

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 14 September 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to the 8756th meeting of the Security Council convened on 10 September 2020 under the agenda item “Children and armed conflict” (see S/PV.8756). In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members for that meeting, the following delegations and entities submitted written statements, copies of which are enclosed: Afghanistan, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, the European Union, Georgia, Guatemala, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, the Observer State of Palestine, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, San Marino, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Yemen.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the enclosed statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Abdou **Abarry**
President of the Security Council



Annex 1**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, Adela Raz**

Let me first start by thanking the Niger for organizing this meeting. I would also like to thank Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF; and Ms. Marika Tsolakis, Senior Researcher of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, for their briefings and very insightful statements.

Ensuring that children are able to have a safe environment to learn and explore their opportunities for the future is an issue of vital importance for Afghanistan, particularly as one of the countries with the youngest populations in the world, with 63 per cent under the age of 25 and 46 per cent under the age of 15. As a country that witnesses violence and destruction and that has seen a time in which girls were even prevented from studying at all, we understand the imperative need to continue to pursue the goal of completely eliminating barriers and violence against schools.

The Government of Afghanistan shares the concern of the Secretary-General with regard to the high number of reported child casualties and the various attacks on schools and other civilian facilities that continue to take place. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Taliban have continued to carry out heinous attacks, including through improvised explosive devices, ground engagements and suicide attacks, going as far as to using civilians and their facilities as shields in carrying out their actions. Their indiscriminate attacks on children and schools have increased uncertainty for the next generation of Afghans, who are already feeling the effects of the closure of schools during the coronavirus disease pandemic. Such attacks are unacceptable and inhumane and demonstrate the total disregard for life that those groups have.

The Afghan Government is committed to the safeguarding of children and to ensuring the protection of schools and all other civilian institutions. Afghanistan is a signatory to the Safe Schools Declaration and has further passed key legislation at the local level, while also ratifying important treaties at the international level. Notably, Afghanistan has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, while also having adopted a road map for ensuring that children are protected and are not engaged in conflict, in line with the action plan on the issue developed with the United Nations. In addition, Afghanistan also adopted a national policy for civilian casualty prevention and mitigation to ensure the effective protection of all civilian institutions, including schools, in all military operations. Furthermore, President Ghani also endorsed the Law on Protection of Child Rights in 2019, further emphasizing the priority that the Government gives to the matter.

We note with concern that the recent pandemic has also put many children in a dangerous situation by preventing them from getting the humanitarian assistance that they so desperately need. In that regard, we call on the Taliban — particularly as we are set to begin intra-Afghan negotiations — to observe the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire, which would allow for such aid to reach all our citizens in need, especially children. Also, we further note the important role that the rights of children will play as part of those negotiations. It is important to mention that the Government will not negotiate the important right to education for all citizens of Afghanistan, as noted and protected in our Constitution.

Allow me to conclude by emphasizing the role of Afghanistan as a dedicated partner for the protection of children in armed conflict and their access to education. We will continue our work to ensure that all Afghans are able to fulfil their potential.

Annex 2**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

Argentina thanks the Niger for organizing this debate on such a crucial issue as attacks against schools in the context of armed conflict on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of resolution 1998 (2011) and in the context of the celebration of the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack on 9 September. This year also marks the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration, an initiative led by Argentina and Norway and to which 104 States Members of the United Nations are signatories. We are confident that this open debate will provide an opportunity to reflect on the progress made in the implementation of resolution 1998 (2011) and subsequent related resolutions, as well as on the major outstanding challenges.

I would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his latest report on children and armed conflict S/2020/525). I also acknowledge the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and thank her for her briefing and for having presented the annual report to the General Assembly in August.

Education is fundamental to development and the full enjoyment of human rights. Access to safe education helps to protect children from the dangers of armed conflict, assisting them in reaching their potential and contributing to building more resilient and peaceful communities. Argentina firmly believes that only international cooperation will make it possible to address the scourge of attacks on schools in all their manifestations, in the context of unrestricted respect for human rights, international humanitarian law and international law.

The closure of schools and their use for military purposes has irreversible consequences for the lives of children, particularly girls, who are less likely to continue their education, as they face greater risks of becoming victims of child marriage, early pregnancy and gender-based violence.

Argentina shares the concern of the Special Representative regarding the almost 23.8 million children and adolescents who are at risk of not returning to school as a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which is aggravated by the growing vulnerability of child victims of armed conflict.

Argentina reiterates its firm support for the work of the Organization aimed at preventing, avoiding and stopping serious violations of children's rights in contexts of armed conflict. In this sense, our country has been one of the first States to ratify, in 2002, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and has supported the adoption of subsequent resolutions 1261 (1999), 1612 (2005), 2143 (2014), 2225 (2015) and 2427 (2018).

We underscore the important work of the ACT to Protect Children Affected by Conflict initiative and the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers as key tools for strengthening collaboration among the United Nations, civil society and the international community. We support actions designed to end and prevent serious violations committed against children in the context of armed conflict in order to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable reintegration that focuses on children's needs and embraces a humanitarian, peace and development approach.

We firmly believe that peace remains the best means of reducing violations against children and that equal access to quality education is essential to ensuring the full realization of their human rights without leaving anyone behind and to moving towards more just, peaceful and egalitarian societies.

Annex 3**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations, Mher Margaryan**

I would like to express appreciation to the presidency of the Niger for convening this important and timely open debate via teleconference. We also thank the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, as well as representatives of civil society, for highlighting the challenges related to the protection of children in armed conflict and upholding their human rights.

The debate is taking place as we mark the inaugural observance of the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 74/275, of which Armenia is a co-sponsor. The international day provides an important platform to raise awareness of the challenges faced by children and to step up the efforts of the international community to promote schools as safe spaces for children.

Five years into its adoption, the Safe School Declaration remains an essential blueprint to accelerate practical measures on the ground to strengthen the safety and security of schools and to ensure quality education for all boys and girls affected by conflict. The reports of the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict highlight multiple challenges and dangerous trends in the protection of children in conflict areas. Armenia is gravely concerned about the drastic increase in the denial of humanitarian access to children, attacks on and the destruction of schools and their use for military purposes, and the killing, sexual violence, recruitment and use of children.

The crisis caused by the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has heavily affected hundreds of millions of children, leading to large-scale disruption of education and further exacerbating education disparities for the most vulnerable, in particular children residing in conflict areas. School lockdowns and movement restrictions have necessitated distance learning measures, with access to the Internet and digital connectivity essential to ensuring the continuity of education for children.

The protection of children and upholding their human rights, including the right to education, is a critical priority for Armenia. As stressed in the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire, silencing the guns is crucial to helping create corridors for life-saving aid to the most vulnerable, including children. Armenia supports the call of the Secretary-General to prioritize education for all children, including children in conflict situations, as reflected in his message on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on children.

In our region, Armenia is gravely concerned by continued attempts to deny the human rights and fundamental freedoms of children, including their inalienable right to education. The military aggression of Azerbaijan unleashed against the people of Nagorno Karabakh in the early 1990s, accompanied by grave violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, entailed deliberate indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population and infrastructure, including schools and health-care facilities.

The children of Nagorno Karabakh became intentional and indiscriminate targets during the large-scale offensive in April 2016. Vaghinak Grigoryan was only 12 years old when he was killed in front of a school building as a result of a missile attack launched by Azerbaijan, which injured two more schoolchildren. We are dismayed that the perpetrators of these horrendous crimes were glorified at the

highest level by the leadership of Azerbaijan in an apparent move to encourage, at the State level, identity-based hate crimes against Armenian children. The recent military provocation of Azerbaijan in July this year resulted in the wounding of a 14-year-old child in the Tavush region of Armenia. Such crimes are in stark contradiction with the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire in all corners of the world and must be condemned at all levels.

Armenia is resolute about following up on its obligations under international humanitarian law, as well as upholding the goals, objectives and principles enshrined in the Safe School declaration, the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, which Armenia has endorsed, in line with our demonstrated commitment to promoting and protecting the rights and the dignity of children everywhere.

Annex 4**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations, Yashar Aliyev**

Allow me to start by expressing our appreciation to the presidency of the Republic of the Niger for organizing this important open debate on children and armed conflict with a focus on attacks against schools. This open debate coincides with two important milestones, namely, the tenth anniversary of resolution 1998 (2011) and the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack. It offers a great opportunity to take stock of the implementation of relevant resolutions of the Security Council and to reiterate our emphasis on the protection of children.

We note with concern that, despite a general decrease in the number of verified child casualties, children living in countries affected by armed conflict continue to be at risk and suffer from grave violations, including the killing and maiming, recruitment and use of child soldiers and sexual violence, as well as attacks on schools.

The latest annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) provides alarming data on grave violations committed against children. Schools continue to be attacked and used for military purposes. According to the report, in 2019 the United Nations verified 927 attacks on schools and hospitals, 494 and 433, respectively. Schools should provide a safe and supportive learning environment and protect children from threats and crises. Attacks on schools, students and educators cannot be tolerated.

To protect children, impunity must be brought to an end and perpetrators of violations against children must be held accountable. An atmosphere of impunity encourages further violations, more attacks and a recurrence of violence. Effective protection efforts must be free from selectivity and must address all situations of armed conflict without distinction, including those of a protracted nature and prolonged impact on civilians and children in particular.

The Republic of Azerbaijan is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 for the Protection of War Victims. My Government gives its highest priority to protecting children and schools and strongly supports international efforts aimed at strengthening child protection in armed conflict.

Regrettably, not all States respect and comply with this moral and legal principle. The continued aggression of the Republic of Armenia against my country has resulted in the displacement of over 1 million Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands; 3,888 citizens of Azerbaijan have been registered as missing, including 718 civilians, of whom 71 are children.

A scorched-earth policy implemented by the Armenian side involved ethnic cleansing of the seized territories of all Azerbaijanis and the brutal killing and maiming of civilians, including children. Armenia notoriously denies its responsibility for war crimes and glorifies perpetrators of atrocities.

The war waged by Armenia against Azerbaijan has resulted in the destruction of more than 4,300 social and cultural facilities, including 693 secondary schools, 855 preschools, 695 medical institutions, 927 libraries, 473 historical monuments, palaces and museums, and six State theatres and concert halls.

In April 2016 alone, many schools in the Goranboy, Tartar, Aghdam and Agdjabadi districts of Azerbaijan were damaged as a result of heavy shelling. This

was verified in the assessment report by the Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees following its mission to the affected areas of Azerbaijan.

The devastating impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic has not deterred Armenia from its armed provocations. On 12 July, the armed forces of Armenia launched a cross-border attack against Azerbaijan in the Tovuz district with the use of artillery and mortars. The attacks continued on the following days, resulting in the killing of a civilian and 12 officers and soldiers of the armed forces of Azerbaijan and inflicting serious damage upon the civilian infrastructure. It is apparent that Armenia's alleged support for and adherence to the appeal of the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire is nothing other than utter falsehood.

Under international law, intentionally directing attacks on buildings dedicated to education is a war crime. It should also be noted that attacks on schools and hospitals constitute one of the grave violations that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is mandated to monitor and report on.

Progress in the matter under consideration requires full compliance by parties to armed conflict with their obligations under international humanitarian law and the implementation of Security Council resolutions. It is important that the Security Council systematically reiterate its demands that parties to armed conflict comply fully with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Annex 5

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations

I would like to commend the Niger for convening this important debate and for focusing on the crucial issue of protecting schools from attacks. Brazil has been a steady supporter of measures aimed at safeguarding children's rights in armed conflict, including the right to education.

During its most recent mandate as a member of the Council, Brazil supported the adoption of resolution 1998 (2011), a landmark instrument for the children and armed conflict agenda. Its focus on the protection of hospitals and schools contributed to consolidating their special status under international humanitarian law.

Brazil has also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, which represents an important political instrument for ensuring children's education even during hostilities. Its commitments to improving the reporting of attacks on educational facilities, to providing assistance to victims, to investigating allegations of violations and to supporting the work of the United Nations on the children and armed conflict agenda provide valuable guidance for action. Brazil encourages all Member States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and to work together to implement its recommendations.

The protection of educational facilities is instrumental to providing a sense of normalcy and stability to children in armed conflict scenarios. Education gives them hope for a brighter future, thereby alleviating the suffering caused by war.

We are deeply concerned by the fact that, despite progress on the legal and political framework on the matter, attacks against schools are still growing, as the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525) shows. Brazil reiterates its strongest condemnation of attacks targeting civilians and civilian objects, as they constitute a blatant violation of international humanitarian law.

The nature of warfare may have changed, but the rules of war have not. The protection of children during armed conflict not only stems from the humanitarian principle of distinction; it is also an obligation enshrined in human rights instruments and reflected in the Council's resolutions. Therefore, violations must be investigated impartially, and their perpetrators must be held accountable.

Brazil takes this opportunity to express its solidarity to countries of the Sahel region in their fight against terrorism. The targeting of education facilities by terrorist groups has a dire impact on children, as they not only become the primary victims of grave violations but are also affected by school closures and other disruptions.

The international community has a collective responsibility to prevent and combat terrorism, and to do so in a manner consistent with international law, including children's rights. In that sense, children must be treated primarily as victims and their vulnerabilities taken into account in rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

Ensuring that children are able to safely access educational facilities is instrumental in promoting a better future and a healthy society. Brazil underscores the essential role of child protection advisers in peacekeeping operations and the importance of establishing standards for their work within missions.

Moreover, proper reporting of violations is key in building strategies to prevent them. Hence, we encourage greater consistency in the reporting of all six grave violations in all country-specific situations, with data disaggregated by sex, age, conflict and violation. This measure will contribute to targeted strategies, particularly because existing data shows that boys and girls are affected differently by violations.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate Brazil's enduring commitment to the advancement of the children and armed conflict agenda in the Security Council, as well as to the wider debate, in different forums, on children's rights to education and the protection of all girls and boys who suffer from violence in the context of armed conflict.

Annex 6

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria to the United Nations

I would like to start by commending the organizers for initiating this open debate and drawing the attention of the Security Council to an issue of such importance as children and armed conflict.

Bulgaria would like to praise the efforts of the many who have contributed to the promotion of children's rights around the world and all those who protect students, teachers, schools and universities during armed conflicts, in particular the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and civil society organizations in this specific field.

According to this year's report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525), there is persisting disregard for the civilian status of schools and hospitals, as 927 instances of attacks have been verified. Those grave violations of the special status of schools and hospitals and persons inside them are deeply concerning. It is also alarming that access to education for 75 million children has been impeded due to conflicts. The outbreak of the coronavirus disease pandemic is commonly expected to aggravate certain existing trends, and access to education may also suffer.

This year, our National Committee for International Humanitarian Law adopted its first report, with a special focus on children's rights in armed conflict. Bulgaria's commitment to counteracting the involvement of children in armed conflicts and to protecting those affected is underpinned by the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. As co-Chair of the Group of Friends for Children and Sustainable Development Goals, we are also determined to provide a platform for children affected by conflict.

Bulgaria also supports the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to introduce a ban on sales on end-use weapons in countries where there are reports about the involvement of children in conflicts. Furthermore, we are in favour of strengthening the specialized protection functions in United Nations peacekeeping, with an emphasis on the protection of children and women in armed conflict. In that context, we recognize the importance of the deployment of child protection advisers within the human rights components of the United Nations peacekeeping operations in Mali — the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the Central African Republic — the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, and Somalia — the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia.

Allow me to stress that education remains at the top of Bulgaria's agenda. We have been working to promote the inclusive education of children with disabilities as one of our main priorities at the national and global levels, including through our official development assistance. I would like to remind the Council that, five years ago, the Safe Schools Declaration was launched, providing States with an instrument to address the challenge. Bulgaria, along with 103 other States Members of the United Nations, has committed to putting in place measures, including a conflict-sensitive education approach, while supporting education during armed conflicts. Therefore, we call upon States to become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Finally, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identifies children as critical agents of change, but it is up to us to ensure the protection of their human rights and to empower them through quality education.

Annex 7**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations**

This statement is submitted on behalf of 45 members of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, which is an informal network of Member States representing all five regional groups at the United Nations.

We thank the Permanent Mission of the Niger to the United Nations for convening today's open debate, and we welcome the Security Council's adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2020/8 on this important issue.

The Group of Friends also welcomes the marking of the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack on 9 September, established by General Assembly resolution 74/275. We take note that this year marks the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration, which has been endorsed by 105 countries.

The Group of Friends is appalled by the more than 25,000 grave violations committed against children during 2019, as documented in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525).

We are particularly alarmed by the increase in the verified number of attacks against schools, namely, 494, and hospitals, namely, 433, including on protected persons. We condemn those grave violations and all violations of international law, and we call for those responsible for committing any of the six grave violations against children in particular to be held accountable.

Beyond the immediate impact of attacks against schools and protected personnel on children affected by armed conflict, we note with concern that attacks or threats of attacks have additional consequences, particularly for girls, including limiting access to education, heightening the risk of sexual and gender-based violence, making children more vulnerable to recruitment and use as child soldiers and increasing the risk of other violations of children's rights.

We are further seriously concerned about the multifaceted impacts of the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on children, especially those affected by armed conflict. According to the United Nations, the pandemic is causing the largest disruption to education in history. That is disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable children and young people, particularly those affected by armed conflict, as well as those who are refugees or internally displaced. Attacks against schools and protected personnel will only exacerbate such impacts on children.

The Group of Friends reiterates its full support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge the Security Council and parties to armed conflict to ensure that the provisions of resolution 2532 (2020) are fully implemented.

We further urge all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law and to put in place concrete, time-bound and effective protection measures for children in armed conflict, including action plans, road maps and command orders, among other measures.

The Group of Friends also welcomes the steps taken by the United Nations to strengthen the protection of children, schools and protected personnel, including through United Nations peace operations. We reiterate our call for the adequate resourcing of child protection capabilities in such operations.

In addition, the Group of Friends encourages all Member States to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict, including by acceding to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and by considering endorsing and implementing practical protection tools, notably the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles, the Paris Commitments and the Vancouver Principles.

Finally, the Group of Friends calls for the full and effective implementation of all Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict, including the milestone resolutions 1612 (2005) and 1998 (2011). We stress the importance that we attach to the independence, impartiality and credibility of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, and we strongly believe that the information presented in the annual reports of the Secretary-General should be accurately reflected in the listing of parties responsible for grave violations, including attacks on schools and hospitals, included in the annexes to the report.

The Group of Friends stands in solidarity with children affected by armed conflict, particularly those impacted by attacks on schools and protected personnel, and we express our deep appreciation to all child protection actors, in particular from the United Nations and civil society, who often work at great risk to themselves to protect children from conflict and violence.

Annex 8

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Chile to the United Nations

Chile extends its regards to Mr. Abdou Abarry, Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, and thanks the Niger for addressing a topic on the Security Council's agenda that is of the utmost importance, namely, attacks against schools in relation to children's rights.

Chile joins the statement submitted by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict (annex 7) and welcomes this timely debate around the progress made in the implementation of resolution 1998 (2011), resolution 1612 (2005) and subsequent related resolutions that gave the United Nations a mandate to identify and list parties in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict, including those parties to armed conflict that attack schools or protected persons in relation to schools, particularly in the context of the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration.

In that regard, we note with concern that, according to the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525), there has been an increase in the verified number of attacks against schools by State actors compared to the previous year. Furthermore, access to education has been hampered by terrorist attacks, which have affected almost 650,000 children and more than 16,000 teachers in the three central Sahel countries.

Protecting schools, while advocating for the right to education, is an efficient means of protecting children from horrific forms of exploitation, including sexual abuse and forced recruitment into armed groups. We would like to highlight that, when it comes to protecting every single child from all six violations, namely, the killing and maiming of children, the recruitment or use of children as soldiers, sexual violence against children, the abduction of children, attacks against schools or hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access for children, just making progress should not be our goal. The urgent need to succeed at that task is what keeps bringing us together to address this issue.

In that regard, we highly value the role of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict within the children and armed conflict agenda, which allows for a better understanding of the situation on the ground as a basis to guide effective action towards protecting children. In that respect, we reiterate the need for a rigorous and transparent procedure to ensure that, going forward, the annexes to the annual report accurately and consistently reflect the evidence collected by the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism.

With regard to accountability, it is important to keep implementing the legislative and institutional frameworks in order to comprehensively address violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In addition, naming perpetrators in the annex to the Secretary-General's annual report is an important step towards accountability for those who commit atrocities against children. Therefore, to ensure maximum accountability we encourage an independent, objective and transparent assessment as to how the listing and delisting criteria set out in the Secretary-General's 2010 annual report (S/2010/181) have been implemented to date.

It is also important to consider the role of local communities in prevention and response strategies. To that end, empowering civilians in local contexts by engaging them and providing them with knowledge and tools to access justice and report incidents could be a meaningful opportunity for building trust and strengthening community responses.

Lastly, as we know, peace remains the most powerful means to reduce violations against children. Therefore, addressing the children's protection mandate when initiating negotiations or implementing peace agreements could contribute to getting conflict stakeholders involved in protecting children and, hence, their educational settings.

Education has already been the collateral damage of conflict, as it now is of the global coronavirus disease pandemic, as well. The destruction of the infrastructure that allows young generations to access a safe, learning environment makes the ideal of a prosperous future for them seem a distant promise, when it is in fact their birth right.

Our duty to children is not limited to only one dimension of their vulnerability due to the context in which they grow up. Our long-term commitment is to their healthy development and growth, access to opportunities and education, but none of that can be done without ensuring their safety and that of their schools first.

Chile would like to reiterate its commitment to the children and armed conflict agenda. We look forward to engaging constructively in our common goal to make sure that children, particularly in armed conflicts, can access safe and quality education not only to enhance their lives and opportunities but also for them to be contributing agents of change and progress of their communities.

Annex 9**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations, Martin Bille Hermann**

I submit this statement on behalf of Norway, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country, Denmark.

The Nordic countries would like to express deep appreciation to the Republic of the Niger for organizing this important debate on children and armed conflict, with a particular focus on attacks against schools.

Education is key to long-term peace and security and sustainable development. Education is a human right, and yet attacks against schools or hospitals still constitute one of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict. We acknowledge that progress has been made on the protection of schools and protected persons in relation to schools from attacks and threats of attacks.

The Security Council adopted resolution 1998 (2011) in July 2011, and related resolutions have followed. The Safe Schools Declaration of 2015 has been an important protection tool with its objective to prevent the military use of schools and stop attacks on schools during armed conflicts. As of today, 104 States are signatories to the Declaration. That indicates the strong commitment to the joint efforts to implement it.

Yet we are alarmed by the fact that the Secretary-General's latest report on children and armed conflict of June 2020 (S/2020/525) verifies 927 attacks on schools and hospitals, with, as of December 2019, more than 3,300 schools closed due to insecurity in the central Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, affecting more than 650,000 children.

The reality is that there are growing security threats and crises in the world. When children are deprived of education, it has a huge impact on long-term peace and security and sustainable development. Attacks on schools are attacks not only on a building but also on the generations of tomorrow. Even when a conflict ends, schools and teachers will be gone if attacks are not prevented.

The implications of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic will exacerbate the crises and security threats of the world, not least for the most vulnerable in conflict areas, such as young girls, who often are subject to increased sexual and gender-based violence.

COVID-19 emphasizes the need for improving remote verification, which is already ongoing in some conflicts, but enhanced methods are needed. Member States can play a role in supporting access to financing and innovative methods for remote data collection.

The Nordic countries urge all States Members of the United Nations to maintain a strong focus on preventive measures to protect children and ensure children's education and access to mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian crises. The protection of children's rights must be integrated into all operational activities at the country level, as must an understanding of what protection is needed for girls and boys at different ages. Furthermore, we reiterate our call for all States to join and implement the Safe Schools Declaration and for defending the mandate of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict.

The Nordic countries also urge all States Members of the United Nations to speak openly about how we can establish effective accountability measures. That is key. We need to ensure that those who are responsible for attacks on schools are brought to justice. That is important for long-term resilience and stability in

affected societies. Most of all, we urge all parties to armed conflicts to comply with international humanitarian law so as to mitigate the severe consequences for children in armed conflict, who must always be afforded the attention and protection to which they are entitled.

Annex 10**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Ecuador to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

I thank the Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Niger for convening this open debate under the theme “Children and armed conflict: attacks against schools as a grave violation of children’s rights”. We consider it critical for all States in the Security Council to be able to express their concerns about the situation of children in armed conflict, address the grave violations of their rights and prevent future crimes against children.

As we prepare to commemorate the tenth anniversary of resolution 1998 (2011) and the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration, and on the margins of the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack, on 9 September, we reaffirm the importance of paying attention to the impact of attacks and threats of attack on schools and protected school-related persons, as well as the safety, educational rights and well-being of children. We also stress the need to take urgent action to ensure that schools are safe in areas of armed conflict and areas affected by conflict.

The situation of children is becoming increasingly worrisome because of the number and severity of violations in countries in conflict, as borne out by reports showing that children are victims of both State and non-State actors, without a collective and comprehensive response to protect them.

Ecuador expresses its concern about the ongoing recruitment and use of children throughout the world. Almost one fifth of the world’s children live in conflict zones. That is why, now more than ever, we need to increase our efforts to enhance the protection of children’s rights in armed conflict.

The Ecuadorian Constitution recognizes children as a priority group and establishes the State responsibilities of protecting children from all types of violence, mistreatment, sexual and other exploitation, as well as eradicating all forms of violence against children.

We therefore refer to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We call for its universal ratification and encourage States that have not yet done so to ratify it without delay.

Similarly, we call for ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, and stress the importance of adequate funding for gender-sensitive reintegration programmes, in consideration of the particular needs of girls who have not been well served by traditional disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes.

In conclusion, Ecuador expresses its full support for the need to protect students, teachers and educational infrastructure in times of armed conflict, and stresses the importance of continuing education during armed conflict, as well as the implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

We believe that it is important to build and sustain peace, which is directly linked to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We reaffirm Ecuador’s commitment to leave no one behind on the road to sustainable development, and we express our desire to use this space to join efforts towards a productive and successful dialogue that highlights the situation of children and armed conflict and its importance to the global agenda.

Annex 11**Statement by the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

El Salvador reiterates its firm commitment to maintaining international peace and security, addressing the heart-breaking consequences of armed conflict and reducing the widespread suffering that it causes for civilians, particularly children and adolescents in conflict areas.

Full compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a high priority for El Salvador. In that sense, the best interests of the child must prevail regardless of the context.

El Salvador expresses its deep concern about the high number of verified attacks against schools, which has doubled with respect to the Secretary-General's previous report (S/2020/525). Such attacks put children's security at risk, violate their right to education and create large gaps in their development by suspending instruction for weeks or even longer. We call on all parties to conflicts to put an immediate end to grave violations of children's rights and to take appropriate measures in that regard, including training in the prevention of children's rights violations.

El Salvador joined the Safe to Learn initiative, which seeks to end violence in and through schools so that children are free to learn, thrive and pursue their dreams. It has also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, which commits it to protecting schools from attack during times of armed conflict. Although there is no armed conflict in El Salvador, we have decided to establish safe places and implement inclusive designs that are resistant to potential threats to educational centres, with the participation of school communities and through the implementation of ongoing monitoring, financing and supervision plans for school facilities.

In addition, as of 2019, we have been implementing the educational violence alert system, which seeks to prevent acts of violence that could affect the school community, such as harassment, bullying, sexual violation, threats and extortion, both within and around schools. That project is led by the Ministry of Education and has a network of public and private educational centres throughout the country.

The Ministry of Education coordinates at the inter-institutional level with the National Civil Police, and together they provide an efficient and effective response to the cases reported through the system. In addition, the set of alerts produced through the educational violence alert system will generate information that will serve as input for the design of public policies and the development of strategies and plans to reduce violence in order to prevent the deadly violence that affects educational communities, thus enhancing school protection and duly attending to those identified in the reports. I take this opportunity to thank the agencies of the United Nations system that have supported this initiative, as well as other friendly countries that have provided cooperation and support in its implementation.

The outbreak of coronavirus disease has caused an unprecedented set of challenges for all Governments and other key actors in achieving the goals on the children and armed conflict agenda. In the latest report of the Secretary-General, we can see how work has been constrained by the outbreak of the virus, and that the social, economic and political consequences of the pandemic, including those related to peace, international security and the protection of human rights, and respect for international humanitarian law, are expected to grow.

In these difficult circumstances, we urge all countries to continue to support, according to their abilities, initiatives that sustain life-saving work, ensuring the existence of alternatives and the viability of long-term projects, providing education and support for the reintegration of victims, psychosocial and mental health services, as well as funding for surveillance and monitoring of grave violations committed against children.

We commend the work of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, particularly for ensuring equal humanitarian access to all persons without discrimination and in a safe, timely and unhindered manner. We specifically laud the support provided by UNICEF in promoting better results in the protection of children in different contexts, especially its work for the protection of children in conflict situations in different regions. At the same time, we call for further strengthening coordination processes among States Members of the United Nations and international, regional and subregional organizations, with a view to enhancing child-protection capacity and the development of strategies for the prevention of grave violations of children's rights.

Finally, El Salvador remains convinced that the protection of all children and adolescents in armed conflicts should be an important aspect of any conflict-resolution strategy by integrating this issue in the mandates of peacekeeping missions and special political missions through clear and relevant provisions. Addressing armed conflicts comprehensively will be the key to ensuring the maintenance of peace in different regions of the world and the long-term durability of that peace.

Annex 12**Statement by the Delegation of the European Union and its member States**

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

The EU welcomes the adoption of the presidential statement on the agenda item entitled “Children and armed conflict” (S/PRST/2020/8) and would like to express its appreciation for the work undertaken by all — but especially the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, the Under-Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and civil society — to protect students, teachers, schools and universities during times of armed conflict. These efforts to ensure the protection of schools and preserve the education of conflict-affected children are even more essential in the time of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Emergencies have disrupted the education of 75 million children, with girls living in conflict-affected countries being two and a half times more likely to be out of school than boys. These figures will probably be further affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This year’s annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) highlights the lack of respect for the civilian character of schools and hospitals, with 927 verified incidents of attacks on schools and hospitals and their protected persons. Behind the numbers are children: children deprived of the chance to grow up in a safe and enabling environment and whose future livelihoods are threatened by lack of access to schooling. Beyond the immediate impact of attacks on schools and on children in armed conflict, we note with great concern that the attacks have additional consequences, particularly for girls, including by limiting their access to education and the heightened risk for them of suffering sexual and gender-based violence.

Furthermore, we attach great importance to the independence and impartiality of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, and strongly believe that the information set forth in the listing of parties responsible for grave violations in the annual reports of the Secretary-General should be accurate and reflect information on attacks on schools and hospitals, including in the annexes to those reports.

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration, to which 105 States Members of the United Nations are signatories. Countries have pledged to implement such measures as developing conflict-sensitive approaches to education and seeking out and supporting efforts to continue education during armed conflict in line with the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict and incorporating them into domestic policy and operational frameworks.

The EU’s policy communication on education in emergencies and protracted crises declares that the EU will support initiatives to roll out and promote the Safe Schools Declaration and that otherwise strengthen child-protection frameworks. We also support the Paris Principles and Commitments as instruments that supplement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its protocols. The Paris instrument refers to the need to fight school closure, advocate the end to attacks on education and prevent military use of schools.

One of the EU’s policy priorities is to champion education for peace, with a strong emphasis on the protective role of education and the importance of

safeguarding learners. Access to education is key to breaking cycles of poverty and to building peaceful societies.

The EU supports advocacy for the endorsement and implementation of the Declaration with the aim of ensuring safe and continuous access to education for children in conflict-affected areas. This support is reinforced by projects such as the one undertaken in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was designed to secure protection at school, avoid disruptions to education and ensure that every child is educated in an atmosphere free from violence.

The aim of the EU policy is to protect children from the effects of armed conflict. As education is central to preventing the use of children in conflict and to supporting reintegration efforts, children formerly associated with armed forces and groups are being given priority in the allocation of support for children's access to safe, protective and quality education. To this end, the EU is a global leader in the field of education in emergencies: we have scaled up the budget devoted to this humanitarian pursuit to 10 per cent as of 2019, which amounted to €450 million for the period from 2015 to 2019 and provided for some 8.5 million beneficiaries. In this context, the EU recently launched two pilot partnership programmes in the Sahel region, budgeted at nearly €10 million and benefitting 370,000 children, to promote strong linkages between education and protection.

The EU has reacted quickly to address the impact of COVID-19 by supporting the strengthening of local child protection systems, especially in countries affected by civil war or conflicts, and countries hosting children fleeing armed conflict, such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Uganda. Since March, through EU support to Education Cannot Wait, COVID-response grants were issued to over 40 countries, amounting to over €42 million.

Finally, we wish to reiterate our full support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. And we urge the Security Council and parties to armed conflict to ensure that the provisions of resolution 2532 (2020) are fully implemented.

Children themselves can act as powerful agents for change, hence they should be empowered; there is no stronger empowerment than through quality education.

Annex 13

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Georgia to the United Nations

I would like to express gratitude to the presidency of the Niger for convening today's important debate, and thank the speakers for their comprehensive update.

Armed conflicts impede children's effective enjoyment of human rights and strip them of protection from violence and abuse. Children, and especially refugees and internally displaced persons, are disproportionately affected in complex humanitarian emergencies, which increase their vulnerability.

This year we mark the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack, the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration and the fifteenth anniversary of the landmark principle of the responsibility to protect. Despite the significant progress that has been made with regard to the protection of schools from attacks and threats of attacks during the last decades, there is still more to be done in order to stop the growing tendency and threats of such attacks.

Alarmingly, the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict verifies 927 attacks on schools and hospitals during 2019. We are concerned over the findings of the report according to which "attacks on schools and hospitals committed by State actors nearly doubled" globally during the last year and

"schools continued to be used for military purposes, eroding their sanctity as safe spaces and exposing schools, teachers and students to attack." (S/2020/525, para.8)

The sharp increase in attacks on education also across central Sahel, subsequently contributing to the closure of schools, is worrisome and requires urgent attention from the international community.

Children affected by conflict continue to suffer on a daily basis in different parts of the world, and timely and unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance for them is crucial. Therefore, we subscribe to the call of the Secretary-General upon all parties to allow safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access.

While the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic poses an unprecedented threat globally, we concur with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict that it has a disproportionate negative impact on children, especially in conflict-affected areas.

In these challenging times, when it is critically important to support the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, I would like to draw the Council's attention to the dire humanitarian and human rights situation in Russian-occupied regions of Georgia — Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia — which has been aggravated amid COVID-19. The fundamental rights, including the right to education in the native language of the conflict-affected children, continue to be violated by the occupying Power, which exercises effective control on the ground.

Alarmingly, Russia continues the illegal process of the erection of the so-called "border signs" and other artificial barriers along the occupation line that prevent local children from gaining access to quality education on the Government's controlled territories. Moreover, the population residing in the occupied regions, including children, remain stripped of access to urgent care and medical evacuation. The above-mentioned once again clearly demonstrates the urgent need for access to both regions of Georgia among international and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms.

In conclusion, we reiterate that it is critical to ensure equal access to education to all children, including the most vulnerable ones in conflict-affected areas, to advance peace efforts and leave no child behind.

Annex 14**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Guatemala to the United Nations**

Allow me to congratulate the delegation of the Republic of the Niger for organizing this open debate. Our thanks are also extended to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their valuable briefings.

Since 1999, the Security Council has adopted specific resolutions on children and armed conflict, and each of those resolutions contain increasingly stringent provisions on the protection to be extended to children. Sadly, much remains to be done on this matter.

Guatemala has endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and is among one of the 105 signatories to the Safe Schools Declaration, which is marking its fifth anniversary this year. In addition, we are glad to commemorate, for the first time, on 9 September, the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, which calls for strong political support for the protection of every child and young student, teacher and school during an armed conflict.

We are currently witnessing an increase in civilian casualties in armed conflict, including egregious crimes perpetrated against children. We express our deep concern about the attacks, as well as threats of attacks, in contravention of applicable international law against schools and educational facilities, the direct targeting of civilians with explosive weapons, air strikes and the use of chemical weapons that cause large numbers of injured civilians, including children, who suffer, in addition to the deprivation of their basic rights. When children miss out on school, especially in times of conflict, they not only are unable to learn the skills needed to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies, but they also become vulnerable to horrific forms of exploitation. The result of these attacks undermines the adequate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal 4, on universal access to quality education by 2030. We therefore request the Council to impose strong sanctions to condemn these attacks.

It is not enough to be aware of the acts of barbarism that affect children; it is imperative to take decisive and immediate action against persistent perpetrators of violations and abuses committed against children in situations of armed conflict. We must bring to justice those responsible for such violations, which are prohibited under applicable international law, through national justice systems and where applicable international justice mechanisms with a view to ending impunity for those committing crimes against children.

It is of particular urgency to address the targeting of schoolgirls by armed groups that threaten their security at school or on their way to and from school, subjecting them to forceful abductions, sexual violence and other forms of abuses. Their protection, rights, well-being and empowerment must be integrated into all peace processes and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning.

Guatemala reiterates its commitment to peace and condemns the recruitment of children by armed groups to serve as soldiers or human shields. We call upon parties to armed conflict to prepare and implement concrete time-bound action plans to halt the recruitment and use of children in violation of applicable international law. Furthermore, we stress the need for effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for children, which are crucial for their well-being

and a critical factor for durable peace and security. Adequate, sustained and timely funding remains necessary for those community-based programmes.

Lastly, let me acknowledge the Council's efforts through its resolution 2532 (2020), which reaffirms the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. We join and also support the call of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gambia de Potgieter, who emphasizes the disproportionate negative impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic on children, especially the most vulnerable in conflict-affected areas. Let us remain steadfast in facilitating a brighter future for them all.

Annex 15**Statement by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations**

At the outset I thank the Niger, as the President of the Security Council, for convening this open debate. We thank all the briefers for sharing their insights on this issue.

Children constitute a third of humankind — the most important third, as they are our future. They are also the most susceptible to suffering and are in need of protection. The international community has the responsibility and obligation to do its utmost to provide succour to children affected by armed conflict.

Over the past two decades, the Security Council has actively engaged in this pursuit, and significant progress has been achieved to protect children in armed conflict situations. Attacks against schools are now regarded as one of the grave violations against children in armed conflicts, along with other violations.

Despite persistent focus by the international community, grave violations against children and attacks on spaces of learning persist. These trends are often both causes and consequences of complex conflicts.

The lack of access to schools and treacherous learning environments make children vulnerable to exploitation and recruitment by terrorists and other non-State actors. Educational facilities are often used as vehicles for radicalization and indoctrination to violent extremist ideologies. Much of that happens in the absence of opportunity for quality formal education for children.

For children, schools are not just a place of learning, but also a social safety net. The absence of safe school environments multiplies protection challenges. Young women and girls become vulnerable to various forms of subjugation, including sexual and gender-based violence, fall victims to forced and child marriages and human trafficking.

The prevailing situation in the Sahel region of Africa presents all these challenges and calls for greater attention by the Council where attacks on schools are surging as a consequence of a complex regional conflict. Terrorists and armed groups are increasingly targeting educational facilities leading to school closures. The occupation of schools for military purposes in violation of international humanitarian law is also a contributing factor in this crisis. This has set in motion a range of negative impacts on children, especially girls.

It is in this context that we wish to highlight the following points.

First, protecting the rights of the child, including their access to education, is the primary responsibility of every Government. The Security Council must do all that is possible to support efforts of Governments to protect schools and other learning spaces, students and teachers in order to ensure uninterrupted education for children. National action plans to protect children must be owned by national authorities and must be implemented with the participation of local communities for best results.

Secondly, United Nations peace operations, both military and political, should have clear and unambiguous mandates and commensurate resources to protect children and their education facilities, as per humanitarian and human rights law.

Thirdly, the Council needs to factor in the stark reality that non-State parties to armed conflicts have little regard for upholding their obligations under the international law. This creates asymmetrical dynamics in the field vis-à-vis the States or United Nations peace operations. The Council therefore needs to ensure

that those who are engaged in protecting children on its behalf have the necessary resources and predeployment and in-mission training to operate and deliver in extremely challenges situations.

Fourthly, there should be greater recognition and comprehensive action to counter threats to children posed by terrorist groups in different parts of the world. Terror networks spread their tentacles across borders threatening peace and stability. Children are most affected, as they live with a looming sense of fear and uncertainty and are often deprived of their right to education.

In order to advance the child protection agenda of the Council, its synergies with counter terrorism need to be translated into action. Terrorist outfits and individuals proscribed by the Council are directly or indirectly responsible for abusing child rights. Member States need to demonstrate greater political will to hold the perpetrators of terrorism and their collaborators and sponsors, especially those sanctioned by the Council, to account, to fulfil Council's child protection obligations.

Fifthly, we need more objective reporting by the officials who have been mandated by the Security Council, based on the complex dynamics of the situations and the obligations of different parties to the armed conflict. The tendency of "mandate creep" must be checked to maintain efficacy and sanctity.

Sixthly, given the complex situation in the Sahel region, we believe that a military response to the situation can bear the desired results only if it is integrated with inclusive regional and national strategies towards security, governance, development, human rights and humanitarian issues and ownership by the Governments, especially in upholding the rule of law. The Sahel must continue to remain a clear priority for the Peacebuilding Commission. The Council, for its part, also should remain engaged in implementing the military and political missions, as well as promoting dialogue and intercommunal harmony in the region. The Council must keep up its engagements with regional bodies. Child protection priorities must be integrated into the core of such engagements.

In conclusion, we reaffirm that safeguarding children's rights, including the right to education in armed conflicts, is critical for sustaining peace and security. The coronavirus disease pandemic has compounded the already existing child protection challenges. This crisis has also demonstrated the power of technology, especially education technology, to provide learning opportunities to children affected by armed conflicts. The international community must seize this momentum to use the full potential of technology to fulfil hitherto unkept promises to the children.

Annex 16

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi

Despite improvements in the area of children's rights, it is alarming that, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525), nearly 500 attacks on schools were conducted in 2019 worldwide.

During the Iraqi-imposed war on Iran, when the world Powers, including the United States, provided every support to Saddam Hussein, thousands of schools in Iran's occupied regions were destroyed completely and, only in areas outside the conflict zones, 1,362 schools were targeted by air strikes or missiles, a few examples of which include: missile attacks against a primary school in Behbahan martyring 72 students, aerial bombings of two schools in Borujerd martyring 66 children and air strikes against two schools in Mianeh martyring 68 schoolgirls.

In the Middle East, attacks against schools have always been a common feature of conflicts. The most systematic and gross violation of the rights of the child, including attacking schools, have definitely been committed by the Israeli regime. In 2019 alone, the United Nations verified 3,908 violations against Palestinian children by the Israeli regime, whose forces killed 32 Palestinian children, maimed 1,539 others and attacked 15 schools.

Attacks against schools in Iraq and Syria by terrorist groups, particularly Da'esh, have also been one of the main violations of the rights of the child in our region. However, except for the crimes of the Israeli regime against Palestinian children, none of the violations of the rights of the child in our region is as brutal or devastating, with far-reaching impacts on the future of children and their well-being, as the crimes committed in Yemen by Saudi Arabia. Between 2015 and 2020, Saudi air strikes have killed 3,468 children, destroyed 256 schools and caused damage to 1,520 other schools in Yemen.

The protection of schools requires first and foremost putting an end to current conflicts and preventing their re-emergence, as well as the emergence of new conflicts. Likewise, every effort must be made to ensure the full and effective implementation of international humanitarian law by the parties to conflict. The mechanism to list the parties violating the rights of children in armed conflict must also be used effectively and without discrimination or selectivity. It is a source of grave concern that the Israeli forces have never been blacklisted as violators of children's rights in the relevant reports of the Secretary-General, and also that the name of Saudi Arabia has been deleted from the top of that list.

We share the views of several Council members that have expressed concern about the discrepancies between the violations described in the reports of the Secretary-General and the listing of the parties in their annexes, as well as the premature delisting of parties, and called for the consistent application of the criteria for listing and delisting parties, stressing the importance of upholding the impartiality and integrity of the listing and delisting mechanism.

We also strongly support the views expressed by a significant number of Member States about their concerns over the uneven application of the listing and delisting criteria, undermining the credibility of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. We also underline the importance of the call by a group of non-governmental organizations for greater transparency in the listing and delisting process.

At a time when the situation of children in armed conflict as well as the number of violations of their right to education is alarming, we need to redouble our efforts to prevent that trend, thereby contributing to peace and prosperity for the generations to come.

Annex 17**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations**

We thank the Nigerien presidency for having convened this open debate on the important topic of attacks against schools as a grave violation of children's rights and the wider children and armed conflict agenda.

Ireland aligns itself with the statement submitted on behalf of the European Union (annex 12).

Ireland also thanks the briefers for their valuable inputs, particularly the youth briefers Rimana and Hadiza. It is important in these contexts that the voice and experiences of youth be heard and heeded.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) documents continuing, and deeply concerning, attacks on schools in conflict-affected areas. Attacks on schools have wide-ranging and enduring consequences. They frequently result in lasting physical and psychological harm to children and education staff, have a disproportionate impact on girls and have severe socioeconomic consequences for the wider community. They also prevent children from realizing their right to education. We thank the Nigerien presidency for drawing attention to the increasing number of attacks against schools in the Sahel and the global challenge of protecting education in situations of armed conflict. We note with concern that at the end of last year more than 3,300 schools remained closed due to insecurity in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.

In the nearly 25 years since the Graça Machel report (see A/51/306), there has been significant progress in developing the international framework for protecting children in armed conflict. That includes resolution 1998 (2011), which designated attacks on schools as a grave violation of children's rights in armed conflict, and resolution 2143 (2014), which urged States to respect the civilian character of schools. We welcome the adoption of the presidential statement today (S/PRST/2020/8), which further contributes to that framework.

Ireland is proud to be among the 104 Member States to have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration since its launch in 2015, and we encourage those Member States that have not yet endorsed this important document to do so.

Despite this progress, we are gravely concerned that attacks continue to be made on schools in conflict situations. It is vital that we all play our part in protecting schools by upholding the provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and ensuring accountability. Let us not forget the duty of States to meet our obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education of all children, including those affected by violence and armed conflict.

The vulnerabilities faced by children affected by conflict in accessing education are now compounded by the consequences of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has seen unprecedented closures of schools and colleges globally.

It is also imperative to recognize that attacks on schools have a disproportionate effect on women and girls. School closures, particularly in low-income settings, exacerbate existing inequalities within education, including gender inequalities. Globally, girls are less likely to return to school following a crisis and face increased risks of child marriage and gender-based violence, including sexual violence. For a generation of girls affected by conflict, the convergence of school attacks and a global pandemic may prove an insurmountable obstacle to securing a quality

education. This is why keeping girls safe is an integral goal of Ireland's Drive for Five initiative to safeguard the right to education for adolescent girls.

Ireland remains deeply committed to the promotion of children's rights, in particular their right to education, both in times of stability and in times of conflict. To that end, Ireland has committed to providing at least €250 million for global education over 2019-2023, with a focus on providing education in emergencies and improving access to quality education for girls in a safe environment.

There is no room for complacency. The international community must redouble efforts and remain vigilant. We must do more to protect our children and their right to grow and learn in a safe school environment. As an incoming member of the Security Council for the term 2021-2022, Ireland looks forward to fully contributing to the work of the Council in that area.

Annex 18**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations**

Italy aligns itself with the statement submitted by the European Union (annex 12), as well as with the statement presented by Canada (annex 7) on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and would like to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

We would like to thank the Government of the Niger for having organized this timely open debate, which offers an opportunity to highlight the unprecedented risks that education is facing at this extraordinary juncture and the need to keep on protecting and promoting education, particularly in situations of emergency. In that regard, we deeply appreciate the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and the Global Coalition for the Protection of Education from Attack, which significantly contribute to protecting educational institutions, teachers and students in times of war.

On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration, we welcome its growing endorsement by Member States. We have been sparing no effort to promote the Declaration's universal endorsement by means of awareness-raising campaigns at both the multilateral and bilateral levels. We are also committed to ensuring that concrete action is taken to respect the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, which offer guidance to better safeguard the civilian character of such facilities.

In line with its strong commitment to supporting education in emergencies, Italy presented an open pledge on the occasion of the thirty-third International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, aimed at guaranteeing that children can live safely and enjoy their rights even in conflict situations. Through that pledge, we committed, among other things, to encouraging wider support for the Safe Schools Declaration and to promoting its effective implementation. We also committed to fostering references to this issue in resolutions, statements and other relevant documents to be adopted by the United Nations and other multilateral forums.

During our most recent term on the Security Council, in 2017, we were engaged in keeping the Council's attention on the issue of the protection of children in armed conflict through the co-organization of an Arria Formula meeting on attacks against schools. In 2018, Italy co-sponsored resolution 2427 (2018), which focuses on children and armed conflict and deals extensively with the heinous crime of attacks against schools.

We recall that attacks on civilian targets such as schools and educational institutions are prohibited under international law and constitute grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and war crimes under the Statute of the International Criminal Court. In order to guarantee the systematic and effective implementation of resolution 1998 (2011) and all other related resolutions, it is important to encourage the investigation of allegations of violations of applicable national and international law and the prosecution of perpetrators, including by strengthening the relevant monitoring and reporting activities.

Armed attacks against schools and educational facilities, by both States and non-State armed groups, constitute one of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict and undermine progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal of universal access to quality education by 2030. Schools are key in dealing with the psychological impact of armed conflict on children, offering them a momentary break from the horrors of war and preparing them to build a better future. We have

the duty to strengthen our efforts to allow children to enjoy their childhood and give them hope for a better future, even in times of war.

Italy will continue to engage and advocate for the respect, protection and promotion of the rights of children, as they represent the backbone of our present and future society.

Annex 19**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, Ishikane Kimihiro**

I would like to begin by thanking the Niger for having convened this important meeting. Japan welcomes the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2020/8 this morning and expresses its appreciation to the Niger and Belgium for their efforts to that end.

Since the adoption of resolution 1998 (2011), the Security Council has reiterated its firm commitment to the protection of schools and hospitals by adopting a series of resolutions, including resolution 2286 (2016), on health care in armed conflict, to which Japan contributed as a co-penholder in 2016. It is deplorable that, according to the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525), attacks and threats of attacks against schools and hospitals are increasing at an alarming rate. Japan strongly condemns any acts that contravene obligations under international human rights law and humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, and it urges all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with them.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is still causing a serious human security crisis, spreading across borders and striking the most vulnerable segments of societies. Japan is deeply concerned about its aggravating impact on children in already fragile situations, including those who are refugees, internally displaced or in conflict-affected areas, as well as those with disabilities, without parental care or in poverty. Girls also need special attention. The international community must step up its efforts to minimize the impact of the pandemic on those vulnerable children affected by armed conflict.

Japan welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2532 (2020), on COVID-19. Japan urges all parties to armed conflict to immediately respond to the call for a ceasefire and ensure safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access to children in need.

Children's right to education must be safeguarded at all cost as the bedrock for realizing peaceful societies and sustainable development in future. Japan echoes the urgent need to protect schools and education from attacks and to ensure access to safe and quality education, with no child left behind. Japan has always partnered with UNICEF to secure education for children affected by conflict. Japan provides a substantial contribution to the UNICEF-led Education for All joint programme in Syria. Japan also supports Syrian children and youths who fled their homes and became refugees in neighbouring countries.

In Afghanistan, Japan supports access to education for internally displaced children and those who are returnees. Furthermore, with a view to assisting developing countries vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19, including those affected by conflict, in March Japan provided emergency assistance of \$28.8 million through UNICEF to improve children's access to quality health services. In April, Japan decided on an additional contribution of more than \$68.1 million to UNICEF. The closure of schools due to COVID-19 would make them more vulnerable to vandalism in conflict-affected areas.

On the bilateral front as well, Japan is making efforts to improve children's learning environments in the Sahel region, where violent extremism and social unrest prevent children from going to school. The Japan International Cooperation Agency School for All programme began in the Niger in 2004 and has been replicated in more than 45,000 schools, mainly across West Africa and the Sahel region. The

programme has contributed to improved access to quality education and higher enrolment of girls.

Japan is determined to make every effort to protect and promote children's rights, including their right to education, and to ensure human security for all children and their families. Japan looks forward to working closely with the United Nations in that endeavour.

Annex 20

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations, Christian Wenaweser

This May marked the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration — an important political commitment to protecting students, teachers and educational facilities from the worst effects of armed conflict. The Declaration remains as relevant today as it was five years ago, and perhaps even more so. The United Nations verified almost 500 attacks on schools in 2019, many of which were unprovoked. Schools also continue to be used for military purposes, eroding their sanctity as safe spaces and exposing schools, teachers and students to attack. Such attacks violate the right to education and often constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Depriving children access to education also has a devastating impact on sustainable development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 4, and inflicts irreparable long-term damage on children, families, communities and societies. It is even more vital to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for girls and boys at a time when the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is having devastating effects on education around the globe.

This year, due to the ongoing pandemic, 1.6 billion learners have had their education disrupted. At least a third of the world's schoolchildren — 463 million — were unable to access remote learning when COVID-19 closed their schools. That reality further compounds the aforementioned challenges for many children living in situations of armed conflict. As schools begin to reopen, many of the world's most vulnerable children will not return. That includes children who are working to help their families, who have been pushed into poverty by COVID-19; children forced into child marriage or early pregnancy while out of school; and those recruited into armed groups or child labour. In total, as many as 10 million children may never return to school following lockdown, and it is predicted that over the next 10 years, we will see an additional 13 million child marriages, which could have otherwise been averted.

The closure of schools has also heightened the risk of domestic and sexual violence for women and girls, as well as for men and boys, in crisis-affected communities. Liechtenstein remains deeply concerned about the high occurrence of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, which will only be exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. Such violence is often underreported owing to fear of stigmatization and cultural taboos, in particular when perpetrated against boys, as documented by the All Survivors Project. A culture of silence continues to impede accountability and justice and contributes to further cycles of violence and persistent harmful gender stereotypes. We also reiterate our strong support for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in order to shed more light on marginalized victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, in line with resolution 2467 (2019). It is critical to uphold the security, privacy and confidentiality of survivors and witnesses, and to consider ethical implications when documenting and verifying information regarding child survivors of sexual violence.

Pandemic-related restrictions on movement will no doubt complicate the monitoring and reporting of these challenges. It is therefore important to prioritize the development and remote roll-out of gender-specific training tools to conduct the safe and ethical documentation of cases of conflict-related sexual violence against girls and boys. With unchanged global reporting guidelines for the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, we must urgently train staff to explore options for remotely verifying incidents of violence. While we acknowledge

the current challenges to the Special Representative's mandate, we reiterate that safeguarding its independence and integrity is crucial to its effectiveness and credibility. That includes the objective, consistent and transparent practice of listing parties that have committed grave violations against children, as well as those that have or have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children. Liechtenstein supports the efforts being made to enable the more comprehensive gathering of information, in particular disaggregated data, including an emphasis on capturing regional and subregional dynamics.

Annex 21**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the United Nations**

[Original: French]

Luxembourg thanks the Nigerien presidency of the Security Council for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict, as well as all the briefers who enriched the debate with their experience and expertise.

Because of the coronavirus disease pandemic, millions of children around the world have seen their classes suspended, their exams cancelled and their schooling affected. For the millions of children who experience the reality of war on a daily basis, the pandemic has exacerbated an already precarious situation. While countries at peace have had to address the challenge of keeping their education systems afloat during the health crisis, one can imagine how difficult that task can be for countries ravaged by persistent conflict. Intimidation and threats against teachers, the kidnapping of students and attacks on schools are all serious violations that have a lasting and often irreversible impact on children's right to education. Such violations deprive future generations of the only way out of poverty, perpetuate injustice, foster ignorance and propagate intolerance. They fuel the vicious circle of conflict.

As highlighted in the concept note (S/2020/881, annex), the Sahel region is particularly affected by attacks on schools. According to data collected by UNICEF, the closure of more than 3,300 schools has disrupted the education of more than 650,000 children in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.

However, attacks on schools can be prevented and the States Members of the United Nations have the means to put an end to them. In some situations — and this is the case in the three Sahel countries mentioned — those attacks are carried out by non-State or terrorist groups, but in others it is the armed forces of the States themselves that are guilty of such violations. The aerial bombardment of schools by the Syrian regime has been amply documented since the beginning of the conflict in Syria.

One factor that can deprive schools of their civilian character under international humanitarian law is the use of schools for military purposes. That is why Luxembourg took the initiative in 2014, when it chaired the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, to propose a resolution, unanimously adopted by the Council as resolution 2143 (2014), that encouraged Member States to take concrete measures to deter armed forces and non-State armed groups from using schools, and called on the United Nations to monitor more closely the use of schools for military purposes and to increase reporting on this issue.

Echoing resolution 2143 (2014), Luxembourg takes this opportunity to underline the contribution of the International Criminal Court in ending impunity for crimes committed against children.

Today, thanks in part to the advocacy work of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attacks, and the efforts of Norway and Argentina, more than 100 countries have signed the Safe Schools Declaration. Thanks to the Niger, that instrument is referenced in the presidential statement adopted by the Council (S/PRST/2020/8). We call on all countries to sign the Declaration and to honour its obligations.

Annex 22

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations

I begin by thanking the Nigerien presidency of the Security Council for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict, as well as today's briefers for sharing their valuable insights and experiences.

As a signatory to the Safe Schools Declaration and a member of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, Malta remains fully committed to the protection of children and their right to education. If entrusted to serve as an elected member of the Security Council in 2023-2024, we will spare no effort to make sure that this issue continues to be given the importance it deserves.

Malta aligns itself with the statements submitted by the European Union (annex 12) and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict (annex 7). I would now like to make a few remarks in my national capacity.

Yesterday we celebrated the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. We once again thank the State of Qatar for that initiative, which we are proud to have co-sponsored. On that occasion, the world had the opportunity to reflect on the plight of children and young people in crisis-affected countries whose education was disrupted by conflict, violence and insecurity. The future of those children is in serious jeopardy, and an attack on children and education must be considered as an attack on the future of the entire country in which they live. Extremism and radicalism thrive in the absence of education, and decisive action is needed in order to prevent such scenarios. The impact that attacks on education has on girls, and the specific targeting of girls in school or on their way to school is an issue that deserves particular attention.

It is despicable that warring parties around the world continue to flout their obligations under international law to protect children. It is unacceptable that so many children have had their education disrupted by conflict, violence and insecurity.

Malta strongly condemns all attacks on schools and hospitals, as well as their use for military purposes. Such actions are in complete violation of international humanitarian law and show the utmost contempt for human life. We urge all parties to armed conflict to fulfil their obligations under international law and ensure the protection of students, educational personnel and educational institutions. We stress the need for accountability, as such heinous crimes cannot go unpunished.

Significant progress has been made since the adoption of resolution 1998 (2011) and subsequent initiatives. However, we remain gravely concerned that children continue to be subjected to multiple risks and vulnerabilities.

Malta reiterates its support for the Secretary-General's global call for peace in the light of the coronavirus disease pandemic and underlines the need to implement the provisions of resolution 2532 (2020). Ceasefire negotiations are a first step to ensure the inclusion of the rights of children and child protection provisions in peace talks. Those include securing the release of all children associated with parties to conflict, prioritizing their reintegration and immediately ending their recruitment and abuse. As stated by the Secretary-General in his most recent report on children and armed conflict, "[p]eace remains the most powerful means to reduce violations against children" (*S/2020/525, para. 15*).

Protecting children from attacks and ensuring that they still have access to an education during armed conflict is no easy task. It requires a global effort and the determination to fully implement Security Council resolutions. Regional and subregional organizations also have a vital role to play in that process. The necessary

resources must be allocated to prioritize equal access for all girls and boys to quality education, to rehabilitate schools and to protect the mental health of children who have been victims of such attacks.

In closing, we welcome the steps taken by the United Nations, particularly the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF, to strengthen the protection of children, schools and protected personnel, including through United Nations peace operations, and greatly value the role of civil society as child protection actors.

Annex 23

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations

[Original: Spanish]

Mexico thanks the Niger for convening this open debate. While we recognize the progress made in the nine years following the adoption of resolution 1998 (2011), which strengthens the protection of children in armed conflict, Mexico considers it necessary to reflect on the challenges to its implementation. We welcome the presidential statement (S/PRST/2020/8) adopted in the framework of this debate, which strongly condemns attacks on schools, children and teachers.

Mexico expresses its concern about the alarming figures contained in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2020/525) with regard to attacks against schools. The protection of children in armed conflict is one of the priority issues that Mexico will promote during its upcoming term as an elected member of the Security Council.

Attacks on schools violate international humanitarian law and international human rights law. They hinder the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and block progress towards sustainable development and peace. Education is an essential tool for conflict prevention and a catalyst for development. Nevertheless, millions of children are deprived of that right — directly or indirectly — by armed conflict.

Mexico urges all parties to conflict to respect their obligations under international law and to heed the call for a ceasefire, as contained in resolution 2532 (2020), in order to address the health pandemic and thus prevent attacks on schools and medical personnel, ensuring their safety and protection and enabling access to humanitarian and health assistance for children.

Children's lack of access to education is one of the most negative effects of the coronavirus disease pandemic on children. That situation has been particularly exacerbated in countries in conflict situations.

The cross-border dynamics of various conflicts, intercommunal violence, insecurity and military operations, including those to combat terrorism, make access difficult for child protection actors, teachers and health personnel. That has resulted in millions of unprotected children, who cannot continue their education because of armed group recruitment and disrupted schooling. The worst manifestation of that is attacks on schools.

In addition, other factors arising from the health emergency increase the vulnerability of girls and adolescents, who are exposed to early marriage, pregnancy and sexual and gender-based violence without access to sexual and reproductive health services.

Against that backdrop, my country calls on the Security Council to, first, systematically request reports on grave violations committed against children and maintain its commitment to combat impunity and hold perpetrators accountable; secondly, ensure, together with Member States, that plans for the reintegration of children include measures with a gender perspective so as to guarantee their right to education; and, thirdly, support the maintenance of the independence, impartiality and credibility of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict.

Annex 24

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Morocco to the United Nations

At the outset, having celebrated the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack, on 9 September, and ahead of the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of resolution 1998 (2011), I would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing this important Security Council open debate under the theme “Children and armed conflict: attacks against schools as a grave violation of children’s rights”.

I would also like to thank the briefers, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director, as well as Ms. Marika Tsolakis, Senior Researcher at the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, for their valuable inputs.

In its resolution 74/275, the General Assembly proclaimed 9 September the International Day to Protect Education from Attack to reaffirm the right to education for all and to underline the centrality of guaranteeing safe and enabling learning environments everywhere, including in the contexts of armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies. It also unanimously condemned all attacks on schools and their use for military purposes.

Despite some progress, strong accountability measures must be taken against all those who continue to act in violation of international law and universal instruments addressing child protection. It is time that crimes against children in armed conflicts be considered crimes against humanity because children are the future of their nations. The right to education is also being obstructed by the persistence and increase in the number of recruitment of children in armed conflicts, in particular by jihadist armed groups, as well as by the kidnapping of hundreds of girls by terrorist groups.

The Kingdom of Morocco condemns in the strongest terms all forms of violence against children, their kidnapping by armed groups, their being taken as hostages, their use as human shields and their recruitment in refugee camps. We also condemn attacks on students, teachers, schools and universities, and reiterate our full support for international efforts undertaken to end such abominable and criminal practices.

Morocco has assiduously associated itself with international efforts aimed at preventing, responding to and ending attacks on education and stopping the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Kingdom has adhered to all international instruments relating to the rights of the child and was among the first countries to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, and the Paris Commitments relating to this question. As part of the extension of its commitments in favour of the protection of the rights of the child, wherever they are, the Kingdom of Morocco endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, as well as the Safe Schools Declaration.

By law, the right to education is guaranteed for all without any distinction or discrimination. States Members of the United Nations have the obligation to protect, respect and fulfil this right. Joint and inclusive efforts should ensure the protection of schools and the guarantee of education for conflict-affected children. This guarantee is even more needed in times of natural disasters or pandemic outbreaks, such as the current one with coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Indeed, the pandemic is having a

disproportionate concrete impact on children. Schools around the world are closing, education is interrupted, and hundreds of millions of children are out of school and facing multiple threats to their safety and well-being.

If the impact of COVID-19 on children is not tackled immediately, the global efforts and the positive results and progress made over the past 30 years — since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — to improve and protect the lives of millions of children around the world, could be at stake. The pandemic, combined with some of the preventive measures being applied, is undoubtedly posing challenges to the full enjoyment of the rights of the child and consequently to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the Kingdom of Morocco's firm commitment to leaving no child behind, especially during these difficult times marked by widespread quarantining. We reaffirm our firm pledge to protect children and combat all forms of violence against them, including sexual abuse and exploitation, forced marriage, child labour and child pornography, as well as our pledge to guarantee their right to education in a safe and enabling environment. The children of today are the future of our societies.

Annex 25**Statement by the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour**

At the outset, we thank the Republic of the Niger for convening today's meeting on children and armed conflict as the international community commemorates the ninth anniversary of resolution 1998 (2011) and as we prepare to commemorate the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack. We also mark the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration, of which the State of Palestine is a proud signatory.

While significant progress has been made to ensure the protection of schools, it is clear that more must be done as attacks and threats against schools are still on the rise. This is very much the case for Palestinian children living in the occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem. Continued attacks and violations of the sanctity and inviolability of schools have had an immeasurably negative impact on the entire education system for Palestinian children. The devastation has been both human and structural.

As the occupying Power, Israel's binding responsibilities under international humanitarian and human rights law vis-à-vis the provision of education in occupied Palestine is clear. However, as documented by the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525), Israel has completely failed to uphold its obligations; indeed, it has violated those obligations in the most appalling ways. Let me offer a snapshot. The Secretary-General's most recent report verified 118 incidents of interference with education in occupied Palestine, affecting over 23,000 children. More than half of these incidents involved Israeli occupying forces firing live ammunition, tear gas and sound grenades in and around schools. This is beyond unacceptable.

These figures do not take into account the many other violations committed by the occupying Power over the span of its more than five-decade long occupation, including the hundreds of schools and educational facilities it has damaged or completely destroyed; the teachers and students it has killed and injured while on school property, including those sheltering at schools during times of emergency; or the children and youth it has arrested and detained while at school. In addition to the psychological trauma and fear this causes for children — and which they could associate with education — children must also deal with constant disruptions to their school day, restrictions on movement and access to school as a result of military checkpoints, and constant harassment, violence and intimidation from violent illegal settlers during their commute to school.

Clearly, the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine has imposed a tragic reality on Palestinian children — one that no child deserves. It is therefore critical that no time or effort is spared in ending the occupation and immediately halting the grave consequences of Israel's illegal policies and practices, which threaten every aspect of life for children in Palestine. This includes attacks on schools, which are attacks not only on their right to an education and the security of their communities, but also on their futures.

Annex 26

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations

[Original: Spanish]

We would like to express our gratitude to the Republic of the Niger's presidency of the Security Council for convening today's open debate within the framework of the children and armed conflict agenda, on attacks on schools, an issue that is relevant to Peru. We would also like to thank the important briefings by Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF; and Ms. Marika Tsolakis, civil society representative.

Peru wishes to highlight its commitment to the children and armed conflict agenda. Children are one of the most vulnerable segments of the population owing to their defencelessness and dependence, both of which greatly increase during armed conflicts. We therefore condemn all forms of violence against children, including physical and psychological violence.

Accordingly, we cannot fail to express our deep concern at the recurrence of new cases of grave violations of children's rights every year. We note with concern that the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525) once again reports an increase in the number of these violations, by both State and non-State actors. One such serious violation of children's rights, attacks on schools, has a devastating effect on the lives and futures of children; we therefore condemn such actions in the strongest terms.

In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all States Members of the United Nations underlined, by consensus, the importance of education for sustainable development by identifying it as a requirement for achieving that objective. We therefore declare as part of the vision we have set ourselves as an international society to arrive at the year 2030 with a world in which literacy is universal and with generalized and equitable access to quality education. To this end, we set as our fourth Sustainable Development Goal ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. However, in armed conflict, every time a school is attacked, in violation of applicable international law, hundreds if not thousands of children are being denied access to education. It is therefore important that the Security Council consider and adopt the measures necessary for preventing such attacks.

We would like to highlight the fact that this year marks the ninth anniversary of resolution 1998 (2011), which addressed this issue directly and specifically. We also welcome the fact that, in order to draw international attention to this problem, the General Assembly, in its resolution 74/275, approved, as of this year, that every 9 September will be the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, in accordance with its obligations and powers.

We wish to emphasize that the principles of international humanitarian law, including the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives, and the principle of proportionality, *inter alia*, must be respected and complied with by the international community. This is a legal obligation incumbent upon the entire international community, as the International Court of Justice specified in its 1996 advisory opinion on the *Legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons*, in which it explained that

“these fundamental rules are to be observed by all States whether or not they have ratified the conventions that contain them, because they constitute

intransgressible principles of international customary law” (*A/51/218, annex, para. 79*).

To this end, we wish to emphasize that international humanitarian law, through the Fourth Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilians in the Time of War, establishes the obligation of States to ensure the education of children and young people during armed conflict. Additionally, international human rights law, in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, enshrines the right of all children to education. Accordingly, we welcome the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration, to which Peru is a party, along with 103 other States Members of the United Nations, and we hope that more States will join the Declaration and that the various parties to armed conflicts will use it as guidelines for the protection of schools.

In the current context occasioned by the coronavirus disease pandemic, attacks, or the threat of their use, against civilian infrastructure, including schools, may make the spread of the disease more rapid or may deprive civilian populations, especially children, of the facilities and equipment necessary for gaining access to education, health or food services. In this regard, we welcome the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2532 (2020), and we once again express our resolute support for the Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire to help contain the coronavirus.

Finally, we consider it equally essential to ensure that perpetrators of these violations of international law are held accountable. We therefore stress the importance of the monitoring and reporting mechanism for children and armed conflict, and the importance of its information being effectively reflected in the reports of the Secretary-General.

Annex 27

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations, Enrique A. Manalo

The Philippines commends the Niger's presidency of the Security Council for this month for organizing today's timely debate on a very important agenda item. We also thank the briefers for their enlightening briefings.

The Philippines is committed to the protection, promotion and fulfilment of the human rights of children. The children and armed conflict agenda is a priority for our delegation. The Philippines maintains that children do not belong on the battlefield. Children are zones of peace, protected from all forms of abuse and violence, never to know first-hand the horrors of war. Children belong in school where they can be nurtured and reared to be future leaders. Attacks against schools are therefore grave violations of children's rights.

The Philippines has established comprehensive legal and operational frameworks for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. In January 2019, the Philippines passed Republic Act 11188, entitled "The Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act" (CSAC Act) as a way to implement the protections guaranteed to children under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. This law takes into account Security Council resolutions related to children and armed conflict as well as resolution 1820 (2008) on women and peace and security.

RA 11188 considers the best interests of children to be paramount and imposes criminal liability for grave violations of children's rights, including the killing or maiming of children, recruitment or use of children in armed conflict, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, abduction of children, attacks against schools or hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access to children. In June 2019, the implementing rules and regulations for the CSAC Act were adopted. The Council for the Welfare of Children heads the inter-agency committee that monitors the implementation of the law and its implementing rules and regulations.

Even before this law and its implementing rules and regulations were enacted, the Department of Education issued its policy on the protection of children in armed conflict, in November 2017, and its National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Zones of Peace two years later. The latter policy reaffirmed the right of children to education and protection, the importance of the education sector in protecting students and school personnel in situations of armed conflict, and the contributions of education to building just and lasting peace. In addition, in 2016, the Department of National Defence issued a circular on monitoring, reporting and responding to grave violations of children's rights committed by State and non-State actors alike during armed conflict situations.

In 2011, the Department of Education, with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), issued a national policy framework for indigenous peoples' education, which advocates for the inclusion of indigenous peoples' perspectives, aspirations, identities, languages, indigenous knowledge systems and practices, and other aspects of indigenous heritage in the national education system.

Unfortunately, there is increasingly reliable evidence that the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army-National Democratic Front has been exploiting indigenous lands for their operations and promoting so-called alternative education through private schools catering to indigenous learners to promote their revolutionary ends.

A case in point is one private school that has annex campuses where Department of Education investigations have revealed that the school failed to comply with the Department's curriculum standards, took students from their home without the consent of their parents, in violation of the Department's child protection policy, and did not obtain the mandatory free and prior informed consent of the concerned indigenous communities or the certification preconditions from NCIP for school establishment, among others. This school was ordered closed by the Department of Education until it complied with certain requirements. Learners at these schools were immediately transferred to nearby public schools to ensure their continued education.

There is more than enough evidence, including the testimony of former rebels, that indigenous peoples' leaders who resisted these communist rebels were executed.

During the siege of Marawi by elements of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in 2017, thousands of families had to leave their homes and children had to leave their schools. Some were even brainwashed and recruited by the rebels. In response, the Department of Education immediately acted to ensure that education continued and that the welfare of learners, including their mental health and psychosocial needs, was cared for. As part of its reintegration programme, the Philippine Government established the Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan programme — or Peaceful and Prosperous Communities programme — which provides sustainable livelihood, protective services for individuals and families, psychosocial counselling and support and cash to former rebels, including children. The Government prioritizes the return of children displaced by the conflict in Marawi to their schools.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippine Government, together with civil society, continued to strengthen protection mechanisms for children affected and displaced by armed conflict by raising awareness for RA 11188 and its implementing rules and regulations through a nationwide online caravan.

Education is an important gateway out of poverty for many people. Elementary and high school education in public schools is free, but university education in State colleges and universities in the Philippines were also made tuition-free in 2017. This aims to remove every hindrance to children's full realization of their potential.

To protect children in situations of armed conflict, it is imperative to integrate child protection measures into peace processes, just as all efforts are exerted to end conflict. On 18 March, President Duterte declared a unilateral ceasefire with the New People's Army in order to make space for response-and-recovery efforts during the pandemic. The Philippines also supports the call of the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire. The Philippines believes that there must be a global consensus to keep children away from conflict during this pandemic and beyond.

The Philippines stands ready to work with Member States, the United Nations, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to end all forms of grave child rights violation and to ensure the protection of children in situations of armed conflict.

Annex 28

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Poland to the United Nations

Poland would like to congratulate the Niger on organizing this important open debate on children and armed conflict. I extend our congratulations to the briefers, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF; and the representatives of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack and of civil society.

We welcome the focus of the debate on attacks against schools as a grave violation of children's rights. We see this debate as very timely in the context of the findings of the latest reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, but also as an element of a wider discussion in a year when we celebrate many landmarks concerning the strengthening of the protection of children in armed conflict. One of them is the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration, to which 104 United Nations Member States have acceded. A second landmark is the 20-year anniversary of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. A third is the tenth anniversary of resolution 1998 (2011). Finally, only yesterday we celebrated the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack, proclaimed for 9 September. Poland is proud to have co-sponsored General Assembly resolution 74/275, establishing that important day.

Poland is deeply concerned about the increase of violence against educational facilities, students and teachers. We call on all parties to armed conflict to immediately cease unlawful attacks and threats of attack against students, teachers, schools and other protected institutions and personnel. We are aware that the already high numbers of verified attacks against schools — 494 — and hospitals — 433 — included in the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) are only a fraction of the actual violations committed. We urge Member States to strengthen the monitoring of, reporting on and accountability for attacks on education and of the military use of schools, including by disaggregating data by gender.

Furthermore, we advocate for the better protection of educational facilities for girls and young women. Girls' schools are often targeted for attack, and girls face specific consequences of attack, including rape, forced marriage and the resulting stigma and serious health concerns, all of which further impede their continued education.

Furthermore, we need also to ensure that children with disabilities have access to quality education tailored to their needs, including in emergency settings. Children with disabilities are among the most marginalized groups. They are at a higher risk of abuse and neglect, and because of their disabilities they often face physical and social barriers in accessing education. Resolution 2475 (2019), initiated by Poland and adopted unanimously by the Security Council last year, stresses the need to provide reintegration, rehabilitation and psychosocial support for children with disabilities and to ensure that their specific needs are effectively addressed.

Moreover, it needs to be noted that the current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic brings additional concerns, as children affected by war face heightened vulnerabilities due to the fragile contexts in which they live. As UNICEF reports, the impact of COVID-19 has long-term and destructive consequences on access to education. According to the information provided, almost 1.6 billion children currently do not attend school, and it is estimated that half of children from poor and developing countries will not be going back to school once they are reopened. As

of now, those numbers must be higher still. We need to remember that, for children, school is more than just a facility providing them with education; it is also a place to provide children with safety, psychosocial security and nutrition.

We are already witnessing the multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, especially those affected by armed conflict. According to the United Nations, the pandemic is causing the largest disruption to education in history. This is disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable children and youth, mostly those who are refugees or internally displaced. In our view, it is imperative that providing children with continuous education be prioritized in the COVID-19 response.

We welcome and support initiatives aimed at putting an end to the use of schools and universities for military purposes. The 2014 Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict are a good example in this regard. To confirm our commitment to the effective implementation of the Guidelines, Poland signed the Safe Schools Declaration and made a pledge at the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Geneva. We believe that such initiatives constitute an important step towards the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, especially in conflict situations.

Poland believes that access to safe, quality education for children affected by armed conflict has an important role in reintegration and rehabilitation for children formerly associated with armed groups in addressing protection concerns, building resilience and social cohesion, and reinforcing education, psychosocial support and livelihood opportunities. In this context, we want to reiterate our strong support for the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF to draw attention to the importance of reintegration programmes benefitting former child soldiers. Poland has stood behind those efforts from the beginning. We have supported the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in its efforts to create a road map to assess the reintegration needs. We are also very honoured to serve as a member of the Steering Committee for the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers and as a member of the Group of Friends of Reintegration.

Finally, fragile groups, especially children, remain a priority for Polish humanitarian assistance and development cooperation, and Poland has managed to develop areas in which we can share our knowledge and experience as far as protection of those groups is concerned.

We highly value the experience of UNICEF, which has been providing consistent support to children in need and delivering them a measure of safety, stability and dignity for decades. Being especially concerned about the situation of children in humanitarian crises, Poland contributes to the budget of UNICEF. In 2019, we dedicated \$100,000 to the UNICEF budget to support children in Venezuela. In 2020, also in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children appeal, we dedicated \$220,000 to protect children in Palestine and another \$35,000 to protect children in Iran.

One of Poland's priorities in the development cooperation field in Lebanon is supporting human capital by improving the quality of formal and informal education, and in particular by improving teaching conditions and the language skills of Syrian students and by increasing access to social services for those at risk of exclusion.

Almost 54 per cent of Syrian children of school age do not attend school in Lebanon, owing mainly to poverty and major differences in school curricula. Since 2016, the Polish non-governmental organization Polish Center for International Aid has been implementing a humanitarian project focused on financial support of the health and education centre in Bire, which is located four kilometres from the Syrian

border and used by Syrian and Lebanese children and youth attending vocational classes. Provided that the number of available places is not exceeded each year, the children of Syrian refugees are admitted without any prerequisites. In total, the programme will benefit over 15,000 people.

Last year, Poland, together with its German counterpart, implemented a project that focused on the renovation of six public schools in northern Lebanon. The scope of work included, among other things, the reconstruction of classrooms, roof repairs, water sanitation installations, and providing access to the buildings and classrooms for children with disabilities. The total budget of the project on Poland's side was €3 million.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that, taking previous crises into consideration and being fully aware of the increased risk and serious consequences that children have to face due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Poland has no doubt that ensuring safe access to schools and a quick return to the schooling system is one of the most pressing humanitarian issues and a priority task for all humanitarian actors for the upcoming year. We will continue to place emphasis on this issue in both our multilateral and our bilateral cooperation.

Annex 29

Statement by the Chargé d'affaires a.i. and Deputy Permanent Representative of Portugal, Nuno Vaultier Mathias

Portugal commends the Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Niger for promoting this open debate on the detrimental effects of attacks against schools on the rights of the child, as a follow-up initiative to resolution 1998 (2011) and on the occasion of the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack.

We would like to reaffirm our support for the work of the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. We welcome the recently published *Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict* as an important, action-oriented document.

Portugal expresses its deepest regret over the 25,000 grave violations against children verified by the United Nations, as well as 494 attacks on schools and 433 on hospitals, including on protected persons, as referenced in the Secretary-General's 2020 report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525).

Attacks on schools have a particularly long-lasting effect, jeopardizing the future of entire generations and disproportionately affecting girls. The safeguarding of educational opportunities under Sustainable Development Goal 4 is therefore crucial and contributes to preventing the recruitment of child soldiers, as well as early and forced marriages. Moreover, as a result, the compromise of educational opportunities in States facing crisis or conflict situations further undermines the building of peaceful and prosperous communities.

Resolution 1998 (2011) was an important milestone in this context, by urging parties to refrain from actions that hinder children's access to education and to health services. Complementarily, resolution 2143 (2014) expressed deep concern over the military use of schools, which may turn them into legitimate targets of attack, thereby endangering children's and teachers' safety, as well as children's education.

Moreover, school closures further jeopardize gender equality and girls' right to education by increasing the risk of early and forced marriages, early pregnancies and sexual and gender-based violence. Therefore, it is fundamental to incorporate a gender perspective into the discussion of children and armed conflict.

In the Sahel region, terrorist attacks are aimed not only at destabilizing the region, but also at combating State authorities. Such attacks on schools deprive children of basic education, serving the purpose of expanding terrorist groups' influence on these communities. Preventing children's access to education thus seriously compromises future peace and stability in the region.

The Safe Schools Declaration confirms intergovernmental commitment to protecting students, teachers, schools and universities from the effects of armed conflict. This document has been endorsed by 104 United Nations Member States. On its fifth anniversary, we call on States to join in this important Declaration.

Portugal reiterates its condemnation of all six grave violations against children in armed conflict identified by the Security Council in resolution 1612 (2005). These represent serious violations of the rights of the child, as well as of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, which the international community cannot tolerate. Fighting impunity and ensuring accountability is essential to the prevention of these crimes.

This year, we celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the monitoring and reporting mechanism. In the light of the coronavirus disease

pandemic, it is essential that the Mechanism remain operational. The collection and reporting of information in a transparent and accurate way needs to remain a key concern.

Finally, Portugal recognizes and supports the work of UNICEF and other United Nations agencies in the area of protecting education from attack.

Annex 30

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani

The State of Qatar would like to thank the Republic of the Niger, President of the Security Council for the month of September 2020, for convening this important and timely virtual debate and for the opportunity to share Qatar's perspective on attacks against schools as a grave violation of children's rights. We thank Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF; and the Global Coalition for the Protection of Education from Attack for their valuable insights on this important topic. We commend the work carried out by Belgium as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Our support for the children and armed conflict mandate is unwavering.

We thank the Secretary-General for his latest report on children and armed conflict, of June 2020 (S/2020/525). The 927 attacks on schools and hospitals, including against educational and medical personnel, during the period from January to December 2019, as documented in the report, are appalling. The reported impact of terrorist attacks and security crises on children and schools in the Sahel region is deeply concerning as well.

The State of Qatar is pleased that this debate is taking place on the sidelines of the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, for the first time observed yesterday, Wednesday, 9 September. On 28 May, the General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 74/275, proclaiming 9 September the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. The resolution, presented by the State of Qatar, strongly condemns all attacks against schools and the use of schools for military purposes, when in breach of international law. Most importantly, it reaffirms the right to quality education for all and the importance of ensuring safe, enabling learning environments in humanitarian emergencies. Underlying this is a deep conviction that quality education can foster sustainable development and peace and that attacks on education destroy the hopes and ambitions of a whole generation of students — reiterating the need to protect and respect educational facilities, in accordance with international law.

Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of the Education Above All Foundation and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Advocate, was the force behind the initiative that led to resolution 74/275. Her Highness had a clear vision that there was a need for an international day to shed light on the plague of more than 75 million children and young people who are currently in urgent need of educational support in 35 crisis-affected countries. A day was needed that would galvanize awareness and global advocacy to ensure accountability for the continued, deliberate attacks on education and the prevalent armed violence experienced by children worldwide.

The continued, widespread use of airstrikes and explosive weapons causes the vast majority of child casualties in armed conflict and the most serious instances of attacks on education. The effects of the ongoing violence against these children have caused devastating disruptions to their access to education and exacerbated their vulnerabilities further, with many experiencing trauma, health complications, stigma and fear that may hinder their ability to continue learning.

Resolution 74/275 reflects a global consensus that all countries have responsibilities to prevent attacks on education in conflict settings. Attacks on education must come to a halt and the perpetrators must be held to account. Moreover, the international day provides an annual platform where the international

community can review progress, new data and make commitments towards effective mechanisms to end impunity for those who attack schools. Furthermore, on this day, it is incumbent upon all stakeholders to recommit to Sustainable Development Goal 4 so as to ensure that everyone, everywhere has equal access to quality education.

The challenge now is for the vision of education for all expressed in resolution 74/275 to be translated from political will into real change on the ground so that the millions of children deprived of education in conflict settings can aspire to a better future. Education is their lifeline and we must protect it. Moreover, we must keep the protection of education at the top of the global agenda so as to reduce widening education inequalities that can increase the risk of conflict and insecurity.

Unfortunately, this first International Day to Protect Education from Attack comes in the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) global pandemic, with its multifaceted impact. In this regard, education has been hit particularly hard. Children and youth in under-resourced communities and in conflict zones remain among the most vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19, as many have been left without distance-learning infrastructure and connectivity. The State of Qatar has often emphasized the disproportionate negative impact of the pandemic on children, especially the most vulnerable in conflict affected areas, and the urgent need to address it, as millions are at risk of not returning to school.

The State of Qatar has for a long time voiced the importance of safeguarding schools as places of protection and safety for students and teachers, keeping children and youth in education during emergencies, and facilitating access by students everywhere in the world to the same quality of education to eliminate inequalities. For example, Qatar Fund for Development initiatives have reached hundreds of thousands of out-of-school children in over 78 countries through the Fund's annual core funding support to its strategic partners worldwide.

The State of Qatar endorsed the Secretary-General's call for global ceasefire and to stand united against the global threat of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, the State of Qatar remains committed to reducing the education gap and bringing education closer to millions of disadvantaged children, including those in conflict situations. We stress that, during the effort to respond to the pandemic, the protection of education should remain a priority for all of us. Education is part of the solution to rebuilding economies shattered by the COVID-19 pandemic, a basic human right and a key to poverty alleviation, inequality reduction, sustainable development and peace and security. It is also very important that rebuilding take into account the key need for education systems to be set up with contingency capacities to mitigate and manage the risk of future pandemics and crises. Education cannot just go back to business as usual after COVID-19. We must use the opportunity the crisis has offered to rethink education in conflict and emergency settings and how to reach out to vulnerable populations, and to focus on resilience, innovation and social cohesion.

Annex 31**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, Cho Hyun**

As we celebrate the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack on 9 September, my delegation would like to commend you, Sir, for convening today's timely open debate and offer its deep appreciation to the briefers for their insightful interventions.

Despite the progress made since the adoption of the landmark resolution 1998 (2011), which included attacks against schools and hospitals as one of the six grave violations against children, the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2020/525) highlights the fact that we are still failing to see a decrease in the persistently high number of attacks on schools, recording a disturbing 494 verified attacks in 2019 alone.

This is undoubtedly a major concern on its own, but it has been further compounded in 2020 by the impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic. According to UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, some 1.5 billion children are now out of school as the virus continues to spread. The Secretary-General, in his April global appeal to protect our Children, emphasized the dangers that arise when children are out of school: domestic violence and abuse, loss of an important early warning mechanism, and dangers to girls, including increases in teenage pregnancy, among others.

Against this troubling backdrop, and while aligning myself with the statement delivered by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict (annex 7), I would like to highlight the following four points, which are of particular importance to my delegation.

First, the Republic of Korea reiterates its support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire and calls for the full implementation of resolution 2532 (2020). The pandemic seriously undermines efforts to provide quality education to girls and boys, and ongoing violence in conflict areas exacerbates already vulnerable situations. In the face of a common global threat, it is imperative that we all work together in solidarity to silence the guns.

Secondly, in promoting education for children in armed conflict, we need a coherent and coordinated approach across the three key areas of the work of the United Nations, namely, peace and security, development and humanitarian action. Education, one of the surest ways to achieve sustainable peace and security, is an inherently long-term project that requires a cross-sectoral approach. This is why various United Nations bodies scattered among the three areas must come together to work as one and synergize greater impact.

Thirdly, we must ensure accountability for all violations against children, including attacks on schools and protected persons in relation to schools. Strengthening accountability and ending impunity is the key to ending gross violations and preventing recurrence. Violators must be held accountable through both national and international justice systems. Furthermore, we must support and strengthen the tools we have at our disposal to document and address violations, including the United Nations-led monitoring and reporting mechanism, the Security Council Working Group and the Secretary-General's annual report.

Fourthly, my delegation believes that United Nations peacekeeping operations can play a significant role in protecting schools, and therefore strongly supports its child protection mandate. We particularly emphasize the critical role carried out by senior child protection advisers and sections in peacekeeping missions and believe

that they should be adequately resourced to properly implement child protection mandates, including in the context of transition and downsizing.

Ensuring access to quality education for all girls and boys is an integral part of our common efforts to protect children in armed conflict. Such efforts will help break the vicious cycle of violence, extremism and crime in conflict States. The Republic of Korea reaffirms its driving commitment to working with the United Nations and all Member States with a view towards better protecting schools from attacks and threats of attack and ensuring inclusive, equal access to all children affected by armed conflict.

Annex 32**Statement by the Permanent Representative of San Marino to the United Nations, Damiano Beleffi**

San Marino aligns itself with the statement submitted by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict (annex 7).

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important and timely meeting.

The Republic of San Marino is particularly concerned over the alarming number of attacks against schools and hospitals, which constitute a great violation against children in armed conflict. Attacks against schools undermine the right to education of children, boys and girls and undermine the progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goal of universal access to quality education by 2030. The disruption of education means a disruption of children's lives, of their routines and of their well-being and constitutes a threat to their long-term education and to their future.

When schools are attacked or used for military purposes, students can no longer access these facilities and are therefore more vulnerable to violations and more exposed to exploitation, sexual abuse and forced recruitment into armed groups. Moreover, girls are more exposed to the risk of child marriage, early pregnancy and gender-based violence, consequently decreasing their opportunity to continue their education.

The international community must stand united against this horrifying view. For this reason, San Marino has joined the Safe Schools Declaration, an important voluntary political commitment aimed at protecting schools during military operations and at not using them for military purposes.

This year, San Marino was also pleased to co-sponsor the General Assembly resolution 74/275, proclaiming the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, an important initiative that asks the international community to be united and raise awareness of the issue.

Unfortunately, the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has been particularly acute on vulnerable groups, such as children, especially those in armed conflicts, and refugees. It has been estimated that 23 million children are at risk of not returning to school and that half of the world's refugee children are out of school. This is absolutely intolerable. We need to make sure that all our children have a safe and secure environment in which to study and learn the skills they need for their future.

In this regard, San Marino has recently joined the Protect our Children declaration, focused on children's access to inclusive and quality education, nutrition, health care and safety amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, in this globally challenging situation, San Marino would like to reiterate the importance of the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, calling on all parties to join this initiative.

The Republic of San Marino firmly condemns senseless attacks on schools and protected personnel and urges all parties to comply with their obligation under international humanitarian law and human rights law.

San Marino firmly believes that together we can stop this hideous violation against children and that we can make safe schools a reality for every child, everywhere, so that all our children, boys and girls can continue to aspire to a better future.

Annex 33

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Senegal to the United Nations

[Original: French]

At the outset, I would like to thank the Nigerien presidency of the Security Council for convening this important open debate, in anticipation of the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of resolution 1998 (2011), the day after the first International Day for the Protection of Education from Attack, held on 9 September, and in the context of the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration.

I also thank Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF; and the representative of the Global Coalition to Protection Education from Attack for their outstanding briefings, which have informed us further about the acuteness and extent of the problem that brings us together this morning.

By inviting us to continue our reflection on this important issue today, the Security Council is once again demonstrating its determination to eradicate a scourge that is among the six grave violations of children's rights. That resolve was illustrated above all by the adoption of resolution 1998 (2011), which strengthened the mechanism for combating grave violations of children's rights in times of armed conflict.

The inclusion of parties to conflict responsible for attacks on schools or school-related protected persons in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict is a major practical step forward and should be noted, together with the requirement that such parties "prepare without delay concrete time-bound action plans to halt those violations and abuses" (*resolution 1998 (2011), para. 6 (c)*).

While welcome, such progress should in no way obscure the persistence and scale of the violations to which schools are subjected in armed conflicts, especially in a context marked by the emergence of new forms of unconventional warfare.

The picture painted by the Secretary-General in his June report (S/2020/525) is quite worrisome, as he notes 494 attacks on schools in 2019. In central Sahel alone, some 3,300 schools have been forced to close due to growing insecurity, thereby disrupting the education of more than 650,000 children and the work of more than 16,000 teachers.

Even more worrisome is the destruction of school infrastructure in countries where education systems are in general very fragile, as well as depriving thousands of children who may fall prey to human trafficking networks and insurgent and terrorist groups of their right to education. Over the long term, such attacks also threaten the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4, on access to universal quality education, by 2030.

In order to be effective and efficient, strategies to protect schools in times of armed conflict should be part of an inclusive approach that promotes better coordination among the Security Council, which defines the mandates of peace missions with regard to the protection of civilians, the Departments of Peace Operations and Operational Support, responsible for planning and managing peace operations, the contributing countries and the host countries.

As part of that approach, efforts should also continue to ensure that all parties to conflicts, including non-State actors, respect the norms of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as the recommendations of the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the status of educational personnel and pupils. Their inclusion in peace and ceasefire agreements should be further promoted, as should the universalization of the Safe Schools Declaration, which has now been endorsed by 104 Member States.

In addition, including provisions for the protection of school infrastructure in the mandates of United Nations peace missions should be mainstreamed from the peacekeeping to the peacebuilding phase. To that end, it will be important to provide such missions with the necessary means to carry out their activities in that regard and to ensure that child protection adviser posts are adequately staffed and resourced.

It is equally crucial to focus on measures to prevent and mitigate attacks on schools, in particular by strengthening monitoring and security risk assessment frameworks for school infrastructure. In that context, particular emphasis should be placed on intelligence-sharing through close cooperation with local communities and non-governmental organizations present on the ground so as to identify threats at an early stage and develop adequate responses.

The situation with regard to responsibility in cases of blatant and systematic attacks against schools is a measure of the credibility of mechanisms for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict, hence the importance of putting particular emphasis on ensuring accountability for the perpetrators of such abuses.

Senegal fully supports that approach, which requires stepping up international mechanisms for the investigation and prosecution of those who violate international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Annex 34

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations, Michal Mlynár

[Original: French and English]

Slovakia agrees with the statements submitted on behalf of the European Union (annex 12) and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict (annex 7).

We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore and representatives of civil society for their statements and for the work that they do for the children of the world. We welcome the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2020/8, prepared by the Niger and Belgium, as well as the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack, which we marked on 9 September.

As an endorsing State of the Safe Schools Declaration, Slovakia considers schools and education as untouchable no matter if it is in times of peace or war. Therefore, we are gravely concerned by any reports of attacks on school facilities, and we are saddened that in 2019 State security forces were responsible for more than half of those attacks, including attacks on hospitals. In that respect, we would like to call on Member States to pay proper attention to the outcomes of international conferences on safe schools, which serve as a unique tool to achieve our common goal — the right to education for all children.

Education is a cornerstone of all societies, in the north and the south and in developing and developed countries, as well as a fundamental human right and essential to the exercise of other human rights. An educated society can better overcome crises, including a political, economic or health crisis, such as the current coronavirus disease pandemic, with its deep socioeconomic effects. Education brings stability and makes a significant contribution to peacekeeping. In addition, access to safe, quality education for children affected by armed conflict has an important role in their reintegration, and yet it is often one of the main targets.

Strengthened monitoring, reporting and accountability regarding attacks on education and the military use of schools, including by disaggregating data by gender, is indispensable, and we urge all to do better in that regard. The United Nations has a particular role, as its monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict has proved to be useful in deterring grave violations against children. A single, complete list of perpetrators that is evidence-based and accurately reflects the data collected and verified by the monitoring and reporting mechanism should be published in the report annexes every year, and all perpetrators of grave violations against children must be held to the same standard regardless of whether they are State forces or non-State armed groups.

As girls' schools are often targeted and girls face specific consequences of attacks, including rape, pregnancy from rape, forced marriage and the resulting stigma and serious health concerns, they are among the most vulnerable. All that further impedes their continued education and prospects for better lives. They therefore deserve the special attention of the international community.

Slovakia reiterates its call to all parties to armed conflict to respect and comply with the norms of international humanitarian law and human rights law, particularly those enshrined in the second Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and to put in place, fully implement and report on concrete and time-bound measures to protect children. We also call for an end to all grave violations, including attacks on schools and hospitals, and further call on parties with existing action plans to take timely steps towards more effective implementation and to report on their progress.

Annex 35

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Slovenia to the United Nations

We wish to thank the Niger presidency for organizing this important debate on children and armed conflict, focusing on preventing attacks against schools. We thank the briefers for their valuable presentations, and we welcome presidential statement S/PRST/2020/8, adopted today in connection with the item entitled “Children and armed conflict”.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statements submitted on behalf of the European Union (annex 12) and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict (annex 7) and wishes to add some remarks in its national capacity.

As we commemorate the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack, it is important that we renew and take stock of our responsibility to protect children, teachers and other staff in the school environment. Attacks against schools constitute a major violation of the rights of the child and international law. As we near the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1998 (2011), on children and armed conflict, we note with grave concern the increasing rate of deliberate targeting of schools in armed conflict around the world.

Assisting victims and alleviating the pain of children affected by armed conflict have always been among Slovenia’s priorities. Well over 500 children coming from active or post-conflict areas have been rehabilitated in Slovenia. Psychological and physical assistance and rehabilitation, social rehabilitation training for preschool and school counsellors and the mine risk education programme implemented by the International Trust Fund for Enhancing Human Security are among activities aimed at providing the overall well-being and development of children affected by conflicts.

In 2017 Slovenia launched a pilot project of school and peer mediation against peer violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By building mediation capacities among teachers and students, schools become promoters of reconciliation, tolerance, human rights and diversity.

Effective human rights education can help to foster tolerance and understanding of diversity in societies. Through the Our Rights project and teaching materials, Slovenia has enabled human rights education for more than 200,000 children around the world.

Strengthening the protection of education from attack and restricting the use of schools and universities for military purposes are essential for ensuring children’s right to education. It is a way to provide them with a safe and enabling environment. The coronavirus disease pandemic and its consequences have further deteriorated the plight of children affected by armed conflicts around the world and impeded their access to education.

Children without access to education face increased risks of poverty, exclusion, marginalization and violence. Education is one of the few signs of hope for children affected by armed conflicts. Surrounded by such devastating realities, children and adolescents find themselves in need to flee, and they too often embark on a perilous journey of uncertainty in the hope of finding a place of safety. Access to safe and quality education, including during armed conflict, is crucial for children’s reintegration and to enable their participation and contribution to the post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. Slovenia is among the States that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and continues to promote its implementation. We call on those that have not yet done so to consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and joining the Paris Principles and Commitments on Children Associated

with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

We cannot ignore our responsibilities in failing to ensure protection for children and teachers. Schools must be, and remain, a safe place, full of curiosity, laughter and hope for a better future.

Annex 36**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations, Agustín Santos Maraver**

[Original: Spanish]

My statement is aligned with that submitted by the observer of the European Union (annex 12).

I would like to congratulate the Nigerian presidency of the Security Council for having organized this open debate, which is aimed at strengthening the protection of schools, children and educational personnel from attacks and threats, especially in the Sahel region. Spain fully shares this objective with the Niger. No boy or girl can be left behind in conflict situations.

I am also grateful for the statements by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore. The statements of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack are equally deserving of attention and appreciation.

Spain is committed to protecting education in armed conflict and fully respecting international humanitarian law. It supports the Safe Schools Declaration as well as the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict and considers the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the work carried out by UNICEF in this area to be vital.

Yesterday, 9 September, we celebrated for the first time the International Day for the Protection of Education against Attack. This should be a key date for being ambitious in terms of that agenda and celebrate achievable goals annually.

Spain organized the third International Safe Schools Conference, in 2019, based on the conviction that the Declaration and its Guidelines enhance international protection for education, schools, universities, students and teachers. We also believe that girls and women suffer disproportionately from such attacks and threats, and therefore require special protection. We proposed that the Guidelines be made operational, and as soon as possible we will organize a workshop to exchange best practices in their implementation. We wish Nigeria success in organizing the fourth Conference and ask those who have not done so to sign the Safe Schools Declaration.

The current coronavirus disease crisis has once again demonstrated the importance of education and of ensuring its continuation even in situations of armed conflict. The pandemic has caused massive disruption to the functioning of the educational system and affects even more children living in situations of armed conflict, who suffer threats and attacks. Girls in those contexts face greater risks of sexual and gender-based violence, recruitment, forced marriage and definitive abandonment of their education.

The call for a ceasefire made by the Secretary-General to the parties to conflict continues to be necessary as well as decisive in terms of the protection of education. Therefore, it is key that the Security Council and the parties to the conflict ensure compliance with resolution 2532 (2020). The Security Council plays a pivotal role both in reiterating the need for it and supporting and monitoring the ceasefire. It also has the authority to request the parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights.

In addition, the unique child-protection mandates in peace operations have proved to be very effective and well targeted. The Security Council Working Group

on Children and Armed Conflict has made outstanding efforts that should continue to be implemented and further strengthened.

Despite all of the aforementioned, it is an outrage, as noted in the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525), that in 2019 25,000 violations were committed against children in 19 situations, and 494 attacks on schools and 433 attacks on hospitals were verified, including on protected persons. Spain condemns those attacks and serious violations and requests that their perpetrators be brought to justice.

Equally worrisome are the developments that the Sahel region has experienced in the field of education since 2017: the closure of thousands of schools and colleges in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger; and the fact that more than half a million children have left the educational system.

Spain calls on the parties to armed conflict to respect international humanitarian law and requests the effective development of and compliance with Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict.

I would conclude my statement with a message of support for children in situations of armed conflict and with a few words of thanks to the United Nations entities, agencies, funds and programmes and all the aid workers that are striving to ensure the right of children to education, assistance and protection.

Annex 37**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations**

[Original: French]

We thank the Niger for holding this important open debate a day after the commemoration of the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack and in the year marking the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration. We welcome the Security Council's adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2020/8 on this crucial topic.

Education is an essential tool to provide both physical and psychological protection to girls and boys from the most devastating effects in situations of crisis and conflict. As one of the 105 States that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, Switzerland encourages countries that have not yet done so to endorse the Declaration and calls on all signatory States to fully implement its provisions. The Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians, chaired by Switzerland in New York, seeks to contribute to advancing the Declaration's implementation. Two priority actions are particularly important in that context.

First, we must continue to protect schools and students from attack. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack has recorded more than 7,300 direct attacks on schools and more than 8,000 students, teachers and other school personnel killed, injured, abducted, threatened, arrested or detained between 2015 and 2019. Seven thousand, three hundred attacks are 7,300 too many. Switzerland urges armed forces and armed groups to put an end to such practices and to refrain from using schools and universities for military purposes. We also call on the Security Council to reiterate its call for all parties to conflict to be held accountable for such attacks and to be added to the list, published annually, of parties that commit grave violations against children, in line with resolution 1998 (2011).

Secondly, urgent responses are required to address the impact of the coronavirus disease on children's access to continuing quality education. Education has been suspended for an entire generation. At the height of the lockdowns in the spring, approximately 90 per cent of the world's students were no longer able to attend school. Without the protective environment of schools, children are at greater risk of being exploited, recruited by armed groups and subjected to forced marriage or labour. The interruption to schooling can also permanently marginalize children, leave them without qualifications when they leave school or impact their development and health, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

Switzerland encourages a coordinated response by the United Nations and Member States to ensure the best possible education for children during the pandemic. Switzerland also calls on the Security Council to support the swift implementation of resolution 2532 (2020) with regard to all situations on its agenda.

In conclusion, Switzerland reiterates its full support for the efforts of the United Nations to protect education from attack, notably through the work of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. In that regard, Switzerland encourages the Secretary-General to continue to provide a complete, impartial and accurate list of all parties committing grave violations of children's rights, including attacks on schools.

Annex 38**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun Hadi Sinirlioğlu**

At the outset, I would like to express our appreciation to the Nigerien presidency for convening today's open debate on children and armed conflict. We also thank the briefers for their valuable contributions.

We also welcome the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2020/8 today.

As we observe the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack, we find today's discussion quite timely. Taking this opportunity, we commend Qatar's leadership in the adoption of General Assembly resolution 74/275, which established this international day, of which Turkey is among the co-sponsors.

In 2020 we are marking the fifteenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2015), which has been a milestone in the children and armed conflict agenda by establishing two important mechanisms: the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the United Nations-led monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. This year also marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. These anniversaries provide opportunities to take stock of our achievements and further discuss necessary efforts to keep children from harm's way, as the severe effects of conflicts on children continue to constitute a significant challenge.

Education is not only a fundamental human right, but it also serves as a main pillar for peaceful, resilient and prosperous societies. Yet education is one of the first to be impacted by conflict and violence and remains the most vulnerable to external shocks.

The Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) shows the gravity of the situation worldwide, including in the Sahel region. It highlights close to 1,000 incidents of attacks on schools and hospitals globally for 2019. These figures do not even include the thousands of schools that are closed or remain non-operational owing to terrorist attacks.

Furthermore, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had serious impacts on countries in armed conflict, with children being among the most vulnerable. In this context, Turkey reiterates its support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire during the course of the pandemic.

As stated by the UNICEF Executive Director Fore, when children miss out on school, especially in times of conflict, they not only are unable to learn the skills needed to build peaceful and prosperous communities, but they also become vulnerable to horrific forms of exploitation, including sexual abuse and forced recruitment into armed groups. That is why, by protecting education from attack, we actually contribute to preventing further violence and breaking this vicious cycle in society.

At the same time, we see the repatriation and reintegration of children as vital tools towards this aim. Turkey fully subscribes to the Secretary-General's appeal to the countries concerned to take steps for the voluntary repatriation of their citizens, especially women and children affiliated with Da'esh.

The Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict verified the highest number of attacks on schools and hospitals for 2019 in Syria. Turkey is deeply concerned to see that these attacks and the suffering of the Syrian children continue unabated.

The report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic of 2 July, which covers the period from 1 November 2019 to 1 June 2020, presents numerous horrific examples of attacks on schools by regime forces, killing and maiming civilians, including many children.

As highlighted in the Secretary-General's latest report, and as no different than in previous years, the terrorist organization Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its Syrian branch, the Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat (PYD)/People's Protection Units (YPG), recruited the highest number of children in Syria in 2019. YPG also topped the lists in abduction of children, the deprivation of liberty of children and using schools and medical facilities for military purposes. This terrorist group targets schools, converts them into ammunition storage and deprives children of their fundamental right to education.

PKK/YPG/YPG issued a decree to forbid students in north-east Syria from taking their final exams to obtain their general secondary education certificate (Bakaloria), usurping their right to education. The World Council of Arameans issued a press release in June documenting the first-hand accounts of students in Qamishli and Rmeilan who have been enduring the oppression and human rights violations of PKK/PYD/YPG. We expect the United Nations to continue documenting PKK/PYD/YPG's violations and investigate the serious incidents and actions contained in the aforementioned press release.

For some countries, these attacks and violations could be merely figures in United Nations reports. However, for Turkey they are a reality in its immediate neighbourhood, which it is firmly committed to addressing.

After fighting against terrorist elements in the areas of Operation Peace Spring, as well as of previous operations, the Turkish Government provided security and allocated significant financial resources for the renovation of school buildings and the safe resumption of education in these areas. As a result, more than 300,000 students, of whom 48 per cent are girls, have safely returned to their classes in 1,256 schools.

Furthermore, we take all necessary measures to alleviate the suffering of children who had fled to Turkey for obvious reasons. As the largest refugee-hosting country, despite the challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic, we continue to invest in the education of refugee children, giving priority to girls in particular.

I am pleased to share that, so far, 63 per cent of the 1 million Syrian children in Turkey have been enrolled in our national education programmes. As such, almost 700,000 refugee children, of whom 49 per cent are girls, have been integrated into the public school system during the 2019-2020 school year. This success is the result of effective and close cooperation with UNICEF, and we extend our appreciation to the UNICEF country team for their efforts.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our readiness to extend our full support to international and regional efforts to protect children.

Annex 39

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations

Ukraine highly appreciates the initiative of the Niger to hold this open debate and expresses its gratitude to all briefers for their presentations.

Yesterday we marked for the first time the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. Ukraine is proud to be among the initial co-sponsors of General Assembly resolution 74/275, which established the day. We believe that this resolution demonstrates our commitment to addressing this issue as a priority and to further contributing to the protection of children in times of war and humanitarian emergencies.

While observing this day, we have to acknowledge that the international community has failed so far to prevent violations against children and establish universal protection of their rights. The recent annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525), which was presented at the open debate on 24 June (see S/2020/594), highlighted the inappropriate scale of violations against children affected by conflict.

While fully subscribing to the report's conclusion that peace remains the most powerful means to reduce violations against children, Ukraine reiterates its regret that the severe implications of the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict on children have remained out of the limelight. As peace is a long overdue for Ukrainians, in particular children, Ukraine reiterates its call to address the issue of Ukrainian children living in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and affected by the conflict at the thematic meetings and events and to include this topic in future relevant United Nations thematic reports.

The Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict has led to dramatic consequences for the affected areas. Seven hundred and thirty-seven thousand schoolchildren and teachers, in more than 3,500 schools, face personal, social, security and economic challenges related to the conflict. Schools for 437,000 children and teachers are located within 20 kilometres of the contact line, and one third of those schools experience security problems.

Many children on those territories, as pointed out by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine on page 22 of its thematic report issued in July, entitled "Impact of the conflict on educational facilities and children's access to education in Eastern Ukraine",

"have spent a significant portion of their childhoods under the constant threat of violence and insecurity due to the conflict ... Schoolchildren and teachers along the contact line have been at constant risk from shelling or small-arms fire, as well from the mines and UXO that litter the area. They are at risk of death, injury, or of having their schools rendered inoperable due to damage."

Attacks on education in situations of conflict are not limited to physical safety or school premises only. Children's mindsets are also among the main targets of the aggressor in the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict. Anti-Ukrainian propaganda and hate speech have gained a foothold in school programmes written by the Russian occupation administration.

According to the Ukrainian Ombudsperson, this September all schools in the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions have to introduce Russian education standards. The Russian occupation administration attempts to expand its creeping annexation attempts on schoolchildren, subjecting them to brainwashing practices.

The militarization of children in the occupied territories of Donbas and Crimea, in particular their enrolment in militarized movements, is aimed at preparing them to wage war. According to available information, they are trained in using weapons, shooting and placing landmines.

As a result, numerous sources, including the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, have reported that minors took part in active hostilities as part of the Russian occupation forces. This practice is a violation of the laws and customs of war and qualifies as a war crime.

Propaganda among children aimed at ensuring voluntary enrolment of residents of the occupied territories in the army is prohibited by article 51 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In Crimea such propaganda constitutes not only a violation of international humanitarian law, but also a way of committing a war crime by compelling service in the enemy's armed forces. The occupying Power has set up an entire system of education and sports events for children ensuring continuous propaganda of military service in the Russian army among children.

I reiterate that, according to article 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, to which the Russian Federation and Ukraine are adherents, States parties shall take all feasible measures to prevent the recruitment or use in hostilities of persons under the age of 18 years.

It is as well inappropriate that more than 200 Crimean children, mostly Crimean Tatars, have been partly left without parental care owing to the imprisonment of their fathers under fabricated and politically motivated grounds. These children are being psychologically traumatized while observing brutal searches in their houses and the detention of their parents.

Ukraine, as a party to core international instruments related to the protection of the rights of children, considers this task in relation to children affected by the armed conflict to be a priority. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic increases the importance of this task. In this regard, Ukraine reiterates its call on the Russian Federation to provide full access to international humanitarian organizations to objectively assess the humanitarian situation in the region in times of COVID-19.

I will conclude by thanking United Nations agencies for their help in protecting children and remaining reliable partners in this area. We rely on them to maintain a high-profile focus on the situation of children affected by the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict situation.

Annex 40**Statement by the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

The United Arab Emirates is pleased to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict, and would also like to thank Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their valuable briefings today.

The United Arab Emirates takes this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to implementing Security Council resolutions aimed at mitigating the impact of armed conflict on children. Today we wish particularly to emphasize the importance of resolution 1998 (2011), in which the Security Council condemns attacks against schools and hospitals as a violation of applicable international law, and requests the Secretary-General to include in the annexes to his reports on children and armed conflict those parties that, in contravention of applicable international law, engage or threaten to engage in recurrent attacks on schools and in recurrent attacks or threats of attacks against protected persons in relation to schools in situations of armed conflict.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has brought to light the vital role of teachers and schools around the world — a role of increasing importance to children living in conflict zones. Schools are not only civilian facilities to be protected under international humanitarian law. They are also a key component of the fabric of societies ravaged by conflict and a place where children look forward to a bright future, hoping to acquire the skills they need and seek new opportunities.

The United Arab Emirates has always prioritized the protection of education — an element essential to the advancement of entire societies. It has extended \$1.55 billion in assistance to support education projects around the world, including \$284.4 million in crisis-affected areas. It has been collaborating with UNICEF and other partners since 2017 to support the education of 20 million children in 59 countries, including by rebuilding 16 schools in Mosul and Baghdad in the past year alone.

As the United Arab Emirates made clear last June, it remains deeply concerned about the increase in serious abuses against children in 2019 and the growing number of attacks on verified schools. Yesterday the International Day to Protect Education from Attack was commemorated. However, much remains to be done, as schools continue to be targeted, endangering the lives of teachers and students. Terrorist and non-State armed groups often attack schools and teachers in order to instil fear in the population, spread extremist ideologies, cripple the education system, forcibly recruit children, prevent such basic concepts as tolerance and coexistence from being taught and undermine opportunities for girls to obtain an education. The perpetrators of such grave violations must therefore be held accountable.

Today's open debate affords us an opportunity to examine why attacks and threats against schools have risen to alarming levels despite the existence of a regulatory framework to curb such acts. The United Arab Emirates urges Member States to renew their commitment to implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions. In coordination with other partners in the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, the United Arab Emirates has adopted tangible measures to support the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions. It has established a

child protection unit and signed a memorandum of understanding with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

The United Arab Emirates reiterates its commitment to continuing to champion the rights of children around the world, particularly in conflict zones, through the United Nations and other entities, including by supporting the protection of schools, preventing serious violations, safeguarding the right to education and creating opportunities for vulnerable groups to attain the development and growth to which they aspire.

Annex 41**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

Uruguay thanks the Niger for having convened this open debate on such a timely and relevant issue and associates itself with the statement delivered by Canada (annex 7) on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Uruguay is deeply concerned at the growing and alarming trend of deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against schools and their use for military purposes, as well as the recruitment of, and perpetration of terrible acts of violence against, children and educational personnel. Women and girls in particular are extremely vulnerable to such crimes and are more likely to be the victims of kidnapping or sexual violence and to suffer the long-term consequences of such attacks.

My delegation wishes at the outset to refer to the Safe Schools Declaration, an innovative instrument that, together with its Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, outlines concrete steps to protect educational institutions, students and staff in times of armed conflict, while defending the right to education. To maximize the potential of that instrument, we must continue to join forces, and it is for that reason that all Member States are encouraged to join this important initiative, which already has broad and strong support from the international community.

Secondly, accountability for the perpetrators of such crimes is vital. In that respect, Uruguay reiterates its full confidence in the work carried out by the International Criminal Court to punish the guilty in cases in which domestic jurisdiction is not applied, as well as in international investigation mechanisms such as those established by the Human Rights Council. However, States must ensure that attacks against schools are investigated and that the culprits are prosecuted in order to combat impunity and prevent future violations.

Thirdly, peacekeeping operations have the scope and capacity to contribute to providing safety and protection to children, school infrastructure and their staff, but those missions need to be better prepared so that they can work with the highest possible effectiveness.

Uruguay contributes directly to the maintenance of international peace and security through its participation in peacekeeping operations. The value that is accorded education and schools as institutions in charge of imparting it is historically rooted in Uruguayan society. For that reason, in the courses offered to personnel who are to be deployed in the field, particular emphasis is placed on respecting schools as areas protected by international law and on the prohibition of their use for any type of military operation. Our contingents receive technical training on how to make this protection effective in the difficult operating environments in which they will carry out their work. In the areas where Uruguayan units are deployed, our troops carry out ongoing oversight in order to ensure the freedom and safety of schools and continuity of education, and so that children have the opportunity to continue attending classes without facing risks despite being in conflict situations.

The international community must redouble its efforts so that schools always remain protected, in times of peace and conflict, and so that the fundamental human right to education is guaranteed, in particular at a global juncture in which education will be essential to prepare students, the new generations, to face life in the post-COVID-19 world.

Annex 42**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Yemen to the United Nations**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I wish you and your delegation every success.

The Republic of Yemen has committed to complying with all the international treaties on child protection and has enacted several domestic laws in line with those treaties, attesting to the Government's commitment to their implementation. The instruments include the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict; the Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups; the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, signed in 2014; the Safe Schools Declaration, signed in 2017; and the road map to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, signed in 2018. Also in 2018, a joint technical committee was established to implement the road map in partnership with the UNICEF country team. The Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Yemeni Armed Forces issued a decision on the guidelines concerning the recruitment of children. On 17 February 2020, His Excellency the President of Yemen, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, decreed that child-protection units and mechanisms should be created to verify the age of military recruits and that focal points should be designated within the Ministries of Defence and of the Interior, in accordance with the road map.

Consistent with its national and international commitments to children in Yemen, the Yemeni Government is determined to implement the road map and work earnestly to reintegrate children into society. It aspires to work seriously and coordinate with the country team to implement the road map it concluded with the United Nations. It also stresses the need to fund reintegration and rehabilitation programmes in Yemen and urges international donors to provide sufficient funding to save Yemeni children from the oppression and terror of the Houthi militias in areas under their control.

Through its commitments under national and international laws, the Yemeni Government continues to support all United Nations entities and strengthen their role in protecting children. We call on all United Nations agencies to help protect children in areas controlled by Houthi rebels by pressuring those militias to stop recruiting children and sending them to the front lines, and to bring an end to violations of children's rights, including bombing schools and shooting at children, as has happened in particular in Taiz governorate.

The Yemeni Government is working to raise awareness of the dangers of children's participation in military activities. It prohibits their recruitment and use in its armed forces and cautions against the continued use by the Houthi militias of schools under their control to attract children by printing extremist sectarian curricula that produce a generation of ideological extremists for whom waging war against their Yemeni brothers is a holy struggle. Such curricula pose no less of a threat to children in the future than the crime of using them militarily does. The aim of those curricula is to enlist a generation of Husayniyun and Zaynabiyat, the names given to groups of child guerrillas. The effect will be that of a time bomb, prolonging the local and regional conflict for many years to come and affecting internal security and social peace as well as domestic and regional stability. The United Nations country team should therefore attach the highest priority to addressing this situation

by requiring the Houthi militias to stop making destructive sectarian changes to curricula.

The military use of schools by the Houthi militias deprives children of their basic right to education and puts them at risk of recruitment and use by the Houthis. Those militias also systematically exploit the economic and financial hardships of Yemeni families in areas under their control, forcing children to become involved in their barbaric war against their fellow Yemenis.

To conclude, my country is committed to updating monitoring mechanisms to ensure that all violations that occur in the areas affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic are monitored. It hopes to establish an alternative mechanism based on more independent, credible and flexible sources to obtain the data and information used to prepare the reports of the country task forces in conflict zones, particularly in areas under the control of Houthi militias, where children are forced to participate in summer camps without any precautionary measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This mechanism must guarantee standards to promote the accuracy, credibility and objectivity of information collected or obtained in the areas controlled by Houthi militias, where the work of the country task forces faces obstacles imposed by the militias, creating an unsafe environment that does not allow the monitoring teams to perform their functions or prepare credible and transparent reports.
