.

We also take note of the grave violations committed against children in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory on and in the aftermath of 7 October 2023. We are appalled by the immense suffering of civilians, particularly children, the critical humanitarian situation in Gaza, as well as the imminent risk of famine caused by insufficient humanitarian access. The European Union urges respect for international law obligations and increased efforts to protect children. Preventing further loss of life is an absolute priority. An immediate ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages and a surge of humanitarian assistance to Gaza are urgently needed. We remain firmly committed to a lasting and sustainable peace based on the two-State solution.

We are moreover extremely alarmed by the deteriorating situation for children in the context of the spiralling violence in the Sudan and worried by the challenges humanitarian actors face when seeking to access children in need. The denial of humanitarian access to children constitutes one of the six grave violations and also a violation of international humanitarian law. It is essential that all parties fulfil their obligations under international law to ensure the protection of all children in the Sudan and cease hostilities, as recalled during the international conference for the Sudan and neighbouring countries, held in Paris on 15 April.

The European Union remains a staunch supporter of the children and armed conflict mandate and welcomes ongoing efforts to strengthen preventive measures, including joint and national action plans. We also underline the critical importance of sustainable reintegration of children formerly associated with

armed forces or groups and join the Secretary-General's call for renewed efforts in that area. We also call upon all Member States to reaffirm their commitments to the international legal framework protecting children in conflict situations, including through the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and considering the endorsement of the Paris Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration. We stress the need to protect the right to education.

Just two days ago, the EU adopted a significant update to its own EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict. That update — the first since 2008 — is a significant step forward in the EU's unwavering commitment to the children and armed conflict agenda. In parallel, we updated the Checklist for the Integration of the Protection of Children Affected by Armed Conflict into Common Security and Defence Policy Mission and Operations for more than 20 crisis management missions. Both documents emphasize implementation responsibilities, coordination in a humanitarian-development-peace nexus, sustainable funding and resources, stronger legal and policy frameworks for accountability, the critical role of education and psychosocial and mental health services and the importance of challenging harmful norms that impede child protection.

In conclusion, two months ago, during the Security Council open debate on conflict-related sexual violence, UN-Women Goodwill Ambassador Danai Gurira asked us a chilling question. She demanded to know whether, for Member States whose own State soldiers perpetuate such atrocities, "fighting their wars on the bodies of their most vulnerable [was] a tactic of war?" (S/PV.9614, *p.* 9) The answer to that question must be a resounding no. The ongoing suffering of children in armed conflict demands our unwavering action. The European Union stands ready to work with its partners to ensure a future where all children are protected from the horrors of war.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

**Mr. Abd Karim** (Malaysia): I would like to thank the Republic of Korea for convening this important debate. We also thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and the briefers for their valuable contributions.

The updates in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384), as well as in the briefings we heard today, are deeply concerning. The past year has seen a worrisome trend of grave violations against children, with the highest numbers occurring in Gaza, Myanmar and the Sudan, among others. Malaysia is appalled by the reported increase in the number of child victims of grave violations in armed conflict — from 27,180 in 2022 to 32,990 in 2023. The outbreak and escalation of conflicts have profoundly affected children, exposing them to unimaginable suffering.

We deplore attacks on schools and hospitals which deprive children of their right to education and health care. We condemn the denial of unimpeded humanitarian access to innocent civilians in conflict. We continue to be concerned about by the anticipated decline in the humanitarian situation in several countries, including in Myanmar, owing to incidents of denial of humanitarian access in various forms, as verified in the report.

Malaysia reiterates the call by the Secretary-General for all parties to adhere strictly to their obligations under international humanitarian law, notably the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions, as well as those under international human rights law. We urge all parties to take all necessary measures to end violations against children. The relevant resolutions, including those by the Security Council, must be fully respected and implemented.

We continue to underline the importance of a reporting mechanism that is credible, independent, impartial, objective and transparent. The listing of the Israeli armed and security forces for killing and injuring children, as well as attacking schools and hospitals, is long overdue and commended. Atrocities committed by Israel against innocent Palestinian civilians, including children, have persisted with impunity for far too long. The lives of thousands of Palestinian children could have been saved had there been strong condemnation and decisive action against the occupying Power much earlier. Malaysia demands a thorough investigation into those grave violations by Israel against Palestinian children, and we insist that the perpetrators be held accountable.

Malaysia welcomes progress on engagements between the United Nations and the relevant parties to protect children in armed conflict. However, there is a

lot more to be done. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that children are protected from the ravages of war and conflict. Beyond the numbers and statistics in the report are real lives of children who deserve to grow up in peace, free from fear and safe from exploitation and violence. Children deserve our protection and the opportunity to achieve their goals in life. Let us guarantee them the future they deserve.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

**Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan):** I extend my gratitude to the presidency of the Republic of Korea for convening this timely open debate, coinciding with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1261 (1999) — the first to ever condemn the targeting of children in armed conflict.

We convey our heartfelt appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, former Secretary-General and Deputy Chair of The Elders, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Ted Chaiban for their thorough briefings and insights on enhancing our joint efforts to safeguard children in armed conflicts. We appreciate the moving testimony from the child briefer from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also applaud the coordinated and tireless efforts of the team of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and other United Nations entities in their pursuit of an end to grave violations against children.

We express profound concern about the significant escalation in the scale and severity of the six grave violations committed against children in the past year, as detailed in the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2024/384). At the same time, the recent signing of action plans with several parties involved in conflict, along with the adoption of conclusions on Afghanistan and Nigeria by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict demonstrate the international consensus on the importance of this issue. It also indicates that positive outcomes are within our reach. We urge all parties to harness that collective will to protect children — our most precious resource.

In that context, Kazakhstan would like to put forward the following recommendations.

First, we must advocate for full compliance with the relevant international treaties and Security Council

resolutions. Failure to uphold those obligations is a breach of morality and humanity. In addition, parties should adhere to the recommendations of the Secretary-General's annual report and endorse international tools related to the protection of children in armed conflict, such as the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles.

Secondly, we need to reinforce accountability for all grave violations against children. Preserving child protection, monitoring and reporting capacities following the closure and transition of United Nations peace missions is vital. Therefore, I would like to stress that it is important to formulate comprehensive child protection strategies and allocate sufficient funding to maintain child protection priorities after the transition.

Thirdly, children who lack opportunities and education are more vulnerable to recruiters and perpetrators. Thus, focusing on preventive measures, including increased investments in overall development, and addressing the socioeconomic needs of children, are critical to prevent grave violations. We must also enhance support for reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for children affected by armed conflict, as we do in Kazakhstan. That will assist them in reintegrating more effectively into society and thriving in their own communities.

To conclude, I once again reiterate Kazakhstan's commitment to all collective measures to ensure the safety and welfare of children.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

**Mr. Zahneisen** (Germany): Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We thank the Republic of Korea for convening this debate and all briefers for their valuable statements. We further commend the Secretary-General for his important and in-depth report (S/2024/384), and we would like to thank him for his continued engagement and his unwavering personal commitment to better protecting children in armed conflict.

Germany is shocked by the 21 per cent increase in grave violations in 2023. We are particularly concerned about the deteriorating situations in the Sudan, Myanmar, Colombia, Lebanon and Nigeria, and we are alarmed by the steep increase and high number of grave

violations in Israel and Palestine, where children are suffering tremendously in the war unleashed by Hamas and other terrorist groups on 7 October 2023. It is unbearable that so many children were killed, maimed and abducted on that day, some of which have been held hostage in Gaza for more than eight months. We also condemn Hamas's despicable practice of abusing schools and hospitals for military activities. We further reiterate our call on Israel to conduct military operations strictly in line with humanitarian law, to make immediate, credible and effective efforts to spare innocent lives, including the lives of children, and to significantly improve humanitarian access. Much more needs to be done to diminish the consequences of that war on the lives of hundreds of thousands of children in Gaza. In that regard, we echo the Security Council's call to accept the three-stage peace plan proposed by Egypt, Qatar and the United States, which we see as the best chance for peace.

Russia rightfully remains listed. It is unacceptable that Russia, in the third year of its unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine and after being listed for the second time, has still not signed an action plan with the United Nations.

In conclusion, Germany fully supports the Secretary-General's recommendations and urges parties to conflict to respect international law, to sign the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, to ratify the relevant conventions, especially the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Vancouver Principles, and to work with the United Nations on concrete plans to protect children.

The children and armed conflict mandate is a powerful tool, and Germany remains fully committed to it. We continue to be UNICEF's second largest donor, and we will continue to support the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the development of the guidance note on denial of humanitarian access, which will be launched later this year.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

**Mr. Vidal Mercado** (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Republic of Korea for the opportunity to participate in this open debate, and we congratulate you, Mr. President, on your steering of the meeting. We take note of the briefings and contributions from the briefers today.

Chile associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

The scourge of armed conflicts is devastating and constitutes one of the main threats to international peace and security, through which the rights of subjects in the international system are violated, with children being the most affected. It is deeply worrisome that grave violations of children's rights in armed conflict increased by 21 per cent in 2023. The United Nations verified 32,990 grave violations, which affected 15,847 boys, 6,252 girls and 458 children of unknown sex in 25 situations and one regional monitoring arrangement for the Lake Chad basin region. Much of that increase was due to the wars in the Sudan, where violations increased by 480 per cent; Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, where they increased by 155 per cent; Myanmar, where a 123 per cent increase was recorded; and Colombia, where violations increased by 67 per cent. In addition, worrisome new situations have emerged in Haiti and the Niger, where the number of grave violations against children is high and were included for the first time in the report (S/2024/384). Indeed, in Haiti, 384 grave violations against 307 children were recorded.

We recognize that declines in grave violations have been recorded in the Philippines, Iraq, Mozambique, South Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen. In addition, we would highlight the fact that the United Nations made progress in contacts with parties to protect children in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen, with more than 10,600 children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups receiving protection or reintegration support in 2023.

There is no doubt that the protection of children in armed conflict is an endeavour that requires the participation of all stakeholders in the international community, given the serious consequences that these

conflicts hold for those who are the most precious element of the future of the world.

Chile is taking part in the international system's efforts to respond to the moral imperative of safeguarding the rights of children in armed conflict. This participation has taken the concrete form of our ratification of the relevant treaties, such as the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We are also committed to the Vancouver Principles, which seek to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers in conflict situations.

For our country, supporting these principles is one way of contributing to the collective commitment to the maintenance of international peace and security, so as to render the work of personnel deployed in peace operations more effective in protecting civilians, in particular children. The extent of children's vulnerability and their developmental stage, which makes them more compliant and easily manipulated than those in other age groups, thus putting them at risk of being used to commit war crimes, requires a preventive approach. In the report under consideration, boys were more frequently targeted for recruitment and use, killing and maiming, and abduction. Girls, for their part, suffered a disproportionately higher incidence of conflict-related sexual violence. The number of verified cases of grave violations recorded a sharp increase in the recruitment and use of boys. Factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, race and disability determined children's vulnerability to these violations.

With respect to the Secretary-General's inclusion of Israel on the list of countries that engage in grave violations of the rights of children in armed conflict, we believe that can serve as a further wake-up call for an end to Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip. There is no doubt that, in the conflict in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, the grave violations against children in the course of the hostilities have been unprecedented in their scale and intensity. Of the 8,009 grave violations perpetrated against 4,360 children, 116 were perpetrated by Hamas against Israeli children as a result of the attacks it launched on 7 October 2023, and the remainder by Israel against Palestinian children. In addition, more than 23,000 grave violations against children were reported — 3,900 against Israeli children

and 19,887 against Palestinian children, which are pending verification.

Finally, we take note of the recommendations of the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict and call for their implementation.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

**Mr. Alwasil** (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

We have noted the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) and are deeply saddened at the grave violations against children's rights worldwide with no accountability and with impunity, including the unprecedented violations of Palestinian children's rights by the Israeli occupation, which is committing a shameful genocide in the Gaza Strip and waging a brutal war on innocent Palestinian civilians in their homes and in the tents where they have taken refuge, in disregard of all international calls for Palestinian civilians to be protected. The targeting by the Israeli occupation of civilian infrastructure, hospitals, schools, humanitarian aid convoys, humanitarian and rescue workers and medical teams constitutes a flagrant violation of international laws and standards. Israel is deliberately starving Palestinian people, using hunger as a weapon of war, which has thus far cost the lives of dozens of Palestinian children. UNICEF and the World Food Programme warn that more children are at risk of death by starvation.

The Arab Group reiterates its call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and for pressure to be brought to bear on Israel to end its war in the Gaza Strip. That war has proved to be against Palestinian civilians and has claimed more than 37,000 Palestinian lives, including 15,000 innocent children. More pressure must be brought to bear on Israel so that it ends its aggression against Gaza immediately and so that all unimpeded humanitarian aid flows freely and swiftly, as required by the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024).

In that regard, we reiterate our call for all border crossings to be opened in accordance with international law so that humanitarian aid, including food and medicine, can reach the Palestinian people immediately and urgently, for the evacuation of the wounded and

other patients, in particular children, and for them to be afforded the necessary medical care. It is also paramount to call for the release of all Palestinian children arrested by Israel, who are being subjected to harsh detention conditions and denied their basic rights and who are being harassed, along with their families.

The Arab Group welcomes the Secretary-General's decision to blacklist the Israeli occupation army and security forces for their heinous crimes against Palestinian children, which — shockingly and horrifically — include killings and attacks on hospitals and schools. The Arab Group expressed its concerns about that in a letter dated 9 April addressed to the Secretary-General. We call upon the international community to assume its responsibility for protecting Palestinian children in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to compel Israel, as the occupying Power, to adhere to the laws and resolutions that guarantee the protection of children. The Arab Group stresses that Palestinian children have the right to live with dignity and freedom on their land, in safety, free from fear and displacement and safe from all kinds of violence, while enjoying their full right to international protection.

In conclusion, the criminal practices of the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people and the violence that targets their existence and future are something that no human conscience or code of ethics can accept. We therefore reiterate the need for Israel to be held accountable for its crimes, for justice to be served for the Palestinian victims, for an end to the Israeli occupation and for an independent Palestinian State to be established in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy. That will give hope to future generations and bring peace and security for all peoples of the region.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Philippines.

**Mr. Lagdameo** (Philippines): We thank the delegation of the Republic of Korea for organizing this very important debate, the focus of which we highly welcome. Advancing our collective norms towards protecting children and ending all grave violations is aligned with the priorities of my delegation on the rights of children agenda. We also thank His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Ted Chaiban and other briefers for their presentations.

Children have the right to a safe, healthy and carefree childhood. They do not belong on the battlefield, and they have the right not to know the horrors of war. Armed conflict, in which children have no say, deprives them of their right to be children. Armed conflict endangers children's lives and deprives them of access to education and health in cases of attacks on schools and hospitals. Disrupted access to education and health services because of armed conflict has long-term consequences on the physical and mental well-being of children and hampers their development. The Philippines is committed to protecting children and fulfilling its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We stand for peace and the peaceful settlement of disputes. We call on parties to conflict to establish enduring ceasefires. We also call for safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access to save and protect children.

The Philippines appreciates the engagement of Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter, and we are committed to working with her to address grave violations against children. We note the reported substantial decrease in grave violations against children in my country, which were mostly committed by rebels and terrorist groups. Led by the Council for the Welfare of Children, the Philippines utilizes a whole-of-government approach in addressing grave violations committed against children. The Government is committed to implementing the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act across all sectors of society. Civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and indigenous communities have a meaningful role to play in raising awareness regarding child protection issues, particularly preventing the recruitment of child combatants. The Philippine armed forces and police authorities have adopted child protection policies and have finalized the protocols on handling children in situations of armed conflict.

Capacity-building for Government and non-government partners has also been initiated to enhance the prevention of attacks against schools. The Government trained more than 3,000 child protection actors on the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act and its implementation. We note the recommendation of Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter on establishing reintegration programmes. That is already being done by the Department of Social Welfare and Development and will be scaled up,

consistent with the principle that we wish for everyone in the Philippines to internalize — that children are zones of peace. Children embody the most compelling justification for the existence of States — to protect their most vulnerable charges as they would preserve themselves. A State without children is a State on the brink of extinction.

I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to speak and assure the Security Council of my delegation's support for all efforts regarding children's rights and protection.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

**Mrs. Zalabata Torres** (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for your initiative to convene this important debate on the topic of children and armed conflicts, during which the most recent report of the Secretary-General on this subject (S/2024/384) has also been presented.

I speak on behalf of a country with a past marked by a long-standing conflict but with a present full of lessons learned and experience in building peace. I also speak on behalf of the Government of change led by President Gustavo Petro Urrego, working for a better future and prioritizing all efforts to protect children affected by the situations of armed conflict that persist in the country. The current proliferation of armed conflicts around the world is a raging storm that is tearing apart the fabric of society, rendering children increasingly vulnerable. To protect them, we must act urgently, using tools such as early-warning systems, robust mandates for the protection of children in peacekeeping missions and investment in community-based child-protection structures.

Allow me to share here that the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition — one of the mechanisms of the comprehensive system of truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition in Colombia, established by the 2016 peace agreements between the Government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo guerillas — heard the testimonies of 1,559 people who had endured multiple violent events as children and adolescents. To contribute to the country's truth, the findings and stories documented by that Commission have fostered mechanisms and actions aimed at protecting children and young people and ensuring safe environments based on the Convention



on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and its Optional Protocols, the instruments of international humanitarian law and Colombia's advanced normative framework.

As a global force for life, Colombia believes that education must serve as a life raft in times of conflict and that schools must be treated as sanctuaries and never as military targets. When schools are attacked, parties to conflict must be held accountable for the clear violations of international humanitarian law carried out against those protected facilities. In that regard, it is essential to foster the universalization of the Safe Schools Declaration, which provides a fundamental normative framework. In that context, we are working on implementing a national plan of action on safe schools containing nine actions aimed at protecting schools and universities, students and the entire educational community from attacks that may arise in the context of an armed conflict. That plan is an ideal mechanism to make progress in implementing resolution 1612 (2005) by cooperating with stakeholders from the education, defence and child protection sectors.

Colombia recognizes the fact that impunity for the crimes committed against children gives rise to resentment and prolongs the cycles of violence. We therefore call for national justice systems to be reinforced, for the International Criminal Court to be supported and for comprehensive witness protection programmes to be guaranteed. Only through effective accountability will we be able to truly heal those wounds.

I would like to conclude by underscoring the fact that children recruited by armed groups are not combatants, but victims. In the context of domestic armed conflict, demobilization, reintegration and psychosocial support are essential to break the cycle of violence. We must invest in programmes that provide those children with the skills and opportunities they need to rebuild their lives. Working on the basis of our experience in this area, Colombia is prepared to cooperate with the international community on all those fronts. We urge all parties involved in armed conflicts, wherever in the world they may be, to prioritize children's security and well-being to ensure peace and human dignity for future generations. Let us work together to build a future in which all children, in every corner of the planet, can experience the joy and innocence of childhood, free from the shadow of war.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

**Mr. Maes** (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Luxembourg aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We would like to thank the Republic of Korea for organizing this public debate.

The annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) paints an alarming picture. Luxembourg is shocked by the increase in serious violations verified in 2023, given that the real figure is much higher. That negative trend continues this year. We deplore the deteriorating situation of children in Myanmar, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Sudan. Since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, thousands of Ukrainian children have been killed, injured, abducted and deported to Russia. The violations committed against children since 7 October 2023 in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in the Gaza Strip, have shocked the conscience of the world.

The lists contained in the annexes to the annual report must continue to reflect reality. We note the listing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas brigades and affiliated factions for the killing, maiming and abduction of children during the brutal acts of terror committed against Israel on 7 October, and the listing of the Israeli armed and security forces for the killing and maiming of children and for attacks on schools and hospitals. We also note the continued listing of certain parties, including the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups.

Luxembourg is concerned by the growing number of cases of humanitarian access being denied and attacks on schools and hospitals. International humanitarian law must be respected. Schools must be a safe place for children. UNESCO has just published a report estimating that failing to send children to school costs the world economy \$10 trillion a year. That fact should make endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration more than a child protection measure — it is also choosing sustainable development.

Impunity for serious violations committed against children is intolerable. Perpetrators must be held accountable. The International Criminal Court plays an important role in ensuring accountability, and we support it. I would also like to reiterate Luxembourg's political and financial support for the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for

Children and Armed Conflict. We must all support the tools available under her mandate, such as the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism. We also welcome the crucial work of UNICEF and civil society on the ground. The Council can continue to count on Luxembourg to promote respect for and the protection of children's rights.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

**Mr. Vinhas (Portugal):** We thank the Republic of Korea for convening this open debate.

We align ourselves with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

The numbers contained in the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2024/384) are deeply shocking, with a 21 per cent increase in grave violations against children in 2023, compared to the previous year. The increase of 35 per cent in the first grave violation — the killing and maiming of children — is particularly disturbing. The report also points to a worrisome trend of increasing denial of humanitarian assistance and of increasing attacks on schools and hospitals. There is only one conclusion to be drawn from those numbers — as Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter said, we are failing children. The rights of children are being blatantly disregarded, and the protections they receive under international humanitarian law are being cast aside.

In the 25 years since the adoption of the landmark resolution 1261 (1999), the children and armed conflict agenda has become more and more robust. We welcome the work the Council has conducted in that area. Examples include the development of a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, the listing of parties to armed conflict that commit violations and engagement with them so that action plans may be developed, the designation of child protection officers in United Nations peacekeeping operations or special political missions, and the inclusion of designation criteria related to child protection in United Nations sanctions regimes.

Portugal believes that there is still work that the Council can undertake, namely during a United Nations mission, after its withdrawal or its transition into a United Nations country team. Child protection strategies should be developed for the transition period,

and personnel and capacity should be preserved within the offices of resident coordinators.

Outside of the Council, developments have been taking place too, namely with respect to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration, the Vancouver Principles and the adoption of a revised child policy by the International Criminal Court. However, and notwithstanding the fact that we should continue working on the normative dimension, implementation is lagging behind.

We see that in the context of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. We reiterate our call upon the Russian Federation to abide by its international obligations, to step up its efforts to protect children and to facilitate the immediate return of all Ukrainian children who have been abducted and are being held against their will.

We see that in the context of the conflict in the Sudan, where the denial of humanitarian access is depriving hundreds of thousands of Sudanese children of their last hope. Here, too, it is essential that all parties fulfil their obligations under international law to ensure the protection of children.

We see that in Gaza, noting the listing of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and affiliated factions, as well as of the Israeli armed and security forces, for grave violations committed against children in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Faced with the immense suffering of civilians, in particular children, in Gaza, we reiterate our calls for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and urge respect for obligations under international law and increased efforts to protect children.

We also see that in Afghanistan, and we urge the Taliban to lift the suspension of girls' secondary education and to reopen schools beyond the sixth grade for all girls, immediately and unconditionally.

Faced with the gaps in implementation, we cannot forget the issue of accountability. It applies in all situations. All perpetrators must be held accountable, and impunity must be stamped out. Victims and survivors must be protected and reintegrated into their communities. The only way to address the implementation gap is for all States to recommit to protecting children in armed conflict. Although

conflict is becoming more complex and new challenges are emerging related to the advent of new armed groups and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, let us not forget the consensual nature of the children and armed conflict agenda. Protecting children from the horrors of war must be a priority for the international community as a whole.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Türkiye.

**Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye):** Let me begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for convening this important annual debate. I also thank His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter, Mr. Chaiban and the child briefer for their valuable briefings.

The situation of children continues to be adversely and disproportionately affected by the prevailing security, protection and humanitarian challenges caused by armed conflicts around the world. The recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) presents a worrisome trend regarding the situation of children in armed conflict, with a staggering 21 per cent increase in grave violations against children. As highlighted in the report, the conflict in Israel and Palestine alone led to an increase in grave violations of 155 per cent. I will not repeat the numbers, but the number of deaths and violations in this conflict are unsurpassed and the nature of the cruelty in Gaza is unprecedented. I am afraid that the true numbers may be much higher than what has been verified in the report, owing to the situation on the ground. United Nations officials warn us that children continue to die of malnutrition and dehydration, while food and clean water wait in trucks outside of Gaza. There is no solution for Palestinian children other than a permanent ceasefire, unhindered humanitarian aid and resumed schooling.

Since the outset of the conflict in Syria, the suffering of children continues unabated due to the grave violations by the regime and terrorist organizations, such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)/People's Protection Units and its offshoot, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The report of the Secretary-General registers some of the grave violations perpetrated by this terrorist organization and points out the increase in the recruitment and use of children by the SDF. The latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic also confirms that the

terrorist organization is the primary perpetrator of violations and serious crimes against children in Syria.

The facts concerning the grave violations of this terrorist organization are crystal clear. As such, expecting it to be bound by commitments of an international framework — the so-called 2019 action plan — is an illusion. While the situation of children in Syria continues to be a grave concern for the international community, the signing, by the United Nations and the Syrian opposition, of an action plan regarding the prevention of child recruitment and grave violations is a positive development.

The PKK and its offshoots' grave violations against children are not limited to Syria. They also continue to kill, maim and abduct children in Iraq. They recruit and use children as soldiers, and they stand as an obstacle to the provision of better public services and infrastructure investments in the localities where they are present. The terrorist organization also exploits the vacuum of authority in order to target my country from Iraqi soil. In the last year alone, the PKK carried out 1,084 attacks against Türkiye from Iraq.

This is a matter of national security. I would like to take this opportunity to register the position of my country with regard to the ungrounded allegations in the report of my country's counter-terrorism operations in Syria and in Iraq. Türkiye is obliged and entitled to take appropriate measures against direct and imminent terrorist threats posed to its national security by Syria and Iraq, in line with its inherent right to self-defence, as outlined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions. Those operations are conducted in full compliance with international law and international humanitarian law, and are carried out with the utmost attention and care so as to avoid harm to civilians, including children, and civilian infrastructure.

The impact of the ongoing war in Ukraine on children is also concerning. In these circumstances, children require special attention. As such, Türkiye, in cooperation with UNICEF, has hosted nearly 2,000 orphans and their caregivers since March 2022 and will continue its efforts in that regard.

Türkiye attaches the utmost importance to the agenda of the United Nations, which addresses the situation of children in armed conflict, and is ready to support all child protection efforts. In conclusion, I reiterate our intention to continue to cooperate with

Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter, the Secretariat and other United Nations agencies.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

**Mr. Miller (Israel):** Every year we meet at the Chamber to discuss one of the most critical issues the United Nations deals with today — protecting our children and, by doing so, protecting our future. And every year we are disappointed that major aspects of the protection of children are gravely overlooked in our discourse.

This year, alongside the inherent methodological errors in the reporting mechanism and the verification process, is the systematic and deliberate use of civilians, including children and civilian facilities, by Hamas for military purposes. That practice, in which heinous, murderous armed terror organizations use schools, hospitals and humanitarian facilities as shields and platforms of operation, represents a blatant disregard for human life and international law.

The report we are discussing today (S/2024/384) fails to acknowledge those actions by Hamas. That is the group's modus operandi — systematically using civilian infrastructure for military purposes. The report omits references to their systematic exploitation of civilian infrastructure for military uses — for storing improvised explosive devices, hiding fighters, digging tunnels and launching rockets from densely populated areas. By starting the narrative in the middle, focusing mainly on Israel's response, the report presents a skewed view that obscures the real culprits of this conflict. Moreover, it ignores the extensive efforts that Israel continues to undertake in order to minimize harm to innocent civilians.

Israel goes to extraordinary lengths to minimize harm to innocents, especially children. We issue warnings before military actions, create humanitarian corridors and coordinate aid delivery. Hamas, on the other hand, attempts to thwart Israel's efforts and actively seeks to increase civilian casualties on both sides, including children — Palestinians and Israelis alike.

The report's failure to acknowledge Israel's humanitarian efforts further distorts the reality on the ground. For years, we have been concerned about the report's methodology, and this year's report has sunk to a new low. The reliance on inflated casualty

numbers from Hamas-controlled sources, the so-called Ministry of Health in Gaza, without proper verification, undermines the credibility of this important mechanism. A report aimed at protecting children should be based on rigorously verified facts, not manipulated data used for political purposes.

The decision to include Israel in the annex of the report, alongside terrorist organizations, is not only unjust and incomprehensible, but counterproductive for the purposes of the report and our mutual efforts to protect children. It effectively rewards Hamas for their atrocities by condemning a democratic nation fighting against the terrorist organization in order to protect its citizens, including children. The report's approach erodes the credibility of the children and armed conflict agenda and fails to address the complex realities of asymmetric warfare.

We must confront the reality that the United Nations, by failing to address these crimes, inadvertently create safe havens for terrorist operatives. Terrorists seek out the protected spaces under international humanitarian law and exploits them for their military purposes. In our unfathomable reality, rather than providing protection for civilians, this infrastructure — schools, hospitals, kindergartens and children's bedrooms — are used to provide protection to the worst terrorist activities imaginable. They are being used as shields, weapon-storage sites and launching pads for attacks.

The United Nations is practically turning a blind eye. Instead of reflecting the severity of this phenomenon and listing Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad for those exact practices, the United Nations, embarrassingly, managed to find only one case of the use of a health facility for military purposes by Hamas and zero cases for the use of schools. How is that possible?

Is the evidence of an entire underground city under Al-Shifa Hospital not enough? What of hundreds of militants hiding underground while doctors operate above? What about hostages brought into the hospital, surrounded by armed terrorists and disappearing into the tunnels, or incubators filled with weapons and explosives in the maternity ward? All of that evidence was formally and informally shared with the United Nations, but was never reflected in the final report. I guess it just did not make the cut.

The Organization's disregard for this modus operandi of terrorist organizations places children all over the world today and in future in grave danger. Schools will no longer be used for learning, hospitals will no longer be used for healing, and kindergartens will no longer be used for playing. Does that sound apocalyptic? It is not so far away.

The Secretary-General and United Nations officials are not isolated in their stance. The members who are celebrating Israel's listing, during today's debate, are shielding those very terrorists by doing so. Their complacency is reckless. The terror they refrain from condemning today may soon rear its ugly head within their own borders, bringing with it dire consequences. This is their wake-up call. They must not turn a blind eye to terror. They must not become indifferent to the horrors of 7 October.

The past year has been traumatic for every Israeli and Jew around the world. We must not forget the Israeli children traumatized by Hamas's actions which started it all. The 7 October massacre saw children murdered in front of their parents and parents tortured and murdered in front of their children; whole families, including children, abducted; and children left alone in filthy, dark Hamas tunnels.

Today 120 hostages, including children, remain in captivity. They include women and men, young and old. Among them are two children — Kfir Bibas, kidnapped at just seven months old, and Ariel Bibas, kidnapped at four years old, along with their mother and father. Their whereabouts are still unknown. We will not give up on them. We will not rest until we bring them all home.

The psychological implications and scars inflicted on a generation of Israeli children living under constant rocket attacks by Hizbullah in the north and Hamas in the south and by the Houthis in the south-east and the Iranian regime in the north-east are immeasurable. Those realities deserve equal consideration in any balanced report on children in this conflict. We call upon the Security Council to refocus its efforts on truly protecting all children affected by this conflict. That means holding Hamas accountable for all of its actions and supporting Israel's right to defend its children, to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and working towards a future where no child — Israeli or Palestinian — lives in fear of violence.

The United Nations stands at a crossroads. It must choose between upholding its principles to protect the vulnerable or becoming a tool manipulated by those who disregard children's lives. We urge Member States to make the right choice for the sake of all children caught in conflict.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Denmark.

**Ms. Lassen (Denmark):** I deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries — Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Denmark. I thank the briefers for their valuable insights.

This year's report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/384) paints an extremely worrisome picture of more violence, more attacks on schools and hospitals, more use of sexual violence, increased recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups and an escalating denial of humanitarian assistance to children in need. As heard many times today, the number of instances of killing and maiming have increased by a staggering 35 per cent. The devastating consequences of those violations will be felt for generations.

Fifty per cent of the grave violations are being committed by government forces. We call for compliance with international law and the protection of children in armed conflict. And we encourage dialogue to prevent grave violations from occurring.

Allow me to highlight three elements to that effect.

First, we call on Member States and parties to conflict to comply with international humanitarian law; human rights law, including children's rights law; and refugee law. And we call on all Member States to become parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

In this year's report, we take note of the listing of the Israeli armed and security forces, as well as Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and affiliated factions for grave violations committed against children in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory on 7 October 2023 and its ongoing aftermath. We are deeply concerned about the immense suffering of children in Gaza, the critical humanitarian situation and the imminent risk of famine caused by the insufficient entry of aid. The Nordic countries underline that the prevention of further loss of life is an absolute priority.

In Ukraine, we are deeply concerned about the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups responsible for committing grave violations against children. In the Sudan, we note with deep concern, that the numbers of grave violations increased by 480 per cent compared to the previous year owing to fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid

Support Forces. We call on both parties to stop their fighting and engage in dialogue. We call on all Member States to investigate and prosecute those responsible for grave violations of international law against children and to cooperate with international justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court.

Secondly, the existing mechanisms and frameworks for protecting children must be strengthened. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism is a necessary prerequisite for the fulfilment of the children and armed conflict mandate. We must ensure its funding and maintenance. We fully support Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter and her Office in carrying out the mandate. Our responses to grave violations against children will be insufficient unless we ensure that our institutions are capable, resourced and robust. We encourage Member States that have not done so to endorse and fully implement the Safe Schools Declaration, the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, the Vancouver Principles, as well as the Paris Principles and Commitments. We furthermore call on parties to conflict to sign and implement joint action plans with the United Nations to end and prevent grave violations.

Thirdly, we must increase our efforts to prevent grave violations from happening in the first place. In Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Chad, Syria, the Sudan, Myanmar and Gaza, the ground is contaminated with explosive remnants of war, exposing children and their families to harm and preventing development and sustainable peace. We must do more to prevent the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

We highlight the importance of ensuring that, during United Nations mission transitions, child protection is carefully planned for and capacities are preserved and transferred to relevant actors to avoid leaving children exposed to violations following such transitions. We must do better to prioritize the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children before, during and after conflict.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

**Mr. Hachem** (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): We congratulate the Republic of Korea on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month

and thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict.

This meeting is taking place against a backdrop of unprecedented violence against children. As Secretary-General António Guterres notes in his most recent report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384), violence against children in armed conflict reached extreme levels in 2023, with a huge increase in grave violations.

Lebanon attaches great importance to this topic, especially at a time when the Israeli aggression against southern Lebanon continues and has shown no mercy on children. Since 8 October 2023, Israel has killed 12 children and injured more than 57 others. Moreover, in a serious incident, three Lebanese children were injured in an Israeli raid that hit a school bus in Nabatiyeh. In addition to those crimes, no less than 30,000 children in the south have been forced to flee their homes and have been displaced to the north because of the ongoing aggression. More than 70 schools have been closed, affecting the education of nearly 20,000 children. In schools that have not closed, we have frequently seen children in a state of panic owing to the ongoing Israeli bombardment. Classes are then suspended to calm students down and send them home.

Finally, and after a long wait, we saw this year the Israeli occupation army on the list of parties that commit grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, contained in annex I of the aforementioned report. We look forward to holding the perpetrators accountable and ensuring that there is no impunity for them, as the abuse of children must be a red line that cannot be crossed by anyone.

In his most recent report covering the year 2023, the Secretary-General noted that six children in Lebanon were killed and maimed by the Israeli occupation army. We look forward to the issuance of next year's report, which will include updated numbers of crimes committed against children in Lebanon this year.

Behind those numbers, there are crimes committed that surpass physical pain, injuries and maiming. The psychological harm cannot be described, and Lebanese families have been completely destroyed. We care about our children's present and future. We are also worried about the long-term impact that this aggression will have on their safety, health and education. As long as this aggression continues, our children will continue to pay the price. It is therefore high time to put pressure

on Israel to end the aggression, killings and flouting of all international laws and conventions.

Our people, our families, our women and our young people — like our children — are rooted in our Lebanon, in our south and in our land. The previous Israeli occupation could not uproot us from our land, and nor will this new aggression succeed in uprooting us. Therefore, a diplomatic solution, a return to the relevant international resolutions and compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law, constitute the best resort. Only then can we protect our children and ensure that they are able to live in safety and security.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

**Mr. Hoang Nguyen Nguyen (Viet Nam):** I thank the Republic of Korea for convening today's meeting and wish to extend Viet Nam's appreciation to former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the other briefers for their insights on this important topic.

Children are our future, representing hope and prospects for a better world, yet armed conflicts nowadays are jeopardizing the lives of millions of children in many parts of the world. The Secretary-General's recent report (S/2024/384) highlights the alarming surge in grave violations against children in conflict zones, leading to increased child casualties and denial of humanitarian access, in addition to the disturbing problems of child soldier recruitment and sexual violence. Moreover, attacks on educational and health-care facilities severely infringe upon children's rights to education and health and undermine their physical and psychological development. Viet Nam strongly condemns all forms of violence against children and is deeply troubled by their continued exposure to extreme danger in conflict settings. In that connection, my delegation wishes to highlight the following points.

First, addressing the root causes of conflicts through sustainable development is crucial for maintaining peace and protecting children. That approach helps to prevent conflicts fuelled by economic and social disparities and to spare children the devastating impacts of wars and violence.

Secondly, adherence to the Charter of the United Nations and respect for international law and international humanitarian law are key to the protection of children in conflict situations. Member

States, especially parties to conflicts, must abide by their obligations under international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, as well as to ensure unhindered humanitarian access. More efforts and priorities must be channelled towards ceasefires for the ongoing conflicts around the world. The cessation of violence and hostilities not only saves lives and facilitates humanitarian efforts, but also allows children to be reunited with their families and return to school, creating foundations for their peaceful and hopeful future.

Thirdly, improving the effectiveness of child protection in conflicts requires a coordinated and unified approach. It is imperative to enhance cooperation among Member States and relevant United Nations entities, such as UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations country teams and United Nations peacekeeping missions, among others. The goal is to create a comprehensive framework that integrates peacebuilding and economic development with child protection, addressing both immediate needs and long-term challenges to ensure a safer future for children affected by conflicts.

Having gone through decades of war and witnessed first-hand the grave consequences of conflicts on children, and as one of the first countries in the world to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Viet Nam places the highest premium on the protection of children. Viet Nam reaffirms its steadfast commitment to working closely with the international community, United Nations agencies and relevant stakeholders to prevent and address conflicts and secure a safer future for children around the world.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

**Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*):** At the outset, I congratulate the friendly Republic of Korea on assuming the presidency of the Security Council, and we thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate.

We extend our appreciation to Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for her comprehensive briefing and her constructive efforts. We also thank the briefers for their valuable contributions.

We align ourselves with the statements delivered on behalf of the Group of Arab States and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

The report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict before us today (S/2024/384) reminds us once again that children continue to pay the highest price in armed conflicts worldwide. Such conflicts continue to endanger their lives and undermine their fundamental rights. In that context, we express our profound regret and sadness at the mounting number of grave violations perpetrated by the Israeli occupation against Palestinian children, especially in the Gaza Strip. We note the appalling reports by UNICEF and humanitarian organizations on the catastrophic humanitarian situation of children in the Gaza Strip, which has become a graveyard for children. One hundred children are killed or injured every day in Gaza by Israel's indiscriminate shelling, systematic starvation and use of food as a weapon by preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In response, the Secretary-General decided to include the Israeli occupation army and security forces on the list of parties involved in perpetrating grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

The State of Qatar condemns in the strongest terms the grave violations perpetrated by the Israeli occupation against children in the Gaza Strip, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, the relevant conventions and protocols on the protection of children in armed conflict and the relevant Security Council resolutions, in addition to the provisional orders issued by the International Court of Justice.

We reiterate our firm position that the right to education must not be a casualty of armed conflict and that efforts must be made to safeguard the right of children to education, particularly in conflict-affected countries. The State of Qatar condemns attacks on schools and hospitals and on protected persons working in schools and hospitals. In that context, we are proud of our ongoing pioneering international efforts to support quality education and safeguard the right to education, especially in emergency situations, including the significant efforts of the Education Above All foundation in the State of Qatar. A great deal has been achieved in that field, genuinely transforming the lives of millions of children worldwide. In that context, as part of the efforts to prevent the outbreak of conflicts and preserve peace, the State of Qatar, aware of the dire repercussions of attacks on education, spearheaded a

pioneering role in leading international efforts to adopt General Assembly resolution 74/275, declaring 9 September the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. The State of Qatar also supported the establishment of the Analysis and Outreach Hub of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in Doha. The Office opened in June 2022 to provide support for capacity-building and to prevent and put an end to grave violations against children in armed conflict.

As part of its ongoing efforts to protect children in armed conflict, the State of Qatar evacuated more than 2,000 wounded and ailing persons along with their companions, including children in the Gaza Strip, along with their companions, and sent dozens of aircraft bearing humanitarian and food aid to Gaza.

The State of Qatar stresses the importance of concerted international efforts and of prioritizing the strengthening of the protection of children affected by conflicts. We also reaffirm the need to ensure that the perpetrators of such violations are held accountable and that obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and relevant Security Council resolutions are upheld.

In conclusion, the State of Qatar reaffirms its steadfast commitment to working with the United Nations and all international partners to strengthen efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts, mitigate their impact on children and provide them with protection.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

**Mr. Balobaid** (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to align ourselves with the statement of the Group of Arab States delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important open debate on children and armed conflict. I would like also to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, and his Special Representative, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, for their efforts to protect children in armed conflict.

We have reviewed the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict for 2023 (S/2024/384), and, in the light of the alarming trends and figures contained therein, we would like to draw the Council's attention to a number of points.



First, the Government of Yemen and national reports warn that Houthi terrorist militias are exploiting the humanitarian truce and the Israeli aggression against Gaza to intensify their mobilization campaigns aimed at recruiting thousands of children. The number of new recruits to the Al-Aqsa Brigades reached nearly 280,000, most of them children. The leadership of those militias targets children through so-called summer camps, a fertile ground for luring and recruiting children and dispatching them to the battlefield. More than 1.8 million children have been enrolled in the summer camps, as noted by those militias.

Secondly, the report referred to myriad violations against children in areas under the control of the Houthi terrorist militias but regrettably neglected to mention the manipulation of the school curricula and the establishment of the so-called summer camps, which are used to brainwash children with extremist ideas, filling their minds with slogans of death and hatred. The report mentioned 59 children recruited by the Houthi militias, and those militias exposed photos of hundreds of recruited children who were on board the *MV Galaxy Leader*. It is strange that the international community remained silent about the largest open recruitment operation by the Houthi militias in history. That runs counter to calls for de-escalation and ending the conflict and to all international norms and instruments. It reveals the true position of those militias and their attempts to create a time bomb that threatens future generations along with regional and international peace and security for decades to come.

Thirdly, the Houthi terrorist militias continue their systemic violations while obstructing monitoring teams and humanitarian operations by detaining staff of national and international organizations and diverting relief aid to serve their war effort. That demonstrates the militias' insistence on destroying children's futures and obstructing any efforts to save them, rehabilitate them and integrate them into society.

Fourthly, the Government of Yemen reiterates its willingness to support the efforts of the United Nations and the Yemen country team to end violations against children while using them in armed conflict. We call on the international community and the Security Council to put pressure on the Houthi terrorist militias to stop perpetrating their crimes against children in areas under their control and especially to stop the so-called summer camps and their manipulation of school curricula. It is our hope that the upcoming report by the Secretary-

General will address those violations extensively. We call on the United Nations and international partners to provide support to the Government of Yemen's programmes for the rehabilitation of children affected by the conflict and to help it to develop effective programmes for reintegrating them in the society and addressing their mental and psychological well-being.

Fifthly, children in sisterly Palestine face grave violations, including killing and maiming by Israel, the occupying Power. The most recent example is what children have been subjected to during the past nine months in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. More than 15,000 children have been killed while the international community and the relevant authorities in this Organization remain silent. We believe that Palestinian children must have adequate protection from such violations committed by Israel, the occupying Power, which must be held accountable for its ongoing crimes against the Palestinian people. We must ensure that there is no impunity for Israel. We welcome the decision of the Secretary-General — albeit 75 years late — to blacklist the Israeli occupation army and security forces for their heinous crimes against Palestinian children, including acts of killing, brutal attacks on hospitals and schools, the killing of humanitarian workers and the obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian aid to children.

In conclusion, children worldwide deserve to enjoy peace and security. We all must shoulder this unique responsibility to end grave violations against children and protect them, protect their rights and make them safe in conflict areas. In my own country, children deserve comprehensive and quality education for all. They must stay away from hatred, violence and terrorism in order to live like other children around the world, not combatants. The children of Palestine deserve to live like all other children of the world. They deserve to have a nation, a land and an identity and to live free from the horrors of the occupation.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Lithuania.

**Mr. Paulaskas** (Lithuania): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the three Baltic countries: Estonia, Latvia and my own country, Lithuania.

We also align ourselves with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

We appreciate the valuable insights shared by the former Secretary-General and Deputy Chair of

The Elders, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Ted Chaiban.

Every year, we hope against hope for progress in alleviating the devastating situation of children caught in armed conflict. Yet, year after year, the situation grows increasingly grim. The Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) delivers a deeply troubling view of the suffering inflicted upon children in Burkina Faso, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, the Sudan and other conflict-affected countries. The persistent increase in child suffering calls for renewed dedication to protecting children in conflict zones, reinforcing the importance of our collective responsibility to safeguard their futures.

For the second consecutive year, Russia remains the only permanent member of the Security Council ever to be listed in the annexes of the report for having carried out grave violations against children in Ukraine. The report states that in 2023 the United Nations verified 938 cases. It is widely acknowledged that this statistic significantly underrepresents the real numbers owing to Russia limiting access to conduct monitoring in territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by Russia. At the same time, we express our confusion regarding the report's welcoming of Russia's supposed engagement with the Special Representative when Russia has not yet signed the action plan aimed at addressing the grave violations the aggressor has committed against children, nor have Russian armed forces stopped committing those violations.

We commend international efforts, especially those led by Qatar, to mediate the return of Ukrainian children, who have been unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred by Russia. We also urge UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to actively engage in the return of the unlawfully deported Ukrainian children. Their involvement is crucial in ensuring that the rights and well-being of these children are prioritized and that effective mechanisms are in place to facilitate their safe and swift reunification with their families. It is also important to highlight the creation of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, which is open for countries to join.

We would also like to draw attention to Russia's extensive passportization campaign in Ukraine. Since the beginning of the full-scale war, Russia has issued more than 1.5 million Russian passports to persons living in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, including children. This violates international law and complicates the identification of missing persons, creating the legal grounds for the mass deportation of children and facilitating the erasure of Ukrainian identity.

The number of children affected by the situation in the Middle East is shocking. Out of all the grave violations committed against children globally in 2023, a quarter were committed in Israel, the occupied West Bank territory and the Gaza Strip. We urge all parties involved in the conflict to take immediate action to adhere to international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It is crucial to agree promptly and without delay to a humanitarian pause in the hostilities.

The dire situation that children face worldwide is compounded by the denial of humanitarian access, recognized as one of the six grave violations. This denial significantly intensifies the suffering experienced by children caught in conflict zones. It is imperative that all parties involved in these conflicts immediately grant unrestricted humanitarian access to both international and local organizations for the delivery of essential aid and support so as to alleviate the severe humanitarian crises affecting vulnerable children and their communities. We would like to reaffirm our steadfast support for the Office of the Special Representative, UNICEF and the other dedicated organizations working tirelessly to protect and uphold the rights of children globally.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Armenia.

**Ms. Melikyan (Armenia):** We thank the presidency of the Republic of Korea for convening this open debate on the theme of children and armed conflict. The presence and briefings of former Secretary-General and the Deputy Chair of The Elders, Ban Ki-moon, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Deputy Executive Director of Humanitarian Action and Supply Operations of UNICEF demonstrate the paramount importance of our joint commitment to protecting vulnerable young lives. Landmark resolution 1261 (1999), the subsequent

Security Council resolutions related to the children and armed conflict agenda and the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict shape the framework of our discussion. We aim to take stock of State practices in the protection of children and to identify gaps and challenges in the light of the shocking increase in grave violations against children, as revealed by the Secretary-General in his report on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384), since that resolution was adopted 25 years ago.

Underreporting is a major challenge that can lead to bias and inadequate responses, enabling further violations to be perpetrated. Regrettably, in our region too, we have witnessed violence against children in conflict situations. The war unleashed against Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020 amid the global pandemic caused immense suffering, destruction and the displacement of thousands of people. Deliberate air bombardments and artillery and missile strikes heavily damaged several medical facilities, including the maternity ward of Stepanakert's Maternal and Child Health Centre. Targeted attacks on educational institutions led to the destruction of schools and kindergartens.

The civilian population in Nagorno-Karabakh has fallen victim to an inhumane blockade, the imposition of which has severely affected the rights and livelihoods of those who are most vulnerable, children, in grave violation of the existing legal obligations and the orders of the International Court of Justice. The humanitarian lifeline blockade has caused a critical shortage of food, medicine, fuel, electricity and other goods, resulting in a full-fledged humanitarian crisis and starvation. After a 10-month siege of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan unleashed a large-scale military offensive in September 2023, as a result of which the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh was forced to leave their ancestral homeland and find refuge in Armenia. People, including children, came to Armenia injured, traumatized and without essential belongings.

It is particularly worrisome that the independent expert mechanisms have been continuously reporting on the involvement of children in State-sponsored hate propaganda on ethnic and religious grounds. Educational curriculums in kindergartens and schools in Azerbaijan are aimed at indoctrinating children with Armenophobia and inciting violence and intolerance. That malicious practice of negative stereotyping,

fuelling hatred on the basis of national identity among children and youth, is not only reprehensible and incompatible with international humanitarian and human rights law, but it further undermines efforts to create an environment that is conducive to peace.

The effective protection of children in situations of armed conflict requires a strengthened commitment to the implementation of relevant international instruments and necessitates early warning and early action. Armenia reiterates its commitment to promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of all children, in particular those residing in conflict areas, as well as preventing grave violations. We support the mandate of the Special Representative in streamlining the activities of United Nations agencies and promoting cooperation with regional organizations, civil society and other stakeholders, aimed at ensuring effective protection on the ground.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

**Mr. Muhith (Bangladesh):** I thank the presidency of the Republic of Korea for convening this annual open debate of the Security Council on children and armed conflict. I also thank Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for presenting the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2024/384). I thank the other briefers, including former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, for their insightful presentations.

We are deeply concerned about the extreme rise in violence against children in armed conflict in recent times. As reported by the Special Representative, in 2023, there was a shocking 21 per cent increase in grave violations. The instances of killing and maiming increased by a staggering 35 per cent. Israel's ongoing aggression in Gaza has led to unprecedented numbers of casualties among Palestinian children. The complete disregard for international humanitarian law by parties to conflict in situations of armed conflict in many parts of the world remains deeply alarming.

The report referred to the situation in Myanmar, where both the military and armed groups have been responsible for grave violations against children. We are particularly alarmed by the ongoing conflicts in Rakhine state, where Rohingya children and youth are reportedly being used as both combatants and human shields. As a country that is hosting more than 1.2 million Rohingya minorities, we are concerned

about the cross-border implications of such activities in Myanmar. It is now critical to address those challenges with urgency in order to ensure that the environment in Myanmar is conducive to the protection of all children and the return of displaced Rohingyas who are taking shelter in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh remains committed to, and places the highest priority on, protecting the rights of children. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees and safeguards the life, liberty, freedom from torture and protection from forced labour of all citizens, including children. We have taken comprehensive legal and policy steps to protect and promote the rights of children. The Children Act of 1974 is the principal law providing for the protection of children. The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act of 2000, or Special Provisions Act, penalizes crimes of violence against women and children. Bangladesh is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol related to children in armed conflict and remains fully committed to the obligations under the Convention. At the global level, Bangladesh remains fully committed to protecting civilians, especially children, in armed conflict. As the leading troop- and police-contributing country, our dedicated peacekeepers have been serving in many difficult situations to protect children from being killed, maimed or affected by sexual violence. Furthermore, they have been protecting schools and hospitals and ensuring their sanctity as spaces of education and healing.

Armed conflicts have devastating impacts on children, especially girls and children with disabilities. During armed conflicts, children are being subjected to violence, including sexual and gender-based violence and forced participation in conflicts, as well as being killed, detained, separated from their families and denied humanitarian assistance. We are particularly concerned about the horrific atrocities being perpetrated unabated against Palestinian children in Gaza. It is shameful that the onslaught is still ongoing, totally disregarding the calls from the international community, including resolution 2735 (2024), which called for an immediate ceasefire. We ask the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to continue to pay more attention to the tragic events in Gaza, including the killing and maiming of thousands of children, who will have to endure a life of permanent disability, if they survive at all.

Bangladesh thanks the Secretary-General for his annual report, which has highlighted six grave violations against children. We also thank the Secretary-General for listing all responsible parties in the annexes to his report, including the Israeli armed and security forces for killing and maiming children, as well as for attacks against schools and hospitals. We express our deep concern about the increased attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access to children.

The perpetrators and persistent violators of children's rights must be punished and made accountable for grave violation of those rights. We call on all parties to armed conflicts to cooperate with all humanitarian actors to ensure the smooth delivery of humanitarian assistance and to silence their guns.

There should be unhindered access to humanitarian assistance and basic services, including health and education, in all circumstances. Schools and hospitals must remain safe at all times. It should be the highest political priority for all Member States to strengthen actions to protect children from the dreadful impacts of armed conflicts. Bangladesh will continue to provide support to humanitarian actors and other partners to ensure the better protection of children in armed conflicts.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

**Mr. Vasconcelos (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*):** Mexico is grateful to the Republic of Korea for convening this debate on a topic of such global importance. We listened with great interest to the briefing presented by Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgeiter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and to the briefings by Mr. Ban Ki-moon and Mr. Ted Chaiban.

This debate provides a new opportunity to explore the challenges we face in a global environment that makes the protection of children in situations of armed conflict extremely difficult. As the Secretary-General's recent report (S/2024/384) demonstrates, it is of particular concern that grave violations against children caught up in armed conflict increased by 23 per cent in 2023 as compared to the previous year. From Afghanistan to Mali, South Sudan, Yemen and Gaza, warring parties are violating one of the most basic rules of war — to protect children. The world is

a dangerous place for children, who seem to have even become deliberate targets of armed attacks.

Despite the fact that the Council has adopted several resolutions on the children and armed conflict agenda, we deplore the continuing attacks against critical civilian infrastructure such as schools and hospitals, which not only deprive children of their right to education and medicine but also take a heavy toll on their psychological well-being. We are particularly concerned by attacks on United Nations agency facilities and their staff.

In terms of the solutions that we Member States must propose and implement, I want to highlight my country's support for the functions of peacekeeping operations, including the work of child protection advisers, who are actively helping Governments to adopt national prevention strategies and to strengthen local peace infrastructure. We must also continue to exert pressure, through the Council and other United Nations bodies, to ensure that parties to conflict comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and, if they fail to do so, to report them to other authorities such as the International Criminal Court.

I should like to conclude by pointing out that Mexico takes note of the plans of action and other commitments that have been established with parties to conflict on this issue, with a view to preventing the commission of serious violations against minors in situations of armed conflict and post-conflict. As my country has done over the past 27 years, Mexico will continue to emphatically condemn all forms of violence against children during armed conflict. We will always raise our voice against forced recruitment, massacres, mutilation, sexual violence and all attacks against the human rights of children, as well as in favour of ending the suffering of those who most need our protection. In that regard, Mr. President, you, the Member States and the international bodies represented here can rest assured that Mexico will continue to be an ally on these issues.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

**Mr. Hmoud** (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting and to wish you success in facilitating the work of the Security Council this month.

I would also like to thank the briefers for their statements and to express our appreciation for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNICEF, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. I would like as well to express our appreciation to all United Nations humanitarian agencies that are active in protecting children. I also cannot but to thank the Republic of Malta for its tireless efforts in leading this effort within the Security Council.

Jordan also aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Group of Arab States and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

The total number of violations documented in 2023 by the report of the Secretary General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) is the highest ever. That increase has grave repercussions and dire implications not only for children in the areas of conflict but also for the security and stability of the world and future generations as a whole.

While the Security Council discusses today the violations documented against children in areas of conflict in particular, the world witnesses the ongoing barbaric Israeli war against the Gaza Strip, which, since it began more than eight months ago, has killed approximately 38,000 Palestinians, a third of whom are children. Moreover, nearly 21,000 children remain missing, according to recent Save the Children statistics. Also, tens of thousands of children have been orphaned, losing their parents as a result of the war. There are no families to care for them or institutions to protect them.

In his report, the Secretary-General included the Israeli occupation army and Israeli security forces on the blacklist of perpetrators of grave violations against children. That provides further documentation by the United Nations of Israel's deliberate killing of civilians, including children, and conclusive evidence of Israel's responsibility for grave violations against the children of Palestine, while using food as a weapon against them, targeting them by killing and starvation and denying them the basic needs for life and survival, without any accountability for such actions.

The ongoing aggression against Gaza and the relentless killing of civilians demand that the Security Council and the international community act immediately and actively to stop that aggression

and put an end to the war crimes committed by Israel against the people of Gaza. That requires lifting the siege imposed on them and protecting them from killing, massacres, starvation and genocide, which undermine their human dignity and most basic human values. Israel cannot continue to enjoy immunity from accountability, thereby undermining international law and completely disregarding the principles and foundations underpinning this Organization.

We warn that Israel's deliberate denial of the basic needs of the people in Gaza by imposing stringent restrictions on the United Nations and humanitarian agencies to deliver essential assistance will create a new humanitarian catastrophe, particularly for the most vulnerable groups, such as children, women and the elderly.

This Israeli war has destroyed a whole generation of children in Gaza before the eyes and ears of the world, in disregard of their childhood, their dreams and their suffering. That will have repercussions for the future of the region and for prospects of achieving peace and coexistence among future generations.

If this war does not stop and we remain on this bloody path, the entire region and future generations will not enjoy the peace and stability that we and the peoples of the region want.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of India.

**Mr. Raguttahalli (India):** At the outset, I thank the delegation of the Republic of Korea for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict. I also note with appreciation the insights of all of the briefers.

This year marks 25 years since the adoption of resolution 1261 (1999), on children and armed conflict. Over the years, the annual debate has brought to fore the challenges faced by children in situations of armed conflict and has helped the international community to recognize the importance of preventing and ending violations against children. Towards that end, we greatly appreciate the work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

However, much progress remains to be made, with the changing landscape of armed conflicts and the varied nature of vulnerabilities that children face. The magnitude and severity of grave violations against children in armed conflict situations is a matter of deep concern. This year's report of the Secretary-General

(S/2024/384) presents a sobering account of the escalating threats faced by children in conflict zones. Terrorists and armed groups continue to commit the majority of violations.

In that context, let me make five points.

First, national governments have the primary responsibility of protecting the rights of the child, as mandated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We continue 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 and to adopt robust legal frameworks for the protection and promotion of child rights.

Secondly, the abuse, exploitation, sexual violence and other grave violations against children, committed by terrorists, need greater focus and determined action. Children remain particularly vulnerable to indoctrination through violent extremist ideologies designed to foment terrorism. That challenge can be overcome only through resolute action by governments on whose territory such entities operate.

Thirdly, the importance of quality education and skill development to mitigate negative consequences cannot be over-emphasized. The use of digital tools to provide education, vocational training and psychosocial support open up new opportunities for children in conflict situations. Protecting schools, especially girls' schools, and health-care facilities and its personnel, must be accorded priority.

Fourthly, there is a need for a more inclusive approach to provide protection to child victims of armed conflicts. Children who face relocation and reintegration require special attention. Children who grow up in conflict and post-conflict situations often need a fresh start.

Fifthly, based on our experience over decades in United Nations peacekeeping, we recognize the importance of having sufficient resources and the requisite number of child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions for effective child protection programmes.

In conclusion, the right to a joyful childhood, leading to a life full of opportunities, is the fundamental right of every child. The health, education and creative abilities of our children and young people will determine the well-being and strength of humankind. Children are the future of the world. Let me conclude

by reiterating India's firm commitment to supporting the United Nations in its endeavour to protect children in situations of armed conflict.

Before I formally conclude, let me respond briefly, in the interest of time, to remarks that were obviously politically motivated and unfounded, made by one representative against my country. I categorically dismiss and condemn those baseless remarks with the contempt that they deserve. They are nothing but another habitual attempt to divert attention from the grave violations against children that continue unabated in the representative's own country, as highlighted in this year's report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

As far as the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are concerned, they will always be an integral and inalienable part of India, irrespective of what this particular representative or his country believes or wishes.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

**Ms. Robles Cartes (Spain)** (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain associates itself with the statements delivered, respectively, on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We share the deep concern about the data in the Secretary-General report (S/2024/384), which specifies unprecedented levels of violence against children in multiple contexts.

As members of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, we draw attention to the more than 20,000 Ukrainian children forcibly deported to Russia since the beginning of the invasion. This constitutes a war crime, and its perpetrators must be brought to justice. We call on all States to comply with the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court.

In the Middle East, grave violations against children increased by 155 per cent. We are deeply shocked by the high numbers of killings, maimings and arrests of Palestinian children in the Gaza conflict, just as we condemn, in the strongest terms, the killings, maimings, abductions and sexual violence committed by Hamas against Israeli children during the brutal terrorist attacks of 7 October.

Spain demands an immediate and permanent ceasefire that allows for the release of the hostages, a massive increase in humanitarian aid and full compliance with the provisional measures decreed by the International Court of Justice. We support the ceasefire proposal contained in resolution 2735 (2024) and call for its immediate implementation.

Most of these incidents are caused by explosive weapons being used in population centres. We are committed to the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and to promoting its universality.

Others are caused by the denial of humanitarian access, which we emphatically condemn. In Gaza 9 out of 10 children are experiencing severe child food poverty, and according to the World Health Organization, more than 8,000 children under five years of age have been diagnosed and treated for acute malnutrition.

According to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, attacks on education have increased by almost 20 per cent in 2022–2023. In addition to their direct impact, such attacks expose children to an increased risk of serious violations, such as abductions and sexual violence.

We promote the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, and we support emergency education projects in Ukraine, Afghanistan and Haiti, among others.

Other causes for concern are violations of children's right to health in conflicts, with increasing attacks on medical missions and their personnel, and the persistence of sexual violence, the true scope of which eludes us, given the difficulty of collecting reliable data on this scourge.

In that connection, the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the agencies that cooperate with her, continues to be essential. Spain will continue to support her work and will remain firmly committed to this agenda, one of the strategic axes of our humanitarian diplomacy strategy.

We also share the view that the Security Council must ensure that child protection is included in all relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions, and that their

withdrawal be accompanied by the strengthening of country teams with regard to child protection.

In conclusion, children do not start wars and should never be the victims of conflicts. We will never tire of demanding respect for international humanitarian law from all parties, in all situations and in all contexts. Those responsible for violations against children must be held accountable and victims must receive the necessary reparations and assistance, including physical, psychological and social assistance. In that connection, we will continue to support the work of the International Criminal Court and the work of the Trust Fund for Victims.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

**Mr. Passmoor** (South Africa): I wish to begin by thanking the briefers for their reports. In addition, we wish to acknowledge the importance of this annual debate and its value for this critical topic.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

It is extremely disconcerting that children, as the most vulnerable members of society, bear the brunt of violence, displacement and loss during times of conflict. It is also distressing that violence against children in armed conflicts has increased significantly, with a 21 per cent rise in grave violations, including a 35 per cent increase in instances of killing and maiming. Furthermore, there have been reports of large numbers of child recruitment, as well as abductions of children by armed groups in conflict zones. Those continued grievous crimes against children have received limited attention and are an indictment on the international community's failure to protect them.

The international community has particular frameworks and conventions that recognize the unique rights of children and uphold their protection during armed conflicts. South Africa therefore remains deeply concerned that, despite those frameworks and conventions, perpetrators continue to disregard international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We uphold that the best course of action to protect children is to address the root cause of conflicts, pursue peace and prevent situations of armed conflict. Yet until that ideal is achieved, we must be pragmatic in ensuring the most vulnerable are not exposed to the

consequences of armed conflict. Parties to any conflict zone must take every measure to ensure children are protected and treated according to international norms and standards, as articulated in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

We also strongly reject any actions that contribute to grave violations. In that regard, we are particularly concerned about the assertion in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/384) that State actors are responsible for the majority of the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access, especially since they bear the primary responsibility for protecting children. We implore all stakeholders in conflict regions to respect and adhere to international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

We are gravely concerned about the impact of the Israeli war on Palestinians in Gaza, particularly on children. The Palestinian children have borne the brunt of unprecedented and disproportionate targeted attacks by the Israeli occupying Power. The Israeli acts are an egregious violation of international law, which cannot be ignored by the international community any further. The numbers in the report reflect that disproportionate reality and furthermore highlight the targeting of humanitarian facilities that serve to help and protect children. Those actions must cease, in accordance with the recent 24 May order of the International Court of Justice, and all perpetrators of grievous acts against children must be held to account for their actions.

South Africa has and will continue to advocate the inclusion of child protection provisions in peace processes and peace agreements. Importantly, we place significant emphasis on initiatives that focus on demobilizing child soldiers, providing psychosocial support and rehabilitation for affected children and reintegrating them into their communities. The report underscores the alarming increase in violence against and abuse of children in armed conflicts, emphasizing the need for concerted international efforts to protect children's rights and ensure their safety and well-being. The engagement of governments and armed groups with the United Nations has shown progress, but more robust actions and compliance with international law are essential to mitigate those grave violations.

South Africa will continue to advocate for strong international mechanisms and adherence to those



mechanisms through active dialogues and partnerships to address the issue effectively, as well as through cooperation and partnership with regional and subregional organizations. We also stress that States must uphold their responsibility to protect children, both within their borders and in conflict-affected areas, and invest in the rehabilitation and reintegration of children who have been affected by armed conflict. It remains imperative for States to pursue and continue efforts to ensure accountability for violations of grievous crimes against children, which would serve as a deterrence.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine

**Mr. Mansour** (Palestine): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important and timely debate on children and armed conflict, and we thank the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2024/384). We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the other briefers for their briefings.

Year after year, report after report, aggression after aggression, the United Nations has placed the situation of Palestinian children in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, among the areas where the highest number of violations against children were verified. Yet still, Israel was not listed, but rather shielded from scrutiny and accountability. Not listing Israel for all the past years was an abandonment of Palestinian children and denied them justice and protection. And Israel took it as a license to harm them more. It is regrettable that it took a genocidal war against our people — an unprecedented crisis for our children — to finally add Israel to the list of shame this year.

Gaza has become a graveyard for children. Nearly 16,000 have been violently killed by Israel. There are 21,000 children still missing, who are presumed to be crushed and buried under the rubble of their homes or shelters or in mass graves or who have been detained by Israel and are not able to be traced. More children have been killed in Gaza in eight months than have been killed in all armed conflicts globally over the past four years. Gaza's children, who once broke world records for the most basketballs dribbled and for the most kites flown simultaneously, are now, if alive, displaced, injured, traumatized, orphaned and desperately in need of safety under relentless Israeli bombardment and brutal attacks targeting their communities, their

families and their lives. Our children should have been finishing their school year soon and set to start their summer vacation, simply enjoying the crowded beaches of Gaza as their only relief during Gaza's hot summer. They should be joining the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) summer camps and probably attempting to break more world records in sports, sending us another message of hope and joy. Instead, Israel is destroying their UNRWA schools — once a safe space for them to learn and play but now not even a safe place for them to shelter and seek refuge.

Our children — boys and girls, Muslims and Christians — are escaping with their families from crowded home to crowded home, from tent to tent, from hospital to hospital, sick and hungry, tired and scared, terrorized and traumatized. For eight months, all the morality that we thought existed in the world has been turned on its head. Photos and videos of Palestinian children and parents begging for help and safety have flooded our social media. We have seen starving children too weak to cry. We have seen injured children with burns all over their soft skin or with no limbs, fighting for life; newborns in incubators gasping for air; children born and killed during the war, who never even had the chance to have a birth certificate; and wounded children with no surviving family members. We have seen children stripped, handcuffed, blindfolded and detained for days and months. We have seen parents clinging, until the last minute, to the motionless and silent bodies of their small children, not ready to let go. We have seen a mother torn between two options — sitting by the bed of her baby in a coma or attending to her surviving children in their tent.

What is wrong with this world? Where is the international community's humanity? Where is its collective resolve and responsibility to pressure Israel to stop the madness it has unleashed on our people, day and night? What are Member States waiting for in order to enforce an immediate ceasefire? They must enforce a ceasefire now and save our and their humanity now, because it is certainly on the line. Representatives should think of our children in Gaza and their parents when they all go home to their children. Member States must save our children from that unfathomable pain and fear. They must stop Israel's war and put an end to its genocide of our people now.

Adding Israel to the list of shame this year outraged Israel because the persistent political appeasement and

double standards made it believe it was exempt from the rule of law, made it believe its own lie that the Israeli army was the so-called most moral army in the world. It is a lie that cannot mislead anyone anymore. There is nothing moral in using attacks against civilians, including children, as a weapon of war, as a tool for political pressure in negotiations or as a catalyst to stay in power. There is nothing moral in attacking aid convoys and humanitarian personnel. There is nothing moral in withholding and arbitrarily delaying humanitarian aid, using it as a bargaining chip or presenting it as a favour by allowing in a few aid trucks for a starving population, half of them children. Those are not isolated acts by troubled Israeli soldiers. Those are widespread policies and systematic practices meant to intimidate, terrorize and subjugate the Palestinian people, who have never stopped aspiring for freedom and dignity despite that sheer brutality. There is nothing moral in occupation — nothing moral in apartheid.

Adding Israel to the list of shame is the right step in the right direction towards recognizing the suffering of our children and the trauma it has caused to our entire society. It is a key step towards accountability, and we will work with the United Nations and the relevant stakeholders to ensure that a United Nations action plan to end and prevent grave violations against Palestinian children is adopted and that Israel shall not be delisted until it fully ceases the commission of all violations against our children and fully complies with its obligations under international law.

Finally, our children are denied their right to life, to freedom and to their childhood, one generation after another. Palestinian children deserve that Council members uphold the Charter's oath, save succeeding Palestinian generations from the scourge of Israeli occupation and allow Palestinian and Israeli children to live in peace and security.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

**Mr. Kridelka** (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): The year 2023 was a horrible year for children in armed conflicts. The Secretary-General speaks of extreme levels of violence against children. Nowhere else has such extreme violence been as apparent as in the current conflict between Israel and Hamas. Belgium welcomes the Secretary-General's decision to list Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad on the list of unspeakable crimes committed during the terrorist

attacks of 7 October, including abductions and acts of sexual violence. Belgium joins the Secretary-General in calling for the unconditional release of all hostages, including children.

We are also seriously alarmed by what the Secretary-General describes as the unprecedented number of children killed and maimed by the Israeli armed and security forces in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and by the attacks on hundreds of schools and hospitals in Gaza. Belgium is deeply worried by the conclusions of the report (S/2024/384) regarding the administrative and arbitrary detention of children by Israel and the ill-treatment inflicted upon them in detention. We echo the urgent appeal launched by the Secretary-General on all the parties to put an immediate end to the grave violations committed against the children of Palestine and Israel and to prevent such violations. In that context, we welcome the recent offer by the Israeli Government to participate in the development of an action plan together with the United Nations.

(*spoke in English*)

Gaza is by no means the only place where intolerable violence against children took place last year. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, devastatingly high numbers of violations against children continue to be registered year after year, including various forms of sexual violence and the recruitment of child soldiers. Those violations are committed by non-State armed groups and by State actors, including foreign armed forces. The commitment of the Congolese Government to cooperate with the United Nations is encouraging. But in the light of the future withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), we urge the Congolese authorities to do more to help end and prevent grave violations against children, and we encourage the United Nations to preserve the necessary child protection capacity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We need to mitigate the impact on child protection of the MONUSCO transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Belgium will play its role in that regard.

Belgium welcomes the signing of an action plan between the opposition Syrian National Army and the United Nations to end and prevent grave violations against children in Syria. Still, we remain alarmed by the unacceptable and grave ongoing violence against

Syrian children. Belgium also shares the Secretary-General's deep concern about the continued killing and maiming of children and attacks against schools and hospitals in Ukraine. We welcome the renewal of the listing of Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups. Finally, Belgium is extremely worried about the shocking increase in grave violations against children in the Sudan. We welcome the listing of the Sudanese armed forces, the Rapid Support Forces and other armed groups, and we urge all parties in the Sudan to comply with their obligations.

Belgium is a staunch supporter of the children and armed conflict mandate and of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter. We renewed our financial contributions to the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, coordinated by UNICEF. Belgium also decided to once

again finance a young professional in Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter's office for the next three years. Earlier this week, during the last Foreign Affairs Council of the Belgian European Union presidency, European Union Council conclusions were adopted on the revision on our European guidelines on children and armed conflict. That revision was one of the main priorities of our European Union presidency. It shows our commitments to the protection and promotion of the rights of children in armed conflict, a commitment that we will continue to uphold.

**The President:** There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until tomorrow afternoon.

*The meeting was suspended at 6.05 p.m.*