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Children and armed conflict in Nigeria

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the fourth report of the Secretary-General on the situation of children and armed conflict in Nigeria. It covers the period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023.

The report documents the effects of conflict on children in north-east Nigeria, highlighting trends and patterns of the six grave violations against children, namely: the recruitment and use of children; the killing and maiming of children; rape and other forms of sexual violence against children; attacks on schools, hospitals and protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals;^a the abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access. Where available, the report contains information on grave violations against children committed by parties to the conflict, including Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (JAS), Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), the Nigerian Security Forces and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). The progress made in addressing grave violations against children is also outlined.

In the report, the Secretary-General notes a significant increase in the number of violations verified during the current reporting period compared with the previous reporting period ([S/2022/596](#)). North-east Nigeria continued to face heightened insecurity. Armed groups, notably JAS, ISWAP and Bakura, remained a security threat and continued to carry out attacks against civilians, including children and humanitarian workers, and against the Nigerian Security Forces.

In the report the Secretary-General highlights the efforts made by the Government of Nigeria and by CJTF to strengthen the framework to respond to, end and prevent grave violations against children.

The report also contains a series of recommendations addressed to all parties to the conflict aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening child protection in Nigeria.

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



I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, covers the period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023. It is the fourth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria to be submitted to the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. In the report, the Secretary-General outlines information on grave violations committed against children in north-east Nigeria, as well as progress made and challenges involved in addressing those violations since the previous report ([S/2022/596](#)) and the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of its conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in Nigeria ([S/AC.51/2023/2](#)). The report also contains specific recommendations aimed at strengthening and promoting child protection in the country. Where possible, parties to conflict responsible for grave violations were identified. In that regard, in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/78/842-S/2024/384](#)), Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (JAS),¹ remained listed for five grave violations against children in annex II, as parties that had not put in place measures to improve the protection of children.

2. The information contained in the present report was documented and verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in Nigeria, which is co-chaired by the Resident Coordinator and the United Nations Children's Fund. Monitoring and reporting of grave violations was, however, challenged by insecurity, especially in areas under the control or influence of armed groups in the northern region of Borno State, such as in the Abadam, Marte and Kukawa Local Government Areas and some locations around the Sambisa forest area, including villages around the Gwoza, Bama, Konduga, Damboa, Chibok and Askira/Uba Local Government Areas. The information contained herein therefore does not represent the full extent of the grave violations committed in Nigeria during the reporting period, and the actual number of violations is likely to be higher than what is reported.

II. Overview of political and security developments

3. During the reporting period, north-east Nigeria continued to face heightened insecurity. Armed groups, notably JAS, ISWAP and Bakura, remained a security threat and continued to carry out attacks against civilians, including children and humanitarian workers, and against the Nigerian Security Forces. Those attacks triggered mass population displacements and heightened the risks of grave violations against children. Armed groups also increased the use of improvised explosive devices, with various incidents occurring in the Abadam, Marte, Kaga, Mobbar, Dikwa and Gwoza Local Government Areas, along main supply routes. Nigerian Security Forces operations, including air strikes, resulted in the killing of armed group leaders.

4. Armed groups carried out attacks which caused casualties among civilians, particularly those who leave garrison-protected towns to engage in livelihood activities, such as farming, collecting scrap metal and gathering firewood. Such attacks have continued to disrupt families' livelihoods, pushing children into risky ventures, such as collecting scrap metals that have, at times, turned out to be improvised explosive devices, exploding and maiming or killing those around them.

¹ See [A/77/895-S/2023/363](#), para. 347.

5. Other risks for children were linked to the disruption of education. Some schools were closed owing to fear of attacks, which pushed children to engage in risky behaviours, and some joined armed groups due to idleness. In addition, persistent attacks by armed groups made it difficult for humanitarian agencies to operate in certain areas, worsening the situation for those in need. Moreover, the lack of security along main supply routes, particularly in Borno State, has hindered the ability of the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations to provide essential support to affected communities through road missions.

6. As of December 2023, some 2.1 million people, including children, were displaced in north-east Nigeria, with Borno State hosting 1,711,481 displaced persons, followed by Adamawa (218,118) and Yobe (155,030) States. About 63 per cent of the displaced persons have experienced protracted displacement for five years or more.

7. With the closure of most formal camps for internally displaced persons in and around Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, over the past two to three years, 300,000 internally displaced persons have been relocated to their areas of origin or to areas in the proximity of their areas of origin. An additional 950,000 internally displaced persons living across 17 Local Government Areas in Borno State reportedly will be relocated in 2024 as a result of plans by the State government to close more camps in six Local Government Areas in Borno. Identified areas of relocation include Ngala, Monguno, Bama and Pulka. Despite the long-term benefits of the closure of internally displaced persons camps, the decision of the Borno State Government poses complex challenges. Such challenges include security threats for children in particular, including being exposed to attacks by armed groups, as well as returning to areas contaminated with improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance, which may be collected as scrap metals by children who are unaware of the dangers such objects pose. Furthermore, most farms are still contaminated with explosive ordnance, which affects women and children tending to the farms. In addition to a lack of food and other basic needs, risks facing children in areas of return include threats of abduction and recruitment by armed groups and risk of sexual violence and abuse due to the lack of safety and security posed by persistent threats by armed groups. The risk of sexual violence is compounded by inadequate or limited basic services and livelihood opportunities.

8. According to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development of Borno State, as of December 2023 an estimated 32,911 people, including 9,460 children (5,068 boys, 4,392 girls) were hosted in the three transit centres in Maiduguri: Hajj camp, Shokari camp and Bulumkutu transit centre. The children, including those who were allegedly associated with JAS or dependants of JAS elements, were hosted in the transit centres pending family reunification and reintegration back into their communities. The defectors and the children surrendered to the authorities in Borno State as a result of several factors, including: a Government amnesty to all those associated with JAS who surrender to the security forces; the harsh living conditions in the Sambisa forest, where many JAS elements lived; the lack of leadership within JAS; fighting between JAS and ISWAP; and Nigerian Security Forces military operations against the two groups. Information received by the country task force from Borno State government authorities indicated that the majority of persons exiting JAS were women and children.

9. In a significant milestone, child protection bills in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States were signed into law during the reporting period.

10. In another positive development, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), with the support of the government of Borno State, continued to sustain its efforts to implement the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children

signed with the United Nations in 2017. CJTF was delisted from the annex to the 2021 report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/75/873-S/2021/437](#)), following a decrease in cases of child recruitment and use.

III. Grave violations against children

11. The country taskforce verified 2,519 grave violations against 1,250 children (502 boys, 743 girls, 5 sex unknown) in the three conflict-affected states of Borno (2,278), Adamawa (238) and Yobe (3) in north-east Nigeria. A total of 819 children (300 boys, 519 girls) were victims of multiple violations, including 455 children (291 boys, 164 girls) who were abducted and recruited and used, 361 children (7 boys, 354 girls) who were victims of abduction, recruitment and use and sexual violence, 2 boys who were abducted, recruited and used and maimed, and 1 girl who was a victim of abduction, recruitment and use, sexual violence and maiming.

12. The main perpetrators were JAS (1,795) and ISWAP (647), followed by the Nigerian Security Forces (35) and the CJTF (4). A total of 38 violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators.

13. Overall, there was a significant increase in the number of grave violations verified during the current reporting period compared with the previous reporting period (694). Grave violations also escalated within the reporting period, with 524 violations verified in 2022 and 1,995 violations in 2023. The abduction of children (1,105) remained the most prevalent violation, especially in 2023, when the number of children verified as having been abducted (859) was the highest recorded since 2014. Recruitment and use (821) and sexual violence (439) followed in terms of prevalence.

14. The significant increase in verified cases may be attributed primarily to the mass defection of members of JAS and their subsequent surrender to the Government of Nigeria, which provided an opportunity for the children under their captivity to escape to Government-controlled areas while giving access to the country task force to conduct verification. In the reporting period, there were also several clashes between JAS and ISWAP, which, coupled with the continuous offensive campaigns by the Nigerian Security Forces against the armed groups, further weakened and reduced the armed groups' capacity to continue holding their captives, thereby providing an avenue for captives, including children, to escape to Government-controlled garrison towns.

15. In addition, the country task force verified 79 grave violations that occurred in previous years but were not verified until the current period, notably the recruitment and use of 32 children (17 boys, 15 girls), sexual violence against 8 girls and the abduction of 39 children (17 boys, 22 girls), which were verified in 2022.

A. Recruitment and use

16. The country task force verified the recruitment and use of 821 children (303 boys, 518 girls) aged between 6 and 17 years, during 2022 (136) and 2023 (685). The violations were attributed to JAS (628), ISWAP (187), followed by the Nigerian Security Forces (3) and CJTF (3), both of which used children in domestic roles as porters and cleaners. Children were used for sexual purposes (438), in combat roles (50) and in supporting roles (338). Violations occurred in Borno (724) and Adamawa (97) States. The vast majority of the children (801) were released or escaped during the reporting period, and 20 remained associated with JAS or ISWAP at the time of reporting.

17. A significant increase was observed in the verified numbers of child recruitment and use, compared with the previous reporting period, when 70 children were verified as having been recruited and used by parties to conflict. There was also a significant increase observed within the reporting period, with a total of 685 children (254 boys, 431 girls) verified to have been recruited and used in 2023, compared with 136 (49 boys, 87 girls) in 2022. That increase may be due to the number of children abducted by JAS and ISWAP in previous years who had escaped during the reporting period and whose cases could only be verified upon their release. For example, 55 children who escaped in the first quarter of 2023 from JAS (32) and ISWAP (23) had been used in supporting roles while in captivity.

18. The recruitment and use of children often led to or followed other grave violations. Most children (819) were verified as having been recruited through abduction, including 361 children (7 boys, 354 girls) who were victims of sexual violence during their association. Children associated with JAS and ISWAP were used in combat, as well as in support roles, such as cleaners or cooks, for intelligence gathering and for sexual purposes.

Deprivation of liberty for alleged association with armed groups

19. The Nigerian Security Forces continued to apprehend children for alleged association with armed groups during security sweeps, military operations and screening procedures outside internally displaced persons camps and on the basis of information provided by informants.

20. The country task force verified the detention by the Nigerian Security Forces of 181 children (121 boys, 60 girls) aged between 2 weeks and 17 years, for actual or alleged association with armed groups. Among those detained, 22 children (9 boys, 13 girls) were detained together with their mothers for the mothers' alleged association with ISWAP. All 181 children were released by the Nigerian Security Forces from detention in the Giwa military barracks in Maiduguri, the main military detention facility in Borno State, during the reporting period. After their release, they received interim care at the Bulumkutu interim care centre and were subsequently reunified with families and communities.

21. The children had mostly been detained after escaping from captivity by armed groups and surrendering to the Nigerian Security Forces at the nearest town or village from their point of escape.

22. Some children had initially been held by the Nigerian Security Forces in local prisons or detention facilities for short periods. Eventually, most of the children were transferred to the Giwa military barracks. According to first-hand testimonies, the conditions of detention at the Giwa barracks have improved when compared with the previous reporting period. Food and water were deemed sufficient. Detained children described decongested holding cells, with better sleeping conditions at night compared with the previous reporting period. However, children were still often held in cells with adult inmates, although the facility has a cell block designated exclusively for minors. During their detention, children were interviewed by officials of the Department of State Services to determine their level of association with armed groups. None of the children had contact with family members outside the detention centre.

23. Once released, all the children were systematically handed over to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development of Borno State, which received them at the Bulumkutu transit centre in Maiduguri. Although the notice given prior to the release of children was usually short (a few days), that notice is considered a good practice, as it affords the Ministry, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations the opportunity to provide interim care and community-based reintegration services.

B. Killing and maiming

24. The country task force verified the killing (65) and maiming (74) of 135 children (94 boys, 36 girls, 5 sex unknown), aged between 7 months and 17 years, in Borno (133), Adamawa (1) and Yobe (1) States. The violations were attributed to ISWAP (53), unidentified perpetrators (38), the Nigerian Security Forces (31) and JAS (13). The child casualties were mostly the result of crossfire (36), explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices (32), shelling (28) and cold weapons (11).

25. A decrease was observed compared with the previous reporting period, when 212 child casualties were verified. An upward trend was, however, observed within the current period, with 53 casualties verified in 2022 and 82 in 2023. This may be due to several factors, including the rises in the number of attacks using improvised explosive devices and in the number of child casualties arising from unexploded ordnance incidents. Attacks on civilian populations by ISWAP were also a significant contributory factor to the number of child casualties.

26. For example, on 8 March 2023, ISWAP elements attacked farmers and fishermen in Mugdala village, north-east of Dikwa town, killing 16 boys aged 13 to 17 years. Also, on 4 June 2023, three boys aged 13 years old were killed, and five other children (3 boys, 2 girls) sustained serious injuries as a result of an incident involving explosive remnants of war. The children had gone to rear animals in the bush; there, they saw a curious object and carried it home where, while playing with it, the elder brother pulled the safety pin and the device exploded.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

27. Girls continued to be extremely vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and forced marriage. Forced marriage has been used by families as a negative coping mechanism to deter armed groups from abducting unmarried girls and to alleviate economic desperation.

28. The country task force verified sexual violence committed against 439 children (7 boys, 432 girls) aged between 10 and 17 years. Violations occurred in Borno (402) and Adamawa (37) States and were attributed to JAS (344), ISWAP (94) and CJTF (1). Of the total, 73 girls were verified as being survivors of sexual violence in 2022, and 7 boys and 359 girls in 2023.

29. JAS and ISWAP were the main perpetrators of verified incidents of sexual violence, which often occurred in the context of other grave violations, such as abduction or recruitment and use. A total of 7 boys and 341 girls were forcibly married to JAS and ISWAP fighters after their abduction. For example, following their escape, 45 children (4 boys, 41 girls) affirmed that they had been subjected to sexual violence through forced marriage while held in captivity by JAS (27) and ISWAP (18) in Bama Local Government Area in Borno State.

30. There was a significant increase in verified cases compared with the previous reporting period, when the country task force verified incidents of sexual violence against 63 children. An increase was also observed within the reporting period, with 73 violations verified in 2022 and 366 in 2023. The country task force members had greater access to children who had left armed groups as part of the ongoing mass exit and surrenders in response to the amnesty programme of the Borno State government, which might partially explain the increase. Furthermore, the country task force conducted mass community mobilization and engagement in locations that had been severely affected by grave violations against children, which led to increased reporting by the community.

31. Nevertheless, sexual violence continued to be vastly underreported owing to stigmatization, fear of reprisals, harmful social norms, the absence or lack of access to services, impunity and safety concerns. The numbers therefore may not fully capture the prevalence of cases of sexual violence against children that may have occurred in north-east Nigeria; nonetheless, they serve to illustrate the severity of the problem.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

32. In north-east Nigeria, 12 attacks on schools (6) and hospitals (6) were verified and attributed to ISWAP (12) in Borno (10) and Yobe (2) States.

33. Hostilities and violence perpetrated by JAS and ISWAP continued to severely affect children's right to access education and health care, in particular in Yobe and Borno States. Of concern were attacks by armed groups that caused damage to schools, health and humanitarian facilities, contributing to a spike in out-of-school children. The conflict has led to the damaging and destruction of learning facilities and a shortage of teachers, resulting in a significant lack of provision of education. Since the onset of the crisis in the north-east in 2009, over 1,400 schools have been destroyed, and another 802 schools remain closed or non-functional. As a result, 41 per cent of all public primary classrooms are unusable or inadequate. In 2022 and 2023, floods resulting from climate change further compounded the problem.

34. Attacks on schools occurred in 2022 (5) and in 2023 (1) and involved arson (5), destruction (4), attacks against school personnel, including abduction (1), or a combination thereof. For instance, on 11 March 2022, ISWAP attacked the Gamboru central primary school in Kanumburi ward A in Gamboru, Ngala Local Government Area in Borno State. They set fire to four classrooms, two teachers' offices and two storage rooms. The school served 1,790 pupils (835 boys, 955 girls) and employed 23 teachers (5 female, 18 male). It resumed operation after rehabilitation of the affected buildings.

35. The country task force verified the military use of one school by the Nigerian Security Forces in Borno State. The military use of the school continued at the time of reporting.

36. Attacks on hospitals took place in 2022 (5) and in 2023 (1) and involved the burning and destruction of infrastructure and equipment (3), the looting of drugs and medical supplies (2) and threats against health personnel (1). For instance, on 3 April 2022, ISWAP launched an attack on the United Nations-supported primary health centre in Damboa town, in Damboa Local Government Area. They looted drugs and set fire to the cold store and to the disease surveillance and notification office in the centre. Before the attack, the facility provided health-care services to about 3,973 internally displaced persons from the central internally displaced persons camp in the town.

E. Abduction

37. The country task force verified the abduction of 1,105 children (406 boys, 699 girls), aged between 3 and 17 years, by JAS (809) and ISWAP (296). Violations occurred in Borno (1,001) and Adamawa (104) States. These numbers reflect a sharp increase compared with the previous report, when the abduction of 287 children was verified. An upward trend was also observed during the reporting period, with 246 children verified as abducted in 2022 and 859 in 2023. The upward trend in abductions may be explained by the continued mass exit of JAS members from the

armed group and their subsequent surrender to the Government of Nigeria, which provided an opportunity for the children in their captivity to escape to Government-controlled areas, enabling the country task force to conduct verification. These high numbers may also be due to clashes between the remaining JAS fighters who have not surrendered and ISWAP, whose strength has been weakening, which affect their ability to keep hold of their captives, leading to the escape of captives, including children, to Government-controlled towns. The number of children abducted by JAS and ISWAP is believed to be significantly higher, as monitoring was hampered by access and security constraints in areas where armed groups operate.

38. Of the 1,105 children verified as having been abducted during the reporting period, 819 (300 boys, 519 girls) were abducted for the purpose of recruitment and use by ISWAP and JAS, including 7 boys and 354 girls who were also victims of sexual violence during their association with the armed groups. The purpose of abducting the other 291 children was unknown. A total of 882 children were released or escaped during the reporting period, and the whereabouts of the other 223 children remained unknown at the time of reporting.

39. The abduction of girls for the purpose of forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence remained of serious concern. Most of the children were forcibly taken away from their homes, schools and communities to be sexually enslaved and forcibly married. For example, in September 2022, 29 girls aged 12 to 17 years in Borno State stated that they had been forcibly married to their captors while in captivity following their abduction by JAS (28) or ISWAP (1).

40. In addition, as a continuing trend from the previous reporting period, the kidnappings of students for ransom beyond north-eastern Nigeria into the north-west of the country continued during the reporting period.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

41. A total of seven incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children were verified during the reporting period: six in 2022 and one in 2023. ISWAP was the main perpetrator, responsible for five incidents, followed by JAS (1) and the Nigerian Security Forces (1). All incidents occurred in Borno State (7). Incidents included threats and violence against humanitarian personnel and assets (5), the abduction of humanitarian staff (3), the disruption and looting of humanitarian supplies (1), interference in humanitarian operations (1), or a combination thereof.

42. Those incidents often resulted in the temporary suspension of humanitarian activities and affected the delivery of humanitarian aid to thousands of children. In addition, increased hostility by armed groups towards humanitarian workers was observed during the reporting period. ISWAP threatened to attack humanitarian workers, including through articles in the media. For example, on 10 March 2022, a group of ISWAP operatives attacked Monguno in Borno State and abducted one staff member and two security guards from an international non-governmental organization (NGO) guesthouse. All abductees were released in the first quarter of 2023.

43. The incident attributed to the Nigerian Security Forces involved an attack against a humanitarian helicopter by a Nigerian Security Forces soldier.

IV. Advocacy and dialogue with parties to conflict

44. On 30 September 2022, the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria signed an agreement with the United Nations on a handover protocol for children

encountered in the course of armed conflict in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin Region. The handover protocol is aimed at preventing the detention of children encountered by military and security forces during armed conflict by identifying and transferring children allegedly associated with armed groups to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development within seven days.

45. A meeting to develop an implementation plan for the handover protocol was held in Maiduguri on 29 and 30 August 2023. The meeting brought together an implementation committee comprising representatives from the Federal Ministry of Defence, the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Office of the National Security Adviser, the Nigerian military, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development of Borno State, the Ministry of Justice of Borno State, the Ministry of Local Government and Emirate Affairs of Borno State, United Nations agencies and international NGOs. The purpose of the implementation committee is to coordinate the monitoring of detention facilities, provide oversight to reinforce accountability within the military, verify and manage data on children detained and released from administrative custody managed through the Joint Investigation Centre in Maiduguri and provide quarterly briefings to stakeholders about the status of children detained and released from administrative custody. On the basis of the work of the committee in 2023, a draft implementation plan was developed and endorsed on 25 January 2024.

46. Since the signing of the handover protocol, the Nigerian Security Forces have been active in processing the cases of children who come into their custody, and 181 children have been released from military custody. The children received interim care at the Bulumkutu interim care centre and were reunified with their families and communities.

47. With respect to accountability, the Borno State government continued to pressure those involved in the armed conflict to take advantage of the amnesty declared in June 2021 and surrender to the Nigerian Security Forces for screening, rehabilitation and reintegration into the community, where various programmes of justice and reconciliation are in place to support reconciliation and healing processes. The Borno State government stated that none of the defectors would receive retribution; instead, all would undergo screening, rehabilitation and reintegration back into the community.

48. The signing into law of the child protection bills in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States represents a substantial advancement of children's rights in north-east Nigeria, providing a long-awaited legal framework for the protection of children against violence and exploitation and for the prevention of child marriage.

49. The country task force supported CJTF in its efforts to establish and provide training 34 child protection units within CJTF in the context of the 2017 action plan signed with the United Nations. A total of 196 personnel (112 men, 42 women) and 42 senior commanders from 27 locations were selected to receive training. The objective of the training was to increase participants' understanding of child rights and child protection, prevention of conflict-related sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse, the psychosocial needs of children, prevention of recruitment and use of children, and the roles of the members of the child protection units.

V. Release of children and programmatic response

50. During the reporting period, 15,967 children (8,159 boys, 7,808 girls), including those associated with armed groups or with suspected family ties to elements of armed groups, received reintegration support through the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development of Borno State, the United Nations and child protection partners.

Of that total, 9,460 children (5,068 boys, 4,392 girls) were released from armed groups and were hosted at Government transit centres (Hajj camp, Shokari camp and the Bulumkutu interim care centre), including 2,340 children (1,241 boys, 1,099 girls) who remained in the three camps at the time of reporting. These 9,460 children were provided with holistic and multidisciplinary support, including interim care support and services that included medical care, psychosocial support and case management as part of their rehabilitation before reintegration back into their families and communities. The other 6,507 children (3,091 boys, 3,416 girls) who were directly reintegrated back into their communities without passing through a Government transit camp, including some children formerly associated with armed groups, were referred to partners working in their area of reintegration for services, as were other vulnerable children.

51. Most child survivors of sexual violence were provided with relevant support and services as part of the rehabilitation and reintegration programme managed by the Nigerian Government through the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development.

VI. Observations and recommendations

52. I am seriously concerned about the significant increase in the number of grave violations committed against children by JAS and ISWAP. I urge JAS and ISWAP to immediately end and prevent all violations against children, release all children associated with them and abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

53. I strongly condemn the abduction of children, many of whom were girls, by JAS and ISWAP, notably for the purpose of recruitment and use and sexual violence. I urge these groups to immediately release all abducted children.

54. I remain gravely concerned about ongoing attacks on schools, hospitals and protected persons in relation to schools and hospitals. I call upon all parties to respect the civilian character of schools and hospitals and to allow safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian actors to conflict-affected populations.

55. I commend both the Government of Nigeria and CJTF for the constructive role that they have continued to play in the implementation of the 2017 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by CJTF and in efforts to address remaining cases of recruitment and use of children. I further welcome the establishment of child protection units in all CJTF formations in Borno State and the roll-out of awareness-raising activities among CJTF and community members, in line with the action plan. I urge CJTF, with the continued support of the United Nations, to fulfil its remaining commitments under the action plan, namely, the training of its units on children's rights and the establishment of accountability mechanisms subjecting CJTF members to disciplinary measures when standing orders that are in line with the action plan are violated.

56. I welcome the adoption of a handover protocol for children encountered in the course of armed conflict in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin Region and the fact that 181 children were released from military detention since the signing of the protocol. I also welcome the endorsement of an implementation plan for the protocol, and I call upon the Government to expedite its implementation.

57. I remain concerned about children still being held in detention for their actual or alleged association with armed groups. I call upon the Nigerian authorities to treat children associated with armed groups primarily as victims and for detention to be used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period, with the best

interests of the child and international standards for juvenile justice as guiding principles. I encourage the Government to continue to coordinate with and adequately notify relevant stakeholders, including the United Nations, before the release of detained children, allowing adequate time for the preparation of the programmatic response. I also call upon the Government to provide unhindered access to child protection actors to detention facilities, in particular the Giwa military barracks.

58. I welcome the efforts of the Government of Nigeria, with the support of the United Nations and partners, leading to the reintegration of 15,967 children affected by armed conflict, including those who were associated with armed groups or who have suspected family ties to elements of armed groups. I encourage the Nigerian authorities to continue to ensure the effective and gender-sensitive reintegration of all children released, as well as the provision of educational, health, mental health and psychosocial programmes to all children affected by conflict. I further urge the Government to pay particular attention to the risks of the re-recruitment of children, in particular in the light of the large number of individuals, including children, escaping from JAS and ISWAP.

59. I urge the Government to swiftly endorse the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups.

60. I appeal to the Government to pursue its efforts to promote accountability, by investigating, prosecuting and sanctioning anyone found to be responsible for grave violations, including sexual violence, against children and to ensure that all victims have access to justice and are provided with comprehensive, age-appropriate and gender-sensitive protection services.

61. I am concerned about the closure of internally displaced persons camps in and around Maiduguri, and the proposed closure of additional camps in Borno State in 2024. These closures pose significant security risks for displaced persons, including children, who may be exposed to attacks by armed groups when relocated to or near their areas of origin.

62. I welcome the contributions of donors to the United Nations, civil society organizations and the Government of Nigeria to support humanitarian and development programmes, especially those that help children affected by conflict and that facilitate access to education and health services. I urge donors to enhance their financial support for these programmes, in particular for the interim care, long-term psychosocial recovery and community-based social and economic reintegration of children who have been abducted, recruited and used and girls who are survivors of sexual violence.