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Chair: Mr. Braun (Luxembourg)

Contents

Agenda item 66: Promotion and protection of the rights of children

- (a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children
- (b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children

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

Agenda item 66: Promotion and protection of the rights of children

(a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children (A/74/136, A/74/162, A/74/231, A/74/246, A/74/249 and A/74/259)

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children (A/74/240)

1. **Ms. Gamba de Potgieter** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), introducing her report (A/74/249), said that it was the common responsibility of the international community to find durable and just solutions for all children affected by war and to uphold the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Responses should not be limited to emergency, recovery and protection interventions, but extend to all phases of the conflict cycle and dovetail with planning and prevention efforts and be incorporated into the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

2. The thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the upcoming twentieth anniversary of the Optional Protocol provided Member States with a good opportunity to take stock of three decades of progress and challenges in the protection of children and the promotion of their rights. She encouraged all States to accede to the Optional Protocol in order to share the responsibility to protect and promote children's rights and put the best interests of the child at the centre of national and global efforts. She also urged Member States, the United Nations, regional organizations, civil society and partners to join the Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict initiative which she had launched in April 2019.

3. The monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict showed that the number of children killed or maimed in conflict situations in 2019 had reached its highest level since the establishment of the Special Representative's mandate. Although children continued to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict, exposed to unimaginable violence, separated from their support networks and deprived of liberty, it was heartening that the number of children released had consistently risen in the previous few years as a result of the direct engagement of the United Nations with parties to conflicts. The trends reported by the mechanism were only the tip of the iceberg, since insecurity, stigmatization, lack of trust in institutions and a lack of capacity prevented the United Nations

from verifying all violations. The mechanism was a unique tool that fostered constructive engagement with parties to conflicts, with the aim of changing behaviours through concrete time-bound commitments. It was imperative for those commitments to be both implemented and monitored in order for tangible progress to be made.

4. Efforts by the Office of the Special Representative and United Nations teams on the ground to engage with parties to conflicts had significantly improved the protection of children in certain countries. Following the recent adoption of commitments by parties in the Central African Republic, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, the number of parties to have signed action plans since the establishment of the Special Representative's mandate had increased to 31; of those, 12 had subsequently been delisted for fully complying with their action plans. The Special Representative had also led missions to the Central African Republic, Colombia, Mali, Myanmar, South Sudan and Thailand, and would soon visit Somalia. Sustained advocacy worldwide had yielded further positive outcomes, including: the adoption of a law on children's rights in Afghanistan; the provision of training to military focal points in Myanmar; the holding of a workshop on the development of an action plan for South Sudan covering all six grave violations against children during armed conflict; the establishment of a road map to revitalize the implementation by Yemen of its 2014 action plan to end and prevent the recruitment of children by Yemeni armed forces; the continued implementation of action plans with armed groups in Nigeria and Mali; and commitments by armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

5. Without the help of child protection advisers in peacekeeping and special political missions, particularly representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), it would be impossible to monitor or verify violations, engage with parties or secure the release of children from armed groups and armed forces. She urged Member States to support and fund child protection advisers within United Nations peacekeeping and political missions in the context of budgetary negotiations in the Fifth Committee and other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. To further improve monitoring, in coordination with UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, her Office had initiated regional workshops to be attended by country task forces on monitoring and reporting and United Nations country teams.

6. To adequately respond to the challenges facing children affected by armed conflict, the United Nations

should support initiatives by Member States and regional organizations that prevented violations from occurring at an early stage. Her Office had helped Member States to develop or strengthen their national prevention plans and had supported the adoption of additional preventive measures. Moreover, in the context of the Secretary-General's prevention agenda, as provided for in Security Council resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#) and General Assembly resolution [72/245](#), she had strengthened her engagement, including with regional and subregional organizations, to develop regional child protection strategies, in particular on cross-border issues.

7. Her Office had initiated a consultative process with child protection and mediation actors in the United Nations system regarding the development of practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues in peace processes. She hoped that, once the guidance had been completed in 2020, it would be used broadly by the mediation community. Her Office had also launched the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers to foster ideas on how to support child reintegration programmes and prevent the recruitment of children in war. The Coalition aimed to address needs and gaps in programming and funding, broaden reintegration to include the peacebuilding, sustaining peace, development and prevention agendas, and map existing funding mechanisms and modalities.

8. She called on Member States to strengthen the legal foundations for the protection of children in armed conflicts and, in addition to acceding to the Convention and its Optional Protocols, to engage in political commitments initiated by Member States, such as the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. Experience had shown that reintegration programmes must be central to preventive efforts as they enabled children traumatized by war to recover their lives and minimized the risk of their re-recruitment.

9. **Ms. Alburquerque Gutiérrez** (Spain) said that her Government had appreciated the participation of the Special Representative at the Third International Conference on Safe Schools held in Mallorca, Spain, in May 2019. The Conference had not only helped to encourage more countries to sign the Safe Schools Declaration but had also resulted in the elaboration of conclusions about gender-based violence and the need for preventive mechanisms for researching and monitoring the situation. To maintain the momentum started by the Declaration, her Government had

announced that, as of 2020, every two years it would hold a training session on best practices for applying the Declaration in schools and universities. Spain would continue to support initiatives that protected children involved in armed conflicts, especially the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration, the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

10. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that, since there was no single solution to the alarming increase in the number of armed conflicts worldwide, the international community would do well to embrace a multifaceted approach that tackled ongoing conflicts and prevented them from occurring. The primary responsibility lay with parties to conflicts to comply with their international obligations under Security Council resolutions and relevant international treaties. Morocco steadfastly condemned all forms of violence against children, including attacks on schools and hospitals, and reaffirmed its commitment to protecting children affected by armed conflict so that they could be allowed to achieve their full potential.

11. **Ms. Verstichel** (Belgium) said that the lack of respect for international humanitarian and human rights law was a continued threat that disproportionately affected children. Belgium strongly supported the development of practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues in peace processes, as the Security Council had requested in its resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#). Close consultation with child protection and mediation actors was required if the guidance was to be truly meaningful and practical.

12. **Ms. Brady** (Canada) said that the implementation guidance on the Vancouver Principles was a non-binding tool, launched in August 2019, that would help Member States to translate their commitments under the Vancouver Principles into national actions and thereby contribute to preventing the recruitment and use of children. Her delegation was pleased that 95 Member States had endorsed the Vancouver Principles and that two additional countries had recently ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Protecting children in conflict was not only the right thing to do, but was a legal obligation enshrined in international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

13. **Mr. Gonzato** (Observer for the European Union) said that the European Union welcomed existing initiatives to protect children, such as the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles, and called on

Member States that had not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and support the Paris Principles. While welcoming the fact that 13,600 children had been released from armed forces and groups over the previous year and the efforts of the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers to further that cause, he emphasized the need for long-term and comprehensive measures to rehabilitate and reintegrate children into society, as well as to prevent their recruitment. The report indicated that the impact of armed conflict on children had reached alarming dimensions and that most crimes were never reported for fear of stigmatization or reprisals. To address impunity for such crimes, more resources should be allocated to the establishment of reliable mechanisms for collecting data and bringing perpetrators to justice. He asked what more could be done to combat sexual violence committed against children during armed conflicts and to encourage victims to speak out.

14. **Ms. Babedi** (South Africa) said that children, particularly girls, were vulnerable to sexual abuse and detention during armed conflicts and should be treated primarily as victims. States therefore had an obligation to ensure that relevant programmes were put in place to reintegrate them into society after their release. Given the importance of access to justice in advancing children's rights and ensuring children's psychological and psychosocial development, it was also troubling that perpetrators of grave violations often remained unidentified. South Africa was grateful to the Special Representative for stepping up her Office's engagement with regional organizations and for her continued involvement in the high-level retreat of the African Union on the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa.

15. **Ms. Košir** (Slovenia) said that her Government had long supported projects to provide rehabilitation services to children, including in Ukraine, Gaza and Syria and, in 2019, had pledged assistance for activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for UNICEF activities in Yemen. The curriculum of a recently-established peacekeeping training centre in Slovenia included specific modules on the protection of children affected by armed conflict. She wished to know what lessons had been learned at the regional workshops launched by the Special Representative for United Nations country task forces on monitoring and reporting.

16. **Mr. Dunkel** (Germany) said that his Government appreciated the Special Representative's work to

prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers and was prepared to provide more funding for regional prevention plans. Nevertheless, since more emphasis should be placed on accountability in prevention efforts than had been the case in Myanmar and Syria, he requested examples of how the Special Representative intended to increase the importance of accountability in upcoming plans, especially regional ones. His delegation was also concerned by the increase in the number of children deprived of their liberty for alleged association with armed groups and wished to know what progress had been made in broaching that issue with States and how Member State could help the Special Representative to do so.

17. **Mr. Dollo** (Mali) said that during a visit to his country in July 2019, the Special Representative had met various actors and authorities responsible for protecting children and ensuring that they did not fall victim to the lack of security in the northern and central regions of Mali. Despite security and humanitarian challenges, the Government of Mali had taken all possible measures to guarantee children's enjoyment of their right to security and education and had ratified almost all international instruments related to the rights of the child. Since the lack of State control in some areas had created an environment conducive to terrorism in Mali, the best way to protect the rights of children was to help the State to restore its authority over its territory.

18. **Mr. Verdier** (Argentina) said that there had been a worrying increase in the number of violations and armed conflicts throughout 2018. Argentina welcomed the Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict initiative and efforts by the Special Representative and the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers to extend support beyond immediate humanitarian assistance to longer-term projects involving society actors, taking into account the specific needs of the child. He asked which activities under the aforementioned Act the Special Representative considered to be the most helpful for preventing the six grave violations.

19. **Mr. Roscoe** (United Kingdom) said that children bore the brunt of the diminishing respect for international humanitarian law and of the increasing readiness of armed groups and Governments to commit grave human rights abuses. The international community should use the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to turn rhetoric on protecting the most vulnerable into concrete action. Given that strong domestic legal frameworks were crucial to such efforts, his delegation supported the Safe Schools Declaration, the Vancouver Principles, the Paris Principles and the Optional Protocol to the Convention

on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. He asked whether systems used by the United Nations to reintegrate child soldiers into society were effective and how they could be improved, including to prevent children from being involved in armed conflicts in the first place.

20. **Mr. Khashaan** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Houthi militia had committed serious violations of children's rights, including by recruiting children and sending them to border areas. The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre in Saudi Arabia had helped to reintegrate some 2,000 child soldiers recruited by Houthis to be used as human shields and had provided the comprehensive support that the children needed to return home. Saudi Arabia respected and would comply with the objectives of the memorandum of understanding that had been signed by the Special Representative to improve the protection of children in Yemen.

21. **Ms. Ahmed** (Sudan) said that her delegation appreciated the Special Representative's support for the implementation of the 2016 action plan on ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children and her continued guidance. In compliance with that action plan, the newly-appointed transitional Government in the Sudan had distributed copies of the standard operating procedures for the handover of children released from armed groups and information on a community-based complaint mechanism for reporting child recruitment in a number of conflict-affected states; completed a handbook, including in Braille, on the development of life skills for children in emergency and conflict situations and carried out an associated pilot project; conducted two workshops on the procedure for estimating age during the recruitment of soldiers; and conducted a voluntary verification mission with the monitoring and reporting mechanism of the United Nations.

22. **Ms. Joubli** (Switzerland) said that the record number of deaths and mutilations of children in 2018 should catalyse countries to take action. She called on all parties to armed conflicts to respect their obligations under international law, especially with respect to civilians and civilian infrastructure and, in particular, to stop using improvised explosive devices, which clearly violated international humanitarian law. Switzerland also called upon parties to complete the implementation of ongoing action plans and establish further plans. Even in the context of counter-terrorism measures or sanctions, dialogue with armed groups remained possible. Lastly, she encouraged Member States to ensure that all lists of parties to conflicts were full and credible and to carry out monitoring and reporting

transparently and in accordance with Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). In recognition of the twentieth anniversary of Council resolution 1261 (1999), she asked the Special Representative how Member States could step up their efforts to prevent violations.

23. **Mr. Molina Linares** (Guatemala) said that that increase in the number of civilian victims of armed conflicts, especially children, was a serious cause for concern. The international community must redouble its efforts to ensure that the protection of children was an integral part of all broad prevention and conflict resolution strategies. In its commitment to protect the rights of the child, Guatemala had signed the Safe Schools Declaration in May 2019, having previously committed to the Vancouver Principles. He encouraged all Member States to join those instruments, since it would be impossible to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development without effective mechanisms for protecting children.

24. **Ms. Matar** (United Arab Emirates) said that her country, as a member of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, aligned its statement with that of Saudi Arabia. The Coalition took its responsibility for protecting all civilians in armed conflict, particularly children, very seriously and was working closely with the United Nations and other international partners on that front. She welcomed the Special Representative's acknowledgement in the report that the Coalition continued to work closely with her Office and had carried out a number of preventative and protective measures.

25. **Ms. Al Sulaiti** (Qatar) said that she was very concerned about the large number of grave violations referred to by the monitoring and reporting mechanism. She called on Member States to answer the Special Representative's call to take appropriate measures to end recurrent or existing violations, improve accountability and step up international cooperation. Qatar had supported the Office of the Special Representative by providing \$1.5 million in support funds over the previous three years and was cooperating with her Office in Doha to set up a training centre and build capacity.

26. **Mr. Samson** (France) said that the information in the Special Representative's latest report was alarming, since it indicated an unprecedented scale of violence perpetrated by regular armed forces, with children being used as suicide bombers, sex slaves and human shields. He called on all Member States to comply with the Geneva Conventions relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts, ratify the additional protocols thereto and endorse the Paris

Principles and the Vancouver Principles. He asked the Special Representative how she intended to adapt her work to address the escalation in cases of murder and mutilation of children. Given the importance of fighting impunity at the national level – and through the International Criminal Court when national efforts fell short – he asked the Special Representative how she could help Member States to fight impunity.

27. **Mr. Kamel** (Algeria) said that his country firmly supported the Children, Not Soldiers campaign and appreciated the progress achieved thus far by the Special Representative in curbing the recruitment of children in armed conflicts. He asked what had been the main difficulties that she had faced in realizing the vision of her mandate, how she had overcome them and what Member States could do to help her accomplish her mission.

28. **Mr. Al Khalil** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that on 29 June 2019, the Special Representative had concluded a plan of action concerning children and armed conflict with the Syrian Democratic Forces. His Government was shocked by that irresponsible action, which established a grave precedent that undermined the credibility of the United Nations. By concluding that agreement, the Special Representative had conferred legal status on an illegitimate non-State group, thereby threatening regional safety and the territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. It should be noted that children in the Hawl refugee camp had been transferred by Kurdish militias to a part of the camp that was reserved for fighters. When the refugees had protested against that action, the militias had ordered their security forces, known as the Asayish, to open fire, killing and wounding several protestors.

29. **Mr. Balobaid** (Yemen) said that his delegation appreciated the work done by the Special Representative and her coordination with the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office in the implementation of action plans in Yemen, which were unfortunately behind schedule. Yemen opposed the practice by Houthi militias of recruiting children as combatants. It was committed to all international legal instruments to which it was party, including the Safe Schools Declaration, and had not recruited any children in its armed forces.

30. **Ms. Gamba de Potgieter** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) said that to prevent the recruitment of children, they must have alternatives to joining military forces. Those engaging with armed groups for the release of children, such as peacekeeping forces and child protection advisers, required additional resources to

achieve that end. Campaigns such as the Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict initiative were also valuable since, at the community level, they fought ignorance about what constituted a violation. At the national level, the campaign promoted the training of trainers, the creation of platforms for civil society and the dissemination of relevant materials. All countries and regions had consistently affirmed that educational and livelihood alternatives were even more important elements than peace in preventing the recruitment of children.

31. To combat sexual violence, more should be done to support the efforts of dedicated child protection advisers in the field, who provided not only educational but also monitoring services. National and local accountability efforts were also vital in creating an environment in which victims felt comfortable applying for health and social services. Religious leaders and community ombudsmen could also be instrumental in removing the stigma attached to sexual violations. Countries emerging from armed conflict had an additional challenge of providing the security sector and judiciary with what they needed to ensure the recovery of children who had been subject to sexual violence. All Member States should have passed legislation that criminalized the six grave violations and should undertake national prevention campaigns as a prelude to developing a national prevention strategy.

32. To promote the reintegration of child soldiers into society, her Office and the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers were organizing a number of workshops on the topic, after which further recommendations would be made. In the past, reintegration efforts had not been bad, but inadequate, on account of a lack of funds. In most cases, the agenda for children in armed conflict had been part of the humanitarian and emergency response to a crisis rather than part of the long-term peacekeeping process. It was vital, however, to promote a nexus among the protection, prevention, peace, development and humanitarian sectors so that children could be guaranteed education, future work, health services and psychosocial support. She welcomed the inclusion of more elements on child protection in the integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration standards.

33. More could be done to prevent impunity by criminalizing violations in regional and national justice systems. Progress had been made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, to ensure that perpetrators of sexual violence were identified, found and prosecuted. It was important, however, not only to aim for accountability, but also to create momentum for

legislative reform. She agreed with the representative of the Sudan that standard operative procedures on the handover of children were among the best mechanisms available in the specific case of children deprived of liberty. Operating standards should be agreed regionally in order for the accountability mechanisms to work effectively.

34. In response to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, she said that she had informed the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in advance of the agreement signed in Geneva with the Syrian Democratic Forces that her signature did not imply a recognition of the legitimacy of any particular group. Her Office had coordinated with the Office of Legal Affairs and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to make sure that nothing in the agreement contradicted relevant Security Council resolutions. Her Office always preferred engaging in dialogue and peace processes with all armed groups to entering in agreements with individual groups; in Myanmar, for example, dialogue had been held between the Government and the four main armed groups party to the conflict, which made it easier to focus national dialogue on the prohibition of recruitment and the conditions of release of child soldiers. As Special Representative, she was obligated to engage with every party to stop violations but that engagement did not imply legitimization of their actions.

35. **Ms. Maalla M’Jid** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children), introducing her report ([A/74/259](#)), said that she had been appointed Special Representative only recently and would ensure the continuity of her predecessor’s work, while exploring new ways in which to end violence against all children. She would adopt a participatory and consultative approach that was conducive to cooperation and dialogue with all relevant stakeholders and emphasize the importance of children as agents of change. In addition to other milestones, 2019 was the tenth anniversary of her mandate and therefore an appropriate moment to identify shortfalls and highlight strategic actions needed to realize the vision of a world free of violence against children by 2030. Her Office had worked with a number of partners in that regard to draft a thematic report entitled “Keeping the promise: ending violence against children by 2030”.

36. She had highlighted in her report that, despite stronger legal and policy frameworks, more and better-quality data and greater coordination among stakeholders, progress towards stamping out violence against children had been slow, as had been highlighted during reviews of the 2030 Agenda and of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Violence

against children remained a hidden and pervasive issue and any gains in tackling it risked being undermined by disturbing trends such as climate change, long-term conflicts, severe humanitarian disasters, increasing numbers of children on the move, new technologies, the spread of terrorism and violent extremism. Peer-to-peer violence was also on the rise, affecting millions of young people each day, as well as their families, schools and communities. The cost of violence was huge for children and society alike, since a damaged childhood translated into damaged families, communities, societies and nations. The financial cost of violence against children to national economies had been estimated as \$7 trillion per year.

37. Many of the solutions were well known. First, children must be placed at the forefront of the political agenda. Second, it was important to galvanize efforts at all levels to prevent and respond to all forms of violence, especially violence against vulnerable children. It should be recognized that children formed a distinct group, as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and that their unique perspective was irreplaceable. Third, more effective cooperation was needed among actors in the field, given that children’s lives were not divided thematically to correspond to the mandates of the organizations working on their behalf and children were often exposed to various forms of violence in multiple settings. Fourth, any solution depended on adequate financing and investment in children, with priority accorded to those in situations of greatest vulnerability and marginalization. Fifth, reliable disaggregated data were a crucial element in revealing the situation of all children, particularly those at greatest risk of being left behind. Sixth, any solution required broad participation throughout the development, implementation, follow-up and review processes of national policies, with effective accountability measures in place. Seventh, children must be active participants in the process and all partners must be prepared to listen to them carefully.

38. Her Office was currently working with key stakeholders to finalize a practical and results-oriented road map for the work of her mandate. In the coming months, she would share that road map with Member States, United Nations mechanisms and other partners, and set out specific actions that she intended to take at the global, regional and national levels.

39. **Ms. Miyazaki** (Japan) said that Japan was a pathfinding country of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. She wondered what States could be expected to do to improve collaboration between different sectors and asked which actors, besides civil society representatives, had the greatest

potential of contributing to preventing violence against children.

40. **Ms. Bellout** (Algeria) expressed gratitude to the Special Representative for her outstanding work with regional organizations, especially the African Union, and her support for African initiatives to end violence against children, including Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, Africa's Agenda for Children 2040: Fostering an Africa Fit for Children and the campaign by the African Union to end child marriage.

41. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that her country had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols thereto and supported the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles. Since children worldwide continued to face structural, political and cultural obstacles to participating in discussions relevant to them, she wondered what mechanisms could be established to facilitate dialogue between children and decision-making bodies.

42. **Mr. Bastida Peydro** (Spain) said that violence against children remained a reality for millions of children worldwide, including in supposedly safe settings, such as the home, schools and public institutions. Spain agreed with the emphasis in the Special Representative's report on the importance of data and research. A recent study by civil society groups in Spain indicated that violence affected not only victims and their immediate environment, but also a country's entire society and socioeconomic development, with sexual violence alone estimated to cost Spain approximately 1 billion euros.

43. **Ms. Vasquez Muñoz** (Mexico) said that the shocking statistics in the Special Representative's report showed that violence against children had in some cases become normalized and highlighted the urgent need for Member States to take action quickly if they were to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Mexico was a pathfinding country of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children and had drawn up an action plan specifically to tackle such violence. She asked the Special Representative for recommendations on how to involve young people and children in the work of the United Nations in New York.

44. **Ms. Hermann** (Observer for the European Union) said that it was shocking that over 1 billion children had experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence globally. Protecting children from violence was a priority for the European Union, as demonstrated by the explicit recognition in its Guidelines on the Rights of the Child of the work of actors involved in protecting the rights of the child. The international community

should focus on gender-specific risks, such as early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation, and on the situation of children with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds. She asked the Special Representative to elaborate on the priorities of her mandate in the coming months.

45. **Ms. Franco Nogueira Calçada Estrela** (Portugal) asked the Special Representative, as a specialist in paediatrics, how she envisioned the role of the health sector in protecting children from violence and requested specific examples of success stories in that regard. She also wished to know which groups of children the Special Representative considered to be most at risk of being left behind.

46. **Ms. Košir** (Slovenia) said that her Government had launched a programme to boost the participation of children in politics. Slovenia had also pledged its support for a joint project with Morocco, Egypt and Kosovo to improve the human right to education of children and for a school and peer mediation project in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her delegation agreed with the emphasis in the report on ensuring that bodies with thematically different mandates provided continuous support for children. She wondered whether the Special Representative planned to continue her predecessor's initiative of expanding cross-regional cooperation on addressing violence against children.

47. **Mr. de Souza Monteiro** (Brazil) said that his Government had developed the Happy Child programme to promote children's development during the early years of life as part of his country's intersectoral and holistic approach to upholding the rights of the child. He asked how Member States could ensure a child-centred approach to tackling violence and requested examples of cases in which children had meaningfully participated in such policies.

48. **Ms. Babedi** (South Africa) said that her delegation welcomed the Special Representative's report entitled "Keeping the promise: ending violence against children by 2030", which referred to alarming rates of violence, abuse and exploitation. In response to the high level of violence in South Africa, her Government had pledged \$475 million to improve the criminal justice system and provide better care to victims and, since 2013, had established courts that specialized in sexual offence cases.

49. **Ms. Al Sulaiti** (Qatar) said that her country had demonstrated its commitment to the promotion and protection of children's rights by becoming one of the first Member States to support the establishment of the Special Representative's mandate. It had also launched educational initiatives to promote the safety of at-risk

children and children during armed conflict and to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

50. **Mr. Maalla M’Jid** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children) said that tackling violence against children required a holistic approach that spanned various policies and Social Development Goals, particularly those related to social and family affairs. It was thus critical to ensure that Governments, at the highest levels, did not work alone but had the necessary budget and indicators to oversee the prevention of violence at the local level. Governments should work on the basis of the accountability mechanisms that already existed yet also develop partnership agreements that specified actors’ roles in the child protection chain, since the failure of one link in the chain could undermine the entire system. The most successful arrangements tended to be those that had clear deadlines and indicators and brought together stakeholders at the federal and local levels, as well as the private sector, academics, communities and children themselves.

51. During her mandate, she intended to build on her predecessor’s promotion of regional and cross-regional meetings but to make sure that all of the most important actors were involved in the process. At meetings, participants should illustrate best practices in their regions but also consider how to scale up those practices and surmount challenges. Such meetings served an additional purpose of making the issue of violence against children more visible at the national level, which could spur on the development of more policies at the local level.

52. In the three months since the start of her mandate, children had already become more active participants in the political process. In a recent study of models of participation, her Office had highlighted the need for policymakers to consider children as stakeholders and to keep them informed, consult with them and listen to their initiatives. The children participating in the political process should be representative of all children, including the most vulnerable and least visible, with due consideration given to the linguistic difficulties that they might encounter in New York. Particular efforts should be made to develop social norms in countries where listening to children was considered counterproductive or an overtly Western approach that implied the disrespect of traditional values. There were many examples of initiatives proposed by children that were less expensive than those envisaged by adults.

53. Violence against children was a public health issue and it was therefore imperative to create a multi-service platform for children in which families could gain

access to health and social services at the same entry point. The mental health of children was no less important than their physical and sexual health, especially given that violence could impair mental health which, in turn, could lead to more violence.

54. She had been developing a road map on the areas in which her mandate could bring added value. In that document, she would highlight her intention to bring stakeholders together at every level and to search for linkages that would allow initiatives to have more of an impact on the ground. In particular, she wanted to ensure that all regions of the world were represented and to galvanize their respective efforts to stamp out violence against children. Her mandate was clear and would cover all forms of violence, including emerging trends, such as cyberbullying and the plight of migrant children, and recognized other forms of violence, such as female genital mutilation and early and forced marriage.

55. **Ms. Gornitzka** (Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)), introducing the reports of the Secretary-General on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/74/231), follow-up to the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children (A/74/240) and the girl child (A/74/246), said that there was no better time to discuss progress in children’s rights and to show the political will needed to invest in children than on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention.

56. The first report highlighted the fact that children deprived of parental care were far more likely to be excluded and to experience violence, abuse or exploitation than those who grew up in the care of their parents. Several countries had already strengthened national laws and adopted care reform strategies to take children out of institutions and reunify separated families. More must be done, however, to discontinue the institutionalization of children, increase investment in child protection and welfare services and in family and community-based care and to improve data collection and reporting systems.

57. The second report indicated that a child born in 2019 had a greater chance of surviving and thriving than in 2008 and that more children survived past their fifth birthday, enrolled in school and received the vaccinations and nutrition that they needed. Moreover, the number of stunted children had dropped significantly and 25 million child marriages had been prevented over the previous decade, driven in particular by dramatic progress in South Asia. Nevertheless, children continued to be subjected to discrimination and to lack the services and support they needed.

58. The third report highlighted the fact that girls, especially in rural areas, faced poverty, discrimination, exclusion and unequal access to basic social services such as water and sanitation; were particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, forced labour, unpaid labour and harmful practices; and were often restricted from owning and inheriting land. More investment was required to support women and girls in rural areas, to deliver on legal and policy reform, to implement programmes to end violence and harmful practices and to reform land and inheritance rights. States that had already implemented such changes could be used as models for others. Skills development, cash incentives and programmes for agricultural self-employment were also instrumental in allowing women to gain economic power and determine their own future.

59. **The Chair** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on the item.

60. **Mr. Kapambwe** (Zambia), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the Group applauded the progress that been made in upholding children's rights since the adoption by the General Assembly of the document entitled "A World Fit for Children" in 2002. They were committed to implementing all internationally agreed development goals, including the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The large youth population in Africa could contribute immensely to Africa's development if the potential of young people could be fully harnessed.

61. Between 1990 and 2017, child mortality and the mortality rate of children under 5 years of age in Africa had more than halved. Nevertheless, malaria remained prevalent, with two thirds of global deaths from malaria occurring in sub-Saharan Africa. Some 13 million children in the Sahel subregion had not benefited from malaria chemoprevention, mainly owing to a lack of funding, despite the fact that they were eligible for it and that since 2012 it had been recommended by the World Health Organization for children aged between 3 and 59 months. The Group encouraged partners to support community-based health programmes, such as the Rapid Access Expansion Programme, which had been proven to significantly reduce malaria-related child mortality in rural communities.

62. Poverty, discrimination, natural disasters, violence and conflict also continued to prevent millions of children in developing countries from enjoying the same rights and fundamental freedoms as their peers in more developed economies. Despite improved child survival rates, pockets of extreme poverty persisted even in wealthy countries, with children comprising a large number or those living in poverty. Improving gender

equality and the empowerment of women and girls was fundamental to achieving all development targets for children. Equally important was the need to keep girls in education, particularly by attending to their basic sanitary needs, including in rural areas. Although there were more children in schools than ever before, pre-primary education was compulsory in only 22 per cent of countries in the African region, meaning that many children started formal schooling without adequate preparation. Continued education would also help to reduce the rates of child marriages and teenage pregnancies. The Secretary-General's report (A/74/240) indicated that 25 million child marriages had been prevented as a result of progress made over the previous decade to put an end to early marriages. In 20 out of 30 African countries, national campaigns had been launched to end child marriage, which had helped to bring advocacy on the issue to a national level.

63. While significant gains had been made in mitigating the socioeconomic impact of HIV/AIDS on children and families, over 1 million children up to 9 years of age had been estimated to be living with the virus in 2017. Timely diagnosis and the introduction of antiretroviral therapy could allow those children to reach their full potential. It was encouraging that the number of children worldwide receiving antiviral treatment had increased slightly in 2016, but further reforms of health-care systems were needed in order to promote best practices, such as same-day point-of-care testing results for children and the expansion of centres for children with the necessary equipment. The Group appealed to its partners to include social protection components in official development assistance and development projects. Such programmes, in particular cash transfers, improved access to health, education and nutrition, strengthened social networks and reduced adolescent vulnerability and risk-taking.

64. Although the number of children suffering from stunting had declined globally, more than one third of affected children were in Africa. Similar disparities in maternal mortality existed across regions and countries. Globally, maternal mortality remained the leading cause of death among girls aged 15 to 19 years of age and only 70 per cent of live births among adolescent mothers of that age group were attended by skilled health personnel. It was imperative to scale up efforts to achieve universal health coverage for all.

65. The Group was concerned by the statistic in the *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime that 30 per cent of all victims of trafficking detected worldwide in the period from 2016 to 2017 were children. The Group was grateful to United Nations agencies and the

international community for providing technical assistance to strengthen their capacity to protect children from all forms of trafficking.

66. **Mr. Kelapile** (Botswana), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that all SADC member States had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had a long-standing commitment to the advancement of children's rights. The participation of children and young people at the high-level event held in Geneva to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention, as well as the involvement of youth delegations in the work of the Third Committee, were promising signs of improvement. SADC member States had ratified numerous continental and regional instruments on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, including the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) of the International Labour Organization; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; the SADC Code of Conduct on Child Labour; and the SADC Minimum Package of Services for Orphans, Vulnerable Children and Youth. SADC member States celebrated 16 June each year as the Day of the African Child and were committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth and target 8.7 on the eradication of all forms of child labour by 2025.

67. Recognizing that education was a fundamental human right, a pathway towards poverty eradication and a strategic pillar for gender equality and women's empowerment, SADC member States supported Agenda 2063 to empower and engage young people and continued to invest heavily in the education sector, particularly skills development programmes. Educating girls, in particular, could reduce gender discriminatory practices and tended to result in later marriage. SADC was grappling with the devastating consequences of early and forced marriage on the educational, economic and social prospects of child brides. In 2016, it had adopted the Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage and endeavoured to harmonize national laws with the recommendations of the African Union campaign to end child marriages, the African Common Position on the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Some States had made significant progress in outlawing child marriages and ensuring that pregnant girls returned to school after delivery, especially by

recognizing the crucial role of traditional and religious leaders in changing practices.

68. SADC acknowledged the importance of the family in bringing up children and inculcating social values. Accordingly, it had adopted family-oriented policies to protect children from exploitation and abuse and had developed a regional strategic framework, programme of action and minimum package to assist orphans and vulnerable children. SADC member States had adopted multisectoral responses to eliminate all forms of violence, including gender-based violence, and had established community shelters to provide services to victims and survivors. To combat the HIV and AIDS pandemic, they continued to promote access to health services and reproductive health care, including universal health coverage.

69. Since efforts by SADC member States were often hampered by inadequate human and financial resources, administrative issues and a lack of infrastructure, SADC appealed to partners for further assistance. In line with the theme of the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly to galvanize multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion, the promotion and protection of the rights of the child depended on a multisectoral approach. He called on all relevant stakeholders to strengthen their partnership efforts.

70. **Ms. Juul** (Norway), speaking on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden), said that millions worldwide had supported the unambiguous message of Greta Thunberg to challenge leaders to act and take responsibility for present and future generations. The thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was an opportune moment to reflect on how the lives of millions of children had improved over the previous three decades: more children attended school and had a say in matters that affected their lives; progress had been achieved in the fight for equality and against discrimination; and young people were more engaged in finding solutions to the challenges of their time. Nevertheless, the international community must make further commitments to ensure that no child was left behind, particularly by upholding children's rights to be free from violence.

71. The Nordic and Baltic countries were proud to have integrated the general principles, rights and obligations of the Convention into their legislation, and yet they still faced major challenges with regard to providing children with adequate protection, preventing violence and eradicating child poverty. While recognizing that the 2030 Agenda was a road map for a

better future, they understood that with only 10 years remaining, they must prioritize their efforts. Education was a high priority for all the Nordic and Baltic countries, especially the target of reaching the most marginalized groups and ensuring inclusive education and support. Norway and Denmark, for example, were increasing their support for Education Cannot Wait, a global fund and partnership dedicated to delivering high-quality education to children and young people in areas affected by crisis and conflict.

72. There was growing recognition of the harm caused by not collecting comprehensive and reliable data on children brought up without parental care. Although the reasons for a child not having parental care were manifold, it was important to note that girls in countries affected by conflict were 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys.

73. In addition to being the anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2019 marked 25 years since the adoption of the ground-breaking Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. Implementation of the Programme of Action was highly relevant to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Too many girls were still kept out of school, forced into marriage or fell victim to violence, abuse and sexual harassment. Girls also faced a larger number of online threats of sexual violence in comparison with their male peers. Men and boys must endeavour to defend the basic human rights of gender equality and all young people should receive comprehensive education about sexuality so that they could make knowledgeable decisions about their lives. The access of women and girls to sexual and reproductive health and rights was also a prerequisite for sustainable development.

74. **Mr. Bourtembourg** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three Optional Protocols guided European Union policy, legislation and financial programmes related to children. The European Union encouraged partner countries to ratify all instruments related to the Convention.

75. It was appropriate for the United Nations to address the issue of children without parental care, since 2019 marked the tenth anniversary of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. The European Union was committed to ensuring that its policies and actions

benefited all children, especially children in vulnerable and marginalized situations, and the protection of the rights of the child was enshrined in the Treaty on European Union. Although there were many reasons why children grew up without parental care, efforts should always be made to prevent family separation when that was in the best interests of the child. Should that prove impossible, children who were deprived of their family environment should be entitled to special protection and assistance from the State, as set out in article 20 of the Convention.

76. Member States and United Nations bodies must work together to ensure the early identification and registration of unaccompanied refugees, migrants and internally displaced children, guarantee the timely appointment of a guardian, ensure compliance with procedural safeguards and protection measures, prioritize programmes for family tracing and reunification and monitor care arrangements. The European Union remained committed to preventing trafficking in children, particularly for children without parental care, who were among the most vulnerable targets, both online and offline, for trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation and abuse. It encouraged States to adopt national strategies on the rights of the child to address the specific needs of children without parental care and to conduct rights-based and gender-sensitive analyses of the situation of children. Such strategies should provide for the adoption and enforcement of relevant laws, better policies and increases in the budget and human resources allocated to support for children, in order to address the root causes of unnecessary family separation and ensure that children were cared for effectively by their families and communities. Governments should make allocations for children, including children without parental care, particularly visible in their national budgets.

77. Given that recourse to institutionalized care was not in line with the Convention and could harm children's growth and development, the European Union supported the development of high-quality alternative care solutions. It encouraged States to take into account the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children in policies pertaining to children without parents or caregivers. Efforts should focus on enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of their parents or, when appropriate, other close family members. Whenever alternative care was necessary, high-quality family and community-based care should be promoted, rather than placement in institutions.

78. The European Union had set out its approach to alternative care in a number of documents. The 2013 European Commission Recommendation of 20 February

2013 entitled “Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage” emphasized the need to enhance family support and the quality of alternative care settings, while the 2017 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the European Council on the protection of children in migration highlighted the need to provide for a range of alternative care options for unaccompanied children. The Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care provided practical advice on making a sustained transition from institutional care to family-based and community-based alternatives. In 2017, the Council had adopted conclusions on enhancing community-based support and care for independent living. Its regulations on European Structural and Investment Funds 2014–2020 specifically stipulated that funds should be used to facilitate the transition from institutional to community-based care. The European Disability Strategy 2010–2020 stipulated the Union’s commitment to promote community-based care for persons with disabilities.

79. In its external policy, the European Union Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child highlighted the importance of appropriate alternative care for children and recommended improving coherence in the European Union’s external activities for children. Recognizing the importance of the global study on children deprived of liberty, the European Union was working with partners to strengthen alternatives to imprisonment for children.

80. He encouraged other Member States to adopt a comprehensive plan of action on the prioritization of alternative care options over institutionalization, along with relevant reforms, legislation, budget allocations and awareness-raising campaigns. All relevant actors and caregivers should receive relevant training and support and be subject to screening and oversight, accountability and monitoring mechanisms. Without access to appropriate alternative care options, children deprived of parental care often faced a downward spiral of economic, social and structural exclusion and marginalization with long-term consequences both for them and their communities.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.