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Children and armed conflict in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, is the fifth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia and covers the period from 1 August 2016 to 30 September 2019. The report focuses on trends and patterns with respect to the six grave violations committed against children and provides information on the perpetrators, as well as action taken to prevent and respond to the violations. The progress made by parties to the conflict in terms of dialogue, action plans and other child protection commitments is also outlined. The Secretary-General provides a series of recommendations aimed at ending and preventing grave violations against children and strengthening child protection in Somalia.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#) and subsequent resolutions on children and armed conflict, is the fifth report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia and covers the period from 1 August 2016 to 30 September 2019. It describes the trends with respect to grave violations committed against children since the previous report ([S/2016/1098](#)) and outlines the progress and challenges since the adoption by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in July 2017 of its conclusions on children and armed conflict in Somalia ([S/AC.51/2017/2](#)). The violations presented in the report have been verified by the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting in Somalia, co-chaired by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and, where possible, perpetrators are identified.

2. The report shows the devastating situation of children affected by the armed conflict in Somalia, with number of children affected by recruitment, use, abduction of children and rape and other forms of sexual violence exceeding the numbers verified in other conflict situations. Most of the grave violations against children were committed by armed groups, with Al-Shabaab as the main perpetrator, and by government security forces, including increasingly by the Somali police and the regional forces of federal member states. The report also documents continued violence involving clan militias, which led to grave violations against children.

II. Overview of political and security situation and parties to conflict

A. Political and security context

3. The presidential and legislative electoral process held between October 2016 and February 2017 was a major milestone on the country's path to federalism. Reconciliation processes within the federal member states and between the Federal Government and the federal member states continued and state presidential and parliamentary electoral processes were held in Southwest State in 2018 and in Puntland and Jubbaland in 2019.

4. The agreement on the national security architecture between the Federal Government and the federal member states, in April 2017, represented an important step towards a unified Somali security sector, as it defined the relationship between federal and state-level security institutions and the overall size, distribution and composition, command and control, resourcing and financing of the security forces. In addition, the agreement foresaw the integration of regional forces into the Somali National Army and the establishment of federal and state police forces.

5. The political stalemate between the Federal Government and the federal member states since September 2018, however, has negatively affected the implementation of the agreement. While efforts to restore relations between the Federal Government and some federal member states have been undertaken since September 2018, constructive political dialogue between all parties is yet to be resumed. The political stalemate has also hampered progress regarding the protection of children in armed conflict, in particular with regard to the implementation at the federal member state-level of the action plans on preventing and combating the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children, signed in 2012 between the United Nations and the Government of Somalia.

6. Al-Shabaab remained the main threat to security and stability in Somalia. After international military efforts had helped to reduce attacks in previous years, a new upsurge of Al-Shabaab activity was observed from 2017. The group continued to exert effective control over large parts of rural areas in southern and central Somalia but did not hold any of the country's major urban centres. Al-Shabaab resorted to largely asymmetrical means of warfare, such as suicide and complex attacks and the use of improvised explosive devices. The group targeted the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali National Army, military installations or heavily protected government buildings, but also civilian installations such as hotels, restaurants and tea shops, leading to many civilian casualties, including children.

7. The number of internally displaced persons in Somalia increased from 1.1 million people in August 2016 to 2.6 million people by December 2019, almost two thirds of whom were children. The main drivers of internal displacement were conflict and insecurity, fear of violence, droughts and floods. Many internally displaced persons moved from rural to urban areas, where they often resided in informal settlements. Mogadishu and Baidoa, the capital of Southwest State, where large swathes of territory are held by Al-Shabaab, hosted the largest numbers of internally displaced persons in Somalia. Among other factors driving displacement, children and their families became internally displaced as they sought to avoid forced child recruitment by Al-Shabaab. Children were exposed and vulnerable to violations while in situations of displacement, especially to sexual violence and recruitment and use by parties to conflict, including by those tasked with guarding them.

8. Large-scale operations by AMISOM and the Somali National Army focused on targeting Al-Shabaab continued. A plan for guiding the transition process of AMISOM, involving a gradual handover of security functions to Somali security forces, was developed in 2018, with the objective that Somali security forces would assume full responsibility for Somalia's security by 2021. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the Federal Government continued to strengthen the Somali security sector through training, capacity-building or material support.

9. From late 2017 onwards, an increase in air strikes by international forces was recorded, in response to increased Al-Shabaab activity. Air strikes were principally directed at Al-Shabaab bases and specific individuals in southern and central Somalia and caused child casualties.

B. Parties to the conflict

Federal Government of Somalia security forces

10. The Provisional Federal Constitution defines the Federal Government of Somalia security forces as its national army, intelligence services, police and prison forces. These entities include the Somali National Army, the Somali national police and the National Intelligence and Security Agency. According to the agreement on the national security architecture, the Somali police shall be composed of 32,000 members divided among federal and state police, while the Army shall be composed of at least 18,000 members, excluding the Special Forces, Navy and Air Force. Various entities operated in different modalities in support of the national army, including clan militias and security forces of federal member states. In annex I to my most recent annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509), the Somali National Army was listed for the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children.

Regional forces

11. Various regional forces, mostly composed of clan militias, are aligned with the federal member states. These include Jubbaland, Galmudug, Puntland and Southwest forces. Since the adoption of the national security architecture, progress in integrating the regional forces into the Somali security forces has been slow, hampered by political tensions between the Federal Government and the federal member states. In 2018, 2,400 members of the Puntland forces were integrated into the Somali National Army.

Armed groups

12. Al-Shabaab remained the main threat to peace and security in Somalia and operated under a well-organized structure, capable of effectively generating revenue through the taxation of businesses and local communities and through the collection of tolls at checkpoints along main supply routes, as well as other revenue streams. The group continued to successfully recruit new combatants into its ranks, including children and foreign fighters. In my most recent annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509), Al-Shabaab was listed for the recruitment and use, the killing and maiming and abductions of children, for sexual violence against children and for attacks on schools and hospitals.

13. In December 2017, Galmudug authorities and Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a reached a power-sharing agreement that foresaw the integration of the latter into the Galmudug forces. However, this process was hampered by political disagreements between the Galmudug authorities, Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a and the Federal Government. On 5 July 2019, the Federal Government launched an exercise to integrate Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a forces into the Somali security forces. It is expected that Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a forces will integrate into the Somali National Army, the Army Special Forces (Danab), federal member state police forces and the Somali police. In my most recent annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509), Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a was listed for the recruitment and use of children.

14. Pro-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) elements in Somalia pledged allegiance to ISIL. These elements are significantly smaller and less operationally active than Al-Shabaab. Targeted assassinations and the forcible collection of funds have been their most common activities. They mainly operate in Puntland, where they briefly managed to seize control over part of Puntland's coastline in 2016.

15. The term "clan militia" is used to refer to a plethora of different militia groups aligned with clans in different parts of Somalia. One of them is the "Westland militia". Violations attributed to this group were reported under the term "clan militia" until January 2019.

Other parties present in Somalia

16. The African Union Mission in Somalia was deployed to Somalia in March 2007 under a mandate by the Security Council of the United Nations and the African Union Peace and Security Council to assist the Somali National Army in the fight against Al-Shabaab and other armed groups. Its military components comprise troops from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. AMISOM has started a transition to Somali security ownership, guided by the transition plan. In addition to their troops operating under AMISOM command, Ethiopia and Kenya both continued to maintain troops in Somalia. The United States of America also targeted Al-Shabaab and pro-ISIL elements in Somalia, mainly through air and drone strikes.

III. Grave violations committed against children

17. The highly volatile security situation, ongoing military operations, population displacements and logistical constraints limited physical access and presented challenges for the monitoring and reporting of grave violations. With much of southern and central Somalia inaccessible, the information contained in the present report is only indicative of the full extent of grave violations committed against children and does not reflect the full impact of armed conflict on children in Somalia.

18. During the reporting period, the country task force verified 14,856 violations against 12,551 children (2,103 girls, 10,448 boys). The main perpetrators were Al-Shabaab (10,672), followed by the Somali National Army (834), regional forces (707), clan militias (494), the Somali police (248), Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (125), the Westland militia (7), National Intelligence and Security Agency (1), and pro-ISIL elements in Somalia (1). AMISOM (64), the Ethiopian Liyu Police (18), the Kenya Defence Forces (8) and the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (5) were also responsible for grave violations against children. Responsibility for the remaining 1,672 violations could not be attributed.

A. Recruitment and use of children

19. The country task force verified the recruitment and use of 6,143 children (149 girls, 5,994 boys) by armed forces and groups. The main perpetrator was Al-Shabaab, with 80 per cent of verified cases (4,910), followed by the Somali National Army (391), the Somali police (172), clan militias (169), Galmudug forces (168), Jubbaland forces (129), Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (113), Puntland forces (61), Southwest forces (22) Westland militia (2) and AMISOM (2). Responsibility for four cases was unattributed.

20. Between August and December 2016, 646 children were recruited and used by parties to conflict in Somalia, and 2,127 children in 2017. Child recruitment and use peaked in 2018, with 2,300 children affected. Between January and September 2019, 1,070 children were verified as having been recruited and used.

Al-Shabaab

21. Al-Shabaab was responsible for 4,910 cases of recruitment and use of children. Al-Shabaab significantly scaled up its recruitment and use of children in 2017 (1,770) and 2018 (1,865) to bolster their ranks in response to large-scale operations by the Somali National Army, AMISOM and international forces targeting the group. In previous years, forced recruitments had mostly been observed in southern and central Somalia (S/2016/1098). In 2017, the group significantly expanded their child recruitment activities in Galmudug State, benefiting from the withdrawal of troops of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces from several locations, which allowed Al-Shabaab to expand its presence.

22. Al-Shabaab compelled children to attend madrasas (Qur'anic schools) run by the group, whose curricula included military training and indoctrination. The group often ordered clan elders to hand over a specific number of children per clan, or to bring them one child per family to be recruited as child soldiers. For instance, on 10 August 2018, 60 boys between the ages of 12 and 17 were brought by clan elders to a primary school in a village in Xarardheere district, Galmudug, that had been transformed by Al-Shabaab into an Islamic studies and training centre for new child recruits. In order to coerce communities into handing over their children, the group often resorted to abducting elders, teachers and community leaders. They also pressured families and communities to hand over girls to be married to Al-Shabaab

fighters. The group used mass abductions to recruit children. Further details on these practices are provided later in the present report.

23. Al-Shabaab targeted vulnerable groups, including unemployed youth, for recruitment, using social and economic incentives to entice recruits, third-party recruitment through friends and relatives, and peer pressure. Other widely-used methods were persuasion through religious leaders and preaching in madrasas. In 2017 and 2018, the numbers of children recruited by Al-Shabaab peaked during the month of Ramadan.

24. A slight decrease in child recruitment by Al-Shabaab was observed in 2019 (875), as many families fled areas held by Al-Shabaab or sent children to government-controlled areas so as to protect them from forced recruitment and in the hope of better education. Many moved from rural localities to urban areas like Mogadishu or Baidoa. Some parents even handed their children over to police and government authorities for protection. Parents who sent their children away often faced reprisals, abductions or fines imposed by Al-Shabaab. For example, in May 2017, 70 families fled from areas controlled by Al-Shabaab to areas under the control of Galmudug authorities or of Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a. Between January and May 2018, around 70 children were either handed over by parents to authorities or sought shelter at police stations in Dhuusamarreeb, Galmudug State. The children were later transferred to temporary community-based care arrangements.

25. Among the children recruited or used in 2019, around 40 per cent were used as fighters. For instance, on 5 August 2019, the cases of two boys, 14 and 15 years of age, recruited by Al-Shabaab were verified after they had been wounded in clashes between Jubbaland forces and Al-Shabaab in a village in Juba Hoose region. The remaining children were used by Al-Shabaab in support roles such as porters, cooks or spies, or forced to marry an Al-Shabaab member.

Federal government security forces and regional forces

26. Cases of the recruitment and use of children by the federal government security forces increased steadily between August 2016 and December 2018, with 65 cases verified in 2016, 130 in 2017 and 248 in 2018. Between January and September 2019, the number of verified cases decreased slightly, to 120.

27. Children were used as escorts for senior military officers, while others manned military checkpoints or guarded army bases. For instance, a 17-year-old boy was recruited by the Somali National Army in March 2017 and worked as a guard at the main entrance of the army base in Dhuusamarreeb, Galguduud Region. In August 2018, two boys aged between 15 and 17, in national army uniform, were verified guarding a police station in the same region. Many children were recruited to take the place of their deceased fathers or uncles, while others were used to perform chores in the barracks.

28. Of particular concern was a continuous increase in the recruitment and use of children attributed to the Somali police. A total of 172 cases of the recruitment and use of children by the Somali police were verified, 11 of which occurred in 2017, 93 in 2018 and 68 between January and September 2019. The majority of those children were used in support roles, for example as cooks or cleaners, or as escorts, guards or at checkpoints. For instance, on 13 October 2018, a girl estimated to be 16 years old was used as a cook and cleaner by the Somali police at a police station in Banaadir Region. She was paid \$30 per month and lived with her parents at a nearby camp for internally displaced persons. On 8 April 2019, one boy aged between 14 and 16 years old was verified controlling traffic and directing vehicles alongside several other police officers in Mogadishu, armed and dressed in Somali police uniform.

29. Incidents of the recruitment and use of children were also attributed to regional forces, responsible for the recruitment and use of 380 children. Of that total, 46 children were recruited and used in the second half of 2016, 102 in 2017, 144 in 2018 and 88 between January and September of 2019. The main perpetrators were the Galmudug forces (168), followed by Jubbaland forces (129), Puntland forces (61) and Southwest forces (22). For instance, on 23 September 2018, the cases of eight boys aged between 13 and 17 were verified, when they were at a police station, as enlisted into the Galmudug forces in Balanbal district, Galguduud Region. Most children had reportedly been brought in to enlist by their parents after they had discontinued school. On 28 July 2018, six boys aged between 14 and 16 were recruited by the Jubbaland forces in Dhooble town, Juba Hoose Region. The boys were promised a salary by Jubbaland security forces and dropped out of school after being recruited. One of the boys had previously travelled to Badhaadhe town to escape recruitment by Al-Shabaab.

Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a

30. Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a was responsible for the recruitment and use of 113 children, with the majority of violations verified in 2017 (66) and in 2018 (14). From January to September 2019, no cases were attributed to Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a. In December 2017, Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a signed an agreement with the Galmudug authorities to merge their forces, and since January 2019, incidents of recruitment and use by Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a have been included in the total of incidents attributed to the Galmudug forces. To date, there has not been a comprehensive screening to identify, release and rehabilitate children from Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a before their integration into the government security forces.

Deprivation of liberty for alleged association with armed groups

31. A total of 910 children (17 girls, 893 boys) were verified as having been detained for alleged association with Al-Shabaab or pro-ISIL elements in Somalia. The Somali National Army accounted for most of the detention cases (492), followed by the Somali police (303), Jubbaland forces (59), National Intelligence and Security Agency (18), Galmudug forces (10), Southwest forces (7) and "Somaliland" forces (2). Clan militia (4) and Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (2) also held children in custody for their association with Al-Shabaab. Furthermore, 13 children were detained by AMISOM (10) and Kenya Defence Forces (3). Children were captured during operations targeting Al-Shabaab or pro-ISIL elements in Somalia or arrested during security sweeps, after explosions of improvised explosive devices or assassinations.

32. While security forces handed over captured children to the United Nations for rehabilitation and reintegration support, the detention of children often exceeded the time limit of 72 hours stipulated by the standard operating procedures on the reception and handover of children separated from armed groups, endorsed by Somalia in 2014. For instance, between 19 and 25 January 2018, the Army Special Forces (Danab) handed over 36 children to the United Nations as part of the implementation of the standard operating procedures. The children had been captured during a military operation on an Al-Shabaab training centre in Shabelle Dhexe Region. Between October and December 2018, the National Intelligence and Security Agency handed over 59 children for community reintegration in Baidoa, Bay Region. The children had been detained for periods ranging from a few days to several months for alleged association with Al-Shabaab.

33. The National Intelligence and Security Agency continued to conduct risk assessment screenings of children formerly associated with armed groups in their custody. Concerns about this practice were raised in the previous report on children

and armed conflict (S/2016/1098), as the practice contradicts the principle that children recruited and used by armed groups should be treated first and foremost as victims and should not be punished for their association with armed groups. Furthermore, there were continuing difficulties in ascertaining the fate and whereabouts of children classified as “high-risk”. A checklist for screeners, specifically tailored to the needs of children and that prioritizes their rehabilitation, is currently being elaborated by the Agency.

34. A total of 40 children, captured by Puntland forces in March 2016, who had received sentences ranging from the death penalty (12 children) to heavy prison sentences of up to 20 years (28 children) for their association with Al-Shabaab, as reported in the previous report (S/2016/1098), were transferred to an interim care centre supported by UNICEF, on 2 April 2017. The death sentences against 12 children were revoked in November 2016. After sustained advocacy by the United Nations and my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the President of Puntland pardoned the 34 children remaining in that centre on 20 August 2018. The children were reunited with their families.

35. Ten children were also detained by AMISOM for their alleged association with Al-Shabaab. For instance, on 28 February 2017, a 17-year-old boy in AMISOM custody on suspicion of his association with Al-Shabaab was shot and injured as he tried to escape, in Buulobarde town, Hiraan Region. The victim was treated in the AMISOM clinic and returned to custody.

36. In addition, 30 children were verified as having been arrested and deprived of their liberty by Al-Shabaab. Children were often held for “lack of discipline”, including fighting in public, playing football at prayer time and possessing banned items such as smart phones and artificial pistols. For instance, on 24 August 2016, two boys aged 15 and 17 were arrested by Al-Shabaab in their homes and detained for three days in Jilib town, Juba Dhexe Region for getting into a fight in public. While in detention, the boys were also interrogated as to why they had not joined Al-Shabaab. They were later released.

B. Killing and maiming

37. During the period under review, the Country Task Force verified the killing and maiming of 2,916 children, including 754 girls and 2,162 boys. Responsibility for almost half of the child casualties (1,233) could not be attributed. Where identified, the main perpetrators were Al-Shabaab (953), the Somali National Army (297), clan militias (158), AMISOM (60), Jubbaland forces (59), the Somali police (50), Southwest forces (42), Galmudug forces (33) and Puntland forces (21). Cases were also attributed to the Kenya Defence Forces (7), Ethiopian Liyu police (2) and the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (1). Child casualties were the result of crossfire, failure to take adequate precautions to protect children during military operations, indiscriminate attacks through the use of improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war, targeted killings and air strikes. Of the 2,916 verified cases of killing and maiming, 436 took place in the second half of 2016, 931 in 2017, 1,041 in 2018 and 508 between January and September of 2019.

38. The figures of killing and maiming by Al-Shabaab show a marked increase in late 2017 and 2018, due to the intensification of conflict, armed confrontations with government security forces and increased numbers of attacks with the use of improvised explosive devices, leading to large number of civilian casualties. For instance, on 14 October 2017, the Zoobe junction truck bomb killed approximately 600 people, including 25 children, and injured many more, including 15 children. Al-Shabaab also executed or maimed children as punishment or for disciplinary

reasons. For instance, on 11 October 2016, Al-Shabaab publicly executed seven boys aged between 14 and 17, who were accused of spying in Galguduud Region. On January 2017, three boys aged between 14 and 16 who were associated with Al-Shabaab had their right hands cut off by Al-Shabaab at a public gathering in Ceel Buur district, Galguduud Region because they could not account for the bullets they had been provided with after a military training. Children were also killed or maimed while they were undergoing training by Al-Shabaab or being used by the group. For instance, on 15 March 2019, 10 boys were killed and 18 wounded when an explosion occurred during a bomb-making training at an Al-Shabaab training camp in Ceel Buur town, Galguduud Region.

39. Somali security forces, including federal and regional security forces, were responsible for 502 cases of the killing and maiming of children. The Somali National Army was the main perpetrator, with 297 cases, followed by Jubbaland forces (59), the Somali police (50), Southwest forces (42), Galmudug forces (33) and Puntland forces (21). Of particular concern are the substantive increases in the number of cases attributed to the Somali police and regional forces that were verified in 2017 and 2018. Crossfire and military operations targeting armed groups were the main causes of child casualties. For instance, two boys aged approximately 15 years old were killed at a farm by the national army during a security operation targeting Al-Shabaab on 25 August 2017 in Shabelle Hoose Region. In-fighting between government security forces or altercations between regional forces also led to child casualties. On 1 June 2018, three girls aged between 11 and 17 and a 14-year-old boy were killed, and a 13-year-old girl and a 16-year-old boy were maimed in crossfire between Mogadishu stabilization force and national army forces in Banaadir Region. The incident happened after clashes erupted between national army soldiers and the stabilization forces stationed in the area.

40. The African Union Mission in Somalia was responsible for the killing and maiming of 60 children. Incidents often occurred while AMISOM was responding to explosions of improvised explosive devices or attacks by Al-Shabaab. For instance, on 31 October 2017, six children, including an eight month-old girl, were killed and three children were maimed in Galmudug when an AMISOM contingent opened fire on the outskirts of Ceel Buur town.

41. Air strikes by international forces remained a serious concern in Somalia, as they continued to result in the killing and maiming of children. The lack of access to air strike-affected areas, mainly controlled by Al-Shabaab, made it difficult to adequately monitor and report on their impact on children. Notwithstanding such challenges, the country task force verified the killing of 23 children and the maiming of 21 children in air strikes by unidentified forces in Al-Shabaab strongholds. For instance, on 16 October 2017, three children (two boys and one girl) between the ages of 5 and 16 were maimed during an air strike carried out by unidentified forces in Shabelle Hoose Region. The bombing, reportedly targeting an Al-Shabaab convoy, struck a house, injuring eight civilians, including the three children.

42. Explosive remnants of war continued to produce casualties among children. For instance, on 21 March 2018, two children between the ages of 8 and 10 died while 11 others (8 girls and 3 boys aged between 7 and 15) were injured when a hand grenade detonated near an area in which they were playing.

C. Rape and other forms of sexual violence

43. The country task force verified that 958 children (954 girls, 4 boys) had been victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Somali security forces and regional forces committed one third (306) of the total cases of sexual violence,

including the Somali National Army (133), Jubbaland forces (75), Southwest forces (42), Galmudug forces (25), the Somali police (24) and Puntland forces (7). Al-Shabaab was responsible for 157 cases of sexual violence and clan militias for 103, Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a for 3 and the Westland militia for 1. A total of 22 violations were attributed to Ethiopian Liyu Police (16), Ethiopian National Defence Forces (4) and Kenya Defence Forces and AMISOM (1 each). Responsibility for more than one third of the cases could not be attributed (366). The number of cases for 2017 and 2018 was the same (331) while 135 cases were verified in the last two quarters of 2016. The number decreased from 331 in 2018 to 161 between January and September of 2019. Sexual violence affecting girls and boys is believed to be underreported owing to fear of stigmatization, reprisals, the lack of accountability and the absence of adequate support services for survivors.

44. Sexual violence against girls and boys included rape, attempted rape and forced marriage. Rape and attempted rape often occurred in camps for internally displaced persons or when children collected firewood or water or looked after animals. For instance, on 13 October 2017, a boy aged 14 was sexually assaulted by two Somali National Army soldiers in Beledweyne town, Hiraan Region. On 11 November 2018, a 16-year-old girl was repeatedly raped by five Al-Shabaab elements east of Xagar town in Juba Hoose Region.

45. Forced marriage often occurred in the context of abductions of girls by Al-Shabaab. For instance, on 26 May 2017, two Al-Shabaab fighters abducted and forcefully married two girls aged 15 and 16 in Ceel Buur district of Galguduud Region. The abduction occurred after both girls and their parents rejected the marriage proposals made by the group.

46. Accountability for sexual violence remained low and impunity persisted. Most perpetrators remained at large or were released after the payment of compensation to the victims or their families, or received minor sentences. For instance, on 4 October 2017, a 17-year-old girl collecting firewood was beaten up and gang-raped by three Southwest forces elements on the outskirts of Bardaale town, Bay Region. She received treatment at a medical facility. Although her parents reported the incident to the Southwest police, no action was taken against the perpetrators. In another incident, on 13 November 2018, a 14-year-old girl was raped by two Galmudug soldiers near Cadaado in Galguduud Region. The perpetrators were arrested by Galmudug police and, on 15 November, sentenced to six months' imprisonment and a fine of \$1,000 to compensate the victim.

D. Attacks on schools and hospitals

47. The country task force verified 242 incidents of attacks on schools (203) and hospitals (39), 80 per cent of which (194) were attributed to Al-Shabaab, followed by unknown armed elements (17), the Somali National Army (8), Galmudug forces and clan militias (7 each), Southwest forces (3), the Somali police and Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (2 each) and pro-ISIL elements in Somalia (1). One incident was attributed to AMISOM. Attacks on schools and hospitals increased, from 21 incidents in the second half of 2016, to 74 incidents in 2017 and to 91 incidents in 2018. Between January and September 2019, 56 incidents of attacks on schools and hospitals were verified. The increase between 2017 and 2018 is linked to the continued targeting of schools and education personnel by Al-Shabaab as a tactic for recruitment, including through abductions of children and teachers from schools and madrasas during these years.

48. In April 2017, Al-Shabaab introduced a curriculum for primary and secondary schools in areas under their control. The subsequent closure of schools and illegal

detention of teachers, parents and elders who did not comply with Al-Shabaab orders to adopt its curriculum triggered population displacement from the regions of Shabelle Hoose and Shabelle Dhexe, as well as from Galguduud, to Mogadishu, Baidoa and other government-controlled areas. For instance, on 13 October 2018, a madrasa teacher was abducted by Al-Shabaab in Jawhar district in Shabelle Dhexe Region when he refused to hand over children to Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab assigned a new teacher to the school, with instructions to implement their curriculum. Parents who kept their children at home after the incident were ordered by Al-Shabaab to bring children to the madrasa or face severe sanctions. Furthermore, on 24 February 2017, Al-Shabaab shut down a madrasa in El Garas town, Ceel Buur district, Galguduud Region after the teacher, who was later arrested, refused to refer his students for Al-Shabaab training. In another incident, in June 2017, Al-Shabaab abducted 162 elders, imams and madrasa teachers in Xarardheere district, Galmudug State for failing to hand over 50 children as young as 7 years old and for refusing to send the children to madrasas established by Al-Shabaab.

49. Al-Shabaab also attacked health facilities and protected personnel, including through the abductions of medical personnel and the looting of medical supplies. For instance, on 11 August 2018, Al-Shabaab raided a village in Afgooye district, Shabelle Hoose and abducted four teachers at the village primary school, as well as three staff working at a mother and child health centre run by a local non-governmental organization. Al-Shabaab also looted medical supplies and equipment at the health centre. On 1 October 2018, Al-Shabaab looted a hospital for office equipment and medical supplies during an attack on a village in Baidoa district, Bay Region, and torched the police station before withdrawing from the village.

50. A total of 20 attacks on schools and hospitals were attributed to federal government security forces (10) and regional forces (10). For instance, on 12 January 2019, three soldiers from Galmudug forces attacked and fired at a mother and child health centre in Cadaado district, Galguduud and coerced the centre's personnel to hire members of their sub-clan. As a result, the centre was temporarily closed to repair the damage. In another instance, on 6 April 2019, soldiers from the Somali National Army forcibly closed a hospital in Baardheere district, Gedo Region, claiming they were not satisfied with the quality of services offered and coercing the hospital to hire a manager from their sub-clan.

51. In addition, the country task force verified the military use of three schools and two hospitals by clan militias (2), the Somali police and the Somali National Army (one each). One school was also used by Al-Shabaab for military purposes. For instance, on 6 February 2019, clan militia seized a hospital in Caabudwaaq district, Galguduud Region for military purposes. The hospital was not vacated, despite appeals and interventions by local leaders, and was therefore permanently relocated to another building. On 25 July 2017, national army soldiers seized a primary school in Ceel Barde district, Bakool Region. The soldiers used the school to treat their sick soldiers for a period of almost two months. During that period, the school remained closed to students.

E. Abduction

52. Between August 2016 and September 2019, the country task force verified the abduction of 4,462 children (356 girls, 4,106 boys). It was verified that 98 per cent of all abductions were committed by Al-Shabaab (4,376), followed by unknown armed elements (43), clan militias (32), Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (5), Westland militia (4), AMISOM, Galmudug forces and Southwest forces (1 each).

53. The number of abductions peaked in 2017 (1,634) and 2018 (1,609), when Al-Shabaab significantly enhanced its forced recruitment campaigns, as outlined above. Between August and December 2016, 373 cases of abductions of children were verified. The reduction in the number of abduction cases noted between January and September of 2019 (846 children) as compared with 1,278 children over the same period in 2018 can notably be attributed to the fact that, following a marked increase in forced recruitment by Al-Shabaab in 2018, families moved their children away from areas controlled by Al-Shabaab to government-controlled areas in order to protect their children from recruitment.

54. Mass abductions of children were one of the main recruitment tactics used by Al-Shabaab, mostly through attacks on villages or by forcing clan elders to hand over children, as described above. For example, in July and August 2017, Al-Shabaab abducted 550 children from several villages in Ceel Buur district, Galmudug State and took them to the Ali Jim'ale training centre, run by Al-Shabaab in Ceel Buur town, Galguduud Region. In a similar incident, 150 boys between the ages of 9 and 16 were abducted by Al-Shabaab from villages in Galguduud Region and taken to a madrasa run by Al-Shabaab in Galguduud Region. They were subsequently transported to a training camp in the same region, on 16 November 2017.

55. Al-Shabaab abducted girls to forcibly marry them to their fighters. For instance, on 14 May 2017, 15 children between the ages of 10 and 17, including seven girls, were abducted by Al-Shabaab in villages in Xarardheere district, Mudug Region. The girls were forcibly married to the fighters, while the boys were recruited as combatants.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

56. The country task force verified 148 incidents of denial of humanitarian access, affecting the delivery of aid to children. Most of the incidents were attributed to Al-Shabaab (82) followed by clan militias (25), Galmudug forces (9), the Somali National Army (5) Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (2), Puntland forces and Jubbaland forces and the National Intelligence and Security Agency (1 each). Responsibility for nine of the incidents could not be attributed. The number of incidents of denial of humanitarian access verified in 2018 increased by 100 per cent (74), compared with 37 incidents in 2017. Nine incidents were verified in the second half of 2016 and 28 between January and September of 2019.

57. Serious challenges remained around humanitarian access in Somalia throughout the reporting period, as the activities of humanitarian actors were frequently hampered by military operations, the volatile security situation and security incidents affecting humanitarian workers. Incidents included threats and violence against humanitarian personnel and assets, abductions of humanitarian workers, the detention of personnel and beneficiaries, entry restrictions, disruptions to humanitarian activities and the looting of goods. The use of improvised explosive devices as part of attacks on humanitarian and commercial convoys has steadily increased.

58. The majority of incidents of denial of humanitarian access were attributed to Al-Shabaab (98) and consisted of violence against humanitarian personnel, including attacks and abductions and the looting of humanitarian goods. In an incident on 21 September 2016, two local workers of a non-governmental organization in Caabudwaaq district, Galguduud Region, were killed, while two others were injured, when clan militia attacked the organization. The attack was carried out as part of a revenge killing against a rival clan militia group. In another incident, on 15 July 2017, seven humanitarian workers were abducted and their vehicle was seized by Al-Shabaab, while the workers were on their way to provide aid to people affected by

drought in Baidoa, Bay Region. Although the workers were released on 24 July, following the payment of a ransom by their family members, the vehicle remained with Al-Shabaab.

59. Federal government security forces (19) and regional forces (11) were responsible for 30 incidents of denial of humanitarian access. On 21 February 2017, two Somali National Army elements attacked staff of a humanitarian organization who were distributing humanitarian goods to drought-affected communities in Xuddur District, Bakool Region. The soldiers threatened the humanitarian workers, demanding that they also be given humanitarian goods. When the humanitarian actors refused, the soldiers opened fire, and the distribution was stopped. There were no casualties. For instance, on 5 October 2018, food aid to be distributed to internally displaced persons by a local non-governmental organization was looted by Galmudug police in Cadaado, Galguduud Region. Although the incident was reported to the police commander, no action was taken.

IV. Progress and challenges in addressing grave violations against children

A. Progress in the legislative framework

60. The Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development submitted the initial report of Somalia to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in September 2019, with support from UNICEF ([CRC/C/SOM/1](#)). Discussions have commenced on the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. In July 2018, the Federal Government held a consultative meeting of child protection stakeholders, facilitated by the African Union, to discuss the ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

61. Two critical pieces of legislation to better protect children from the six grave violations were elaborated by the Federal Government. In May 2018, the Council of Ministers unanimously adopted the sexual offences bill, which, once enacted, will criminalize a wide range of sexual offences. The bill sets out clear duties for the police, investigators and prosecutors and imposes penalties on those who fail to adequately investigate or prosecute crimes of sexual violence or interfere with investigations and prosecutions. It is survivor-centred and prioritizes the rights and needs of the survivors during proceedings so as to protect their identity and welfare. The bill envisages the establishment of specialized units to investigate sexual violence, comprising specialized police, investigators, prosecutors and judges to investigate, prosecute and hear all sexual offence cases. Once adopted, the bill has the potential to significantly enhance accountability for crimes of sexual violence in Somalia. However, its adoption by Parliament has been pending since 2018.

62. In November 2017, the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development launched the drafting process of a child rights bill, aimed at incorporating the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into national law and criminalizing the six grave violations. With UNICEF support, the drafting of the child rights bill was at an advanced stage at the time of writing.

63. At the federal member state-level, the Sexual Offences Law was enacted in November 2016 in Puntland. The law provides stronger protection for women and girls against sexual violence. It criminalizes all sexual crimes, including gang rape and sexual exploitation and abuse, and broadens the definition of consent, which is now designed to redress the balance in favour of survivors, without prejudicing the

accused's right to a fair trial. The law has led to greater accountability for victims of sexual violence, with examples of prosecutions.

64. Notwithstanding the progress made, Somalia's international obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child have not yet been fully incorporated into the national legal system. The ongoing constitutional review process presents a good opportunity to address these issues. Legal ambiguities persist regarding the definition of a child between the Provisional Federal Constitution, which stipulates a child as anyone under 18 years of age, and the regional constitutions of Puntland and of Southwest State, both of which define a child as anyone below the age of 15.

B. Follow-up on dialogue and implementation of action plans

65. The Federal Government of Somalia continued to make progress on the implementation of its 2012 action plans on preventing and combating the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children.

66. On 21 August 2017, the Commander of the Somali National Army issued a general command order to prevent child recruitment and use within the Somali armed forces, as well as all grave violations against children during military operations. The command order has been translated from English into Somali for wider dissemination within the national army.

67. In April 2018, the Federal Government started the process of drafting a national strategy aiming at preventing child recruitment and facilitating the release and reintegration of children associated with armed groups. The strategy will ensure a harmonized provision of services for children affected by armed conflict in Somalia as well as a more coherent approach to preventing child recruitment. Furthermore, the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Security, initiated a national strategy on assistance to victims, aiming at supporting survivors of armed conflict, including children affected by conflict.

68. In 2019, the Federal Government began the verification and biometric registration of all Somali National Army personnel. The exercise is primarily aimed at improving the collection of human resources data and at reviewing the eligibility of personnel, and is expected to contribute to the prevention of child recruitment.

69. In order to accelerate the implementation of the action plans, the Federal Government, with the support of the United Nations, elaborated and committed to a road map, which was signed by the Minister of Defence and by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict during her visit to Somalia in October 2019. It includes renewed commitments to strengthening the legislative framework, to capacity-building and awareness-raising for security forces on grave violations against children, and to the screening of troops and the release and reintegration of child soldiers. The road map also foresees the implementation of the action plans at federal member state-level through the creation of regional working groups on children and armed conflict. In addition, it contains provisions on the prevention and response to sexual violence against children.

70. The country task force cooperated with the Ministry of Defence in the screening of a total of 5,929 troops, including the Somali National Army (2,493), Puntland forces to be integrated into the national army (2,060), Jubbaland forces (1,069), Southwest forces (235), Hirshabelle police (60) and the National Intelligence and Security Agency (12). A total of 23 boys associated with Puntland forces (17), the national army (4) and Southwest forces (2) were identified, 19 of whom were separated and provided with reintegration assistance.

71. In collaboration with the European Union military mission to contribute to the training of Somali security forces and AMISOM, the country task force conducted joint child protection training for government security forces, including the Child Protection Unit of the Ministry of Defence. The country task force and AMISOM also organized joint capacity-building and outreach events, including for the commemoration of the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, the Day of the African Child and Universal Children's Day.

72. During the reporting period, 3,554 children, including 709 girls, benefited from United Nations-supported community-based reintegration services, including psychosocial assistance, back-to-school support programmes and vocational training. Among these children, 80 per cent were formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, while 20 per cent were vulnerable children from conflict-affected communities. Owing to continued insecurity in most areas of origin, children often remained in reintegration centres for longer periods, resulting in increased unplanned financial expenditure and contributing to making the children's reintegration into their communities more difficult and unpredictable. In October 2019, some funds were made available to support the reintegration of children by the Peacebuilding Fund.

73. The standard operating procedures on the reception and handover of children separated from armed groups, endorsed by the Government of Somalia in 2014 as part of the implementation of its action plan, were often applied inconsistently. While the majority of the children enrolled in UNICEF-supported reintegration centres had been handed over by government security forces, the time children spent in detention often exceeded the 72-hour time limit stipulated in the standard operating procedures.

74. Notwithstanding the progress achieved, significant gaps remain, and efforts need to be sustained to fully implement the two action plans, including the adoption and enactment of the child rights bill, the full application of command orders and standard operating procedures on the reception and handover of children separated from armed groups, and the continued screening of troops, including those forces and groups that will integrate the Somali National Army. Significant challenges also persist in holding perpetrators of grave violations against children accountable.

C. Advocacy and engagement on child protection

75. Throughout the reporting period, the country task force exchanged written communications and held meetings with AMISOM to raise the issue of violations against children committed by AMISOM. Violations attributed to the Kenya Defence Forces, Ethiopian National Defence Forces and Ethiopian Liyu Police were also systematically shared with the Governments of Kenya and Ethiopia, respectively, who reported having conducted investigations.

76. On 16 June 2019, the global campaign by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, "Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict", was launched in Somalia by the Minister of Justice and Judiciary Affairs during an event held to commemorate the Day of the African Child. The Minister reaffirmed his Government's commitment to strengthening child protection legislation in Somalia.

77. From 27 to 30 October 2019, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict visited Somalia and held discussions with national and international partners on mechanisms to strengthen child protection and address grave violations against children. She held meetings with representatives of the Federal Government and the Southwest State authorities to advocate immediate action to end and prevent violations against children by government security forces. During her visit, the Federal Government committed to a road map to expedite the implementation of the

two existing action plans to end and prevent the recruitment and use and killing and maiming of children. The Special Representative also launched a project for the prevention of child recruitment and for community-based integration, funded by the Peacebuilding Fund. During her visit, a Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, chaired by Denmark, was established.

VI. Observations and recommendations

78. I am concerned by the continuing high number of grave violations committed against children by all parties to the conflict in Somalia. I strongly condemn these violations, in particular the staggering numbers of abductions and of the recruitment and use of children by Al-Shabaab. I call upon all parties to immediately cease all violations and abide by their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law.

79. I am concerned by the number of violations attributed to government security forces, in particular the sharp increase in cases of the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children and of sexual violence against children attributed to the Somali police and regional forces. I call upon the Federal Government to fully implement the commitments made under the action plans to end and prevent the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children, signed in 2012. In this regard, I welcome the signature of the road map for the expedited implementation of the two action plans by the Federal Government of Somalia in October 2019 and call for its swift implementation, including at federal member state-level.

80. I welcome the national strategy aimed at preventing child recruitment and facilitating the release and reintegration of children, which the Federal Government is finalizing, and look forward to its adoption and implementation.

81. I encourage the Federal Government to ensure that armed groups or militia integrating its security forces are screened and that any children who are associated are identified, released and reintegrated.

82. I welcome the revocation of the death penalty against 12 children, as well as the presidential pardon by the President of Puntland for 34 children who had been sentenced to prison terms for their alleged association with Al-Shabaab.

83. I am, however, concerned about the continued detention of children for their actual or alleged association with armed groups and the fate of children classified as “high-risk” by the National Intelligence and Security Agency. I urge the Federal Government to treat children associated with armed groups primarily as victims, with the best interests of the child and international protection standards as guiding principles, and in line with the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (the Paris Principles) that Somalia has endorsed.

84. In this regard, I further call upon the Federal Government to fully apply the standard operating procedures for the handover of children separated from armed groups that it signed in 2014 and to allow full access for child protection actors to children at every stage of the release and reintegration process.

85. I encourage the Federal Government to further strengthen its legal framework for the protection of children, including by ratifying such relevant international legal instruments as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

86. I encourage the Federal Government to take into account child rights issues in the framework of the constitutional review process. I welcome the efforts made by the Federal Government towards enacting the sexual offences bill into law, as it will provide justice for victims of sexual violence, including children. I reiterate my call for the timely enactment of the bill, as stated in my reports on children and armed conflict (S/2019/509) and conflict-related sexual violence (S/2019/280). I also commend the progress made in drafting the child rights bill aimed at domesticating the Convention of the Rights of the Child and look forward to its enactment. I further call on Puntland authorities and Southwest authorities to harmonize their legislation on the age of majority with federal laws and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

87. I pay tribute to AMISOM for its efforts and sacrifices and note the decrease in the number of grave violations against children attributed to AMISOM. I welcome the close cooperation between the country task force and AMISOM on the protection of children in Somalia and call upon AMISOM and the African Union to investigate reports and allegations of grave violations against children, to ensure accountability for perpetrators and to further reinforce measures to end and prevent grave violations against children.

88. I call upon the international community to continue to support efforts for the prevention of child recruitment and for the rehabilitation and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups in Somalia, including through the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers.
