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Seventy-seventh year

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. De Almeida Filho	(Brazil)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Lamce
	China	Ms. Huang Lijin
	France	Mr. Samson
	Gabon	Mr. Diaba
	Ghana	Mr. Boateng
	India	Mr. Sharma
	Ireland	Ms. Trant
	Kenya	Ms. Momanyi
	Mexico	Mr. De La Mora Salcedo
	Norway	Mr. Von Tetzschner
	Russian Federation	Mr. Kuzmenkov
	United Arab Emirates	Mr. Azzam
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Ghazi-Bouillon
	United States of America	Ms. Kroeker-Maus

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493)

Letter dated 5 July 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2022/540)

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The meeting resumed at 3.05 p.m.

The President: I would like to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than three minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Mr. Malovrh (Slovenia): At the outset, we would like to thank the Brazilian presidency for organizing this open debate. We also want to thank Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF, and Patrick Kumi for their insights.

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

Slovenia remains deeply concerned about the appalling and continued high numbers of grave violations and their negative trends, especially the rise in abductions. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493) reveals the scale and severity of grave violations committed against children in contexts of armed conflict in 2021. Children killed and maimed, images of schools and hospitals attacked and other blatant violations of international law have become devastating everyday realities. That is unacceptable and must stop. During these times of heightened global insecurity, we have to address the consequences that armed conflicts have for children worldwide, including most recently as a result of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Forcibly displaced and stateless children are at higher risk of being trafficked, abducted, recruited or sexually abused. We remain deeply concerned about the high level of conflict-related sexual violence frequently used as a weapon of war. The scale of this grave violation against children, both girls and boys, is often underreported and is still met with widespread impunity. Accountability for such heinous crimes against children is imperative.

As we reflect on the 25 years since the establishment of the children and armed conflict mandate, we should also recognize the robust tools we have developed to support its implementation. It is crucial to make use of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, including the listing mechanism in the Secretary-General's

annual reports on children and armed conflict, whose independence, impartiality and credibility remain crucial. Despite many efforts by the international community in the past 20 years, attacks on schools continue in many parts of the world. That impedes children's healthy development and exposes them to violations of all kinds. The Safe Schools Declaration is an important tool for protecting schools against attacks. Schools must remain safe havens for children.

The integration of child-protection measures into peace processes and the protection of their rights in those processes are vital to creating conditions for sustainable peace. Reintegration programmes are crucial. Children associated with armed groups should be treated primarily as victims of violations and not as perpetrators. If properly reintegrated into societies, children themselves can act as powerful agents for change and contribute to peacebuilding efforts. We call on all who have not yet done so to consider ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and joining the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.

Slovenia is firmly committed to promoting the rights and well-being of children, including children affected by armed conflict. Child protection has also been a long-term priority of Slovenia in the field of humanitarian aid and post-conflict assistance. We have continued to support projects implemented by the Slovenian organization ITF Enhancing Human Security in Moldova, Jordan, Lebanon, Armenia, Madagascar, Egypt and Palestine, including Gaza and the West Bank. Since 2017, our efforts have also helped to provide education for more than 41,000 Syrian refugee children in Jordan and have responded to the needs of Ukrainian refugee children in Poland and Slovenia.

We join the calls to prioritize the protection of children in armed conflict and to ensure that United Nations mechanisms are adequately financed and monitored in that respect. In view of that, we have provided additional voluntary contributions to support UNICEF programmes for children in Ukraine and the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross addressing sexual violence in Nigeria. Slovenia just recently announced its first voluntary contribution to the Trust Fund for Children and Armed Conflict.

In conclusion, violations against children require immediate and strong responses and actions on our part. And since we just celebrated Nelson Mandela

International Day yesterday, allow me to conclude by borrowing his words: "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

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

Ms. Lõuk (Estonia): We thank Brazil for convening this high-level meeting and the briefers for their presentations. We also thank Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and her Office and UNICEF, as well as all child-protection actors, for their tireless work.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

The children and armed conflict mandate, including its Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, is a unique and essential part of the Security Council's work to ensure peace and security, and it should be utilized accordingly. The significant and devastating impact of conflicts on children is clear. The number of verified grave violations last year reached nearly 24,000. Those violations destroy lives and communities, fuel conflict and have an impact on international peace and security that lasts for years.

The reasoning for the relevance of the children and armed conflict mandate is clear; action by the Council, the United Nations system and national actors must follow. That includes promoting compliance with international law and ensuring accountability for violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including through international mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court and the exercise of universal jurisdiction. It includes the incorporation and use of criteria related to children and armed conflict in sanctions regimes. It includes political, financial and operational resources for United Nations child protection activities. It includes focusing attention on the violations against children, with the urgency they deserve, in every single Security Council discussion of a country situation on its agenda. That is what Estonia aimed to do during its Security Council membership.

We welcome the steps being taken to further develop the analysis of the gender dimensions of children and armed conflict. The rise in the proportion of grave violations against girls, including sexual violence and abduction, is alarming and requires the Council's attention. We condemn the restrictions on and attacks against girls' education, including in Afghanistan.

We cannot turn back the clock on the rights of girls anywhere.

The Secretary-General has designated Ukraine as a situation of concern with immediate effect. That follows the long trail of blood left by the Russian Federation in Ukraine and the cruel and targeted attacks against civilians, including children. The pattern of the killing and maiming of children, sexual violence, denial of humanitarian access, deportations and illegal adoptions, and deliberate attacks on schools and hospitals perpetrated by the Russian Federation, are grave violations against children. We call on the Secretary-General to ensure the monitoring and reporting of violations against children in Ukraine without delay, along with the necessary child protection capacity in Ukraine. We also call on him to engage closely with Ukraine through his Special Representative.

We call for accountability for the violations perpetrated against children in Ukraine, just as we have continued to call for accountability in Syria, Iraq, Mali, Afghanistan and in other situations reflected in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493). For its part, Estonia will continue to support, including financially, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General as well as UNICEF in their daily crucial work to protect children around the world.

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

Mr. Hermann (Denmark): I deliver this statement on behalf of Norway, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country, Denmark.

Allow me, at the outset, to thank Brazil for organizing today's open debate as well as to express our particular appreciation, admiration and sincere gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter, and her Office for their important work and tireless commitment to ending the six grave violations against children in armed conflict.

We are deeply alarmed by the scale and scope of grave violations against children, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493). The Nordic countries strongly condemn all the incidents of the grave violations described in the report. Specifically, the dramatic increase in sexual violence, particularly against girls, is deeply concerning, as is the increase in abductions and attacks on schools. Those are all likely to lead to other forms of grave violations.

We call upon all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law, in order to prevent and end grave violations against children. We must prioritize the protection of the rights and well-being of all children in armed conflict.

Nearly 37 million children are displaced worldwide — the highest number ever recorded — and that shocking figure does not include the children displaced in 2022, including as a result of Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, which has placed Ukrainian children at increased risk of separation from their families, forced deportations, trafficking and sexual and gender-based violence. We call on Russia to end its violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in Ukraine, including grave violations against children.

Refugee, internally displaced and stateless children are particularly vulnerable to grave violations. The Security Council must play a more effective role in preventing displacement around the world. Governments must strengthen the protection of, and access to services for, refugee, migrant and displaced children.

The denial of humanitarian access and life-saving assistance heavily affects children, which is quite simply unacceptable. We once again call on all parties to conflict to ensure safe, rapid and unhindered access for humanitarian actors, in accordance with international humanitarian law, and to guarantee respect for humanitarian principles.

The impact of armed conflict on education presents urgent humanitarian, development and social challenges. Access to safe, quality and conflict-sensitive education can help protect children and young people from death and exploitation. For girls in particular, education also reduces the risk of child marriages and early pregnancies.

In the Sahel, for example, where 60 per cent of the population is under the age of 18, an entire generation risks being left behind. Across the region, close to 8,000 schools are closed due to violence. As a consequence, we have seen an increase in child recruitment, child marriages and early pregnancies among school-age girls. As in other contexts, education is crucial for breaking the cycle of conflict.

We call on all States to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration and resolution 2601 (2021) and to realize all children's right to education.

Crises exacerbate already existing gender inequalities. While boys are also impacted, girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, forced marriage and exploitation. As we know, the figures represent only the tip of the iceberg. We must prioritize and invest in preventive actions to combat the underlying reasons for gender inequality. Conflict-related sexual violence continues with complete impunity in many places and is used to punish, terrorize and destroy populations.

Therefore, we must increase our funding for the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, especially in conflict-affected settings. The Security Council must also consider incorporating conflict-related sexual violence as a designation criterion for targeted sanctions. We must redouble our efforts to eliminate abductions of children, not least boys, for recruitment and use by armed groups, and we must support children who are affected. Failure to do so has immediate and long-term consequences for stability and security.

To effectively reintegrate children and build lasting peace, it is crucial to fight impunity and use all the mechanisms at our disposal. All Member States working on counter-terrorism, peace and security must develop immediate and effective mitigation strategies to prevent and respond to the six grave violations against children. To address the needs of children in conflict and post-conflict settings, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund and their strategic cooperation with UNICEF are critical.

Finally, we must establish credible systems of accountability and support existing international mechanisms to prosecute perpetrators of the six grave violations against children. That entails dedicated and gender-responsive and child-specific expertise in international investigations and continued support for the International Criminal Court and other judicial mechanisms. The accountability and reintegration mechanisms must have a survivor-centred approach.

True justice involves reparations and access to gender- and age-responsive specialized services. That includes sexual and reproductive health and rights services, medical, mental health and psychosocial support services, and legal and livelihood support for

survivors of the six grave violations as well as for their families, whose trauma may endure for years.

The Nordic countries remain committed to doing our part.

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

Mr. Massari (Italy): I would like to thank Brazil for organizing this annual open debate on children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their informative briefings.

Italy aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and with the statements to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect. I would like to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

As shown by this year's report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493), all over the world children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict, suffering violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. That has been even more evident in the past few months since the unlawful and indiscriminate attacks by the Russian armed forces on homes, educational facilities and hospitals in Ukraine have made children front-line targets for widespread killing, trafficking, sexual violence, abduction and other violations. In that regard, Italy welcomes the inclusion of Ukraine as a situation of concern in the report.

In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children, regardless of their legal status, have the right to enjoy their childhood in stable and peaceful societies where they can feel safe, learn and become actors for positive change, peace and sustainable development. In these challenging times, schools and leisure facilities play a life-saving role, as they provide children with psychological and physical support as well as social protection, offering them hope for a better future. Attacks on schools and children's facilities constitute one of the six grave violations committed against children during armed conflict, seriously jeopardizing their immediate and long-term health. The fact that armed conflicts are overlapping with other ongoing crises, especially the coronavirus disease pandemic and climate change, is further

exacerbating children's vulnerability and emphasizing the importance of protecting those living in emergency situations. Furthermore, forced displacement exposes the most vulnerable to a higher risk of being recruited, abducted, trafficked, sexually exploited or subject to other harmful practices, including early and forced marriage.

If we are to break the cycle of violations affecting children, we need a systematic and coherent approach, from prevention to accountability to reintegration. That requires, first and foremost, the widest possible support for the Safe Schools Declaration, in order to mitigate the consequences of armed conflicts for education, students and educational personnel, as well as educational infrastructure. In that regard, Italy reaffirms its support for the Declaration and calls on all Member States to endorse and fully implement it.

Secondly, we also endorse the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Vancouver Principles on peacekeeping and preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers, conscious as we are of the crucial importance of integrating those principles into the wider peacekeeping agenda. Our interventions should aim to provide a child-rights-based response to the problem, bearing in mind the best interests of children in all aspects of their lives and treating children formerly recruited by armed groups primarily as victims.

Thirdly, when we see that children displaced by armed conflicts are deprived not only of their homes and families but also of a chance to learn and play, we cannot just limit ourselves to condemning these attacks. All the perpetrators of grave violations against children must be held accountable, regardless of whether they are State forces or non-State armed groups. In that regard, we reaffirm our strong support for international justice, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, including the work and the independent role of the International Criminal Court.

Lastly, exposure to the cruelties of war and the battlefield has a serious and often irreparable impact on the physical and psychological well-being of children involved in armed conflicts. We must engage in reintegration programmes and foster the crucial role of the Peacebuilding Commission, including through psychological support, education and training.

Yesterday, for all these reasons, together with Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and in

co-sponsorship with Brazil, Canada, Kenya, Qatar and Malaysia, we organized a high-level event in the margins of today's open debate on the theme "Strengthening, monitoring, reporting and response to the abduction of children", in order to present the United Nations guidance note on abduction, which we have supported and hope will offer concrete solutions to the issue of closing child-protection gaps.

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

Ms. Leendertse (Germany): Germany thanks the Brazilian presidency for convening this important debate.

We align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and the statement made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell and Patrick Kumi for sharing their valuable experiences and recommendations.

Germany is deeply concerned about the shocking number of almost 24,000 grave violations committed against children in the past year, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493). That number is all the more worrisome because we know that many more violations go unreported. We remain very concerned about the situations in Syria, Afghanistan, Mali and the broader Sahel region, Myanmar, Yemen and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also welcome the decision to include Ukraine, Ethiopia, Mozambique and the central Sahel region as new situations of concern. A timely, complete and evidence-based listing of perpetrators in all those situations of concern will further advance efforts to achieve accountability and compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and child-protection norms. Accountability must rank high on the agenda to protect children. Among other things, we call on the United Nations and all Member States to increase their efforts to protect children affected by Russia's ongoing war of aggression on Ukraine, including through specialized services, monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Germany would like to highlight four crucial points for future action. First, we are appalled by the increasing number of abductions and cases of sexual violence against children, with an increase of more

than 20 per cent in comparison to 2020. Girls in particular remain at a higher risk of being abducted and are experiencing unacceptable levels of sexual and gender-based violence. Germany will continue to push for a sufficient level of gender-sensitive financing for child-protection capacities in United Nations peace operations. We are also deeply concerned about the increasing reports of abductions of Ukrainian children by and to Russia. We call on United Nations agencies to scrutinize the reports with a view to including the results in the Secretary-General's report next year.

Secondly, the annual report shows that stateless, refugee and internally displaced children are at a higher risk of facing one or multiple grave violations. We urge continued engagement with all the relevant United Nations agencies. As the second largest contributor to both the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNICEF, Germany will continue its close cooperation on the issue with UNHCR and UNICEF.

Thirdly, we should prioritize the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces. For several years now Germany has supported the work of the non-governmental organization Watchlist on children in detention and has contributed to projects that advance the reintegration and education of former child soldiers. We call on all actors to adhere to handover protocols that give guidance for the swift transfer of children from security forces to civilian child-protection actors, including with support in the areas of mental health and psychosocial help. Providing access to safe and inclusive education, including in emergency contexts, with a particular focus on girls, refugee and internally displaced children and children with disabilities, must remain a priority for reintegration.

Lastly, we encourage the Security Council to include the perspectives of representatives of children and young people in its briefings on a regular basis. We also advocate for a stronger focus by the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund on topics related to children and armed conflict.

Promoting children's rights is a key pillar of Germany's human rights policy. We encourage all who have not yet done so to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, as well as the Paris and Vancouver Principles, and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

In conclusion, let me assure you, Mr. President, Germany will remain committed to advancing the children and armed conflict agenda in all the aspects that were mentioned today.

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

Mrs. Theofili (Greece): I would like to thank the Brazilian presidency for organizing this timely meeting.

Greece aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union and wishes to add the following additional remarks in its national capacity.

Unfortunately, the situation of children in armed conflict remains of grave concern. As of the end of 2021, the more than 36.5 million children that have been forcibly displaced face a high risk of being further victimized and subjected to sexual violence or to recruitment and use as child soldiers.

In order to address those multifaceted challenges, the international community must take action in a coordinated manner, while demonstrating solidarity and promoting burden- and responsibility-sharing among all relevant stakeholders. In that respect, improving reception conditions, as well as accelerating asylum procedures for refugee and asylum-seeking children and their families, in addition to ensuring non-refoulement, are indispensable. Unaccompanied minors require special attention in order for their protection to be guaranteed.

In that respect, all children should be registered at birth. Ensuring birth registration for every forcibly displaced child provides the basis for the recognition and protection of that child's human rights. It prevents statelessness. It is the foundation of respect for their human dignity. In that regard, host countries should strive to integrate children on the move and their families. Meaningful access to basic services such as health care and education should be a *sine qua non* element of integration strategies. At the same time, voluntary repatriation should always be facilitated in a safe, dignified and sustainable manner.

Greece places particular emphasis on the protection of children in armed conflict, through the adoption of national legislation as well as through the ratification of the relevant Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, Greece is implementing its first national action plan on the rights of the child

and a comprehensive national strategy for the protection of unaccompanied minors. The protection of conflict-affected girls is also addressed in my country's first national action plan on women and peace and security.

In addition, another national action plan on the protection of children from sexual abuse and exploitation has been announced. The Greek authorities operate both at land and sea borders with the utmost attention to the protection of human life and with full respect for persons, including children, who may be entitled to international protection.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my country's commitment to joining hands with all partners in an effort to protect the rights of conflict-affected children and build a peaceful, inclusive and resilient future world.

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

Mr. Kelapile (Botswana): I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, consisting of 55 Member States and the European Union, which this year is co-chaired by Costa Rica, Croatia and my own country, Botswana.

The Group would like to thank Brazil for organizing today's important open debate. I would also like to extend our gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Catherine Russell, and youth activist Patrick Kumi for their highly informative briefings.

As highlighted by the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/428) on the responsibility to protect, children and young people are uniquely — and often disproportionately — affected by conflict and atrocities. Today millions of children around the world face the risk of mass atrocities; their safety, protection, dignity and welfare are fundamental to the objectives of the responsibility to protect. Depending on the circumstances, the six grave violations against children during situations of armed conflict, as identified by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, may amount to either atrocity crimes themselves or an indication that an atrocity crime may have been committed.

Over the past 16 years, the United Nations has verified 266,000 cases of grave violations against

children in more than 30 conflict situations. While those cases were verified through the 2005 United Nations-led Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, the actual figures are most likely much higher, according to UNICEF.

Among the six grave violations, the abduction of children is one of the most difficult to document. Where it constitutes an atrocity crime, abduction may be punishable under the Rome Statute. Moreover, we are especially concerned by the drastic increase in child abductions and the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers, including girls. We encourage the United Nations to also further investigate allegations of cross-border abduction and child trafficking for adoption purposes.

We firmly condemn such illegal acts — wherever they occur — and welcome the recently presented guidance note on abduction made by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We hope it will contribute to the prevention of child abduction.

The Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect would like to stress the following points.

First, children and young people face distinct atrocity risks. The international community should therefore ensure that every aspect of atrocity prevention — from planning to implementation to monitoring and evaluation — is guided by the general principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Furthermore, children and young people can and should play critical roles in informing early warning and capacity-building and developing more cohesive, inclusive and resilient societies. Those roles will contribute to the prevention and resolution of conflict and peacebuilding. Ensuring the meaningful participation in conflict resolution and atrocity prevention of children and young people, including those who have experienced atrocities in the past, means recognizing the role that they can play, not just as beneficiaries of interventions but also as partners in peace.

Secondly, all perpetrators of the six grave violations against children must be held accountable. The United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and the Secretary-General's annual report and its annexes are essential for ensuring accountability and preventing further violations against children. Those tools will remain powerful only if they maintain their credibility. A single, complete evidence-based list of all those

found responsible for such violations and abuses that accurately reflects the data collected and verified by the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism should be published in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report every year.

Thirdly, it is important that all existing mechanisms for monitoring, reporting and responding to violations against children be strengthened, including the child protection capacities of United Nations peace operations and political missions and the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

We would like to encourage the Secretary-General to alert the Security Council whenever there is credible information that parties are committing any of the six grave violations against children by including such situations of concern in his annual children and armed conflict report.

Fourthly, appropriate legislative and institutional arrangements are essential for comprehensively addressing violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law against children and young people. We encourage States that have not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We also acknowledge the efforts of Member States that have endorsed the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration.

Lastly, Member States should bring to justice all who are responsible for crimes involving violations against children, including any atrocity crimes, through prompt investigations and, where appropriate, prosecutions. In that context, we encourage Member States to support the accountability measures for perpetrators listed in the annex to the Secretary-General's report, based on the findings of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

Mr. Camelli (*spoke in French*): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Andorra, Georgia, Monaco and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

First and foremost, I would like to thank Brazil for organizing today's open debate and the briefers for their poignant interventions this morning. We are appalled by the unacceptably high levels of grave violations against children, especially girls, outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493). We urge the parties to the conflict to put an end to those violations as soon as possible and for States to bring the perpetrators to justice. In that regard, we support cooperation with international justice mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court. While the EU remains committed to addressing the impact of conflict on children worldwide, we would like to highlight the five following specific situations.

First, we are horrified by the impact on children of Russia's illegal war of aggression on Ukraine. Children have been killed and maimed and schools and hospitals attacked, all in blatant violation of international law. We are alarmed by the reports of forcible deportations of children to Russia. We welcome in that regard the decision to designate Ukraine as a situation of concern with immediate effect. We call for increasing the reporting and monitoring of this without delay, in accordance with the children and armed conflict mandate, and urge the United Nations and all Member States to redouble their efforts to protect the children affected by Russia's illegal aggression. Russia must put an end to the war.

Secondly, in the light of the developments in the Tigray region and in Cabo Delgado, we also welcome the addition of Ethiopia and Mozambique as situations of concern with immediate effect.

Thirdly, the situation of children and the interlinked conflicts affecting communities in the Sahel, the Lake Chad basin region and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo are also of particular concern to us. We urge all the armed forces involved to fully comply with international humanitarian law.

Fourthly, we also call on the Myanmar Armed Forces and its security forces to bring an end to the continuing arrests of children, parents and relatives of opponents.

Fifthly, we must once again condemn the Taliban's persistent and unacceptable refusal to provide secondary education to Afghanistan's young girls and urge it to ensure equal access to education.

The EU reiterates its call for prioritizing the protection of children in armed conflict and ensuring

that the relevant United Nations mechanisms and peace operations are adequately financed and equipped to achieve that. We urge the Security Council to engage closely and regularly with the Special Representative, including on specific country situations, in order to ensure that those deliberations accord the protection of children the importance it deserves. We value the findings of the *Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate 1996-2021* and of UNICEF's report, published in June. We call on the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to develop a guidance note on monitoring, reporting, advocacy, accountability and dialogue with regard to the denial of humanitarian access for children. The EU remains committed to doing its part.

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

Mr. Kulháněk (Czech Republic): I would first like to thank the Brazilian presidency for convening today's important debate. We fully support the statements made by the observer of the European Union and on behalf of the two Groups of Friends — of Children and Armed Conflict and of the Responsibility to Protect. Although much has already been said, I would like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

Today's open debate could not be timelier, as we are currently witnessing many horrendous armed conflicts around the world in which children continue to suffer disproportionately. Wars are fought in urban areas, among civilian populations, basically blurring the lines between the battlefield and places that should not be targeted, such as homes, schools, hospitals and other critical civilian infrastructure. And it goes without saying that they have both immediate and long-term negative effects on children. When such violations against children occur, the international community must act. We must never give up on calling for increased compliance with international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law and child-protection norms. We must strive to strengthen accountability for all serious violations committed against children.

The Czech Republic, along with several other countries, has joined a statement condemning Russia's illegal actions against the children of Ukraine. Its unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine grossly violates the rules of international law. It inflicts severe physical and emotional suffering on the Ukrainian population, including children. Russia's illegal and forced displacement of Ukrainian children

from their home country, with those displaced being orphans, children deprived of parental care and children whose parents have died as a result of Russia's war against Ukraine, is a flagrant and cynical violation of the rights and freedoms of children. More than 182,000 children have already been forcibly displaced from Ukraine to Russia. There is now an abundance of alarming evidence of inhumane acts perpetrated by Russian troops, including sexual violence against children, which we deplore in the strongest possible terms.

We call on the international community to make every possible effort to stop Russia's illegal actions as an aggressor State, hold it to account for its deliberate and unconscionable actions and protect the rights of children forcibly displaced from Ukraine.

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

Mr. Lagatie (Belgium): At the outset, I would like to thank Brazil for organizing today's open debate. I would also like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter, Ms. Russell and Mr. Kumi for their work, both here in New York and on the ground.

While we have come far in the past 25 years, the report presented today (S/2022/493) shows that ending the thousands of documented violations of children's rights in conflict requires a clear focus and attention on the part of all of us. Conflicts are increasingly prolonged and fought in urban areas, blurring the lines between battlefields and critical civilian infrastructure, which is often deliberately attacked, with immediate and long-term negative consequences for children's survival and well-being. The children and armed conflict mandate has achieved important progress in the protection of children over the past 25 years. It has proved that it has sufficient instruments at its disposal, and they have made an existential difference in so many young lives. Belgium therefore confirms its unwavering support to the mandate, including the integrity and impartiality of its listing mechanism.

We would like to make the following remarks on the occasion of the publication of the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict.

First, the report's accurate reflection of the worsening situation for children, especially in Ukraine, is a timely and important signal that illustrates the dramatic impact of hostilities on children in Ukraine,

Ethiopia, Mozambique and the central Sahel region. We are particularly worried about the increasing number of acts of sexual violence committed against girls.

Secondly, Belgium supports a rigorous, objective and transparent process to ensure that parties are listed and delisted consistently across all country situations. Holding the perpetrators of such violations accountable increases the costs of non-compliance with international law, deters future violations and better protects children.

Accountability is essential for protecting children in war and ending grave violations. The listing and delisting of perpetrators in the Secretary-General's annual report remains a unique and powerful tool for promoting compliance with international law. It is therefore extremely worrisome that the perpetrators could not be identified for 15 per cent of those violations, making subsequent accountability extremely challenging.

Thirdly, the children and armed conflict mandate does not operate in a vacuum but in a broader framework of standards and norms that provide specific protection to children. That framework, which we must all uphold by defending it rigorously and committing to its obligations, includes the Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most-ratified human rights instrument in the world.

Fourthly and finally, Belgium continues its call for an increased child-protection capacity in United Nations peace operations and political missions, including through financial, political and operational support to fully deliver on child protection mandates.

Let me conclude by thanking the Secretary-General profoundly for the presentation of his annual report on children and armed conflict, as well as Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter for all her work on the protection of children in an increasingly complex context of war. The numbers in the report are again very sobering. The violations are still horrific, and the task of preventing them remains vast. Yet the challenge is always in the moment, and the moment is now.

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

Mr. Szczerski (Poland): I would like to thank Brazil for convening this debate and all of the briefers for their

remarks. I would also like to reaffirm Poland's strong support for the Special Representative's mandate and thank her for all her efforts to put an end to violations and abuses against children.

Poland remains firmly committed to protecting children in armed conflict. We strongly condemn all violations and abuses against children. Parties to conflict should cease violations against children and show compliance with international humanitarian law, international human rights law, international refugee law and international child protection norms. For millions of children around the globe, living in a conflict-affected area is tantamount to being deprived of one's childhood and basic human rights, including the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and to education, which we recently discussed with Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter in a conference at the Polish Mission.

Given the return of war to European soil caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, as well as other ongoing crises described in the Secretary-General's annual report for 2021(S/2022/493), we must continue to scale up our efforts. The Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine reports that nearly 1,000 children have suffered as a result of massive Russian military strikes. Just this past week, Russian missiles that struck the city of Vinnytsia killed at least 23 people, including three children. Across the country, hundreds of schools have been destroyed by Russian shelling and air strikes. We therefore welcome the decision to include Ukraine as a situation of concern in the next report and call for additional reporting and monitoring in accordance with the children and armed conflict mandate, without further delay.

We would like to turn the Security Council's attention to the thousands of Ukrainian children transferred to Russia against their will. Such actions constitute a violation of both the Genocide Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The international community should do everything in its power to hold the perpetrators accountable and protect Ukrainian children's right to identity, including their nationality.

We are also deeply disturbed by the tragic situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. The Taliban's leaders have not only failed to keep their promises — as they are blocking girls' access to second-level education — but also openly stated that they have shut schools indefinitely. The Taliban is stripping

away the rights that women have fought for over the past two decades. We in the international community have not done enough to make the Taliban abide by its obligations.

We underline the importance of mainstreaming children's rights in the areas of early warning, conflict analysis, the peaceful settlement of disputes, transitional justice and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. The most constructive way to empower young people and ensure that they are not radicalized is to invest in high-quality education.

We strongly condemn attacks against students, teachers and schools, as well as the use of schools for military purposes. Appropriate and timely reintegration support is crucial for the future of children who were formerly associated with armed groups. Poland is proud to be a member of the Steering Committee for the Global Coalition for Reintegration, as well as the Group of Friends of Reintegration, and we are eager to further engage in the activities of those forums.

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

Mr. Košuth (Slovakia): Slovakia aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity of observer, and with the statements made on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect. I would like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

We commend Brazil for convening today's very timely open debate and thank today's briefers, including Mr. Kumi, for their powerful presentations. We also highly appreciate the important role that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF play in child protection and the promotion of children's rights.

Despite a slight decrease in the number of grave violations against children as compared to 2020, the figures and trends in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493) remain very alarming. The ongoing killing and maiming of children, as well as their recruitment and use as soldiers, the denial of humanitarian access to them and the continued dramatic increases in abductions, sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals, are extremely concerning. Even more sadly, the figures in the report are by far not comprehensive, given the absence of data from Ethiopia, Mozambique and Ukraine.

As a neighbouring country directly affected by the situation in Ukraine, Slovakia welcomes its designation as a situation of concern with immediate effect and its inclusion in the next report of the Secretary-General. Russia's brutal aggression has officially led to hundreds of children being killed and injured, hundreds of schools and hospitals destroyed or damaged and two thirds of Ukraine's children forced to flee their homes — and all of them adversely affected. And we know that the real figures are much higher.

We cannot overlook those facts at today's open debate, since we once again witnessed Russia's attempts to divert attention from its atrocious violations of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. It is crucial to recall that it is Russia that bears full responsibility for this child crisis. Had it not been for its illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine, none of this would be happening.

We therefore once again call on Russia to cease all its military activities in Ukraine and immediately and unconditionally withdraw all its troops and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. Slovakia does its utmost to ensure the well-being of almost 173,000 child refugees who have crossed our borders so far and to protect their rights, in particular their right to education, and we will continue to do so.

Slovakia fully endorses the recommendations outlined in the Secretary-General's report and would like to complement them with a call for action in three particular areas: the adoption of a robust legal framework, full compliance with obligations under international law and effective accountability for violations.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration are all key instruments that have been adopted at the international level. Slovakia has ratified, endorsed and implemented all of them. We call on those States that have not yet done so to take that action as a matter of priority. Moreover, in order to further strengthen the legal framework and fill the gap in international criminal law, we urge States to finally make meaningful progress towards establishing a new convention on crimes against humanity this year.

At the domestic level, it is crucial to ensure the criminalization of grave violations, the adoption of

effective national frameworks for reintegration and assistance to child victims, and proper cooperation with international and regional accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court. However, even these robust frameworks will not bring an end to children's suffering without full compliance and effective accountability for violations. We therefore reiterate our strong call to all the parties to any armed conflict to fully respect international humanitarian law, human rights law and international refugee law. Wherever there are violations, accountability must be ensured and the perpetrators brought to justice.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I want to assure you that Slovakia, in its capacity as Vice-President of the Executive Board of UNICEF and currently serving as its interim President, will spare no effort to help save children's lives in conflicts across the globe, protect their rights and enable them to fulfil their potential, despite their dire circumstances.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Mr. Fepuleai (New Zealand): New Zealand would like to thank Brazil for organizing today's important open debate. We also want to express our gratitude to Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF, and Mr. Patrick Kumi, Executive Director of Similar Ground, for their highly informative briefings.

It has been 26 years since the release of the Graça Machel report (A/51/306), which drew global attention to the devastating impact of armed conflict on children. The Secretary-General's latest report on children in armed conflict (S/2022/493) makes it clear that children and young people are uniquely and often disproportionately affected by conflicts and atrocities. New Zealand thanks and commends the Secretary-General and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict for their tireless work and advocacy. We are all horrified by the way children are used, abused and manipulated, with their lives upended and their futures destroyed. The Secretary-General's report is harrowing reading. We would like to highlight a few issues that demand urgent attention.

Both schools and hospitals have special protections as civilian objects under international humanitarian law. Yet in its latest report, the United Nations verified

116 attacks on schools and hospitals. New Zealand has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, as have 113 other Member States, and we urge others to do the same. In 2016, at the initiative of New Zealand and four other elected Security Council members, the Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016), on health care in armed conflict, which unequivocally condemned attacks on health-care workers and facilities. That resolution has a very simple message, which is that the wounded and sick, medical personnel, facilities, transport and equipment must be respected and protected. The delivery of medical assistance must not be obstructed. Yet attacks on hospitals have continued, with children frequently among the casualties. Russia's illegal and unprovoked attack on Ukraine has seen further egregious examples. Those attacks are an affront to our common humanity and must stop.

Girls in situations of armed conflict face unique risks. In 2021, almost one in three child victims of grave violations were girls, a sharp increase from 2020. In total, 98 per cent of sexual violence was perpetrated against girls, while 30 per cent of abductions affected girls, another significant increase from 2020. Sadly, we know that those numbers are just the tip of the iceberg and that the true numbers are far greater. New Zealand will continue to advocate strongly for the rights of children, especially girls, to be protected in armed conflict.

Finally, we note that climate change is driving conflict through competition for scarce resources. It is inevitable that this will have negative consequences for children. Climate change is the most pressing issue for our region, the Pacific, and we remain deeply concerned about the effects it is already having on children. Adding conflict to that mix is not a welcome development. We commend the Special Representative and the Secretary-General for committing to further investigate the links between climate change and conflict and their impacts on children.

In conclusion, let me reiterate New Zealand's full support for the work of the Special Representative and her Office, the rigour and integrity of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and the Secretary-General's comprehensive reporting and recommendations. We urge all Member States to continue to support their vital work and to help them translate the global consensus on the need to protect the rights of children in conflict settings into a much better reality than the one we see today.

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

Mr. Alateek (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Brazil's presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. We support your tireless efforts at the helm of the Council and wish you every success.

The protection of children in armed conflict is a vital issue if we wish to create balanced generations that can build a more stable and prosperous future for conflict-affected countries. The international community should approach the issue of children in armed conflict very carefully by working to create a new reality for such children that includes breaking the cycles of violence, addressing its negative effects on children and dealing with related problems that have the potential to create an environment that fosters extremism and violence. In that regard, I would like to highlight the following points.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia believes that the protection of children in armed conflicts worldwide is the shared responsibility of the entire international community. Upholding it requires a collective response and concerted efforts to address the consequences and causes of armed conflict. My country has joined many international frameworks in that regard. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493), and in particular the section related to the coalition's cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, despite our reservations regarding the number of incidents that have been attributed to the coalition. The report underscores the coalition's commitment to supporting legitimacy in Yemen and the protection of children. We also support the continuing important measures being taken to enhance child protection in the conflict in Yemen, based on the relevant international terms of reference. The coalition is in fact a model for other international coalitions when it comes to protecting children in armed conflict.

In that regard, we reaffirm our support for the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, as well as her positive role in protecting children at the international level. We hope that her constructive cooperation with the coalition will continue with a view to developing protection mechanisms for children related to armed conflict in Yemen. The report showed an increase from

the previous year in the number of violations against children committed by the Houthi militias, including recruitment, killings, maiming and abductions. The Houthi militias continue to perpetrate the most atrocious crimes against children in Yemen. They violate children's rights, including by herding them into stadiums and buildings with the aim of influencing their ideas in order to incite them to commit terrorism and spread extremism and to prepare them to be sent to fight on the front lines.

We would like to stress here that all current and future references in the reports related to the Houthi militias should be followed up by the Houthis with genuine implementation, commitment and positive efforts on the ground regarding Yemeni children. So far all the evidence has repeatedly shown that the Houthis are not serious about this and have persistently violated all agreements.

In conclusion, Saudi Arabia underscores the importance of strengthening international cooperation in addressing and responding to the suffering of children in armed conflict. We very much hope to see more children back in the classroom, which is where they really should be.

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

Mr. Chindawongse (Thailand): I would like to thank Brazil for organizing today's important open debate. My appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General for his annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493) and to all the briefers for their valuable contributions.

Children always deserve better, whether in times of peace or in times of armed conflict. It is in that strong belief that I wish to underscore the following three points.

First, Thailand supports the call by the Secretary-General for all parties to conflict to adhere to international law and principles in order to protect children and ensure their rights. That should cover access to education, health care, social services and safe spaces, which are especially important during a global pandemic that has aggravated the vulnerabilities of children, including those in armed conflict situations.

Thailand also supports the continued efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to engage with concerned

States and parties to protect children from harm and exploitation. Children should not be made part of conflict. In that regard, we welcome the release of more than 12,000 children by armed groups and armed forces last year, which is a testament to the value of a constructive approach that produces concrete outcomes.

Secondly, we must continue to mainstream child protection across the peace continuum, including in peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts to achieve a sustainable peace. Their security is an important part of human security. To mainstream child protection, Thailand encourages greater consultations among the Security Council, host countries, troop- and police-contributing countries and other stakeholders on the need to have a clear mandate on child protection in all relevant United Nations peacekeeping operations.

That mandate must be accompanied by adequate and timely resources as well as enhanced capabilities at United Nations Headquarters and missions. In addition, Thailand supports greater interaction between the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission to identify ways to effectively address the needs of children in armed conflict and post-conflict situations and to promote synergies in those efforts. That should include contributions by peacekeepers as early peacebuilders.

That leads me to my third and final point: enhancing multi-stakeholder partnerships in finding pathways towards sustaining peace, which is also in line with Thailand's long-standing humanitarian tradition. For our part, Thailand has been working closely with all partners in reducing the statelessness of children concerned to enable their eventual reintegration into their societies. Thailand stands ready to share our best practices in that regard, as well as our home-grown development approaches, which could contribute to the efforts to address conflicts at their root cause and in turn make peace more sustainable.

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

Mr. Lam Padilla (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Guatemala would like to thank Brazil for convening today's open debate to discuss the theme of children and armed conflict, as children are the world's most affected and vulnerable segment of society. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary General for her briefing, as well as Ms. Catherine Russell for UNICEF's contribution to providing vital humanitarian

supplies and essential services to vulnerable children and families.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2022/493) and express our concern about the continued reports of killings and maiming of children, as well as the recruitment and use of children as soldiers. Millions of children around the world have been forcibly displaced owing to armed conflict. Many of them become stateless — migrants and refugees — and like internally displaced persons, they are at greater risk of being subjected to trafficking or sexual exploitation and experiencing physical or psychological trauma and they lack access to medical care and services to meet their needs. In addition, it is urgent that unimpeded and unhindered humanitarian access to them be granted.

Four months and 23 days have passed since the start of the Russian Federation's illegal, unjustified and unprovoked invasion of the sovereign territory of Ukraine, during which time it has indiscriminately shelled areas, destroyed critical infrastructure and killed civilians, including women and — of most relevance to today's debate — children.

The proliferation of small arms in conflicts has devastating effects on the lives of children and contributes to a lack of protection before, during and after armed conflicts. Because small arms are light and easy to handle, children can operate and repair them with little training. As a result, those weapons facilitate the use and targeting of children in war, contributing to an environment in which they are the victims of human rights violations, forced displacement, psychosocial trauma and other grave abuses. Those weapons have claimed more lives than they have ever saved.

It is therefore important for States to ratify international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, as well as the Arms Trade Treaty, and to ensure the effective implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

Guatemala greatly values the role of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and the benefits disbursed by its Peacebuilding Fund. The PBC plays its role by achieving positive outcomes among its different country configurations, in particular by supporting capacity-building for adequate demobilization, disarmament and reintegration at the community

level, while taking into account specific needs and the impacts on affected children. We believe that we need to strengthen the inherent space for the PBC and its crucial contributions to the consideration of draft resolutions of the Council. We must also take into account the mandates of the Office of the Special Representative and related partners in the context of the PBC's unique platform for peacebuilding in post-conflict States in order to lay the foundation for future generations to enjoy the dividends of peace.

We recognize the valuable work of the Council in seeking the protection of children in armed conflict and respect for and compliance with international norms. We urge all States to continue fulfilling that commitment.

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

Mr. Fifield (Australia): Australia thanks Brazil for convening today's important debate, which coincides with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. We would like to thank the Special Representative, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, for her leadership and dedication to children affected by armed conflict around the world. We also thank her team for producing the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2022/493).

In the past 25 years, more than 170,000 children have been freed from armed forces and groups and reintegrated into society — thank goodness. That has been achieved with the help of child protection advisers, joint and national action plans and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration — all guided by the United Nations children and armed conflict efforts. That demonstrates the critical role of the children and armed conflict mandate, which continues to have Australia's full support.

Sadly, despite that success, conflict continues to take a devastating toll on children each and every day. The Secretary-General's report details 23,982 — let me say that again, 23,982 — grave violations committed against children in the past year alone, especially the violations of killing and maiming, recruitment and use, and denial of humanitarian access.

The well-being of children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Syria and Yemen continues to be of great concern. We encourage the signing and implementation of joint and national action plans with the United Nations to end and prevent grave

violations in those countries. We must also highlight the plight of children in other conflict situations, such as in Myanmar, where an accurate picture of the extent of violations against children is sadly difficult to obtain.

However, I must say that the inclusion of Ukraine, Ethiopia and Mozambique as new situations of concern for the next report is a sobering reminder that the rights of children across the world need our active attention and protection more than ever.

Australia is particularly concerned by the increase in grave violations against girls, who, in addition to becoming casualties of conflict, are disproportionately subjected to abduction and sexual violence, and such incidents are vastly underreported. Conflict also displaces children from their homes and disrupts their education, development and well-being.

It is our shared responsibility to prevent further harm to and the exploitation of children in conflicts. All parties to conflict must comply with international obligations and commitments to protect children, including international, humanitarian and human rights law. All parties must take action to protect children in accordance with the principles of precaution, distinction and proportionality. We must prioritize gender- and age-responsive interventions with the interests of the child at the centre.

Australia supports increased child-protection capacity in United Nations peace operations and special political missions and increased support for the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism to inform response and prevention efforts.

As an international community, we must do more to end grave violations against children and to shield current and future generations of children from the impact of armed conflict. In doing so we strengthen the foundations for a sustainable peace.

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

Mr. Bae (Republic of Korea): I thank you, Mr. President, for having convened today's open debate.

I would first like to express my delegation's support for Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and her Office.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the children and armed conflict mandate, and while we can point to some notable accomplishments, the sustained

high numbers of violations, including the killing, maiming and abduction of children and the recruitment of child soldiers, is very alarming.

Despite the efforts of the Special Representative's Office and country task forces, which allowed for the release of more than 12,000 children from armed groups and forces last year, it is our belief that we can do much more to protect children in armed conflict. Against that troubling backdrop, I would like to make the following points.

First, we call for all parties to conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. In addition, ensuring accountability and ending impunity for violations against children is crucial. To facilitate that process, we urge Member States to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to consider endorsing and implementing measures for child protection. It is imperative that all parties release all abducted children in their custody immediately and unconditionally.

Secondly, safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access as well as access by children to services and protection must be ensured. The lives of children depend on such measures. In addition, schools, hospitals and their personnel must be protected at all times. Attacking such facilities aggravates the difficult situation of children, which has been impacted by the coronavirus disease and conflict.

Thirdly, my delegation reiterates the significant role played by the United Nations, including peacekeeping operations and UNICEF, in child protection. We strongly support United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions in their efforts to facilitate a protective environment for children affected by armed conflict.

My Government has been working with UNICEF for education, reintegration and assistance programmes for girls and boys in many fragile regions of the world, including Afghanistan, and we assert our willingness to continue that cooperation.

The Republic of Korea reaffirms its commitment to working with the United Nations as well as all Member States with a view to better protecting children from the scourge of armed conflict.

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

Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to welcome Ambassador Fernando Simas, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil, and to thank him for presiding over this important meeting on the situation of children in armed conflict and protecting them from all forms of grave violations. I should also like to thank all briefers for their comprehensive presentations.

The Government of the Sudan stresses its ongoing endeavours to protect and promote children's rights, especially those in areas affected by armed conflict. My Government continues its efforts to reintegrate the armed movements and groups signatories to the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement into the road map on protecting children from violations, in line with the implementation of the joint plan between the Government of the Sudan and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, signed in 2016. In order to achieve those endeavours and efforts, the Government has established a number of structures to prevent such violations, as follows: the reconfiguration of the high-level Sovereign Council, presided over by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Social Development; the membership of the Ministry of Defence; the Secretariat General of the National Council for Child Care and other relevant ministries, as well as partners of peace signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement and the UNICEF Executive Director in the Sudan.

The establishment of a number of technical committees that provide training and capacity-building for the child-protection units and mechanisms affiliated with the armed forces reflects the positive steps taken and the tireless efforts made to provide protection and promotion for children's rights in conflict-affected areas and prevent any grave violations against them.

Turning to legal protection, the law provides for mechanisms to protect children survivors of violence and sexual abuse. Units for the protection of families and children were established, as well as children's prosecutors and courts. The National Council for Child Care has formed a special prosecution unit to combat violence against children and has taken measures to protect children from sexual violence.

With respect to the segment on the Sudan in the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/493), dated 23 June

2022, I would like to reiterate that the Government of the Sudan is fully committed to promoting and protecting children's rights and preventing any grave violations against them in areas of armed conflict. We stress the implementation of the 2016 national plan to protect children. I would also like to refer to our efforts to revitalize and reactivate the plan to prevent any grave violations against children, which led to the delisting of the Sudan from the 2018 list of child violations.

In that vein, my Government would request a more meticulous approach and greater objectivity in that type of report, free of any generalizations or inaccurate information, with a focus on supporting the Government's efforts to prevent and stop any intercommunal conflicts that could lead to such violations against children. There is a need to assist the Government to dispose of any explosive remnants of war, which are the main cause of the death and maiming of children. The Government should also be supported in its negotiations with other armed movements non-signatories to the October 2020 Juba Peace Agreement, so that we can ensure the protection of children in the context of peacekeeping operations.

To conclude, the Government of the Sudan encourages and welcomes the field visits by Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and her team. We stress our continued cooperation and coordination on all matters related to child protection and the prevention of any forms of grave violations against them.

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

Ms. Bassols Delgado (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish at the outset to thank Brazil for having convened this open debate and the Secretary-General for his report (S/20220/493), which has served as a basis for our discussions. I also wish to thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and her entire Office for the tireless work that they do on all aspects of the children and armed conflict agenda.

Spain aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

In the past 10 years, it has become progressively more difficult to access children to protect them. Today this access is more difficult than ever. The Secretary-General himself acknowledges in his report that this cannot go on. The international community as a whole must — we must all — work urgently and

in a coordinated manner to ensure safe, rapid and uninterrupted humanitarian access to children.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has unleashed very real and very negative consequences that have affected millions of children around the world. Their access to safe education has been hampered; essential protection, vaccination, nutrition and food services have been disrupted; and the risks of violations of their rights have increased, including the six grave violations documented in the report of the Secretary-General.

Allow me to share a few brief reflections related to three areas that directly affect children in conflict situations. First, with regard to education, of particular concern is the fact that 50 per cent of refugee and displaced girls who were forced to leave schools during the pandemic or who are forced to leave schools in conflict situations, will never return to school. Many of these girls face, inter alia, early marriage and pregnancy, trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence.

Access to safe education is the best way to ensure the protection and future opportunities of children in complex emergencies and situations of armed conflict. Spain has signed the Safe Schools Declaration and its guidelines. Following the holding of the third and fourth Safe Schools Conferences, in Spain and Nigeria, respectively, we convene an annual virtual seminar on the implementation of the Declaration, which is open to the States that have subscribed to it.

Resolution 2601 (2021) was an important step forward in this area. Let us not forget that. I would like to take this opportunity to invite all States that have not yet done so to sign the Declaration, but I would especially like to invite all Member States that sponsored resolution 2601 (2021) but have not yet signed it to do so.

To those countries that, like Spain, have signed the Declaration, I would like to convey our support for working together on its implementation. We hope and wish that the Transforming Education summit that the Secretary-General has convened for 19 September will be instrumental in strengthening the humanitarian protection of schools, children and teachers at the highest level.

Secondly, with respect to health, the protection of children's health is a basic right, and attacks against their health are a very serious violation committed against children. Spain calls on all parties to armed

conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and with the substance of resolution 2286 (2016).

Finally, in relation to the protection of victims, it is essential that peace operations improve and expand the mandates for the protection of children. The Security Council and its members have the opportunity to enhance protection mandates, including by appointing protection advisors and expert teams. Council members can count on Spain's support for this essential work. Spain welcomes action plans and dialogue with State and non-State actors to prevent and reduce grave violations.

The report of the Secretary-General clearly indicates that parties to armed conflicts must commit to handing over child soldiers and prisoners to associations in charge of their protection. For Spain, the protection and redress of victims' rights is fundamental. We recently made a voluntary contribution of €150,000 to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to enable it to strengthen the mechanisms for reintegrating child soldiers, guarantee their rights and ensure their participation in the design of reintegration plans and programmes.

With this contribution, Spain also wishes to convey its commitment to the mandate of the Special Representative and especially to the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, which is a mechanism that allows for investigating facts and documenting grave violations against children with independence, impartiality and credibility. It should be a model and an example for future United Nations mechanisms investigating violations of international humanitarian law. That is why Spain considers it essential that the results of this Mechanism be adequately reflected in the annual reports. It is one of the best instruments available to the Secretary-General to enforce international law, influence the conduct of parties to conflict, including non-State actors, protect children and prevent the six grave violations against them.

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

Mr. Erdan (Israel): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's important annual meeting. Of course, I thank the Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter for her briefing, as well as the other briefers for their remarks.

Keeping civilians safe, starting first and foremost with our children, in both peacetime and war, is a matter of utmost importance. The protection of

life — even more so, the protection of a child's life — is a fundamental aspect of Israel's ethos. Child-protection and prevention policies are one of the most integral parts of our soldiers' training, and this training is translated into practice on the battlefield, at times when Israel is forced to defend its citizens, including children, against those who seek our destruction.

One of the central challenges faced by Israel is combating terror. Whether it is Iran's terror proxy Hizbullah to our north, Hamas to our south or Palestinian incitement and terrorism from Judea and Samaria, what they share is the relentless drive to violently murder Israelis. Israeli children are the targets of Palestinian terror. They are struck with rocks and firebombs while on car rides or on hikes. They are maimed by rockets while running to nearby shelters. They are hit by machine gun fire while walking down the street.

Israeli children are not just legitimate targets of Palestinian terror; they are primary targets. But it goes deeper than that. Israel uses missile-defence systems to protect our children, yet those who seek our destruction use their children to protect their missiles. While Hamas fires rockets at Israeli schools, it uses Gazan schools as rocket launchpads and cover for terror tunnels. They use their own children as human shields.

Targeting kindergartens, playgrounds and private homes is a war crime. Doing so while hiding behind civilians is a double war crime. This cannot be tolerated.

Beyond purposely using Palestinian and Lebanese civilians as human shields, these terrorists also deliberately and actively recruit and train minors to commit heinous terrorist attacks. My children, along with the children of many others in this Chamber, are now at summer camp. Yet while our children are playing sports, Hamas is teaching children in Gaza how to assemble assault rifles.

But for Palestinian children, summertime is not the only time that they are taught to commit jihad. The Palestinian leadership continues to espouse hate in both textbooks and across social media. From glorifying terrorists to inciting violence against Jews, the minds of young Palestinians are being poisoned.

With all of that being said, I will now make one thing abundantly clear: this phenomenon is not a one-off event. Using children as human shields and recruiting them as terrorists and fighters is a central part of the Palestinian terror and radical Islam's modus

operandi. Hamas, Hizbullah and other groups like them want to drive up Palestinian and Lebanese casualties. Do participants know why? It is in order to delegitimize Israel's basic right to defend itself from their terror. For those terrorists, children are simply another tool to be disposed of in their mission to annihilate Israel. Horrifyingly for them, a win is when they can drive up the body count of civilians and then brazenly campaign, primarily here at the United Nations and in the media, to convince the world to blame Israel — all in order to cripple Israel's right of self-defence.

Sadly, this report (S/2022/493) adds fuel to the terrorist fire by counting civilian casualties almost completely divorced from their context. Israel, a law-abiding, democratic State, does everything in its power to protect all civilians. Yet terror groups, which openly violate international law, purposely drive up civilian casualty rates, including among their own children, all while pointing the finger of blame at Israel. Any comparison between murderous terror groups and a democratic State committed to the rule of law has no place in the Security Council or anywhere else.

Israel agrees that everyone in this Chamber has a duty to protect children in times of peace and in times of war. We commend the efforts of Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and her team to protect children across the globe. However, we must be careful never to draw conclusions based on numbers alone. Those who are fully responsible for civilian casualties must be held fully accountable. The Security Council must place the full blame where it belongs — on the shoulders of Hamas, on the shoulders of Hizbullah and on the shoulders of radical Islam. There has been enough playing into the hands of terrorists. The lives of children are too precious for that.

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

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Brazil for convening this important meeting. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the report on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493).

For 20 years, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict has been guiding the efforts of Member States to ensure the rights of children to special protection, as well as their right to education in conditions of peace and security. However, the number of attacks on schools is rising. Refugee, internally

displaced and stateless children affected by violent conflicts are often denied of their rights, even to go to school.

The situation faced by children in Ukraine since the Russian invasion is particularly worrisome. Japan made a contribution of \$14.2 million to UNICEF in March and an additional \$10 million in April to ensure child protection and education for children affected by the war.

Lost educational opportunities will have lasting negative impacts on future generations and on the future of every nation. We must not forget that education needs to be maintained at all costs, even during conflict and other dire situations, as education can be a life-saving intervention and can provide hope for the future. In that regard, it was a privilege for me to sign a note with UNICEF last week to provide approximately \$9 million to support quality education and promote access to education in Burkina Faso. The international community needs to continue to do more to protect and empower our children and our future.

I would like to emphasize that, in an age of uncertainty and complexity, the best way forward is to invest in people. Providing quality education is a powerful tool to prevent and mitigate conflicts and crises and to promote peace and sustainable development. I am expecting that today's open debate will feed into our ongoing discussions and generate further momentum towards the Summit on Transforming Education in September.

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

Mrs. Vives Balmaña (Andorra) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank Brazil, in its capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of July, for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict, and for the attention that the Council is giving to this topic. I thank the briefers — Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Ms. Catherine Russell and Mr. Patrick Kumi — for their contributions.

Andorra associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict and with that of the European Union.

Although we learned of some progress this morning, at the national level we are very concerned about the serious situation that persists. The Secretary-

General's 2021 report (S/2022/493), whose data is fully verified, shows an increase in the most serious violations. To simply give some figures, the number of abductions of, and cases of sexual violence against, children have increased by more than 20 per cent and attacks on schools and hospitals by 5 per cent.

We take this opportunity to call on all parties involved in armed conflicts to respect international humanitarian law, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration in order to protect children from the most serious violations, while paying particular attention to girls, children with disabilities and displaced children.

My country has always been committed to the protection of children's rights, with a specific focus on education as an essential element of every person's development. Resolution 2601 (2021) clearly set out that framework. In September, the Summit on Transforming Education will open new spaces its implementation: children cannot be left behind; and nothing should prevent them from accessing their right to education, even more so in times of crisis.

I would like to mention Andorra's actions regarding the protection of refugees, refugees, children from Ukraine, who have been educated since their arrival, integrated into extracurricular activities and received psychological and mental health care.

We need to put children back at the centre of our discussions, our decisions and our policies. All children are children, and they must be treated as victims in conflicts, not as the ones responsible for adult decisions. We need to raise our voices to make their reintegration a priority to help to create the necessary settings and mechanisms.

The most serious violations against children in armed conflict involve perpetrators who must be held accountable for their actions. In those extreme situations, where children are at their most vulnerable, their abuse cannot go unpunished.

We would like to especially commend the efforts of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on the work done in recent years for children and their reintegration and for its holistic approach in taking into account the conditions that affect children, particularly the work done alongside UNICEF. It is essential to end violations of children's rights in armed conflict. How

the verification and negotiation work is immense and needs strong support.

We are aware of the difficult conditions in which the children and armed conflict team operates. I would like to congratulate it and all the actors on the ground for their tireless dedication.

This year, we are celebrating 25 years since the establishment of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. On that anniversary, Andorra was honoured to host the visit by Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter for the first time.

Andorra supports the work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. We are committed to it with the same dedication. We encourage the Security Council in its initiatives and actions for the lives of children.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Sabbagh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank you, Mr. President, for holding this important meeting.

I would like to add the following brief remarks. First, my delegation stresses that Syria's national legislation has been framed by the principle of the protection of children under the provisions of our Constitution. The Syrian Government's national plan on the protection of children is based on its comprehensive understanding of the current challenges and willingness to address the consequences of the terrorist war imposed on Syria, while ensuring the security and prosperity of all Syrians.

Secondly, in line with its commitments to upholding international human rights law, over the past 10 years the Syrian State has adopted a number of laws and legislation on child protection and child care. In 2013, a law that includes an amendment to the penal code was adopted to criminalize child recruitment and children's participation in combat. We also adopted a national plan to address the issue of victims of child recruitment. Last year, we adopted a law on the rights of the child to promote the role of the State and its various institutions in protecting and focusing on the welfare of children, in order to ensure their cultural, psychological and socioeconomic development and rehabilitation and create the conditions they need to contribute in every aspect of development.

Thirdly, our children have regrettably fallen victim to various countries' well-known aggression against Syria. They have suffered and continue to suffer from the unilateral measures imposed on us. Many have been subject to recruitment by terrorist organizations and separatist militias that have forcibly involved them in the scourge of war. All such actions represent grave violations of children's rights. Children under the yoke of the Israeli occupation in the occupied Arab territories in Palestine and the Syrian Golan also continue to suffer as victims of Israel's various violations.

Fourthly, the situation in north-eastern Syria in the Al-Hol camp, which is under the control of separatist militias that are proxies for the United States occupation forces, is a pertinent example of the suffering that children are enduring. Many children in the camp are at serious risk of being indoctrinated into extremist takfiri ideology, which will turn them into time bombs and pose a threat to security and stability in the region and beyond if the issue is not immediately addressed.

Addressing the problem of foreign terrorists' families, including women and children, requires genuine political commitment on the part of their countries of origin, which should guarantee the repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of every family member. My delegation calls on the countries concerned to follow the example of the successful experiences of a number of countries that have genuinely assumed their responsibilities and have repatriated their citizens in coordination with the Government of Syria, not through suspect deals with terrorist entities or separatist militias.

Fifthly and lastly, my delegation stresses the importance of dissociating the issue of promoting the protection of children around the world from all political considerations. We want to underline that effectively reintegrating all children suffering from the impact of various conflicts requires serious and organized engagement aimed at motivating them to return to school, rehabilitating schools that are affected and providing them with an environment conducive to enabling them to become a pillar of sustainable development in the post-conflict period. They must also become a major part of the foundation underlying social cohesion and sustained peace. My delegation calls on UNICEF and other relevant United Nations agencies to play an effective role in returning those children to a normal life and helping them overcome the negative effects of years of conflict.

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

Mr. Abd Aziz (Malaysia): Malaysia would like to thank Brazil for organizing this important meeting. We also want to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and the other briefers for their valuable contributions to this debate.

Malaysia is committed to promoting and safeguarding the rights and well-being of children in armed conflict, which was reflected in our initiative in introducing resolution 2225 (2015). While the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493) reports a decrease in the number of grave violations in comparison with the 2021 report (S/2021/437), the number remains alarmingly high at more than 20,000 cases. We are appalled by the spike in the cases of abduction, which have increased by more than 20 per cent compared to last year, with a 41 per cent rise in the abduction of girls. It is also alarming to note that a total of 36 parties to conflicts around the world — State and non-State actors alike — have failed to put in place measures to improve the protection of children pursuant to the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Those distressing trends demand concerted action on the part of all the parties concerned. Malaysia commends the work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and of UNICEF in publishing the guidance note on abduction in April. It will help country task forces with monitoring and reporting, as well as their equivalents in non-monitoring-and-reporting-mechanism situations and their partners in implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions. That in turn will help to strengthen monitoring, reporting and responding to the abduction of children in armed-conflict settings. In that regard, I would like to focus on three central aspects that Malaysia considers of particular importance.

First, it is crucial to develop practical guidance on data collection involving the denial of humanitarian access. Such efforts will help standardize and support the work of the country task forces on monitoring and reporting for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism.

Secondly, we echo the Secretary-General's proposal that the Security Council ensure that child-protection provisions and capacities are included in all relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping

operations and special political missions and that data and capacities related to child protection are preserved and transferred during mission transitions.

Lastly, it is important that all States become party as soon as possible to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and that they endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Malaysia reiterates the importance of a reporting mechanism that is credible, independent, impartial, objective and transparent. We regret that Israel, the occupying Power in Palestine, is not listed in the annex to the report, despite its indiscriminate killing of and violence against thousands of Palestinian children in the occupied Palestinian territory. We emphasize the need to hold Israel accountable for its apartheid crimes and grave human rights violations and support the Secretary-General's recommendation for listing Israel in annexes to future reports.

Children are society's most precious asset, as they are our future. Let us all work together to ensure that children around the world affected by armed conflict are given the enormous consideration and attention that they truly deserve.

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

Mr. Khandamishvili (Georgia): At the outset, I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Brazilian presidency for convening today's open debate on this critically important topic and to thank the briefers for their comprehensive and sobering presentations.

Georgia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union (EU) in its capacity of observer and would like to make some additional remarks in its national capacity.

As we speak, children in conflict continue to experience extreme levels of violence, killing and denial of humanitarian access. We are gravely concerned about the findings contained in the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/493) concerning the increasing numbers of those killed, maimed or recruited.

In that context, let me underline the vital importance of upholding international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the relevant international legal frameworks, such as the Convention

on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

As we gather here, Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and premeditated full-scale military aggression against Ukraine continues, causing enormous human suffering, civilian casualties and forced displacement. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as of 12 July a total of 343 children had died during Russia's military attack on Ukraine. However, the real numbers could be higher.

We condemn Russia's military aggression against Ukraine in the strongest possible terms, which is a flagrant violation of international law and represents an assault on the key principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. We reiterate Georgia's strong solidarity with the Ukrainian people and reaffirm its unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders.

Unfortunately, Russian aggression and occupation are well known to Georgia. The fundamental rights of the conflict-affected children in the Russian-occupied regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, continue to be violated by the occupying Power exercising effective control on the ground. Among the major concerns are restrictions on the freedom of movement, access to health care and social services and the prohibition of education in the native language, thereby depriving up to 5,000 children each year of the right to education in their mother tongue and other basic rights.

That pressure on ethnic Georgians living in the Russian-occupied regions of my country, coupled with other gross human rights violations and ethnic discrimination, creates the risk for another wave of displacement. Many schoolchildren and their families are forced to leave their homes and move to the territory controlled by the Government of Georgia in order to have the possibility of studying in their native language.

In that regard, let me stress that the Russian Federation, the Power exercising effective control on the ground, as clearly demonstrated by the recent ruling of the European Court of Human Rights, bears full responsibility for the violations of human rights

and fundamental freedoms in both occupied regions of Georgia.

Against that background, while we reiterate our full commitment to the protection of children's rights, we call on the international community to urge Russia to cease its provocative and destructive actions in the occupied regions of Georgia and start the fulfilment of its international obligations — first and foremost, the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement.

Children are agents for peace and change. The international community has a moral responsibility to guarantee their rights and make conflict prevention a priority. All perpetrators of violations of children's rights must be held accountable, as there can be no peace without justice.

Georgia will remain committed to upholding international law and continuing its close cooperation with the United Nations system to keep child protection a high priority, both at the national and international levels.

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

Mr. Ferreira Silva Aranda (Portugal): I would like to thank Brazil for convening today's important debate.

We welcome the reports of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493) and UNICEF on children and armed conflict. We would also like to express our particular appreciation for the tireless efforts of Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and her team. We also acknowledge the intervention by Patrick Kumi and encourage the Security Council to ensure the regular, safe and meaningful participation of children in these briefings.

Portugal aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity of observer, as well as with the statement made on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and would now like to make the following remarks in its national capacity.

This year, we celebrate both the twenty-fifth anniversary of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Under the purview of that mandate, we have created a number of robust initiatives, such as the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, the Security

Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the Secretary-General's annual reports.

Under the Optional Protocol, we have prohibited the military conscription of children and the military recruitment of children under 16. Other tools, such as the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the Safe Schools Declaration, build on the work done under the mandate and the tenets of the Optional Protocol. Portugal calls on all States to ratify and fully implement those instruments.

Nonetheless, in spite of those developments, we need to look at the shortcomings and consider how we can overcome them. The Secretary-General's most recent report provides us with a sombre picture of what happened last year, and UNICEF shows beyond a doubt that, over the past 16 years, grave violations against children have increased year over year.

That is only the tip of the iceberg. If the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict had greater capacity in human resources, the number of verified grave violations would exceed those that were reported. Situations such as those in Ukraine and Afghanistan are cause for great concern. To date, Portugal has received 351 children fleeing Afghanistan and 12,846 children fleeing Ukraine.

Portugal will continue to pay special attention to the provision of education in emergencies. That remains one of the top priorities of our humanitarian agenda. Education is critical for children in conflict settings. It is the very foundation of tolerance and peace — the cornerstone of sustainable development. Confronted with the fact that 872 schools and hospitals were attacked last year, we all must do more. We condemn all attacks on education and the military use of schools, as well as all threats to students and teachers, including military action to prevent girls from attending classes.

We call for the full implementation of resolution 2601 (2021). The international community must ensure that violations of international humanitarian law and grave violations against children do not go unpunished. Full accountability is required. We must all work together to ensure the protection, promotion and realization of the human rights of all children.

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

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Brazil for assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and organizing today's timely debate. I also take this opportunity to congratulate Albania on its successful presidency of the Council last month.

We thank the briefers and commend the leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, as well as that of UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell, and assure them of our full support.

As Vice-President of the UNICEF Executive Board for this year, I and my country, Lebanon, attach great importance to today's open debate. The report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493) paints a grim picture. The number of violations reported against children in conflict situations over the past year is terrifying. Almost 24,000 verified grave violations were committed against children in conflict situations in 2021 alone. It is heartbreaking to see that 2,500 children were killed and 5,555 were maimed in conflicts — and those are only the ones that were reported.

The UNICEF report *25 Years of Children and Armed Conflict: Taking Action to Protect Children in War* also concurs with those statistics and highlights that between 2016 and 2020, a staggering average of 71 verified grave violations against children per day were committed by parties to conflict. During the launch of the UNICEF report, Executive Director Russell observed that between 2005 and 2020, the United Nations verified more than 0.25 million violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

In Afghanistan alone, almost 33,000 children have been killed or maimed over the past 20 years, according to Save the Children. The Secretary-General's report noted that 2021 was the deadliest year on record for Palestinian children since 2014, with 78 killed and a further 982 injured by Israeli soldiers. In Syria, according to Ms. Michelle Bachelet, the Human Rights Commissioner, 27,126 children were killed between March 2011 and March 2021. Thousands of children are killed or abused every day in the more than two dozen conflicts around the world.

Girls deserve our particular attention today. As noted in the Secretary-General's report and in Ms. Gamba de Potgieter's briefing today, the number

of girls who have been killed or maimed or subjected to abduction and sexual violence has increased. In some contexts, such as Afghanistan, for example, the situation of girls is particularly dire. The denial of their basic rights, including the right to education, is unacceptable. Many girls are also being forcibly married so that the family has one less mouth to feed.

We have to admit that we have failed to protect children around the world, despite all of the conventions, legislations and action plans that are supposed to protect them — especially in conflict. We have failed not because those conventions are not well-written or lack the seriousness that the matter warrants, but because there is no will to implement them. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified treaty in history. It has been ratified by a staggering 196 countries. And while we must acknowledge that it has made a difference, it is not enough of a difference to protect children in conflict from being the first victims.

We need to find strong instruments for implementation that can transform those conventions from legal documents into living practice in every corner of the planet where there is a conflict. The conventions need teeth to be able to succeed in their mission. We need to be creative and more serious in implementing the humanitarian conventions and laws that protect children. Some people describe the United Nations annual so-called list of shame of those responsible for grave violations against children in conflict as a useful tool for preventing violations.

Those who violate the rights of children, who kill, maim or recruit children and abuse them have no shame. They cannot be shamed; they have to be held responsible and designated as child killers and abusers so that even if they run, they cannot hide from international justice. We need to deny impunity to those who violate the rights of children. We need accountability for the perpetrators and justice for all the children who have suffered at their hands.

The current status quo is not tenable anymore. Children should be made off limits to warmongers. Children need pens, not guns; warm beds, not bullets in their heads; and schools, not bombs in their playgrounds and backyards. Children need peace. That should be our absolutely top priority here at the United Nations and elsewhere around the world. The Council is where the solution starts and the problem ends. It has the power and should exercise it for the sake of the children.

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

Ms. Mocanu (Romania): Romania adds its voice to those of previous speakers in thanking Brazil for convening this open debate, but also in condemning the unprecedented levels of serious violations against children described in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493). And we appreciate the hard work done by Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and her Office.

Children are the most innocent victims in conflicts, and unfortunately we read and hear almost every day about horrific stories that affect them, whether in Africa, Latin America, Asia or even Europe. Many of the Security Council's debates and consultations deal with such stories — perhaps more often than intended — and it continues to be the Council's duty to make every effort to alleviate the horrendous tragedies that children are subjected to. Romania acknowledges and expresses its deep appreciation to all child-protection actors — those from the United Nations in particular, but also from civil society — who work to protect children and support their resilience and recovery during periods of conflict and violence, and primarily in their aftermath.

By the end of 2021, the total number of people worldwide who had been forced to flee because of conflicts, violence, fear of persecution or human rights violations had risen to nearly 90 million, according to the annual *Global Trends* report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Children accounted for 41 per cent of all forcibly displaced people. The Russian military aggression against sovereign Ukraine pushed the already growing numbers of displaced people to more than 100 million. As a neighbour of Ukraine, Romania has done its utmost to ensure protection for all Ukrainian refugee children, including those who are unaccompanied. Currently, of the total number of Ukrainian refugees entering Romania, 25 per cent are children. Ukrainian children under the protection of Romanian social services, or those living in host communities with family members or caretakers, can benefit from counselling services tailored to their specific needs, including trauma care provided by child-protection specialists.

The Romanian authorities treat the issues of abduction and trafficking in human beings as seriously and responsibly as possible. Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the inflow of refugees, our

authorities have focused close attention on such issues. We have been working and continue to work together to tackle them, including with the United Nations agencies present in the field. We are making efforts to bridge the gaps that have been identified so as to strengthen our capacity to protect children affected by war.

In line with resolution 2601 (2021) and as a supporter of the Safe Schools Declaration, the Government of Romania has taken steps to create a climate of normality in terms of facilitating access to education for refugee children fleeing the war. Ukrainian children and students are entitled to education free of charge in both Ukrainian and Romanian as a measure to ensure their integration. Teachers also received training in the provision of social and emotional support for Ukrainian children and communicating with their parents in order to facilitate integration, as well as psycho-pedagogical assistance and counselling.

Five months after Russia's unjustified and unprovoked military aggression against Ukraine began, the Romanian authorities are now focusing on a long-term approach to protecting the rights of Ukrainian refugee children. In that sense, preparations for the next school year are in place, and complementary early-education activities at kindergartens, nursery schools and day-care centres will be organized at the community level alongside already existing measures.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser (Palestine): I would like to convey the State of Palestine's congratulations on Brazil's able leadership of the Security Council this month and to thank you, Sir, for convening this important high-level debate on children and armed conflict. I also express our appreciation to the Secretary-General and Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter for the annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493) and their advocacy and efforts to protect children.

While there is hardly a child not affected by the coronavirus disease pandemic and the global food crisis, the impact has been most severe on children living in conflict, refugees and internally displaced and stateless children. The Council bears a great responsibility for safeguarding the rights of the child, protecting children and holding accountable the perpetrators of violations of children's rights.

In occupied Palestine, Palestinian children are being systematically targeted by Israel's occupation and by its military forces and settler militias. They continue to be killed and maimed, detained and imprisoned, forcibly transferred and displaced, banned from returning to their towns and villages, with millions forced to remain refugees. Palestinian children, including girls, continue to experience violent arrest raids and abduction from their bedrooms in the middle of the night, traumatized by violent military interrogations without the presence of their parents or legal counsel, as well as attacks on their schools, delays in or deprivation of their access to medical care and constant harassment, intimidation, violence and abuse by the Israeli occupying forces and settlers. Those are all in flagrant violation of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law.

Israel's targeting of Palestinian children in their homes, schools and streets in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, amounts to a structural pattern of abuse deliberately aimed at intimidating children and their families and causing trauma and insecurity to the whole of Palestinian society. The Israeli representative's remarks, claiming that we purposely expose our children to such horrors, are dehumanizing and offensive and must be rejected.

Even as the Special Representative and others stress the important role of child-protection partners on the ground, civil-society organizations in Palestine, such as Defence for Children International, are labelled terrorist organizations and banned by Israel in attempts to undermine their monitoring, reporting and advocacy, as well as to conceal the facts of Israel's gross violations of children's rights in the occupied Palestinian territory.

As indicated in the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's report, last year, among the nearly 3,000 grave violations recorded, Israel killed 78 Palestinian children, six of them during its 11-day aggression against the Gaza Strip in air strikes targeting densely populated neighbourhoods. Since the start of 2022, Israel has killed at least 16 Palestinian children in a pattern of extrajudicial and wilful killings. Such shocking and deplorable facts cannot be ignored.

In Masafer Yatta, 1,200 Palestinians are at imminent risk of forced eviction and displacement by the occupying Power. Among them, 580 Palestinian children are threatened with the loss of their homes, access to water, primary health care and schools, in grave breach of international humanitarian law,

thus representing a war crime. That scenario repeats itself over and over again in East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley. An entire nation continues to suffer dispossession, displacement and the denial of rights. As I address the Council today, no Palestinian is safe, no Palestinian child is safe.

The passage of 25 years since the adoption of the mandate on children and armed conflict has proved that listing and delisting remains the most powerful tool of accountability and an effective deterrent and guarantee of child protection. In that regard, we take note of the Secretary-General's warning that Israel is to be listed should it repeat its 2021 attacks against Palestinian children in 2022. However, we must reiterate our calls on the Secretary-General to list Israel now for the war crimes it has been methodically and constantly committing against Palestinian children year after year in order to hold Israel fully accountable for its appalling record on child rights.

We have heard today over and over again that accountability is essential for protecting children, and we call on the Security Council to stand against impunity. We urge it to pursue accountability measures without delay and to act now to ensure international protection to Palestinian civilians, in particular children, including through continued and enhanced support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its vital child-protection services and assistance to refugee children, in order to spare them more loss and suffering. International law and the Council's resolutions provide the tools for accountability and protection; we implore the Council to use them.

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

Mr. Yoseph (Ethiopia): I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your successful presidency of the Security Council for the month of July. I would also like to acknowledge the attendance of the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, His Excellency Ambassador Fernando Simas, and thank him for making time to appear in person and lead the discussion on this important agenda item. I also thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell and Mr. Patrick Kumi for their briefings this morning.

Children are the first to suffer and the primary victims of the devastating short- and long-term impacts

of any conflict. Cognizant of that gruesome fact, Member States have adopted several binding legal instruments on the protection of children in armed conflict. My country, Ethiopia, is a State 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 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In line with the prescriptions of those instruments, our laws and policies provide full protection for children based on specific and local circumstances.

In the past two years, Ethiopia has been faced with extraordinary challenges owing to the terrorist attack waged against the Ethiopian National Defense Force and the continued targeted and orchestrated attacks against civilians in various parts of the country. Humanitarian challenges have been exacerbated as a result of the extreme drought that we continue to face in some parts of the country.

The Government of Ethiopia, in parallel with its law-enforcement operations, has made concerted efforts to ensure full humanitarian protection with a special focus on children in areas affected by instability. Owing to those efforts and cooperation with international partners, we are addressing the special nutrition, protection rights and needs of children.

We have also applied a clear path for accountability for violations of rights, including those of children. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights conducted investigations and issued a joint report. Based on the accepted recommendations of that report, the Government took a series of measures to ensure accountability and redress. In both the humanitarian and human rights sectors, the United Nations has been an instrumental partner, and we have the highest regard for that partnership.

On the content of the report presented this morning, we thank Her Excellency Virginia Gamba for her efforts to be transparent in compiling the report. However, we would like to underscore that the report came out inaccurate and unbalanced despite her efforts to follow a constructive approach. Our request to be heard and to have the facts reflected went unaddressed, for no reason. We regret that approach, which will only undermine the efforts made by Member States.

In the past two years, we have been flagging to the United Nations several signs of selectivity and

partiality in the consideration of human rights issues. The use of children as fighters and human shields for the declared objective of protecting the rapacious political interests of a terrorist group is ignored. The publications by Western media of gruesome pictures of children carrying weapons glorifying their sacrifice received no condemnation. Some United Nations specialized agencies could have revealed those broad-daylight violations instead of harbouring a United Nations official who on record condoned the use of child soldiers by a terrorist group.

If the work of the Special Representative is to follow a credible and constructive path, the concerns of Member States must be respected and incorporated, and the process has to be fully transparent and consultative. I would like to underscore for the record that cooperation with Member States is critical for the effective protection of children in vulnerable situations, including conflict.

Finally, I would like to reiterate Ethiopia's commitment to the protection and well-being of children and to the fulfilment of its obligations under domestic and international law.

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

Mrs. Narváez Ojeda (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Chile thanks the Permanent Mission of Brazil for having convened this timely debate. We also thank the briefers for their important statements. Moreover, Chile endorses the statement made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Chile expresses its concern at the 23,982 grave violations against children verified by the United Nations in 2021: killings, maimings, the recruitment of children and the denial of humanitarian access were the most frequent violations recorded. Children are the ones who suffer disproportionately from the consequences of conflicts despite the fact that they have nothing to do with their causes or continuation. Consequently, protecting them and safeguarding their rights is a moral imperative for the international community.

In that light, Chile, as a signatory to the Safe Schools Declaration, reiterates the importance of protecting schools from attacks in order to guarantee the right to quality education for children, so that they can be agents of change to halt cycles of violence and in

so doing contribute to placing their communities on the path towards lasting peace.

Against that backdrop, we appeal to all parties to conflict to respect international law, including international humanitarian law, and to refrain from attacking infrastructure critical to civilians in conflict situations. We urge parties to conflict to accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and practical protection instruments, including the Paris Principles and Commitments, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles. In addition, we highlight the importance of implementing a gender approach to child-protection mandates to prevent and address the occurrence of one or more of the six violations from a trauma-informed approach, based on the needs of children.

Chile also strongly condemns the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. In this context, we wish to recognize that children, particularly those associated with armed forces or armed groups and former child soldiers, should be treated as victims. We therefore recognize the need to provide them with support for their reintegration into society and to heal the trauma caused by their painful experiences, including through mental health and psychosocial support services.

Urgent action is needed to ensure that all children, particularly stateless, refugee and displaced children, are better protected from grave violations and abuses, including recruitment, trafficking and detention. In this regard, we reiterate the importance of the independence, impartiality and credibility of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism established by resolution 1612 (2005).

Most important, we owe it to these brave children to continue to seek solutions. We must continue to strengthen an integrated and synergistic response that contributes to building resilient societies that support children from the origins of conflict through repairing the cycles of violence, hopefully enabling them to move from being victims to being agents of change.

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

Ms. Stoeva (Bulgaria): Bulgaria aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

I would like to highlight several elements in my national capacity. First, I would like to thank Brazil for spearheading this year's open debate on children and armed conflict and for including the topic of children as a centrepiece of its presidency's human rights agenda. Bulgaria would also like to thank today's briefers, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell and Patrick Kumi for their insightful and sobering briefings.

I would like to pay tribute to all those working in the field for the protection and promotion of the rights of the child in the context of armed conflict. Their work is invaluable. In this regard, we welcome the active engagement with parties to conflict, leading to the release of 12,214 children from armed groups and forces.

According to the recently published report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493), children in armed conflict were subject to a deeply concerning number of grave violations in 2021, such as recruitment and use of children, maiming and incidents of denial of humanitarian access as well as killings. An accounting of the price children are paying for Russia's aggression against Ukraine has not yet been formally included in the report, but we welcome the inclusion of Ukraine to the list of concerning situations. We are looking forward to thorough reporting and monitoring by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on that issue.

The Russian Federation's illegal, unjustified and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine has not spared children. We are deeply alarmed by the attacks on children's homes and schools, as well as hospitals and orphanages. In this regard, members of the Group of Friends of Children and the Sustainable Development Goals, which is co-chaired by Bulgaria, presented a joint statement deploring in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation and its implications for all children in Ukraine.

The staggering number of children on the move as a result of the war is also quite disturbing. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that there are millions of refugees fleeing to host countries, almost half of whom are children, while more than 7 million people are also in vulnerable situations, as they are displaced internally within Ukraine. We are greatly concerned with the reports on forcible deportation of children to the

Russian Federation since the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

It is particularly alarming that, according to the report of the Secretary-General, attacks on schools worldwide continue to increase. Inclusive education is at the top of Bulgaria's human rights agenda, and we also promote it through our official development assistance. Moreover, we call on Member States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

We welcome the Secretary-General's call for the Security Council to ensure that child-protection provisions are included in all relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions. Furthermore, Bulgaria urges Member States to support the Vancouver Principles, ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and implement the Paris Principles and Commitments. Prevention of the six grave violations is key when it comes to children in armed conflict, but long-term recovery and inclusive reintegration programmes for children are indispensable, and we call upon the international community to support this critical agenda.

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

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): First of all, let me congratulate Brazil for its very successful presidency of the Security Council this month.

We would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the entire Brazilian delegation for organizing this year's annual debate of the Security Council on children and armed conflict. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the other briefers for their insightful and important briefings.

In a world that is still afflicted by the coronavirus disease, by protracted and new conflicts and by a food, fuel and finance emergency, it is evident that we must do more to protect our children and ensure their safety, welfare and prosperity. Millions of children are trapped in wars and conflicts across the world, while some fall victim to widespread violence against civilians. Many children become casualties of calculated and targeted actions against them. Still others suffer the trauma of sexual violence or the multiple deprivations of armed conflict, including hunger and disease.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/493) portrays a sombre picture. It notes overall 23,982 verified grave violations against children. Indeed, the killing and maiming of children remained the most verified grave violation against children, followed by the recruitment and use of children in conflicts and the denial of humanitarian access to children.

Children also suffer immensely in situations of foreign occupation. Nowhere is this trend more visible than in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The most recent report of the Secretary-General has expressed deep concerns about the continued grave violations against children in occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The report has urged the Indian Government to undertake preventive measures to protect children, including by ending the use of pellets against children and their illegal detention in occupied Kashmir and in various faraway prisons across India.

Despite the persistent concerns raised by multiple United Nations special rapporteurs and mandate holders of the Human Rights Council and by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the human rights and humanitarian situation of children in occupied Kashmir has continued to deteriorate, especially since 5 August 2019, when India unilaterally and illegally passed legislation to annex the occupied and disputed state. An estimated 13,000 Kashmiri children and youth have been arbitrarily captured by the 900,000 members of the Indian occupation forces in Jammu and Kashmir. Children and youth are routinely detained and subjected to torture and ill treatment in order to elicit intelligence or to extract confessions that they are associated with the Kashmiri groups struggling for the self-determination that has been promised to them by the Security Council.

The administration of Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir itself admitted to the Indian Supreme Court that, in August and September 2019 alone, 144 children were detained. The youngest of them was 9 years old.

During 2021, more than 210 innocent Kashmiris, including women and children, were killed in fake encounters and staged cordon-and-search operations. Thousands were arbitrarily detained, and hundreds of houses were destroyed as part of collective punishments inflicted on the Kashmiri communities. Many participants might have seen — and, if not, must see — the gut-wrenching picture of a 3-year-old

Kashmiri boy sitting in shock on the dead body of his grandfather after he had been killed by Indian forces.

The list of such horrifying crimes is long. Last year, the Government of Pakistan released a comprehensive and well-researched dossier covering accounts, corroborated by audio and video evidence, of 3,432 cases of war crimes, including against women and children, perpetrated by senior officers of the Indian occupying forces since 1989.

We will share that evidence with the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and we urge that those responsible be held accountable. We also urge the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to continue to closely monitor, and report on, the situation of children in Indian-occupied Kashmir.

Pakistan fully supports the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to deal with situations of children in armed conflict. The legal parameters of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's mandate must be scrupulously respected. The singular focus of that mandate is to address the conditions of children in situations of armed conflicts. It does not extend to the consideration of violence within Member States, which is within their national jurisdictions.

On the basis of that understanding, my delegation will further enhance its engagement with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Security Council's Working Group.

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

Mr. Al-Saadi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Brazil for convening this important meeting to discuss children in armed conflict. I would also like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres and his Special Representative Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter for their efforts to protect children in areas of armed conflict. This topic constitutes a priority for the Yemeni Republic given that it is a country that suffers from armed conflict.

The Yemeni Government welcomes the delisting of the Yemeni armed forces from annex II to the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict covering 2021 (S/2022/493), which is long overdue.

We also welcome the commending of the efforts of the Yemeni Government to protect and ensure the rights of Yemeni children through engagement with the United Nations at all levels in order to end all forms of violations against children in Yemen and to prevent their use and recruitment in armed conflict. The Yemeni Government, based on its responsibilities, spares no effort in maintaining and protecting the rights of children. Despite difficult circumstances and challenges as a result of the conflict, the Government took many steps and measures in that regard, which we list as follows.

The Yemeni Government ratified a number of treaties and international instruments and took a number of measures to ensure the protection for children in armed conflict. First and foremost among those initiatives, in 2012 the Yemeni Government ratified the Paris Principles to protect children from illegal recruitment and their exploitation by armed groups. In 2014, the Government signed with the United Nations a joint action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Yemeni armed forces. In 2017, we ratified the Safe Schools Declaration in order to prevent the use of schools for military purposes and to protect them from the impact of conflict. In 2018, we also signed a road map in addition to the protocol on the release of children in armed conflict. In March 2018, the Deputy Supreme Commander of the armed forces issued a military circular to the effect that the armed forces of Yemen must abide by the national regulations and legislation, which are in line with international laws and instruments that criminalize the recruitment and use of children in conflicts. In that circular, there is a demand to abide by the protocol on releasing children who are arrested during armed operations and to hand them over to the civilian bodies that are in charge of protecting children and rehabilitating and reintegrating them into society, together with the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre.

Over the past two years, the Yemeni Government has consolidated its cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. That close cooperation yielded a number of field visits and rehabilitation and training workshops and sessions, while also activating focal points and resuming the meetings of the joint technical committee. We reiterate the importance of continuing that collaboration in order to protect all Yemeni children from all forms of violations.

The Yemeni Government continues to take a series of measures in order to protect children from the impact of conflict as part of its commitments and in partnership with the United Nations. We continue to provide care and protection for children who are victims of conflict, and we provide them with various forms of aid and assistance, particularly emergency aid. We continue to train Government officials on means of protection, the latest of which was implementing a training programme for a group of seven officers, training them on the protection of children in conflict. In turn, they trained 203 non-commissioned officers in various military zones. We also undertook a number of other measures that fit the reality of the war while focusing on its causes. The latest of those efforts was the launching of a child protection campaign in Aden in the month of May, which coincided with a visit to Yemen by the team from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

We welcome the recognition in the Secretary-General's report of those efforts by the Yemeni Government, which resulted in the delisting of the Yemeni armed forces from annex II. However, we regret that the report did not mention all the statistics and information on the grave violations perpetrated by Houthi militias in recruiting thousands of children in so-called summer camps, which is one of the largest campaigns of child recruitment witnessed by humankind. The Houthis seek to brainwash children by teaching them about violence, hatred, radicalization and rejection of others while pushing them into the battlefields. Children in areas under the Houthis control suffer from their crimes and their disregard for the life and future of those children, who die either as recruits, human shields or mine victims. They also die as a result of explosives planted by Houthi militias, which kill Yemenis, including children, on a daily basis or result in permanent disabilities.

Among the broadest and gravest violations by the Iranian-supported Houthi militias are those perpetrated against children, including girls, by using them in, and recruiting them for, armed conflict — killing them, maiming them, abducting them, exposing them to sexual violence and using them as human shields, as well as attacking schools and hospitals and using them for military purposes. All of that is in addition to denial of humanitarian aid to those in need. Those militias also devote weekly sessions and lectures for pupils, trying to incite them to enlist and choose war and jihad while exposing them to motivational videos

in order to incite children and encourage them to go to war. That was detailed in the reports of the Panel of Experts of the Sanctions Committee in its 2021 report (see S/2022/50). Lately, Houthi militia leaders have stopped the teaching of Yemeni school curricula in primary schools and, instead, focused exclusively on material that serves their agendas, goals and outcomes, which poses a serious threat to the current and future generations in Yemen and to the security and stability of the region.

In conclusion, the Yemeni Government reiterates its eagerness and readiness to continue to collaborate and support United Nations efforts, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the country team in Yemen in ending the violations of children's rights and their use in armed conflict.

We call on the international community and the Security Council to exert pressure on the Houthi militias to stop their crimes and violations against children in areas under their control. We also express our hope that the next report of the Secretary-General will provide more details and information on violations perpetuated in areas under Houthi control and will propose practical and effective measures to stop grave violations against children in Yemen.

We further call on the United Nations and international partners to support the Government in helping to rehabilitate children affected by the conflict, establishing effective programmes for children's reintegration in society in order to ensure their mental and psychological well-being and creating an environment conducive to ensuring children's education and the preservation of their rights so that they can enjoy peaceful and stable life, as other children do throughout the world.

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

Mr. Keçeli (Türkiye): We would like to thank you, Sir, for convening today's open debate, and we commend the United Nations work in taking forward the children and armed conflict agenda.

Yet we need to step up our efforts to ensure that United Nations country task forces on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children be provided with the adequate resources to fulfil their mandates. We concur with the call of the Secretary-General to ensure that child-protection provisions and capacities are included in all relevant mandates of

United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions. In addition, we see the repatriation and reintegration of children as important aspects of that agenda. My country fully subscribes to the Secretary-General's appeal to the countries concerned to take steps towards the voluntary repatriation of children, including those with alleged links to Da'esh.

The report of Secretary-General (S/2022/493) reveals once again that the plight of children continues unabated in many parts of the world. As for Syria, the destructive war that the Al-Assad regime has waged against the country's own people has had a staggering impact on children and has left the lives and the future of a generation of Syrian children hanging by a thread. The crimes of the regime are not the only threats that the children of Syria face. The well-documented crimes of the terrorist organization the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its Syrian branch, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), continue to be a source of grave concern.

The so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the YPG/Women's Protection Units, the Internal Security Forces, the Kurdish Revolutionary Youth, the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement and the so-called self-administration mentioned in the report are all elements of one and the same terrorist organization: the PKK/YPG. In nearly 2,000 attacks in the past two years, PKK/PYD/YPG have killed almost 400 Syrian civilians, including children. In addition, the PKK/YPG and the so-called SDF continue to abduct children and forcibly impose military training in camps.

We have shared with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General evidence of those violations. In their attempt to spread their separatist ideology, the PKK/YPG and affiliated elements also use tactics such as imposing arbitrary school curricula and arresting, dismissing or mistreating teachers who oppose them. While we support United Nations efforts to document the crimes of the PKK/PYD/YPG and other terrorist groups, we must stress the need to demonstrate a unified front against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

The belief that a terrorist organization would be bound by commitments under an international legal framework is an illusion. We would also like put on the record our country's stance concerning the incorrect references in the report to my country's counter-terrorism operations in Syria and Iraq. All those operations are conducted as part of Türkiye's

legitimate right to self-defence, in full compliance with international law and international humanitarian law and in line with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. Those operations exclusively target terrorists, with the utmost attention and care being devoted to avoid causing any harm to civilians or civilian infrastructure.

My country supports the United Nations agenda addressing the situation of children in armed conflict, and we will continue to work closely with the Office of the Special Representative to ensure that all the information to date is correct and complete.

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

Mr. Peñaranda (Philippines): We thank the presidency of Brazil for organizing this open debate. We also thank the briefers for their insightful remarks and the work they do for children.

Armed conflict uproots children from their families, communities and other support systems. Refugee, internally displaced and stateless children deserve our protection. This year, the Philippines acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, which reflects our commitment to achieving legal protection for all, including children. It is critical that more countries do the same.

Nationally, our law on children in situations of armed conflict recognizes the equal rights of girls and boys, including those who have been displaced, to obtain the documents necessary to enjoy their legal rights. The law also ensures children's right to education. Paired with the National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Zones of Peace, those measures ensure the safety of students and schools, as well as the continuity of education in situations of armed conflict.

We know that education helps address the root causes of child recruitment. To that end, our Department of Education has established a national peace framework to promote a culture of peace in the education system. In addition, the Council on the Welfare of Children teaches child-protection actors about the law on children in situations of armed conflict.

Those actions have better equipped our police and armed forces to rescue children from violent groups and refer them to agencies that facilitate reintegration. Rescued children are provided with health services, protection, social support and access to justice. Importantly, those services are child-specific and

gender-sensitive. The Government is not alone in its efforts. It actively involves civil society organizations, including reintegrated former child combatants.

We emphasize the importance of collaboration. The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493), which is mandated by the Security Council, can be an effective resource when there is active communication with national agencies during the drafting process. Coordination and referral mechanisms between Governments and United Nations country teams should be actively utilized. Joint strategic plans, such as the joint strategic plan of the armed forces of the Philippines and the United Nations, are also promising.

We join the Security Council in condemning the following six grave violations against children: the recruitment and use of children, the killing and/or maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual violence, the abduction of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access.

The Philippines is committed to keeping children away from armed conflict, rescuing those exploited by armed groups and giving such children the chance to recover and be positive agents of change in their communities. Our commitment is manifested in our concrete actions and policies and our unwavering determination to forge a future in which children are free to simply be children. The battlefield is no place for children.

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

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by thanking Brazil for convening this important meeting. I also congratulate Brazil on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. We wish its delegation every success in managing the work of the Council. I would like to thank Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF, for their important briefings and for their support to children in Iraq and around the world. I also want to thank Mr. Patrick Kumi for his important and valuable participation in today's meeting and remarkable courage. And I thank the members of the Council for their considerable support to my country's Government in promoting security and stability for all Iraqi people, especially children.

Children are the reason we are meeting today, to discuss their plight and seek solutions to their suffering by ensuring that their voices are heard at the highest levels of global decision-making.

Before addressing the issue of the suffering of children in Iraq, I would like to remind everyone of the extraordinary scale of the reprehensible criminal attacks perpetrated by Da'esh on Iraq and on every sector of our population, regardless of age or gender. Even symbols of the heritage and history of humankind did not escape the abuses of that terrorist organization, which has mustered considerable military resources and numerous foreign terrorist fighters from the four corners of the world. In addition, its impressive propaganda and media machine targeted everyone through intimidation. It has brutal methods of killing, recruitment and the use of human shields and banned weapons. It has planted mines and bombed houses, schools and institutions. The list of its abuses is long. I would like to point out that the war waged by the Iraqi people and their security forces has been the first line of resistance in defending the country, a war to defend dignity, freedom, democracy, human rights and our children's right to a decent life. I stress that this defensive war was waged by Iraq and all our friends in the region and around the world, in cooperation with the international community, which has provided support to Iraqi security forces. That support led to the formation of the Global Coalition Against Da'esh, led by our States and institutions that support its planning, financing and training.

Wherever it occurs and regardless of the circumstances, war is always harrowing for those who must endure it — men, women, the elderly, young people and children. Those children are the primary victims. Iraq regards children as victims and indeed as some of the worst-affected victims. They need assistance, rehabilitation and education so that they can rebuild their self-confidence and reintegrate into society. My Government, in cooperation with the United Nations and civil-society organizations, has therefore made every effort to seek all possible solutions and to adopt legislation on children's rights aimed at saving children and ensuring their future. If we lose our children's future, we lose the future of an entire generation. We will never be able to compensate for that loss at the human, social and economic levels. In that regard, I would like to thank the States that have repatriated their children from Iraq and to call on other countries

with children in Iraq to cooperate with us and repatriate them as soon as possible.

I want to stress that Iraq remains committed to cooperating with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to establish and implement an active and clear action plan to put an end to the recruitment and use of children in Iraq. We know that the Secretary-General's report of 23 June (S/2022/493) does not include any cases of recruitment or use of children by the Iraqi Government. In that regard, I want to stress that previous cases were individual ones that could not be considered part of a systematic effort.

My Government is working to develop legislation on issues relating to children and the protection of children in Iraq, in line with our national and constitutional laws and pursuant to our international obligations. To that end, we believe that an in-depth study that includes the views of various specialists, eminent persons and experienced individuals from our society, as well as those of victims, will be the best way to draft applicable legislation that can truly deliver justice for children, ensure their protection and contribute to their development. It will require considerable time and effort, as well as awareness-raising campaigns, to ensure that we do not implement solutions that could lead to further crises that in turn could end in disaster, and our Government, in cooperation with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq, UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Development Programme, as well as civil-society institutions and other stakeholders, is working to that end.

I would like to bring up the following crucial topics for the Council's consideration.

First, we urge Member States to assist us with an extremely complex issue that we are using all possible national means to resolve. We are trying to clear Iraqi territories of mines and explosive ordnance that were planted by Da'esh, particularly in rural areas and near residential centres and schools. They continue to claim lives, maim children and hinder the return of displaced persons, as well as the country's general development. I should point out that in cooperation with the United Nations Mine Action Service, the Government has implemented a strategy for Iraq for the period from 2020 to 2023. However, the programme needs further cooperation and funding, as well as capacity-building, in order to remove those mines and explosive ordnance from contaminated areas.

Secondly, as it has everywhere else in the world, the coronavirus disease pandemic has had an enormous negative impact on the work of Iraq's institutions. It has restricted people's freedom of movement and affected the delivery of humanitarian aid to displaced persons, as well as hindering the implementation of a number of recovery projects in areas with displaced persons. The support provided to Iraqi national institutions in the form of training and investments can therefore contribute greatly to assisting the local population and reducing the administrative burden while achieving more effective results.

We also emphasize the need for legislation that supports the voluntary return of citizens, as well as their participation in reconstruction efforts, within an established time frame for the resumption of normal life in all facilities and in all areas of activity.

Thirdly, we listened to the statements delivered by the representatives of other States, which included important remarks and proposals. In that regard, I would like to stress the specificity of each State and its people. We recall the need to listen to the States directly concerned when it comes to issues relating to their children and means of their protection, including the development of special political missions and peacekeeping operations on a case-by-case basis.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that peace is the best and most effective plan to protect children and ensure development, reconstruction and reform and to put an end to impunity. We must continue to cooperate as Member States and as the international community in order to enhance the paths of peace at all times.

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

Ms. Rizk (Egypt): At the outset, I would like to thank Brazil for organizing this important annual open debate on children and armed conflict. We would also like to thank the briefers for the information and input they provided at the beginning of the meeting.

Egypt notes with concern the exacerbation of the negative impacts of armed conflict on children, particularly during the past two years, as they are compounded by the repercussions of the coronavirus disease pandemic and the current food crisis. In that regard, Egypt believes that the current situation requires more international cooperation and stronger measures to urgently respond to the negative impacts

of armed conflict on children, which deprive them of their human rights.

As we have reiterated on numerous occasions, I would like to convey Egypt's readiness to cooperate in order to ensure the delivery of much-needed humanitarian assistance in that domain. We also strongly support all efforts to strengthen the protection of children and end the violations committed during armed conflict, especially crimes committed by terrorist organizations.

We take note with appreciation of the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/493), some of which Egypt has already implemented.

Egypt is already a State party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the provisions of which are further reflected in our national legislation.

In addition, respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of children in armed conflict, forms part of the curriculum provided by the Egyptian Ministry of Defense to its personnel, especially those deployed to peacekeeping operations. The content of that curriculum is prepared in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, as part of Egypt's commitment to ensure the protection of the rights of the child.

Egypt is also actively engaged with both the African Union and the League of Arab States in enhancing regional cooperation towards the protection of children in armed conflict.

Let me conclude by reiterating Egypt's commitment to continue backing all efforts at all levels to protect children and to end and prevent violations against them in situations of armed conflict.

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

Mr. Mabhongo (South Africa): We thank Brazil for convening this open debate. This year marks 25 years since the establishment of the Security Council's children and armed conflict mandate. This meeting provides an opportunity for the Council to take stock and deliberate on ways to strengthen that important mandate.

The current global climate is characterized by protracted and new conflict situations, which adversely affect vulnerable groups, especially children, women and young people. Often neglected and with their safety and livelihoods disrupted, they are left to protect themselves without any means, which leaves them vulnerable and exposed to the consequences of armed conflict.

The report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493) paints a bleak picture of the state in which children find themselves. Their conditions have been compounded by the prevailing coronavirus disease pandemic, which has hampered the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and reduced child protection initiatives. The grave violations identified in the report that children continue to endure are distressing. It therefore remains imperative for the Security Council to continue to consider practical actions to strengthen the protection of children affected by conflict.

South Africa has noted that, as reflected in the study conducted by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, some progress has been made in strengthening the agenda. We therefore applaud the continued engagement of the United Nations and parties to conflict in their efforts to implement action plans for protecting children in armed conflict. The continuation and strengthening of those efforts by both State and non-State actors must be encouraged.

South Africa maintains its view that child protection policies and programmes should be innovative and responsive. That requires comprehensive engagement with children regarding their own experiences, which should inform the design of programmes in peace processes, especially those aimed at protection and reintegration. The convening and advisory role of the Peacebuilding Commission can contribute towards building and sustaining peace in the context of child protection programmes. The effective use of the Peacebuilding Fund could potentially serve a valuable purpose in that regard.

The report of the Secretary-General provides concrete recommendations for addressing outstanding challenges. It is the responsibility of the Security Council to take positive action in that regard. The Council must continue to ensure that child-protection provisions and capacity are included in all relevant mandates of peacekeeping and special political

missions. South Africa further supports the Secretary-General in his call for engagement with all stakeholders to prevent grave violations, including engagement with regional organizations on prevention modalities and the need to strengthen monitoring and reporting on children and armed conflict.

I conclude with two points.

First, in order to address the plight of children in armed conflict, there must be a commitment to a broad strategy on conflict prevention, which should address the root causes of armed conflict in a comprehensive manner and create an environment conducive to the protection and promotion of children's rights.

Secondly, United Nations peacekeeping and political missions must be commended for their continued efforts to deliver on their child protection mandates. Their work in data collection and verification contributes significantly to reporting on violations against children in armed conflict and monitoring the implementation of such plans, which we hope will serve as a deterrent. It is therefore important that sufficient resources be provided to enable peacekeeping missions to effectively achieve their child protection mandates.

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

Ms. Ahangari (Azerbaijan): We thank Brazil for convening this open debate on a very important topic.

As children continue to be targeted by grave violations, ensuring their effective prevention and protection and ending impunity remain constant global challenges and ongoing imperatives.

First and foremost, ensuring full compliance with international humanitarian law is key to the effective protection of children in armed conflict. Of equal importance is ensuring accountability for violations, since wrongful acts left unpunished often serve as a catalyst for the resurgence of conflicts and the commission of new crimes. As recommended by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2022/493), it is also important to prioritize efforts to clear explosive remnants of war, improvised explosive devices and mines in order to eliminate their impacts on the protection of children.

The 30-year occupation of Azerbaijan's territory by Armenia, which has been accompanied since the early 1990s by numerous war crimes and the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of our citizens,

is a sorry example of how children are affected by the devastating effects of conflict. The war claimed the lives of hundreds of Azerbaijani children, while 92 children were taken hostage and some 3,500 children lost either one or both of their parents.

Approximately 1,500 secondary schools and preschools were destroyed or substantially damaged. Another act of aggression committed by Armenia during the fall of 2020, including through missile strikes on residential areas in the cities of Ganja and Barda, resulted in the deaths of 12 children and injuries to 16.

As the 44-day war put an end to the occupation, the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the liberated territories is a top priority for Azerbaijan. However, challenges remain. The most pressing is the presence of landmines, which impedes reconstruction efforts and the safe return of internally displaced persons.

In the post-conflict period, more than 200 Azerbaijani citizens, including young people, have been killed or maimed by mining explosions, as Armenia has failed to share accurate and comprehensive information about the landmines that it laid on Azerbaijan's territory. Additionally, the fate of almost 4,000 citizens, including 71 Azerbaijani children, who went missing in connection with the conflict remains unknown. We expect the Armenian side to clarify the whereabouts of those missing persons.

At the same time, Azerbaijan initiated the process of normalizing inter-State relations with Armenia based on mutual recognition and respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity within their internationally recognized borders. Azerbaijan is determined to strengthen security and stability and advance post-conflict peacebuilding, reconciliation, reintegration and development in the region.

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

Mr. Hossain (Bangladesh): I thank the Brazilian presidency for having convened today's debate. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Gamba de Potgieter; the UNICEF Executive Director, Ms. Russell; and others for their insightful presentations this morning.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Botswana on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

Children are always affected uniquely and excessively in conflict situations. Despite the continual efforts of the United Nations, including the Security Council, there has been a steady increase in the number of children killed or maimed by explosive remnants of war, improvised explosive devices and mines. It is unfortunate that children continued to suffer a high number of grave violations in armed conflicts, including 23,982 verified grave violations, in 2021.

We thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2022/493). We commend the engagement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the country task forces with parties in conflict, which resulted in the release of 12,214 children from armed groups and armed forces. We also commend the work of the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Bangladesh is committed to protecting civilians, including children, in armed conflict. Bangladesh is the leading troop- and police-contributing country, and our peacekeepers have been serving in many difficult situations to prevent children from being killed, maimed or affected by sexual violence. They have also acted to protect schools and hospitals from attack and to prevent the military use of such infrastructure.

We have been providing shelter to more than 1 million Rohingyas for the past five years. More than 50 per cent are children who faced atrocities and persecution in Myanmar. Despite the enormous challenges, we have been providing for their basic needs, including educational opportunities through 5,617 learning centres. We have also introduced a Myanmar curriculum on a pilot basis.

Regrettably, there has been no progress in Myanmar aimed at creating an environment conducive to the return of those children. We urge the Council to take concrete measures to ensure a prosperous future for Rohingya children in Rakhine state, including their full repatriation.

Allow me to highlight a few points of particular importance.

First, the protection of children in armed conflict is the primary responsibility of the State. However, the responsibility of other parties is also critical. We must work to strengthen engagement with all parties to ensure their accountability under international human

rights and humanitarian law. An amendment of national legislations is also required.

Secondly, peacekeeping mandates to protect children in armed conflict should be strengthened further with adequate capacities and resources. We thank the Secretary-General for his recommendations in that regard.

Finally, we reiterate our call to enhance coordination among all stakeholders of United Nations peacebuilding activities. We also emphasize the synergies between the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund to ensure a preventive and protective approach.

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

Mr. Paulauskas (Lithuania): Lithuania aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and would like to deliver a statement in its national capacity.

Lithuania would like to thank the Brazilian presidency of the Security Council for having organized this very important debate. We would also like to express our appreciation to the Special Representative, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and to the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Catherine Russell, for their presentations. Special thanks go also to Mr. Patrick Kumi for his powerful story.

The recent annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493) reveals the unacceptable: nearly 20,000 children were affected by grave violations during the 2021 reporting period. We have witnessed how cross-border conflicts and intercommunal violence have affected children, particularly in the central Sahel and Lake Chad basin regions. We have also witnessed how coups d'état and takeovers have aggravated the already difficult situation of children in Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Mali, Myanmar and the Sudan.

We all know that the impacts of armed conflict and violence are particularly devastating for children, with, inter alia, interruptions to education and health-care services and a heightened risk of conflict-related sexual violence. During the reporting period, the scale and severity of grave violations against children remained very concerning, including an increased number of children recruited and the use of children by parties to armed conflict. In particular, Lithuania is appalled at the fact that this year, once again, two types of violation showed a sharp increase: abduction,

and rape and other forms of sexual violence, both rising by 20 per cent. That is utterly disturbing, especially given that sexual-violence cases are usually greatly underreported. Children with disabilities and displaced children were particularly vulnerable.

We are also extremely concerned by the fact that next year's report will be even worse and the number of children suffering from armed conflict will clearly grow. As already indicated in the report, the high intensity of Russia's war in Ukraine will be added to the list of situations of concern. Since Russia launched its illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable aggression against Ukraine, we have seen that children are not exempt from being killed, injured or forced to flee. On the contrary, as UNICEF has stated, at least two children have been killed every day, with many more injured.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, more than 300 children have been killed and another 500 injured, mostly owing to the use of explosives in built-up urban areas. For nearly five months, Russia's armed forces have been continuously attacking Ukrainian cities, intentionally targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, and killing and injuring thousands of civilians, including children. Russia must stop the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and attacks on civilian infrastructure. We are very concerned about the growing evidence of violence perpetrated by the Russian military forces, including sexual violence, against children. Lithuania therefore expects that all violations against children by Russia will be duly documented and reflected in next year's report.

Lithuania is very concerned about reports that Russia is modifying its existing legislation to facilitate fast-track and simplified adoption procedures for forcibly transferred and evacuated Ukrainian children in Russia. Let me reiterate that UNICEF, as has been mentioned in the Council more than once, is of the view that that adoption should never occur during or immediately after emergencies. Children separated from their parents during a humanitarian emergency cannot be assumed to be orphans, and the Russian Federation must ensure that family reunification and the best interests of the child are the guiding principles. The unlawful transfer, deportation and adoption of Ukrainian children during and right after the war may constitute a breach of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, forcibly transferring children of one national

group to another group is mentioned as one of the criteria of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and can therefore be seen as a genocidal method.

We urge Russia to unconditionally withdraw all its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine. Lithuania strongly condemns Russia for all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including war crimes. All atrocities and all violations must be thoroughly investigated, and all perpetrators must be held accountable.

In Lithuania's statement last year, we said that the report of 2020 (S/20021/437) should be a wake-up call and that the responsibility of protecting children, their dreams and their tomorrow lies on our shoulders (see S/2021/617, annex LII). We are clearly failing to live up to our commitments, as we are forced to add new armed conflicts to the list of children suffering.

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

Mr. Tun (Myanmar): I would like to thank the presidency of Brazil for convening today's high-level open debate on children and armed conflict. We welcome this year's focus on the protection of displaced children, their abduction and their reintegration. I am also grateful to all the briefers for their insightful briefings. I particularly thank the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, Mrs. Gamba de Potgieter, for this year's report on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493).

The situation of children in armed conflict continues to be a great concern to all of us. The number of grave violations against children remains high. We are saddened by the tragic loss of more than 8,000 children's lives as a result of killing and maiming. On the other hand, we are encouraged by the release of more than 12,000 children from armed groups as a result of the United Nations engagement with parties to the conflicts.

As the Secretary-General rightly points out in the report, while the coronavirus disease exacerbated the vulnerabilities of children, military coups have worsened their situation, including in Myanmar.

In our country, while supporting the United Nations-led Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, the National Unity Government of Myanmar is committed to promoting and protecting the rights of the child and is

cooperating with the relevant United Nations entities in that regard. The National Unity Government developed a set of guidelines on prevention and the protection of children affected by armed conflict in Myanmar and an implementation plan, in accordance with international laws and the relevant Security Council resolutions. In March this year, the National Unity Government submitted to the United Nations a report on its efforts to promote and protect the rights of the child, especially in situation in armed conflict, as well as the guidelines on children and armed conflict.

After the military perpetrated the illegal coup in Myanmar in February 2021, the illegal military effectively destroyed the rule of law by lawlessly arresting, torturing and killing civilians, including children, in cold blood. Even with the elected civilian Government and Parliament in place, the military was the main perpetrator of grave violations against children. After the coup, no legal protection in place was able to protect Myanmar's children from the violence by the military, which has no regard for domestic or international law.

The impact of conflict on children in Myanmar is indeed severe, deeply disturbing and heartbreaking. In this year's report, the United Nations verified 503 violations against 462 Myanmar children. They attacked schools and hospitals 17 times, used 52 schools and hospitals for military purposes and denied humanitarian access. Those verified accounts in the report do not necessarily represent the full scale of attacks and violations by the military against children. The military took children hostage to force their parents or relatives to surrender. Nearly 7.8 million children remain out of school; and 250,000 out of more than 1 million internally displaced persons in Myanmar are children.

Children retaining safe access to quality education is another important matter. There is no doubt that attacks on schools and hospitals have destructive effects on children and society in every way. To that end, the military has deliberately deprived children of their basic human rights to health, education and development.

In addition to the displacement of children within the country, many children, together with their parents, escaped from Myanmar to neighbouring countries to seek refuge. We are greatly concerned that they are now at high risk of becoming victims of human trafficking. Therefore, we are seeking the protection of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees (UNHCR) for them. Many of them are still awaiting effective actions from UNHCR. I hereby appeal to the international community to look into that matter seriously and in a timely way and to help them. Children must be protected under every circumstance. Every child deserves a future.

In conclusion, as we speak, the war that the Myanmar military has waged on its own citizens, including children, continues. Unless the international community takes concrete action to protect Myanmar children from the ongoing grave violations, we risk having a lost generation of children due to the conflict-inflicted consequences. Needless to say, the key root cause of children's suffering in Myanmar is the military junta's brutal attempt to do anything to assert control over the population, who resoundingly continues to resist its illegal coup. With their culture of impunity, the military forces have proved that they are not reluctant to go to extreme lengths, including by blatantly violating both domestic child rights law and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In that situation, the international community needs to protect children in Myanmar, who have been victims of the military junta's widespread and systematic attacks against the civilian population.

In that regard, I wish to urge the Security Council to take swift and decisive action, in accordance with its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and the children and armed conflict resolutions, to end military violence against children, stop military use of schools and hospitals and release all arbitrarily detained children. The Council must also do everything that it can to bring perpetrators of grave violations against children to justice and to help aid workers get safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to children in need, especially those displaced by conflict, not only in Myanmar but also in other conflict situations. The Council must act now.

The full version of my statement was sent via the e-statement link.

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

Ms. Moutchou (Morocco): At the outset, my delegation would like to thank Brazil, as President of the Security Council for the month of July, for organizing this open debate on the very important issue of children and armed conflict. We would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for

Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Catherine Russell, for their comprehensive and enlightening insights. I also wish to take this opportunity to also thank Mr. Patrick Kumi for sharing with us his heart-rending and deeply moving testimonial.

Since its creation 25 years ago, the mandate of children and armed conflict has contributed tremendously to persuading the international community to develop powerful international instruments and national strategies and action plans for the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. That has indeed led to progress in protecting children from the impacts of wars and conflicts, notably with the adoption of international standards for the protection of children and the implementation of strategies and programmes to protect war-affected children. In addition, more than 30 action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children have been signed around the world, and 170,000 children have been released from armed groups.

However, we unfortunately continue to witness serious violations of children's rights in many contexts, including in several humanitarian situations in which armed groups abduct children, separate them from their families and recruit them with total disregard for their fundamental rights. Those children are abducted to be exploited as combatants, spies, messengers, transporters of ammunition or sex slaves. Many serve as human shields or suicide bombs. They are robbed of their childhood and treated barbarically. Some are drugged before being abducted, kidnapped, separated from their families or sent to fight. They become dependent on those who abduct them. They are forced to commit atrocities, sometimes against their own families. Often, the abduction and forced recruitment of children by armed groups is a means of terrorizing civilians and blackmailing them. Most of the time, those children face generic violence, including early and forced child marriage and sexual exploitation and abuse. They are targeted for abduction because they are easy to manipulate. They can be easily enlisted as child soldiers. They are not aware of the dangers they will face. They have not fully acquired a real notion of right and wrong. Those who are released after being abducted therefore continue to struggle with the impact of their traumatic experiences on their psychological development. We ask how we can expect them to fully recover, overcome their suffering and be able to restart their lives. They need support and follow-up as an urgent priority.

International humanitarian law and international human rights law provide extensive protection for children. In addition, the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration, as well as all the recently formulated reports and guidelines, including the guidance note on abduction, which was released only yesterday, offer an exhaustive global, universal and inclusive protection framework addressing all situations. The problem is not the instruments. They exist. The problem is Member States and armed groups' implementation and compliance with them. It is also crucial to focus more on prevention, accountability and impunity. Member States, civil society and national human rights institutions should work together to protect all children and ensure monitoring, reporting and responding to all forms of violence against children and urgently addressing the six grave violations of children's rights.

As a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three Optional Protocols, the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles, Morocco is and will remain fully committed to the protection and promotion of all children's rights and will avail itself of every opportunity to reaffirm its unwavering commitment, which is what we did during our three-year term as President and Vice-President of the UNICEF Executive Board. And we will continue to do so in all other relevant forums.

Lastly, we reiterate our thanks to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for her active commitment throughout her mandate, and we also want to take this opportunity to thank UNICEF, as well as all the United Nations entities and those who selflessly endeavour to promote and protect the rights of children around the world, despite the difficulties, with the ultimate objective of leaving no child behind.

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

Ms. Squeff (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): We commend the Government of Brazil, through its Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Fernando Simas Magalhães, for convening this debate on such a critical topic. We are also grateful for the briefings by Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell and Mr. Patrick Kumi, whose recommendations we also value.

We also thank the Secretary-General for his most recent report (S/2022/493) on children and armed conflict. In that regard, we share the serious concern about the fact that despite a slight decrease in grave violations compared to 2020, alarming trends remain, together with increases in other related areas. For example, kidnappings and cases of sexual violence increased by more than 20 per cent, and attacks on schools and hospitals increased by 5 per cent in a context of school closures owing to the pandemic, the military use of schools, insecurity and disregard for children's rights to education and health care.

Argentina has been an active and strong supporter from the start of the Safe Schools Declaration, endorsed at the Oslo Conference on Safe Schools, in the understanding that education is critical to development and the full enjoyment of human rights. Continued access to safe education is crucial as a protection mechanism for children and youth in armed conflict, as it enables them to reach their potential and contribute to building stronger communities. In that regard, we call firmly for immediately ending grave violations against children, promoting the implementation of all necessary measures to prevent such violations and providing children with humanitarian assistance that will meet their needs, based on a human rights-based approach and treating children as victims of such violations, while ensuring that their perpetrators are held to account.

We also applaud and support Special Representative of the Secretary General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter in the important work she is doing. We must work for a renewed and broader approach to reintegration, not only in terms of immediate humanitarian assistance, but also as a long-term commitment to ensuring that children's reintegration programmes look towards the future, involve all of society's stakeholders and focus on children's specific needs.

In conclusion, we must conceive concrete actions while incorporating the cross-cutting principle of leaving no one behind. Argentina reiterates the urgent need to agree on and implement concrete measures. That task must be carried out within a framework of absolute respect for international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law. Only by working towards a humanitarian approach to development and peace can we achieve a sustainable outcome ensuring respect for human rights and the successful reintegration of all children.

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

Mr. Sahraoui (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the delegation of Brazil on its able leadership of the work of the Security Council this month. I also want to thank our briefers, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter, Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF, and the civil-society representative for their insights.

More than 25 years after the publication of Graça Machel's report (A/51/306), the protection of children in armed conflict remains a priority. However, we are seeing an increase in violations against children as a result of decisions and measures taken by others while children bear the brunt.

Algeria accords great importance to the protection of children in conflict areas. As part of an international group of States, Algeria made a positive and effective contribution to the *Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict Mandate 1996-2021*, marking the agenda's twenty-fifth anniversary. It clarified beyond doubt that much remains to be done to protect children in armed conflict and adapt the mandate to the nature of the various armed conflicts.

The subject of children and armed conflict is extremely important. We must address the root causes of conflicts and ensure justice and accountability by prosecuting all the perpetrators of violations. That is a very complex task, given the nexus between armed conflict and organized crime, specifically human trafficking and human smuggling. That is why we need to intensify our efforts and cooperation and establish flexible mechanisms to ensure effective protection for children.

My country's delegation would like to contribute to today's open debate by sharing with Council members some ideas that we believe are important in the light of the questions posed by the concept note (S/2022/540, annex).

First, the issue of the protection of children should be given priority by respecting relevant international instruments and taking urgent and effective steps to prevent the abduction and recruitment of children. That priority should be translated into effective policies that enhance regional and international cooperation.

We also need to ensure that children are not treated as fighters. We should establish and promote prevention and protection mechanisms and enhance the legal framework related to children in situations of armed conflict, including by joining the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and committing to its provisions. Algeria ratified the Optional Protocol on 6 May 2009.

Peacekeeping operations also play an important role in that regard, pursuant to Security Council resolutions. We stress the need to uphold the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism in order to protect children in armed conflict.

Secondly, with regard to accountability, our strategy should be to combat impunity pertaining to the verified and documented crimes against children in armed conflict, in particular through close cooperation among Governments and country teams on monitoring and reporting. We also need to support them by strengthening capacity-building and providing them with the necessary funding to allow them to uphold their mandates.

Thirdly, with respect to addressing the root causes of armed conflicts, we cannot address the issue of children and armed conflict without considering the global picture. That is why we need to find a peaceful and lasting solution to armed conflicts. It is worth noting that development and economic issues are important causes of many conflicts that threaten the lives of children and jeopardize their future. Therefore, our approach should go beyond the security and legal dimensions, while taking into consideration social and economic considerations.

Fourthly, concerning education, the natural place for children is the classroom, not on the battlefield or in situations of armed conflict. Therefore, we should ensure that children receive education even amid armed conflicts. Since its independence, Algeria has provided free education for all people on its territories, including refugees and the victims of armed conflicts.

Fifthly, we need to develop reintegration policies that target children who are victims of armed conflict, in particular those who were abducted. They should be granted access to medical care and psychological and social support and should be allowed to resume their education. We need to adopt sustainable policies that guarantee children access to basic services. We

reiterate, in that regard, that implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the best way to sustainably and effectively reintegrate those children, in particular in post-conflict periods.

I would like to reiterate that grave violations perpetrated against children in armed conflict are not inevitable. We should therefore act to uphold the best interests of children in armed conflict situations. That would allow us to build a better present and future in which all children have the right to live in an environment that enables them to develop and achieve their goals and aspirations as generations of the future, without discrimination.

I should mention, in that regard, the crimes perpetrated against Palestinian children in the occupied Palestinian territories. Those children are deliberately and systematically targeted by the occupying forces, in blatant violation of international law. The international community, in particular the Security Council, should honour its commitments and adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the protection of the Palestinian people, including children, and should not exclude them from international protection.

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

Mr. Knyazyan (Armenia): We thank the presidency of Brazil for convening today's open debate.

We would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Catherine Russell, and Mr. Patrick Kumi for their comprehensive briefings.

Children continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflicts. We are very concerned about the high number of grave violations against children, as reflected in the recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2022/493), including their recruitment and use, their killing and maiming and the denial of humanitarian access to them.

We condemn violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including attacks on schools, students and educational personnel, as well as the use of schools for military purposes. International humanitarian law and international human rights law shape the crucial framework for the effective protection of children in conflict settings. In that context, we stress the

imperative of intensifying the efforts of the international community to address the protection needs of children residing in conflict areas.

In our region, we continue to face the humanitarian consequences of the premeditated military aggression of Azerbaijan in the fall of 2020, amid an outbreak of the unprecedented global health-care crisis, which resulted in thousands of casualties, displacements and the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure and took a particularly heavy toll on children.

Among the 19,000 displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh, 88 per cent of them were women and children. Deliberate bombardment and shelling, including by prohibited weapons, such as cluster munitions, heavily damaged several medical facilities, including Stepanakert's maternal and child health centre. Targeted attacks on educational institutions led to the destruction of 18 schools and six kindergartens in Artsakh, thereby depriving 28,000 children of their right to education.

The violations of international humanitarian law perpetrated by Azerbaijan have been widely documented by international humanitarian and international human rights organizations. In the aftermath of the aggression, hundreds of cluster bomblets and other explosive remnants of war, which are spread across civilian settlements and agricultural lands, continue to cause serious security risks to the lives of civilians, in particular children.

The denial by Azerbaijan of the safe and unhindered humanitarian access for United Nations agencies to the conflict zone undermines the comprehensive assessment of humanitarian protection, early recovery needs and the human rights situation of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the ability to ensure the protection of the rights of the child and enable access to inclusive and quality education, health care and social services.

We are particularly concerned about the continued involvement of children in State-sponsored propaganda of hatred on ethnic and religious grounds. Educational curricula in kindergartens and schools in Azerbaijan are aimed at indoctrinating children with Armeniaphobia and inciting violence and intolerance. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance has observed that "Azerbaijan's leadership, education system and media are very prolific in their denigration of Armenians" and that "an entire

generation of Azerbaijanis has now grown up listening to this hateful rhetoric". The opening of the Military Trophy Park, which propagates vilifying images of ethnic Armenians and exposes them to children, is yet another manifestation of the systemic policy aimed at dehumanizing Armenians.

Armenia reiterates its commitment to the goals, objectives and principles enshrined in the Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, which are crucial instruments for promoting and protecting the rights of all children, in particular those residing in conflict areas, and for preventing grave violations.

We fully support the mandate of Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter in streamlining the agenda of children and armed conflict into the activities of the United Nations agencies and promoting cooperation with regional organizations, civil society and other stakeholders with a view to ensuring effective protection on the ground.

The President: The representative of India has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Sharma (India): I have been impelled to take the floor for a second time only because one delegation has chosen yet again to misuse this forum and the meeting to make some frivolous remarks attacking my country. While such statements deserve our collective contempt and sympathy for a mindset that repeatedly utters falsehoods, it is important to set the record straight.

Pakistan has failed to protect the rights of its minorities, including Sikhs, Hindus, Christians and Ahmadiyyas. Thousands of women and children, particularly girls, from minority communities have been subjected to abduction, forced marriage and conversion in Pakistan. The entire union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh were, are and always will be an integral and inalienable part of India, irrespective of what the representative of Pakistan believes or wishes. We call on Pakistan to end its cross-border terrorism so that our citizens can exercise their right to life and liberty.

I will stop there, as today's discussion is extremely important if we are to strengthen our efforts to protect children in situations of armed conflict and work to

provide them with a future free from violence and terror, as they deserve.

The President: The representative of Pakistan has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Rashid (Pakistan): I thank you, Sir, for giving me the floor. The representative of India has made some familiar but false assertions. Unfortunately, deflection and disinformation have become a core part of India's diplomacy today and obviously the biggest example of that is what we have just heard — namely, that Jammu and Kashmir is part of India.

Jammu and Kashmir is not part of India now, nor was it ever. That is a legal fiction. All United Nations maps show Jammu and Kashmir as disputed territory. In all its resolutions on the subject, the Council decided that the final disposition of Kashmir should be determined by its people through a United Nations-supervised plebiscite. India accepted that decision and is bound to comply with it in accordance with Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations. Above all, the report under consideration by the Security Council considers Jammu and Kashmir to be a disputed territory.

Children have been killed and subjected to violence in Pakistan in recent years, but that is largely due to terrorist attacks, while Indian forces have been responsible for grave violations against children in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan and the Balochistan Liberation Army are behind those attacks on children in Pakistan, including the cowardly and unfortunate terrorist attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in 2014, which resulted in the loss of more than 130 innocent children's lives. We have concrete evidence that those terrorist organizations were financed and sponsored by Indian agencies. The captured Indian spy commander Kulbhushan Jadhav confessed to India's support for such terrorist and subversive activities.

Moreover, it is India that has sponsored and perpetrated terrorism and aggression against all its neighbours, creating terrorist groups and destabilizing and blockading neighbours to force them to do its strategic bidding while sponsoring subversion, sabotage and terrorism in various parts of Pakistan. I would also like to bring to the Council's attention the fact that there is no terrorism across the line of control in Jammu and Kashmir. The ceasefire agreed in February 2021 is holding.

In conclusion, the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General is to address the plight of the children affected by armed conflict and is most relevant in cases of foreign occupation. Pakistan will also share detailed information on grave violations against children in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir with the Office of the Special Representative and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The Security Council should seek accountability for India's crimes against children in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I would like to reiterate Brazil's thanks to our briefers for their important contributions and above all for the work that they do, as well as for their personal testimonies. I would also like to thank the Security Council Affairs Division and the interpreters for their tireless work throughout a long day.

The meeting rose at 7.05 p.m.