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Promotion and protection of the rights of children: promotion and protection of the rights of children

Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict

Summary

The present report is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to its resolution [73/155](#) on the rights of the child, in which it requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to continue to submit reports to the Assembly on the activities undertaken in the fulfilment of her mandate and on the progress achieved in advancing the children and armed conflict agenda. The report covers the period from August 2018 to July 2019 and describes trends, issues of concern and progress made over the past year, including the mainstreaming of child protection issues within the United Nations system. It also provides information on the field missions of the Special Representative, her vision, including her engagement with regional and subregional organizations and international partners, as well as information on her Office's new campaign, Act To Protect. It outlines a number of challenges and priorities in her agenda and concludes with a set of recommendations to enhance the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

* [A/74/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [73/155](#), the General Assembly requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to continue to submit reports to it and the Human Rights Council on the activities undertaken in the fulfilment of her mandate, including information on her field visits, on progress achieved and challenges remaining on the children and armed conflict agenda. The request stemmed from the mandate given by the Assembly in its resolution [51/77](#), in which it recommended, inter alia, that the Special Representative raise awareness and promote the collection of information about the plight of children affected by armed conflict and foster international cooperation to ensure respect for children's rights in these situations.

2. In line with that mandate, and as requested by the Assembly in its resolution [73/155](#), the present report provides information on current trends regarding children affected by armed conflict and gives an overview of emerging issues and challenges. It also highlights the ongoing engagement with parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations as well as efforts undertaken with State and non-State actors to raise global awareness and catalyse action on this issue. The present report also makes reference to steps taken by the Special Representative in response to the request contained in General Assembly resolution [72/245](#) to increase her engagement with States, United Nations bodies and agencies, regional and subregional organizations and to increase public awareness activities, including by collecting, assessing and disseminating best practices and lessons learned, in accordance with the existing mandate.

II. Overview of trends, emerging issues and challenges

3. As the year 2019 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the nineteenth anniversary of the adoption of its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, it is important to remind all States parties of their responsibility to protect and promote children's rights and put the best interests of the child at the heart of their national and international engagement, to assess the status of child rights and take immediate measures when those rights are at risk. While notable progress has been achieved in the past three decades in transforming children's lives around the world, considerable challenges remain for girls and boys in the context of armed conflict.

4. Overall, 2018 data from the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict show persistent high levels of grave violations. While the numbers of children victims of recruitment and use, sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals and of denial of humanitarian access stabilized, those were offset by a dramatic increase in the number of casualties caused by the killing and maiming of children, resulting in an overall increase in verified grave violations.

5. Protracted conflicts, the intensification of combat situations, new conflict dynamics and operational tactics, combined with widespread disregard for international humanitarian and human rights law, including inadequate application of the principles of distinction, proportionality and military necessity, had a devastating effect on children. Cases of children killed and maimed reached record levels, with an unprecedented number attributed to State actors. Aerial and ground operations, especially in urban and populated areas, resulted in complex challenges for the protection of children. Armed groups continued to be responsible for large numbers of child casualties as a result of the intensification of clashes, increased military

operations or crossfire incidents, and children also continued to be affected by explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices.

6. Recalling General Assembly resolution [71/177](#), the Special Representative urges Member States to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction, proportionality and the obligation to take all feasible precautions to avoid and minimize harm to children.

7. The fact that many actors are involved in hostilities poses a challenge for the monitoring, reporting and attribution of violations. Certain military operations, such as crossfire or aerial operations, pose specific challenges to the monitoring and reporting mechanism. Some 11 per cent of child casualties could not be attributed to a specific party. This in turn hampers effort by the United Nations to engage with parties to conflict in order to prevent future violations and protect children.

8. The Special Representative actively engaged with and called upon parties to take all necessary and immediate measures to prevent violations and to protect children in the context of aerial or ground operations. Member States positively engaged in child protection measures, such as revitalizing national policies on the prevention and mitigation of civilian casualties or considering the inclusion of wider child protection aspects in existing action plans. Others designated a civilian focal point to coordinate compliance with international humanitarian law and with civilian casualty mitigation policies within military operations, or implemented force directives on child protection.

9. Children continued to be abducted at high levels for recruitment and use, sexual abuse or forced marriage, or as punishment for the affiliation or alleged affiliation of relatives with parties to the conflict. Vulnerability and poverty continue to be push factors for child recruitment and use, with violations verified as having been perpetrated overwhelmingly by armed groups, who sometimes recruit children as young as eight years old. Children were used as human shields, cooks, porters or guards, for sexual purposes, as human bombs or for the purpose of carrying and detonating improvised explosive devices. In certain situations, recruitment reportedly took place in schools and orphanages.

10. When schools or hospitals are attacked, looted, destroyed or occupied, and teachers, health-care personnel and students are threatened, it affects thousands of children, with irreversible consequences for their education, health and future. Although the number of attacks against schools and hospitals decreased overall, the number of attacks significantly intensified in some countries

11. Rape and other forms of sexual violence remained significantly underreported, in particular when perpetrated against boys, owing to stigma, the involvement of powerful perpetrators, the lack of services and as a result of concerns about the protection of survivors and witnesses. In addition, widespread impunity and the lack of accountability mechanisms discourage children and witnesses from reporting violations. Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo persist as the country situations with the highest verified figures of such violations.

12. Globally, children continue to be inadequately protected from armed conflict, and violence continues to leave indelible marks on their lives. Ensuring long-term and sustainable responses to violations remains a challenge. Children are left with no option but to cope and survive, without adequate assistance programmes to allow them to properly heal. The traumatic violence they survived or witnessed leaves irreversible scars on their bodies and minds. Even when adequate health-care and reintegration programmes exist, they are still not sufficient to cover all the needs of every child affected. Such gaps create cycles of vulnerability and leave children prone to re-recruitment or to experience other violations on multiple occasions.

13. Action plans and other bilateral commitments continued to allow constructive engagement with parties to conflict to protect children and to end and prevent violations. Engagement by the Special Representative and the United Nations led to the development and signature of actions plans in the Central African Republic and the Syrian Arab Republic. To date, 31 action plans have been signed, including 11 by Government forces and 19 by non-State armed groups, as well as a memorandum of understanding signed with the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen. Preventive measures should be considered with the same attention as restorative measures in order to ensure sustainable peace. The Security Council, through its resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#), expressed its commitment to take concrete preventive action towards the goal of protecting children, with a view to building sustainable peace.

14. The United Nations has only been able to verify a fraction of the actual number of grave violations committed against children. Documentation and verification have been increasingly hampered by access constraints. Such constraints have resulted from mutually compounding factors, such as active conflict and military operations, volatile security situations or intentional restrictions on access by parties to conflict. Threats towards and the intimidation of child protection monitors and child protection actors, which are also directed at children, witnesses and communities, have led to a shrinking space for monitoring and reporting. In addition, the reduction in the number of child protection advisers in political and peacekeeping missions, as well as within United Nations country teams, reduced the capacity to verify and report on violations and to establish appropriate strategies for responding to child protection concerns. The decrease in the number of verified violations in 2018, in certain categories, is believed to be a result of restricted resources and restricted access for monitoring and verifying grave violations, rather than the result of an improvement in the situation of children in armed conflict. In the Sudan, the ability of the United Nations to monitor and report on grave violations was hampered by access restrictions and reduced child protection capacity. In Nigeria and Yemen, child protection practitioners faced significant access restrictions to conflict-affected areas, thereby impeding their ability to verify grave violations and to deliver life-saving aid to children.

15. Some violations are typically more difficult to document and to verify, such as sexual violence. Girls and boys express reluctance to report such violations owing to stigma, the fear of reprisal or rejection by their families and communities, and their lack of confidence in police or judicial responses. In conflict settings, stigmatization can mean the loss of community protection in situations where retaliation comes at the hands of armed actors, or where the weak rule of law response is further compromised by general insecurity. Boys may face additional reporting barriers due to stigma related to perceived gender roles. There may also be criminal repercussions as the rape of boys may not be criminalized and may fall instead under the criminalization of same-sex conduct, which impedes reporting for fear of prosecution. In Iraq, as a result of stigma and fear of retribution, among other issues, the United Nations did not verify any cases of sexual violence against children.

16. The monitoring and reporting mechanism measures the grave violations committed against children in armed conflict and identifies perpetrators, with the aim of fostering accountability and compliance with international law and child protection standards. It also represents an entry point for the United Nations to advocate the protection of children and to engage with parties to conflict, in particular through action plans, to end and prevent violations. The implementation of such commitments by listed parties, and the monitoring thereof, are crucial in effecting positive change for children and ensuring sustained engagement with listed parties to protect children. Child protection actors have a unique role in mainstreaming child protection, in monitoring and verifying violations and in engaging with parties to improve the

situation of children affected by armed conflict. Maintaining and strengthening these dedicated child protection resources, in peace operations, political missions and in other settings, is essential to the implementation of the mandate of the Security Council and General Assembly to protect children affected by armed conflict.

III. Opportunities for enhancing the protection of children affected by armed conflict

A. Leveraging security, development, humanitarian and human rights agendas to prevent grave violations against children

17. The international community has a collective responsibility to prevent violations against children in armed conflict and to provide children in such situations with the safety and security they need to develop themselves. The most effective protection for children is to prevent conflicts from erupting and to ensure that, if war breaks out, violations against children are prevented. Efforts to prevent violations must stem from a thorough understanding of the structural causes of conflict and the factors that give rise to these violations, such as poverty, discrimination, environmental degradation, social and economic marginalization, grievances and inequality. Without addressing those factors, children will continue to be used and abused in armed conflict.

18. The General Assembly, in its resolution [63/241](#), called upon Member States to enhance the complementarity of strategies related to security, development, human rights and humanitarian issues, with a view to addressing the impact of armed conflict on children in a sustainable and comprehensive manner. It is critical to mainstream and integrate specific child protection principles and obligations in connected workstreams, at policy levels and within specific country situations. International legal obligations regarding children, action plans and international instruments, such as the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, refer to a series of actions that are connected to security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, military discipline, accountability, training and capacity-building, doctrine, mediation efforts, justice sector reform, the rule of law, development and ultimately to peacebuilding.

19. Preventing conflict and providing protection and relief for children affected by armed conflict remains the primary responsibility of Member States. The United Nations can foster and complement those actions by supporting efforts in the aforementioned areas.

20. In its resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#), the Security Council reaffirmed the role of the Special Representative in contributing to conflict prevention and acknowledged that serious abuses and violations of human rights or international humanitarian law, including against children, can be an early indication of a descent into or an escalation of conflict. Regional and subregional organizations were also encouraged to develop and expand regional and subregional initiatives to prevent violations and abuses against children affected by armed conflict.

21. Through her advocacy, awareness-raising and engagement with parties to conflict, the Special Representative has stepped up her efforts on prevention, in cooperation with partners. The Special Representative has promoted the adoption of prevention plans at the national and regional levels, as an additional tool to the existing children and armed conflict architecture.

B. Capitalizing on best practices and lessons learned

22. In its resolution [72/245](#), the General Assembly requested the Special Representative to collect, assess and disseminate best practices and lessons learned. The Special Representative thus began an exercise to collate knowledge and experience from the 20 years of implementation of the children and armed conflict mandate, translating it into practical guidance for child protection actors. The exercise focused on the inclusion of child protection concerns in peace processes, the role of action plans in ending and preventing grave violations, and the monitoring and reporting mechanism as well as on specific country situations, including Colombia, the Philippines and Uganda.

Developing practical guidance on the integration of child protection concerns in peace processes

23. As requested by the Security Council in a statement by the President of the Council ([S/PRST/2017/21](#)) and in its resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#), the Office of the Special Representative continued the consultative process started in July 2018 with child protection and mediation actors to develop practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues in peace processes, in collaboration with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). In November 2018, the Special Representative convened an expert group of protection and mediation actors composed of representatives from the Berghof Foundation, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Geneva Call, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria and a former child soldier and youth advocate from Sierra Leone. Information collected through those consultations and bilateral interviews will inform the practical guidance to be launched by the end of 2019. During a side-event on "Children and armed conflict – protecting children during and after war" organized by Argentina, Belgium, Norway, Spain and Uruguay, in cooperation with UNICEF, Plan International, Save the Children International and World Vision International during the humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council, held in Geneva in June 2019, the Office of the Special Representative presented the process for elaborating the guidance.

Fostering exchanges and generating lessons learned on the monitoring and reporting mechanism

24. In order to discuss trends, challenges and best practices in documenting and responding to grave violations against children in armed conflict, the Special Representative, in cooperation with UNICEF, launched a series of regional workshops that brought together members of different United Nations country task forces on monitoring and reporting. Those consultations, the first of their kind, aimed at fostering exchanges and generating lessons learned on the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations and on United Nations engagement with listed parties. They also aimed at ensuring the broader participation of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in the country task forces on monitoring and reporting.

25. A first regional high-level and technical-level workshop of the country task forces covering the countries of the Middle East and North Africa region was organized in Amman, in November 2018. It brought together the Special Representative, UNICEF and the co-chairs of the country task forces from Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, as well as the United Nations country team leads

from Lebanon, Libya and the State of Palestine, as along with the regional directors of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. A second workshop, following the same structure, was held in Nairobi, in January 2019, bringing together the co-chairs of the country task forces from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan, as well as the regional directors of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. A third consultation is to be held in Asia later in 2019.

26. With a view to fostering lessons learned and moving forward with the monitoring of violations and of action plan implementation in Myanmar, in November 2018, the Special Representative hosted members from the country task force in her Office and facilitated meetings with the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, the Permanent Mission of Myanmar to the United Nations and other interested Member States.

27. In June 2019, the Office of the Special Representative co-organized a retreat of the country task force of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was aimed at taking stock of the work of the task force and strategizing its work. Discussions also focused on dialogue with armed groups and the “ACT to Protect Children Affected by Conflict” campaign.

IV. Commitments, action plans and dialogue with parties to conflict

A. Addressing grave violations against children by Government forces

28. The Special Representative continued to support the implementation of action plans. In Myanmar, the Special Representative enhanced her advocacy and outreach with the Government to press for progress on ending and preventing all six grave violations. In December 2018, in Myanmar, the Special Representative, in cooperation with the country task force, organized a training on the grave violations for the Committee for the Prevention Military Recruitment of Underage Children and for military focal points. That was followed by a training-of-trainers course for senior officers in May 2019. In a further development, on 31 March 2019, the Tatmadaw released seven children and 25 young people who were recruited when they were below the age of 18.

29. In Afghanistan, the Law on Protection of Child Rights (Child Act) was enacted in March 2019 by presidential decree. While the criminalization of *bacha bazi* and child recruitment was included in the revised Penal Code, which entered into force in 2018, the Child Act provides more specific protection measures. The Child Act was a priority under the terms of the 2014 road map for the implementation of the 2011 Afghan National Defence and Security Forces action plan.

30. In South Sudan, following engagement by the Special Representative, the Government agreed to revise the 2012 action plan on recruitment and use to address all grave violations for which security forces are listed. In February 2019, the South Sudan country task force hosted a workshop with South Sudan security forces, including South Sudan People’s Defence Forces (SSPDF), government ministries, parties integrating into SSPDF, civil society, United Nations system entities and the Office of the Special Representative. At the time of drafting, the draft action plan was under review by the Government.

31. In Somalia, a road map was developed in 2018 to expedite the implementation of the 2012 action plan to end and prevent child recruitment and use, and the 2012 action plan to end and prevent killing and maiming, signed by the Government and

the United Nations. The road map identifies gaps and key priority activities to accelerate the implementation of the action plans and is pending signature.

32. In Yemen, sustained advocacy by the Special Representative and the country task force led to the adoption in December 2018 of a road map to revitalize the implementation of the 2014 action plan between the Government and the United Nations on ending and preventing child recruitment and use by the Yemeni Government forces.

33. The Special Representative intensified her engagement with the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen. In December 2018, the Special Representative convened a meeting for Coalition members in New York to discuss measures to enhance child protection in Yemen. As a follow-up, on 21 February 2019, the Special Representative facilitated a workshop in New York for the child protection unit of the Coalition to discuss measures to end and prevent casualties and other grave violations in Yemen. Sustained engagement resulted in the signature of a memorandum of understanding to strengthen the protection of children affected by armed conflict in Yemen by the Coalition Force Commander and the United Nations in March 2019, in Riyadh. The memorandum contains key provisions on child protection and creates a political framework for the ongoing development of a concrete workplan to prevent the killing and maiming of children in military operations by the Coalition in Yemen.

34. At the request of the Government of Thailand, the Office of the Special Representative and UNICEF jointly undertook a mission to affected areas of southern Thailand in January 2019 to discuss the protection of children with Government officials, non-governmental organizations, teachers and children. The Office of the Special Representative also participated in a seminar on the prevention of violations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, attended by representatives of relevant ministries, non-governmental organizations and UNICEF. In May 2019, during the third International Conference on Safe Schools, in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, the Special Representative exchanged with the Thai delegation on identifying best practices and gaps in the protection of schools.

B. Addressing grave violations against children by armed groups

35. The Special Representative and the United Nations engaged consistently with a wide range of armed groups on the protection of children in armed conflict, with action plans remaining the central tool for engagement and fostering change for children affected by conflict. In the Central African Republic, in June 2019, following advocacy by the United Nations, the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique signed an action plan to end and prevent child recruitment and use, sexual violence against children, the killing and maiming of children and attacks against schools and hospitals, and to undertake preventive measures regarding abductions and the denial of humanitarian access. In June 2019, after months of engagement between the United Nations and the Syrian Democratic Forces, in coordination with the Special Representative, an action plan was signed with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children.

36. The Special Representative also continued engaging with armed groups that have signed action plans. In October 2018, with the support of the United Nations, the Special Representative engaged with factions of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North on the implementation of the 2016 action plan on ending and preventing child recruitment and use. The Special Representative advocated increased access for the United Nations to monitor progress in the implementation of the action plan. Regarding the situation in Mali, the Special Representative met on several occasions with the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA), in New York,

including in February 2019, in the framework of the 2017 action plan and discussed with them ways forward to continue its implementation. In September 2018 and May 2019, the country task force organized two workshops with CMA in Kidal and Gao on action plan implementation. In Nigeria, sustained advocacy by the United Nations within the framework of the 2017 action plan signed by the Civilian Joint Task Force led to the release of over 1,700 children to child protection actors during the reporting period.

37. There was progress in engagement with listed armed groups outside the context of action plans. In Yemen, the United Nations initiated contacts with the Houthis with a view to ending and preventing violations for which the group is listed. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, between July 2018 and March 2019, 15 commanders of armed groups signed unilateral road maps to end child recruitment and use and other grave violations, leading to the release of 847 children. In Mali, in January 2019, the country task force organized a workshop involving the political and military leaders of the Mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad, Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad-Plateforme and Coordination des mouvements de l'entente in order to elicit firm commitments to ending and preventing grave violations against children, and to release children from their ranks.

V. Raising global awareness and building partnerships

A. Field visits and awareness-raising

38. In September 2018, the Special Representative travelled to South Sudan to engage with the Government on grave violations committed against children and to advocate the strengthening of reintegration efforts. She welcomed the release of almost 1,000 children from armed groups in 2018 and urged the Government to take immediate and concrete action to end grave violations against children and ensure accountability. She advocated the expansion of the 2012 action plan to include all grave violations (see para. 30 above). The Special Representative also met with civil society representatives, religious leaders and, in Yambio, with children recently released by parties to conflict.

39. The Special Representative travelled in January and March 2019 to the headquarters in Riyadh of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen, in order to develop and sign a memorandum of understanding to improve the protection of children in Yemen. The Special Representative met the Commander of the Coalition Joint Forces and discussed measures taken by the Coalition to prevent grave violations against children during the conduct of its military operations in Yemen.

40. In May 2019 the Special Representative travelled to the Central African Republic where she met with the President, Prime Minister, President of the National Assembly, ministers, representatives of armed groups signatories of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, representatives of the PK5 neighbourhood of Bangui, the diplomatic community, religious leaders and civil society. At a meeting in Kaga Bandoro with former Séléka, anti-balaka and associated militia, the Special Representative encouraged the full implementation of the 2018 action plan signed by the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique and called on other listed armed groups to sign action plans with the United Nations. In June 2019, Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique signed an action plan with the United Nations. In Bangui and Kaga Bandoro, the Special Representative also met with children formerly associated with armed groups who benefited from reintegration programmes.

41. The Special Representative visited Mali in July 2019 to engage with the Government, armed groups signatories of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, representatives of international forces present in the country and civil society. She advocated that gaps in the legislative framework be addressed in line with Mali's international commitments and child protection standards. She offered support to institutionalize and strengthen trainings for the Malian Defence and Security Forces on child protection. She called upon all relevant parties to fully implement the protocol on the transfer of children captured in military operations to civilian child protection actors. The Special Representative urged the leaders of armed groups to release all children from their ranks and to end the recruitment and use and other grave violations. She encouraged the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad to fully implement their 2017 action plan and called upon Platform to adopt an action plan. The Special Representative travelled to Mopti, a region plagued by intercommunal violence which has resulted in the killing of children. She encouraged the representatives of the Fulani and Dogon communities to help the prevention of violations by identifying community mechanisms to be strengthened with the support of the United Nations. The Special Representative launched the global campaign "Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict" in Bamako, with the support of the Prime Minister and his Government, as well as the diplomatic community, and witnessed the creation of a new Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, co-chaired by Belgium and the Niger.

B. New global campaign: Act to Protect Affected by Armed Conflict

42. In April 2019, the Special Representative launched the new media and advocacy campaign "Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict". Building on the previous campaign "Children, Not Soldiers", the new campaign aims to raise awareness of all six grave violations, including by highlighting the linkages between violations and the need to address them holistically. The campaign, which will run until the end of 2022, also seeks to link the issue of children and armed conflict with the peacebuilding, sustaining peace and the development and prevention agendas.

43. The campaign was developed in consultation with various United Nations partners, including UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, as well as civil society organizations and Member States. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation, Forest Whitaker, also lent his support to the campaign. In order to mobilize collective action and to ensure that the campaign is used by the child protection community, interested Governments and parties to conflict, a set of advocacy tools was developed in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

44. The Special Representative launched the campaign in New York on 2 April 2019 at an event co-sponsored by the European Union and the African Union. A regional launch was held in April 2019 at the European Parliament, in Brussels, and will be followed by other regional launches. National launches in the presence of the Special Representative took place in May 2019 in the Central African Republic and in July 2019 in Mali. In addition, in June 2019, on the occasion of the Day of the African Child, the Government launched the campaign in Somalia with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and the African Union Mission in Somalia.

C. Building and supporting global alliances

45. Providing adequate, sustainable and reliably funded reintegration programmes is essential to ensuring that children recruited and used by parties to conflict benefit from the necessary support to rebuild their lives and allow them to reintegrate into their communities. In September 2018, during the high-level week of the General Assembly, the Office of the Special Representative co-organized, with Belgium, a high-level event on “Funding the future: challenges and responses to the reintegration of child soldiers”. During the event, which brought together Member States, civil society organizations and representatives of the United Nations, the Special Representative launched the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers to generate new ideas for addressing sustainable support for child reintegration programmes. The Coalition is co-led by UNICEF and composed of child protection experts from the United Nations and civil society organizations, as well as the World Bank and Member States. The Coalition is addressing needs and gaps in programming and funding, on linkages to peacebuilding, sustaining peace and the development and prevention agendas, and on mapping existing funding mechanisms and modalities.

46. The Special Representative also supported initiatives including the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles), the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, and encouraged Member States to endorse those instruments. In February 2019, the Special Representative was a speaker at an event co-hosted in New York by France and Save the Children entitled “Free children from war: the role of the Paris Principles and commitments”. In February 2019, the Special Representative attended the International Review Workshop on the Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles, held in Ottawa.

47. In March 2019, in Geneva, the Special Representative was a panellist at an event on “The Safe Schools Declaration – Better protecting women and girls from attacks on education” organized by Argentina, Mali, Norway, Romania, Spain, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. In May 2019, the Special Representative participated in the third International Conference on Safe Schools, hosted by the Government of Spain in Palma de Mallorca.

D. Working with regional and subregional organizations

48. As requested in General Assembly resolution [72/245](#) and following the adoption of Security Council resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#), the Special Representative further strengthened her engagement with regional organizations in support of the global mandate to prevent violations against children in armed conflict. The Special Representative gave a presentation on her mandate to the Technical Support Committee of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, in Nairobi, in January 2019. The Framework is supported by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. She also engaged with the Economic Community of Central African States in the Central African Republic, in May 2019, on the prevention of violations against children. Representatives of her Office met in May 2019 with the Andean Community and in July 2019 with the League of Arab States to discuss regional strategies to prevent violations against children in armed conflict.

African Union

49. The Special Representative continued her strong partnership with the African Union. In October 2018, her Office participated in the ninth high-level retreat of the African Union on the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa, held in Accra. The new campaign, Act To Protect, was launched in New York in cooperation with the African Union. In June 2019, on the occasion of the Day of the African Child, the Special Representative and the Department of Peace and Security of the African Union issued a joint press statement. Also in June 2019, in Addis Ababa, representatives of the Office of the Special Representative participated in a brainstorming session with the African Union and other partners on cooperation and coordination among different partners on ending and preventing violations in Africa. In addition, there was substantive cooperation between the Office of the Special Representative and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

50. The Special Representative, including during her meeting of July 2019, in Mali, with the Deputy Force Commander of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, advocated the mainstreaming of child protection provisions in the international humanitarian law and human rights compliance framework of the Joint Force. The Office of the Special Representative also contributed to the development of training modules on child protection for Joint Force officers and troops.

European Union

51. The partnership between the Special Representative and the European Union continued throughout the reporting period. In October 2018, the Special Representative briefed the Working Party on Human Rights on the children and armed conflict mandate. In April 2019, the Special Representative signed a memorandum of understanding with the European Parliament to establish a framework of cooperation on children and armed conflict. On that occasion, she also briefed the Political and Security Committee of the Council of the European Union.

52. In November 2018, the Special Representative opened the United Nations Liaison Office for Children and Armed Conflict (Europe) in Brussels, tasked with enhancing cooperation with European Union institutions and member States and covering relations with the Human Rights Council and other Geneva-based mechanisms and institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations. The Liaison Office provided briefings and trainings on children and armed conflict to experts from the European External Action Service, as well as to human rights and gender advisers from Common Security and Defence Policy missions of the European Union. In July 2019, the Office of the Special Representative co-organized with Belgium and Italy a seminar on “Children and armed conflict: a discussion of European Union and United Nations frameworks of action and mainstreaming opportunities”. The Liaison Office further facilitates the engagement of the Special Representative with the Human Rights Council (see para. 60 below).

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

53. The Office of the Special Representative has continued to strengthen its partnership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Throughout 2018, the Office supported the NATO Allied Command Transformation to update NATO training on child protection. In October 2018 in Brunssum, the Netherlands, and in July 2019, in Naples, Italy, her Office supported the second and third training sessions on children and armed conflict for NATO child protection focal points. In addition,

in October 2018, her Office participated in the United Nations-NATO staff talks, at which it was agreed to focus cooperation on capacity-building and awareness-raising. The Office of the Special Representative continued to support the Senior Focal Point on Children and Armed Conflict at NATO headquarters in updating the NATO policy document entitled “The protection of children in armed conflict – the way forward”.

E. Building partnerships with civil society

54. Building and maintaining strong partnerships with civil society organizations and academia remained a priority for the Special Representative. In addition to regular engagements with New York-based non-governmental organizations, the Special Representative engaged with civil society partners during her missions to country situations as well as with non-governmental organizations based in Europe, including in Berlin, Brussels, Geneva and London. The opening of the Liaison Office in Brussels facilitated those latter collaborations. The Special Representative participated in dozens of events organized by non-governmental organizations.

55. In September 2018, the Special Representative was a keynote speaker at an event on the theme “Hear our voices: listening to children affected by conflict”, organized by World Vision on the margins of the high-level week of the General Assembly. In November 2018, the Office of the Special Representative, together with civil society partners including Geneva Call, organized an event during Geneva Peace Week. The Special Representative was a keynote speaker at an event on the theme “Reintegrating children as a contribution to peace and security: delivering long-term and sustainable solutions”, together with Child Soldiers International. In May 2019, the Special Representative was a panellist in the global symposium on the theme “Stop the war on children” organized by Save the Children, in The Hague, on the occasion of its 100th anniversary. In June 2019, in Berlin, the Special Representative participated alongside the Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany in an event organized by World Vision Germany regarding the need for sustainable and dedicated funding for reintegration programmes for children associated with parties to conflict. She also discussed the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration with members of the German Parliament at a meeting organized by civil society. The Special Representative provided video messages, for example for the “Girls Get Equal” campaign, launched by Plan International on 11 October 2018.

56. The Special Representative also continued to raise awareness about the children and armed conflict agenda with universities, academia and think tanks. During her missions to Brussels, in April 2019, and to Berlin, in June 2019, she met with representatives of the European Institute of Peace and with the Centre for International Peace Operations, respectively, and discussed avenues for cooperation.

F. Building support through partnerships with United Nations mechanisms and international organizations

57. The Special Representative continued to leverage her role as a key advocate for children’s rights to foster international cooperation with a view to improving the protection of children. On 25 September 2018, during the high-level week of the General Assembly, in the presence of the Queen of Belgium, the Special Representative, with the co-sponsorship of Belgium, organized an event that brought together Member States, civil society organizations and representatives of the United Nations, to discuss reintegration programmes for children. With respect to the global study on children deprived of liberty, mandated by the General Assembly, the Office

of the Special Representative continued to participate in the thematic research group on children deprived of liberty related to armed conflict and national security. Her Office briefed the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations on child protection in the context of peacekeeping and resources for child protection advisers.

58. The Special Representative participated in the Youth Forum of the Economic and Social Council, held in April 2019, and spoke during the interactive dialogue on the theme “Youth, peace and security: challenges and prospects”. She underlined the important contribution children can make as agents of change to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular to Goal 16.

59. The Special Representative continued to collaborate intensively with the Security Council and relevant subsidiary organs. She briefed the Security Council on the situation of children and armed conflict in Yemen (April 2019) and in the Central African Republic (May 2019) and briefed the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [2127 \(2013\)](#) concerning the Central African Republic. The Special Representative briefed the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict on specific country situations and issued country reports on Myanmar ([S/2018/956](#)), South Sudan ([S/2018/865](#)), the Syrian Arab Republic ([S/2018/969](#)) and Yemen ([S/2019/453](#)). Her Office also supported the preparations for the visit of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict to South Sudan in November 2018. In February 2019, Belgium, the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and France organized an Arria-formula meeting on the protection of children affected by armed conflict in contexts where humanitarian space is shrinking, with a specific focus on the Central African Republic.

60. Regular communication with the Human Rights Council regarding violations of the rights of children in situations of conflict continued. On 5 March 2019, the Special Representative presented her annual report to the Council ([A/HRC/40/49](#)). Her Office continued to support universal periodic review processes by providing information on the six grave violations and progress made by the countries on the agenda. Dialogue with the Committee on the Rights of the Child continued on enhancing the sharing of information and efforts on implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the optional protocols thereto. The Special Representative also continued her dialogue with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council on common areas of concern. In March 2019, in Geneva, she participated in a panel organized by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons and the Global Protection Cluster on improving the protection of internally displaced children. Following continued advocacy by the Special Representative and the United Nations, South Sudan acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

61. The Special Representative continued her cooperation and engagement with other United Nations system entities, including UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, OHCHR and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Her Office contributed to the update of the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards with respect to the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups. Her Office also contributed to a training on child protection developed by Department of Peace Operations as well as to the Occasional Policy Paper of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs entitled “Building a culture of protection: 20 years of Security Council engagement on the protection of civilians”, published in May 2019. The Office of the Special Representative actively participated in the review group on the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces. Her Office closely cooperated with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the compliance framework of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

62. The Special Representative strengthened her outreach with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and with the Special Advisers to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect. In December 2019, they issued a joint press release to condemn reports of 150 women and girls having been brutally raped in November 2019 near Bentiu, South Sudan. On 19 June 2019, on the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Special Representative, with the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Argentina, co-hosted an event on the importance of a survivor-centred approach.

63. In addition, the Office of the Special Representative increased its engagement with the World Health Organization, UNHCR and UNESCO on participation in the monitoring and reporting mechanism and in order to increase synergies.

64. Cross-cutting issues relevant to the children and armed conflict mandate remained an important entry point for mainstreaming child protection concerns. The Special Representative continued to treat the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers as a matter of priority, including by regularly engaging with the high-level steering group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate and the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Children and armed conflict concerns were also mainstreamed in such Organization-wide initiatives as the implementation and work towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. In this context, in March 2019, the Special Representative was a panellist during a side-event organized in Geneva by Qatar and the Education Above All Foundation on the theme "Education 2030 – leaving no one behind: children with disabilities, girls, forcibly displaced children and minorities".

65. As regards the plight of children associated or allegedly associated with groups designated as terrorist by the United Nations, including foreign fighters, the Special Representative co-led a group of United Nations counterparts working on the issue of violent extremism and terrorism to explore how child rights should be upheld in that context. Efforts included convening an information group of senior United Nations leaders to discuss the children and counter-terrorism issue, which eventually became part of the structure of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact. The Office also contributed to several meetings and reports on the issue such as those of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The Special Representative systematically stressed that children associated or allegedly associated with such groups, including foreign fighters, should be treated first and foremost as victims and that the best interests of the child should be the primary consideration. The detention of any such children should remain a measure of last resort and their reintegration and rehabilitation must be prioritized. The Special Representative participated in an event on children and counter-terrorism in March 2019 in Geneva, organized by the European Union, Switzerland, Human Rights Watch, Defence for Children International and the non-governmental organization panel for the global study on children deprived of liberty.

VI. Recommendations

66. The Special Representative is deeply concerned by the scale and severity of grave violations committed against children, in particular the high number of verified cases of killing and maiming. She calls upon all parties to immediately end and take all necessary measures to prevent such violations, including

through mitigation measures and by enhancing training on preventing the six grave violations, as well as ensuring strong accountability measures for perpetrators.

67. The Special Representative calls upon Member States to continue supporting the implementation of action plans and other commitments aimed at strengthening the protection of children in armed conflict, including by facilitating United Nations engagement with armed groups.

68. The Special Representative encourages all Member States and parties to conflict to ensure the inclusion of child protection provisions in peace negotiations, mediation and peacebuilding and to ensure linkages of child protection into disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes and security sector reform processes.

69. The Special Representative encourages Member States, United Nations partners, regional organizations, child protection actors and parties to the conflict to join the “Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict” campaign.

70. The detention of children for their alleged association with parties to conflict, including groups designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, remains an issue of grave concern. The Special Representative urges Member States to treat these children primarily as victims and to avoid further stigmatization. She reiterates that detention should only be used as a last resort, for the shortest period of time, and that alternatives to detention should be prioritized whenever possible.

71. The Special Representative calls on Member States to engage closely with the United Nations to facilitate the return and reintegration of foreign children and women actually or allegedly affiliated with groups designated as terrorist groups by the and to ensure a coordinated response based on international law and on children’s rights, bearing in mind their best interests.

72. The Special Representative urges Member States to allow safe, timely and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance and to ensure the protection of humanitarian personnel and assets. Parties to conflict should disseminate clear orders specifying that humanitarian assistance for children should be facilitated.

73. The Special Representative reiterates the importance of dedicated child protection capacities, in particular in peacekeeping and special political missions. She also encourages Member States, as well as regional and subregional organizations, to strengthen those capacities and enhance the mainstreaming of and training on children and armed conflict. She further encourages these actors to engage with the United Nations to develop prevention initiatives, with due attention to the links between security, development, humanitarian and human rights agendas, in order to forestall grave violations.

74. The Special Representative stresses the importance of training and capacity-building with regard to specialized child protection functions, with a focus on prevention, to ensure that Member States, the United Nations and regional organizations have the adequate resources to end and prevent violations against children.

75. The Special Representative calls upon the donor community to provide sufficient, sustainable and reliable funding for child reintegration and address existing gaps in order to allow child protection actors to react swiftly to the release of children and to put in place long-term viable alternatives to military life, notably through gender-sensitive reintegration programmes that provide,

among other resources, psychosocial support, education programmes and vocational training.

76. The Special Representative welcomes all steps taken to ensure full compliance with international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, and calls on Member States to further strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict, including through the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the endorsement and implementation of the Paris Principles, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles.
