



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9366**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 5 July 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Dame Barbara Woodward . . . . .	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
	Brazil . . . . .	Mr. De Almeida Filho
	China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Yun
	Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Biang
	Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
	Japan . . . . .	Mrs. Shino
	Malta . . . . .	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mrs. Nusseibeh
	United States of America . . . . .	Mr. DeLaurentis

## Agenda

### Children and armed conflict

How to prevent and respond to grave violations against children in armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2023/363)

Letter dated 23 June 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2023/470)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Expression of thanks to the outgoing President**

**The President:** I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to Her Excellency Mrs. Lana Zaki Nusseibeh, Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates, and her team for their service as President of the Security Council for the month of June. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing our deep appreciation to Ambassador Nusseibeh and her team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **Children and armed conflict**

#### **How to prevent and respond to grave violations against children in armed conflict**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2023/363)**

#### **Letter dated 23 June 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2023/470)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Algeria, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Türkiye, Ukraine, Uruguay and Yemen to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter; Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Mr. Omar Abdi, Deputy Executive Director for Programmes at the United Nations Children's Fund; and Ms. Violeta, child civil society representative.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/363, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, and document S/2023/470, which contains the text of a letter dated 23 June 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter.

**Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter:** I thank Ambassador Woodward for her remarks and for hosting today's open debate. I deeply appreciate the United Kingdom's long-standing support to the children and armed conflict mandate, as well as the collective commitment of Security Council members. I also thank my co-briefers and all participants for their presence here and online today. I value the attention given to this important issue.

In 2017, the year I took office, the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/821) covered 20 situations across four geographical regions and documented 21,000 grave violations verified the previous year. The mandate has since grown significantly; it now spans five geographical regions and covers 26 situations. Two new situations — Haiti and the Niger — have been added given the worrisome and unfolding security situations on the ground. Detailed information on both will be included in next year's report, as was done for Ethiopia, Mozambique and Ukraine, which were added in 2022 and are featured for the first time in the report (S/2023/363) before the Council.

The challenges that the world is facing also increased and layered on each other. Just to mention a few: climate insecurity added a layer to the fight over resources and forced displacement; the accumulation of explosive remnants of war and mines added new dimensions to the killing and maiming of children; and terror tactics of armed groups were played out against children and their education rights, particularly those of girls. And the situation outlined in this year's report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict reflects on all of those. The United Nations verified 27,180 grave violations against 18,890 children last year. They include 2,880 violations that were late-verified. As well, 8,630 children were either killed or maimed, 7,622 children were recruited and used, and 3,985 children were abducted. Those three violations remained the ones verified at the highest levels; and all of them increased in 2022.

Children were killed or injured in airstrikes, by explosive weapons, by live ammunition, in crossfire or in direct attacks. In many cases, they fell victim to explosive remnants of war. Rape and sexual violence against children, although chronically underreported, was also verified at high levels — 1,165 children, almost all of them girls, were raped, gang-raped, forced into marriage or sexual slavery or sexually assaulted. Some cases were so severe that they resulted in the death of the victims.

The crimes committed against those children are horrifying. Overall, the United Nations verified attacks on 1,163 schools and 647 hospitals. That represents a 112 per cent increase as compared to the year before. Fifty per cent of those attacks were perpetrated by Government forces.

In addition, the use of schools and hospitals for military purposes remains a major concern. It exposes teachers, students, medical personnel and patients to harm, and it often leads to damage to, or the complete destruction of, civilian infrastructure. The United Nations verified a sharp increase of over 60 per cent of such cases last year, conducted by both armed forces and armed groups.

In situations of conflict, when protection, education, health care, food production systems, water facilities and essential services are weakened or broken down, the only hope left for children and communities often comes in the form of humanitarian assistance. But that too is increasingly under threat. The United Nations

verified 3,931 incidents of the denial of humanitarian access to children in 2022. Humanitarian workers were killed, assaulted and abducted. Humanitarian supplies were looted, and assets and vital infrastructure were destroyed. Bureaucratic impediments and restrictions on movements further complicated the delivery of humanitarian aid. Given the increasing control over the work of humanitarian actors and restrictive laws, that unfortunately is a deteriorating trend as well.

We should never forget that behind each verified violation is the life of a child, with their own individual story. Last year 18,890 children were affected, yet their stories are not told, as is the case of the three girls gang-raped in South Sudan during five days of terror, the boys killed by an improvised explosive device in a school in Afghanistan, the 14-year-old girl in Myanmar abducted and burned alive and the girl with amputated limbs as a result of airstrikes in Ukraine — and so many more. That is why we must remember that behind the figures are the faces of children suffering from armed violence around the globe. We must do more to prevent and protect our children from the ravages of armed conflict.

Despite the need to protect our children better, there are simply too many areas that we do not have access to; too many situations where the demands far outweigh our monitoring capacities; and too many victims and witnesses have been silenced. All too often, children and their communities either do not have access to safe reporting channels and assistance or are too afraid to make use of them. Boys are often taught that being a victim undermines their masculinity. Societies shame girls for the harm done to them. Communities are put under pressure. Human rights defenders and humanitarian workers are threatened. And therefore those most in need of our support are left alone in their suffering, without receiving care or justice.

In some cases, instead of receiving protection, child victims are punished for their circumstances. Last year, 2,496 children were deprived of liberty for their actual or alleged association with parties to conflict. Being particularly vulnerable at the hands of authorities, children under detention were exposed to further violations of their rights, including torture and sexual violence. In some cases, they were even sentenced to death.

Finally, justice and accountability continue to elude children. Despite progress in some situations, grave violations against children continue to go unpunished,

and perpetrators are unchecked by the national and international legal systems. We owe it to children to guarantee them access to justice.

And while acknowledging that armed groups, including those designated as terrorists by the United Nations, were responsible for 50 per cent of grave violations, I would like to underscore that the main perpetrators of the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access in 2022 were the armed and security forces of Governments, whose primary responsibility is to ensure the protection of civilians, including children.

In the face of ongoing tragedies that children endured, our hope remains unwavering. The relentless commitment of my Office and the United Nations on the ground, actively engaging with parties to conflict, has not only given us purpose but has also empowered us to strengthen our efforts. For instance, upon assuming my Office in 2017, a total of 8,052 incidents of the recruitment and use of children were documented. Nevertheless, by 2022 that number had decreased to 7,622 incidents, despite the fact that we are reporting on six more situations than in 2017. Those figures attest to and reinforce the ongoing significance of our mandate and its effects when consistently applied.

Allow me to also underline the positive achievements accomplished thanks to United Nations engagement with all parties to conflict, which led to concrete results in multiple situations last year. In Yemen, we signed an action plan with the Houthis — who call themselves Ansar Allah — to end and prevent violations. That is the third commitment signed in Yemen, meaning that the United Nations has engaged concretely with all three major parties to the conflict. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Mai-Mai Machine signed unilateral commitments to protect children. In Iraq, the Government signed an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces. In addition, 1,448 Iraqi children were repatriated from north-east Syria.

The United Nations is engaging actively in other situations and with parties to those situations, such as in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Ukraine and the Russian Federation, all of which I recently visited, to secure concrete and practical commitments to protect children and put in place prevention plans and/or protection plans.

In other situations, progress was achieved through the adoption of handover protocols, the development of child protection policies, the strengthening of legislation and the integration of child protection in peace processes and national dialogues. United Nations engagement also focused on training and awareness-raising, reaching thousands of stakeholders. Notably, 12,460 children formerly associated with armed forces or groups were released and provided with protection or reintegration support. Those achievements are important and meaningful, and I commend every single person who was involved in attaining them.

Going forward, however, much bigger strides are required. We urgently need bold and resolute action. We must build on the international consensus on child protection and rally behind the instruments that have already been agreed upon widely. That includes defining as a child everyone under the age of 18, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which must be protected.

I urge everyone to embrace peace and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, which remains the only sustainable way to reduce and prevent violations against children. I call on everyone to boost financing for child protection programmes, including meeting the enormous needs for reintegration programmes, which far outpace the resources currently available. It is heartbreaking when children who have been released from recruitment and use, or encountered after enduring other violations, find that there is in fact no safe place for them to go and no support available. The financing of demining action programmes and mine education should also be a priority, given the devastating impact of explosive remnants of war on children globally.

I would also like to underline that the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) is only as strong as the resources and capacities given for its operations, including budgetary resources and staff positions and capacity-building. That is particularly salient as between 2022 and 2023 five new situations have been added to the agenda of children and armed conflict, including the Niger and Haiti this year. It is important for friends of the mandate to support the MRM in budgetary decisions, including in the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly and in United Nations mission budgets. Furthermore, the resources of UNICEF country offices specifically dedicated to the MRM, monitoring and response and the reintegration of children also need to be preserved and sustained, while

building similar child protection capacity and expertise in other United Nations entities as part of country task forces for monitoring and reporting on violations against children in armed conflict.

Lastly, we need to put children at the centre of our efforts and hear their voices. I am therefore committed to working on four major areas during 2023 and forward: advocating for the peaceful resolution of conflict, improving the directives for monitors to best identify grave violations, increasing the resources available for child protection expertise on the ground and the development of a new public awareness campaign that aims at putting the voices of children at the centre of all our work. That campaign will be child-focused and will include their participation, their views and their voices for us to better respond to their concerns. In that regard, I thank Violeta for being here today to share with all of us her recommendations on how to involve children in peacebuilding processes.

I for one remain hopeful that our joint engagement, dedication and action can lead to positive change for children trapped in war. I remain deeply committed to their protection. I invite everyone to join me in that.

**The President:** I thank Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Abdi.

**Mr. Abdi:** Today is a difficult day in the history of the children and armed conflict agenda. This year's report (S/2023/363) of the Secretary-General includes both the highest number of grave violations ever verified by the United Nations, at over 27,000, and the highest-ever number of situations of concern, at 26. UNICEF is gravely concerned by the plight of children in the situations most recently added to the report, including Haiti and the Niger this year, and Ethiopia, Mozambique and Ukraine in 2022. However, we should bear in mind that the highest numbers of grave violations against children were verified in long-standing protracted conflicts, including those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel and the State of Palestine and Somalia.

Those three situations have consistently appeared in the Secretary General's report since the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism was established, in 2005, meaning that children in those contexts have faced unrelenting grave violations for years, and in some cases, like the children in the State of Palestine, for

decades. Due to recent escalations, we expect verified violations in at least some of those situations to increase over the coming months.

And while the eruption of a new conflict in the Sudan occurred outside of the reporting period for this year's report, UNICEF is also gravely concerned about the impact of the ongoing conflict on the country's 21 million children. More than 1 million children have now been displaced by the fighting, and the United Nations has received credible reports, under verification, that hundreds of children have been killed and injured.

The children and armed conflict agenda is effective, as we discussed at last year's open debate (see S/PV.9096), there are countless stories of the positive impact that the children and armed conflict agenda has had on children affected by conflict globally. At least 180,000 children have been released from the ranks of armed forces and groups since the year 2000. And 39 action plans have been signed since 2005, in 18 different situations of conflict. Those action plans have succeeded in preventing and ending grave violations against an untold number of children through proactive measures taken by parties to conflict. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, the implementation of the 2012 action plan led to a significant reduction in the number of children recruited and used by the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), including the screening and separation of over 1,100 children, leading to the delisting of the FARDC for that violation.

One of the greatest strengths of the children and armed conflict agenda is the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism for grave violations, which serves as the evidence base for the present report. The data is reliable and robust. It measures up to the scrutiny that comes with United Nations verification. Trained child protection experts meticulously collect that data impartially, independently and neutrally, in line with fundamental humanitarian principles. We stand behind the veracity of the data and call on Member States to do the same.

Critically, that data enables the United Nations and its partners to better target our efforts at preventing grave violations and supporting children who have experienced grave violations. For example, it helps UNICEF target prevention actions and responses to tragic incidents like the one that killed 27 children and

injured 53 others last month in southern Somalia after ordnance exploded at a playing field. While UNICEF reached more than 9 million children globally with explosive ordnance risk education in 2022, the perils of widespread weapon contamination require us to do more. Similarly, our understanding about where the recruitment and use of children is happening allows us to engage with parties to conflict for their release and to provide those children with support. In 2022, UNICEF and partners provided more than 12,460 children with reintegration or protection support.

The United Nations-verified information reflected in the Secretary-General's report also serves as the United Nations entry point for engaging with parties to conflict to urge them to take measures to better protect children. Over the past 18 months, several parties have committed to steps for the protection of children because of the United Nations engagement. For example, handover protocols adopted in Burkina Faso and Nigeria last year outline steps necessary to protect children encountered, detained or identified in the course of conflict, including their swift transfer to civilian child protection actors responsible for their care and protection.

We also applaud Member States that made bold commitments to keep children safe during last month's Oslo Conference on Protecting Children in Armed Conflict. They included South Sudan, which committed to endorsing the Paris Commitments and Principles and the Vancouver Principles, and incorporating them into national legislation; Somalia, which committed to ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involvement of children in armed conflict; and the Government of Norway, which committed NOK1 billion to programmes that prevent and respond to child rights violations in situations of armed conflict.

Those countries should be commended and supported in their commitments to strengthening protections for children, and we encourage others to follow their lead. But those commitments, whether they be action plans, prevention measures, handover protocols, endorsement of key instruments or adoption of legislation, must be implemented and backed by the political will of parties to conflict and their allies if meaningful change for children is to be effected. With over 27,000 violations verified this year, up from 24,000 last year, existing commitments are clearly not

enough. UNICEF calls on parties to take meaningful and unambiguous action for children.

We are disappointed by the lack of progress by the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in adopting conclusions from the Secretary-General's country reports, despite the commendable efforts of Norway and Malta as chairs of the Group. Conclusions are an important tool for senior leaders and practitioners on the ground to strengthen advocacy with parties to conflict, donors, community leaders and beyond. We call on members of the Security Council to place the protection of children above other political considerations, including through expediting the adoption of Security Council's Working Group's conclusions that are robust, meaningful, and swift.

As the report of the Secretary-General notes, non-State armed groups were responsible for more than 50 per cent of grave violations last year. In Burkina Faso, for example, almost 85 per cent of all violations were attributed to armed groups. Yet far too often, we encounter State actors that wish to prevent or curtail United Nations engagement with armed groups or de facto authorities for political reasons. Let me be clear: United Nations humanitarian engagement does not legitimize these actors. In order to continue to make a difference for children in conflict, including through the provision of services and dialogue to end violations, we call on Member States to enable and support United Nations engagement with armed groups, including with armed groups that may be designated as terrorist.

As the number of countries on the children and armed conflict agenda grows, so does the number of children in need of our protection and support. UNICEF co-leads this work in all of the more than 26 countries that are part of the agenda. As we announced at the Oslo conference, we are investing our core resources in the work of monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children to ensure that we can meet the needs of affected children. But the United Nations depends on the support of donors to sustain our efforts to provide children with the humanitarian services they need and to document grave violations. We call on Member States to scale-up support for United Nations efforts. Today there are more children at risk than at any other time in the last 75 years. The reason for this is plain to see: children are suffering and dying because of cruelty and indifference to their plight, because some political leaders and parties to conflict are simply failing to observe the principle of humanity in times of conflict.

In conclusion, on behalf of UNICEF, I urge all States and entities to join us in putting children first and protecting them today so they can grow up to create a more peaceful world for future generations.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Abdi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Violeta.

**Ms. Violeta** (*spoke in Spanish*): Hello, I am Violeta, and I take the floor on behalf of all the boys, girls, adolescents and young people who live in Colombia. I am a female adolescent, which we celebrate, because in most forums, including this one, representation is usually by adult males.

Talking about conflict, war and peace in a country such as Colombia is basically talking about the entire history of the country. The armed conflict in Colombia has left millions of victims throughout the country, with the people living in the countryside being the most affected. Being a child, adolescent or young person living in the Colombian countryside, belonging to Afro-Colombian Indigenous communities, being a refugee or migrant, or simply belonging to the LGBTIQ+ community, is not easy. We live with the constant fear, when going out to play with a ball in a park or an open space, that we might step on a mine or get caught in the middle of a confrontation. That is very powerful. It is also not easy to go to school and have to be alert all the time because there may be more clashes, and you may be affected, or because an armed group may arrive at your school and recruit some of your classmates. It is also not easy to see how the physical structure of schools is deteriorating day by day thanks to clashes, or how the educational equipment, which is already scarce and not very efficient, has also been compromised. And it is not easy to see how, as the days go by, the chairs in the classrooms emptying as children and adolescents are recruited, killed or displaced, or have to go to a city to look for better opportunities. These young people pack their dreams in a suitcase and leave their roots, their dreams and their ancestors behind in their territories of origin. Nor is it easy to suffer harassment or physical or verbal attacks for being a girl, for having different tastes, for having a different skin colour, for speaking differently or having different customs.

On the other hand, violence in cities, while somewhat different, is just as significant. Living in remote, stigmatized or hidden areas of the cities is not easy either. The existence of armed groups or gangs undoubtedly limits the life and development of

adolescents and young people living in these areas, because there is a constant fear of crossing an invisible barrier without realizing it, or of being attacked or threatened for looking this way or that. And just like in the countryside, after a while, the chairs start emptying, because in cities there is another type of recruitment — by gangs. It becomes commonplace to see classmates lying dead on the sidewalk, and just like in the countryside, there are clashes near recreational areas, schools, parks and hospitals. And often the scarcity of resources, poor educational methodologies, lack of opportunities, school dropouts and violent dynamics of the environment become translated into a great non-conformity in young people and adolescents who want to build a life free and far from violence. Those young people affirmed their strength, resistance and yearning for a dignified life through shouts and chants as they led a great social demonstration in 2020 and 2021 to express a vision of justice and safety from the war that had stigmatized them, silenced them, kidnapped them or exterminated them physically and politically. Something that is also very striking about this vision is that it is also present in the dynamic of the territories and their inhabitants, where the spouse or child of a family member could easily be one of the 6,402 victims of extrajudicial executions or false positives, according to figures released by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace in 2021.

It is impossible to make an exact calculation of the number of victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, but it is possible to make approximations. According to figures documented by the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, as of 2019, more than 3 million children, adolescents and young people were victims of the conflict, either by recruitment, forced disappearance, kidnapping, displacement, murder or violence. More updated figures show us that the war in Colombia is still ongoing. In the first quarter of the year, according to official figures from the *Coalición contra la vinculación de niñas, niños y jóvenes al conflicto armado en Colombia* — the coalition against the involvement of children and adolescents in the armed conflict in Colombia — there have been at least 4,583 child and adolescent victims. The statistics show that there were 18 incidents of forced recruitment, leaving approximately 36 victims; 17 incidents of forced displacement, leaving approximately 1,283 victims; and 15 attacks on and occupations of schools, leaving approximately 1,126 child and adolescent victims.

However, most of these injuries could be prevented in future if children, adolescents and youth had the opportunity to participate in peacebuilding processes. Between September and February, through a project supported by Save the Children, studies and surveys were carried out with children, adolescents and young people in different countries that once had some kind of internal armed conflict, including Colombia, Yemen, the Philippines, Mali and Nigeria. Almost all the people surveyed believe that children should be involved in peacebuilding processes. Why is that? Basically, it is for the following reasons.

First, children have the right to freely express their opinions and are capable of speaking on these issues.

Secondly, sharing views increases the likelihood of building peace.

Thirdly, in that process, children can learn information and skills that they can share with their families and communities.

In addition to that, we also asked about the factors that usually hinder children and adolescents' participation in peace processes, and we found that there two main reasons.

First, adults think that children, adolescents and young people are not mature enough to contribute to the conversation about peacebuilding and peace agreements, and for that reason they do not invest in their participation.

Secondly, most adults do not know how to work with children and adolescents; neither do they have the methodologies or the tools to do so. They do not know how to reach those communities.

And finally, what I think may be the most important result of the project is that nearly 95 per cent of the people surveyed are interested in working for peace. In other words, there really is a great interest — people truly want to do this — and that is why we should invest in that kind of process.

As I approach the end of my briefing, I will continue by making recommendations. And there are a lot of recommendations, given that such a long history of conflict has shown and taught us what works and what does not.

As a first recommendation, it is necessary to condemn and prevent recruitment, as well as to free children and young people who are in the ranks of

any armed groups, in order to prevent the continued use of children, young people and adolescents in war, including those from Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, refugee and migrant communities. In that regard, we call for the funding and swift implementation of efforts aimed at re-establishing the rights of children and young people who are former members of those groups in a comprehensive manner. Moreover, children and young people belonging to those groups must be recognized both as victims of conflict and as agents of change and peacebuilding, because we are usually recognized in two ways: as victims and as conflict multipliers — war machines. But we are not recognized for our most important role, that is, as agents of change.

As a second recommendation, we call for a restructuring of my country's vision of security in order to prevent future violence against young people, such as the violence that occurred during Colombia's great social upheaval and in the context of the extrajudicial executions and the "false positives" scandal. To do that, it is necessary to provide information to both legal and illegal groups in the conflict in order to enable them to fully respect international humanitarian law. We also call for the release and restitution of rights of the victims and their families, as well as the release of the young people imprisoned during those events. Basically, we call for the political prisoners to be released.

As a third recommendation, we recommend strongly condemning the sexual violence committed against children and adolescents during the conflict and taking immediate measures to prevent such violence, as well as to provide redress to the victims quickly through both physical and mental health services, in addition to legal procedures.

As a fourth recommendation, we call for taking the necessary reforms to guarantee coverage, access, quality, permanence and relevance in education, especially in rural and remote areas, enabling children to pursue life projects far from the realm of armed confrontation and illegal acts. That work can be facilitated through compliance with the guidelines of the Safe Schools Declaration, which, even though it has already been signed by Colombia, is something that needs to be monitored and implemented throughout the country's territory. It may have already been signed, but how is it working? We also call for monitoring the recommendations of the Colombia's Truth Commission on the restructuring of the rights to the education of



children and young people in the areas affected by the armed conflict.

As a fifth recommendation, we want to guarantee the presence of the State in terms of its focus on children and young people's integral development and peace education in rural areas. That will enable them to develop life plans in peace, outside of the conflict, and ensure that State presence is not for defence purposes only.

As a final recommendation, we call on the Security Council and its member States to be guarantors of compliance with the peace agreements signed in 2016 and to continue generating possible solutions to the armed conflict that has been resurging in our national territory. We propose the creation of a commission that has knowledge of security and peace issues and is committed to defending human rights and the social rule of law. Such a commission should support possible peace negotiations and ensure the participation of children in the current and future processes, because although previous processes included some participation by children, that participation was neither integral nor fully representative. There were no round-table discussions in remote and rural areas, and the process was not integral or representative — and that is what we are asking — for the future representation to be fair and for our voices to be fully taken into account — and not merely for the purposes of filling a role. Furthermore, we call for the participation of young people, humanitarian organizations, victims, ethnic peoples, young women and people from the LGBTIQ+ community, as well as representatives of the military, police and intelligence agencies.

The normalization of violence, the conflict and the resulting consequences we face are the result of many years of war. We reiterate that, despite the fact that a peace agreement has already been signed in Colombia and that Colombia is seen as a post-conflict country, nothing could be further from the truth, because the conflict is still ongoing in Colombia, and it continues to affect communities. Establishing and maintaining peace is not the responsibility of a single group of people only. It is everyone's responsibility. And peace is not established merely by signing a paper with certain groups and then being done with it. Peace must be established throughout a country's territory. Peace is maintained by all of us, and it is necessary that we all work for it. It is also very important to work from the foundational stages — childhood, adolescence

and youth. Because a country that does not allow its children, adolescents and young people to work on peacebuilding and peace processes is a country that condemns itself to a future at war.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Violeta for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Mrs. Frazier (Malta):** I would like to begin by thanking the United Arab Emirates for its excellent work in June as President of the Security Council, and I wish the United Kingdom all the best for a fruitful and successful presidency in July.

I thank the United Kingdom presidency for convening today's open debate. I also thank Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Abdi and Ms. Violeta for their insightful yet sobering briefings.

We are alarmed by the growing number of grave violations against children that were verified in 2022. Threats and attacks against monitors, which prevent them from reporting on the full scale of violations against children, are unacceptable. It is equally worrisome that Government forces were the main perpetrator of the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access.

The Special Representative's progress in engaging parties to conflict to protect children is encouraging. However, we are deeply concerned by the deterioration in many situations faced by children, such as in Myanmar, South Sudan and Burkina Faso. The high number of grave violations against children in Ukraine, which does not represent the full scale of incidents, is also shocking. Malta calls for the continued objective, impartial and transparent listing of perpetrators in the annex to the Secretary-General's annual report on children in armed conflict (S/2023/363).

Moreover, as the Security Council, we must make sure that United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions have sufficient capacity and robust mandates to ensure that child protection concerns are addressed. That includes during the drawdown and withdrawal of any peacekeeping operation. Malta is actively collaborating with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on child-protection capacity-training and will continue to do so in the coming years. We further encourage the Special Representative

to further deepen the analysis of how gender norms have shaped children's exposure to each of the grave violations across various contexts.

As the drivers of conflict become more complex, including owing to both new armed actors and chronic crises, we call on Member States to cooperate at all levels to mitigate the impact of armed conflict on children, intensify efforts to preserve peace and find political solutions to war. We also call on all the parties to conflicts to conclude and implement action plans and comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. It will be crucial to invest in United Nations efforts to prevent and respond to grave violations, including by monitoring and reporting on them. Humanitarian access must always be facilitated, and actors should be able to engage with all parties, including armed groups. As Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Malta urges continued strong support for the children and armed conflict mandate in the Council and will do its utmost to ensure a consensus on the protection of children in all country situations.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, Madam President, let me assure you of France and my delegation's full support for your presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the UNICEF Deputy Executive Director for Programmes and our young briefer.

The Secretary-General's annual report (S/2023/363) reminds us of the urgent need to combat the suffering of children in times of conflict. Children continue to be the primary victims of war, and France is deeply concerned about the continued grave violations committed against them. Russia's aggression against Ukraine is having devastating consequences for children. As the report underscores, Russia has been responsible for the killing, maiming and forced transfer of children, for sexual violence committed against them and for attacks on schools and hospitals. Its inclusion on the infamous list of the annual report affirms the seriousness of the crimes it has committed. France urges Russia to respect international law and put an end to those abuses immediately. As children continue to fall victim to atrocities in Burma, Yemen and Syria, our support must not waver. France condemns the segregation policy that girls are facing in Afghanistan. We should also come to the aid of the children in Haiti who have become the victims of sexual violence and

have been recruited by gangs. We must respond to these situations by collectively implementing the instruments available to us to ensure the protection of children.

France urges all States to ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, as well as the Rome Statute, all of which are critical tools. Together with UNICEF, we have launched a campaign for the universalization of the Paris Principles and Commitments, which have so far been endorsed by 115 States. Their universal endorsement, as well as that of the Safe Schools Declaration, is imperative if we are to combat such violations. We must continue to take action. The Council should continue to support the work of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, which must be provided with the resources necessary to enable the Secretary-General to draw up a comprehensive and impartial list of violators. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict must be able to work rapidly to adopt outcomes to be implemented on the ground, and I commend the efforts of Malta's chairmanship in that regard. We must combat the impunity that continues, and we support the work of the International Criminal Court to that end. Lastly, we must support projects to protect children. We must do more in terms of prevention and reintegration.

France will continue to commit to implementing the children and armed conflict agenda, as protecting future generations is a prerequisite for ensuring lasting peace. Since 2005, as an indication of the Council's success, more than 200,000 children have been removed from conflict. We must do more.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I congratulate the United Kingdom on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to express my appreciation to the United Arab Emirates for its excellent work in presiding over the Council last month. I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and UNICEF Deputy Director for Programmes Omar Abdi for their briefings. I also listened closely to the briefing by Ms. Violeta.

Children are the future and hope of humankind, and armed conflict has shattered the dreams of countless children. Every day we hear reports of violations against children, and the six types of grave violations, as defined by Security Council resolutions, persist, which is truly heartbreaking. In recent breaking news, more than 20 children have been

shot and killed in the occupied Palestinian territory this year. On 3 and 4 July, Israeli military operations in Jenin led to the death of four Palestinian children. In Haiti, half a million children live at the mercy of gangs who shoot students in classrooms and abduct children near schools and have forced a large number of schools to close. In the Sahel, terrorists have trained thousands of children to be killing machines, forcing them to pick up rifles when they should be holding pens. In Afghanistan, foreign military operations have done terrible harm. Many children have been injured by landmines and other explosive devices left behind by foreign troops. Unlawful unilateral sanctions have further left humanitarian agencies in dire straits. Children who need prosthetic limbs wait in long lines outside humanitarian aid hospitals.

The list goes on, and those I just mentioned are only the tip of the iceberg, from the Middle East to the Horn of Africa, from the Caribbean to the Mediterranean and from Ukraine to Iraq; many other children in conflict areas are suffering without respite. Many have lost their lives on the path of migration or have suffered from inhumane treatment at holding centres. The Convention on the Rights of the Child — the most important instrument of international law for the protection of children — has yet to be universally endorsed, as there is a single country remaining that has still not ratified it. The international community has a long way to go in protecting children and must do so with a heightened sense of urgency, taking concrete actions and shoring up safeguards so that every child is shielded from war and harm and can grow up safely and happily. I would like to emphasize the following three points.

First, stopping grave violations is the most immediate form of protection. Protecting children from harm is an obligation under international law that must be fulfilled by all the parties to a conflict. We call on all parties to conflict to strictly implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, end all indiscriminate attacks and violence that could harm children, refrain from the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas and address the problem of impunity for those who violate children's rights. We encourage the countries concerned to use judicial protection, social relief and other means in the process of post-conflict peacebuilding, prioritize the protection of the rights and interests of vulnerable groups, including children, and work closely with the United Nations to develop

policy frameworks and implementation mechanisms for the protection of children.

Secondly, achieving lasting peace is the ultimate form of protection. As long as conflict remains unabated, there is no guarantee for the safety of children. The international community should make full use of political dialogue, mediation, good offices and peace talks, strengthen preventive measures, support regional and subregional organizations in playing a greater role and work to promote peaceful ways in which the parties to conflict can resolve tensions and clashes and eliminate the scourge of war. The goal is to provide a safe environment for children's healthy growth and development. In that process, we should fully respect the sovereignty and ownership of the country involved in conflict, support the people of those countries in their exploration of institutions and development paths, in line with their national context, and avoid the imposition of external solutions.

Thirdly, supporting the all-round development of children is the most effective form of protection. Relevant United Nations agencies' reports indicate that this year 1.1 billion children worldwide are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. We call on traditional donors to step up their emergency assistance to help those children meet their immediate needs. At the same time, it should be noted that efforts should not stop at crisis response. The international community should focus on children's future development and help the Governments of the countries concerned to take effective measures to eradicate hunger and poverty, provide universal basic education and ensure that children in conflict have access to basic necessities and education.

It is also imperative to step up investment in health care for children in conflict and pay attention to mental health support, in particular to help children resist extreme terrorist ideologies. UNICEF and relevant agencies should effectively discharge their responsibilities in that regard.

The Secretary-General's annual report (S/2023/363) on the matter is an important reference for the Council in carrying out its work. The report should be aimed at helping the Council to obtain a full picture of the situation on the ground, adhere to the principle of non-politicization and avoid double standards and selective blind spots. We note that this year's report does not pay sufficient attention to the long-standing

problem of violations being committed against children in Haiti.

The occupied Palestinian territory has the second-highest number of violations against children out of the 25 conflict situations. Yet no perpetrators are listed. China finds that to be deplorable and hopes that improvements will be made in the next report. China's stands ready to work with the international community, make every effort to maintain international peace and security and create a favourable environment for the healthy growth and comprehensive development of children in all countries.

**Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana): Let me begin by congratulating you, Madam President, and the United Kingdom on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. I also express Ghana's appreciation and thanks to Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh for the United Arab Emirates exceptional leadership of the Council during the month of June.

As the Council considers further measures it can take to advance the protection of children in armed conflict, we should be compelled to do more. Across all conflict situations, our children are not in a good place and have been forced to grapple with immense physical and mental challenges that they do not have the capacity to address. Ghana therefore commends the United Kingdom for convening today's open debate on children and armed conflict. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and Deputy Executive Director Omar Abdi for their briefings, as well as Ms. Violeta for her additional perspectives from the Colombian experience. The words and grave stories that have been shared with the Council today should lead us to act on our commitments and promises for the benefit of the world's children.

Ghana remains deeply concerned about the atrocious violations and attacks that children growing up in conflict communities continue to suffer at the hands of armed groups and actors who have chosen to exploit social disorder and power vacuums to purvey their unimaginable horrors. Killing and maiming children, putting children in the crosshairs of conflict and using them as weapons of war are unacceptable and rob them of their future.

While the opportunities to bring about positive changes have often not been accepted by parties to conflicts, Ghana is encouraged by the outcomes that the

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and other partners have managed to achieve. We encourage the Special Representative's continuing engagement with parties to conflict, regional organizations, civil society organizations and United Nations actors, which has led to successful outcomes, including the development and implementation of relevant protocols and action plans in countries such as Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Yemen. The past outcomes inspire hope. In furtherance of the objective to strengthen the regime for the protection of children in armed conflict, we would like to share four key messages.

First, we call on the Secretary-General to facilitate more systematic reporting to the Security Council on early-warning indicators of potential violations and abuses against children. Child protection and the prevention of violations can be truly successful if risk factors that lead to grave violations against children are identified and adequately addressed before and during conflict. An example of a major risk area that can be focused on and addressed is the impact of socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and a lack of educational opportunities, which increases the susceptibility of children to recruitment and re-recruitment by armed groups and sexual violence, among other serious violations.

Peacekeeping missions by the United Nations and regional organizations should seek to incorporate child protection obligations into mission planning, policies, decisions and activities and must include child protection focal points in field operations. In that regard, we salute the African Union's efforts to mainstream child protection into its institutional responses through the launch of the Policy on Child Protection in African Union Peace Support Operations and the Policy on Mainstreaming Child Protection into the African Peace and Security Architecture.

Secondly, given the cross-border nature of some violations against children in armed conflict, there is a need for enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, as well as with Member States, through the development and implementation of joint strategies and coordination mechanisms to prevent cross-border recruitment and use, as well as trafficking.

Thirdly, we urge regional organizations to deepen their collaboration with civil society organizations in

the areas of early warning and early response, with a tailored focus on child protection. Platforms such as the Peace and Security-Civil Society Organizations Platform of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), if strengthened, can help to better detect and predict threats to peace and security in West Africa and their effects on children. For that reason, we encourage ECOWAS, in its partnership with West Africa's network of civil society organizations, to foster the sharing of information and experiences geared towards more effective conflict prevention and child protection.

Lastly, an indication of the level of importance we attach to the children and armed conflict agenda is reflected by the resources we are willing to devote in support of its implementation. We therefore urge the Council's full support for the allocation of targeted, practical and rapid resources to facilitate responses to threats against children. Moreover, there is a need for targeted resources and urgent collaborative efforts by the international community and Member States to sensitize communities on explosive ordnance risks, as well as to ensure the identification, fencing off and eventual destruction of all manner of explosive ordnance, which endangers the lives of children.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Ghana's commitment to the work of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as to international frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles, as well as the Safe Schools Declaration. While significant strides have been made globally in raising awareness and preventing grave violations against children in armed conflict, the miles left to travel are still long. Ghana is committed to travelling the extra mile for the cause of protecting our children and securing their safe and sustainable future. We all have a responsibility to ensure that no child must worry about where their next meal will come from or be traumatized by which direction the next threat or bullet will come from. In doing so, we must work collectively for the cause of peace.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): Let me congratulate you, Madam President, and your team on assuming the presidency of the Council, and thank you for organizing this open debate. We are grateful to the United Arab Emirates for presiding over our work during the month of June. I also thank Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and the Deputy Executive Director for

Programmes at UNICEF for their insights, as well as Ms. Violeta for her account.

Every year we look forward with great interest to the findings of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2023/363). It is an important document, but it remains a painful read. The overall situation has not improved. There are more conflicts around the world that have made an already tragic situation worse, particularly through the killing, maiming, abuse and recruitment of children. We are alarmed by the increase in cases of abduction, of sexual violence, especially against girls, and of deliberate attacks on schools and hospitals. Forced displacement remains a growing challenge, with an ever-growing number of children fleeing in search of protection.

In Myanmar, the spread of violent conflict in new areas and the proliferation of armed actors have resulted in a serious increase in the number of grave violations against children. The growing intercommunal violence in South Sudan and the Sudan has exacerbated sexual violence against children, abductions and attacks on schools and hospitals. The surge in terrorist activities has aggravated the conditions of children in the central Sahel region, particularly in Burkina Faso. In Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Mali, Syria and Yemen, children continue to be in desperate need of protection and humanitarian aid.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has inflicted new levels of violence and misery on children. The inclusion of Russian troops and affiliated armed groups on the list of shame is proof of our deep concerns. There have been repeated denunciations of atrocities, deliberate attacks on women and children and abductions committed by Russian troops and the Wagner Group mercenaries. We were appalled to learn that 91 children have been used as human shields while attacks on schools and hospitals have continued unabated. There is only one way for Russia to avoid the world's continued scorn for such despicable atrocities, and that is to stop violating the fundamental principles of child protection in wartime, hold perpetrators to account and withdraw all its troops from Ukraine, respecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

If we are to have any chance of another and more hopeful discussion next year, with fewer spine-chilling stories, and to be able to assure Ms. Violeta, and all children everywhere, that we are serious and committed, we have to take real action to change the realities for

children on the ground for the better. That starts with serious work on prevention and conflict resolution. Dealing with the root causes is a long-term investment with a greater and better guarantee of generating tangible benefits for all civilians, especially children.

We know that successful prevention cannot be achieved without accountability. Holding the perpetrators of violations accountable increases the cost of non-compliance with international law and helps deter future violations. That is why we must support the efforts of the United Nations to prevent and respond to grave violations, including by monitoring and reporting on them and by providing assistance to affected children. Child-protection practitioners, civil-society organizations and humanitarian personnel in the field must be protected. All parties must allow and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded access for humanitarian workers, as well as children's access to services, assistance and protection, including integration and rehabilitation.

We deplore and condemn in the strongest terms all atrocities committed against children anywhere in the world. A crime against a child is an affront to all of us — to humankind. We must never countenance the irreplaceable harm inflicted on children in conflict. We call on all the parties to the conflicts listed in the annexes to the report to proactively engage with the United Nations on the ground and with the Office of the Special Representative in order to put in place measures to prevent violations against children affected by conflict. Nothing should be spared in efforts to prevent conflicts, preserve peace and find political solutions to war, because peace is the ultimate guarantee of children's security. It is conducive to an environment in which children can receive a normal upbringing with the education and care that they need and deserve and that we owe them.

**Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil):** Let me start by congratulating the United Arab Emirates on a very successful presidency of the Council during the month of June. I also wish the United Kingdom all the best in its presidency in July. I thank you, Madam President, for convening this annual debate, which provides us with a unique opportunity to discuss such an important file. Brazil is deeply committed to the children and armed conflict agenda, and we hosted a signature event on children and armed conflict during our most recent presidency of the Council (see S/PV.9096).

I thank the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2023/363) and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, for her tireless efforts to protect children. Brazil fully supports the work of the Special Representative, and we encourage her to continue engaging with all parties to conflicts, including through field visits and action plans. That engagement is essential to preventing and ending violations, especially when there is no direct cooperation between the parties involved in an armed conflict. Brazil welcomes the positive results of those efforts, with reintegration support given to more than 12,000 children formerly associated with armed forces or groups in 2022. I also thank Mr. Omar Abdi, Deputy Executive Director for Programmes at UNICEF, for his dedicated work and for his presentation.

*(spoke in Spanish)*

I would like to thank Ms. Violeta for her testimony and the recommendations she presented to us.

*(spoke in English)*

Children do not initiate wars, but when the Security Council fails to maintain international peace and when Member States fail to settle their disputes by peaceful means, children are killed, maimed and raped. The ultimate guarantee of children's security is peace. When considering each of the situations covered by the report, the Council should be clear that humanitarian action alone will not end children's suffering. Only through peace can we avoid child recruitment, abductions, attacks on schools and hospitals and other grave violations. The best approach to protecting children is by promoting dialogue rather than isolation, financing ceasefires rather than wars and engaging in the peaceful settlement of disputes rather than coercive unilateral sanctions. The most effective way to protect children from the inevitable suffering caused by war is to prevent it in the first place, and to favour the immediate cessation of hostilities and the opening of peace negotiations when peace is broken.

Brazil reiterates its principled position according to which multilateral sanctions should not have adverse consequences for children. The Security Council should continue improving humanitarian carveouts in sanction regimes and including experts on children's rights in the monitoring mechanisms of the Sanctions Committees, including Panels of Experts. Child-protection provisions should be included in all the

relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions. We should always treat children primarily as victims, including those associated with groups designated as terrorists. Brazil strongly supports reintegration efforts, education for peace and justice for victims. We also encourage the Office of the Special Representative and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to make use of the expertise of the Peacebuilding Commission.

A world that abandons its children has no future. It inspires neither confidence nor hope. The primary responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security is also a responsibility to the children we may prevent from being included in future reports. Let us not fail them.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to join others in congratulating the United Arab Emirates on its presidency of the Security Council in June, and I wish you, Madam President, and your team, every success in the month of July. Madam, you can count on Switzerland's support.

I would also like to thank you, Madam President, for organizing today's debate, and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter and Deputy Executive Director Abdi for their in-depth analysis and crucial work. My special thanks go to Ms. Violeta.

Almost 30 years ago, Graça Machel made an urgent appeal in her seminal report on the impact of armed conflict on children:

“We must look beyond what seems immediately possible and find new ways and new solutions to shield children from the consequences of war” (A/51/306, para. 312).

The Security Council has responded to this call by developing the Children and Armed Conflict agenda through 13 resolutions that offer important tools for protecting children. While the Children and Armed Conflict agenda has helped to change the lives of thousands of girls and boys, the annual report (S/2023/363) reminds us that the situation of children caught up in armed conflict remains disastrous. Twenty-seven thousand grave violations of children's rights are 27,000 grave violations of children's rights too many, and although more than half of the total number of violations emanate from armed groups, it is worrisome to note that, as Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter mentioned, Government forces have been responsible

for the majority of child killings, attacks on schools and hospitals, and obstacles to humanitarian access.

Respect for international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law is fundamental in this context, and we must intensify our collective efforts to protect children in armed conflict. To this end, we must focus on the following three points.

First, the tools developed by the Security Council will remain effective if and only if they are used independently, credibly and impartially. The criteria for including parties in the annexes to the annual report, or for removing them, must be transparent and objective. The listing of Myanmar's armed forces for additional grave violations, as well as that of the Russian armed forces and armed groups affiliated with them in the context of the military aggression against Ukraine, is consistent and important. We call for a meaningful engagement of all listed parties with the United Nations to prevent and end all grave violations. The task now is to mobilize additional resources, including for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, which Switzerland supports in several countries.

Secondly, verified attacks on schools and hospitals have more than doubled in one year, which is simply unacceptable. There has also been a marked increase in the use of this infrastructure for military purposes. We call on all states to sign and respect the Safe Schools Declaration, and to implement resolution 2601 (2021). Realizing the right to education is the key to a better future and to lasting peace.

Thirdly, the successful reintegration of children previously associated with armed groups or forces is fundamental. We must not underestimate the importance of long-term reintegration programmes that also open up economic prospects and address gender-based needs. This is an effective way of countering the risk of further recruitment.

Although the annual report paints a grim picture, let us keep in mind what Ms. Violeta illustrated in her briefing today: children, with their creativity, ambition and recommendations, to which we have listened carefully, can change the world, or, to once again borrow Graça Machel's words:

“In a world of diversity and disparity, children are a unifying force capable of bringing people to common ethical grounds.” (ibid., para. 6)

**Mr. Afonso** (Mozambique): Mozambique wishes to warmly congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. We pledge our fullest and strongest support. We also thank the United Arab Emirates for its excellent and dynamic presidency of the Council in June.

We commend the United Kingdom presidency for convening today's important open debate. We extend our appreciation for the comprehensive briefings made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter; the UNICEF Deputy Executive Director for Programmes, Mr. Omar Abdi; and Ms. Violeta. We also wish to pay tribute to Malta for its excellent leadership and devotion in chairing the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We commend the Working Group on its results.

Mozambique expresses great concern for the ongoing trend of violations against children's rights around the world. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/363), many children have been confronted with living in situations of vulnerability, which demands attention and action, particularly in areas affected by armed terrorist groups.

Violence against children is a grave violation of human rights. At its core, it challenges the very notion of international peace and security that we espouse in this Chamber. It is therefore with great concern that we continue to witness cases of violations of the fundamental human rights of children, including acts of killing, maiming, sexual violence, psychological torture committed against children, and their recruitment and use for criminal purposes.

Mozambique condemns in the strongest terms the grave violations inflicted on innocent children. The rights of children and their protection and defence are enshrined in our Constitution. All of Mozambican society is conscious of the primary duty and responsibility of the State and of the society itself to defending and protecting our children.

Accordingly, our Government considers it to be of fundamental importance to cherish and uphold the tenets of international human rights and of international humanitarian law as they are applied to children. It is of paramount importance to implement the various resolutions of the Security Council, particularly

resolution 1612 (2005), on the protection of children in armed conflicts.

In that regard, we welcome the efforts made by Governments around the world in countries identified in the report of the Secretary-General, from Asia to Africa and from Latin America to Europe. We praise their commitment to addressing measures that are conducive to the protection of children and to the facilitation of humanitarian assistance for them. The United Nations and other relevant stakeholders play a pivotal role by extending their support through concrete actions in order to prevent violations against children all over the world.

We must take stock of the existing international, regional and national tools to address violations against children. We believe that regional and international instruments are most important in that endeavour, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Convention of the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Paris and Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration. Those instruments are powerful prevention tools to ensure that children are better protected and not subjected to grave violations.

In that context, we commend the positive role played by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We appreciate her recent visit to our country, Mozambique. It was an opportunity to further strengthen our cooperation and coordinate our views and actions in a constructive manner. We value such dialogue and engagement, as they reinforce our national and regional capacity to deal with the situation of terrorism and respect for children's rights. Terrorism is, by definition, a negation and grave violation of children's basic and fundamental rights, and it should be treated as such.

Peace is the foundation for children's security. It is the basis of their right to life, which is the most basic right. In order to prevent and respond to violations against children's rights, it is crucial that we develop and implement holistic approaches that can address the structural causes of vulnerability of children and communities, including issues of development. In that regard, we would like to underline the following points.

First, there is a need to increase training programmes for State and civil society actors in matters related to human rights of the child and international



humanitarian law. We believe that will strengthen the capacity of those actors in handling cases of children in conflict situations. It is also important that those programmes be, by design, gender-sensitive, taking into account the high levels of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated against children.

Secondly, we think that the utmost attention should be given to key legal instruments, including resolution 2427 (2018), taking into account local, national and regional approaches. In that connection, we underscore the relevance of implementing the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Thirdly, we must mainstream child protection in all peace processes, including in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as well as in security sector reform programmes. We must incorporate children's rights in humanitarian advocacy in order to ensure equal access to reintegration support for all children, including those formerly under the yoke of terrorist groups.

Fourthly and lastly, we as the United Nations must avoid and deny any appearance of extending a semblance of legitimacy to terrorist groups in their action against children, because that action is based on force, violence and coercion. On the other hand, we must emphasize multifaceted support to the action of legitimate Governments in their fight against terrorism and their efforts aimed at nation-building and peacebuilding.

In conclusion, Mozambique reiterates its firm commitment to continue implementing measures that can contribute to our collective action in addressing human rights violations against children. It is our firm conviction that our children are the world's future. It must be our solemn duty to protect them.

**Mrs. Shino** (Japan): I would like to join my colleagues in thanking the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates for its excellent work as the President of the Security Council in June. I also congratulate the United Kingdom's team and Ambassador Woodward on their smooth assumption of the presidency, beginning with their convening of today's important annual debate on children and armed conflict. Let me assure you, Madam President, of our team's full support for your country's successful presidency in July. I also thank Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter, Mr. Abdi and Ms. Violeta for their insightful briefings.

Behind every statistical figure of child victims of armed conflict, children's futures and dreams are being taken away. Member States and all parties to conflicts must bear in mind the serious impacts of armed conflict that children endure. The Secretary-General's latest report (S/2023/363) shows that, in 2022, there were 27,180 grave violations against children, every single of which is unacceptable, and we should not ignore that there is a greater number of children affected by conflict that is not reflected in that figure. Moreover, I am particularly distressed to find yet another deplorable aspect of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in the report.

Since the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was created, various frameworks and guidelines have been established to improve the situation of children affected by armed conflicts. All stakeholders in the international community should remember the importance of implementation on the ground. No child should live in fear of attacks, and neither should children fight on the front lines of armed conflicts. In that regard, let me stress two points.

First, the international community should take preventive measures to ensure children's safety. According to the Secretary-General's report, some 26 per cent of child casualties are due to explosive ordnance, including explosive remnants of war, improvised explosive devices and landmines. Japan is convinced that effective mine action contributes to preventing grave violations against children and ensuring their freedom from fear. Japan has therefore been supporting mine clearance and mine-risk education through the United Nations Mine Action Service, UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme, which will reduce the risks for children.

Secondly, access to education is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool to prevent and mitigate conflict. It is regrettable that international humanitarian law and international human rights law are openly ignored, hindering children's access to school. Ensuring access to education for children in armed conflict leads to investing in people who will shape and promote more effective, accountable and resilient institutions and societies. With that in mind, Japan has been supporting education programmes. For example, this year, the Government of Japan made a contribution to UNESCO to provide emergency digital education and school meals to children who fled Myanmar. Japan also

supports school meals programmes through the World Food Programme in many countries to help children attend school even in conflict situations.

Children who are already in vulnerable circumstances are typically confronted by greater human-security challenges combined with those presented by armed conflict, climate change and food insecurity. We are responsible both for addressing those human security threats and removing those impediments that hinder children's ability to create a pathway to a future. Japan will continue to work with other Member States, the United Nations system, international humanitarian organizations and civil-society organizations in that endeavour

**Mr. DeLaurentis** (United States of America): Let me take this opportunity to thank the United Arab Emirates for its effective stewardship of the Security Council in June and to welcome the United Kingdom presidency for the month of July. I am very grateful to Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Abdi, and I especially thank our civil-society briefer, Ms. Violeta, for bringing her voice from the front lines of this important issue to today's discussion.

It is clear that we have not done nearly enough to protect children from the effects of conflict. The United States remains firmly committed to the children and armed conflict agenda item and is keen to see it elevated, enhanced and better integrated into all the work of the Security Council. This year's annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed violence (S/2023/363) provides a sobering snapshot of how conflict has impacted children. As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General underscored, in 2022 the United Nations reported 27,180 instances of the six grave violations against children, including more than 8,600 children killed or maimed. We are deeply saddened by this staggering statistic. We are encouraged by the outcomes of engagement with parties to conflict, which resulted in the release of 12,460 children from armed groups and armed forces, and we hope for more steps that will make children's lives better. However, too many children have been further subjected to sexual violence, abducted or denied humanitarian aid.

Girls in particular are at high risk of gender-based violence, both during and after conflict, and have unique needs in recovery after conflict. Armed

conflict also takes a devastating toll on children with disabilities. There are reports of children in the Sudan who have been forced from their homes and in some cases separated from their families or subjected to sexual violence. Armed groups remain the main perpetrators of abuses against children in Colombia, where the forcible recruitment or use of children remains a prevalent concern, particularly for Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities in rural areas. We welcome the continued progress made by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. We encourage the Colombian Government to prioritize ending such abuses in any peace talks with illegal armed groups and to act swiftly to implement protective measures. Perpetrators of crimes against children, including sexual violence, must be held accountable through the justice system. In Afghanistan, the ban on girls' access to education beyond primary school, patterns of early and forced marriage and the recruitment and use of child soldiers have been detrimental to young people's physical and emotional welfare. We call on the Taliban to reverse the policies and practices that restrict women and girls' access to education at every level.

Of course we cannot talk about the impact of conflict on children without discussing Russia's war on Ukraine. In pursuing Russia's war of choice, members of Russia's forces and its officials have committed crimes against humanity, and that includes children. Members of its forces have committed execution-style killings of Ukrainian men, women and children, and alongside other Russian officials have deported hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian civilians to Russia, including children forcibly separated from their families. Those acts are not random or spontaneous but are part of a widespread and systematic attack on Ukraine's civilian population. Russia's forces continue to attack areas where children are clearly present, including schools, hospitals and residential buildings. That stark reality serves as a poignant reminder of the urgency and necessity of strengthening the international community's child-protection capacities and of the crucial need for all States to respect international law and the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Children are not merely caught in the crossfire. They are often deliberately victimized. Many continue to experience trauma, rejection and social isolation from their communities and require a broad, holistic, survivor-centred and trauma-informed range of

interventions to support their long-term health and well-being and enable them to make future contributions to peaceful societies. We must do better. Children around the world deserve to feel safe, receive an education and have a future. When we take steps to protect them, we are safeguarding our collective future and helping to end enduring conflicts.

**Mr. Montalvo Sosa** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council, and at the same time we appreciate the focus on prevention and response strategies that you have proposed for this debate.

I am grateful for the information provided by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and Mr. Omar Abdi, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director for Programmes, and for the first-hand account by Ms. Violeta, to whom we listened especially closely.

The killing, recruitment, use and kidnapping of children, and sexual violence committed against them, among other atrocious acts committed against children in conflict situations, are crimes that leave lifelong physical and mental scars on the victims, deprive them of their right to fully experience childhood, hinder their reintegration into society and prevent them from contributing to it as agents of change. My delegation condemns the obstruction of humanitarian access by State and non-State forces and the destruction of schools and hospitals, wherever they occur. Given the extreme level of vulnerability of children and the violations and abuses of their rights in conflict situations, we cannot remain silent. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/363) and today's briefings have confirmed the increase in 2022 in grave violations committed against children, who continue to be disproportionately affected. Ecuador therefore underscores the importance of the children and armed conflict agenda in the Security Council and the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter. As a member of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, my country acknowledges her work and that of her team, as we believe that we need a concerted response by the international community if we are to address the deteriorating situation in various regions of the world.

In the current context, it is vital to strengthen and define efforts to establish national frameworks for the protection of children, with the support of the relevant

agencies and bodies of the United Nations system, based on international law, international humanitarian law, international refugee law and the international architecture for the protection of children, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We also encourage the implementation of demining plans that reduce the risk of death and maiming from improvised explosive devices.

The Security Council should emphasize family reunification and the safe and dignified return of children displaced by violence, in particular when they have been forced or have had to do so unaccompanied. We support the Secretary-General's call for the rehabilitation and reintegration of children who were recruited as victims, not as former combatants.

The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism is a valuable tool for the investigation and classification of violations against children. The international community should ensure its funding, and States should guarantee the access and safety of personnel, in accordance with resolution 1612 (2005), which includes a set of mandates that must be fulfilled.

We must encourage the strengthening of institutions that promote accountability, transitional justice, investigation and the sentencing of perpetrators of violations in armed conflict, in cooperation with international institutions such as the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

Prevention is the best chance of ensuring that an increasing number of children have access to well-being and physical and mental health. Making that possible is a collective responsibility. Ecuador stands ready to contribute to that end.

**Mr. Biang** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I congratulate the United Arab Emirates on its outstanding presidency of the Security Council in the month of June. I congratulate you, Madam President, and the United Kingdom on your assumption of the presidency of the Council this month, as well as on convening today's important debate on children and armed conflict.

The briefings provided by Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and Deputy Executive Director Omar Abdi are particularly serious and alarming. The moving testimony and recommendations given by Ms. Violeta underscore the gravity of the situation. According to the report of the Secretary-

General (S/2023/363), children are the victims of murder, maiming and physical violence, abduction, denial of humanitarian access and recruitment and use in terrorist organizations in various regions of the world affected by armed conflict.

The year 2022 was particularly horrific for children in various conflict zones throughout the world. There were 24,300 violations of children's rights, 2,985 murders, 5,655 cases of maiming, 7,622 instances of recruitment, 3,985 abductions and 2,496 detentions for actual or alleged association with armed groups. Those numbers must be said out loud for us to grasp the gravity of the situation.

The Secretary-General's report highlights a persistence and resurgence of gender-based violence, in particular rape, forced marriage and other kinds of sexual violence that have an impact on the physical and mental health of children. That is compounded by child labour, trafficking, smuggling and numerous attacks on schools and health facilities that are used for military purposes and deprive children of their right to education and health services.

My country remains deeply concerned about the use of explosive devices on the battlefield. Such devices brutally kill and maim countless children. In Africa, many forcibly recruited children serve as combatants, scouts, mine testers, messengers and cooks. Some are used as human shields. Women and girls are used as sex slaves. In some crisis-stricken countries, children are used as scouts at checkpoints to gather intelligence or plant improvised explosive devices. In crisis-affected countries, programmes to rehabilitate, reintegrate and assist children separated from armed groups must be systematically implemented, taking into account their age and gender as well as the progress made in repatriating them to their countries of origin and treating them as victims.

The protection of children in armed conflict must remain a priority on the Council's agenda. Children must be able to live anywhere in a stable and safe environment in which their fundamental rights are respected and protected. We must ensure the implementation of the relevant legal instruments at our disposal to give full effect to the protection of children in conflict, in particular resolutions 1612 (2005) and 2427 (2018). In all conflict zones in which the safety and dignity of children are under threat, humanitarian access must be unhindered and the parties to conflict

must strictly respect international humanitarian law and adhere to relevant resolutions of the Council, in particular resolutions 1998 (2011), 2143 (2014) and 2601 (2021).

The partnership concluded between the United Nations and UNESCO to combat attacks on schools, with a view to guaranteeing quality education for all, is a lever for action that must be supported at the global and national levels. Without a doubt, we must go beyond the significant progress made in talks between the United Nations and armed groups in order to better protect children in armed conflict. It is up to every State to guard against the spectre of violence against children by taking concrete measures.

First, States must make national legislation on the protection of children as robust as possible and sufficiently dissuasive and ensure that, in times of conflict or peace, the perpetrators of atrocities or violations of children's rights are held to account.

Secondly, education and access to health care and the eradication of poverty and hunger are essential links in the prevention of violence against children. Education is a key lever in the fight against obscurantism, fanaticism and terrorism.

In conclusion, I reiterate our support for the efforts of Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter, while underscoring the importance of implementing international legal instruments and strengthening international cooperation to ensure better protection and a better future for children in armed conflict.

**Mrs. Nusseibeh** (United Arab Emirates): I want to begin by thanking the United Kingdom for convening today's important debate as the first in its presidency of the Security Council in July. We wish the delegation every success in leading our work this month. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter and Deputy Executive Director Abdi for their briefings today and for their tireless efforts to strengthen the protection of children around the world. I would also like to thank Ms. Violeta for bringing a direct voice of experience into Council deliberations today.

I would like to start by welcoming the clear four-point action plan put forward by Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter in her remarks, as well as Ms. Violeta's point that the Security Council should be a guarantor of the implementation of peace agreements.

That goes to the core of the Council's mandate and its ability to protect children around the world.

As we have all noted of the 2022 report (S/2023/363), the trend lines are alarming and give us all pause to reassess when it comes to our efforts in terms of what is working and what is failing. The report highlights that the highest number of grave violations were verified in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, Somalia, Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Yemen. And we would really support continued partnership with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in those countries to ensure that the trend does not continue this year.

Tragically, in 2022 we saw 8,630 children either killed or maimed overall, according to the verified numbers in the report. As members of the United Nations, we should all find that unacceptable. Given the finding that the majority of child casualties were perpetrated by Government forces, our common target as United Nations Member States should be nothing less than to reach the point where the mandate of the Special Representative is no longer needed.

First, to support the Special Representative's priorities, the Council must double down on conflict prevention and resolution. The record high number of situations of concern clearly demonstrates that conflict management strategies are not enough. We need a change of paradigm to sustainably end conflict and prevent it from happening in the first place. The Council's tools must be tailored to reflect the reality and true nature of conflict today. With non-State armed groups responsible for 50 per cent of grave violations, deploying the standard responses, the list of shame and other traditional means are simply not as effective with those groups. In the face of bad-faith actors who prey on and exploit children, the Council must do better to adapt to those new realities. The ultimate objective is not merely to punish but to change behaviour and mindsets and deter and prevent future violations. We must make full use of the powers of the Council to fulfil our responsibilities towards children.

Secondly, we are deeply concerned about the cascading cycle of violence that occurs when children are also violated through their indoctrination and recruitment into armed groups. In the words of a previous Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, child soldiers are forced to give violent expression to the hatred of adults.

As Ms. Violeta reminded us today, we must recognize that those children are not only victims. They are also agents of change and peacebuilders. In that regard, countering indoctrination and recruitment must be a cornerstone of the Security Council's work on the children and armed conflict agenda. The Security Council must see education as its most potent weapon in countering the threat of armed conflict against and by children. We should ensure equal access to quality education that promotes peace, tolerance and mutual understanding, as well as the re-establishment of educational facilities, including through international cooperation and assistance. If we fail in that endeavour, we risk creating lost generations of children newly susceptible to radicalization.

Thirdly, we must change the mindset of the partnership of Governments with Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and her team to an approach based on complementarity. I think that would be one of the most effective things for us to do collectively. Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter has worked tirelessly to improve partnerships with Governments around the world, and that should be acknowledged. But we must accelerate that trend to ensure that her work and that of her team is embraced and carried out in full partnership and cooperation with Governments, based on trust and confidence-building measures. We must aim to create a new understanding about implementation, based on collaboration rather than avoidance. The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism may be a technical tool, but we must ensure that the full weight of the Council is behind it to ensure dialogue with key stakeholders and the implementation of corrective measures.

I will end with a quote by Ishmael Beah in his book about his experience as a child soldier in Sierra Leone. "My squad is my family; my gun is my provider and my protector; and my rule is to kill or to be killed." I think we can all agree that is not a childhood that any of us would wish on anyone.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the briefers for their contributions to today's discussion.

Children are one of the most vulnerable sectors of a population during conflict, and terrorist and extremist groups involved in armed conflicts continue to pose a particular threat in that regard, with the methods they favour being child recruitment, abduction, sexual

violence, the use of children as human shields and obstruction of humanitarian aid.

The worst situation in terms of the terrorist threat is unfolding in the Sahara-Sahel region, where terrorists are stepping up their activities and extending their geographical reach. It suffices to recall the numerous crimes of Boko Haram, as well as the horrific practices of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria. We continue to be particularly concerned about the activities of ISIL-Khorasan in Afghanistan, which continues to claim child victims as well. And children are dying in Palestine, too. There is also a difficult situation in Myanmar, where armed groups continue to operate. However, we note the efforts of the Government of Myanmar to prevent serious violations against children, including through the implementation of the corresponding national action plan.

When it comes to protecting children in conflict, we should not forget Syria. We are extremely concerned about the plight of children in territories in Idlib and the north-east of the country that are not under Damascus's control. The catastrophic situation in the Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps for internally displaced persons in the north-east has gone unresolved for years. Human rights organizations and the Human Rights Council special procedures have been talking for a long time about the abduction of children for the purpose of recruitment, with the most recent such statement issued on 16 February. The United States, as the occupying Power in control of the camps, refuses to address the problem. We once again call on all States to fulfil their obligations under international law and adopt measures to repatriate children of their citizens from armed-conflict zones.

As for the situation in Ukraine, the issue of child protection has unfortunately been cynically chosen as part of a dirty information campaign to defame the Russian Federation, launched by the Western media and promoted by the so-called International Criminal Court (ICC), which has served as a laundry for whitewashing second-rate fakes. To our bewilderment, the Secretary-General has now also decided to do his bit for the campaign. Let us try to make sense of the situation.

We have been insisting since 2014 that the United Nations should give a proper assessment of the Kyiv regime's crimes against civilians in Donbas, including children. In nine years, more than 130 children have

been killed and more than 440 minors injured due to the Ukrainians' actions. The authorized structures of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics have sent 2,000 communications to the European Court of Human Rights and more than 1,500 to the ICC. In nine years, they have sent appeals to the Security Council, the Human Rights Council, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. However, all of those appeals have gone unheeded. Since February 2022 the territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics have been shelled by the Armed Forces of Ukraine more than 19,000 times. More than 5,000 civilians have been killed, including almost 200 children, and several thousand, including more than 300 children, have been wounded. Some 600 educational institutions and more than 150 medical facilities in Donbas have been destroyed or damaged. Cases of death and serious injury to children have been recorded in Zaporizhzhya and Kherson, as well as in Belgorod, Bryansk and Kursk oblasts as a result of the shelling perpetrated by the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The Special Representative mentioned a poor maimed girl from Ukraine. We organized an Arria Formula meeting on the subject "Children and armed conflict: the crisis in Ukraine", at which one of the briefers was Evgeny Zhilitsyn, head of the children's division of the Donetsk centre for traumatology. It was a pity that Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter was unable to hear the doctor's testimony about dozens of children from Luhansk and Donetsk who were maimed as a result of the strikes by the Armed Forces of Ukraine targeting residential areas in those cities or were blown up by Ukraine's "*lepestok*" anti-personnel mines. The brutality of the perpetrators of the Kyiv regime is mind-boggling. In a school in the city of Lysychansk, in the Luhansk People's Republic, fighters from the notorious volunteer Tornado Battalion set up a real torture room in which children were tortured and raped, with all of it filmed on video. In another town in the Luhansk People's Republic with the peaceful name of Shchastia — which means "happiness" — orphaned girls were taken to the Aidar Battalion, with the participation of the principal of one of the town's high schools, to be tormented and sexually abused.

However, those stories and figures are not reflected in the reports of the United Nations. The Organization is unwilling to accept objective information from the field and to draw attention to the fact that there are

people living in Donbas who were the first victims of the Ukrainian conflict, nine years ago. They are the ones that the Russian Federation is now protecting. However, even without the full information, the Secretary-General was forced to record in his report (S/2023/363) 80 cases in which children were killed and hundreds in which children were maimed, as well as the destruction of hundreds of schools and hospitals by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. At the same time, the Secretary-General decided not to include the Armed Forces of Ukraine on the list of parties engaging in violations against children. The question in that regard is, why do not the children of Donbass, Zaporizhzhya, Kherson, Belgorod, Bryansk, and Kursk oblasts need the protection of the United Nations? Are their lives less valuable? What do you think? Is 80 too few? The response is clear. The deaths of children in these parts of Russia do not fit the picture painted by the Western media outlets of Ukraine being a beacon of democracy, which means that all such facts have been conveniently swept under the rug.

Clearly, the Secretary-General took a political decision. One cannot fail to recognize that, in order to voice accusations against the Armed Forces of Ukraine, a certain courage is needed. It is difficult to counter the blatant pressure from the West. The Secretary-General was unable to summon that courage. And yet the Secretary-General at least partially reflected the crimes committed by the Kyiv regime, while Western countries in the Security Council, as we heard today, assume on the whole that those crimes do not exist at all.

The reason for that is clear. There is a need to conceal the crimes perpetrated by Kyiv in which these countries themselves are implicated. The deaths of children and the destruction of schools and hospitals in Russian regions are the result, *inter alia*, of the use of Western weapons delivered to Kyiv and of the involvement of personnel trained by Westerners. Moreover, representatives of the United States from time to time boast about the fact that they provide intelligence to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as well as discuss military designs with them. In legal language, this means that they bear responsibility for the crimes the Armed Forces of Ukraine commits.

But international organizations are not interested in those issues. Therefore, in that regard, we decided to establish a parliamentary commission on the investigation of crimes committed by Kyiv against

children. This commission's work will help to redress violations of the human rights of children and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.

The head-in-the-sand policy in relation to the crimes committed by the Kyiv regime against children entails, *inter alia*, demonizing the image of the Russian Federation and its army. This is the logic that underpins the scandalous decision by the Secretary-General to include the Russian Armed forces in the annex of parties engaging in violations against children. Any objective expert can confirm that there is no factual basis for this decision by Secretary-General. We can see that in the report, which lacks specific. Indeed, instances of supposed violations are described in such a way that they cannot be verified. Moreover, our requests to receive clarifying information did not bear fruit or yield the necessary results. Most of the actions in Ukraine are accompanied by deafening flows of disinformation received from the Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, which is biased and effectively under the control of the Kyiv regime, as well as of unverified data that the United Nations should have thoroughly checked in conjunction with the affected sides.

However, the Russian Federation, as I mentioned, the Secretary-General opted for a quick political decision. We have repeatedly observed similar instances of his doing the bidding of Western countries. One cannot fail to notice the chronically biased nature of the list of so-called parties engaging in violations against children. For example, neither the United States nor its allies are on the list, as if there were no litany of their bloody invasions in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. States of the collective West consistently and systematically perpetrate acts that run counter to efforts to prevent serious violations against civilians.

That is starkly attested to by the numerous murders and maiming of children permitted by the NATO coalition, as seen in the years-long indiscriminate air strikes targeting civilians in Afghanistan. According to various reports, as a result of the such actions in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021, there were 46,000 to 70,000 casualties, up to a third of whom were minors. According to the reports of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, approximately 40 per cent of those who died as a result of NATO air strikes were children. One of the most odious instances occurred in July of 2008 in Nangarhar province, when American planes dropped bombs on a wedding procession, as a result of which 35 children died. In July

2011, as a result of NATO air strikes, in Khost province, eight children died, the youngest of whom was only five days old. It was documented that 51 children died as a result of air operations in 2012. On 29 August 2021, and only two days before the completion of the hasty withdrawal of their troops, the Americans conducted air strikes targeting Kabul, as a result of which civilians, not terrorists from the Islamic State of Iraq, contrary to initial reports from the Pentagon, died. Of those 10 civilians, 7 were children.

London has recognized its personnel's responsibility for the deaths of 16 minors in Afghanistan. At the same time, according to reports of human rights activists, the number of children killed by British troops could be as high as 135. The most pervasive cause for these deaths is air strikes by British air forces and the use of weapons in densely populated areas. Furthermore, crimes perpetrated against children in Iraq by British soldiers are still assiduously concealed.

During the NATO bombings of Yugoslavia in 1999, approximately 90 children died. The symbol of the NATO aggression there was three-year-old Milica Radkić, who died at home near Belgrade in April 1999, when alliance aircraft bombed an adjacent military airfield, and the air strikes destroyed civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and even kindergartens. The delayed consequences of NATO's use of depleted uranium munitions in Yugoslavia include an increasing number of cancer cases among children and genetic mutations among newborns. Contrary to all those outrageous facts, NATO, the Americans and the British have not been listed, which essentially answers the question of the objectivity of the United Nations mechanism used to protect children. Moreover, these people are now imperiously accusing the Russian Federation of crimes that have not been proved by anyone.

Irrespective of any reports, the Russian Federation reaffirms its continued commitment to the protection of children during armed conflict, specifically during our special military operation. We are adopting every systemic measure to prevent the deaths of children and damage to hospitals and schools. All this time, the Russian Federation has been open to cooperation with the United Nations on this issue, specifically with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

I would like to start by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter, Deputy Executive Director Abdi and Ms. Violeta for their briefings. I would like to thank Ms. Violeta, in particular, for her tremendous courage and valuable insights on the impact of conflict on children.

The scale of grave violations outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/363) is shocking. Over 8,000 children were killed and maimed in 2022. Attacks on schools and hospitals increased by 112 per cent. Violations in the Sahel increased by 85 per cent and in Myanmar by 140 per cent, and over 1,500 children were recruited and used in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These are not just statistics. They are the stories of real children and their families and communities.

For the first time, a permanent member of the Security Council, the Russian Federation, is listed for over 1,200 grave violations against children, which is a listing based on robust United Nations data that represents the tip of the iceberg. There is only one solution to ending the suffering of Ukrainian children: an end to Russia's illegal invasion.

We will continue to support the Government of Ukraine's efforts to protect its children and bring them home after Russia's forced deportations. International frameworks to ensure children's rights, such as the Safe Schools Declaration, the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the Children and Armed Conflict Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism need our full support.

The United Kingdom is taking action. We support programmes delivering psychosocial support, safe spaces and addressing the drivers of recruitment, and we are a major donor to Education Cannot Wait, helping over 8.8 million children achieve their right to an education. We will continue to drive the global response to conflict-related sexual violence, to remove barriers to justice, increase support for child survivors and implement our commitments under the platform for action promoting the rights and well-being of children born of conflict-related sexual violence.

Children do not start wars, but they continue to be the most vulnerable to their effects. We should do better.



I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to comment on two subjects.

First, in his statement, the representative of the United States accused Russia's armed forces of executing children. It is completely inappropriate to say such things in the Chamber.

Secondly, the representative of the United Kingdom said verbatim — I heard the words — that the Russian armed forces are being blamed, according to the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/363), for the deaths of 1,200 children. I ask her to at least be accurate and state the exact figure that is being alleged in the report — although it is not verified — which is 120 children, and not 1,200.

**The President:** I wish 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 Mexico.

**Mr. Ochoa Martínez** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank the United Kingdom for convening today's annual open debate. We also thank all the briefers for their briefings.

Let me begin by recalling the importance of supporting the vital mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict. To protect children, it is necessary to engage in dialogue with all parties to an armed conflict, from Government authorities to leaders of armed groups, including those under sanctions. In that regard, the efforts of the Special Representative should not be undermined by giving consideration to matters that are unrelated to the fulfilment of her mandate, which is to ensure the welfare of children in situations of armed conflict.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/363) once again presents us with a bleak overview. Serious violations against children and adolescents persist and, unfortunately, in many cases, they are increasing. That represents a failure of our efforts to protect children in situations of conflict. We must spare no effort to reverse that trend. Mexico once again calls on all parties to conflicts to fully respect international law and the child protection norms, such as the Safe Schools Declaration.

As far as the Latin American and Caribbean region is concerned, we recognize that the Secretary-General has included the case of Haiti as one of the worrisome situations in his report. Indeed, the number of cases of recruitment, killings, mutilations, sexual violence, attacks against schools, kidnappings and denials of humanitarian access confirm the grave situation in and around Port-au-Prince resulting from armed gang violence. Action needs to be taken to end the suffering of Haitian children.

In conclusion, we reiterate our urgent call for mainstreaming the protection of children perspective in all peace missions and special political missions, particularly in cases of withdrawals, as in the case of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and other transitions of peacekeeping missions.

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

**Mr. Szczerski** (Poland): Poland would like to thank the United Kingdom for convening this important and timely open debate.

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

The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/363) for 2022 unequivocally demonstrates that children are among the most profoundly affected groups during armed conflicts. Regrettably, attacks against them have evolved into a powerful weapon for eroding a nation's future. The fundamental rights of the youngest generation are being flagrantly violated in many parts of the world, encompassing forcible deportations, the use of explosive weapons, recruitment into armed groups, the imposition of bans on education and the deprivation of access to food and health care.

Poland's commitment to safeguarding the rights of children and ensuring their protection is deeply

ingrained in our political agenda. We demonstrated that dedication in our recent tenures on the Security Council and the Human Rights Council. Going forward, as we prepare to join the Economic and Social Council in January 2024, we will continue to champion children's rights as an integral part of our social agenda. Poland's active membership in the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and its 2023 vice-presidency of the UNICEF Executive Board Bureau also serve as tangible examples of our steadfast engagement in the global endeavour to protect and support children.

The gravity of violations of children's rights cannot be fully assessed. Still, from the perspective of an immediate neighbour of an ongoing war, let me focus on the situation in Ukraine. Poland has experienced the humanitarian fallout of Russia's full-scale aggression, becoming a safe haven for the largest community of Ukrainian refugees, exceeding today 1.6 million individuals, with women and children constituting 90 per cent of that population. Those children brought with them horrific memories of the acts of their Russian aggressors, comparable only to the stories of the Second World War. We hear those stories again and again, listening to children deliver their testimonies in their own language, which makes them even more appalling. We swiftly implemented comprehensive measures to extend support to Ukrainian children, ensuring their access to essential services such as education, health care and family benefits. Furthermore, since March 2022, we have proudly hosted the UNICEF Emergency Response Office in Warsaw. We highly value our collaborative efforts for the benefit of all children.

We are deeply concerned about the forcible displacement of Ukrainian children to the occupied territories and to Russia. Such actions flagrantly violate the tenets of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Consequently, this year's report explicitly references Ukraine as one of the countries with the highest incidence of grave violations against children. It is even more appalling that the parties perpetrating those heinous acts are the Russian armed forces and their affiliated armed groups — forces belonging to a permanent member of the Council that the world expects to be especially committed to upholding peace and protecting civilians.

In conclusion, we welcome the fact that the report urges Russia to adopt measures to terminate and

forestall such violations, while pursuing accountability. In that context, we find it symbolic that the very first arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in relation to the war concern crimes against children. Both the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, and Maria Lvova-Belova, the Commissioner for Children's Rights in his Office, are allegedly responsible for the war crime of the unlawful deportation and transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation. Poland strongly supports the mandate of the ICC and its efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice for the sake of the rights of the child.

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

**Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine):** I thank the United Kingdom presidency for organizing this important open debate, and Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and Omar Abdi for their insightful briefings. I also want to extend a special thanks to Ms. Violeta for sharing her testimony and practical recommendations today.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/363) reveals a troubling trend in 2022: a rise in children affected by grave violations in 25 conflict situations. The exponential increase in both grave violations against children and the number of conflict situations poses challenges to the children and armed conflict architecture, necessitating additional support such as adequate resources for child-protection specialists and activities.

The devastating impact of Russia's aggression on children in Ukraine serves as a vivid example of that. It is crucial not to forget that the numbers verified do not reflect the true scale and volume of those violations, as mentioned in the report. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has affected all of Ukraine's 7.5 million children, nearly two thirds of whom have been internally or externally displaced. Due to the unabated bombardment and shelling by the Russian armed forces, as of 3 July, at least 494 children had been killed and 1,036 injured. And 379 children have been reported missing during hostilities.

In addition, 13 cases of sexual violence committed against children in various regions have been recorded by the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine. Ukraine's Ministry of Education reports that nearly 3,450 educational institutions across the country have been damaged, with 331 of them destroyed.

Furthermore, nearly 1,500 medical facilities have been damaged, with 185 of them destroyed.

Unfortunately, the report fails to adequately address the issue of the mass abduction of Ukrainian children by Russia. Russian authorities themselves have repeatedly stated that more than 700,000 children were relocated from Ukraine to Russia. Ukraine has strong grounds to believe that several hundred thousand Ukrainian children were forcibly and unlawfully taken by Russia, with many still being held against their will. To date, Ukrainian authorities have identified 19,492 such children, including 4,390 who are orphans or lack parental care. So far, only 380 have been successfully returned and reunited with their families. Even those terrible statistics of grave violations against children are not definitive, owing to the lack of access to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

It is crucial to remember that Ukraine has been a victim of Russian aggression since 2014. Therefore, given our belief in the potential of the children in armed conflict mandate to enhance the protection of Ukrainian children affected by the war, my delegation has consistently requested, since that time, that the situation in Ukraine be included in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict whenever the Council meets to discuss it. As a party to core international instruments related to the safeguarding of children's rights, Ukraine remains determined to further strengthen children's protection, particularly in the context of Russia's aggression. We appreciated the Secretary-General's decision in July 2022 to monitor the situation in Ukraine and established constructive dialogue and cooperation with his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. In order to further that commitment, the Government of Ukraine has appointed a focal point on conflict and armed children. We also established an interministerial committee to ensure regular communication with the children and armed conflict team. Furthermore, the Government has implemented various preventive measures, including the voluntary development of a national prevention plan aimed at preventing grave violations against children in the context of Russia's war.

We were pleased to welcome Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter and her team to Ukraine in May, following our own invitation. As agreed during the visit, a joint prevention plan with the United Nations has been drafted and will soon be signed. Ukraine welcomes the Secretary-General's

decision to include the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups in the annex to his report. The Russian army undoubtedly belongs on the very same list that includes the most egregious criminals, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Al-Shabaab and the Taliban, to name a few, given the horrific crimes that it has committed and continues to commit daily against children in Ukraine. Yesterday alone, on 4 July, Russia once again perpetrated an act of terrorism by targeting a civilian neighbourhood in Pervomaiskyi, in the Kharkiv region. The assault resulted in 43 injuries, including 12 children, among them a 3-month-old newborn, a 10-month-old infant and a 1-year-old child. It is also without doubt that the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups have engaged in similar barbaric practices in other countries and regions.

Since Russia continues to disregard any dialogue with United Nations human rights entities, such as the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice, we expect to see evidence of its true determination to cooperate with the United Nations and the children and armed conflict team, in particular. We hope one day to see the full implementation of the most comprehensive action plan developed by Russia together with the United Nations, as stated by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter during her press briefing on 27 June. Only then may it be justified to name Russia as one of the listed parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children. In that regard, we urge the United Nations, and especially the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to persistently demand that the Russian Federation fulfil all its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. That includes ending all grave violations against children in Ukraine and ensuring the timely and safe return of all Ukrainian children who are forcefully and illegally held by Russia.

In the meantime, however, the intervention made today by Putin's envoy, who is wanted by the ICC, as always was humbug and hypocrisy — in order to avoid more precise language to describe it. We call on the international community to continue exerting pressure on the Russian Federation to cease its aggression against Ukraine and withdraw all troops from Ukrainian territory within its internationally recognized borders,

as the most effective measure to protect Ukrainian children. Russia must also immediately and safely return all Ukrainian children whom it is illegally holding. Holding all violators accountable, whether for violations against children or other war crimes and crimes against humanity, remains a top priority. Together with its partners, Ukraine will spare no effort in bringing all perpetrators and their commanders to justice.

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

**Ms. Tickner** (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of Colombia, I would like to thank the United Kingdom for convening this open debate and to underscore the central importance of the children and armed conflict agenda in the United Nations peace and security architecture. I also acknowledge the briefing by my compatriot Ms. Violeta, whom all members listened to.

I begin by underscoring that the “total peace” policy developed by the Government of Gustavo Petro Urrego includes a deep commitment to guaranteeing and protecting children’s rights in situations of armed conflict. As a reflection of that policy, since the presidential inauguration in August 2022, military air strikes against armed groups’ camps where children may be present were indefinitely suspended, as highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/363), which Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter presented earlier.

I would like to mention three additional concrete measures that my country has taken to stop grave violations against children.

First, the national Government has sought to de-escalate the armed conflict in order to reduce the number humanitarian crises, which disproportionately affect people in vulnerable situations, including Afro-Colombian and Indigenous children. In line with achieving that goal, one of the main conditions established for initiating any form of dialogue with armed groups is predicated on the commitment to eschewing the recruitment of minors, the commission of acts of gender-based sexual violence, the use of anti-personnel mines and actions that result in the confinement or internal displacement of the civilian population.

Secondly, Colombia has endorsed the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians

from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and the Safe Schools Declaration. With regard to the latter and in response to my compatriot Ms. Violeta, I am pleased to report that Colombia has developed an action plan to implement the Safe Schools Declaration, which seeks to effectively protect schools and universities from attacks and military use by the parties to our conflict.

Thirdly, at the institutional level, we have strengthened the Intersectoral Commission to Prevent the Recruitment and Use of Children, Adolescents and Young Persons, the technical secretariat of which was placed under the aegis of the Presidential Adviser’s Office on Human Rights and International Relations in December 2022. The emphasis on prevention and the effective reintegration of demobilized minors into civilian life constitute a central pillar of the Petro Urrego Government’s strategy to promote the protection of children.

Lastly, Colombia reiterates its commitment to prioritizing the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by the armed conflict and joins the Secretary General’s call for armed groups to immediately cease violations, unconditionally release children and make concrete and time-bound commitments to cease and prevent grave violations.

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

**Ms. Zacarias** (Portugal): Portugal aligns itself with the statements to be made on behalf on the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. We thank the United Kingdom for convening this debate and we wish you, Madam President, every success during your presidency.

Allow me to start by welcoming the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/363) and by expressing Portugal’s full support to the United Nations system for the protection of children in armed conflict, including the mandate of Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter. I would also like to commend the work of UNICEF in that regard and thank Ms. Violeta for her very moving, relevant and touching testimony.

Portugal remains a strong supporter of the growing body of hard and soft international law that seeks to protect children in armed conflict, including the first Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, resolution 2601 (2021) and documents such as

the Safe Schools Declaration, the Vancouver Principles and the Paris Principles. We call on all Member States to endorse and implement those relevant documents.

We also believe that education is key in preventing violations against children, as is conflict prevention and, of course, sustainable development. In the draft resolution on the right to education, which Portugal submitted just yesterday at the Human Rights Council, we acknowledge the growing body of norms and standards on protecting education from attacks and reiterate our strong condemnation of the military use of educational facilities. We stand with all efforts towards monitoring and accountability contained in those annual reports, including through the International Criminal Court, and voice our support to the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, as well as the listing mechanism. Those two mechanisms must remain impartial and independent.

Engagement with the various parties to a conflict and the development and implementation of action plans are essential elements of that framework, which should be further stimulated. Nonetheless, we must have in mind that last year UNICEF showed how over the previous 16 years grave violations had increased year after year, and this year is no exception.

The Secretary-General's 2022 annual report notes an increase of approximately 12 per cent in grave violations against children. Despite that gloomy picture, there are achievements that may serve as an example to other Member States and advance the protection of children. In our view, Mozambique is one such example. Despite the difficulties in Cabo Delgado, where grave violations against children have been documented, the Government has taken proactive steps. An interministerial commission on human rights and international humanitarian law has been established, an armed forces child protection focal point has been appointed and there is increased training in the military on the prevention of grave violations. Examples such as that must be welcomed.

In conclusion, let us acknowledge that grave violations have a long-lasting impact on victims and survivors. Portugal believes that the international community must pay greater attention to achieving true justice, which includes livelihood support and full access to mental health and psychosocial services. We cannot return "childhood" to those who have been deprived of

it, but we must take it as a shared responsibility to give them back hope and all the support we can.

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

**Mr. Prabowo (Indonesia):** I thank the United Kingdom presidency for bringing the Security Council's attention to this very important agenda. I also thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Deputy Executive Director Omar Abdi and Ms. Violeta for their updates on the issue.

Despite numerous and countless endeavours, every year the Security Council is confronted by continued grave violence against children in armed conflict. As pointed out in the annual report (S/2023/363), almost 24,000 children have been denied a safe childhood. Every three out of 10 children in an armed conflict situation have either lost their lives or been maimed. That is a serious warning for us to work beyond "business as usual". Allow me to highlight three pertinent points.

First, the universal principle of child protection should never be compromised. As one of the most fundamental principles enshrined in the most widely and rapidly ratified human rights treaty, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the protection of children must always be upheld as a priority, including in conflict situations. We call on all parties to a conflict situation to uphold and implement the universal principle of the protection of children. In the same vein, national Governments continue to hold the primary responsibility to protect all children. We call on more robust international cooperation to support national capacities on child protection in armed conflict.

Secondly, community engagement and empowerment are key. The protection of children in armed conflict requires the commitment and collaboration of all parties, built upon trust and confidence. Community engagement plays a significant role in creating an enabling environment. Beyond engagement, we must also work to empower communities to lead in child protection efforts. In that regard, United Nations missions hold a unique and important role. Indonesia calls for a stronger capacity of United Nations missions in relation to community engagement and empowerment to better protect children in armed conflict.

Thirdly, regional cooperation and networks must be advanced. In the collective work of protecting children

in armed conflict, regional cooperation and networks can appropriately and effectively support national and local actions to protect children in armed conflict. That comes from the closeness of regional initiatives with the specific context and situation faced by each country.

In 2019, Indonesia initiated the first Regional Conference on Humanitarian Assistance. In 2021, the Conference expanded to involve more than 100 humanitarian actors from 21 countries and was successful in building a network of humanitarian actors and initiatives across the region. Through the network, humanitarian actors from countries in the region are able strengthen their capacities in helping to guarantee children's access to humanitarian assistance.

To conclude, let me reassure the Council of Indonesia's commitment to contributing to international efforts to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict. Children are not soldiers, and they should not become victims. They are our future.

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

**Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein):** The Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2023/363) makes the plight of children due to armed conflict brutally clear. We are particularly concerned about the report's account of an overall increase in the six grave violations committed against children, including a 112 per cent increase in attacks on schools and hospitals, a 21 per cent increase in recruitment and use and a 15 per cent increase in abductions.

We are deeply concerned about the violence committed against children in Myanmar, where grave violations have increased at an alarming rate, as well as in Afghanistan, the Sudan, Mali and Palestine, to name just a few situations. We are also aware that a complete monitoring by the team of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General is almost impossible, and those concerning numbers are therefore likely to be lower than the actual figures. Similarly, the six grave violations do not account for all the ramifications of armed conflict on children. Conflict remains a primary driver of malnutrition and hunger, both of which particularly affect children. We reiterate that respect for the independence and integrity of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General is crucial to the effectiveness and credibility of the work of her Office, which also includes the objective, consistent

and transparent practice of listing parties that have committed grave violations.

We note the section of the report documenting violations committed against children in the course of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine. As the report documents, the Russian armed forces and proxies have shown little regard for the protection of civilians, and in particular the rights of children. As a result, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued arrest warrants against President Putin and Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova for the deportation and transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine. We reiterate our call for the return of all illegally deported children in Ukraine and elsewhere.

We welcome the Special Representative's visit to Ukraine and the Russian Federation in May. In that context, we are mindful of the United Nations essential contact policy regarding meetings of United Nations officials with individuals with arrest warrants from the ICC and the need for its full and transparent application. As such, we had hoped to see an explanation in the Secretary-General's report on the decision that the meeting with the Children's Rights Commissioner was essential for the purpose of that visit.

We remain deeply concerned about the high occurrence of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children. Such violence is often underreported, owing to fear of stigmatization and cultural taboos, in particular when perpetrated against boys. The civil society organization All Survivors Project has played a key role documenting that violence. We commend their work to everyone in the Chamber.

A culture of silence continues to impede accountability and justice and contributes to further cycles of violence and persistent harmful gender stereotypes. We reiterate our strong support for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to shed more light on marginalized victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, in line with resolution 2467 (2019). It is key to uphold the security, privacy and confidentiality of survivors and witnesses, as well as ethical considerations in documenting and verifying information on child survivors of sexual violence. We also appreciate the cross-cutting nature of that work across different mandate-holders and encourage the Special Representative to work with her counterparts to develop relevant frameworks and

principles for the protection of children from sexual and gender-based violence.

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

**Mr. Kim Sangjin** (Republic of Korea): I would like to express my delegation's support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and her Office. My appreciation also goes to the United Kingdom for convening today's important meeting and to the briefers for their contributions.

The Republic of Korea aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. I would now like to deliver the following statement in our national capacity.

The Republic of Korea remains deeply concerned about the disturbingly high number of grave violations against children around the world. It is even more appalling that the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/363) reveals that Government forces were the main perpetrators in the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access. In that regard, my delegation takes note of the new listing decisions pertaining to the situation in Ukraine, as well as the additional incidents of violence added to the listing of the Myanmar armed forces, with concerns about the situation of children in the region.

My delegation is particularly concerned by the increasing number of attacks on schools, which continue to constitute a blatant infringement on children's right to education. Children must not be deprived of their access to education, even in conflict-affected settings, as it is crucial to building resilience in societies and achieving sustainable peace, as well as sustainable development.

In order to prevent those grave violations and to better protect children in conflict-affected areas, we need to fully utilize the relevant legal and operational tools that we have already developed. In that connection, all parties to conflict must comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The Republic of Korea also reiterates its full support for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

In addition, we need to reinforce capacities on the ground, including by ensuring sufficient human and financial resources for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, while preserving its independence, impartiality and credibility. This year, the Secretary-General added Haiti and the Niger to the list of situations of concern. The situation of children in those regions, as in all countries mentioned in the report, must receive the necessary attention from the Security Council, as well as from the international community. In that context, the Republic of Korea strongly supports United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions in facilitating a protective environment for all children affected by armed conflict.

My Government has proudly provided \$5 million in humanitarian assistance to people, focusing on children in Bor, South Sudan, through UNICEF and in close cooperation with the civil-military cooperation activities of our engineering units in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, which could serve as a good practice.

As an elected member of the Security Council for the term 2024 to 2025, the Republic of Korea reaffirms its commitment to working with the United Nations, as well as with all Member States, with a view towards better protecting children from the scourge of armed conflict.

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

**Ms. Chan Valverde** (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica thanks the United Kingdom for convening this open debate, as well as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the other briefers for their interventions.

Costa Rica expresses its profound concern at the continuing grave violations against children in the context of armed conflict, as reflected in the increase in all forms of such violations in the past year. We are extremely concerned that, for the first time, State groups and forces are the main perpetrators of those violations. Costa Rica reminds all actors — and States in particular — of the obligation to respect international humanitarian and international human rights law under all circumstances. It is impossible to speak of a new preventive approach or lasting peace when rights are being violated and new generations denied a future. In that regard, Costa Rica vehemently calls on the Council to fulfil its responsibility to protect children

in armed conflicts and in other fragile contexts. We also call on it to cooperate with the Secretary-General to implement rigorous and objective processes for the listing of State and non-State perpetrators in the latter's report (S/2023/363).

Secondly, we stress the importance of an intersectional approach to ensure adequate and child-sensitive responses to both prevent and put a stop to grave violations. One example is the impact of the indiscriminate application of counter-terrorism approaches to the reintegration of children associated with armed groups and forces, as well as the impact of the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas against children. For Costa Rica, the correction of those and other situations must be guided by and for children themselves, centring their voices and experiences and ensuring their full participation in the design of responses.

We also call for the protection of community, religious and civic leaders and other human rights defenders, who are the guarantors of truth and the key to reconciliation in the context of armed conflict.

The success of the children and armed conflict mandate rests on the effectiveness of the tools at the Council's disposal, in particular the Working Group responsible for issuing recommendations for the protection of children. Costa Rica reaffirms its full commitment to the children and armed conflict mandate and calls on all States, in particular the members of the Council, to redouble their efforts to ensure the effective functioning of those mechanisms.

**The President:** There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. Given the lateness of the hour, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

*The meeting was suspended at 1 p.m.*