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Children and armed conflict in the Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the sixth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Sudan. It focuses on trends in and patterns of violations committed against children in Darfur, the Two Areas and Abyei between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2019. It provides information on the perpetrators of the violations, as well as on actions taken by the parties to the conflict to improve the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including dialogue and actions plans. The report also contains a series of recommendations aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children in the Sudan.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the sixth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Sudan and covers the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2019. It contains descriptions of the trends in grave violations committed against children since the previous report ([S/2017/191](#)) and outlines the progress and challenges since the adoption of the conclusions by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in July 2017 ([S/AC.51/2017/3](#)). The violations presented in the report have been verified by the country task force on monitoring and reporting, co-chaired by the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for Darfur, and the Resident Coordinator and UNICEF for the Two Areas (Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile) and Abyei. Where possible, perpetrators are identified.

2. The present report shows continuing trends in grave violations affecting children in Darfur, with the most prevalent being killing and maiming and sexual violence. Most of the violations were committed by unidentified armed elements and occurred in the context of intercommunal violence or conflicts between nomads and farmers. Children in rural areas and internally displaced children continued to be particularly vulnerable to grave violations and suffered from the prevalence of explosive remnants of war. Almost one third of the total violations against children were attributed to Government security forces, often in the context of military operations, attacks against civilian populations or excessive use of force against demonstrators. Infighting between different factions of the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW) further caused grave violations against children. In the Two Areas, very few violations against children were verified owing to the continued lack of access to areas under the control of armed groups. The present report also details progress made in engaging parties to conflict to end and prevent grave violations, such as the completion of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Government and progress in the development and implementation of action plans with armed groups.

II. Political and security situation and parties to conflict

A. Political and security developments

3. Hostilities between the Government of the Sudan and armed groups decreased significantly as a result of Operation Decisive Summer (January 2014 to June 2016), which reduced the presence and activities of armed groups in Darfur. The Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) lost their foothold in Darfur; however, both groups maintained a presence in South Sudan and were reportedly increasingly active in Libya. The Government consolidated its control and authority across Darfur, except for small pockets in the Jebel Marra area, which remained under the control of SLA-AW. After a relative lull during most of 2017, Government security forces resumed their operations against the group in 2018, including through aerial bombardments, which resulted in child casualties. In the same period, SLA-AW targeted Government security forces bases and checkpoints, mostly through sporadic hit-and-run attacks.

4. Internal divisions over the engagement in negotiations with the Government further weakened and fragmented SLA-AW, leading to leadership struggles and infighting between different factions. This resulted in fierce competition and clashes among various factions and grave violations against children. The feud between

SLA-AW-Saleh Borsa and SLA-AW-Mubarak Aldouk, sparked by Mubarak Aldouk announcing his intention to negotiate a peace agreement with the Government, was the most protracted, as SLA-AW-Saleh Borsa staged attacks on SLA-AW-Mubarak Aldouk positions in Daya village in the south-west of Rockero, Central Darfur. Those sporadic attacks led to displacements of the population and grave violations against children. In North Darfur, the Sudan Liberation Army/Peace and Development (SLA/PD) harassed, assaulted and attacked civilians, in particular at the Sortony camp for internally displaced persons. Areas in Jebel Marra under SLA-AW control remained inaccessible to the United Nations owing to insecurity and government restrictions from 2017 to late 2019.

5. While armed hostilities between Government forces and armed groups abated in most parts of Darfur, intercommunal conflicts over land and natural resources continued to fuel tensions and clashes. Disputes between farmers and nomads over nomadic migratory routes or access to grazing land and farmland often resulted in violent confrontations. Abduction, killing and maiming of children and rape of girls by elements described as armed nomads remained prevalent in farming areas. Conflict over access to land and natural resources also negatively affected the capacity of internally displaced persons to return to their areas of origin. Internal displacement remained a major source of vulnerability, as internally displaced children often fell victim to grave violations. Furthermore, the presence of explosive remnants of war in Darfur continued to cause child casualties.

6. In Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan States, unilateral ceasefires declared by the Government and by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) remained in effect throughout the reporting period. However, the SPLM-N-Malik Agar faction accused Government security forces of violating the ceasefire on several occasions. In March 2017, the SPLM-N Deputy Chair Abdelaziz Al-Hilu resigned over a disagreement on the inclusion of self-determination in the peace negotiations with the Government. On 8 July 2017, SPLM-N announced the formal split between the faction led by Malik Agar in areas of Blue Nile and the faction led by Abdelaziz Al-Hilu in areas of Blue Nile and in the Nuba Mountains of Southern Kordofan. The split led to tensions and clashes between supporters of the two factions and along ethnic lines, and subsequent population displacements in Blue Nile. During the period under review, monitoring in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile was constrained owing to the continued denial of access to SPLM-N-controlled areas by the group from within the Sudan. In Abyei, while tensions between the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya continued, the security situation overall remained relatively calm. Occasional incidents of criminal activity and attacks by unidentified armed elements occurred, resulting in child casualties.

7. UNAMID underwent a reconfiguration and drawdown, leading to challenges in the monitoring and verification of violations against children in areas from which UNAMID had withdrawn. In 2017, the Security Council determined that there had been an overall improvement in the security situation in Darfur and decided to reduce the UNAMID footprint (resolution [2363 \(2017\)](#)). In 2018, a gradual withdrawal of UNAMID from the more stable areas and concentration on conflict-affected areas was authorized. As part of that process, the child protection section of UNAMID underwent a large reduction of its capacities, which negatively affected the monitoring and reporting of violations and engagement with parties.

8. In December 2018, popular demonstrations broke out in Khartoum and spread to other states over the high cost of living occasioned by the withdrawal of government subsidies on essential commodities. That unrest led to the removal, on 11 April 2019, of the President, Omer Al-Bashir, by the Sudanese Armed Forces. Those events had repercussions in Darfur, where large crowds in major urban centres and camps for internally displaced persons gathered to celebrate events in Khartoum.

The demonstrators targeted National Intelligence and Security Service and other security forces facilities, perceived as symbols of the previous Government. The government security forces, mainly the Rapid Support Forces, responded with excessive force to the protests, thereby causing child casualties.

9. On 17 August 2019, with the support of the African Union and the Government of Ethiopia, the Transitional Military Council and the Forces for Freedom and Change, an umbrella opposition group instrumental in organizing the popular demonstrations, signed a constitutional declaration agreeing on transitional arrangements for the forthcoming 39 months. On 21 August, the Sovereign Council of the Sudan was sworn in, replacing the Transitional Military Council. The Sovereign Council comprised five military personnel and six civilians, including two women. Abdalla Hamdok was sworn in as the Prime Minister of the transitional Government the same day. A new 18-member Cabinet, including four women, took office on 8 September.

10. Meanwhile, starting in April 2019, the President of South Sudan hosted peace negotiations between the transitional Government of the Sudan and various opposition groups under the Sudanese Revolutionary Front umbrella in Juba. The talks led to the signing, on 11 September 2019, of the Juba Declaration for Confidence-building Procedures and the Preparation for Negotiation, which constitutes a road map and trust-building agreement. Furthermore, the Government agreed to permit humanitarian access to all areas of the country, including conflict-affected areas of Jebel Marra, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. This allowed the United Nations, in late 2019, to access parts of those areas for the first time in many years, creating a renewed opportunity to engage with armed groups on the situation of children affected by the conflict

B. Parties to the conflict

Government security forces

11. The Sudanese Armed Forces are the military forces of the Sudan, consisting of the Land Forces, the Sudanese Navy, the Sudanese Air Force, and the Popular Defence Forces. The Sudanese Armed Forces were delisted from the annexes to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict as of 2018 (S/2018/465), after having taken all the steps in their action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children.

12. The Sudan Police Force works under the command of the General Director of Police. The Popular Defence Forces, a paramilitary group established in 1989 through the Popular Defence Forces Act to support the Sudan Police Force, was dissolved by the Transitional Military Council in May 2019. The Popular Police Force, a paramilitary reserve force of local citizens raised by the Government to augment and provide assistance to the Sudan Police Force, derives its mandate from the Popular Police Act of 1989.

13. The Rapid Support Forces, a major security player in Operation Decisive Summer and composed of members of the former Border Guards and Government-allied armed Arab militias, continued to emerge as a major security entity. In January 2017, the Parliament passed the Rapid Support Forces Act, integrating them into the Sudanese Armed Forces. Some 30,000 members of the Rapid Support Forces were reportedly absorbed into the Sudanese Armed Forces.

14. The General Intelligence Service, created in July 2019 by the Transitional Military Council, replaced the former National Intelligence and Security Service. The agency was renamed in response to demands by protesters for the dissolution of the

National Intelligence and Security Service because of its involvement in the violent response to popular demonstrations in late 2018 and 2019. For the purposes of the present report, the service will be referred to as the National Intelligence and Security Service/General Intelligence Service.

15. Joint Government security forces consisting of Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces conducted military operations against SLA-AW in Jebel Marra. Joint forces consisting of the Rapid Support Forces, the Sudanese Armed Forces and the National Intelligence and Security Service/General Intelligence Service were also involved in the violent response to the popular demonstrations in 2019.

Armed groups

16. SLA-AW was gradually fragmented by internal divisions and leadership struggles and the territory under its control and its operational capabilities were significantly reduced during the reporting period. Defections of key commanders who signed peace agreements with the Government led to shifts in allegiances and infighting between the different factions. Splinter groups included SLA-AW Saleh Borsa, SLA-AW Mubarak Aldouk, SLA/PD Siddiq Al Fouka, SLA-AW Zanoun, the Sudan Liberation Movement-General Command, led by Amir Yousif Adam, and the Sudan Liberation Movement-Field Leadership, led by Yousif Ali Shag. SLA-AW is listed for the recruitment and use of children in annex I to the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/74/845-S/2020/525](#)) as a party that has not put in place measures to improve the protection of children.

17. In July 2017, SPLM-N split into two factions, led by Malik Agar and Abdelaziz Al-Hilu, as detailed in the preceding section. The Malik Agar faction was present in parts of Blue Nile State, while the Abdelaziz Al-Hilu faction held territory in parts of Blue Nile State and in the Nuba Mountains of Southern Kordofan. SPLM-N is listed for recruitment and use of children in annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/74/845-S/2020/525](#)) as a party that has not put in place measures to improve the protection of children.

18. Although SLA-MM and JEM have lost their foothold in Darfur since 2014, both groups maintained a presence in South Sudan and were increasingly active in Libya. According to the Panel of Experts on the Sudan, Libya is an important source of financing for those groups, as they are involved in mercenary and criminal activities (see [S/2019/34](#) and [S/2020/36](#)). SLA-MM and JEM are listed for recruitment and use of children in annex I to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([A/74/845-S/2020/525](#)) as parties that have not put in place measures to improve the protection of children.

III. Grave violations committed against children

19. Between 2017 and late 2019, access restrictions to conflict-affected areas of Darfur presented challenges to the verification of grave violations against children. Access to areas controlled by SPLM-N in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile was constrained throughout the reporting period, despite ceasefires declared by the parties to the conflict and advocacy by the country task force and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for monitoring access to those areas. Therefore, the information contained in the present report does not reflect the full impact of armed conflict on children in the Sudan.

Darfur

20. During the reporting period, the country task force verified 714 grave violations in Darfur, affecting 679 children, of which 291 were girls. The great majority of the violations (405), including 144 violations caused by explosive remnants of war, could not be attributed to any party. Government security forces were responsible for more than one third of the total violations (272). The remaining 37 violations were committed by SLA-AW and its splinter groups. In 2017, 213 violations against children were verified. The number of violations peaked in 2018 (293). In 2019, the United Nations verified 208 violations. South Darfur was most affected, with almost half (332) of all violations against children, followed by North Darfur (161), Central Darfur (139), West Darfur (75) and East Darfur (7). Overall, killing and maiming accounted for most of the violations (451), followed by rape and sexual violence (171), abduction (53), attacks on schools and hospitals (31) and recruitment or use and denial of humanitarian access (4 each).

Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States and the Abyei Area

21. During the reporting period, the country task force verified 20 grave violations in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States and the Abyei Area, affecting 17 boys, 2 girls and 1 baby whose sex was unknown. The violations were attributed to unknown armed elements (18) and the Sudanese Armed Forces and SPLM-N (1 each). The violations occurred in 2017 (16), 2018 (1) and 2019 (3) in Southern Kordofan (16), Abyei (3) and Blue Nile (1).

A. Recruitment and use of children**Darfur**

22. Four boys were verified as recruited and used by SLA-AW. The violations occurred in South Darfur (2), North and Central Darfur (1 each), in 2019 (3) and 2017 (1). Furthermore, the country task force is in the process of verifying alleged cases of recruitment and use of children by the Rapid Support Forces.

23. Four cases of recruitment and use of children by SLA-AW were verified during the reporting period. For instance, a 14-year-old boy was recruited by SLA-AW in 2017, following separation from his family after an airstrike. He was used to guard SLA-AW military bases and observation points. The boy later escaped from the group and received reintegration assistance. In 2019, a 14-year-old boy recruited in 2016 escaped the SLA-AW-Saleh Borsa group and sought refuge at the Sudanese Armed Forces military garrison in Golo, Central Darfur, after he had shot a soldier for punishing him. The Sudanese Armed Forces handed the child over to child protection actors. The boy was reunited with his family in Zalingei but later left his family; his whereabouts remain unknown.

24. The country task force continued the verification of the alleged recruitment and use of 14 boys as part of a reported mass recruitment of children by the Rapid Support Forces. On 18 May 2019, the country task force received information that 87 children aged between 14 and 17 from South Darfur had joined the Rapid Support Forces training centres in Nyala town. The children reportedly received training on dispersing demonstrators. They were reportedly sent to Khartoum and posted to different areas to carry out the crackdown on demonstrators in June; 8 of them were reportedly killed by unidentified perpetrators during the crackdown, while 10 reportedly returned to their families in Nyala. Furthermore, in August 2019, the country task force received allegations of the recruitment and use of boys by the Rapid Support Forces in Kabkabiyah, North Darfur, leading to the closure of two secondary

schools for boys. The children were allegedly sent to Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The country task force was permitted to access Rapid Support Forces camps in Darfur and found no evidence of recruitment of children.

Detention for alleged association with armed groups

25. In May 2017, four children, aged between 16 and 17, were arrested by the Rapid Support Forces in Kutum, North Darfur, for their alleged association with SLA-MM and the Sudan Liberation Army/Transitional Council and detained by the Sudanese Armed Forces. The children were transferred from military detention to the Family and Child Protection Unit of the Sudan Police Force in October 2017 to receive medical and psychosocial support and to be reunited with their families. The Special Representative and the country task force advocated for their release, which resulted in the attorney general dropping the charges on 15 February 2018.

26. In November 2017, 18 children were arrested and detained by the Rapid Support Forces for their alleged association with Musa Hilal's forces in North Darfur. Following joint advocacy by the country task force and the technical committee for the implementation of the action plan, chaired by the National Council for Child Welfare, the children were transferred to the Family and Child Protection Unit of the Sudan Police Force in El Fasher and released by decision of the Governor on 23 December. However, the children were released to individuals who were not their relatives, resulting in delayed reunification with their families.

B. Killing and maiming

Darfur

27. Killing and maiming accounted for approximately two thirds of all verified violations during the reporting period in Darfur. Overall, 451 children (111 girls and 340 boys) aged between 0 and 17 were killed (170) or maimed (281). Most (258) of those casualties could not be attributed to any party, including 144 cases of children killed or maimed by explosive remnants of war. Almost 40 per cent of the killing and maiming was attributed to Government security forces (176), including the Sudanese Armed Forces (68), the Rapid Support Forces (67), the National Intelligence and Security Service/General Intelligence Service (13), the Sudan Police Force (12), the Popular Defence Forces (10), joint Sudanese Armed Forces/Rapid Support Forces/Sudan Police Force operations (5) and the Joint Chad-Sudan border monitoring force (1). The remaining casualties were attributed to SLA-AW (15) and SLA-AW Abu Jamal and General Leadership factions (1 each). Child casualties increased from 146 in 2017 to 186 in 2018. They decreased to 119 in 2019. Children were killed or maimed by gunshots (205), explosive remnants of war (144), attacks with high-calibre weapons or aerial bombardment (43) and through physical assault or other causes (59). The great majority of violations occurred in South Darfur (219), followed by Central Darfur (94), North Darfur (85), West Darfur (47) and East Darfur (6).

28. Over half of the incidents involving the killing and maiming of children (258) could not be attributed to any party. In many instances, it involved cases in which perpetrators were described as armed nomads and the country task force was unable to verify whether the perpetrators belonged to any particular group. For instance, on 15 January 2017, two girls, aged 10 and 11, were killed between Feina and Kidjir in east Jebel Marra, when armed men identified as of Arab ethnic origin attacked the group of women the girls were travelling with and looted all of their belongings. The case was reported to the police, but no action was taken against the suspected perpetrators. On 11 April 2017, a 17-year-old girl sustained gunshot injuries following

an assault by unidentified armed men described as armed nomads in Golo locality, Central Darfur. The perpetrators opened fire on the girl and her mother as they resisted a rape attempt. Both the girl and her mother were hospitalized. The case was reported to the police; however, the perpetrators remained at large. On 25 December 2018, a 7-year-old girl from Zamzam camp for internally displaced persons was shot and injured in the chest while farming in Abu Zeriga area, North Darfur, by unidentified armed men wearing military uniforms and riding camels.

29. The presence of explosive remnants of war continued to gravely affect children in Darfur, accounting for almost 32 per cent of the total killing and maiming of children during the reporting period. Children encountered them while playing, fetching firewood and water, or herding livestock. Often, children played with the objects they could not identify, hit them with stones or other objects or threw them into fire, causing explosions resulting in loss of life or limbs. For example, on 26 January 2017, an 8-year-old boy was maimed by an explosive remnant of war in El Geneina locality, West Darfur, while he was looking after animals. The boy picked up the object and smashed it against stones, which made it explode, causing him to lose his fingers. In another example, on 6 May 2018, six children (three girls and three boys), aged between 3 and 14, were killed and two children (one girl and one boy) were injured when they played with an explosive remnant of war that subsequently exploded in Karkarah, Um Dukhun, Central Darfur.

30. Government security forces were responsible for 176 child casualties in the reporting period. Incidents of killing and maiming occurred in the context of indiscriminate attacks with live ammunition or rocket-propelled grenades affecting civilian populations, including children, often while they were fleeing villages under attack. During fighting in Jebel Marra, attacks on civilians by Government security forces and allied militias and the aerial bombardments and use of long- and short-range high-calibre weapons by the Sudanese Armed Forces resulted in child casualties. For instance, on 29 March 2018, during an attack by the Rapid Support Forces on Feina, east Jebel Marra, South Darfur, six children (four boys and two girls) were killed, and one boy was maimed by gunshots. Two boys were killed as their house was set on fire. On 13 May 2018, three boys were shot and killed when they were fleeing an attack by the Sudanese Armed Forces on Turri village, south Jebel Marra, South Darfur. Later the same day, four boys were killed by aerial bombardments on Turri village and on Koya village, south-west Jebel Marra. On 15 July 2018, the Sudanese Armed Forces fired a long-range high-calibre weapon on a village in east Jebel Marra, where internally displaced persons had sought refuge, resulting in the killing of two girls, aged 2 and 3.

31. Children were also affected by the excessive use of force employed by Government security forces during public demonstrations. Such incidents increased significantly from late 2018, when demonstrations over the standard of living sparked nationwide protests that ultimately led to the removal of the President, Mr. Al-Bashir, in April 2019. On 22 September 2018, one girl was killed and nine boys and one girl were maimed when the Rapid Support Forces started shooting indiscriminately at a peaceful demonstration against the visit of Mr. Al-Bashir to Kalma camp for internally displaced persons, South Darfur. On 21 April 2019, three boys aged 14 to 15 were seriously injured when National Intelligence and Security Service/General Intelligence Service agents opened fire on internally displaced persons who were demonstrating in front of the National Intelligence and Security Service/General Intelligence Service and Sudanese Armed Forces offices in Kutum, North Darfur. On 25 May 2019, the Rapid Support Forces opened fire on demonstrators in Kass, South Darfur, resulting in the maiming of two boys, aged 12 and 16. On 15 September 2019, one 15-year-old boy was shot and killed, and four boys aged between 16 and 17 were maimed by National Intelligence and Security Service/General Intelligence Service

while they were participating in a demonstration in Mershing camp for internally displaced persons, South Darfur.

32. This kind of incident was not limited to Darfur. Violent responses by security forces to demonstrations, leading to the killing and maiming of children, occurred in other parts of the Sudan as well. The crackdown by Government security forces on a sit-in site in Khartoum on 3 June 2019 and the ensuing violence in Khartoum and in other parts of the country reportedly resulted in the deaths of 19 children and the injury of 49 more, according to UNICEF.¹ In a statement to the press on 11 June 2019, the Security Council strongly condemned the violence and expressed regret for the loss of lives and injuries among civilians. On 29 July 2019, Government security forces opened fire on a demonstration by high-school students in El Obeid, North Kordofan, killing five children and injuring many others, according to UNICEF.² As those incidents occurred outside of the conflict-affected areas of the Sudan, they were not represented in the numbers of children killed and maimed that were verified in the framework of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict.

33. Children were also killed and maimed in attacks on civilians committed by SLA-AW and its splinter groups and in clashes between SLA-AW factions. For instance, on 23 November 2019, two armed members of SLA-AW broke into a house in Bardani village, Jebel Marra, and attacked a family. During the attack, they cut the foot of a 3-year-old girl with a knife. The child was admitted to a local hospital. The armed men also burned two houses in the village.

Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States and the Abyei Area

34. The country task force verified 18 cases of killing (12) and maiming (6) affecting 17 boys and one 8-month-old baby (sex unknown). Most violations were unattributed (17), including four children affected by explosive remnants of war. SPLM-N was responsible for the killing of one child. The violations occurred in Southern Kordofan (15) and Abyei (3), and the great majority were verified in 2017 (16), while the remaining 2 occurred in 2018 and 2019.

35. For instance, on 13 February 2017, a 10-year-old boy was killed, along with his father, by elements of SPLM-N during a cattle-looting incident in the Bagaia area, Kadugli locality, Southern Kordofan. On 13 February 2017, two boys, aged 12 and 16, from the Tagali tribal group, were killed in the Abbasiyya locality, Southern Kordofan, reportedly by members of the Kawahla tribal group.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

Darfur

36. A total of 171 children (169 girls and 2 boys) were verified as subjected to rape or other forms of sexual violence during the reporting period. In almost 60 per cent of the cases, perpetrators could not be identified (101). Government security forces were responsible for 65 cases, including the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces (29 each), the Sudan Police Force (4), the Popular Defence Forces (2) and the National Intelligence and Security Service/General Intelligence Service (1), followed by SLA-AW (4) and SLA/PD (1). The violations occurred in South Darfur

¹ UNICEF. "Children killed, injured, detained and abused amid escalating violence and unrest in Sudan: statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore", 11 June 2019.

² UNICEF, "No child should be buried in their school uniform: statement by Abdullah Fadil, UNICEF Representative in Sudan", 29 July 2019.

(63), North Darfur (53), Central Darfur (32), West Darfur (22) and East Darfur (1), in 2017 (44), 2018 (68) and in 2019 (59).

37. Children in rural communities or in camps for internally displaced persons were particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, as perpetrators often assaulted their victims while they were working on farms, fetching water or firewood or when they carried out livelihood activities outside camps. Nevertheless, sexual violence against children is believed to be underreported in Darfur owing to widespread impunity, fear of reprisals, stigma and discrimination and the limited availability of services for survivors. In addition, with UNAMID withdrawal from several areas of Darfur, girls leaving camps for internally displaced persons were left more vulnerable. While perpetrators in some cases of sexual violence were brought to justice, accountability remained low as the absence of a comprehensive witness protection and reparations law, inadequate legal aid and the limited presence of rule of law institutions in remote locations continued to discourage survivors from seeking justice, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2019/280).

38. Unidentified armed men, many of whom were described as armed nomads, committed most (101) cases of sexual violence against children during the reporting period. For instance, on 23 December 2017, two girls, aged 14 and 15, were raped by six unidentified armed men at Ragi farming area, close to Nertiti, South Darfur. The survivors were attacked when they were returning from their farm and carried to nearby bushes, where they were raped. The girls were released by the armed men after two hours of captivity. One of the perpetrators was later arrested by the police. On 5 February 2019, two girls, aged 16 and 17 and residents of Zamzam camp for internally displaced persons in El Fasher, North Darfur, were raped by unidentified perpetrators described as armed nomads. The victims had gone to collect straw along with other women outside of the camp when they encountered the armed men, who beat them and threatened them at gunpoint, before raping two girls and one woman. The case was reported to the Sudan Police Force and the survivors received medical assistance.

39. Government security forces were responsible for 38 per cent (65) of the cases of sexual violence, with most cases attributed to the Rapid Support Forces and Sudanese Armed Forces (58 in total). For instance, on 3 August 2017, a 6-year-old girl was raped by a Sudanese Armed Forces element in Malam, South Darfur. The girl had been sleeping at her home when the perpetrator attacked her. The family found the victim bleeding and crying close to her house. The victim's family reported the incident to the police and the perpetrator was arrested. In another example, on 29 March 2018, the Rapid Support Forces and allied militias attacked Feina, South Darfur, and raped seven girls aged 10 to 12 as they were on their way to the water point. On 5 January 2019, a 14-year-old girl from Kassab camp for internally displaced persons in Kutum was raped by two Sudan Police Force elements as she was coming back from the town. The case was reported to the Sudan Police Force and two suspects were arrested and detained at Kutum police station.

40. Five cases of sexual violence were attributed to armed groups. For instance, on 25 May 2019, SLA-AW-Saleh Borsa group attacked Tergei village, in Jebel Marra, and raped two girls, aged 15 and 17, during the attack. On the same day, SLA-AW-Saleh Borsa elements also attacked Dongola village in Jebel Marra and raped one 16-year-old girl.

Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States and the Abyei Area

41. Two cases of rape affecting two girls were verified and attributed to the Sudanese Armed Forces and unknown armed elements in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan, both in 2019. On 28 April 2019, a 15-year-old girl was threatened at

gunpoint and then raped on her farm by two unidentified armed men dressed in military uniform and riding camels at Elfaid Um Abd Allah town, Abu Kershola locality, Southern Kordofan. On 12 August 2019, a 13-year-old girl was raped by a Sudanese Armed Forces soldier, in Damazine, Blue Nile. The soldier threatened the girl with his rifle while she was on her way home from the market, then raped her in a nearby empty house and left her bleeding. The incident was reported to the police and the victim received medical and psychosocial support. The perpetrator was arrested a day after the report and discharged of his duties. He was later sentenced to 20 years in prison.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

Darfur

42. During the reporting period, the country task force verified 31 attacks on schools (20) and hospitals (11), many of which were attributed to Government security forces (15), including the Rapid Support Forces (9), the Sudanese Armed Forces (5), and jointly to the Rapid Support Forces and an Arab militia (1); 4 of the attacks on schools and hospitals were attributed to SLA-AW and one to SLA-AW-PD; and 11 attacks could not be attributed to any party. Most of the incidents occurred in South Darfur (15), followed by North Darfur and Central Darfur (6 each) and West Darfur (4). A sharp increase was documented from 2017 (8) to 2018 (17), followed by a decrease in 2019 (6).

43. Attacks on 13 schools and two hospitals were attributed to Government security forces. For instance, in May 2018, the Sudanese Armed Forces looted Qubo and Shallal basic schools and destroyed their roofs during an attack on Qubo in Jebel Marra. On 29 December 2019, the Rapid Support Forces, supported by Arab tribesmen, entered El Geneina hospital, where they harassed and threatened medical staff at gunpoint and destroyed hospital assets, including the blood bank. As a result, hospital staff went on strike.

44. Five schools and six hospitals were attacked by unidentified armed elements. For instance, on 30 December 2017, three unidentified men wearing civilian clothes threw tear gas into the premises of a school in Zalingei, Central Darfur, where students and teachers were celebrating the end of the school year. As a result, 30 girls, aged between 14 and 17, were hospitalized: 20 were discharged the same day and 10 were admitted for two days to one week, with 3 in critical condition. On 27 August 2018, an unidentified militia set the Qur'an School in Wuoh Ateem village, South Darfur, on fire while retreating from the area.

45. In addition, the military use of 12 schools by the Rapid Support Forces (5), the Sudanese Armed Forces (3), SLA-AW (2), and the Sudan Police Force and the National Intelligence and Security Service/General Intelligence Service (1 each) was verified in North Darfur, South Darfur and Central Darfur (4 each). Many of the schools had been used for military purposes for years, having a negative impact on children's access to education. After advocacy by the country taskforce, the Rapid Support Forces vacated two schools and SLA-AW vacated one school in 2019.

Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States and the Abyei Area

46. No attacks on schools or hospitals were verified during the reporting period. However, the military use of five schools and two hospitals was verified, all attributed to the Sudanese Armed Forces in Southern Kordofan (2 schools, 1 hospital) and in Blue Nile (3 schools, 1 hospital). For instance, in May 2017, the Sudanese Armed Forces in Kurmuk locality, Blue Nile, used three schools (Kurmuk Secondary School for Boys, Kurmuk Secondary School for Girls, and Basic School in Sali village) and

one health clinic in Jurt West village. The facilities were vacated in 2018 after the country task force's advocacy with the Ministry of Defence

E. Abduction

Darfur

47. During the reporting period, 53 children (11 girls and 42 boys) were abducted by unidentified armed elements (34), Government security forces (14), including the Rapid Support Forces (9), the Sudanese Armed Forces (2), the Border Guards (2) and the Popular Police Force (1), and SLA-AW (5). Abductions occurred in South Darfur (33), North Darfur (15), Central Darfur (4) and West Darfur (1). An increase was documented from 2017 (13) to 2018 (22), followed by a slight decrease in 2019 (18).

48. Within the Government security forces, most violations were attributed to the Rapid Support Forces, the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Border Guards. For instance, on 5 June 2018, a 16-year-old boy from Wira village, Central Darfur, was abducted by Sudanese Armed Forces elements and taken to an unknown destination. The victim had been hiding in forests around Wira with a group of women who were planning to flee when they encountered the perpetrators. On 16 March 2018, a 16-year-old boy living in Hasahisa camp for internally displaced persons in Zalingei, Central Darfur, was abducted together with two men by a Rapid Support Forces element while they were collecting firewood. The victims were taken to the house of the Rapid Support Forces member and released the same day, after payment of a ransom.

49. Cases attributed to unidentified armed men were often related to intercommunal conflict. For instance, on 12 March 2018, three boys from Dereige camp for internally displaced persons in Nyala, South Darfur, were abducted by unidentified armed men who accused internally displaced persons in the camp of stealing their goats. The boys were eventually released after the internally displaced persons paid for the stolen goats.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

Darfur

50. Areas under SLA-AW-control in Jebel Marra remained inaccessible to humanitarian actors during most of the reporting period owing to ongoing operations and restrictions imposed by the Government. The restrictions were relaxed in late 2019, allowing UNAMID and humanitarian actors to enter some areas for the first time in many years.

51. Furthermore, the country task force verified four incidents of denial of humanitarian access: two in Central Darfur and one each North Darfur and West Darfur. Two were attributed to the Sudanese Armed Forces, one to SLA-AW and one to unidentified armed elements. Three incidents occurred in 2019 and one in 2017 and they included abductions of humanitarian personnel, restrictions of movement and looting of humanitarian goods.

52. For instance, on 3 July 2019 in Golo, Jebel Marra, SLA-AW-Saleh Borsa elements carjacked and kidnapped four staff of an international non-governmental organization and their driver. They were released the following day, allegedly after a ransom payment. On 24 June 2019, an inter-agency humanitarian mission on its way to Kuraynik locality in West Darfur State was stopped by members belonging to the military intelligence of the Sudanese Armed Forces who alleged that proper procedure

had not been followed while organizing the mission. The humanitarian actors were instructed to leave the locality immediately.

Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States and the Abyei Area

53. No specific incidents of denials were verified; however, during most of the reporting period, all areas controlled by SPLM-N factions remained inaccessible to the United Nations as the Government indicated that it would permit access for humanitarian aid and personnel to those regions only through the Sudan and both SPLM-N factions were only willing to allow access from neighbouring countries. The conducive political climate and negotiations with the Government allowed for a first humanitarian mission to Blue Nile State in December 2019, to an area that had not been visited since September 2011.

IV. Progress and challenges in ending and preventing grave violations against children

A. Engagement with the Government

54. The Government continued implementing its action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children signed in March 2016. Remaining key steps included the establishment of clear procedures for identification and screening of children in their forces, the endorsement of handover protocols, the implementation of complaint procedures and awareness-raising activities.

55. By October 2017, in addition to the high-level ministerial committee and the technical committee chaired by the National Council for Child Welfare, the Government had established state-level technical committees to support the implementation of the action plan in all five states in Darfur. Regular joint monitoring missions with the country task force were conducted, which included meetings with civilian and military authorities and communities to advocate for and raise awareness of child protection issues and conduct spot checks in Sudanese Armed Forces barracks and Sudan Police Force training centres. Command orders and directives were issued covering all the government security forces (the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Rapid Support Forces, the Popular Defence Forces, the National Intelligence and Security Service/General Intelligence Service and the Sudan Police Force) to end and prevent child recruitment.

56. In November 2017, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict visited the Sudan to engage with the Government on the implementation of its action plan. This was followed by a visit by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict between 25 February and 1 March 2018, during which she took stock of the implementation of the action plan. She strongly advocated with the Government to capitalize upon the gains of the action plan and transform it into a national prevention plan on grave violations against children.

57. On 26 April 2018, the high-level ministerial committee endorsed a manual on complaint mechanisms in judicial and security institutions to enable the public to report child recruitment by Government security forces. On 28 April, Government representatives signed standard operating procedures on the release and handover of children associated with armed groups and captured during operations. Those standard operating procedures are aimed at preventing the detention of children formerly associated with armed groups by putting in place clear procedures and time frames for the handover of children to civilian child protection actors.

58. On 13 May 2018, the Government endorsed the UNICEF Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices study on the recruitment and association of children with armed forces and groups, including in intercommunal conflict. The endorsement paved the way for a national communications campaign to end and prevent child recruitment and use by armed forces and groups and other violations.

59. Following those developments, the Sudanese Armed Forces were delisted from the annexes to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict as of 2018 (S/2018/465).

60. On 25 July 2018, the high-level ministerial committee agreed to build upon the gains of the completed action plan, including by maintaining the institutional structures and mandates of the national and state-level technical committees. The state-level committees continued to coordinate training for security forces, support the roll-out of the complaint mechanisms manual, report grave violations by armed forces and ensure the application of the standard operating procedures on the release and handover of children associated with armed groups. Following advocacy by the Special Representative with the Government on the development of a national prevention plan on grave violations, following Security Council resolution [2427 \(2018\)](#) and an exchange with the Government in New York in September 2018, by the end of 2019, the Government had agreed on a road map with the country task force to ensure continued compliance with the action plan, developed and drafted a national strategy on the protection of children in armed conflict, developed communications and awareness-raising materials to launch the national communications campaign, and drafted a standardized training manual on child protection for government security forces.

61. In 2019, following reports of the recruitment and use of children by the Rapid Support Forces for its operations in the Sudan and overseas, a United Nations-led screening and verification exercise of Rapid Support Forces barracks was agreed upon by the United Nations, the National Council for Child Welfare and the Rapid Support Forces. Some 1,346 Rapid Support Forces soldiers were screened in South Darfur and West Darfur, and no child was identified. Further visits are planned for 2020 to other Rapid Support Forces bases and training centres across the Sudan, including in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan. Furthermore, in 2019, the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces issued and disseminated further command orders prohibiting the recruitment of children into their ranks.

62. The country task force continued to support the state-level technical committees with training for security forces on the action plan and children's rights. In 2018, for example, 450 commissioned and non-commissioned officers from the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces received such training. In 2019, 568 soldiers from the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces (including five women), mainly from Khartoum, West Darfur, East Darfur and South Darfur, received similar training. In the Two Areas, 3,188 members of the security forces (the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Rapid Support Forces, the National Intelligence and Security Service/General Intelligence Service, the Popular Defence Forces and the Central Reserve Police) received the training.

B. Dialogue with armed groups

63. While SLA-MM and JEM were operating outside of the Sudan for most of the reporting period, the country task force continued to engage with both groups on the implementation of their action plans, signed in 2007 and 2012, respectively. Following a meeting in Geneva in November 2016, the country task force organized a workshop in April 2017 with both groups, which resulted in road maps outlining

next steps and priority activities. Following the workshop, SLA-MM shared their existing command orders prohibiting child recruitment, draft disciplinary measures and age-assessment procedures, which were reviewed and strengthened in consultation with the country task force. On 16 August 2017, SLA-MM reissued the command order prohibiting the recruitment and use of children, sexual violence, the abduction and killing and maiming of children, and attacks on schools and hospitals.

64. On 22 January 2018, the Chair of JEM renewed a command order instructing members to refrain from the recruitment and use of children, sexual violence, and the killing and maiming of and other violations against children. The order reiterated the adherence of JEM to international norms and standards, as well as to national laws protecting children against violations.

65. While dialogue continued, the verification of the implementation of measures proved difficult, as the groups' operations were located in third countries. In the beginning of 2019, dialogue was further hampered as representatives of the groups left the Sudan. However, at the time of writing, the current peace process is providing opportunities for revitalized engagement with SLA-MM and JEM.

66. While SLA-AW has not formally engaged on the signature of an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, the country task force was able to establish contact with one of the splinter groups, the SLA-AW-Saleh Borsa faction, in late 2019. Following the Government's agreement to allow humanitarian access to all areas of the country, the country task force could access conflict-affected areas in Jebel Marra for the first time since 2011. In Daya village, Jebel Marra, which is in an area heavily contested by different SLA-AW factions, a child protection-focused engagement began with the SLA-AW-Saleh Borsa faction.

67. The country task force convened a workshop with SPLM-N in 2017 to review the status of its action plan, signed in 2016, and to finalize command orders and develop disciplinary measures, a complaint mechanism and an age-assessment protocol. However, as mentioned in the previous report ([S/2017/191](#)), the country task force continued to be denied access to areas under the control of SPLM-N for monitoring and verification of grave violations and following up on progress on the action plan.

68. After the group split in July 2017, both factions committed to the existing action plan and appointed new focal points and action plan committees. The Special Representative spoke repeatedly with both factions and travelled to the region for a possible meeting with Malik Agar and Abdelaziz Al-Hilu in support of engagement by the country task force. However, the planned meeting did not take place because of the SPLM-N leaders' inability to travel.

69. Furthermore, the conducive political climate created by the peace process enabled the United Nations to access areas in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile controlled by the SPLM-N Al-Hilu faction in late 2019, after months of negotiations with the transitional Government, leaders of South Sudan and the SPLM-N Al-Hilu faction. In October 2019, United Nations representatives were able to visit Kauda locality in Southern Kordofan. The United Nations subsequently conducted a humanitarian needs assessment mission to the area. In December 2019, United Nations representatives conducted a mission to oversee the distribution of food and school materials to flood- and conflict-affected communities in southern Blue Nile State, for the first time since 2011. On 6 January 2020, a humanitarian mission was conducted to Ulu, Blue Nile, an area under the control of SPLM-N Agar.

70. The country task force also engaged with parties to conflict not listed in the annexes of the annual report on children and armed conflict ([A/74/845-S/2020/525](#)) by advocating for the adoption of measures to end and prevent grave violations

against children. After advocacy, on 16 October 2018, Musa Hilal, a northern Rizeigat leader with strong influence over the Border Guards and head of the Sudanese Awakening Revolutionary Council, issued a command order to all members of the Council prohibiting the recruitment and use of children and the abduction, killing and maiming of and other violations against children. Hilal also agreed to continue working with the country task force and all relevant actors in the promotion of child protection efforts. However, Hilal and some of his followers were arrested in mid-November 2018.

71. In addition, after engagement and awareness-raising with the country task force, SLA/PD issued a command order prohibiting the recruitment and use, abduction, killing and maiming of children, sexual violence against children, and attacks on schools and hospitals. In the order, which the country task force received for verification in November 2018, the group emphasized that such acts were prohibited under Sudanese law and international law. The country task force provided training on child rights and protection to SLA/PD, supported the dissemination of the command order in areas where SLA/PD members were present and monitored compliance.

V. Observations and recommendations

72. The Juba peace process represents an opportunity to sustainably address the grievances of children affected by years of armed conflict in the Sudan. I call upon all parties to the peace process to ensure that the rights and needs of conflict-affected children are taken into account during the talks and in any future peace agreement, including provisions on the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups.

73. I am concerned about the violations against children presented in this report, especially the killing and maiming of children and sexual violence against children. I urge the Government of the Sudan to undertake further efforts towards ensuring accountability for grave violations against children by bringing perpetrators to justice and providing remedies to victims of grave violations. In this regard, I welcome the commitments made by the Government of the Sudan in the Framework of Cooperation of the Sudan and the United Nations on the Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence in Conflict.

74. I welcome the progress made by the Government of the Sudan in the implementation of the prevention and accountability mechanisms foreseen in their action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, which led to the delisting of the Sudanese Armed Forces from the annexes of my annual report on children and armed conflict as of 2018. I am, however, concerned about continued violations committed against children by Government security forces and about recurrent reports of child recruitment by the Rapid Support Forces.

75. In this regard, I welcome the cooperation of the Government of the Sudan with the country task force on the screening of Rapid Support Forces barracks and training sites to identify and release children. I urge the Government of the Sudan to take measures to prevent the killing or maiming of children by Government security forces in the context of military operations or when responding to public demonstrations.

76. I further encourage the Government of the Sudan to sustain the gains of the completed action plan through the swift implementation of the road map developed with the United Nations to ensure continued compliance with the

action plan and through the development and implementation of a national prevention plan on grave violations against children.

77. I call on the armed groups listed in the annexes of my most recent annual report on children and armed conflict (A/74/845-S/2020/525) to cooperate with the country task force on the swift and full implementation of their action plans to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children to ensure the identification, release and reintegration of associated children. I urge SLA-AW to engage with the United Nations on the development of an action plan. I welcome the road map for the expedited implementation of their action plan developed by the SPLM-N Al-Hilu faction with the country task force and call for the swift implementation of that action plan.

78. I call on the international community to ensure that sufficient resources are available, including in United Nations missions mandated by the Security Council, to continue supporting the Government of the Sudan in the protection of children, the reintegration and rehabilitation of children affected by conflict, the monitoring and reporting on the situation of children affected by conflict, and the monitoring and implementation of action plans with armed groups.
