



Security Council

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Letter dated 26 June 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to the video-teleconference of the Security Council convened on 23 June 2020 under the agenda item entitled “Children and Armed Conflict”. Enclosed herewith are copies of the briefings provided on that occasion by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba; the Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund, Henrietta Fore; and Mariam, the civil society briefer; as well as copies of the statements delivered by the representatives of Council members Belgium, Estonia, France, Indonesia, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (on behalf of the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa and Tunisia), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members for this video-teleconference, the following delegations and entities submitted written statements, copies of which are also enclosed: Afghanistan, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, the European Union, Fiji, Georgia, Greece, Guatemala, India, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Norway, Pakistan, the Observer State of Palestine, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Yemen.

Pursuant to the procedure described in the letter dated 7 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of Security Council (S/2020/372) and agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the enclosed briefings and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Nicolas de Rivière
President of the Security Council



Annex 1

Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba de Potgieter

[Original: English and French]

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to thank France for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict. I commend France for the important role it played in the establishment of this mandate, and I welcome its continued support.

Before I turn to the content of this year's report (S/2020/525), I would like to mention three positive developments on the children and armed conflict agenda in 2019.

First, through the direct engagement of the United Nations on the ground, supported by my Office, parties to conflict adopted over 30 action plans, road maps, command orders and other measures to better protect children, including in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen; others, such as Somalia and the Sudan, recommitted to action plans. This is the highest number of mutually agreed measures in any one year. At the same time, while accountability remained slow, perpetrators in several situations were prosecuted for violations against children, for instance in Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic.

Secondly, the search for peace in 2019 yielded seven different peace dialogues and processes in children and armed conflict situations, such as the one in the Central African Republic. The guidelines on ways to include child protection language in peace processes, which were developed by my Office and presented to the Council in February, are now beginning to be applied.

Thirdly, as a result of advocacy by the United Nations, including in the context of peace agreements, some 13,200 children were released by parties to conflict in 2019.

I now turn to the report before the Council. The number of grave violations verified by the United Nations, although showing a decrease from the previous year, remains very high. Much more work needs to be done to bring those figures down. I ask Member States and parties to conflict to put child protection at the centre of their action. In 2019, actual violations committed against children amounted to 24,422, but our monitoring teams were also able to belatedly verify an additional 1,241 violations committed prior to that date. Thus, the overall verification in 2019 amounted to more than 25,000 grave violations. This represents 70 grave violations against children per day. Country task forces conduct late verifications when access to children has improved, often as a result of enhanced engagement with parties, increased capacity and improved security.

In 2019, 7,747 children, including 668 late verifications, were verified as having been recruited and used, the vast majority of those being attributable to non-State actors. On a positive note, action plans and enhanced engagement led to increased access to verify the presence of children within the ranks of conflict parties and to the release of those found. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, hundreds of children were released as a direct result of engagement with parties by the United Nations.

That same year, while a decrease in child casualties was verified, resulting from mitigation measures in the conduct of military operations and the establishment of action plans and/or peace processes, the erosion of respect for international

humanitarian law still led to high numbers of children being killed or maimed: 10,173 child casualties were verified, including 534 late verifications, a decrease of nearly 2,000 casualties as contrasted with previous years. Killing and maiming remain the highest verified violation in the annual report.

Lastly, there was also a decrease in abducted children. Over 1,600 children were verified as having been abducted in 2019, mostly by armed groups — a considerable decrease. My Office is preparing a technical guidance note to better assist our country task forces in monitoring and reporting on this violation. I encourage the United Nations system and international and regional bodies to continue to work, within their respective mandates, to better understand and address this issue.

While the introduction of measures, peace dialogues and enhanced engagement by child-protection actors have led to decreases in some violations, it has not been the case for all violations, starting with sexual violence, including rape. In 2019, over 730 cases of sexual violence were verified. However, this violation continues to be disturbingly underreported, including when perpetrated against boys, owing to the fear of stigma and retaliation, the involvement of powerful perpetrators and a lack of services for survivors, all of which discourage children and their families from reporting violations and seeking justice. More disturbing still, the number of cases attributed to State actors and non-State actors are similar and do not seem to be dropping, despite an increasing number of parties having signed commitments with the United Nations to end this violation. Stronger accountability mechanisms and systematic care services for survivors are needed to decisively address this scourge. It is also critical that armed forces strengthen their training for the prevention of this violation and that prevention be adequately reflected in national legislation criminalizing sexual violence.

I am equally troubled by the persistently high number of attacks on schools, hospitals and protected personnel. In 2019, monitors were able to verify 930 attacks, and verified attributions to State forces doubled. I call on all parties to respect the civilian nature of school and health infrastructure. State armed forces have a specific duty to protect them. In that connection, I recall the Safe Schools Declaration and encourage States to endorse and implement its guidelines. When schools are used for military purposes, their sanctity as safe spaces is eroded and teachers and students are at risk of attack. The targeting of schools by armed groups using extreme violence needs to be better understood in order to engage in effective prevention. Equally, we need to explore the linkages between attacks on health facilities and coronavirus disease lockdowns, which might be a disturbing new trend.

During the reporting period, 4,400 incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children were verified, an increase of over 400 per cent from 2018 and, indeed, other previous years. That is overwhelmingly the violation that showed the greatest increase in 2019, with most denials attributed to non-State actors. Violence against humanitarian workers, assets and facilities included, among other things, killings, abductions, assaults and arbitrary detentions. I plead for States and armed groups to facilitate the access of humanitarian workers to deliver much-needed assistance to children.

Finally, I would like to underscore my serious concern at the detention of more than 2,500 children for their actual or alleged association with armed groups, including those designated as terrorist by the United Nations, and on national security charges. States must treat these children primarily as victims. Detention should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest period possible, with respect for their fundamental rights, due process and international juvenile justice standards.

With the support of the Security Council, we have achieved a lot, but not nearly as much as we need to. Here, I wish to make a special plea to all Member States: the monitoring and reporting mechanism is only as strong as the resources and capacities available for its functioning. Having well-trained, specialized and dedicated child-protection advisers in peace operations, as well as in country offices of the United Nations Children's Fund, is essential to ensure that the mandate is effective. If Member States want to assist in better protecting children, resources must be provided to maintain and strengthen child-protection capacity on the ground. The Council and the Fifth Committee should ensure that, when a new peacekeeping or political mission is set up or the budget of existing missions is negotiated, enough child-protection capacity is mandated and retained. I further plead for an increase of the financial support to UNICEF so that it can conduct its children and armed conflict-mandated functions, as well as its other child-protection work, on the ground.

I wish to end my statement by talking about the children. Behind the figures are boys and girls with stolen childhoods and shattered dreams, as well as families and communities torn apart by violence and suffering. The only thing children and communities have in common today is their hope for peace, a better life and a better future. We must rise to meet that expectation. We can do that by engaging all parties to ensure better protection for conflict-affected children, by pleading for their immediate release and by assisting them in their reintegration into normal life. The efforts of all the Groups of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict can make a real difference in that regard.

Another way to assist is through supporting effective reintegration programmes, as called for in resolution 2427 (2018) and the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups — the Paris Principles. Reintegration programmes must be long-term, sustainable and gender- and age-sensitive and must provide children with access to health care, mental health, psychosocial support, education and vocational training, civil registration and justice. I call on States to endorse and implement the Paris Principles in order to make reintegration a reality for children, and I encourage them to join our advocacy for adequate and sustainable child reintegration, including through the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers, which I launched in 2018, together with UNICEF and other key actors, some of whom are here today, including your country, Mr. President, as co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Reintegration.

I further ask the Council's assistance in rolling out the campaign Act to Protect Children Affected by Armed Conflict, which was launched last year, and I look forward to working with everyone present to find opportunities for roll-out.

We find ourselves looking back at another year of challenges in the quest for better protecting children in conflict. We need to deliver concrete results, and I count on everyone present to support that work. We must advocate for children, like Mariam, who will speak today through the good offices of Save the Children. We must support our child-protection experts and advisers. We must strive for dialogue and peace. And we must support UNICEF and its civil society partners in reintegration efforts so that children can move away from conflicts that they neither started nor chose. Let us give children a real chance at childhood. Let us give children the ability to dream again.

Annex 2

Statement by the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Henrietta H. Fore

I thank France for convening this debate, and I welcome Mariam, our young civil society briefer. We look forward to learning from her experiences.

There are few children as vulnerable as those living through armed conflict situations. Whether they are trapped by the fighting, on the move as migrants, refugees or internally displaced persons, part of the fighting itself or being detained because of perceived or actual links to armed groups, these children are, first and foremost, victims of circumstances beyond their control. They are, first and foremost, children.

The voice and support of the Security Council can be instrumental in supporting those children. It can help return what has been so cruelly taken from them by conflict — the simple gift of a normal childhood.

Fifteen years ago, the global community gathered around those needs. Resolution 1612 (2005) and the establishment of the children and armed conflict agenda and the monitoring and reporting mechanism represented a milestone in living up to our commitment to protect all children. The United Nations Children's Fund has been there from the start, pushing the agenda forward and co-chairing country task forces on monitoring and reporting in 14 countries. Along with the Secretary-General's annual report, we, together, are protecting children and holding parties to conflict to account.

Since then, tens of thousands of children have been released from the ranks of armed forces and armed groups. In the past three years alone, UNICEF has helped release nearly 37,000 of them and supported them with release and reintegration programming in 19 countries. Child survivors are finally getting the services they need to recover and reintegrate.

Our work has also created a new space to engage with parties to conflict to prevent and end grave violations against children. Over the years, parties to conflict have signed 32 action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children. Our efforts have raised public awareness — and, often, public alarm — about the plight of these children and the need to support them.

Together we have sent a clear message to those who would violate children's rights: such actions are illegal, immoral and unacceptable, and the global community is committed to holding them to account. The culture of impunity must end.

Countries now have a number of tools and normative frameworks to guide their work in that area. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is now joined by a number of important instruments: the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, ratified by 170 countries; the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups — the Paris Principles; the Vancouver Principles; and the Safe Schools Declaration, endorsed by 104 States.

Guided by those frameworks, many States have gone one step further and brought those commitments to life in their laws and regulations. Just last week, the Central African Republic adopted the new Child Protection Code, which also criminalizes the recruitment and use of children. Last year, the Philippines adopted the Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Law. It criminalizes the six grave violations, provides special protections for children in armed conflict and establishes penalties for violations. In at least five countries, including Denmark, the United

Kingdom and New Zealand, military manuals and directives now reflect the Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines. But these instruments are only as effective as the global will to use them. We therefore call on all States to endorse and reflect them across their legal frameworks, because we have more work to do.

We continue to see appallingly high numbers of verified violations against children. Over the past 15 years, the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict has documented a shocking 250,000 grave violations against children in armed conflict, including the recruitment and use of over 77,000 children, the killing and maiming of over 100,000 children, rape and sexual violence against over 15,000 children, the abduction of over 25,000 children, nearly 17,000 attacks on schools and hospitals, and nearly 11,000 incidents of denial of humanitarian access. These are just the verified cases. The actual numbers are certainly much higher. The coronavirus disease adds a new urgency to this work. As the pandemic spreads, health-care facilities have been damaged or destroyed by conflict. Services have been suspended. Children are missing out on basic medical care, including vaccinations. Water and sanitation systems have been damaged or destroyed altogether, making it impossible for children to wash their hands.

Some 1.5 billion children are out of school. In conflicts, these children are at a double disadvantage, missing out on an education and finding themselves at increased risk of violence, abuse, child marriage and recruitment to armed groups. Crowded conditions in camp settings, informal settlements or densely populated urban areas and detention centres make physical distancing impossible. Far too often, parties to conflict are using the pandemic and the need to reach and support children, particularly those on the move, for political advantage. Children are not pawns or bargaining chips. This must stop.

To address these growing needs, we need the support and united voice of the Council to call for action in five key areas.

First, we need the influence of Member States to urge the 50 parties to conflict that have not yet signed action plans to do so. We need action, not words, and signing these plans is a demonstration of real commitment. I ask Members to help the United Nations create space for dialogue to bring these plans to life. These plans should increasingly address all six grave violations, instead of primarily recruitment and use. The action plan signed in South Sudan is a good model to follow.

Secondly, we call for the immediate release of all children in detention for their recruitment, use or alleged association with parties to conflict. These children, including those who may have committed crimes, are victims first and foremost. They are also at acute risk of contracting COVID-19 and must be handed over to child-protection actors, such as UNICEF.

Thirdly, UNICEF calls on Member States to bring nationals and their children home and to repatriate them. These children have a right to access protection, basic services, education and reintegration services. This includes the thousands of children stranded in north-east Syria — young lives who are shunned and deprived of liberty because of perceived or actual links to groups designated as terrorists. After all they have experienced, they need protection and support. Instead, they are met with ostracization and rejection. They are locked up. Some have had their right to nationality denied or stripped away altogether. This is unacceptable. We must support these children.

Fourthly, we call on Member States to invest in education and vocational training for reintegrated children. This is not only their right, it is the right thing to do. Education provides a pathway to hope, a better life and social cohesion. Beyond investments, we also call for all attacks on education facilities to stop. Last year

saw 927 verified attacks on schools — among the 13,000 since the monitoring and reporting mechanism began. Once again, these numbers are likely much higher. We must protect this essential infrastructure.

Fifthly, we call for urgent action to respect and protect water and sanitation infrastructure. Water is a basic human right, and sanitation is the first line of defence against diseases like the coronavirus disease, but also cholera, as well as malnutrition.

UNICEF urges the Council to use its influence to build on the many successes over the past 15 years and give every child the protection and support they deserve, because they are children first and foremost. If we fail them, we fail the future, we fail humanity and we fail in our duty to leave the world a better, more peaceful place than we found it.

Annex 3

Statement by the civil society briefer, Mariam

[Original: English and French]

I would like to begin my speech by thanking the French Government for having organized this meeting of the Security Council. I also thank the Council for giving me the opportunity to represent civil society organizations, especially children. I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF for their engagement and advocacy for children.

My name is Mariam, I am 15 years old. I am a member of the National Children's Parliament of Mali. I am committed to the protection and well-being of children. I am particularly sensitive to the situation of children who have been internally displaced by conflicts. It is for this reason that we have started a fundraising campaign to distribute clothes, toys and food to these children.

In 2019, it was verified that 7,747 children around the world, some as young as 6 years old, had been recruited and used by armed groups, according to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525). Exactly four years ago, Mohamed, a native of Bankass, located in the Mopti region in central Mali, was enjoying his childhood. He lived surrounded by his parents, his friends, happiness and joy. One day, an armed group attacked his village, killing people, burning houses and taking all the property. As a result, Mohamed became an orphan, not knowing where the other members of his family were. As if that were not enough, he was recruited by force by an armed group when he was only 10 years old.

He accompanied the armed group and participated in the atrocities. One day he was forced to witness the massacre of an entire family. This was a huge shock for him, and in the evening he decided to run away and take refuge in a family. Fortunately for him, this family helped him come to Bamako to one of the centres for internally displaced persons.

Having no more consideration for his person, and no longer having confidence in others, he does not know what the future holds for him — his future in a world where leaders seem deaf to the most poignant evils. No child should experience this kind of experience, because it takes away not only his innocence but also all his dreams.

I ask leaders to make decisions and take actions to prevent other children from finding themselves in the same situation as Mohamed.

The consequences of wars and conflicts for children are enormous. Many children have become gangsters or thieves, and some have fallen into alcohol and drugs. In conflict and war zones, children feel frustrated and in danger because they tell themselves that their lives can change at any time. They can be killed, abducted or forcibly recruited by armed groups.

Thousands of children are out of school because of war. In Mali, 1,251 schools were closed in March of this year, depriving thousands of children of one of their fundamental rights, which is education. Aminata, a 12-year-old child who lives in an internally displaced persons camp, told me this:

“Before, I was happy to go to school because I had friends with whom I had fun and I was learning a lot of things. I loved my teacher so much that I wanted to be like her in the future. One day, people came to my school and burned the

benches because they do not want to see formal schools open. I am wondering how I am going to be a teacher now, because I am not in school anymore.”

Conflicts separate family members. Bakary, aged 14, went on vacation to Mopti in 2017 to stay with one of my uncles. One day when they went out on an errand with one of his friends, they were kidnapped by armed groups. His parents remained without news of him for several months. Afterwards, the armed groups contacted them by phone to give them news of Bakary, and they talked to him. No one has heard from him for over two years. Because of this, his mother has gone mad and can no longer take care of Bakary’s little brothers and sisters. What are Member States doing to ensure that Bakary and other abducted children are found and rejoin their families?

Girls and boys are victims of rape. Fatou, aged 12, lived in the Gao region with her parents. One day the armed men went to her house. They murdered her father in her presence and raped her. It happened in the presence of her mother, who did not survive. After being raped and losing both her parents, Fatou suffered psychological trauma. She was afraid of people, especially those of the opposite sex. She no longer wanted to continue living. She was supported by a neighbouring family who welcomed her and helped her to go to one of the youth reception centres, where she received psychological care.

I tell myself that it could have been me. What would have become of me if I had experienced this situation? I have no answer to that question.

I speak with a tearful heart because I know that children suffer and that they simply never should, especially in times of conflict and war. In my country, thousands of children lose their enthusiasm for life and, at the same time, their dreams. There is an urgent need for justice so that victims do not grow up by wanting to take justice into their own hands.

I ask States Members of the United Nations to take actions to protect children, including in times of conflict and war. As fathers, mothers, uncles and aunts, I know that no one would want their children or loved ones to be victims of conflict. I am convinced that all children, regardless of race, colour, ethnicity or religion, have the right to enjoy their childhoods and their rights. I urge Member States to take the necessary measures to protect and guarantee the future of children, including in times of conflict or war, because, as we say in Bambara, *Djamana ka Sini nyè sigi bé a dawn bolo* — the future of a country is in the hands of its children.

Allow me to say that we children want to participate in decision-making that concerns us, because we also have a voice and ideas to propose in order to reduce the impact of armed conflict on children. I ask decision-makers, States members of the Council, to help us improve our living conditions and not to be victims of conflict.

Annex 4

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve

This year marks the fifteenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. This year also marks the twentieth anniversary of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

However, despite progress in the implementation of the mandate, there is little to celebrate. Last year, more than 25,000 grave violations against children in 19 country situations were verified by the United Nations. The violation of denial of humanitarian access has seen an exponential increase. The steady erosion of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and respect for civilian lives, in particular of children, continues. The numbers of incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence and of attacks on schools and hospitals do not go down, even where action plans are adopted and measures are taken. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) further exacerbates the situation. We must step up our efforts.

It is fitting that we hold today's open debate under the French presidency of the Security Council, as France was the first Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Belgium, as the current Chair of the Working Group, stepped into the shoes of its predecessors with ambitious goals. We aim for the Working Group to adopt conclusions on all of the 14 country situations with listed parties within our two-year term. We agreed with Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter to increase the frequency of country reports, shortening the reporting periods and increasing their relevance, as more timely conclusions of the Working Group are being adopted.

The Working Group is also mainstreaming the topic of children and armed conflict in the work of the Council. For example, video-teleconferences are held with country task forces on monitoring and reporting ahead of mandate renewals of United Nations missions. This illustrates the importance we attach to sufficient child-protection adviser capacity in United Nations missions, whether they be peacekeeping operations or special political missions. The tireless and often dangerous work of the child protection teams and the country task forces on monitoring and reporting on the ground forms the basis of the children and armed conflict mandate and should be acknowledged and safeguarded. In addition, more attention has been paid to the follow-up and implementation of previously adopted conclusions.

In February, Belgium organized a Security Council debate on children and armed conflict, with a statement by the King of the Belgians (see S/PV.8721). On that occasion, the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2020/3) calling for the dissemination and use of the United Nations "Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict". In the light of the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire in response to COVID-19, it is now more relevant than ever that child protection should be a central focus in ceasefire and peace negotiations.

Time and again, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict manages to find consensus on the protection of children, even in country situations about which the Security Council is often divided. This reflects the Council's continued strong support for the children and armed conflict mandate. This unity illustrates the importance of maintaining the strengths of the mandate, including the integrity and impartiality of its listing mechanism. Evidence-based listing and delisting, accurately reflecting the data collected and verified by the monitoring and reporting

mechanism, according to the formal criteria included in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict of 2010 (S/2010/181), are key. The listing mechanism provides leverage to the United Nations to work with listed parties to improve the situation of children on the ground, and is therefore a precious and powerful tool. Delisting parties prematurely takes away that leverage, including for the Working Group, as it is the basis on which it works.

Accountability for all violations and abuses against children is at the heart of the mandate on children and armed conflict.

Furthermore, we share the concern, expressed in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525), related to children in detention for association with armed groups, including those designated as terrorists by the Security Council, or on national security-related charges. Those children should be treated primarily as victims and in line with international juvenile justice standards. Detention should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time. Reintegration is key, and reintegration programmes must be gender- and age-sensitive, include mental-health and psychosocial support, education and vocational training, and access to civil registry, identification documents and to justice.

As His Majesty King Philippe said before the Security Council in February,

“The year 2019 marked the end of a very challenging decade for children in conflict zones. It is up to us all to ensure — with just and concrete measures — that 2020 marks the start of a decade of hope for all children.”
(see *S/PV.8721*, p. 8)

Annex 5**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Sven Jürgenson**

We thank all briefers for sharing their views today. We also thank France for organizing today's debate, which addresses the key building blocks of the Security Council's work on children in armed conflict.

The report of the Secretary-General before us (S/2020/525) confirms the continuing immense need for the Council's attention to children and armed conflict — and not only today. The protection of children is relevant to every situation on our agenda and should be included in all our discussions on peacekeeping and special political mission mandates as well as in the work of the sanctions committees. The conclusions and discussions of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict provide valuable input for this and should be drawn upon systematically.

The continued high level of verified violations against children also points to the continued failure by parties to comply with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We support the Secretary-General's call for strong national accountability measures for grave violations against children and for cooperation with relevant international accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court. As a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, Estonia calls on countries not yet having done so to ratify the Protocol.

Likewise, we welcome all initiatives that aim to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict. Estonia joined the group of over 100 countries endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration earlier this year.

We are deeply concerned about the high number of child casualties — over 10,000 children killed or maimed — with the number of attacks climbing in Afghanistan, Mali and Myanmar. We are alarmed by the increase in the denial of humanitarian access to children, and unlawful attacks against schools and hospitals, in, among other places, the Syrian Arab Republic, the occupied Palestinian territory, Afghanistan and Somalia.

We are deeply concerned about the continued underreporting of cases of sexual violence, and the lack of accountability and access to services, including sexual and reproductive health services, in this regard.

The monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict is a unique and valuable mechanism created by the Council for the collection of timely, objective, accurate and reliable information. That data, along with the consistent application of the criteria laid out in the report of the Secretary-General contained in document S/2010/181 to guide the Secretary-General's annual reporting, provide an essential tool for the Council for addressing and preventing violations against children in conflict.

The mechanism cannot deliver without sufficient human and financial resources. We strongly support ensuring continued dedicated child-protection capacity in United Nations missions, including in situations of transition and drawdown. Estonia continues to support UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict through voluntary contributions.

We are concerned about the increased vulnerability of children in armed conflict due to the coronavirus disease pandemic, including in terms of recruitment

and the denial of humanitarian access. We reiterate our strong support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, aimed to protect the most vulnerable among us.

We extend our deep appreciation to all actors on the ground ensuring the continued work of the monitoring and reporting mechanism. We note with concern the potential gaps in reporting due to the limitations imposed by the pandemic and the possible impact on the implementation of the Council's mandate on children and armed conflict.

Finally, we express our strong appreciation to Belgium as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for ensuring the continued functioning of the Working Group despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Annex 6**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: English and French]

I add my voice to the acknowledgements given to our briefers of the day. I would like to thank Mariam in particular, and through her the youth of Mali and all those who work daily on the ground to improve the situation of children.

Fifteen years ago, the age of Mariam, my predecessor Ambassador De la Sablière and his counterpart from Benin submitted an ambitious and innovative draft resolution to the Council. Resolution 1612 (2005) structures our collective action to put an end to the infamy that brings us together today. Since 2005, our efforts have resulted in the release of more than 150,000 children, thanks to the commitment of the Security Council, successive Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, UNICEF and civil society.

Our discussions have highlighted this collective success, which illustrates what the multilateral system can do best when the Security Council is vigilant, united and equipped with effective tools. However, grave violations against children continue at alarming levels, fuelled by the escalation of conflict. That is why we must make the best use of the tools that the Security Council has put in place. Its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict must continue to meet regularly, develop contacts with those involved in child protection, and carry out field visits. In this respect, I pay tribute to Belgium for its dynamic chairmanship of the Working Group. Since 2001, the Council has also asked the Secretary-General to release an annual infamous list. It is a heavy responsibility that is to be exercised on the basis of rigorous and objective criteria.

For its part, France will continue to play an active role and promote the universal endorsement of the Paris Principles and Commitments. In the field, France supports projects for children in emergency situations. In particular, through UNICEF and the Education Cannot Wait Fund, we support projects in Lebanon and the Sahel.

Protecting children from recruitment and indoctrination by terrorist groups is imperative. Empowerment, through education and training, is one of the best ramparts against these forms of exploitation. This is why France has made education a priority of its external action. It has significantly increased its bilateral aid in this area and actively supports UNESCO, in particular in strengthening the resilience of young people in the face of violent extremism in the Sahel. France has also strengthened its support to the Global Partnership for Education with a historic contribution of €200 million.

Since girls are particularly vulnerable, France supports the establishment of a protective environment for girls in schools. This is one of the objectives of the “Priority for Equality” initiative, which operates in the Sahel countries.

Finally, in the face of the unacceptable increase of mutilation and sexual violence, our action includes a section devoted to care. This is why we support, for instance, several projects in Iraq as well as the Mukwege-Murad fund for survivors of sexual violence.

Annex 7

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, Dian Triansyah Djani

I would like to thank France for organizing this timely open debate on children and armed conflict. I also thank Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Executive Director Henrietta Fore and Mariam for their updates on this issue.

Today's debate is a vital contribution to the overall efforts to halt and reverse the negative impacts on children caught up in armed conflict. For Indonesia, ensuring children's well-being is a priority to which we are abidingly committed. We, the international community, cannot stand by silently as children's lives are cut short by the blunt force of armed conflict.

It is an unfortunate fact that children and conflict are consistently mentioned in the same breath. In 2019, over 25,000 grave violations against children were reported and more than 10,000 children were killed or maimed.

While reiterating our continuous support to the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, Indonesia has three points to underscore today.

First, child protection has become even more urgent during this pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has further jeopardized children's lives in conflict areas. They are facing higher risks of health issues, violation and exploitation. Through our peacekeepers on the ground, Indonesia maintains its concrete contribution on child protection. Our rapidly deployable battalion in the Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo continues to engage communities within civil-military coordination activities, including by supporting children to understand how to address the pandemic in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We need to ensure that our efforts against the pandemic take the rights and needs of children into account. That includes their access to health care, quality education and the delivery of a timely COVID-19 response.

Secondly, it is imperative to stop using children in armed conflict. We should continue to sustain actions to end the recruitment of children as well as address the root causes of conflict. Fifteen years since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), we are pleased to hear a "success story" of 13,200 children released from armed groups last year, including in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar. However, we cannot be complacent. Our full support towards enhanced engagement by all parties to conflict on child protection should be consistently maintained.

Thirdly, the process of reintegrating children should be given greater attention. As member of the Group of Friends of Reintegration, Indonesia believes that the protection of children's rights must start with family or caregivers. Providing children with a safe and nurturing environment in the family is the best way to break the cycle of their involvement in armed conflict.

A conducive environment will not only prevent the re-recruitment of former child soldiers, but also prevent children from being exposed to terrorist groups in conflict areas. Therefore, positive engagement and commitment from all stakeholders are critical for the reintegration process. That includes the role of United Nations peace operations, particularly by involving women peacekeepers, who are well-positioned to protect children. Today there are 159 Indonesian women peacekeepers in various missions, who have been trained to engage and protect children.

This year also marks 20 years since the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. There are many international instruments related to the well-being of children. But, as Henrietta, the Executive Director of UNICEF, clearly alluded to, all those instruments are only as effective as the global will to use them. It is up to us to implement faithfully all protocols, agreements and legislation on children. It is the duty of our generation to give meaning to the Protocol. Our legacy for children is to ensure that their natural constitution is preserved to adulthood. Children are neither soldiers nor victims; they are our future.

Annex 8**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Gennady Kuzmin**

We thank France for convening today's meeting. We further thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and other briefers for their contributions to today's discussion. The topic of child protection is of paramount importance to the Russian Federation.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2020/525) confirms that children in different countries around the world involved in armed confrontations continue to encounter brutal violence. One of the main reasons for their plight is that parties to armed conflicts ignore the rules of international humanitarian law and armed groups make open use of barbaric methods of warfare. The Security Council cannot remain indifferent and should make unflinching efforts to protect children in armed conflicts.

Almost 15 years ago, the Security Council adopted the milestone resolution 1612 (2005), with a noble aim: to protect those most vulnerable in armed conflict — children. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, created by that historic decision, is a unique mechanism, which has facilitated more effective protection for children in conflict. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work for the sake of children trapped in various conflicts all over the world.

Efforts by the Group would be incomplete without the crucial work done by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. We would like once again to express our sincere appreciation to Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter for her hard daily work in pursuing her mandate and making a tangible difference for children in situations of armed conflict. We are open to further cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Office of the Special Representative in the field of the protection of children in armed conflict. Russia continues to support her important initiatives — raising awareness of the problems of child victims of armed conflict, information campaigns on the reintegration of children, and preventing their recruitment, among others.

In various countries around the world engulfed in hostilities, children continue to endure brutal violence and hardship. And now their plight has become even harder due to the unprecedented global health crisis posed by the coronavirus disease. Unfortunately, even this crisis has not led to the rejection of unilateral coercive measures, which affect essential health care services, social infrastructure, food security and other aspects of life. These affect ordinary people, especially children, directly, despite all the reassurances about so called "humanitarian exemptions" that we have heard so many times in the Council. We regret that the Secretary-General has not mentioned this key issue in his report. We call on the Secretary-General and Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter to pay special attention to the detrimental effect of illegal political sanctions on children in armed conflict and include a relevant section in future reports.

Terrorists present a major threat to children in armed conflict. They do not shy away from using even small children and bringing them into their ranks. No child caught in such a devastating maelstrom should be marginalized by society. Children have the right to, and should, become full members of society once again. Their rehabilitation and reintegration are a crucial aspect of the children and armed conflict agenda today.

The Russian Federation fully supports and concurs with the Secretary-General's call on all Member States concerned not yet having done so to take steps for

the voluntary repatriation of children stranded in conflict zones, including children actually or allegedly associated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

We understand the importance of reintegrating children affected by conflict. Since 2018, the Russian Federation has ensured the return of Russian children from battlegrounds in Iraq and Syria, and their ongoing rehabilitation. More than 150 Russian children have already successfully been evacuated from Iraq and Syria. Although the current pandemic has slowed down this work, it will be continued.

Our hope is that there will be more examples of the successful reintegration of child combatants, addressing the plight of children in conflict and better protecting their lives. Our overall efforts in the Security Council should foster progress to that end and develop strategies to prevent grave violations for the benefit of children and our future.

Annex 9

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Halimah DeShong

It is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African countries that are members of the Security Council plus one (A3+1) — the Niger, South Africa, Tunisia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. We express sincere thanks to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and UNICEF's Executive Director, Henrietta Fore, for their insightful briefings.

They say that a child shall lead us. To Mariam, we extend a special word of gratitude for her courage, guidance and wisdom. Ensuring children's participation matters because solutions crafted with and for them are more likely to succeed.

As the Security Council marks the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), the A3+1 welcomes this opportunity to reflect on key developments and priority actions towards the protection and empowerment of children globally.

Notwithstanding the challenges related to collecting data on the six grave violations against children, we have registered significant progress in the monitoring and reporting mechanism processes. Those improvements supported the emergence of evidence-informed, country-specific action plans on child protection, national child-focused legislation and child-centred policies.

Moreover, mechanisms for collaboration across the United Nations system and the wider international community underpin a number of important initiatives, including the presidential enactment of the Child Rights Protection Law prohibiting *bacha bazi* and the recruitment and use of children in Afghanistan; the adoption of the Child Protection Code in February 2020 criminalizing the recruitment and use of children in the Central African Republic; cooperation on the protection of children during military operations in the Sahel; and the widespread inclusion of child-protection actions within the various United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions' mandates.

The protection of children in armed conflict should be addressed at all levels, including through preventive diplomacy, mediation in peace processes, at all stages of peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and as a key dimension of the protection-of-civilians mandate. We wish to recognize the work, commitment, advocacy and overall contribution of UNICEF and of local civil-society organizations to these developments.

As we continue to witness worrying levels of recorded violations against children, coordinated leadership among global governance institutions, regional and subregional organizations, national Governments and civil society will continue to prove crucial in ending such unconscionable harms globally. In that regard, the A3+1 recognizes the child-protection programme in the African Union's Peace and Security Department, in collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and the commitment made by African Union leaders to eradicate the burden of conflict and thereby prevent it from affecting future generations and to focus on prevention efforts as part of the Silencing the Guns by 2020 in Africa and the wider Agenda 2063.

In addition, we appeal for full compliance with internationally recognized juvenile justice standards, focused on the release, rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims. We regard the indiscriminate criminalization and incarceration of children, particularly those recruited and used by violent extremist groups, as compounding their victimization. Educational and vocational training as well as

psychosocial and socioeconomic support by the international community, the State, local communities and families should form part of wider actions to protect and support children in these contexts.

The African Union's Youth Envoy, Aya Chebbi, reminds us that education is the most powerful instrument for peace and that the success envisioned under the Silencing the Guns in Africa initiative requires quality education for children, with a specific focus on girls' education. Internally displaced children and refugees, who are made particularly vulnerable, also deserve access to a quality education.

The A3+1 denounces attacks on education and urges all parties to conflict to adhere to their obligations under international law to protect children, educators and educational institutions from violence and destruction. We also call for an end to impunity by extremist armed groups and other perpetrators of such attacks, including kidnapping and gendered and sexual violence in schools or along school routes, where girls are particularly targeted. We support the enactment of existing commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and related national and regional child-protection legislation and policies. We strongly urge all parties to cease their occupation of educational institutions for military purposes and to adhere to the call to ensure that schools remain zones of peace and places where intellectual curiosity and an appreciation for social justice are cultivated.

Access to meaningful education, health care and key socioeconomic protections remain seriously compromised for children and their families affected by protracted conflict. In addition to direct violence, the devastating effects of preventable illnesses associated with malnutrition and poor sanitation in conflict-affected countries continue to ravage communities, acutely affecting children. Children are also the most affected by the security crisis in the Sahel, the Lake Chad basin and other regions affected by the triple threat of conflict, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and climate change, with adolescent girls in particular suffering the egregious consequences of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence.

We encourage Governments in armed-conflict situations to do all they can to institute a culture of respect for women and children among their armed forces. We also call for improved age- and gender-responsive actions to prevent abuses, provide reparation and psychosocial support to victims and survivors, and promote positive shifts in consciousness regarding childhood and gender. Further, we encourage our friends and partners in the international community to renew efforts to support the socioeconomic development of those regions, in line with national needs and priorities and in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In closing, we wish to reiterate that long-term, strategic, child-centred and focused interventions must be supported by immediate measures to address children, rendered most vulnerable in conflict settings. With the numbers of displaced persons on the rise globally, the majority of whom are women and children, parties to conflict must comply with international humanitarian law and international refugee law. As noted by the Secretary-General, the cross-border dynamics of conflict, intercommunal violence and military processes associated with counter-terrorism operations have all hindered access for child-protection actors. We urge parties to ensure unimpeded access, in line with international law, for the delivery of critical life-support supplies and access to health care by children and their families to save lives and sustain child development.

We appeal to Members to strengthen their political commitment to the children and armed conflict agenda and for organizations to remain committed thereto, especially in the light of the further budgetary constraints occasioned by the

effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Children represent a significant proportion of populations globally, a figure much higher in countries ravaged by armed conflict. They are owed a more fruitful inheritance. Nothing short of global, national, local and individual transformation will deliver the change they deserve.

Annex 10

Statement by the Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, James Roscoe

I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for hosting this year's annual debate. Our thanks go also to Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and Executive Director Fore. We also thank in particular Mariam for her very powerful briefing.

The United Kingdom is committed to protecting children in conflict. We remain one of the largest donors to the Office of the Special Representative and support its efforts to carry out its mandate. As an active member of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we work to ensure that the Council provides pragmatic recommendations to parties to conflict, to address child-rights concerns and encourage systematic follow-up to its conclusions. We call on parties to conflict to adopt and implement action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children and urge Governments to hold perpetrators to account.

Since their establishment 15 years ago, the Working Group and the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism have achieved great successes, including by contributing to the release of more than 155,000 children associated with parties to conflict. However, 15 years later, it is clear that more work is needed to ensure that those mechanisms remain transparent and credible vehicles for accountability. The Secretary-General's 2020 annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) makes for sombre reading. The vast numbers of violations committed against children is abhorrent and must serve as a rallying call to the international community. We must do more.

The parameters for this year's report mean that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is not covered. But, as we heard from Ms. Fore, its impacts will have a devastating effect on children in conflict. Ensuring that child-protection actors are able to continue to monitor, report and respond to grave violations during this pandemic is paramount. The United Kingdom reiterates its strong support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and urges Member States to collectively enable humanitarian access. The Secretary-General's annual report and its annexes provide a valuable tool for strengthening compliance with international law, promoting accountability and influencing improvements in the behaviour of parties to conflict.

The strength of this tool, however, depends on a standardized approach to listing and delisting based on data collected by the monitoring and reporting mechanism and consistent application of the criteria set out in the Secretary-General's 2010 annual report (S/2010/181). The United Kingdom calls on the United Nations to review its approach and work with Security Council members to reinforce our global commitment to supporting children in armed conflict. We will call on Council colleagues to make greater use of the Working Group's tools and mechanisms to promote the protection of children and ensure that there is sufficient child-protection capacity in United Nations peace operations and political missions.

The United Kingdom supports the emphasis on education at this open debate. Access to safe, quality education for children affected by armed conflict has an important role in reintegration as well as in providing a route to a better future. Schools can often protect such highly vulnerable children. Education also contributes to a safer and more prosperous world, reduces conflict and increases stability.

We are therefore concerned by the annual report's findings that in 2019 State actors were responsible for more than half of all attacks on schools. In 2018, the

United Kingdom endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, committing to reduce the impact of conflict on education. We strongly support the Secretary-General's call for other States to sign on to the Declaration to strengthen the protection of education from attack because, as Mariam reminded us, children have a right to their childhoods and to an education free from conflict.

Mass school closures across the world as a result of COVID-19 have had the biggest impact on girls' lives. Globally, girls were already more likely than boys never to receive any type of education, and their access is even lower in times of crisis and emergency. They are least likely to return to school following a crisis, facing increased risks of child marriage, teen-age pregnancy, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and the loss of vital sexual and reproductive health services. In that regard, we would like to conclude with a call on the United Nations to continue to improve the collection of gender-disaggregated data on grave violations in order to strengthen its gender-sensitive response to child protection.

We need to do better because, as Ms. Fore says, when we fail children, we fail the future. And so we owe it to Mariam, the children of Mali and children across the world to redouble our efforts.

Annex 11

Statement by the Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Cherith Norman-Chalet

As I begin my remarks today, I should like to offer my thanks to Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and UNICEF Director Fore for their efforts to spotlight and address child protection around the world. Those efforts are noble and consequential. One of the most powerful lines that Ms. Fore spoke during her opening statement just now is that children are not pawns, and it must stop. We fully agree, and it is so true.

Fifteen years after the Council established its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the United Nations-led monitoring and reporting mechanism, the United States remains fully committed to supporting this critical work because the impact of conflict on children remains all too real around the world. Far too often, and sadly, we still see the six grave children and armed conflict violations being committed globally. This tragic fact is starkly illustrated, on a scale that is really hard to imagine, in this year's report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525).

Such violations include the continued killing and maiming of children, the recruitment and use of child soldiers, sexual violence and abduction, attacks against schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access. Such acts must end, and perpetrators must be held to account.

Even though many of us have taken steps to both help reduce the impact of armed conflict on children and support reintegration efforts around the world, our collective efforts and work on this issue are far from over, as so many have said already. Children continue to suffer in numerous places, including in Burma, Mali, Syria and Somalia. An added challenge, as others have highlighted, is the onset of the coronavirus disease, including in countries where violations and abuses against children continue to take place with impunity.

I want to thank Mariam for her bravery in speaking with us today. Her testimony inspires us to work towards further support for reintegration and education, as Ms. Fore so passionately pleaded for, for children who have had similar experiences. The United States is horrified by reports of terrorists forcibly closing schools and killing teachers in Mali, depriving children and exposing them to trauma in truly awful ways. An entire generation of Malian children are impacted by these heinous tactics; the psychosocial effects alone will last for years.

For our part, the United States has launched the Sahel Diplomatic Engagement Framework to focus on State legitimacy. As part of the Girls Leadership and Empowerment Through Education programme in Mali, the United States has contributed \$23 million to address gender disparities and help gravely impacted women and girls in Mali. The provision of basic services such as schooling is essential for stabilizing not only Mali, but the entire Sahel region.

Effective recovery from conflict also requires ensuring that the children impacted by conflict have the tools they need to succeed later on in the workforce. That includes accounting for their emotional and physical well-being while also providing access to education, age-appropriate vocational training and job opportunities.

Those opportunities are the same ones desired by children who spoke to Ambassador Craft and so many of us on trips — but especially on Ambassador Craft's visit to South Sudan, where they told us they wished for all of this in their own lives. I hope the Council sees that investing in young people is a primary, cost-effective

means of achieving sustainable human, social and economic development. In the long run, investing in the future of young people is vital to ensuring international peace and security.

Additionally, in the wake of conflict, many children continue to experience trauma, rejection and social isolation from their communities. They require support for their long-term health and well-being, as well as to promote their future contribution to peaceful societies. The United States is committed to ensuring that children affected by conflict have the opportunity to thrive. We place a priority on life-saving child-protection programming, as well as support for longer-term recovery, resilience and healing. As a notable example, the United States has contributed \$30 million to the Education Cannot Wait global fund, and we call on other international partners to do their part.

The United States will continue to invest in preventive and responsive programming to protect children from violence. That will help empower children by creating the safe and protective environments they need and deserve, facilitating their access to essential social services, working with their families and other caregivers and ensuring their participation in peace processes that will positively shape their future for generations to come.

Annex 12

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dang Dinh Quy

We express our appreciation for the three briefers today and thank the French presidency for organizing the open debate on children and armed conflict, a topic that is always touching and heart-wrenching at the same time.

Fifteen years after resolution 1612 (2005) and 20 years after the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, today's meeting provides a meaningful opportunity to reflect on our efforts and progress, and serves as a reminder that much more needs to be done to fulfil our commitments to children. With the creation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, resolution 1612 (2005) is critical to the child protection agenda.

The monitoring and reporting mechanism has proved to be a valuable tool for collecting and verifying information on grave violations against children in armed conflict. Behind each statistic are patterns and trends depicting the scale and severity of violations. Behind each statistic are untold stories of children suffering from violations. And behind each statistic is a growing urgency to prevent and stop all these horrifying practices.

We are deeply grateful to all colleagues who, despite dangerous situations, work wholeheartedly to bring objective and reliable information to our attention. Furthermore, we fully share the sentiments of Mr. Olara Otunnu, former Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, when he said that "[a] monitoring and reporting mechanism is of limited value unless it leads to action" (*S/PV.5129, p. 5*). In that connection, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict has been working diligently to review reports and make practical recommendations for various situations in specific countries. With the release of more than 155,000 children and over 60 country-specific recommendations, we have good reason to be encouraged by the continued impact and contributions of those two mechanisms with regard to the situation of children in armed conflict.

We believe that the crucial factor to the success of the Working Group is sincere dialogue and the spirit of unanimity among all 15 members for the common goal of child protection. In furtherance of its entrusted mandate, the Working Group needs to continue upholding the long-standing tradition of consensus since it is the only way to fulfil its demanding tasks and, above all, to safeguard the best interests of the child, to which we are all dedicated. We take this opportunity to pay tribute to UNICEF, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her Office, and United Nations peacekeeping and political missions for their work in advancing the children and armed conflict agenda.

Though much has been achieved on this agenda, the situation of children in armed conflict remains painful. As shown in the Secretary-General's latest report (*S/2020/525*), in 2019, 25,000 grave violations against children were verified, or 80 violations committed every day. We are deeply concerned about the continued high level of violations.

While a long-term solution to the problem of children in armed conflict lies in conflict prevention, it is imperative to work out concrete measures and immediate actions to save thousands of children from the devastating effects of armed conflict. We welcome the focus of today's discussion on the importance of education and vocational training. That is particularly true to ensure the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of children released from armed forces and armed groups.

Witnessing and committing violence greatly affects their emotions and behavioural skills. For those children, education and vocational training will be the ticket to their lost childhood and a better future.

Pursuing education is never easy during armed conflict. The international community needs to strongly condemn attacks on schools and their personnel. We call on all parties to armed conflict to immediately prevent and end such abhorrent attacks. With the arrival of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), access to education is now even more challenging. In that regard, we encourage the sharing of good practices and innovative ways to ensure the continuity of education. While online classes mostly work for children in urban areas, radio has been brought into use for children in poor and rural areas. In our country, we encourage the voluntary participation of young people to assist in the distribution of lessons to children in remote and mountainous areas.

In a broader sense, we share the concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of national, regional and United Nations child-protection agendas. Children in armed conflicts and other fragile situations will be affected primarily by its secondary socioeconomic consequences. We therefore call for greater efforts and the cooperation of all Member States and the United Nations system as a whole to closely monitor the impact and to take timely action together in the fight against the pandemic.

In conclusion, past progress shows that with political determination and through concerted action, our commitments can be translated into tangible results for the sake of our children. We must step up our efforts and build on our progress in order to bring children hope and enact positive changes that they need and deserve.

Annex 13

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, Adela Raz

At the outset, allow me to thank France for hosting this important meeting. I also thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF for their very thorough briefings. The adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict constitutes a landmark moment in the Security Council's history. Today, 15 years after the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we can say that the United Nations has played a pivotal role in advocating for children and working towards a world in which our children can live and grow away from conflict, suffering and despair.

Afghanistan shares the concerns reflected in the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2020/525) about the high number of cases of child casualties reported over the past year. Afghan children casualties continue, primarily as a result of despicable attacks carried out by the Taliban, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other terrorist groups through roadside improvised explosive devices, suicide attacks, ground engagements and the use of civilian locations and human shields. One example of these barbaric terrorist attacks took place at a Médecins Sans Frontières maternity ward in Kabul on 12 May, where terrorists mercilessly shot and killed expectant mothers and newborns. Instead of being able to attend school, children continue to be the victims of the decades-long ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Such acts are unacceptable and must be stopped.

The Afghan Government is fully committed to the protection of children in conflict and strongly condemns and opposes all forms of violations against children, including recruitment, killing and maiming, rape and other kinds of sexual violence, abductions, attacks against schools or hospitals and denial of access to humanitarian assistance. As a ratifying country of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as other conventions and obligations on the matter, Afghanistan has been actively engaged in reforming its institutions through the adoption of policies and laws, including the law on juvenile delinquency and the signing of the joint action plan in 2011 and the subsequent road map towards compliance, in 2014, to ensure that children are protected and not engaged in conflict. That includes zero-tolerance measures on the prohibition of the recruitment of children in all sections of the Afghanistan National Defence and Security Forces and throughout relevant ministries working to protect our children from the threats of the Taliban, ISIL and their affiliates. We have also adopted a national policy for civilian casualty prevention and mitigation in order to avoid civilian casualties during military operations, and passed a new penal code in 2017 that sets punishments for those perpetrating sexual violence against children and a child protection law endorsed by a decree signed by President Ghani in March 2019.

Despite Government efforts, the Taliban, ISIL and other terrorist groups continue to violate the rights of children, using them as human shields and enlisting them as child soldiers to carry out many of their heinous attacks. Their crimes and their blatant disregard for the lives of children, as indicated by the six grave violations assessed by the United Nations, is a contravention of human rights and international humanitarian law. We strongly reiterate our insistent call to halt those actions and further stress that guaranteeing the rights of children, particularly girls, remains a strong imperative of the Government of Afghanistan in their peace talks with the Taliban. The Government continues its committed efforts for a prompt start of direct

talks with the Taliban and supports the Secretary-General's call for a humanitarian ceasefire that can stop the bloodshed, particularly as we also deal with the threat of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate Afghanistan's strong position as a committed partner for the protection of children in armed conflict. We will continue our firm work and commitment to creating a new Afghanistan of opportunities for children to grow and flourish into the leaders of tomorrow.

Annex 14**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Andorra to the United Nations, Elisenda Vives Balmaña**

[Original: French]

At the outset, Andorra thanks France for organizing this open debate of the Security Council on children and armed conflict, as well as the speakers for their input on the importance of preserving and promoting the right to education in armed conflict.

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

Andorra notes with concern the increase in violence against children reflected in the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2020/525). Also worrying is the growing number of children displaced by armed conflict who are now unable to attend school. Similarly, the devastating effects of the coronavirus disease in recent times have deepened inequalities by disrupting children's right to education in conflict zones.

This year we are celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the monitoring and reporting mechanism, which has made it possible to significantly deter children's rights violations during armed conflict. This year also marks the twentieth anniversary of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, to which Andorra is party.

It is clear that the work accomplished in recent years through those instruments reflects the commitment of the international community to protecting children. However, we must remain aware of the emerging challenges. The increase in attacks on schools and in the denial of access to humanitarian aid is alarming. We must step up our efforts to ensure that children receive the assistance and support necessary to secure their future. To that end, we acknowledge the role of the agencies on the ground, whose work and coordination are essential to ensuring the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Andorra also commends the essential work of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to prevent violations of children's rights and to promote their reintegration. This year, the Office of the Special Representative has concluded 29 agreements with parties to conflicts.

Andorra has strongly supported the work of the Special Representative in recent years through voluntary contributions. We are aware of her team's particular needs and the difficult conditions in which it must operate. For that, I thank her for her invaluable work and reiterate Andorra's commitment to her task.

Andorra remains committed and will continue to work with the international community to ensure a protective environment and hope for the future for all children.

Annex 15**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Angola to the United Nations, Maria de Jesus dos Reis Ferreira**

First and foremost, I would like to thank France for inviting us to participate in today's supremely important debate on children and armed conflict. In the same vein, we commend Belgium for its dedication and a job well done as the Chair of the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict at this challenging moment, which is strongly marked by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

We welcome the briefing on the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525) by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, as well as the briefing by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore.

We believe that today's open debate is a great opportunity for States Members of the United Nations to reflect on the challenges faced since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) and look for new ways to promote compliance with the children and armed conflict agenda. Some 15 years after the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which strengthened the monitoring and reporting mechanism that set up a functional and structured system for verifying and reporting on the six types of violations committed against children around the world and which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, armed conflicts currently continue to negatively affect children.

In this regard, we note with deep concern that, according to the Secretary-General's report, the United Nations has verified more than 25,000 serious violations against children in 19 situations, more than half of which were committed by non-State actors and a third of which were committed by Government and international forces. Some 7,747 children were verified as recruited and used. Among these, 90 per cent were used by non-State actors. Likewise, in 2019, a total of 13,200 children worldwide were separated from non-State actors and armed forces. Fundamental challenges hindered the successful and sustainable reintegration of these children, of children at risk who were protected from recruitment through action plans or other measures, and of children released from detention for actual or alleged association with armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations.

The situation of child soldiers should receive special attention from the Security Council, as they are used in many cases directly or indirectly by armies, armed opposition groups and rebels as well as by terrorist and extremist groups, in breach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Sending children to war is a violation of their most basic rights. First, in addition to putting their lives at risk, they are deprived of contact with their families and communities at a stage in their lives when such relationships are essential. Secondly, child soldiers no longer dedicate themselves to their studies, which compromises their personal and professional future. Moreover, the consequences can be drastic for their psychological, mental and academic development, which will make it difficult for them to readapt to society and sustain themselves in adult life.

We understand that the COVID-19 issue poses new challenges for children in situations of armed conflict, which may lead to difficulties for the United Nations system, including the Office of the Special Representative and peacekeeping missions, to protect children, due to movement restrictions. In this regard, we would like to stress the importance of the Secretary-General's recommendation that the Security Council ensure that child protection provisions are included in all relevant mandates of United Nations operations, including peacekeeping and special political missions.

We note with concern the growing trend of attacks against civilian personnel and medical facilities. These criminal actions must end, and, in due time, the perpetrators are to be held accountable.

We call on Member States and the international community to carry on with everything in their power to help protect schools, students and teachers in situations of armed conflict and ensure that schools remain safe places, with strict respect for their civil character. Angola joined the Safe Schools Declaration, which was adopted at the Oslo Conference in May 2015, and endorses the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, a process conducted by Member States, civil society and child-protection actors. It is also a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In conclusion, on a positive note, we would like to underline the progress made by the “Act to protect children affected by conflict” campaign, national political negotiations and peace processes. In some situations, conflict reduction has been beneficial for the protection of children in armed conflicts. We advocate the inclusion in peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes of specific commitments related to child protection, including requirements for the rapid release of children from armed forces and non-State armed groups, and their social reintegration.

Preventing the outbreak of conflict is still the best way to protect children. The international community must continue to work towards adopting the most appropriate tools for effective preventive action. Meanwhile, the protection of children in armed conflict must remain at the heart of the international community’s priorities and be addressed through a comprehensive strategy of active protection and humanitarian response.

Annex 16

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations

[Original: Spanish]

Argentina thanks the Government of France for organizing today's debate on the essential topic of the comprehensive protection of children in the context of conflict, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It also thanks Special Representative Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore for their briefings. We also express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his most recent report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) and its annexes.

Argentina firmly supports the Organization's work to prevent, avoid and stop the six grave violations of children's rights in the context of armed conflict. In that regard, our country was one of the first States to ratify, in 2002, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and supported the adoption of resolutions 1261 (1999), 1612 (2005), 2143 (2014), 2225 (2015) and 2427 (2018). Argentina therefore stresses the relevance of resolution 1612 (2005) and the creation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism as a fundamental tool for the protection of children.

I would like to highlight the coordinated action of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the tasks carried out by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General with the collaboration of UNICEF and other agencies of the United Nations system, which is reflected in the progress made in the area of prevention and protection of the rights of children.

Accordingly, we appreciate the important work of the "Act to protect children affected by conflict" campaign and the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers initiative as key tools for strengthening collaboration between the United Nations, civil society and the international community in support of actions designed to end and prevent grave violations committed against children in armed conflict and to achieve a comprehensive and sustainable reintegration that is oriented towards the needs of children and takes a humanitarian, peace and development approach.

Argentina welcomes the rescue of a total of 13,200 children who were separated from non-State actors and armed forces in 2019, the prevention of the recruitment of children at risk and the release of children detained for being associated with or suspected of belonging to armed groups, as mentioned by the Secretary-General in his most recent report. However, despite the great work done and the progress made, several challenges remain to be confronted.

Argentina shares the serious concern of the Secretary-General about the alarming number of more than 25,000 grave violations against children verified during 2019 and the great increase in the number of children affected by the denial of humanitarian access as a result of violence against humanitarian workers, restrictions on their movements and impediments to the performance of their work. Preserving access to medical care and safeguarding health personnel and medical and surgical supplies, in addition to allowing medical evacuations, is essential to safeguarding children's lives. We also express our concern and strongly condemn cases of killing, maiming and sexual violence perpetrated against children. In this regard, it is necessary to recognize the increased exposure of girls and boys to sexual violence in conflict situations and to bear in mind that all responses to this scourge must focus on the needs of survivors and ensure access to essential health services and to justice.

Argentina expresses its concern over the increasing number of kidnappings of children. Not only does kidnapping constitute a serious violation in itself, but it also gives rise to other violations, such as forced labour, sexual slavery and military recruitment. Kidnapping is also used as a means of punishing civilian populations.

Argentina condemns the attacks perpetrated against schools and hospitals, whose number nearly doubled, according to the report. Education is critical to the development and full enjoyment of human rights, and access to safe education supports the protection of children from the dangers of armed conflict, helping them to reach their potential and contributing to building more resilient and peaceful communities. Argentina firmly believes that the scourge of attacks on schools in all their manifestations can be confronted only through international cooperation, within the framework of unrestricted respect for human rights, international humanitarian law and international law.

In that regard, Argentina reiterates its firm support for the Safe Schools Declaration, adopted in May 2015 and promoted by Argentina and Norway, which has been endorsed by 104 States. The Declaration commits States to implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, thereby ensuring the right to education and the protection of children and young people in conflict situations. We recall that the Secretary-General has called on all countries to endorse the Declaration and note that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has indicated that the endorsement of the Declaration has contributed decisively to the adoption of concrete measures to prevent attacks on education.

Argentina supports the Secretary-General's 23 March global appeal for peace, in which he stressed the urgent need to "put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives". Peace is the best protection we can give to our children.

We reiterate the urgent need to agree on and implement measures to increase the international community's pressure on State and non-State actors that commit violations against children, in order to demobilize, separate, rehabilitate and reintegrate children associated with such groups, in collaboration with their respective communities, within the framework of absolute respect for international humanitarian law, international human rights law and refugee law. In order to ensure the full protection of children, a human rights-based approach to protection is essential and should guide the mandates of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, the peacebuilding actions of the Security Council, as well as efforts aimed at combating terrorism and violent extremism. In this regard, it is essential to develop, maintain and strengthen capacities in the field of peacekeeping operations in the areas of prevention, protection, assistance, advice, documentation and verification of violations of children's rights. Likewise, it is of crucial importance to strengthen the role of child protection advisers, who carry out a fundamental task in the implementation of Security Council mandates on child protection.

In conclusion, we highlight and support the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and of the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers in advancing this important initiative as it provides us with a renewed and comprehensive understanding of reintegration. It is crucially important that we adopt both a comprehensive approach to reintegration, understanding it not only as immediate humanitarian assistance but also as a long-term commitment, and gender-sensitive integration programmes that include mental health, psychosocial support, education and access to justice as key aspects of sustainable reintegration. In this regard, it is essential to meet the urgent need to come up with concrete actions to comply with the cross-cutting principle of "leaving no one behind" set

forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We firmly believe that an inclusive approach to society as a whole, focusing on the collective commitment and coordinated efforts of all stakeholders, is a key factor in achieving the sustainable reintegration of all children, on the basis of humanitarian assistance, development and peace.

Annex 17**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations, Mher Margaryan**

I would like to thank the French presidency for convening today's Security Council open debate via video-teleconference on the theme of children and armed conflict. We also thank the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, for highlighting the challenges relating to the protection of children in armed conflict.

The fifteenth anniversary of the landmark resolution 1612 (2005) is an opportunity to elaborate on the achievements and good practices adopted in the implementation of the resolution and the ways forward towards making progress on the international community's efforts aimed at preventing violence against children in conflict situations. The United Nations-led monitoring and reporting mechanisms and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict have been instrumental in operationalizing the resolution's provisions, and the success of their activities can be measured in the thousands of children's lives they have saved.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) and for the recommendations contained therein. We are concerned about the very high number of incidents of the killing and maiming of children, as well as abductions, sexual violence, recruitment and use of children, which underscores the imperative of scaling up the international response to violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The crisis caused by the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has heavily affected civilians, trapped in conflicts, including children. We share the Secretary-General's recommendation to all parties to conflicts to allow safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access in order to provide assistance to children. Attacks on and targeting of humanitarian workers are unacceptable and should be clearly condemned. As stressed in the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire, the silencing of guns is crucial to help create corridors for life-saving aid to the most vulnerable, including children.

Having unequivocally endorsed the Secretary-General's appeal, Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) continue to implement fully and in good faith the trilateral ceasefire agreement of 1994 with Azerbaijan and the 1995 agreement on consolidation of the ceasefire regime.

The continuous attacks on schools and their use for military purposes also remain a source of serious concern. The fifth anniversary of the Safe School Declaration creates momentum to step up the efforts of the international community on protection of the right to education of children affected by conflicts on the international agenda. I would like to underline the urgency of reaching out to children residing in conflict areas to ensure their access to safe and quality education.

Armenia reiterates its support for the mandate of the Special Representative in preventing grave violations, advancing the agenda of children and armed conflict in activities of United Nations agencies, and promoting cooperation with regional organizations, civil society and other stakeholders aimed at ensuring effective protection on the ground.

Armenia prioritizes the protection of children and upholding their human rights, as reflected in its national policies and programmes and frameworks of international cooperation. We support the call of the Secretary-General to prioritize education for all children and put an emphasis on the most vulnerable, including children in conflict situations, as reflected in his message on the effect of the

COVID-19 pandemic on children. We commend the efforts of UNICEF in alleviating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children in Armenia, including projects aimed at supporting the continuity of education through partnership with private sector and civil society organizations.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is an important partner for Armenia in promoting safe education in conflict-affected border regions, in line with our international commitments, including the Safe School Declaration. We also welcome the recently adopted General Assembly resolution 74/275, on the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, which Armenia co-sponsored.

In our region, the aggression of Azerbaijan against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh has been accompanied by deliberate indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population and civilian infrastructure, including schools and health-care facilities, resulting in the killing and injuring of civilians, including children. The suspension of activities of the conflict-related field operations due to the pandemic increases humanitarian risks for the civilian population, including children in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and the border regions of Armenia. The recent military provocation of Azerbaijan on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border resulted in the wounding of a 14-year-old child. Armenia deplores, in strongest terms, the provocations of Azerbaijan along the line of contact between Artsakh and Azerbaijan and the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, in violation of its obligations under international humanitarian law. Such appalling actions are in stark contrast with the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire and the relevant calls of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

We are equally alarmed at reports of children being involved in State-sponsored hate propaganda. Educational curricula in the kindergartens and schools of Azerbaijan deliberately expose children to anti-Armenian propaganda, fuelling ethnic hatred and inciting violence and intolerance. The report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance in Azerbaijan, adopted in 2016, highlights that

“political leaders, educational institutions and media have continued using hate speech against Armenians... an entire generation of Azerbaijanis has now grown up listening to this hateful rhetoric”.

Such policies and practices are incompatible with the norms and principles of international human rights law and international humanitarian law and must be identified and met with adequate responses by the international community.

Annex 18

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations

Austria would like to thank France for convening this open debate. We commend the work of Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, as well as the relevant civil society organizations. We also thank Mariam from Mali for her participation and her calls for more action to protect children in armed conflict.

Austria fully aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and shares the following points in its national capacity.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2020/525). Our support for the Security Council's children and armed conflict mandate is steadfast. We need to rely on and preserve its integrity and impartiality to ensure the listing of all perpetrators of grave violations against children, based on the objective findings of the monitoring and report mechanism and on the criteria for listing and delisting established in the Secretary-General's report contained in document S/2010/181 of 2010.

The 25,000 grave violations against children documented in the report and committed by all parties to conflict, both armed groups as well as Government forces, include multiple denials of humanitarian access to provide assistance to children are appalling. The reported increase in attacks against schools, hospitals and protected personnel is also deeply concerning. These breaches of international humanitarian law, international human rights law and refugee law need to be investigated and condemned.

Austria is convinced that parties to conflict can prevent crimes against children and protect children by abiding by their obligations under international law as well as the comprehensive set of existing principles and commitments aimed at protecting boys and girls affected by the scourge of war. We encourage all Member States not yet having done so to adhere to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, and the Safe Schools Declaration.

We welcome the adoption of several new actions plans by parties to conflict as well as measures to enforce criminal justice to protect children in armed conflict. We call for enhanced accountability, including by introducing laws to criminalize grave violations against children. Austria would like to take this opportunity to reiterate its full and unwavering support for the International Criminal Court and highlight its importance for the rule of law, accountability and the fight against impunity for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole.

We need to address the high number of children killed and maimed due to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. In October 2019, Austria therefore organized an international conference to raise awareness of the humanitarian impact of the use of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, which started a process of the elaboration of a political declaration on that subject. The participation of 133 States, international organizations and civil society organizations underscored the importance attached to this matter. We are strongly supportive of the process and hope for a strong political declaration.

We express our serious concern that children allegedly associated with non-State armed groups are too often perceived and treated as perpetrators rather than victims of grave violations. States need to ensure alternatives to detention and prosecution, whereas the impartial monitoring and reporting on the detention of children needs to continue. In this regard, Austria welcomes the 2019 United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty.

The Austrian Development Cooperation supports projects seeking to reduce the threat of violence against children. At present, the Austrian Development Cooperation is carrying out a project in the Sudan, where parties to the Darfur conflict receive training on the rights of the child. This project also supports the Child Protection Unit of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur in facilitating dialogue between the conflict parties. It is estimated that 2.4 million children in Darfur will indirectly benefit from this project, which seeks to contribute to the reduction of the six grave violations against children. For example, in 2019, representatives from rebel groups from Darfur were invited to Austria in order to provide them with a “safe space” for exchange and to foster dialogue, not least about children’s rights. As a result, a joint declaration on explosive remnants of war and the situation of internally displaced persons in Darfur/the Sudan was signed.

Reintegration and education programmes are of paramount importance in creating sustainable peace for every individual child and for the communities affected by conflict. In this context, it is important to provide assistance and support to children without parental care in armed conflict. Austria recalls, in this context, the most recent General Assembly resolution on children without parental care, resolution 74/133, and invites all Member States to follow up with its implementation. Foster parent programmes can serve as a best practice to allow children to find a new home and family. Austria particularly welcomes the engagement of the civil society organizations, such as SOS Children’s Villages, in this field.

Finally, the monitoring and reporting mechanism has yielded important results for the past 15 years in collecting evidence and information on the six grave violations against children. We pay tribute to the members of the country task forces of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, who collect this information, often risking their lives. The data generated through the monitoring and reporting mechanism has fostered accountability and helped the United Nations to engage with parties to conflict in elaborating action plans. We need the monitoring and reporting mechanism to remain the objective basis of information for the children and armed conflict mandate of the United Nations. Austria will continue to advocate in the General Assembly for a sufficient level of financing for United Nations child protection advisors to support the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the children and armed conflict mandate.

Annex 19**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations, Yashar Aliyev**

At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of France for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict.

Despite some progress made in preventing and responding to grave violations committed against children, serious challenges remain. Effective protection efforts must be free of selectivity and must address all situations of armed conflict without distinction, including those of a protracted nature. The wrongs of the recent past, including attacks on schools and hospitals, the killing and maiming of children, forced displacements and the abduction of children, must not be neglected.

During the continued aggression by Armenia against Azerbaijan, serious violations of international humanitarian law have been committed. A scorched-earth policy implemented by the Armenian side involved the ethnic cleansing of the seized territories of all Azerbaijanis and the brutal killing or wounding of thousands of civilians, including children. Over more than 30 years, Azerbaijan has hosted one of the highest numbers of refugees and displaced persons in the world, many of whom are children. To give a sense of the scale of the devastation caused by the aggression, more than 900 settlements, 150,000 homes, 693 secondary schools and 855 pre-schools have been looted, plundered or destroyed in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

Following the establishment of a formal ceasefire in 1994, the Armenian armed forces have continued to target the densely populated areas in Azerbaijan situated along or further behind the front line, causing casualties among civilians and destroying civilian objects, including residences, schools and kindergartens.

Moreover, as of the beginning of 2020, 3,889 citizens of Azerbaijan were registered as missing as a result of the conflict, including 719 civilians. Among the civilians, 71 are children. It has been established that 871 of the 3,889 missing persons were either taken as prisoners of war or hostages, including 267 civilians, of whom 29 are children. Armenia is in breach of international law for refusing to account for the missing persons within its control, as well as for refusing to conduct a prompt and effective investigation into their fate.

The recently published comprehensive report on war crimes in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and Armenia's responsibility (S/2020/90, annex) provides convincing evidence as to the range, variety and consistency of Armenia's commission of multiple war crimes. Some of the offences examined in the report amount to the crime of genocide, as ethnic Azerbaijanis have been targeted because of their nationality and/or ethnicity, and the relevant intent has been to destroy the group in part. The facts contained in the report necessitate prompt action by the United Nations and the international community as a whole to ensure accountability, in accordance with the international law of State responsibility and international criminal law.

In order to break the cycles of violence and to aid prevention efforts, respect for international humanitarian law is imperative, and impunity must end. Being an inevitable consequence of the offences committed, accountability is an important prerequisite on the path to peace and long-lasting reconciliation.

Annex 20**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations, Jamal Fares Alrowaiei**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, Sir, I should like to thank you for convening this important meeting, coming in the midst of exceptional global circumstances resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has brought about increased threats to the security and safety of civilians in conflict situations.

I should also like to thank Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, for their valuable briefings.

This meeting is being convened on the fifth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which strongly condemns the recruitment and use of child soldiers by parties to armed conflict and requests the Secretary-General to establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. It also marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which was ratified by the Kingdom of Bahrain in 2004, and stresses that States parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities.

These anniversaries have assumed added significance as the COVID-19 pandemic affects education and the movement of humanitarian supplies, posing a grave danger to children in general and children in armed conflict in particular. Bahrain therefore welcomes the call of the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire, and supports the joint statement issued by a group of Member States, expressing deep concern at the continuation of hostilities in various corners of the world, particularly in the midst of the global health crisis, which is taking a severe toll on the most vulnerable, especially women and children. Bahrain also underscores the importance of diplomatic efforts to save lives and mitigate the social and economic devastation. A ceasefire would allow humanitarian workers to reach the populations most vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19.

In April, in response to the call of the Secretary-General, the coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen announced a comprehensive ceasefire in Yemen to deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak and stand by the brotherly Yemeni people. That step was welcomed by the Secretary-General.

The decision of the Secretary-General to remove the coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen from the list, annexed to his report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525), of parties that have not put in place adequate measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period clearly points to the coalition's unwavering commitment to protecting all civilians in armed conflict, especially children, and the preventive and protective measures the coalition has taken to promote the protection of children in Yemen.

The Kingdom of Bahrain affirms its commitment to working with the international community to make progress on protecting children in conflict situations and strengthening frameworks for the effective implementation of international resolutions and international law through confidence-building measures and the resumption of political negotiations for peace and stability in conflict zones so that all children can enjoy their rights to life, health and education without fear of being killed, recruited, abducted or subject to any other kind of violation. The Kingdom of

Bahrain also stresses the importance of supporting and activating surveillance and accountability tools against violators of children's rights around the world in order to uphold the principles of security and justice.

Annex 21

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, Rabab Fatima

I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this virtual open debate. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Gamba, the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Fore, and the other briefers for sharing their valuable insights.

We appreciate the efforts of the Council's monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The participation of children and dialogue with parties to the conflict throughout the conflict cycle hold the key. Reintegration and curbing recruitment can be sustainable only by building social acceptance and awareness in the broader context of conflict prevention and development. The Security Council should be able to utilize their political outreach vehicles, such as the Peacebuilding Commission and special political missions, to create space for the monitoring and reporting mechanism to better manoeuvre. United Nations system-wide efforts need to be backed by adequate and sustained funding and break the silos across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. When schools are too dangerous to attend, some innovative, alternative education arrangements, such as community-based learning or virtual schooling, would be useful. This cannot be more relevant than during this pandemic.

Our peacekeepers in the field are working hard to prevent the recruitment of children by parties to conflicts and keeping schools safe from military use. As the current President of the Executive Board of UNICEF, we are also working closely with the UNICEF leadership, particularly Ms. Fore, to overcome key challenges to protecting children in armed conflicts. We believe that UNICEF can further leverage its comparative advantage of a widespread field presence and vast network of partners.

We have taken note of the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2020/525) and its recommendations. The report highlights the grim realities about violations of child rights and protection in many parts of the world. We would like to draw the Council's attention to the Myanmar situation, where "a threefold increase of child casualties" due to intensified fighting in Myanmar's Rakhine state is reported (S/2020/525, *para.* 7). Notably, 25 per cent of those casualties were caused by explosive remnants of war, improvised explosive devices and anti-personnel mines. This only signifies Myanmar's blatant disregard for international humanitarian law and human rights law.

We cannot agree more with the report's inclusion of the Tatmadaw in the list under section A of annex I. Out of the 1.1 million Rohingyas we are hosting, about 60 per cent are children, and each of them has a story to tell. There cannot be a stronger proof of the Tatmadaw's wrongdoing. However, we are dismayed and concerned that the Tatmadaw has been delisted as an entity from the category of violation of recruitment and use. In our view, it can at best be an illusion that the Tatmadaw's violations in that regard have subsided in Rakhine state. Recent reports point to the contrary. It is imperative that the pressure be kept up on it. Delisting sends the wrong message. We therefore urge that the Tatmadaw be relisted immediately. We must be extremely careful that our actions are not used to hide or downplay the Tatmadaw's serious crimes or to exculpate it from the responsibility of justice and accountability for the Rohingya children.

Meanwhile, along with our humanitarian partners, we have continued our efforts to provide these Rohingya children the protection and assistance that they

need, particularly during the coronavirus disease pandemic. We have partnered with UNICEF to introduce the Myanmar curriculum for Rohingya children in the camps, but more than anything else these children would like to realize their inalienable right to return to their homes. We urge the Council to act decisively in that direction. The international community must not fail them.

Annex 22**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations**

[Original: English and French]

I would first like to thank France for convening this meeting on such a fundamental issue. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2020/525).

This year marks the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established a robust framework to enhance child protection in armed conflict. Brazil is proud to have supported the resolution as a member of the Council in 2005. The monitoring and reporting mechanism thereby created constitutes one of the pillars of the children and armed conflict agenda.

Brazil is fully committed to the advancement of this agenda. We ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and endorsed both the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and the Paris Commitments. We have also supported initiatives on the ground, such as the promotion of the practice of capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial art, as a tool to reintegrate former child soldiers in Haiti and in eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

During its most recent mandate as a member of the Council, Brazil supported the adoption of resolution 1998 (2011) — another landmark instrument for the children and armed conflict agenda — which focuses on attacks against hospitals and schools. The protection of educational facilities is instrumental to providing a sense of normality and stability to children. Education gives them hope for a brighter future, thus alleviating the suffering caused by war.

In that spirit, Brazil endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, which represents an important political commitment to ensuring children's education, even during hostilities. Last February, Brazil also hosted, together with Poland and the United States, a meeting of the Warsaw process working group on humanitarian issues and refugees, which brought together delegations from all regions to discuss challenges regarding child protection and education in the Middle East. The working group made a relevant contribution to ongoing regional and national efforts, including those coordinated with United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations, to protect children and youth in armed conflicts as well as to ensure access to quality education during displacement.

Brazil welcomes the signing of new action plans and commitments by the United Nations with listed parties to conflicts. The continued engagement with Governments and non-State actors is a powerful tool to change behaviour and protect children's rights.

Despite progress in some areas, the reported 25,000 grave violations are a matter of great concern, as they reveal a broader trend of blatant disrespect for international law. Brazil reiterates its condemnation of the targeting and use of children in armed conflict and underscores the responsibility of all parties to shield them from the direct consequences of war, including by refraining from the use of force, as required by the Charter of the United Nations.

Brazil shares the Secretary-General's concern at the growing number of children in detention for actual or suspected association with opposing parties and concurs with the report's assessment that children should be treated primarily as victims.

While both armed conflicts and domestic law enforcement are examined in the annual report, they pose entirely different challenges and must be addressed through different policies. Armed conflicts and other threats to international peace and security are under the purview of the Council and follow specific rules, while issues of internal law enforcement fall outside its mandate. One should not lose sight of this distinction or of the appropriate forums in which to discuss each of them.

In conclusion, the international community can count on Brazil to advance the children and armed conflict agenda in the Security Council and to promote peace, which “remains the most powerful means to reduce violations against children” (*S/2020/525, para. 15*).

Annex 23**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations**

[Original: English and French]

We thank the Permanent Mission of France for convening today's open video-teleconference on children and armed conflict. Canada welcomes the focus on resolution 1612 (2005) as we mark the fifteenth anniversary of this important milestone for the children and armed conflict agenda.

The mechanisms established by resolution 1612 (2005), namely, the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, are essential to our collective efforts to protect children and hold perpetrators of grave violations to account.

Canada welcomes the efforts of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, particularly during this unprecedented period of social distancing. The systematic implementation and follow-up of the Working Group's conclusions are essential. Canada will continue to forge links between the Working Group and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict to support this.

Canada emphasizes its strong support for the impartiality and independence of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict and for the need to apply clear, consistent and evidence-based criteria in the listing and delisting of parties responsible for grave violations against children in the Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict. Anything less undermines the effectiveness of these important tools and threatens the credibility of the children and armed conflict mandate.

The Secretary-General's annual report (S/2020/525) paints a grim picture of the plight of children affected by conflict. Canada condemns the unacceptably high number of grave violations committed against children during 2019. The report presents what is a clear and alarming disregard for the life and safety of children in too many armed conflicts.

This picture is all the more startling due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. COVID-19 and its related mitigation measures are exacerbating the risks already facing children affected by armed conflict. Disruptions to education, life-saving health care, humanitarian assistance and protection services will compound these risks.

The significant progress made in recent decades to protect children and promote their fundamental rights will be at risk unless there is a concerted effort to place children at the centre of the COVID-19 pandemic response. Canada therefore fully supports the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire in the light of the pandemic. Armed conflict must be put on lockdown to ensure that children are protected and their humanitarian needs met. The Security Council must overcome the deadlock and fully endorse this appeal.

At the same time, the Security Council, Member States, the United Nations and regional organizations must prioritize the protection of children in armed conflict and work together to prevent and end the six grave violations against children. A major focus of Canada's efforts is strengthening the child protection mandate in United Nations peace operations. Canada is supporting the Department of Peace Operations in standardizing and delivering training in English and French for United Nations peacekeepers to ensure that they are better prepared and equipped to protect children.

Canada also supports UNICEF and the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative to build African peacekeeping capacity for child protection, including through improved training and policies with the African Union, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia.

The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, a set of 17 political commitments focused on peacekeeping and the prevention of the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups, also remain a priority for Canada. There are now 96 endorsements of the Vancouver Principles from all regions of the world. Canada congratulates Morocco, Kuwait and Ecuador on their recent endorsement of the Principles. Canada calls on all Member States to endorse the Principles without delay.

The work does not stop with endorsements. That is why Canada launched the *Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles*, which serves as a practical resource for military, police and civilian organizations engaged in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Canada has been making progress at the national level. For example, the Canadian Armed Forces have developed child-soldier content in predeployment training and incorporated child-soldier scenarios into several major exercises, and they provide courses on children affected by armed conflict in professional military education programmes.

Canada will continue to work closely with its partners to implement the Vancouver Principles and end the scourge of the recruitment and use of child soldiers. This is also a testament to Canada's commitment to the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, adopted 20 years ago.

Since 2006, Canada has been proud to chair the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in New York, which has grown to 45 members from all regions. Canada also proudly chairs or co-chairs a number of the local Groups of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict that have been established, including in Colombia, the Philippines, South Sudan and the Sudan.

In addition to their direct advocacy to prevent and end grave violations against children, these local Groups of Friends can also be important platforms for country task forces on the monitoring and reporting mechanism, as well as for the Security Council Working Group in following up on its conclusions. Canada looks forward to engaging with and through these local Groups of Friends to leverage our collective commitment to preventing and ending grave violations against children wherever they occur.

Annex 24

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict

The Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict — an informal network of 45 Member States representing the five regional groups of the United Nations — expresses its serious concern over the multifaceted impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on children, especially those affected by armed conflict.

Mitigation measures to curtail the spread of the virus may also inadvertently and negatively impact children. We strongly encourage the protection of children in the response to the pandemic, including through the continuity of child-centred services and rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to those in need, including children in detention.

The Group of Friends reiterates our full support for the Secretary-General's appeal of 23 March for a global ceasefire and urges the Security Council to swiftly endorse the appeal.

The Group of Friends is appalled by the scale and scope of the over 25,000 grave violations committed against children, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/525). We are particularly alarmed by the increase in the verified number of attacks against schools and hospitals, as well as the shocking increase in verified incidents of denial of humanitarian access for children. We are further alarmed by the persistence of recruitment and use of children as soldiers and of their killing, maiming and abduction. Moreover, sexual violence, which disproportionately impacts girls, continues to be vastly underreported overall.

We urge all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law and to put in place concrete and effective protection measures for children in armed conflict. In that regard, we welcome progress in the signing and implementation of action plans by parties to conflict and the engagement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the United Nations and other actors in the field. We encourage full implementation of all action plans and commitments. Further, we reiterate that the signing of an action plan should not form the basis for delisting in the Secretary-General's report.

The Group of Friends welcomes the release of over 13,200 children from armed forces and armed groups in 2019 and the work of the United Nations Children's Fund, the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers and other actors in promoting effective services for those children. We also welcome ongoing efforts associated with the ACT to Protect campaign. In that connection, the Group of Friends encourages all Member States to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict, including by acceding to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, particularly as we mark its twentieth anniversary, and by considering endorsing and implementing practical protection tools, notably the Safe Schools Declaration, the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Vancouver Principles.

This year marks the fifteenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005). The United Nations-led monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Security Council's Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict continue to be essential tools for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The Group of Friends reiterates the importance it attaches to the independence, impartiality and credibility of the

monitoring and reporting mechanism. It is crucial that the mechanism continue to be able to document grave violations against children impartially and objectively, based on the facts on the ground.

We welcome the increased regularity of reporting by the Secretary-General to the Working Group, as well as the associated conclusions reached by the Working Group. We extend our thanks to Belgium in its capacity as Chair for ensuring that the Working Group continues to deliver on its mandate. The Group of Friends encourages the full implementation of Working Group conclusions, as well as systematic follow-up in that regard. Furthermore, we emphasize the importance of mainstreaming concerns facing children affected by armed conflict throughout the work of the Council and encourage more regular briefings to the Council by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

The protection of children should be an important aspect of any comprehensive strategy to resolve conflict and sustain peace. The Group of Friends welcomes the practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict. We encourage the broadest possible dissemination of the guidance and its full use in peace and mediation processes.

The Group of Friends also strongly supports the child protection mandate in United Nations peace operations. We welcome the manual for child protection staff in un peace operations in particular. The Security Council and Member States should continue to support the implementation of child protection mandates in United Nations peace operations, including through the deployment of child protection teams and advisers. We call for the adequate resourcing of these capabilities, including in the context of transition and downsizing. Consolidation efforts that would undermine the ability of the United Nations to deliver on the child protection mandates should be avoided.

Combating impunity and ensuring accountability, including through international justice mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court, are key to preventing grave violations against children. We call for dedicated child rights expertise within investigative and accountability mechanisms. True justice also involves reparations and mental health and psychosocial support for survivors of grave violations, whose trauma may endure for years.

The Group of Friends also welcomes the decision of the General Assembly to establish 9 September as the International Day to Protect Education from Attack.

Finally, the Group of Friends recognizes the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to ensure the timely release of the annual reports of the Secretary-General. We encourage the Secretary-General to ensure that these reports are released to Member States earlier and in advance of scheduled Security Council open debates.

Annex 25

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Chile to the United Nations

Chile extends its regards to the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière, and thanks France for putting the topic of utmost importance — children and armed conflict — on the Security Council's agenda.

More than a duty, it is a moral imperative to protect children, who, without being given a choice, experience the wrenching and painful consequences of conflict as part of their daily lives. The figures showing that reality are appalling. This year, the United Nations verified more than 25,000 grave violations against children and a total of 13,200 children were separated from non-State actors and armed forces worldwide. We must not forget our commitment to the 7,000 children who were abducted, recruited by force or in exchange for money, employed as combatants, messengers or cooks or forced to provide sexual services when their place really should be in school and with their families, like many children around the world.

Children also experience physical and psychological trauma that will scar them for life. The secondary impacts of conflict put them in situations where they might actually be left behind developmentally, physically and emotionally. The current 400 per cent increase in denials of humanitarian access to children does little to assist them. What is worse, the lack of protection, holistic resources for survivors and accountability mechanisms disincentivizes survivors, their families and witnesses from reporting violations. Meanwhile, restrictions put in place to mitigate the spread of coronavirus disease threaten to hamper efforts to prevent, monitor, report and respond to child rights violations.

Chile strongly believes that there is an urgent need to address immediate threats while also incorporating preventive approaches in order to evaluate emerging challenges and conceptualize long-term solutions. To that end, we highly value the role of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, which allows a better understanding of the situation on the ground as a basis to guide effective action towards protecting children. Accordingly, we add our voice to those who call for the Secretary-General to initiate a rigorous and transparent procedure to ensure that, going forward, the annexes to the annual report accurately and consistently reflect the evidence collected by the monitoring and reporting mechanism.

With regards to accountability, it is important to keep implementing the legislative and institutional arrangements in order to comprehensively address violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Naming perpetrators in the annex of the Secretary-General's annual report is an important step towards accountability for those who commit atrocities against children. Therefore, to ensure maximum accountability, we encourage the conduct of an independent, objective and transparent assessment of how the listing and delisting criteria set out in document S/2010/181 have been implemented thus far.

But, most important, we owe it to these brave children to keep seeking solutions. We must continue to keep strengthening an integrated response that contributes to building resilient societies, supports children from the origins of a conflict to the end of the cycle of violence and seeks full, systemic reintegration. That needs to be done while consistently implementing the existing instruments that facilitate the protection of children, such as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, the Safe Schools Declaration and the programmes for the reintegration of child soldiers.

Annex 26**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Colombia to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

I thank France for convening this open debate, as well as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Director of the United Nations Children's Fund for their presentations.

Colombia has experienced the phenomenon of forced recruitment by illegal armed groups. However, the children concerned are identified and cared for by the Colombian State as victims and, consequently, are not deprived of their liberty, which is in line with the Special Representative's recommendations and helps to avoid further stigmatization.

Pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005), Colombia continues to make progress on effective mechanisms to prevent recruitment, such as the Intersectoral Commission for the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Children and Adolescents by Illegal Organized Groups, which has helped to identify risk factors and coordinate State action. In addition, in November 2019, the Government adopted a public policy on the prevention of recruitment and use of children and adolescents and of sexual violence against them by organized armed groups and organized criminal groups. The policy's main purposes are to create protective environments, progressively reduce all forms of violence and exploitation, guarantee rights and establish mechanisms to facilitate intersectoral coordination.

Colombia has made an unequivocal commitment to respect that population group and has directed all the necessary efforts to prevent the recruitment, use and utilization of children, and sexual violence against them, by armed groups and organized crime. It is important to reiterate that law enforcement entities have been respectful of children's rights. They have complied strictly with the prohibition on involving them in service activities, in accordance with the Code on Children and Adolescents and the Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence Act.

In response to acts of sexual violence, the Government is developing a technical assistance strategy to include the comprehensive care and prevention programme in the development plans of the target territories. Colombia rejects and condemns the use of schools and educational centres by organized armed groups to conduct their criminal activities. Likewise, it reiterates its respect for the rules of international humanitarian law.

My country encourages the Secretary-General to indicate in his annual reports the sources of the recorded figures, in order to improve the data analysis process of international organizations and States and to contribute to strengthening evaluation mechanisms. The reports are a guide and a starting point in the formulation and improvement of public policies.

Education and vocational training are the most effective means of creating safe environments for comprehensive development and of preventing the six grave violations committed in times of armed conflict. It is imperative that we continue working towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, which include, inter alia, rights to an adequate standard of living, food, equality, health, education and personal integrity.

Today we reaffirm once again Colombia's commitment to building an increasingly prosperous and secure future for children and adolescents. They are the future and the seed of peace in our country.

Annex 27**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations, Rodrigo A. Carazo**

[Original: Spanish]

Costa Rica associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and takes this opportunity to congratulate France on its presidency of the Security Council for the month of June and to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Henrietta Fore, for their presentations.

In times like these, when a pandemic is sweeping the globe, we must protect children who are caught up in armed conflict. Their health, safety, education and future are doubly threatened by the violence of war and the impact of coronavirus disease and the measures taken to contain it. That is yet another reason to silence the weapons, and why the delegation of Costa Rica wishes to recall the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. We also stress the importance of the members of the Security Council supporting the call, which is so necessary to protect child victims of hostilities.

Given the times, the fifteenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005) should lead us to reflect more than ever on the importance of its mandates and their implementation as mechanisms to protect children and guarantee their rights. In 2020 we also celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of General Assembly resolution 60/1, on the responsibility to protect, which reminds us that the duty of all States to prevent atrocities and genocide includes protecting children. Resolution 1612 (2005) achieved three main things.

The first is the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict, which is the best way to obtain timely, objective and accurate information on the condition of children and to take the necessary action to guarantee their rights.

The second is the adoption of action plans for the protection of children in armed conflict. We take this opportunity to acknowledge the achievement of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in signing 29 plans in 2019 and in supporting Governments in adopting relevant legislation.

The third is the establishment of the Security Council Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict, which has the important responsibility of reviewing the mechanism's reports, taking effective action and determining progress made in the situation of children and the implementation of action plans. In that connection, the resolution underlined the role of listing and delisting, which should be done on the basis of reports and objective criteria. We emphasize that there must be consistency between the findings of reports and the lists.

I conclude by recalling the obligation of all States, even those without armed conflict, to end impunity for abuses, crimes and atrocities committed against children, as well as the important role played by institutions such as the International Criminal Court in the fight against impunity.

Annex 28**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations, Luis Gallegos Chiriboga**

[Original: Spanish]

I wish to congratulate France and Germany on their presidencies of the Security Council in June and July, respectively, and to thank you, Sir, for having organized this debate on children and armed conflict. I would point out that all the elements highlighted by Ecuador in the debate held on 27 May on the protection of civilians (see S/2020/465), in particular as concerns the consequences of conflicts, are even more applicable to boys and girls.

On that occasion, I expressed Ecuador's interest in participating in the efforts of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict to further promote the efforts of the international community in terms of the protection of children. Today I have the honour of aligning Ecuador, for the first time, with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends, of which we have been a part since June.

On 21 March, Ecuador also formalized its adherence to the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Although there have been important advances in the 75 years since the United Nations was founded, the situation of children in armed conflict continues to reflect a devastating reality, as described in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525).

Ecuador is also deploying considerable efforts at the regional level to fight the trafficking and recruitment of minors. However, this is a global challenge that concerns the entire international community. It represents yet another reason to increase, for example, the funds allocated to peacebuilding, not only for countries in conflict but also for cross-border cooperation in affected areas, and to direct them towards the protection of children.

We as an Organization must focus greater efforts on the care of children, which has also deteriorated owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has exacerbated conditions in conflict zones. For that reason, Ecuador, together with Malaysia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Slovenia, Japan, Jamaica, Oman, Senegal and Sweden, initiated a statement of firm support for the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire at the global level, which has received the support of more than 170 delegations.

It is vital that the Security Council adopt the draft resolution on COVID-19 (S/2020/607) and endorse the call for a ceasefire so that it can be implemented more effectively. For that reason, I invite all Council members to do so in order to save the lives and alleviate the suffering of the more than 420 million children living in conflict zones.

I would be remiss if I were to conclude without once again stressing the urgency of strengthening the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, especially in this context of increased pressure and challenges resulting from the pandemic.

Finally, the message conveyed by Mariam, from Mali, this afternoon in the Security Council must not only be recorded in the record of speeches given during this debate but must also be heard and truly heeded by the Security Council and the United Nations in general. Mariam, 15 years old, is a contemporary of resolution 1612 (2005), whose fifteenth anniversary we are also commemorating. The best way to do so is to ensure the effective promotion and protection of the rights of children

worldwide, with special attention paid to those who live in conflict zones and those who, despite still being in zones of peace, are at risk of being kidnapped or recruited.

Annex 29**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Egypt to the United Nations**

At the outset, we would like to thank France for having organized this important debate on children and armed conflict. We would also extend our thanks to the briefers for their interesting briefings delivered at the beginning of the meeting.

Egypt believes in the importance of raising awareness regarding human rights issues and their linkage with the realization of peace and security, particularly as concerns issues relating to the protection and promotion of the rights of the child.

Egypt strongly support all efforts to strengthen the protection of children and to put an end to violations committed during conflict, especially crimes committed by terrorist organizations. Armed conflicts deprive children of their right to life, physical integrity and mental health, as well as their social, cultural and educational rights.

The strong negative impacts of armed conflicts on children have been aggravated by the impacts of the coronavirus disease pandemic. This requires greater international cooperation and stronger measures to urgently respond to those exacerbated impacts. In that regard, Egypt, at the highest level, has expressed to the United Nations its willingness to cooperate to the utmost possible extent in order to ensure the delivery of much-needed humanitarian assistance.

In 2002, Egypt ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The provisions of the Protocol have been incorporated into our national legislation.

Furthermore, respect for international humanitarian law, including the protection of children in armed conflict, is part of the curriculum provided by the Egyptian Ministry of Defence to its personnel, especially for those personnel participating in peacekeeping operations. The content of the curriculum is prepared in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood with a view to ensuring the protection of the rights of the child.

Egypt will continue its efforts nationally and internationally to ensure the protection of the rights of the child, especially for those trapped in difficult situations.

Annex 30**Statement by the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

El Salvador thanks the presidency of France for having convened this open debate, and the Secretary-General for presenting his latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525).

We commend the Council's efforts to facilitate and encourage dialogue on the protection of children and adolescents through various actions, consultations and campaigns that have contributed to the inclusion of child protection in specific cases involving peace negotiations.

El Salvador wishes to reiterate its deep commitment to the maintenance of international peace and security in tackling the heartbreaking consequences of armed conflict and working to alleviate the resulting widespread suffering of the civilian population, particularly children, girls and adolescents in conflict areas.

El Salvador believes that full compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a high priority in order for the best interests of the child to prevail, regardless of the context.

We welcome the progress set out in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on this issue. However, we express our deep concern at the continued forced recruitment of minors, whose use in conflicts constitutes a serious violation of their rights, resulting in separation from their families, sexual abuse, appalling mutilation and, in the worst case, their tragic death. Such traumas deprive them of their childhood and dignity and leave permanent scars on their adult lives.

At the same time, we deplore the significant increase in the number of attacks on schools and hospitals, which is why we urge a greater commitment on the part of the international community and condemn the use and recruitment of children and adolescents in conflicts. We must continue working for the promotion, protection and full and effective enjoyment of the rights of children and adolescents, while giving priority to that goal in our work.

Because El Salvador is committed to those who suffered as children during the internal armed conflict, it has progressed in terms of the creation of legislation and institutions for the protection of children, having signed and ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

El Salvador therefore recognizes that respect for, and the protection and guarantee of, human rights are essential pillars of the establishment of genuine rule of law. Consequently, it has made a resolute commitment to the issue of prevention and to that of locating and identifying missing persons, especially boys and girls, as well as support for the families of disappeared persons, the investigation of cases, the punishment of those responsible and comprehensive reparations for victims and their families.

El Salvador has recognized the right of families to know the whereabouts of those girls and boys who disappeared during the armed conflict. For that reason, in 2010 El Salvador created the National Commission for the Search for Girls and Boys Disappeared during the Internal Armed Conflict, which conducts research and locates, contacts and reunites disappeared children — who today are adults — with

their biological families, as well as provides psychosocial support to families that are victims of enforced disappearance.

In addition, October 2013 saw the creation of the Reparations Programme for Victims of Severe Human Rights Violations That Occurred in the Context of the Internal Armed Conflict, which includes the forced disappearance of persons. The Board of Directors of the Registry of Victims of Serious Violations of Human Rights That Occurred in the Context of the Internal Armed Conflict was also created. Likewise, the country is promoting the creation of a State bank of genetic profiles in order to locate missing children in the context of the internal armed conflict.

All of the aforementioned is in line with Salvadoran initiatives within the United Nations such as the proclamation, through General Assembly resolution 65/196, of 24 March as the International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims. El Salvador suffered from the scourge of an armed conflict for more than 10 years, which left us with countless lessons learned and allowed us to strengthen our regulatory framework, with the primary goal of not repeating the mistakes of the past. For that reason, we passed the Law for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents, which establishes a series of rights, guarantees and duties of children and adolescents that is consistent with the international framework of human rights. That law establishes that, in the event of disasters or in situations of armed conflict, the State must provide all children with special protection based on their rights. It also provides protection measures against sexual abuse and exploitation as well as other forms of exploitation, including the forced or compulsory recruitment of children and adolescents for use in conflict.

In addition to those measures, El Salvador joined the Safe to Learn initiative, which is aimed at ending violence in and through schools so that children can be free to learn, prosper and pursue their dreams. It has also signed on to the Safe Schools Declaration and to the commitment to protect schools from attack in times of armed conflict. Although there is no armed conflict of any kind in El Salvador, a decision was made to establish safe places and implement inclusive designs that are resistant to the threats to which educational centres may be exposed, in the process involving educational communities and implementing monitoring projects, financing and continuous supervision of the relevant facilities.

In addition, 2019 saw the implementation of the Education Violence Alert System, which is aimed at preventing acts of violence that could affect the educational community, including harassment, bullying, sexual abuse, threats and extortion, both inside the schools and in their vicinity. The project is led by the Ministry of Education and has a network of public and private educational centres throughout the country.

The Ministry of Education works at the inter-institutional level in coordination with the National Civil Police, and together they provide an efficient and effective response to cases reported through the system. In addition, the set of alerts produced through the Education Violence Alert System will generate information that will serve as input for the design of public policies and the development of strategies and plans to reduce violence in order to urgently prevent critical acts of violence affecting educational communities, thereby strengthening the protection of schools and providing adequate care in order to serve the people involved in the reported cases.

We take this opportunity to thank the agencies of the United Nations system that have supported that initiative, as well as other friendly countries that have offered their cooperation and support in its implementation.

In the framework of the General Assembly, El Salvador, as a State member of the Latin America and Caribbean Group and in conjunction with the European Union, submitted a draft resolution entitled “The rights of the child” (General Assembly resolution 74/133), which, among other things, encourages all States to strengthen efforts to protect children affected by armed conflict, including from the recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and by supporting long-term and sustainable reintegration and rehabilitation for these children.

Likewise, El Salvador co-sponsored resolution 74/275, entitled “International Day to Protect Education from Attack”, which highlights the need to take measures to achieve the full realization of the right to education for all children and, in particular, to take all feasible measures to protect schools from attacks and to refrain from actions that impede children’s access to education, and to facilitate access to education in armed conflict.

In addition, El Salvador is a pioneer country in the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, which aims to make progress in the fight to eradicate violence as well as in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We are pleased to report that El Salvador, following up on the commitments made and in the context of openness to special procedures, received, from 23 April to 3 May 2019, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, Mr. Fabian Salvioli, in order to assess the progress made in the implementation of transitional justice measures in order to address the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed during the armed conflict.

Among his preliminary findings, the Special Rapporteur acknowledged the progress made since the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords in terms of truth and guarantees of non-recurrence, as well as recent initiatives to search for disappeared adults and children, the request for a public apology and the first steps forward in the criminal investigation of the violations committed.

We would like to thank UNICEF for all its support at the national and international levels in promoting better results in the protection of children in various contexts, particularly its work in different regions for the protection of children in conflict situations. We believe it is necessary to strengthen programmes to reintegrate children who have been released and removed from military activity, so they can be properly integrated into society through viable alternatives. In this way, we will reduce the chances that they will again become vulnerable to abuse, social stigmatization and recurrent recruitment.

We believe that it is best to apply preventive approaches that ensure that all children and adolescents are protected and given the opportunity to grow up and strengthen their abilities to build their life projects. To that end, in December 2017, El Salvador joined the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and considers them to be a comprehensive set of measures to end the recruitment of child soldiers.

The Vancouver Principles, which are based on the existing framework for the protection of children and the promotion of their rights, constitute an innovative measure to encourage the reporting of all types of abuses and grave violations against children and adolescents in armed conflict. It is important to apply such measures in areas where peacekeeping operations are carried out, taking into account the impact that conflicts can cause on children and how vulnerable to failure the objectives of the United Nations would be if we did not take measures to prevent the violation of children’s rights. We call on the international community to consider joining this

initiative and thereby strengthen the protection of children and the promotion of their rights.

The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has caused an unprecedented set of challenges for all Governments and other key actors in achieving the goals on the children and armed conflict agenda. In the Secretary-General's most recent report, we can see how progress has been constrained by the outbreak of the virus. The social, economic and political consequences of the pandemic are expected to grow, including consequences to peace, international security and the protection of human rights and international humanitarian law.

El Salvador wishes to emphasize the importance of multilateralism and the collective support that each country and international organization, civil society, the private sector and other relevant actors, each working in its own area of specialization, can provide to minimize the negative consequences, as we face the effects of the outbreak of COVID-19. We must maintain a spirit of solidarity as we work together to support efforts aimed at protecting children and adolescents, without reversing course on the important achievements we have made.

The time has come to take immediate action to respond to the effects of COVID-19. This response must address the immediate effects of the pandemic, bearing in mind that incitement to hatred, inequality and restrictions on access to health care, among other restrictions that undermine human rights and limit progress in the area of peace and security, have also been exacerbated in the effort to contain the impact of the pandemic. In these difficult circumstances, we call on all countries to continue to the best of their abilities to support efforts aimed at continuing life-saving work. We commend the work of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, in particular for ensuring equal humanitarian access for all, without discrimination.

We would urge all parties to conflicts to respect international law, primarily human rights law and international humanitarian law, and to continue to take measures to end violations of the rights of children and adolescents in armed conflicts, and to take preventive, protective and rehabilitative action, as required, on a case-by-case basis. For our part, while El Salvador has made significant achievements in terms of children's rights in various contexts, we will continue to seek solutions to the challenges before us — solutions that not only respond to the mandate to adapt our national legislation to the principles and precepts of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also involve concrete steps forward in the transformation of our society in favour of a paradigm of comprehensive protection for children and adolescents.

Finally, El Salvador remains convinced that the protection of all children and adolescents in armed conflict must be an important aspect of any strategy for conflict resolution and of any peacebuilding process. Addressing armed conflicts from a comprehensive perspective is the key to ensuring the maintenance and sustainability of peace in different regions of the world.

Annex 31**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations, Taye Atske-Selassie Amde**

I would first like to thank the President of the Security Council and France for convening today's open debate. I also wish to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Ms. Henrietta Fore and all the briefers for their informative presentations.

Over the past 15 years, since the adoption of the landmark Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict, significant progress has been made in ending and preventing violations against children in conflict situations around the world. The monitoring and reporting on children and armed conflict by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005) and the signing of 32 action plans and other types of engagement with parties to conflict have played a critical role in further strengthening the protection of children affected by conflicts.

Despite these efforts, however, grave violations of international humanitarian law committed against children in armed conflict persist. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525) documents over 10,000 verified child casualties. It is totally unacceptable that children are still being subjected to gruesome killing and maiming, denial of humanitarian access, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and coercive recruitment and use.

We are also seriously concerned that the abuse of refugee and migrant children, including through trafficking, torture, sexual violence and ill-treatment in detention, remains unresolved. As one of the largest refugee-hosting countries, Ethiopia firmly believes in the need to treat refugees with special care, bearing in mind their basic needs in terms of access to shelter, food, clean water, health care and education, as well as the provision of official documentation.

We are committed to the continuous provision not only of international protection, but also education and health services, to refugee children, including unaccompanied minors who are forcibly displaced as a result of armed conflict. This is why Ethiopia last year adopted one of the most progressive refugee policies in Africa. We believe much more needs to be done to find durable solutions to the general living conditions and status of children affected by conflict and forced displacement. In this regard, strengthened support from development actors to countries emerging from conflict and to refugee-hosting countries remains vital.

We believe the signing of action plans by parties to armed conflict is a step in the right direction. However, enhanced cooperation between the Council and regional and subregional organizations is critical to ensuring concrete implementation. In this regard, we would like to encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to explore mechanisms for further strengthening the cooperation between the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council.

Ethiopia acknowledges the role of the monitoring and reporting mechanism in tracking violations against children in armed conflict, including in the context of peace operations. We believe that any alleged grave violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law should be properly investigated. In line with the provisions of resolution 1612 (2005), close coordination with national Governments, troop-contributing countries and relevant United Nations and civil society actors will enable the mechanism to properly verify the objectivity, accuracy and reliability of any information.

In that regard, we have noted the references in the report of the Secretary-General to the African Union Mission in Somalia and regional forces operating in Somalia, including the Ethiopian National Defence Forces, in relation to two alleged cases of violations. We reaffirm the need for a coordinated investigation with the troop-contributing countries and international forces concerned as well as relevant international and regional organizations.

As a major troop-contributing country, Ethiopia has taken various measures to ensure the protection of civilians, including children, in areas where our troops are deployed. Our troops are guided by elaborate rules of engagement within the framework of our obligations under international humanitarian law. Our troops are given intensive predeployment training on the protection of civilians, with special attention on protecting the most vulnerable groups — particularly women and children. We have also put in place mechanisms for predeployment orientation and after-duty evaluation in order to ensure accountability for any violations committed by our troops deployed in a mission.

Ethiopia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its amendment and two Optional Protocols. Undoubtedly, international commitments are vital to further strengthening the Convention and bringing about the necessary changes in attitudes to create conditions for the protection of children in armed conflict. In this regard, my country will work towards the full adoption of the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Finally, I would like to conclude by reiterating Ethiopia's firm and continued commitment as a troop-contributing country to ensuring the protection of children in armed conflict. We will continue to work with all the relevant actors to that end.

Annex 32

Statement by the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations

I am pleased to submit this statement on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. I extend our congratulations to the briefers, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict, the Executive Director of UNICEF and Mariam from civil society. I thank the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's debate.

This year we mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Since then, we have seen some significant progress: countries have criminalized recruitment, adopted protocols for the handover of children and implemented measures to protect schools and hospitals. The resolution is an important milestone, and, on this occasion, we commend Belgium for chairing the Working Group.

Despite the progress made in some areas, the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525) shows that there are still significant gaps and concerns to be addressed. We expect members of the Security Council to deal with them as a matter of priority and with complete dedication. This means ensuring the mainstreaming of the agenda across the work of the Council, inviting the Special Representative to brief on country situations, raising issues from the children and armed conflict agenda, including those related to child protection, during Security Council visits, providing ample resources for child protection and making sure that these issues are addressed in relevant mandate discussions for all United Nations missions and with all Special Representatives of the Secretary-General who appear before the Security Council.

It is shocking that, in 2019, over 25,000 grave violations were committed against children in the 19 situations assessed by the monitoring and reporting mechanism, with continuing sexual and gender-based violence, which remains vastly underreported, and a worrisome trend of a 400 per cent increase in denial of humanitarian access, with 4,400 verified incidents this year, and attacks against schools and hospitals. The EU urges parties to armed conflicts, State and non-State alike, to ensure universal respect for international humanitarian law, implement human rights law and refugee law and allow for concrete and effective protection, which is all the more important against the backdrop of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The EU also calls upon States Members of the United Nations and non-State actors to improve access to safe and quality education, in line with the recently adopted General Assembly resolution 74/275.

This year, as we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, we call on its universal ratification. We also welcome other initiatives that build on the existing framework in a complementary manner, such as the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. The Safe Schools Declaration is also a valuable tool to this end.

The EU remains a staunch supporter of the United Nations children and armed conflict mandate, which is equipped with essential tools that have a real impact: the Security Council Working Group, the monitoring and reporting mechanism, the action plans and the annual report, with its annex listing parties to conflicts that have committed grave violations. Considering the indispensability of these tools, it is of the utmost importance to protect the agenda's integrity and impartiality.

The EU places a high value on accountability, including through the International Criminal Court. Every year, EU member States review the EU list of priority countries on children and armed conflict, based on the description of the country situations in the annual report. We encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to continue to secure agreements on new action plans and support the implementation and monitoring of existing ones. In parallel, we value the Manual for Child Protection Staff in United Nations Peace Operations, and we actively support the practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict, launched in 2020.

The protection and promotion of the rights of the child is central to the EU's human rights policy. The draft EU action plan on human rights and democracy 2020-2024 supports the demobilization, long-term rehabilitation and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups. The children and armed conflict agenda is mainstreamed in EU common security and defence policy missions, and child protection aspects are taken into account in the planning of operations, trainings, early warning and peace negotiation, in close cooperation with the United Nations peacekeeping operations, agencies and funds as well as other actors, such as civil society. The EU continues to support projects in Bangladesh, Colombia, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and the Sudan — providing tailor-made assistance for the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups, including access to education, psychosocial support and improved livelihood opportunities.

Our strong engagement to the conflict-prevention agenda and dedication towards moving the children and armed conflict agenda forward in times of crisis, such as the one engendered by COVID-19, is key to ensuring that the rights of the child are taken into account in all our efforts aimed at building back better.

Annex 33

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Fiji to the United Nations

Fiji congratulates France on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June. I thank France for inviting Member States to participate in the Security Council's debate on this important topic of children and armed conflict.

Forty years have passed since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which placed the crucial obligation on States to protect children in conflict. The Convention has been further reinforced by over 20 Security Council resolutions since 1999 relating to the protection of children in armed conflict. Despite these, the Secretary-General reports today that the United Nations has documented over 25,000 grave violations against children in 19 situations around the world. Secretary-General Guterres's report to the Security Council (S/2020/525) further states that half of these grave violations were committed by non-State actors and a third by Governments and international forces. The Secretary-General's other recent reports on the protection of civilians (S/2020/366) and conflict-related sexual violence (S/2020/487) highlight an alarming trend overall. They build a picture of increasing violations and deaths in conflict. These reports combined called for the Security Council to seriously step up.

Protecting children in armed conflict is a legal obligation first, and a moral obligation second. Fiji welcomes and fully supports the continuous efforts by the United Nations to protect and assist children in armed conflict. The Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict reflects the effort taken by all agencies to investigate and document grave violations against children in armed conflicts. The annual reports continue to highlight the same challenges over and over. Children need to be protected, perpetrators need to be held accountable and impunity needs to end.

The Security Council has an important role to play in preventing conflicts through early intervention. It has the powers to ensure accountability and to end impunity. It has been 15 years since the establishment of its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The Working Group's recommendations should continue to be the Council's main guidance for matters related to children in armed conflict.

The country task force on monitoring and reporting still faces the challenge of access in order to investigate violations. Member States should continue to allow access to the task force and work together with it towards fulfilling their international obligations.

As the report highlights, non-State actors are a growing challenge to the protection of children in armed conflicts. All stakeholders should continue to engage with non-State actors to build awareness of their responsibilities in protecting children.

Fiji respects its international obligations with regard to the protection of children in armed conflicts. Fiji is a party to the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles. Fiji believes that schools and other educational facilities must be designated prohibited areas for all parties involved in armed conflicts. Keeping armed parties away from schools is a step in achieving a secure learning environment for children and in protecting children from activities that can be a danger to them. But trying to do all that when local communities have suffered and are dispersed and when State institutions have been weakened or destroyed can be a huge challenge for States.

Children are always the most vulnerable and will continue to be the first victims of armed conflicts. The most effective way to protect children in armed conflicts is preventive intervention and, when conflicts do break out, then protection requires the strongest possible oversight, reporting and investigation. In all those areas, the Security Council needs to do a lot more. It needs to step up monitoring: oversight is pressing as conflicts are becoming even more complicated. Furthermore, new technologies make it easier to spread hate speech easier and for non-State actors to influence and radicalize young people. Similarly, climate change in many conflict zones is destroying livelihoods and making children more vulnerable to manipulation by armed groups.

Fiji supports the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report and requests the Security Council to give this challenge urgent and most serious attention in its deliberations.

Annex 34**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations, Kaha Immadze**

At the outset, I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the French presidency for convening today's important open debate. We would also like to thank the distinguished briefers for their comprehensive overview.

While the findings of the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525) on children and armed conflict contain some encouraging elements, the rest of the account remains a cause for alarm. Particularly deplorable is the continuing practice of grave violations, including sexual violence against children, attacks against schools or hospitals and denial of humanitarian access to children. We have to move towards the implementation of the legal corpus that, throughout the past decades, has been neatly crafted by the international community, including in the Security Council. That is especially relevant against the backdrop of the fifteenth anniversaries of milestone resolution 1612 (2005) and the landmark principle of the responsibility to protect (General Assembly resolution 60/1), which we mark this year.

Georgia, as a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, is committed to upholding the norms for the prohibition of the recruitment and use of child soldiers. We have endorsed vital documents in recent years, including the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Yet, notwithstanding our efforts, the fundamental rights of the conflict-affected children in Russia-occupied regions of Georgia — Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia — continue to be violated by the occupying power, which exercises effective control on the ground. The major concerns include, inter alia, the restrictions on freedom of movement, access to health care and the prohibition of education in the native language, as well as the various other forms of discrimination that children regularly face and that each year deprive up to 5,000 of them of the right to an education in their mother tongue and other basic rights.

That dire humanitarian and human rights situation on the ground has been aggravated by the coronavirus disease pandemic. In these difficult times, when it is critically important to support the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and show care for conflict-affected children, Russia continues the illegal process of erecting the so-called border signs and other artificial barriers along the occupation line. To make matters worse, due to the irresponsible and inhuman approach of closing the so-called crossing points along the Russian occupation line, the population residing in the occupied regions, including children, remain stripped of access to urgent care and medical evacuation. Thus, owing to the Russian occupation regime's denial of medical evacuation to those in need, the death toll of ethnic Georgians has risen to 14 since the closure of the occupation line in the Tskhinvali/South Ossetia in September 2019.

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

Annex 35

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations

Greece would like to congratulate the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's open debate on children and armed conflict. Greece would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund and Mariam from civil society for their comprehensive briefings.

While aligning itself with the statement submitted by the European Union, Greece would like to highlight the alarming number of verified grave violations against children in armed conflict in 2019 — 25,000 according to the latest annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525). Around the world, children remain the largely invisible victims of human rights violations and abuses, for instance be killed or maimed, recruited or used as soldiers, detained for their actual or alleged association with parties to conflict or terrorist groups, sexually abused or raped, abducted, deprived of education and health services due to military attacks against schools or hospitals, as well as denied humanitarian access.

In addition to that, the current global health crisis due to the coronavirus disease pandemic, which is exacerbating existing vulnerabilities, has a cumulative negative impact on other dimensions of human security, namely, personal, food, economic or community security, especially for children, and impedes the equal enjoyment of their human rights.

This cruel and devastating reality illustrates the urgent need to accelerate coordinated international action in order to achieve peace and sustainable human development for all, especially children since they are key actors in building peaceful, inclusive and resilient societies founded on the rule of law, justice and strong institutions, (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16). Therefore, the focus of the international community should be directed towards ensuring accountability for violations against children through child- and gender-sensitive criminal justice mechanisms, as those are considered the best way of preventing the recurrence of violations and contributing to sustainable peace. Moreover, precise legislation and guidelines for the armed forces enhance the protection of civilians, especially children.

In addition, sustainable human development presupposes good quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, especially children (SDG 4). In fact, education and vocational opportunities facilitate the rehabilitation and smooth reintegration in society of children recruited and used as child soldiers. In this respect, as armed conflicts place the education of entire generations at risk by destroying or damaging educational facilities, priority should be given to providing education during emergencies, as well as to rebuilding schools once peace has been achieved.

Effective coordinated international action to address the specific needs of conflict-affected children requires enhancing system-wide policy coherence by mainstreaming the children and armed conflict agenda together with a gender perspective throughout the whole range of United Nations policies so as to leave not even one boy or girl behind.

Greece, as a dedicated supporter of the United Nations children and armed conflict agenda, places particular emphasis on the protection of children's rights, especially in times of armed conflict. Having ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and endorsed the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver

Principles, Greece is in the process of developing a national action plan on the rights of the child and another on women, peace and security, which prioritizes the protection of girls from conflict-related violations and abuses.

In that light, Greece remains committed to joining forces with all international stakeholders in a common effort to adequately promote and protect the rights and welfare of conflict-affected children and, thus, to contribute to building a future peaceful, inclusive, resilient and gender-equal world.

Annex 36**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Guatemala to the United Nations**

Allow me to congratulate France on having organized this open debate marking the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005). We appreciate the concept note, which provides guidance, as well as the valuable briefings by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, and the executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Henrietta Fore.

The Security Council has been adopting resolutions regarding the protection of children affected by armed conflict since 1999. Each of the resolutions contains increasingly stringent provisions on the protection of children. Adequate and timely financial support remains necessary to ensure that the monitoring and reporting mechanism, as well as the child protection advisers within peacekeeping operations, fulfil their role under this mandate.

It is clear that development and peaceful and inclusive societies cannot be achieved without the comprehensive protection of children. However, despite the efforts of the international community, we continue to see serious abuses committed against children by armed groups, which not only constitute a serious violation of their human rights but are also a clear demonstration of contempt for human life.

Civilian casualties in armed conflicts are on the rise, with children being the victims of atrocious and vicious violence that hampers their development and education. Of extreme concern are the indiscriminate attacks on hospitals and schools, direct attacks on civilians with explosive weapons, air strikes and the use of chemical weapons, which cause high rates of injury among civilians, including thousands of children, who, in addition to the deprivation of their basic rights, may suffer or die. The perpetrators of such acts should be subject to strict sanctions by the Council.

Armed conflicts have devastating consequences for the social structure of a country. Guatemala considers that the preventive approach (sustaining peace) must be accompanied by actions to promote a culture of peace, respect and tolerance as part of the efforts to reintegrate children into their families and communities. Guatemala stresses its commitment to protecting the rights of every child. An example of that commitment is our endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration, which calls for strong political support for the comprehensive protection of every child.

This occasion is also important to highlight the global suffering caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which is a common enemy and does not discriminate on the basis of nationality, sex, religion, ethnicity or age. Despite this emergency, armed conflicts continue around the world. For that reason, we applaud the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. It is time to put an end to armed conflict and, today more than ever, to focus collectively on the fight against COVID-19.

I conclude by emphasizing that defending children is a moral and political imperative. If we continue to act jointly, we will be sending a message of hope and be able to fully carry out our responsibility to protect our societies' most precious asset — children.

Annex 37

Statement by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations

We congratulate France on their successful presidency of the Security Council this month and convey our appreciation for convening this open video teleconference. We also thank the briefers for sharing their perspectives.

The Security Council's children and armed conflict agenda has evolved considerably over the last two decades. This year also marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. While a sound normative framework is already in place, the protection of children in armed conflicts continues to present a wide array of operational challenges. A lot more remains to be done in keeping with the changing nature of armed conflicts and the varied nature of the vulnerabilities that children face in such situations. We wish to highlight following points in that regard.

First, cherry-picking situations beyond the mandate of the Council for inclusion in the Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict politicizes and instrumentalizes the child protection agenda. It also diverts attention from situations that pose a threat to international peace and security.

There is also a need for greater transparency and honest engagement between the Member States and United Nations mandate holders in order to provide accurate, objective and reliable information to the Security Council on the grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. The relevant Security Council resolutions require, in no ambiguous terms, that such monitoring and reporting activities be undertaken in cooperation with, and with the participation of, the host Government. That requirement has to be followed in letter and in spirit.

Unfortunately, in the case of the paragraphs of the Secretary-General's latest annual report (S/2020/525) pertaining to India, none of the above was adhered to, thereby contravening the mandate given to the Secretary-General with regard to preparing the report. The information claimed to have been verified by the United Nations cannot be based on hearsay, and due diligence must be done in a transparent manner. Any derogation from that only undermines the credibility of the report.

Secondly, abuse, exploitation, sexual violence and other grave violations against children by terrorists need greater focus and understanding. Terrorist networks are increasingly interlinked with other non-State actors, such as organized crime syndicates, spreading their tentacles across borders. In some situations, the unholy nexus between State machineries and non-State actors further adds to the complexities that lead to widespread violence and deprivation, which afflict children in multiple ways.

Thirdly, children remain particularly vulnerable to indoctrination through violent extremist ideologies designed to foment terrorism. Their social, emotional and cognitive developments are often interrupted by radicalization and the experience of violence in armed conflicts, impacting them for life.

Nowhere is that truer than in our region. Terror emanating from Pakistan has jeopardized the future of millions of children in its neighbouring countries and beyond. Pakistan has the dubious distinction of running a system of "schooling" young children in violent extremist ideologies and recruiting them for terrorist activities. A thriving transnational narco-terror network run by Pakistan threatens the future of millions of children across regions. Educational institutions for girls continue to be targeted, and children belonging to religious and ethnic minorities in Pakistan remain particularly vulnerable to egregious violations and deprivation of

rights. Yet the delegation of Pakistan relentlessly pursues an agenda of peddling fake narratives about India at every United Nations forum, turning a blind eye to its own follies. These are smoke screens for its design of perpetuating terror in the region.

We call for an end to impunity for all actors inciting and perpetrating grave violations against children at home and abroad. There must be greater accountability and sincere efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice by the Governments from whose territory such entities operate. The United Nations must also reckon with the full complexity of such situations in order to better situate the child protection issues in context.

Fourthly, we need a more inclusive approach to providing protection to child victims of armed conflict. The children who face relocation and reintegration require special attention. Children who grow up in conflict and post-conflict situations often need a fresh start. Engagement with Governments to strengthen legal and operational tools for child protection is important. The tools have to be complemented by community awareness and family resilience, so that parents cannot be coerced into sacrificing their children or their children's future.

From our experience of United Nations peacekeeping over the past six decades, we also recognize the importance of having sufficient resources and the requisite number of child protection advisers in the field to make a difference.

The importance of good quality education and skill development to mitigate those negative consequences cannot be overemphasized. The use of digital tools to provide education, vocational training and psychosocial support opens up new opportunities for children in fragile situations. Protecting schools, especially girls' schools, and health-care facilities and personnel must be accorded priority in order to give all children the opportunities they deserve.

Fifthly, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has deepened the vulnerability of children in armed conflicts by increasing their risk of exposure to violence and exploitation. United Nations agencies, peacekeeping missions and other partners have made commendable efforts in mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 and in facilitating humanitarian assistance. The rights and needs of children must continue to receive priority when responding to the pandemic in armed conflicts.

In conclusion, we reiterate India's support to United Nations endeavours to protect children in armed conflicts.

Annex 38**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Iraq to the United Nations**

At the outset, my country would like to thank the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, President of the Security Council this month, for holding this constructive dialogue. We are confident in his wisdom and able leadership. We also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Henrietta Fore, for their tireless efforts in assisting and supporting children all over the world.

Iraq, like many countries around the world, has been affected by the coronavirus disease pandemic and has made it clear to the Office of the Special Representative, during the preparation of this report (S/2020/525), that it was not able to clarify any alleged information mentioned in the draft version of the report, since Baghdad was under curfew and remains under partial curfew now. However, we call upon the Office not to further burden Iraq at a time when — not to mention the impact of the global pandemic — we continue to witness recurring terrorist attacks that claim the lives of innocent Iraqi citizens, including children.

Iraq would like to thank Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter for calling upon the countries concerned to facilitate the repatriation of foreign children to their countries of origin, in line with the principles of international law and with respect for the best interests of the child.

With reference to paragraph 77 of the report, Iraq would like to remind the Office of the Special Representative of its note verbal of 12 March 2020 (CMT 3/2/102), which clearly states that the authority concerned is working on a draft bill on the rights of the child that includes articles providing for the criminalization of the recruitment and use of children. The Iraqi Government works closely with the international organizations providing humanitarian assistance to Iraqis in camps for internally displaced persons. However, as with any other sovereign country, it has security measures that need to be respected. There are no so-called bureaucratic impediments, only security measures that guarantee the safety and security of our people, as well as humanitarian personnel.

While we commend the commitment of the United Nations to assisting Iraq in reintegrating affected children, Iraq wishes to highlight the elements of rehabilitation and reintegration, which it considers to be complementary and must be brought together when dealing with children who were exposed to severe terrorist propaganda and a long brainwashing process by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Iraq does not consider innocent children as criminals, on the contrary. Iraqi laws on juveniles are in line with relevant international standards, bearing in mind that there are children who were associated with ISIL and were, as we mentioned, brainwashed, some of whom have committed crimes and are dangerous to themselves and to all Iraqis. Those children are being dealt with by the competent Iraqi authorities in a way that ensures the public's safety as well as theirs. There are steps and measures in place to rehabilitate them so that one day they may be ready to rejoin society as normal, productive and responsible individuals. However, it would be a threat to public safety if they were set free prior to rehabilitation.

Despite our repeated calls on the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, inaccurate and incomplete alleged information is still being incorporated into the reports. In this year's report again, only the number of violations were included, with neither date nor place, which makes them impossible

to verify and complicates the situation from our side in terms of addressing any alleged violations. Therefore, we call on the Office of the Special Representative to be reasonable in its approach while pursuing the best interests of children.

Last but not least, Iraq works closely with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) as part of the efforts to clear the land previously occupied by ISIL. The quantity of landmines and explosive remnants of war is unprecedented. Iraq, with the cooperation of UNMAS, is raising awareness and educating the people living in those areas about the threats posed by mines. We call upon United Nations agencies and offices working in Iraq to better coordinate among themselves, while avoiding overlap or duplication of their functions.

Iraq reiterates its statement issued on 8 January 2020 in response to the third report on children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/2019/984).

Annex 39**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations**

We thank the French presidency for giving Member States an opportunity to present statements for this important debate on children and armed conflict. We also thank Belgium for its invaluable leadership of the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict.

Ireland aligns itself with the statement submitted by the observer of the European Union.

In what is already a year of important anniversaries for the United Nations, 2020 also marks 15 years since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which led to the creation of the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We thank the briefers — the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba de Potgieter; the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Henrietta Fore; and Mariam, representative of the National Children's Parliament of Mali — for their key insights and for shedding light on the current situation.

Too often, debates at the Security Council can feel detached from their impact on the ground, but the children and armed conflict agenda has catalysed enormous change in the lives of some of the world's most vulnerable. Since the introduction of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, over 155,000 children have been released by parties to conflict. The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, supported by Ireland, have made an important contribution to that progress. For our part, we will continue to advance our efforts to protect the most vulnerable, which include the initiative we are leading on strengthening the protection of civilians from humanitarian harm arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

However, much remains to be done. The recent Secretary General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) underscores just how prevalent grave violations against children remain, having verified over 25,000 cases in the past year. That is unacceptable, as are the 4,400 instances of humanitarian access to children being denied. More must be done to strengthen the monitoring and reporting mechanism, which could benefit from further transparency and robust evidence-collection systems. Accountability is essential to our efforts to foster compliance with international law. We must also guarantee child protection in humanitarian and conflict situations, ensure reintegration and uphold commitments to the children and armed conflict agenda.

Addressing the needs of children affected by armed conflict requires a holistic approach, combining the three pillars of the United Nations — human rights, peace and security, and development — to ensure support throughout childhood and adolescence. For that reason, we welcome the French presidency's focus on the empowerment of children through access to education, skills and livelihood opportunities. That is a priority for Ireland, as reflected in our development policy, A Better World.

A lack of access to education in armed conflict situations not only violates the rights of children but also limits their future opportunities. In conflict situations, education is often cast aside or, worse, is a target for warring parties. That furthers the cycle of poverty and vulnerability. We call on Member States to take concrete measures to deter the military use of schools by armed forces and groups, in line with the Safe Schools Declaration, which Ireland supports.

We must acknowledge that girls are at a particular disadvantage in such situations, as they are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys in countries affected by conflict, making them increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Those risks are being compounded by the coronavirus disease pandemic, with school-attending children, particularly girls, at an even greater risk of dropping out of school permanently.

Earlier this year, Ireland hosted two events on our Drive for Five initiative: a global call to action to ensure adolescent girls have access to safe, good quality education. We heard from numerous brave young voices who had escaped conflict situations to fulfil their educational aspirations. Similarly, we were especially pleased to listen and learn from the powerful words of our briefer Mariam. Young people deserve to be heard and engaged in peace and security. We know that, for children to flourish and to become the leaders and peacebuilders of tomorrow, an education is essential.

On 17 June, Ireland was elected as a member of the Security Council for the term 2021-2022. When we assume our seat on the Council next year, we will work to advance the children and armed conflict agenda, the achievement of peace and security, and the values of multilateralism.

Annex 40**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations**

Italy aligns itself with the statement by the Delegation of the European Union, as well as with the statement by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict and would like to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

We thank the presidency of the Security Council for organizing this debate at a challenging time for the protection of civilians in times of war, which exposes the most vulnerable in particular. Children continue to be disproportionately affected by gross violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, as the latest Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict shows (S/2020/525).

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further exacerbated the need to protect children living in emergency situations by strengthening international cooperation. Italy supports key global actors, such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, the Global Partnership for Education and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, whose action is crucial to ensure that no child is left behind. The Italian Development Cooperation Agency is consistently working in numerous countries around the globe to serve children's needs and provide them with comprehensive, good-quality services. In order to achieve long-lasting results for the protection of the rights of children, both during and after conflict, Italy made an open pledge on the occasion of the thirty-third International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, held in Geneva from 9 to 12 December 2019.

We are willing to further intensify our efforts, in particular by fostering children's access to education and health services and facilities and by guaranteeing that those facilities are protected and respected in accordance with international humanitarian law. Italy actively promotes references to this key issue in all relevant international documents and contributes to the global response through multilateral programmes and initiatives.

This year we celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of the monitoring and reporting mechanism through landmark resolution 1612 (2005). The mechanism and its related advocacy efforts have contributed to the release of more than 155,000 children from parties to conflict and to the signing of 32 action plans. As child protection advisers within peacekeeping missions play a key role in the framework of the monitoring and reporting mechanism, the relevant posts need to be duly staffed and budgeted.

Child protection is currently one of the main priorities of the United Nations peacekeeping architecture, and Italy strongly promotes its mainstreaming into the mandates of all United Nations peace operations. We welcome the practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict and the manual for child protection staff in United Nations peace operations. We encourage their broadest possible dissemination and full use in peace and mediation processes.

This year also marks the twentieth anniversary of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We encourage all Member States to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol with a view to achieving its universality.

Due to COVID-19, schools are being left empty or abandoned, which poses an increased risk of their becoming military targets or premises, as well as a major risk of exposing girls to violence, abuse and recruitment. In accordance with international humanitarian law, Italy considers it fundamental to protect and respect educational

facilities and personnel and condemns all armed attacks against them. We welcome the General Assembly's decision to establish 9 September as the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. We are working with determination to achieve the universal endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration, with a particular focus on gender-based implementation of the Declaration. Italy has endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers and is strongly convinced that children formerly recruited by armed groups should be treated primarily as victims, as stated in resolution 2427 (2015), which Italy co-sponsored.

Italy supports the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and strongly appreciates her campaign "Act to protect children affected by armed conflict", aimed at widening the reach of the previous "Children not Soldiers" campaign. We will continue to engage and advocate for the respect, protection and promotion of the rights of children, as they represent the backbone of our present and future societies.

Annex 41

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, Ishikane Kimihiro

I would like to begin by thanking France for convening this important meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for the report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525).

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the fifteenth anniversary of landmark resolution 1612 (2005), which instituted the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. Despite the Council's continued resolve, it is regrettable that children affected by armed conflict continue to experience grave violations and abuses. Japan urges all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with the obligations under international human rights law, international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is currently causing a serious human security crisis, spreading across borders and striking the most vulnerable segments of society, in particular children in armed conflict. Japan is alarmed at the lost opportunity for their education, the increased risk of their recruitment and use, and the further delay in their release. Japan strongly urges all parties to armed conflict to immediately respond to the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire and ensure safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access to children affected by conflict. In March, Japan provided \$28.8 million in emergency assistance through the United Nations Children's Fund to assist developing countries prone to the impact of COVID-19, including those affected by conflict, to improve children's access to quality health services. In April, Japan decided on an additional contribution of over \$68.1 million for UNICEF.

Human security implies that all individuals, in particular vulnerable people, including children, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their potential. Under prolonged crisis caused by armed conflict, children are deprived of all that.

As one of the largest contributing countries, Japan is cooperating with UNICEF to protect children who fled their homes in Syria and Myanmar. It is also working to enhance a child-friendly justice system and a gender-sensitive social welfare system in Yemen. Furthermore, as the largest donor to the humanitarian window of the Fund to End Violence against Children, Japan has provided substantial assistance for children affected by armed conflict in African countries. Over 1,900 children have been released from Boko Haram and military detention facilities, over 70,000 children and caregivers have received psychosocial support and over 42,600 have been given mine risk education. Japan calls upon other Member States to join in that endeavour.

Japan is determined to make every effort to achieve target 16.2 under the Sustainable Development Goals, namely, to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children and to realize human security for all children. Japan renews its unwavering commitment to the protection and promotion of children's rights and looks forward to working closely with the United Nations.

Annex 42**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kyrgyzstan, Mirgul Moldoisaeva**

First of all, let me express my gratitude to France for the invitation to today's open debate of the Security Council and to commend it for the placing this very timely and critical issue on the agenda during its presidency this month. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Henrietta Fore, for their very informative addresses. Let me thank the organizers of today's open debate for the opportunity to speak on the important topic of children and armed conflict.

Fifteen years ago, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1612 (2005), which established the United Nations-led monitoring and reporting mechanism to provide timely and reliable information on the recruitment and use of child soldiers in violation of applicable international law and on other violations and abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict. By adopting that important resolution, the Security Council made important progress towards ensuring that children caught in armed conflict are protected from violence and related threats to their security and well-being.

Today the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict play a vital and positive role in ending and preventing violations against children in situations of armed conflict. We strongly believe that the Security Council should continue to be actively engaged on issues related to children and armed conflict and to promote all possible measures fostering the protection of children affected by armed conflict.

The armed conflicts in different regions today increasingly cause pain and concern among the international community. In the unstable situations in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Gaza, Africa and Afghanistan, armed conflicts and terrorist attacks claim the lives of children every day. The advent and rapid spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on a global scale has had a severe impact on the protection of children in conflict-affected States. We note with deep concern the continued spread of the coronavirus pandemic in all regions of the world, which poses a great threat to children's health and safety. It is obvious that children in conflict-affected States pay the highest price in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Continuing armed conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic around the world highlight the need for timely and effective measures to protect children.

Unfortunately, according to the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525), education continues to be under attack in conflict situations. Millions of children in armed conflict lack access to education owing to attacks on schools. Education, as one of the critical needs of children affected by armed conflict and a vital element of reintegration programming for children formerly associated with armed forces or groups and their communities, must be prioritized by all United Nations Member States. It is obvious that all States need to take steps to achieve the full realization of the right to education for all children and to take all feasible measures to protect schools from attack. In that regard, we fully supported and became a co-sponsor of General Assembly resolution 74/275, on the International Day to Protect Education from Attack.

We strongly condemn all acts of violence against children. In that regard, Kyrgyzstan fully supports all initiatives of the international community to resolve conflicts and protect children. We ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict in 2003

and are considering adhering to other international documents highlighting the importance of child protection.

Kyrgyzstan strongly supports the efforts of all Member States, United Nations entities and other donors to support national institutions, United Nations agencies and civil society organizations working to implement the monitoring and reporting mechanism and other related child-protection activities. In that context, Kyrgyzstan is interested in active cooperation with the United Nations and all international partners in order to fulfil the requirements of all Security Council resolutions related to children and armed conflict.

Annex 43**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, Amal Mudallali**

Allow me at the outset to congratulate France on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month and to thank it for organizing this important and timely debate, at a time when the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to sweeping across the globe, severely impacting people, including children. I also would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, Henrietta Fore, for their comprehensive briefings, as well as for their leadership in their respective fields.

Lebanon is proud to have joined the statement supporting the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Lebanon, alongside 168 countries, signed the joint statement "Protect our Children" in response to the Secretary-General's call on countries to prioritize children's education, food, health and safety amid the pandemic. In the statement, we reiterated our firm commitment to leave no one behind and no child behind.

Lebanon believes that children should be allowed to be children and should never be recruited in conflicts or used as soldiers, because they are not soldiers and should never be exploited as such. Accordingly, Lebanon has been working on concrete steps to build a better, safer and more secure future for children. In this respect, let me underline that the Higher Council for Children, a governmental institution under the Ministry of Social Affairs of Lebanon, is currently working on updating and streamlining the national action plan to prevent and protect children associated with armed violence in Lebanon. The action plan was adopted in 2014 in the light of the Secretary-General's latest annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2014/339). Since the solution to that problem should be comprehensive in its approach, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Higher Council for Children have been cooperating with international partners, including UNICEF, and the relevant ministries and institutions — the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, the Lebanese Armed Forces, the internal security forces and the General Directorate of General Security. The plan aims at providing a legal review that will lead to the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which Lebanon signed in 2002. It will also establish coordination, awareness-raising and capacity-building mechanisms and will propose rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

In parallel, the Higher Council for Children, in partnership with various stakeholders and civil society organizations, is carrying out a number of activities with the aim of raising awareness and disseminating information about the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Furthermore, Lebanon is working towards the adoption of national strategies on counter-terrorism and cybersecurity, which will encompass online recruitment. The General Directorate of General Security has launched several awareness campaigns to educate people, and children in particular, on how to protect themselves against online recruitment attempts by terrorist groups.

With regard to the situation of militants inside Palestinian camps in general and children in particular, the Lebanese army prioritizes the humanitarian situation, as well as the interests of civilians and children, and focuses on spreading awareness and providing facilities to governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organizations working in the camps and in the field.

I thank the President again for organizing this important debate and assure him of Lebanon's firm commitment to do more and to work with our partners, especially the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to further advance the children and armed conflict agenda.

Annex 44

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations, Christian Wenaweser

Only a few weeks ago, we celebrated the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration — a political commitment to protect students, teachers and educational facilities from the worst effects of armed conflict. The current global situation illustrates that the Declaration is as relevant today as it was five years ago. The United Nations verified almost 500 attacks on schools in 2019, many of which were unprovoked. Schools continue to be used for military purposes, thus eroding their sanctity as safe spaces and exposing schools, teachers and students to attack. Such attacks violate the right to education and often constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Depriving children of access to education also has a devastating impact on sustainable development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 4, and inflicts irreparable long-term damage on children, families, communities and societies. It is therefore vital to ensure inclusive, equitable and good quality education for girls and boys at all times. It is also important to put children's voices first, to listen to them as advocates and agents of change and to empower them when they experience violations of their rights.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure gives children that voice. It is a reflection of the true spirit of the Convention and is in the best interests of the child. Liechtenstein has been among the few States to ratify the Optional Protocol, and we hope that many others will join us.

For many children in situations of armed conflict, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further deteriorated their already challenging and devastating reality. It has exacerbated the risk of exploitation and violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including human trafficking and modern slavery. Quarantine, curfews and other restrictions on movement are weakening protection mechanisms and heightening risks of domestic and sexual violence for women and girls, as well as men and boys, in crisis-affected communities. Its socioeconomic effects increase the vulnerability of children to recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups, child labour and sexual exploitation and abuse. The Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire is an opportune moment to put armed conflict on lockdown and to focus together on the fight against COVID-19 and on protecting the most vulnerable.

Liechtenstein remains deeply concerned at the high occurrence of rape and other forms of sexual violence against children. Such violence is often underreported owing to the fear of stigmatization and cultural taboos, in particular when perpetrated against boys, as also documented by the All Survivors Project. A culture of silence continues to impede accountability and justice and contributes to further cycles of violence and persistent harmful gender stereotypes.

We reiterate our strong support for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to shed more light on marginalized victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, in line with resolution 2467 (2019). Upholding the security, privacy and confidentiality of survivors and witnesses is key, as are ethical considerations in documenting and verifying information of child survivors of sexual violence. In the light of the pandemic, it is all the more important to prioritize the development and remote roll-out of gender-specific training tools to conduct the safe and ethical documentation of cases of conflict-related sexual violence against girls and boys. With global

guidelines for reporting to the monitoring and reporting mechanism unaltered, it is vital that monitoring staff be urgently trained to explore options for remote verification of incidents of violence.

While we acknowledge the challenges the Special Representative's mandate is currently facing, we reiterate that the protection of the Office's independence and integrity is crucial to its effectiveness and credibility, which also includes the objective, consistent and transparent practice of listing parties that have committed grave violations against children, as well as those that have or have not put in place measures during the reporting period to improve the protection of children.

Annex 45**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the United Nations**

[Original: French]

Luxembourg aligns itself with the statements submitted by the Delegation of the European Union and on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We thank France for organizing today's open debate, and the briefers for their statements and priceless work. We congratulate Belgium on its commitment as Chair of the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict.

Fifteen years ago, resolution 1612 (2005) set important benchmarks by establishing both the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict and the monitoring and reporting mechanism. Through the mechanism and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's commitment, undeniable progress has been made. Nevertheless, the current trend is worrisome. Over 25,000 serious violations against children were recorded in 2019. The coronavirus disease pandemic is likely to worsen that trend, as children suffer the most from the impact of denial of access to humanitarian assistance.

Regarding the annexes to the annual report, Luxembourg is concerned at the premature removal from the lists of the Saudi coalition and the Tatmadaw. In relation to the former, 222 cases of murder and mutilation of children have been recorded, while 205 cases of violations have been recorded in connection with the latter. Accordingly, we join the others who have requested an independent assessment of the basis on which the addition and removal of entities are decided.

Education remains under attack, with schools being destroyed or closed, teachers threatened or killed, sometimes in front of their students, and many children denied access to education. The Sahel region has seen a significant rise in such attacks. Over 3,300 schools have been closed, thus affecting nearly 650,000 children. Luxembourg notes that Burkina Faso and Cameroon have been added to the list of situations of concern.

In West Africa, Luxembourg's cooperation agency has set education and vocational training as its priority, providing particular support to a funding system for training and specialization. Education is an essential element that makes children less vulnerable to forced recruitment.

In this twentieth anniversary year of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, Luxembourg reiterates its full support to the mandate of Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter and will continue to provide support to her office in Brussels. The Special Representative's work and recommendations must be taken into account, especially in the planning and formulation of peacekeeping mandates. It would be appropriate for the Special Representative to be invited more systematically to brief the Security Council on specific geographic situations.

Luxembourg has endorsed the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, and encourages all Member States to do the same.

Annex 46**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations**

Malta thanks the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing this important open debate on children and armed conflict.

Malta fully aligns itself with the statements submitted by the European Union and on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

Malta is pleased to note that progress has been made since the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, 20 years ago, and of resolution 1612 (2005), 15 years ago. However, we remain gravely concerned that children continue to be subjected to multiple forms of intersectional risks and vulnerabilities. The coronavirus disease pandemic has only heightened the gravity of the situation, and Malta avails itself of this opportunity to once again reiterate its support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire.

Malta thanks the Secretary-General for his report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525). It is shocking that the United Nations has verified 25,000 grave violations against children and 7,747 instances of recruitment of children. We stress that the killing, maiming, torture and rape of children are completely unacceptable, and the fact that such cases are happening all around the globe further underscores the need for collective action.

We strongly condemn all attacks on schools and hospitals, which are in complete violation of international humanitarian law and show the utmost contempt for human life. Accountability, especially in such cases, is of crucial importance, as those crimes cannot go unpunished. In that connection, Malta also highlights the role of international mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court.

We are proud to have co-sponsored the General Assembly resolution establishing 9 September as the International Day to Protect Education from Attack (resolution 74/275), as we stand convinced that education is not only an investment in the future of individual children but also an investment in society and international peace.

Malta joins Special Representative Gamba de Potgieter in urging the inclusion of child protection provisions, such as securing the release of all children associated with parties to conflict, prioritizing their reintegration and immediately ending their recruitment and abuse. In that connection, we would like to underline the psychological impact that conflict has on children and the need to make sure that the mental consequences of conflict are duly addressed. It is crucial that we do not give up on children who have been involved with armed groups and exposed to extremist ideologies.

Annex 47**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

Mexico thanks France for convening this open debate and recognizes the work of Belgium as Chair of the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report on the issue (S/2020/525).

This open debate is taking place as part of the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict, and the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We welcome the recent accessions of the Gambia and Myanmar to the Optional Protocol and call on all States that have yet to do so to consider ratifying that instrument.

We recognize that, since the establishment of the mechanism, significant progress has been made in releasing minors from armed groups and adopting action plans and specific recommendations, as well as that the Working Group has conducted field visits. Those achievements are the result of the effective work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, who has also placed special emphasis on the urgent need to finance sustainable and comprehensive reintegration programmes with a gender focus.

During its most recent participation in the Security Council, Mexico chaired the Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict and led the Working Group's first field visit to a country on its agenda, namely, Nepal. The well-being of children remains of the highest priority for Mexico; accordingly, during our next term as an elected member of the Council, we will continue to promote initiatives that prevent their suffering.

We welcome the presidential statement, adopted in February, which incorporates the protection of minors across relevant activities in the areas of conflict prevention and sustainable peace (S/PRST/2020/3), as well as the practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict.

The Secretary-General's recent report describes the challenges in implementing the children and armed conflict agenda. The recording of over 25,000 serious violations against children in 19 situations is particularly dramatic. The number of recorded violations against children — murder, mutilation, recruitment and use of child soldiers, kidnapping and sexual violence, which disproportionately affects girls, continues to be used as a weapon of war and, because it is taboo, discourages victims from speaking out — is abhorrent. The fact that nearly 7,500 children, including some as young as 6 years old, have been recruited and used by armed groups warrants unequivocal condemnation. Moreover, justice mechanisms must be strengthened so that such crimes do not go unpunished. Victim assistance mechanisms must also be strengthened so that they may cope with the serious physical and emotional toll of those atrocities.

Mexico is concerned at the growing number of incidents of denial of humanitarian assistance, particularly by non-State actors, where minors have been affected, and at the persistent attacks on schools and hospitals by the various parties to conflict. All such actions constitute serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, which are unacceptable and abominable and must not remain unpunished.

Regarding our hemisphere, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report, we acknowledge the decrease in cases of recruitment in Colombia, as well as the policies adopted towards the end of 2019 by that country's Presidential Council for Human Rights to prevent the recruitment and use of children and sexual violence against children. However, we note with concern that some armed groups, such as the Ejército de Liberación Nacional and dissident groups of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, continue to recruit children. This must stop immediately.

In the light of the coronavirus disease pandemic, there is a need to pay greater attention to the impact of the pandemic on child soldier reintegration programmes, which have been suspended, partly because of a lack of access to health services. It is vital to provide the necessary psychosocial support needed by children who are removed from the ranks of armed groups. Those are essential services that should not be interrupted. Universal health coverage cannot leave behind children affected by armed conflict.

In Mexico's view, it is fundamental that human beings, especially children, are put at the centre of our policies. The needs and aspirations of youth have a common denominator: education. Unfortunately, that right remains one of the main casualties of armed conflict. The United Nations should redouble its efforts to ensure that education, as both a prevention and reintegration tool, can be accessed.

Therefore, we call for the relevant parties to: implement and observe international humanitarian law and human rights law, especially child protection laws, and strengthen accountability for all violations of serious violations against children; promote measures to ensure safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access with a view to facilitating humanitarian assistance and child protection services; enhance support to the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict, which is necessary in order to continue ascertaining that the applicable legal framework is used effectively on the ground — we underscore the efforts to document cases of release, recruitment and reintegration, while recognizing that improvements are needed in the areas of training, disaggregated data and statistics; and strengthen peacekeeping mandates through child protection advisers and support reintegration programmes with a gender focus that also envisage mental health and psychosocial support. Without comprehensive programmes, stigmatization can have serious consequences on the development of children, including their recruitment.

As a member of the Security Council for the period 2021-2022, Mexico will spare no effort to continue moving forward this priority agenda.

Annex 48

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Morocco to the United Nations

My delegation would like to thank the French presidency of the Security Council for the month of June 2020 for organizing today's open Security Council video-teleconference on a very important question — children and armed conflict — as we are celebrating this year the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, for their comprehensive and enlightening insights.

Twenty years ago, the world committed to taking action on combating the use of children in armed conflict. The adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict was a milestone that contributed to the release of more than 145,000 boys and girls from armed groups and the prevention of the recruitment and use of millions of children around the world. For two decades, tangible progress has been made in the protection of children in situations of armed conflict, notably with the adoption of international standards for the protection of children and the implementation of strategies and programs to protect war-affected children.

However, children continue to be the primary victims of conflict. The last few years have unfortunately been marked by an alarming recurrence and intensification of conflicts with devastating effects on civil populations, including children. With the proliferation of conflicts, we no longer count the situations where children are recruited and exploited by armed groups. Several statistics are presented, but, in fact, no one knows the real number of children victims of war. Even if they have been released after being abducted, many have experienced horrific scenes during their detention that have been traumatic for their psychological development. How can we expect them to be able to overcome their suffering and start their lives over? These children need our support as a priority.

The international community would benefit from a global, comprehensive, strategic and coordinated approach to this challenge consisting of concrete and immediate actions that not only tackle the ongoing situations of armed conflicts, but also emphasize the prevention aspect. At the same time, the approach should be pragmatic, combining both incentive and deterrent measures, particularly in terms of accountability and the fight against impunity.

The Kingdom of Morocco condemns in the strongest terms all forms of violence against children, their abduction by armed groups, their use as human shields or as hostages, and their recruitment in refugee camps. Morocco has assiduously joined international efforts to end the involvement of children in armed conflict. It has acceded to all the international instruments relating to the rights of the child and was among the first countries to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, also known as the Paris Principles.

As part of the extension of its commitments to protecting the rights of children wherever they are, the Kingdom of Morocco endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, the Safe Schools Declaration and other instruments highlighting the importance of child protection for a range of related issues. The Kingdom of Morocco thanks Ms. Virginia Gamba for presenting the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) and welcomes the removal of the Coalition

to Support Legitimacy in Yemen from the list of groups violating children's rights annexed to the report.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Morocco condemns in the strongest terms all forms of violence against children, in all contexts and under all circumstances, including in armed conflicts. The importance that my country attaches to the rights of the child at the international level is manifest, in particular, in its presidency of the UNICEF Executive Board in 2019 and its vice-presidency of the Board this year. I take this opportunity to reiterate to Ms. Fore and UNICEF our great appreciation for the remarkable work that she and her staff are doing and for their selflessness in promoting the well-being of all children around the world, despite the difficulties, with the ultimate objective of leaving no child behind.

Annex 49

Statement by Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations, Hau Do Suan

My delegation welcomes the delisting of the Tatmadaw — the Myanmar Armed Forces — from the violation of recruitment and use of children, which is mentioned in this year's annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525). We thank the Secretary-General for giving due recognition of Myanmar's commitment to and efforts aimed at ending violations against children. We shall continue to work relentlessly to fulfil our strong commitment to ending all violations against children and building a safe and bright future for them.

Over the past eight years, Myanmar has taken many steps to prevent and end recruitment and use of children. One significant action was the recent ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, following, in July 2019, the enactment of a new Child Rights Law. It demonstrates our commitment to aligning our national policies and regulations with the Convention.

The new Child Rights Law prohibits all forms of violence against children as well as the recruitment of persons under the age of 18. The Law provides stronger legal protection for children affected by armed conflict and criminalizes the six grave violations against children. In January 2019, the Government established an interministerial committee for the prevention of the six grave violations during armed conflict.

Since 2012, over 1,000 child soldiers have been released and reintegrated into their communities. The Government provides each former child soldier with one-time financial assistance as well as educational and livelihood support to help them reintegrate into society.

In collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to end forced labour, the Government has established a complaint mechanism to prevent underage recruitment for military service. Recently, in June this year, Myanmar ratified the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973. In line with the Joint Action Plan, the Tatmadaw issued three command orders prohibiting recruitment and use of minors in 2019. It also issued a command order on rules of engagement in 2017.

With regard to the grave violations, the Government has adopted a national action plan on the prevention of killing, maiming, and sexual violence against children in armed conflict. As part of the action plan, the Government will soon be launching nationwide awareness-raising activities. The country task force on monitoring and reporting will be able to play an important role to provide technical assistance in the implementation of the national action plan.

Despite tremendous challenges posed by increased armed clashes in Rakhine state, the Government has scaled up its efforts to grant humanitarian access to displaced people, especially women and children. The World Food Programme and the International Committee of the Red Cross have been granted permission to provide food and emergency items to affected people in Rakhine state and southern parts of Chin state. The Government's response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic adheres to the principle of leaving no one behind.

Myanmar welcomes the policy brief entitled *The Impact of COVID-19 on children*. My delegation also supported the joint statement in response to the Secretary-General's call on countries to prioritize children's safety, education amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the devastating effects of the pandemic on vulnerable people, especially children, Myanmar has reinforced domestic preventive

mechanisms and enhanced cooperation with international partners, including the United Nations.

On 9 May, in response to the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire, the Tatmadaw announced a three-month nationwide unilateral ceasefire to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The unilateral ceasefire will be applied to all areas except where terrorist groups have taken positions.

The Government is also supporting and encouraging engagement between the country task force for monitoring and reporting and the armed ethnic groups signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) to prevent recruitment and use of children. Efforts are being made to find a lasting solution to the ongoing armed conflict through political means. During the third session of the Union Peace Conference — the 21st Century Panglong Conference — an article prohibiting the six grave violations was adopted as part of the NCA.

I thank Special Representative Gamba and her Office, UNICEF and the United Nations country team for their commendable efforts and crucial contributions in the successful implementation of the joint action plan. We also appreciate the work of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, with which we will continue to cooperate. We are committed to maintaining and further strengthening the existing mutual understanding, trust and cooperation between Myanmar and the United Nations in our common efforts aimed at ending in the near future all grave violations against children.

Annex 50

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Namibia to the United Nations, Neville Gertze

I congratulate France on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June 2020 and thank the President of the Council for organizing this important annual open debate on children and armed conflict.

I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Executive Director of UNICEF, as well as the civil society representative, for their insightful briefings. I further thank the Secretary-General for his annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525).

As we mark 15 years since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the United Nations-led monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, it is important to recognize the progress that has been made in this field since 2005. Tangible results have been achieved to prevent violations against children in situations of armed conflict: 32 action plans have been signed, more than 155,000 children have been released from parties to conflict, and 12 armed forces and groups have been removed from the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General through the implementation and completion of such action plans. The Security Council Working Group has also conducted essential work, notably in the adoption of over 60 country-specific recommendations on children and armed conflict.

Nevertheless, despite this progress and the existence of relevant legal norms around the world, grave violations against children in conflicts continue unabated. As outlined in the latest report of the Secretary-General, in 2019, the United Nations verified over 25,000 grave violations against children in 19 conflicts. Some 7,747 children were verified as having been recruited and used, mostly by non-State actors. Some 10,173 children were verified as having been killed and maimed.

The report of the Secretary-General further highlights 735 verified cases of rape or other forms of sexual violence committed against children. The Secretary-General warns that these crimes are vastly underreported. In this regard, we reiterate our support and commitment to the various Security Council resolutions adopted under the women and peace and security agenda, including, most recently, resolution 2467 (2019), which, *inter alia*, encourages Member States to ensure that prevention of and responses to sexual violence in conflict is non-discriminatory and specific and respects the rights and prioritizes the needs of survivors, including vulnerable or targeted groups.

I take this opportunity to remind States Members of the United Nations of the importance of accountability for all crimes committed against children. As the report of the Secretary-General warns,

“[t]he lack of protection, of holistic services for survivors and of accountability mechanisms disincentivize survivors, their families and witnesses from reporting violations” (S/2020/525, *para. 10*).

As an international community, we must do far better in this domain.

Namibia also wishes to highlight the increase in attacks against schools. As the concept note prepared by France highlights,

“[a]ccess to safe, quality education is one of the critical needs of children affected by armed conflict. It is fundamental both to children’s well-being and to the fulfilment of their most basic rights”.

Attacks against schools, and therefore their closure, are fertile ground for the forced recruitment of young people by armed groups. The impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic on schools and students cannot be underestimated either.

Many of the parties listed in the annex to the Secretary-General's report for not having put in place measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period are from the African continent. As part of the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 and its ten-year implementation plans, the Heads of State and Government decided in the AU's Fiftieth Anniversary Solemn Declaration, dated 26 May 2013, "not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans" and therefore to silence the guns by 2020 through the African Union Master Road Map of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020. As the aforementioned numbers demonstrate, ensuring the silencing of the guns on the African continent is essential, most notably to protect children and future generations of the continent. Namibia takes this opportunity to acknowledge and welcome the parties that have put in place during the reporting period measures aimed at improving the protection of children, notably the State actors from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and South Sudan.

This year also marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Namibia ratified this all-encompassing, vital Optional Protocol in 2002. Namibia has taken other important steps to ensure the protection of children in armed conflict. In August 1999, under the Namibian presidency of the Security Council, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 1261 (1999) — the first resolution of the Council on the targeting of children in armed conflict, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers (see S/PV.4037).

Furthermore, article 15 of the 1990 Namibian Constitution enshrines children's rights. In particular, article 15.2 notes that

“[c]hildren are entitled to be protected from economic exploitation and shall not be employed in or required to perform work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their education, or to be harmful to their health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development”.

Namibia has also finalized the operationalization of the Child Care and Protection Act 3 of 2015 to further give effect to the rights of children as contained in the Namibian Constitution and international agreements binding on Namibia.

In conclusion, I wish to underscore that ensuring the protection of the lives and futures of children affected by armed conflict is not only the right thing to do, but it is also in the interests of all. Children represent the future. We must ensure that they are protected.

Annex 51**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations, Amrit Bahadur Rai**

I wish to begin by congratulating France on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June. I welcome the convening of this high-level video-teleconference on children and armed conflict.

I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, for presenting the report of the Secretary-General on the topic before us (S/2020/525). We also extend our thanks to Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, and the civil society representative for their briefings.

Children are among the most vulnerable population groups in conflicts and crises. Because of the profound effects of conflicts and crises on their physical and mental well-being, they may easily become victims. During conflicts, they may be killed, maimed, sexually abused, abducted or even recruited as child soldiers. Furthermore, they may be denied their rights to education and health and access to humanitarian support.

The report of the Secretary-General highlights that in 2019 there were over 25,000 cases of grave violations against children. It underlines the serious concerns about the violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

During such crises as the coronavirus disease pandemic, children are disproportionately affected. They bear unfathomable losses due to disruptions in education systems and other socioeconomic impacts. Such impacts have long-lasting effects not only on the lives of this generation but also on future generations.

Nepal stresses the need for adequate resources and international cooperation for protecting children and ensuring them better lives, education and well-being. Children should be protected during both conflicts and crises alike. They are an important pillar of all peaceful and prosperous societies.

Nepal has always supported international efforts aimed at ending the involvement of children in armed conflict. It is party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to the Paris Principles and Commitments on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. Nepal also welcomes the “Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict”, launched by the Secretary-General on 12 February 2020.

Nepal’s Children’s Act (2018) has ensured all rights for children, requires the State to make necessary arrangements for their basic needs and includes the maintenance, protection, health and education of children in need of special protection. The Act also guarantees that no child shall be deployed in the army, the police or in any armed group, or be used for armed conflict or political purpose directly or indirectly. It prohibits an attack on or hindrance to the operation and management of any school, including the place, services or facilities of schools, which are always to be used for the best interests of children, without excuse during times of armed conflict or in any adverse situation whatsoever.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the importance of providing children with education, skills and livelihood opportunities in order to help them build a dignified life. This is also crucial for the success of peacebuilding and prevention efforts as well as for ensuring a peaceful today and tomorrow.

Annex 52**Statement by the High-level Focal Point for Children and Armed Conflict and the Head of Human Security of NATO, Clare Hutchinson**

I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to address this body on the occasion of today's open debate on children and armed conflict.

I would first like to acknowledge the considerable and impactful work that the Security Council has done over the years through its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, and to note that much has been achieved.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has long recognized the fact that protecting children in armed conflict is an important aspect of any comprehensive strategy to resolve conflict and a key component of durable peace and security. NATO has mainstreamed child protection into its work since the 2012 NATO summit, held in Chicago, with a view towards practical, field-oriented measures to address conflict-related violations against children. This approach was given concrete structure with the adoption by the North Atlantic Council of the Protection of Children in Armed Conflict — the Way Forward policy in 2015, and was reaffirmed by the Alliance in its most recent summit, in Brussels in 2018. NATO is also considering avenues to strengthen its policy framework on children and armed conflict in the near future, in the light of lessons learned.

However, a key measure of any successful policy is its impact on the ground in places where children are in harm's way. Crucial to impactful action to protect conflict-affected children are both awareness by our own forces and experts, on the one hand, and the full integration of child protection in our work with partners, on the other hand. Together with the United Nations, we have developed practical, field-oriented measures to address conflict-related violations against children, including adopting standard operating procedures for monitoring the six grave violations and an updated training package for our troops on children and armed conflict, which should be released shortly.

In Afghanistan, NATO's Resolute Support Mission, a non-combat mission, is established to train, advise and assist the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. The Mission continues to prioritize child-protection principles in its training and capacity-building and played an active part in the development of the 2017 Afghan National Army child-protection policy. Since 2016, a senior child protection adviser in place in our Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan has undertaken policy advocacy with all Afghan security forces, ensuring that child protection is addressed. NATO officials continue to raise the issue of the protection of children in their political and military engagements with senior officials.

While we are proud of what we have achieved, there is still much to do. We continue to reach out to the Afghan security forces and our United Nations and non-governmental organization partners to ensure that training and policy goals to better protect children are maintained and deepened and to reinforce our political commitment.

Fifteen years ago this month, also under a French presidency of the Security Council, the world stood up and adopted resolution 1612 (2005), making a choice to protect conflict-affected children around the world not just in statements but in concrete action (see S/PV.5235). NATO stands with the entire international community in recognizing that we all have a collective responsibility in guaranteeing that all children everywhere are protected, not only in word but also in deed.

Annex 53

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, Mona Juul

The Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Norway — are deeply concerned about the continued increase in verified violations and abuses against children, including the denial of humanitarian access. This trend can and must be reversed.

First and foremost, parties to conflict must respect international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. Violations and abuses against children during armed conflict have immediate and long-term negative impacts not only on children themselves but also on their communities and societies. Equally, protecting children and upholding their rights in situations of armed conflict contributes to conflict prevention and peacebuilding by supporting successful reconciliation, reintegration and development.

Education is a human right that is guaranteed in international human rights law. It is fundamental for human, social and economic development and a key element to achieving lasting peace and sustainable development. Continued access to safe education can help protect children and youth from the impacts of armed conflict. We must all do more to provide and protect education in emergencies, protracted crises and conflict, with a special emphasis on girls' access to education.

The Safe Schools Declaration is an important protection tool in this context, with its primary objective of preventing the military use of schools and stopping attacks on schools during armed conflicts. As we celebrate its fifth anniversary, we are pleased that 104 States have so far endorsed the Declaration. We welcome the concrete steps endorsing States are taking to implement the Safe Schools Declaration, and we encourage all States to join and implement it.

The Nordic countries also remain particularly concerned about the continued silence and stigma related to sexual and gender-based violence. We must speak openly and frankly about these terrible crimes and their impacts if we are to truly combat and prevent them. To this end, at the international conference on ending sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises held in Oslo last year, States made significant pledges for increased funding and renewed action. We urge all States and organizations to translate these commitments into action.

We must also recommit to ensuring the successful reintegration of children formerly associated with armed or violent groups. This is not only in the best interests of the child but also an important contribution to building sustainable and peaceful societies. The human rights of children formerly associated with armed or violent groups must be fully respected, in line with international law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Resolution 2427 (2018) also provides an important framework, as it stresses accountability for all violations and abuses against children, not just the gravest crimes. As such, the resolution represents a new standard for the prevention of human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. It is now up to all of us to translate this resolution into reality.

Children involved in armed conflict need not only comprehensive support, care and protection, but also justice. Securing accountability for conflict-related crimes involving children is of the utmost importance, and we would like to recognize the important work of the Justice Rapid Response initiative, which is a global facility that provides rapidly deployable specialized justice experts, and thank these experts for their efforts.

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) and wish to highlight the importance we attach to a transparent process that ensures all relevant States and parties to conflict are included in the report and its annexes. In addition, we highlight that the mere signing of an action plan should not form the basis for a delisting in the Secretary-General's report.

We reiterate our strong support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Gamba de Potgieter, who plays an essential role at the global, regional and national levels by advocating children's protection and the rights of the child and providing practical guidance, in particular the "Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict", which was launched by the Office of the Special Representative in February 2020, with the support of Sweden and Belgium.

This issue has remained on our agenda for far too long. Parties to conflict and the international community can and must do more to protect the increasing number of children and young people affected by armed conflict and to ensure that they be included in peacebuilding and development processes. The Nordic countries again urge all States Members of the United Nations to ensure that children in armed conflict get the attention, protection and respect for their human rights to which they are entitled.

Annex 54

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations

We thank the Permanent Mission of France for convening today's very important Security Council open debate via video-teleconference on the issue of children and armed conflict. We also thank Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, and the civil society representative for their insightful briefings.

In the last few decades, particularly after the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) and the Secretary-General's effective outreach efforts, a comprehensive normative framework has been developed in protecting children's rights. As a result, the theme of children and armed conflict has been mainstreamed into the Security Council's work. The work done by the Special Representative and regular monitoring, reporting and action plans have all helped. Yet a lot more still needs to be done. Despite progress, violations and abuses of international law affecting children are rampant, and this disturbing trend shows no signs of abating.

The facts revealed in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525) are stark. Children remain at the front line of armed conflicts around the world. The tragedy of children being used and abused in, for and by armed conflicts continues unabated, as the United Nations has verified that over 25,000 such grave violations took place last year alone. Moreover, the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic has further exacerbated difficulties in the protection of children affected by armed conflicts, with humanitarian agencies finding it difficult to conduct their work safely. Unfortunately, the scale and intensity of today's conflicts are stretching our capacity to protect children. Particularly in situations of foreign occupation and alien domination, we are witnessing the worst form of atrocities against children.

Nowhere is this grim reality starker than in today's Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir. In this regard, I wish to draw the Council's attention to the latest report of the Secretary General, which has expressed deep concerns about the continued use of torture, pellet guns and illegal detention against children in occupied Jammu and Kashmir by the Indian security forces.

The Secretary-General's report also raises alarm on the

"the [illegal] detention of [Kashmiri] children, including their arrest during night raids, internment at army camps, torture in detention and detention without charge or due process" (S/2020/525, *para. 204*).

Accordingly, the report cites in particular 68 verified instances where children between the ages of 9 and 17 were detained by Indian security services in Jammu and Kashmir on national-security-related charges. In view of these serious concerns, the Secretary-General has urged the Indian Government to immediately end such practices and take preventive measures to protect children, including by ending the use of pellets against children.

We are not surprised by the findings in the Secretary-General's report. Over the past 70 years, succeeding generations of Kashmiri children have suffered the brutality of the occupying Indian forces. In the wake of India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August 2019, these atrocities have been redoubled. Even after 10 months, the Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir remains under a digital and physical lockdown. Harrowing and spine-chilling stories abound — of widespread torture and arbitrary arrests and of how thousands of people, including children, have been removed from their homes by occupation forces in the dead of the night, taken away

without a trace. Some have even been extrajudicially killed in so-called cordon-and-search operations and fake encounters. The worsening situation and increased attacks against children in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir as reported in the Secretary-General's report calls for the Security Council's intervention in the form of holding India accountable for its clear grave breaches of international humanitarian law and war crimes in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

Pakistan fully supports the mandate of the Special Representative, which is adequate for dealing with situations of armed conflict. While the mandate does not need accretion, we would like to see the political consensus around it strengthened. We firmly believe that the legal parameters of the mandate established by Security Council resolutions must be respected. Our singular focus should remain on situations of armed conflict. In this context, we wish to state for the record that the references in the report of the Secretary-General to certain situations in Pakistan are not within the purview of the mandate established to address children and armed conflict. We hope that this principle will be kept in mind in the preparation of future reports.

Annex 55**Statement by the Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations**

The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) reflects the tragic reality of children around the world who, living in situations of armed conflict, continue to be subjected to shocking human rights violations and abuses and to violations of international humanitarian law. Despite strong laws in place, implementation and accountability remain largely absent. As a result, the number of children who are at risk of being killed, maimed, recruited, subject to sexual violence or abductions, and of suffering from attacks on schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian access continues to rise.

This same lack of implementation and absence of accountability has caused exponentially growing suffering for generations of Palestinian children living under Israeli occupation in the occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem. Tragically, the situation of Palestinian children is very relevant as we discuss the importance of the monitoring and reporting mechanism established by the Security Council in 2005 pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005), for its purpose was not only to gather and document evidence on the six grave violations but also to provide a mechanism for accountability. Unfortunately, despite the creation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and Member States' support for it, and despite continual reports of grave violations against Palestinian children by Israel, the occupying Power, the children and armed conflict framework has grossly failed to foster accountability or the compliance by the Israeli occupying forces with international child-protection standards.

Unquestionably, the international community's unwillingness to enforce international law when it comes to Israel has only fuelled and emboldened its lawlessness and the culture of impunity in the Government and the occupying forces. We reiterate that, according to the established criteria and the thorough documentation available to the Security Council, the perpetration of such violations and crimes warrants that Israel, its army and its settlers be put on the list of parties that commit grave violations against children.

The absence of such inclusion has not only perpetuated an environment of impunity leading to the loss of more Palestinian children's lives, but it has also undermined the credibility of the list, exposing it to the criticism of politicization. Similar criticism can be lodged against the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. In the section on Israel and the State of Palestine, the report continues to blatantly ignore the prevailing context of military occupation. We continue to appeal to the Secretary-General and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to rectify this omission in future reports.

The State of Palestine will continue to exert all efforts aimed at protecting Palestinian children as we wait for the international community, including the Security Council, to finally carry out its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, respect the relevant United Nations resolutions and muster the political will to act immediately and without selectivity in order to stop precluding the protection of Palestinian children under Israeli occupation. This starts and ends with holding Israel accountable.

Annex 56**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

We would like to thank the French Presidency for convening today's open debate. We welcome the valuable briefings by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore, and the representative of civil society.

Peru wishes to highlight its commitment to the children and armed conflict agenda. Children are one of the most vulnerable segments of the population because of their defencelessness and dependence, both of which greatly increase during armed conflicts. Accordingly, we condemn all forms of violence against children, including physical and psychological violence.

We wish to highlight the anniversary of several important milestones in this agenda: the twentieth anniversary of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict; the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which created the monitoring and reporting mechanism and established the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict; and the fifth anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration. These and all other instruments aimed at protecting children in armed conflict demonstrate the international community's interest in the problem.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, we cannot but express great concern about the recurrence of new cases of grave violations of children's rights every year. We note with concern that the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525) once again describes an increase in the number of such violations, by both State and non-State actors. We also wish to express great concern about cases of sexual violence, sexual slavery and forced marriage, which continue to be used as a tactic of war and which disproportionately affects girls.

As part of the general civilian population, children are subjects of international law and are entitled to minimum standards of protection under humanitarian law. Furthermore, they also enjoy rights pursuant to specific human rights instruments. In that context, we would like to highlight Common Article 1 of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, on the obligation to respect and ensure respect for the Conventions' provisions. It is therefore incumbent on the Security Council, and on all States Members of the United Nations, to make a greater commitment to implementing urgent and effective measures to reverse the trend towards increased violations and ensure the due protection of all children during armed conflicts, in accordance with the obligations established under international law.

Emphasis should be placed on preventive measures to stop the statistics from continuing to rise, on rehabilitation actions to help the recovery of victims of these grave violations and ensure their future, and on corrective measures involving exemplary sanctions against the perpetrators to prevent these situations from recurring. Peru agrees with the Secretary-General's call to all actors involved — listed and unlisted — to take all the necessary and effective measures to end and prevent the grave violations described in the report.

The serious effects of the coronavirus disease pandemic throughout the world should lead us to reflect on the importance of complying with the obligations of international humanitarian law, which guarantees the immunity of civilian infrastructure, especially schools and hospitals. Our vulnerability to the impacts

of disease and climate change should lead us to strengthen the protection of this infrastructure and ensure that the provision of services is not disrupted. If we do not ensure this, societies affected by armed conflict risk dangerously reversing their development and pushing their populations into conflict, thereby creating a threat to international peace and security. In this regard, Peru resolutely supports the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire to help contain the coronavirus.

We welcome the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict aimed at making progress on the children and armed conflict agenda. We also stress the priority that the Secretary-General attaches to this issue as a vital element in building sustainable peace.

Finally, in the framework of its firm commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Peru will continue to work constructively in favour of the children and armed conflict agenda, in order to ensure their well-being and guarantee the exercise of their fundamental rights.

Annex 57

Statement by the Chargée d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Philippines to the United Nations, Kira Christianne Danganan Azucena

The Philippines commends the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's timely debate on a very important agenda item. Indeed, resolution 1612 (2005) may be considered a true United Nations success story for bringing about important breakthroughs in child protection around the world. We also thank the briefers for their enlightening statements.

Philippine law and Philippine society hold children in the highest regard. Even before they are born, the Philippine Constitution already protects them. Children take pride of place in the family. Their health, education, well-being and future are important concerns of their families and of the State. The Philippines maintains that a State without children is a State on the brink of extinction.

Children do not belong on the battlefield. They have absolutely no role in conflict. They belong in school; they must be nurtured and reared to be future leaders. Children are "zones of peace", protected from all forms of abuse and violence, never to know first-hand the horrors of war.

Since 2002, the Philippines has established procedures for the handling and treatment of children involved in armed conflict. The Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006 contains provisions to address the needs of children involved in armed conflict who have committed acts that will make them criminally liable under existing laws. In 2016, the Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act was passed to ensure the protection of the fundamental rights of children before, during and after emergency situations.

In January 2019, the Philippines passed Republic Act No. 11188 — the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act — as a way of implementing the protection guaranteed to children under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. This law takes into account Security Council resolutions related to children and armed conflict as well as resolution 1820 (2008), on women and peace and security. Republic Act No. 11188 considers as paramount the best interests of children and imposes criminal liability for grave violations of children's rights, including the killing or maiming of children, the recruitment or use of children in armed conflict, rape and other forms of sexual violence against children, the abduction of children, attacks against schools or hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access to children.

In June 2019, the Implementing Rules and Regulations for the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act were adopted. A process flow for rescued children was also set up. The Council for the Welfare of Children heads the interagency committee that monitors the implementation of the law and the Implementing Rules and Regulations. Other entities in the interagency committee include the Departments of Education, Social Welfare and Development, the Interior and Local Government, and National Defence. The Armed Forces of the Philippines, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, the Philippine Commission on Women, the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos and the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process are also members of this committee.

Having struggled for decades with armed rebel groups and separatist movements, the Philippines has had its fair share of conflict. During the siege of Marawi by elements of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in 2017, thousands of

families had to leave their homes and find shelter elsewhere. Children had to leave their schools. Some were even brainwashed and recruited by the rebels. As part of its reintegration programme, the Philippine Government established the Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan programme — the Peaceful and Prosperous Community Programme — which provides sustainable livelihood and protective services to individuals and families, and psychosocial counselling, support and cash to former rebels, including children.

The Philippines is also implementing a conditional cash-transfer programme, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Programme, better known as the 4Ps, for the purposes of alleviating poverty. One of the conditions for the disbursement of cash is that children stay in school. During the current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Philippines partnered with financial institutions and the private sector to deliver much-needed cash assistance to families affected by the pandemic. Even with the challenges of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippine Government, together with civil society actors, continues to strengthen protection mechanisms for children affected and displaced by armed conflict by raising awareness of Republic Act No. 11188, publicizing violations and updating, inter alia, the Protocol on the Monitoring, Reporting and Response System on the Grave Child Rights Violations in the Context of Armed Conflict to align it with Republic Act No. 11188.

For many people, education is an important gateway out of poverty. The Philippine Government prioritizes the return of children displaced by the conflict in Marawi to their schools. While elementary and high-school education in public schools had always been free, university education in state colleges and universities has been tuition-free since 2017. It is a step towards removing every obstacle to the full realization of children's potential.

To protect children in situations of armed conflict, it is imperative that child-protection measures be integrated into peace processes. It is also crucial that all efforts be exerted to end conflict. The Philippines supports the call of the Secretary-General for a global ceasefire during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Philippine Government also believes that there must be a global consensus to keep children out of conflict during this pandemic and beyond. The Philippines reiterates its commitment to meeting this goal.

Annex 58

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Poland to the United Nations

Poland would like to thank France for organizing today's important open debate on children and armed conflict. I extend our thanks to the briefers — the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Executive Director of UNICEF and Mariam from civil society — for their briefings. Poland welcomes the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict for 2019 (S/2020/525) and reiterates its full support for the children and armed conflict agenda.

We welcome the focus of today's debate on the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We consider it important to acknowledge the progress achieved in the last 15 years. Data collection on the grave violations has greatly improved since the launch of the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism in 2005. This data provides the basis for the annual report of the Secretary-General and the listing in its annexes of perpetrators of violations, which has proven powerful in influencing warring parties' behaviour and promoting accountability and compliance with international law. The listing process has led to the signing of action plans by more than 30 parties to conflict, of whom 12 have fully complied with their commitments and been delisted.

With regard to the report of the Secretary-General and the challenges that remain for the children and armed conflict agenda, the report for 2019 identifies more than 20 countries, including Iraq, Syria and Yemen, with verified cases of grave violations against children, including an alarming number of instances involving State actors. It proves that we must call for the protection of children to be considered in all phases of the conflict cycle. Only a concerted effort by the international community in its entirety, including the United Nations, Member States and civil society, can put an end to the issue of children in armed conflicts.

The abduction of 1,683 children, rape and other forms of sexual violence continued to be vastly underreported, with 735 verified cases; these, together with the approximately 4,400 incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children and 927 attacks on schools and hospitals, are only few of violations to be named in this year's report. These numbers should be a call to States Members of the United Nations to make concerted efforts towards ensuring, first and foremost, the safety of all children. Poland calls upon all parties to allow safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access in order to aid children and ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and assets.

To prevent grave violations against children, Member States must fight impunity and ensure accountability, including through such mechanisms of international justice as the International Criminal Court. Alongside justice and accountability, we must ensure psychosocial support for survivors who are victims of grave violations. We cannot forget that, even with professional help, victims' trauma will endure for years.

Moreover, Poland is concerned about the streamlining of mandates and budget cuts affecting child protection advisers. Today, more than ever, dedicated child protection advisers are needed to monitor and report on grave violations, operationalize action plans and strengthen the overall child-protection architecture in United Nations missions. We consider dedicated child-protection-adviser posts in United Nations peace operations and political missions to be essential for the effective protection of the rights of children.

With respect to our priorities and activities, the protection of children and persons with disabilities in humanitarian crises was one of Poland's priorities during its term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. Poland prioritized protecting children in armed conflicts and placed a major focus on children born of sexual violence, the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces, and the protection of children with disabilities. In the light of the outrageous phenomenon of child recruitment by armed forces or armed groups, Poland recognizes the importance of constant psychological support for children and youth.

Poland is especially concerned about the increase of violence against educational facilities, students and teachers. We welcome and support initiatives aimed at putting an end to the use of schools and universities for military purposes, including the 2014 Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. To confirm our commitment to the effective implementation of the Guidelines, Poland signed the Safe Schools Declaration. We believe that such initiatives constitute an important step towards the protection and promotion of the rights of the child, especially in the conflict situations. Poland welcomes the decision of the General Assembly to establish 9 September as the International Day to Protect Education from Attack (General Assembly resolution 74/275).

It is especially relevant that the Warsaw process, which is an initiative inaugurated last year by the United States and Poland to tackle security problems in the Middle East, is also discussing humanitarian and refugee issues, with emphasis on vulnerable groups. The refugee crises and forced displacements in the Middle East are among the most pressing issues to be addressed by the international community and are still causing a dire humanitarian situation, especially in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Children and young people are particularly affected. These conflicts deprive children of one of their basic needs and rights — safety. Children are being maimed, abducted and attacked, recruited to fight and sexually abused. They are also being denied access to education and humanitarian aid. Such traumas deprive them of their childhood and their dignity and leave permanent marks on their adult lives. Violations of the rights of the child not only endanger their lives, but also undermine the overall stability and welfare of our societies.

Those issues were further developed during the meeting of the Warsaw process working group on humanitarian issues and refugees that took place from 4 to 6 February, in Brasilia. The main purpose of the meeting was to work out political solutions, better coordination and structural interventions leading to the reduction of the impact of the humanitarian crises on children and youth in the Middle East.

Due to the disproportionate impact of conflict on children, the Warsaw process working group on humanitarian issues and refugees focused its attention on the issues of education and child protection in a broad sense, acknowledging that mental health and psychosocial support are critical components of humanitarian responses. To this end, delegations discussed key child-protection and education challenges and solutions for displaced populations in the Middle East and focused on innovative practices enabling children to continue education and find psychological support during displacement.

One of Poland's priorities in the development-cooperation field in Lebanon is supporting human capital by improving the quality of formal and informal education, in particular by improving teaching conditions, strengthening the language skills of Syrian students and increasing access to social services of those at risk of exclusion.

Almost 54 per cent of Syrian children of school age do not attend school in Lebanon, mainly due to poverty and major differences in school curricula.

Since 2016, the Polish non-governmental organization the Polish Centre for International Aid has been implementing a humanitarian project focused on providing financial support for the health and education centre in Al-Bireh, some four kilometres from the Syrian border. The centre is used by Syrian and Lebanese children and youth attending vocational classes. Provided that the number of available places is not exceeded each year, children of Syrian refugees are admitted without any prerequisites. In total, the programme will benefit over 15, 000 people.

Last year, together with its German counterpart, Poland implemented a project that focused on renovating six public schools in northern Lebanon. The scope of work included, inter alia, reconstruction of classrooms, roof repairs, water-sanitary installations, and providing access to the buildings and classrooms for children with disabilities. Poland's total budget for the project was €3 million.

Finally, with regard to the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease, it is noteworthy that the ongoing pandemic brings additional concerns, as children affected by war face heightened vulnerabilities owing to the fragile contexts in which they live. We are particularly concerned about the growing scale of sexual and gender-based violence and the lack of access to education, in particular for girls. While the outbreak has exacerbated humanitarian need, restrictions to mitigate its spread also challenge the delivery of assistance and hamper efforts to monitor, report and respond to violations of children's rights. It is imperative that child protection and well-being be prioritized in the COVID-19 response and that efforts to document and respond to grave violations continue.

Annex 59

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations

We thank France for convening today's open debate and express our gratitude to the briefers for their valuable briefings.

Portugal is fully aligned with the statements submitted by the European Union and the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict (S/2020/594, annexes 32 and 24, respectively) and would like to make some additional remarks.

The protection of children in armed conflict is pivotal in the peace, security and development agenda. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General covering 2019 (S/2020/525). In this regard, we wish to express our deepest regret for the 25,000 serious violations against children verified by the United Nations — a figure that has grown in comparison to the previous reporting period, in which 24,000 violations were registered (see S/2019/509). More than half of these violations were committed by non-State actors and a third were committed by Government and international forces. We would also like to reaffirm Portugal's support for the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The recently published *Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict* is a commendable important action-oriented document.

The year 2020 marks the fifteenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the monitoring and reporting mechanism. Notwithstanding the challenges posed by the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic, it is essential that the mechanism remains operational. The collection and reporting of information in a transparent and accurate way remains a key priority.

We would like to highlight the importance of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. This year, as we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of this legal instrument, we call on States not yet having done so to ratify the Optional Protocol.

Besides the Optional Protocol, Portugal has also endorsed the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups — the Paris Principles — the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

In armed conflicts, children, including those associated with armed groups or born to their members, must be regarded and treated primarily as victims. As stated in resolution 2467 (2019), a survivor-centred approach must guide the prevention of, and response to, conflict-related sexual violence. On the other hand, the vulnerability of children with disabilities in armed conflict also deserves our careful attention, as established in resolution 2475 (2019).

Attacks on schools have a particularly long-lasting effect, risking the future of entire generations and disproportionately affecting girls. The safeguarding of educational opportunities, under Sustainable Development Goal 4, is therefore crucial and contributes to preventing recruitment as well as child, early and forced marriage.

We need to work on the reintegration of children and the rehabilitation of their families and communities. The protection of children can be a first step to resolving or mitigating conflicts. Establishing it as priority in negotiations in peace processes and ceasefire agreements can create engagement between parties to conflict.

Finally, Portugal recognizes and supports the work of UNICEF and other United Nations bodies in this field. We call for States to cooperate with these entities, as well as with civil society organizations, to protect the rights of children in armed conflict.

Annex 60**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani**

[Original: Arabic]

I should like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to thank you for convening this meeting. I should also like to thank Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Ms. Henrietta Fore, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, for their briefings.

We are meeting today in unprecedented circumstances, as the entire world is confronted with the challenge of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In such difficult times, it is our humanitarian duty to think about children and vulnerable groups in conflict zones, who are being threatened by the epidemic even as they are also the victims of violations by parties to conflicts of their obligations under international humanitarian law.

The adoption by the Security Council of its historic resolution 1612 (2005), which established the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, raised hopes that we might be able to end the abuses suffered by children in armed conflict. Regrettably, however, the report (S/2020/525) of the Secretary-General reveals the seriousness of the violations to which children in conflict zones are subjected and the failure of the parties to various conflicts to fulfil their legal obligations. This has had disastrous consequences for children's upbringing and future, the price of which will be paid by their societies and countries.

Everyone had hoped that this meeting would be dedicated to celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which was ratified by 170 States and subsequently reinforced by the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe Schools Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

While we acknowledge the successes achieved in that regard, the harsh conditions faced by children in conflict zones require the international community to redouble its efforts to protect children, ensure compliance with international law, put an end to such crimes and hold the perpetrators accountable via legal mechanisms.

We therefore add our voice to those of the States that have been calling for the relevant annual reports to include a consolidated, accurate list of perpetrators compiled on the basis of impartial and evidence-based accounts. We also stress the importance of identifying and holding accountable the perpetrators, thereby ensuring that victims obtain justice and international law is observed.

Access to safe quality education is one of the basic needs of children affected by armed conflict, and is essential to their well-being and ability to enjoy their most basic rights. Education is a basic element of reintegrating affected children and enabling them to resume their lives after conflict, not to mention the role that education plays in preventing children from being recruited and used in armed conflict in the first place. Sadly, however, educational institutions are among those most damaged by armed conflicts. As the Secretary-General confirms in his report, hundreds of schools have been attacked and thousands of children have left school.

Given the disastrous effects of such attacks, the parties to various conflicts must be compelled not to target educational institutions, and they must be held liable for the legal consequences of doing so. At the same time, international efforts to achieve Goals 4 and 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must be intensified.

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious threat to children in conflict zones. The closure of schools will cause an increasing number of children to join armed groups, thereby threatening their lives and futures. We therefore reaffirm our support for the Secretary-General's call for ceasefires in various armed conflicts, so that efforts can be focused on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Qatar attaches great importance to ensuring that children in areas of armed conflict are able to receive an education. Accordingly, my country has launched several initiatives to deliver education in such areas. In September 2018, on the margins of the opening of the session of the General Assembly, His Highness the Emir of Qatar announced that the country had pledged \$100 million to provide quality education by 2021 in areas experiencing conflict and in which conditions are precarious. The programmes and initiatives developed by the Education Above All foundation, the patron of which is Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, President of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, have been highly successful and garnered international recognition. The Education Above All Foundation, together with UNICEF and more than 80 global partners, is providing quality education to 10 million children in more than 50 countries and has developed pioneering programmes to facilitate distance learning at home in different languages.

Qatar, in keeping with its efforts to protect children in conflict, is proud that, on 28 May 2020, the General Assembly adopted resolution 74/275, designating 9 September as the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. Qatar presented that resolution at the initiative of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, President of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, and it was co-sponsored by 60 other States.

As part of our effort to support the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and enable it to fulfil its mandate to prevent violations from being committed against children and to protect them and reintegrate them into society, and in keeping with the partnership agreement that was signed in November 2019 by Qatar and the Office of the Special Representative, work is under way in Doha to open the Analysis and Communication Centre of the Office of the Special Representative. That centre will prepare studies, provide analyses and assessments, hold workshops, raise awareness and engage in capacity-building in relation to the protection of children in armed conflict.

In conclusion, Qatar will continue to support all international efforts to protect children in armed conflict and to work with the Security Council and other United Nations agencies to achieve this noble humanitarian goal.

Annex 61**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, Cho Hyun**

My delegation commends you, Sir, for convening today's timely open video-teleconference of the Security Council on children and armed conflict, and expresses its deep appreciation to the briefers for their enlightening interventions.

Since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), 15 years ago, there has been meaningful progress in our efforts to protect children from armed conflicts. However, the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) clearly illustrates that significant gaps remain between our goals and the harsh realities on the ground. Government forces and non-State armed groups alike have increased the intensity and frequency of their attacks against children, and sexual and gender-based violence against children horrifically persists unabated.

In addition, the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic raises grave concerns regarding the safety and well-being of children in armed conflicts. As the Secretary-General emphasized in his April global appeal to "protect our children" amid the pandemic, children in armed conflict are among the most vulnerable groups and deserve to be accorded our highest priority.

It is in this context that I am particularly concerned over the Secretary-General's report that the denial of humanitarian access to children saw a shocking increase of over 400 per cent in 2019. Full, comprehensive and unhindered humanitarian access to children, including those in detention, should form an integral part of our efforts to minimize the negative impact on children.

Against this troubling backdrop, and while aligning myself with the statement by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, I would like to highlight the following four points of particular importance to my delegation.

First, the Republic of Korea urges all parties to conflict to support the Secretary-General's timely appeal for an immediate global ceasefire to collectively tackle the COVID-19 crisis. Any military threat or attempt to incite violence must stop. The entire global population is now facing a common threat, and protecting vulnerable populations, especially children in armed conflict, requires us to work together in solidarity to silence the guns. In this regard, my delegation strongly hopes that the Security Council will be able to unite to come up with substantive measures to support the Secretary-General's urgent appeal for an immediate global ceasefire. It is better late than never.

Secondly, the reintegration of children affected by armed conflict is a strategic investment that can help break the vicious cycle of violence. The Republic of Korea, as a member of the Steering Committee of the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, commends and supports the work of the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF. Child reintegration programmes must take a community-based approach to avoid stigmatization, and I emphasize the importance of education and vocational training programmes, which help ensure that communities enjoy the concrete benefits that reintegration programmes bring.

Thirdly, we must ensure accountability for all violations against children. Strengthening accountability and ending impunity are key to ending gross violations and preventing recurrence. Violators must be held accountable through both national and international justice systems. Furthermore, we must support and strengthen the tools we have to document and address violations, including the United Nations-led

monitoring and reporting mechanism, the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the Secretary-General's annual report.

Fourthly, the Republic of Korea strongly supports the child-protection mandate in United Nations peacekeeping operations. We particularly emphasize the important role carried out by senior child protection advisers and sections in peacekeeping missions, and believe that they should be adequately resourced to implement child-protection mandates, including in the context of transition and downsizing.

Efforts to prevent violations against children today are a high-yield investment that will prevent future violence and crimes. The Republic of Korea reaffirms its driving commitment in working with the United Nations, as well as all Member States, with a view to better protecting children from the scourge of armed conflicts.

Annex 62**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of San Marino to the United Nations, Damiano Beleffi**

San Marino aligns itself with the statement submitted by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting, and the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2020/525).

San Marino continues to firmly believe in and support the Security Council's children and armed conflict mandate.

Thanks to the resolution 1612 (2005), adopted 15 years ago, which established the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we can proudly affirm that we have achieved positive results in our common cause of preventing and ending grave violations against children in armed conflict. In this regard, I would also like to thank Mrs. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter and her staff, who, with great dedication, have finalized a terrific number of action plans and commitments.

Despite the successful results, we also have to recognize that great concerns remain. The number of verified violations against children is still very worrisome, while education, which should be one of our priorities, is still under attack. We are particularly worried about the impact of the coronavirus disease on vulnerable groups, such as children in armed conflicts. Some restrictive measures adopted, such as the closure of schools, inadvertently expose children to abuse, exploitation and recruitment. In addition, closed schools can easily be used for military purposes.

We need to better protect safe and quality education for these children. In this regard, San Marino joined the Safe Schools Declaration, an important tool that promotes the protection of students, teachers and schools, with the aim of allowing young people to continue their education, giving them hope for their future.

San Marino also recently co-sponsored General Assembly resolution 74/275, on the International Day to Protect Education from Attack.

Furthermore, due to the pandemic, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for children have been, or will have to be, put on hold. This is very worrisome, since these programmes are crucial for the well-being of these children.

While humanitarian need is rising, the humanitarian space is shrinking. We are particularly concerned over the record number of incidents related to the denial of humanitarian access. The new restrictions imposed due to the pandemic risk are worsening the situation. We cannot allow this to happen: the delivery of humanitarian assistance must be guaranteed, especially now.

Finally, we should not forget that, as stated in paragraph 15 of the Secretary-General's report, "[p]eace remains the most powerful means to reduce violations against children". Therefore, San Marino calls on all parties to join the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire.

San Marino firmly believes that, especially during difficult times, the international community has to stay united, while fully supporting international humanitarian law and human rights law. This year marks 20 years since the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We encourage all parties to accede this fundamental instrument for the prevention of the recruitment of child soldiers, as well as other tools, such as the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated

with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

Together we can continue to achieve positive results for our common cause: to end and prevent horrific violations against children and support their recovery and empowerment for a better and more peaceful future for all.

Annex 63**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations, Abdallah Y. Al-Mouallimi**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on the assumption by France of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June, express my delegation's support for your tireless efforts in managing the Council's work and wish you continued success.

The issue of the protection of children in armed conflicts is acquiring ever greater importance. Such protection could help to break the cycle that perpetuates these conflicts in the long term. It is all the more significant given the role that today's children will play in building their homelands and societies and bringing about their future stability and prosperity. Strengthening the protection of children in armed conflicts can be used as a peacebuilding tool to address the negative effects of those conflicts on children, thereby contributing to transforming the present situation of the affected societies into a more stable future. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia therefore believes that the protection of children in armed conflicts around the world is the shared responsibility of all parties in the international community, and calls for collective confrontation and concerted efforts to address the ramifications of armed conflicts for children. These efforts should be crystallized by taking a number of important steps.

First of all, strict and effective measures should be taken against armed militias that use children as human shields or recruit them and force them to become involved in armed conflicts. Measures should also be taken against the States that back such militias, support them with money and weapons and fuel them with extremist ideas to spread their destructive ideologies. Such practices end up implanting violent extremist tendencies in many of those innocent children and the communities to which they belong.

Secondly, the occupation of States should be condemned. Such occupations engage in brutal practices towards civilians and children. They violate their rights, deprive them of their freedoms and impose painful realities on those children and their communities. It is important to hold occupiers accountable and compel them to desist from their violations and comply with the relevant international terms of reference. The practices of the Israeli occupation authorities are the most egregious example. That occupation's atrocities against the defenceless children of Palestine — which include murder, displacement, imprisonment and torture — demand a strong and firm stand by the international community and the Security Council.

Thirdly, we must invest in efforts to help children who face social neglect as a result of such practices. They must be provided with the necessary health, psychological and social support through rehabilitation and integration programmes, and guaranteed access to uninterrupted education during conflicts. Education provides victims with alternatives. It enables children and young people to acquire the skills and achieve the economic security necessary to break the cycle of violence. Moreover, it addresses one of the root causes of conflict by instilling and promoting the values of peace and a culture of tolerance in children's hearts and minds.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia emphasizes that protection of civilians and children, especially in armed conflicts, is of the utmost importance. In that connection, my country has joined many international frameworks. It has acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as the Geneva Convention and

a number of protocols thereto. It is also a member of the steering committee of the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers and a member of the Friends of Reintegration Group. I reiterate my country's commitment to international law and international humanitarian law and its determination that all measures possible should be taken to protect children in armed conflicts.

My country welcomes the removal of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen from the list annexed to the 2020 report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2020/525) of parties that have not put in place adequate measures to improve the protection of children. That development is a reflection of the ability of Coalition countries to provide a model for protecting children during armed conflicts. It is a testament to the Coalition's commitment to protecting children and the effectiveness of its significant and ongoing measures to strengthen the protection of children in the conflict in Yemen in accordance with international standards. The most notable of these measures are as follows.

A child protection unit has been established to develop mechanisms to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict and meet obligations under international law.

Children recruited by Houthi militias are cared for and provided with health and psychological support prior to being handed over to the Yemeni Government to be reintegrated into society. Support is provided to the Yemeni Government's programmes in Yemen to rehabilitate children prior to their being returned to their families.

Ongoing proactive engagement with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict has resulted in the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations and the development of an action plan.

Additional preventive measures are being taken to protect children in the ongoing armed conflict in Yemen.

In that regard, we affirm our support for the mandate of Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, and we look forward to continuing constructive cooperation between her and the Coalition to develop mechanisms for the protection of children in the armed conflict in Yemen. We stress that the Coalition must be provided with sufficient information regarding the allegations made against it in the report in order to conduct the relevant investigations.

My country values the major role the Secretary-General plays in ending and resolving armed conflicts, and his efforts to strengthen the protection of children in times of conflict. The Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen has been responsive to the Secretary-General's recent call for a ceasefire in Yemen, and Saudi Arabia has supported the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire in the light of the coronavirus disease pandemic, as well as the efforts of his Special Envoy for Yemen to push forward the political process.

These positions flow from a firm faith that a comprehensive political solution to the conflict in Yemen can be reached on the basis of the three terms of reference, namely, the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative, the outcomes of the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference and the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2216 (2015).

That conflict was instigated by an illegitimate coup staged by the Houthi militia, backed by Iran, with no regard for its consequences for the Yemeni people. The resources of Yemen have been plundered. Its people have been plunged into

chaos, hunger and disease. Its children have been exploited. All this damage has been done for authoritarian gains. The international community and the Security Council should take strict measures to support of the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy with regard to that insurrectionist militia, which rejects peace, and compel it to accept a political solution to avoid further suffering for the Yemeni people, especially children.

Annex 64**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Slovakia to the United Nations, Michal Mlynár**

Slovakia aligns itself with the statements submitted on behalf of the European Union and of the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict.

We thank the Secretary-General for his latest report on the impact of armed conflict on children (S/2020/525) and for providing clear recommendations. We appreciate the briefings by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore, as well as their tireless work for children.

Slovakia ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, endorsed the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe Schools Declaration as well as the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, and we call on others to join us in this regard.

As we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict this year, there is no better time to reiterate the call for its universal ratification, and we encourage those States that have not yet signed or ratified the Protocol to do so without delay.

This year we also celebrate fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the landmark resolution 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict, establishing the United Nations-led monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict. The monitoring and reporting mechanism, together with the Secretary-General's annual report and the annex thereto, has been useful in deterring grave violations against children.

Regrettably, numbers of grave violations committed against children are still not decreasing, and the Secretary-General's latest report highlights that they tripled in the last decade. There is still a huge lack of compliance with international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law. Criminalization and accountability are key elements to eliminate these grave violations, and Member States have to ensure them proactively at the national level as well as by deeper cooperation at the international level. Therefore, it is important that the naming of perpetrators — an important step, but only the first one — be followed by the more important step of accountability.

Another worrisome trend is the growing number of children in detention, often as the result of allegations of those children being associated with armed forces or groups. These children need to be treated first and foremost as victims. All Member States should support the release and reintegration of child soldiers through demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programmes. We urge the United Nations and its Member States to develop, in collaboration with host communities, reintegration programmes that emphasize psychosocial support, education and training opportunities. In this regard, we welcome the efforts of the Global Coalition for the Reintegration of Child Soldiers as well as the "Act to Protect children affected by conflict" campaign.

Annex 65

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Slovenia to the United Nations

We wish to thank the French presidency of the Security Council, for convening this open debate; the Secretary-General, for his annual report (S/2020/525); the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter; the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Henrietta Fore; and Mariam, for sharing her experience.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statements presented by the European Union, and by Canada on behalf of Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, and wishes to add some remarks in its national capacity.

The year 2020 marks the anniversaries of two milestones in the normative framework for the protection of children affected by armed conflict: the twentieth anniversary of the agreement of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict, which established the landmark monitoring and reporting mechanism.

Nonetheless, the latest annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict reminds us that there is still a long way ahead of us. We are deeply concerned that in 2019 there were more than 25,000 grave violations committed against children in armed conflicts, an alarming increase of cases of denial of humanitarian access to children, continuous attacks on schools and hospitals and inconceivable prevalence of sexual violence against girls and boys.

It is therefore of key importance to ensure unfailing respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law by all parties to conflicts around the world. For the protection of children and preventing grave violations against them, accountability and the fight against impunity should be strengthened. We call on all those States not yet having done so to consider ratifying the Optional Protocol and joining the Paris Principles and Commitments on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Safe School Declaration and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers.

We share the concerns that the coronavirus disease pandemic and its consequences exacerbate the plight of children affected by armed conflicts around the world, including by impeding activities to protect the children. In particular, the pandemic has worsened access to education, health care and clean drinking water. Education is one of the few signs of hope for children affected by armed conflicts.

The Secretary-General's report also shows some promising developments in 2019, since fewer children were killed and maimed, recruited and used and abducted than the year before. More than 13,200 children were released or separated from armed forces or armed groups. This progress was possible due to continued efforts by the Special Representative and her Office, the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, child protection advisers in field missions and all others in this network of protection, and we would like to commend them for their tireless work.

Slovenia is not just a strong advocate of child protection in international forums, but also contributes to the efforts on the ground to lessen the burden of children affected by conflicts. In 2019 and 2020, Slovenia supported several projects for children from Ukraine, Palestine and Syria, as well as providing humanitarian aid to UNICEF for Yemeni children. In addition, projects aimed at empowering children to become actors for peace were conducted in more than 20 countries worldwide.

Annex 66**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations**

Sri Lanka warmly congratulates France on its assumption of the presidency for the month of June and is confident that it will be a successful tenure. The convening of this open debate on children and armed conflict is appreciated and timely as the scale, severity and recurrence of violations and abuses against children in such conditions remain a grave concern. Despite global efforts to end and prevent violations against children in situations of armed conflict, they continue to be targeted, greatly impeding their right to a normal childhood and development. This has also been exacerbated by the coronavirus disease pandemic.

For nearly three decades, Sri Lanka suffered at the hands of brutal terrorism, propagated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is designated as a terrorist organization by 32 countries, whose modus operandi included the forcible recruitment of children as soldiers.

UNICEF reports indicated overwhelming evidence of recruitment of children, often forced, throughout areas under LTTE control as well as from Government-controlled areas in the north and east. As of September 2007, the total number of children known to have been recruited by the LTTE since January 2002 was well over 6,000, although the real number was thought to be much higher, including 40 children orphaned by the 2004 tsunami that ravaged certain coastal areas of the island.

In fact, in the lead-up to the end of the conflict, in February 2009, the UNICEF Representative in Sri Lanka expressed its gravest concerns for children, stating that it had “clear indications that the LTTE [had] intensified forcible recruitment of civilians and that children as young as 14 years old [were] now being targeted.”

As a country that maintains a zero-tolerance policy on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, one of the immediate priorities of the Government of Sri Lanka following the end of separatist terrorism in 2009 was the rehabilitation of these child soldiers, reuniting them with their families and addressing their educational needs. The programme launched under the Commissioner of Probation and Child Care Services resulted in the rehabilitation and reintegration of all former child soldiers, numbering 594, which is a success story in this respect for Sri Lanka to share with the world.

Recognizing that access to safe, quality education is a critical need, particularly for children affected by armed conflict, all the former child soldiers were supported by the Government of Sri Lanka in their education by facilitating school enrolment, with the provision of school supplies and financial assistance, including scholarships. Education being a key component of reintegration programmes for children associated with armed groups, special attention was paid to those whose education had been disrupted due to such conscription and who were seeking to complete their formal education. As a result, the rehabilitation programme implemented in Sri Lanka enabled a number of former child soldiers to participate in national school examinations. With education being a central goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, such policies have contributed to the pursuit of achieving this objective.

These initiatives provided opportunities for children who had lost their childhood to terrorism, and Sri Lanka is pleased to note that 11 children had taken university entrance examinations, with 4 being successful, either during or after their rehabilitation programme. Three were able to receive a university education.

Many others have participated in vocational training programmes offered by the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation, which made a transformative contribution to these conflict-affected societies by facilitating the employment of many of these former child soldiers as accounts clerks, computer instructors, mechanics, carpenters, farmers, fishermen or in the garment-manufacturing industry.

In recognition that involvement in violent conflict and loss of loved ones cause trauma and other psychosocial effects that could severely hamper a child's growth and education, those requiring special attention with regard to these aspects were identified and provided with care, including professional counselling. This was accomplished through the education system as well as community and civil society groups. A special screening process was also carried out to identify former child soldiers who were physically disabled, recovering from injury, and others who required medical intervention.

As a concerted policy, no former child soldiers were prosecuted, with priority being accorded to their investigations and to the speedy conclusion of their cases. In these efforts, the Government collaborated with United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and civil society organizations, including international non-governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations with knowledge and experience in dealing with children exposed to armed conflict, with a view to their rehabilitation.

On the international front, Sri Lanka is a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols thereto on the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Sri Lanka has also endorsed the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. As we commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, Sri Lanka, as one of the first States to have ratified the Protocol, takes this opportunity to reiterate its firm commitment to the promotion and protection of children's rights.

All signatories abiding by these international legal instruments in spirit and letter would make the world better for the young generations of today and tomorrow. However, we as nations must also work towards holding non-State actors formally accountable for engaging in the abhorrent practice of using children in the arena of armed conflict. Further, States must also desist from supporting such non-State actors, as such support could be interpreted as an endorsement of an illegal policy. Let us all pledge to unwaveringly secure childhood, in accordance with its norms of a safe development to adulthood, so as to better the world.

Annex 67**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations**

[Original: English and French]

Switzerland would like to thank France for having organized this virtual debate and the speakers for their valuable contributions.

Switzerland wishes to express its deep concern at the continuation of armed conflicts in various parts of the world and their devastating impact on children. Switzerland would like to recall that, in situations of armed conflict, children must be considered primarily as victims and treated as such; this includes children who are linked to armed groups or whose parents are so affiliated. We encourage the Security Council to strengthen its commitment to the protection of children in armed conflict. The call of the Secretary-General for an immediate global ceasefire is important and must be supported by the Council.

This year, we are celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) and the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. In this context, Switzerland encourages the Secretary-General to continue to provide a complete, impartial and precise list of parties that commit grave violations of the rights of the child. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict is important for reviewing the reports of the monitoring and reporting mechanism and making recommendations to the Council on possible measures to promote the protection of children affected by armed conflict. In addition, Switzerland wishes to stress the following three points.

First of all, Switzerland is concerned about the aggravating effects of the coronavirus-disease pandemic on the situation of children in armed conflict, and in particular that of girls, who are particularly exposed to the risks and consequences of conflict. Wherever access by humanitarian actors is restricted, the well-being of children is at risk. That is why Switzerland urges all parties to conflict to guarantee humanitarian actors unhindered access to affected populations.

Secondly, Switzerland calls on the Council to take concrete steps to end attacks on schools. We regret that an increase in such attacks was observed over the past year. Deprived of the protective environment school provides, children are more exposed to the risks of exploitation, such as recruitment by armed groups, early marriage and forced labour. We encourage Member States to deter armed forces and non-State armed groups from occupying schools left empty due to the pandemic and to join the Safe Schools Declaration.

Thirdly, the protection of children in armed conflict must be integrated into all conflict-prevention activities. In this regard, we welcome the launch of the *Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict*. Protecting children is an integral part of lasting peace. That is why Switzerland is committed to ensuring that children who have participated in fighting or lived in conflict zones are taken care of with particular attention and closely supported in their reintegration into a safe environment. Protecting children means empowering them to build peace.

Annex 68**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations**

Thailand welcomes the annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525), which provides strategic guidance to Member States on how to strengthen child protection. We further note with appreciation the hard work and dedication of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on this issue.

Thailand also calls on all parties to adhere to the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediate global ceasefire, and to prioritize humanitarian access to children and the most vulnerable in situations of armed conflict. Thailand wishes to highlight the elements we believe deserve special emphasis in today's discussion.

First, we need to form a stronger partnership, especially among States, United Nations agencies and civil society. Thailand welcomes the continued engagement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General with States. Beyond that, all stakeholders, including civil society, must work closely together to address various emerging issues such as the evolving tactics used to recruit children, including through online and social media platforms. In addition to law enforcement, strong community advocacy and education can provide the best defence for children against falling prey to recruitment. Thailand also commends the global ACT to Protect Children Affected by Conflict campaign, which is aimed at generating greater awareness and action to protect children affected by war.

Secondly, we have to synergize various international efforts in child protection for the best interests of the child. This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Thailand reaffirms its firm commitment to the Convention and its Optional Protocol and is ready to support fellow States parties in fulfilling their obligations wherever appropriate.

Thailand joins the international community in viewing with concern the plight of children affected by armed conflict. Thailand condemns all violations and crimes against children in situations of armed conflict and supports the effective implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions on this issue.

We fully support the launch of the new *Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict*. In our view, not only should we promote children's participation in a meaningful and sustainable manner, but their voices and needs must be taken into account in any effort to resolve conflict at any phase, while ensuring the best interests of the child.

Looking ahead, relevant bodies within the United Nations system should work in a more coordinated and integrated manner so that their actions are mutually reinforcing.

Thirdly, we need a comprehensive approach to the protection of children in armed conflict, from prevention through to post-conflict management and the social reintegration of affected children.

Thailand stresses the importance of ensuring that the rights of children are protected, and that the legal infrastructure is in place to enable their active participation in society. In this regard, we stress the importance of resolution 2427 (2018), which underlines the need to prevent violations against children in countries affected by armed conflict and in their immediately surrounding regions. We therefore encourage further regional engagement on this issue.

It is equally imperative that we create an environment conducive to the reintegration of children associated with, or having fallen victim to recruitment by, armed forces and armed groups. Access to quality education for children, for instance, is one of the key factors in enhancing children's capacities and participation in both prevention and reintegration processes.

To put an end to any conflict and ensure sustainable peace, Thailand urges all stakeholders to ingrain a sustainability mindset, together with development approaches, into efforts to address the root causes of armed conflict, such as limited access to quality education and health services; poverty; discrimination; gender inequality; social injustice; and economic and social exclusion of persons and communities vulnerable to and at risk of radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism.

Fourthly, mainstreaming child protection into relevant United Nations peacekeeping, peacebuilding and political missions is vital. And, in this connection, fifthly, training and capacity-building, including training of trainers, should be accorded priority.

In armed conflict situations, peacekeepers are often at the forefront of protecting civilians, including children. As part of the task of early peacebuilding, our peacekeepers have been providing a safe learning environment for local children, with basic education and development learning centres, in their assigned United Nations peacekeeping missions. Our female peacekeepers also play a vital role in building trust and ensuring a protective environment for vulnerable groups, including children.

We underscore the importance of having clear mandates and guidelines for effective operations and for smooth transitions from peacekeeping to post-conflict development. Peacekeepers and peacebuilders also need specific predeployment and in-mission training on issues concerning children affected by armed conflict.

For our part, Thai peacekeepers are trained as a standard procedure to assist the local population in their efforts to prevent a relapse into armed conflict and to ensure sustainable development. Training elements include international law, child protection, gender-based issues, protection of civilians, conflict-related sexual violence and cultural sensitivity.

We also stress the importance of sharing knowledge, best practices and lessons learned. Thailand is therefore committed to further collaboration, including by working to become a regional centre of excellence on the issue of children and armed conflict.

Last but not least, mainstreaming child protection into relevant United Nations peacekeeping, peacebuilding and political missions is particularly critical in helping local communities address the impacts and challenges of the coronavirus disease, especially against the risk of children becoming victims of trafficking and all forms of violence, as well as recruitment as child soldiers.

The international community must exert all efforts to put an end to the suffering of children in armed conflict. Thailand endeavours to do our part and looks forward to working with others to amplify our efforts.

Annex 69**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations**

At the outset, I would like to express our appreciation to the French presidency for convening today's Security Council open debate on children and armed conflict. We thank the briefers — the Executive Director of UNICEF, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and dear Mariam of Mali — for their valuable and informative contributions.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2020/525) and to commend the efforts of the United Nations to advance the children and armed conflict agenda.

This year we mark the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which was a milestone in the children and armed conflict agenda in its establishment of two important mechanisms, namely, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the United Nations-led monitoring and reporting mechanism.

The year 2020 also marks the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Right of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. This anniversary provides an opportunity to take stock of our achievements and to further discuss necessary efforts to keep children from harm's way as the severe effects of conflicts on children continue to constitute a significant challenge.

The Secretary-General's report highlights over 25,000 verified grave violations against children in 2019, in 19 situations. Although there is a slight decrease from previous years, the number is still high and it shows that much more remains to be done.

Children continue to suffer immensely in many places around the world, including Syria, Palestine and Myanmar. Furthermore, the coronavirus disease pandemic, which presents an unprecedented global health crisis, causes serious impacts on countries in armed conflict, with children being among the most vulnerable groups. In this context, Turkey reiterates its support to the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire during the course of the pandemic.

Meeting the fundamental humanitarian needs of children in conflicts and emergencies, including for the provision of health services, must be one of our priorities. In the meantime, investing in the education of all children, particularly girls, requires our special attention.

In addition, we see the repatriation and reintegration of children as important aspects of the agenda. Turkey fully subscribes to the Secretary-General's appeal to the countries concerned to take steps for the voluntary repatriation of their citizens, particularly women and children affiliated with Da'esh.

Unfortunately, in Syria, the suffering of children continues unabated. The crimes of Al-Assad's brutal regime in the form of indiscriminate air strikes, barrel bombs, chemical weapons, artillery shelling and the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure are not the only menaces Syrian children face. The well-documented crimes of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist organization and its Syrian branch, the Democratic Union Party/Kurdish People's Protection Units (PYD/YPG), in relation to the recruitment of young girls and boys over the years are a source of grave concern.

PYD/YPG employs the same tactics as other terrorist organizations operating in Syria, such as Da'esh, Al-Qaida, Al-Nusra and other affiliated groups. As such, they deserve no less condemnation.

As a reminder, let me recall a few recent examples of the PKK/YPG's notorious terrorist activities in Syria. On 28 April, PKK/YPG carried out a bomb attack in a market in Afrin, killing 40 civilians, including 11 children. It was followed by another one, in El-Bab on 10 May. In just these two attacks, PKK/YPG killed more than 50 civilians.

The Secretary-General's latest report provides damning insights into the horrific treatment of children at the hands of the PKK, as well as in areas under its control. As highlighted in the report and as no different than in previous years, YPG recruited the highest number of children in Syria in 2019. YPG also topped the lists in the abduction of children, deprivation of liberty of children and using schools and medical facilities for military purposes. This terrorist group targets schools, converts them into ammunition storages and deprives children of their fundamental right of education.

We fully support United Nations efforts to document PKK/PYD/YPG's and other terrorist groups' crimes. At the same time, we must stress the need to demonstrate a unified front against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. As such, we will not approve any act that could be exploited by terrorists in their search for recognition and legitimacy. That is why we condemned the signing of an "action plan" last year with a well-known PKK terrorist, Ferhat Abdi Şahin, also known as Mazloum Abdi, for whom INTERPOL had issued a red notice.

In the same vein, I should underline that we do not accept, and cannot remain idle before, a terrorist organization being praised for committing to limiting its level of criminality. We just heard from Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba that, despite an increasing number of parties having signed commitments with the United Nations to end their violations in different areas, numbers do not seem to be dropping. This is indeed not surprising; believing that a terrorist organization, whose primary method is to inflict fear through violence would be bound by commitments under an international legal framework is an illusion.

However, what is surprising and equally disturbing is to see that the burden of the failure of PKK/YPG to abide by its commitments is cast upon a Member State. This attempt to whitewash the crimes of this terrorist organization perpetrated against children through such pretexts is regrettable. This approach needs to be urgently reversed.

My Government fully shares and supports the agenda of the United Nations in addressing the situation of children in armed conflict. For that, we show utmost care and take all precautions under international humanitarian law. We will continue to work closely and in complete transparency with the Special Representative's Office to make sure that all the information they receive is correct and complete.

We also take all necessary measures to alleviate the suffering of children fleeing armed conflict. Of the almost 4 million Syrians having fled to Turkey for obvious reasons, 1.7 million are children under 18. We have mobilized our resources to provide proper and dignified living conditions for Syrian children who are under temporary protection in Turkey, from free education to health care.

In conclusion, I would like to underline Turkey's unwavering support to all international and regional efforts related to the protection of children.

Annex 70**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, Lana Nusseibeh**

I would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing this open video-teleconference on children and armed conflict. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba and UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore for their insightful briefings today.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is having broad-reaching and long-term impacts on lives and livelihoods. For children living in conflict situations, this adds yet another layer of vulnerability. They already struggle to access health services and coverage for their basic needs, including access to education. The weakening of their social protection systems incentivizes child recruitment by armed groups as well as their sexual exploitation.

In order to mitigate the impact of armed conflict on children, the United Arab Emirates takes this opportunity to renew once again its support for and commitment to the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire. We note with concern that lack of political will has prevented the silencing of guns in most conflict situations.

The United Arab Emirates continues to prioritize the provision of medical care in conflict situations around the world, which has a direct impact on children and their communities. As part of the United Arab Emirates' efforts to support the global fight against COVID-19, we have provided aid to more than 60 countries.

Our humanitarian efforts are also directed towards the long-term interests of children threatened by conflict, including such interests as education. The United Arab Emirates firmly believes that education is not only the right of every child, but also an essential tool for uplifting entire communities. The concept note highlights how access to safe, high-quality education and vocational training is one of the critical needs of children affected by armed conflict, and the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/525) similarly emphasizes that ending the cycle of violence for children in armed conflict requires comprehensive reintegration programmes that must include education and vocational training.

Since 2017, the United Arab Emirates has worked with partners such as UNICEF to support the education of 20 million children in 59 countries, including through the rebuilding of 16 schools in Mosul and Baghdad in the past year alone. We have also funded two pre-pilot programmes in Iraq and Colombia so that refugees and vulnerable migrants can get a UNESCO Qualifications Passport in order to have access to higher education and employment opportunities in the future.

My country is deeply concerned by the high level of grave violations against children in 2019 described in the Secretary-General's report this year. In particular, we are alarmed by the sharp increase in the number of verified incidents of denial of humanitarian access to children, the overwhelming majority of which were perpetrated by non-State actors, particularly in Yemen, Mali, the Central African Republic and Syria.

The vulnerable situation of children is particularly troubling in the Middle East, where the number of violations continues to be unacceptably high. In the longest and most entrenched of the crises in our region, we are appalled by Israel's neglect of children in the occupied Palestinian territories and its detention of hundreds of Palestinian children in 2019. The current plans for annexation threaten to further undermine their rights.

In Yemen, the Houthis continue to be listed for grave violations, including killing, maiming and recruiting children, deliberately attacking schools and hospitals, and using dozens of schools for military purposes. We are deeply concerned by and condemn in the strongest terms the Houthis' escalating obstruction of humanitarian relief efforts, with the Secretary-General verifying 1,553 such incidents attributed to the Houthis, an increase of nearly 650 per cent from the already high number of incidents of Houthi obstruction in 2018. These actions by the Houthis are exacerbating the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on families in the areas under their control.

Extremist and terrorist groups in our region also continue to pose a serious threat to children. Da'esh in Syria and Iraq, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham in Syria, Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen, for example, deliberately kill, abduct and sexually abuse children, as well as recruit children for suicide bombings.

We welcome the delisting of the coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen, as a recognition from the United Nations of the Coalition's unwavering commitment to protecting all civilians in armed conflict, especially children, and the precautionary and protective measures the coalition has taken to strengthen the protection of children in Yemen. Together with other coalition member States, we reiterate that the coalition will continue to uphold its commitments and obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, as well as relevant Security Council resolutions on the protection of children in armed conflict. On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, as a coalition member, allow me to take this opportunity to express the coalition's deep appreciation of and full support for the critical mandate and work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her Office. We look forward to continuing to work closely with her to strengthen the protection of children in Yemen and around the world.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates reiterates its continued commitment to upholding the rights of children around the world and to the valuable architecture established by the Council 15 years ago. We urge other Member States to promote a qualitative leap in implementation. In order to do so effectively, full engagement and consultation between the United Nations and Member States are critical to strengthen child protection capacities and develop strategies to prevent grave violations.

Annex 71**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations**

Uruguay thanks France for convening this open debate and aligns itself with the statement submitted by Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends on Children in Armed Conflict.

Uruguay expresses its deep concern about the increase in serious violations that continue being perpetrated against children. In 2019, more than 25,000 grave violations were verified by the United Nations, as compared to over 24,000 violations in 2018. The high occurrence of sexual violence and of indiscriminate attacks on hospitals and schools, as well as the exponential increase of cases of denial of humanitarian assistance to children, is particularly alarming during the coronavirus disease pandemic, when children desperately need to be protected and to have access to basic life-saving medical and humanitarian assistance.

Implementing the children and armed conflict agenda is becoming more pressing than ever. Uruguay would like to emphasize the following points we view as relevant towards that end.

First, strict compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law is a necessity. Uruguay encourages all Member States to ratify and implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The twentieth anniversary of the conclusion of this international instrument is an appropriate moment to advance towards its universal ratification and full implementation. Uruguay endorsed the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, the Paris Commitments and the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, and calls on other States to do the same.

The alarming number and increasing cruelty of intentional attacks targeting hospitals and schools and their personnel, as well as against children seeking medical care or education, make the full implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) indispensable. Those countries not yet having done so should endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

Secondly, the effective reintegration of children, in particular those associated with armed forces or armed groups, should be prioritized. Such children should always be treated primarily as victims within the framework of legislation and a juvenile legal system oriented towards their rehabilitation. Long-term, sustainable programmes and services for children victims of conflict are required. They should include psychosocial support, education and vocational training, and take into consideration the specific needs of girls.

Thirdly, this delegation wants to stress the transforming and fundamental role of education. Education is also key to preventing conflicts and achieving reintegration. Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underscores that every child has the right to quality education, which has an important role in reducing poverty and inequality. Education provides children professional opportunities and economic security and prevents them from resorting to crime or from being re-recruited.

Fourthly, it is essential to take advantage of all instruments and mechanisms that the United Nations has at its disposal to fulfil the children and armed conflict mandate. My delegation wishes to highlight the role of the Special Representative

and her team, as well as that of UNICEF. They can count on Uruguay's full support in their efforts to protect children from conflict.

Likewise, the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the list annexed to the report of the Secretary-General are effective tools that have a tangible impact on the protection of children. When there is documented evidence that parties to conflict committed grave violations against children, they must be included in the list. When it comes to attacks against children, there is no place on that list for waivers or exemptions of any kind. For the list to be effective, it must be complete, exhaustive, independent and impartial. Otherwise, its credibility will be undermined, and its role in condemning and its ability to respond to and prevent such violations will be weakened.

Peacekeeping operations are also relevant instruments. It must be ensured that child advisers participate in these missions and that adequate instruction is provided to peacekeepers. In that regard, Uruguay provides predeployment training to its troops on child protection issues, among other matters.

Violators must be held accountable for their crimes and face justice. This will end impunity and ensure that violations are not repeated. States should cooperate with the International Criminal Court, and the Security Council should refer cases to the Court when appropriate.

In conclusion, the coronavirus disease means that millions of boys and girls living in fragile settings face additional vulnerabilities. Children trapped between the horror of war and the impact of the pandemic need stronger political will and multilateral action from Member States. This is imperative to counter the current global health crisis, which is already transforming into a protection crisis, from having catastrophic consequences for the new generations. The unprecedented crisis caused by the pandemic also represents an unprecedented opportunity for cooperation and solidarity. We need to take advantage of this opportunity to protect our children and safeguard our societies' most valuable treasures.

Annex 72**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Yemen to the United Nations**

Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I wish you and your friendly delegation every success.

The Republic of Yemen has acceded to numerous international instruments on child protection and enacted several national legislations consistent with their provisions to reflect the commitment of the Yemeni Government to those instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. We endorsed an action plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in 2014, as well as the Safe Schools Declaration of 2017, and signed onto a road map in 2018 by which joint committees were established to implement it in partnership with the UNICEF country team. We also issued a military order, signed by the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ensuring guiding principles on child recruitment and, on 20 February 2020, directives by the President of the Republic of Yemen, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordering the adoption of a mechanism to verify the age of members of the armed forces and establish liaison focal points within military units in accordance with the understandings of the road map with the country team.

The Government of Yemen welcomes the delisting of the coalition from annex I, section B, and commends the dedicated efforts of the coalition to establish a child protection unit and provide for the financing of the Ma'rib rehabilitation centre for former child soldiers recruited by the Houthis, which involved extensive coordination with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. My Government is determined to update the monitoring mechanism and looks forward to establishing an alternative mechanism with new methodology for the selection of reliable sources. In the context of the Yemeni conflict, such a mechanism will be instrumental in enhancing the accuracy, reliability and objectivity of the information gathered, particularly in Houthi-controlled areas, where the country task team consistently faces obstructions and threats and operates in an unsafe environment that severely limits the team's ability to carry out its mandate and ensure transparent and credible reporting.

In accordance with the national and international commitments towards children in Yemen, the Government of Yemen is sparing no effort to implement all the necessary measures to protect children and fully preserve their rights. To that end, the Government of Yemen remains committed to implementing the road map and has taken significant steps to reintegrate former child soldiers into society. In that regard, we look forward to enhanced coordination with the country task team to ensure the full implementation of the road map.

We also wish to stress the need to fund the reintegration and rehabilitation programmes in Yemen. We urge international donors to provide the critical funding needed to save Yemeni children from the oppression and terror of the Houthi militias in areas under their control.

With regard to education and vocational training, the country task team should place more focus on issues related to the manipulation of school curricula by the Houthis. The severe consequences of such actions are most evident in Yemen where the Houthis' imposition of extremist ideologies in school curricula and summer camps has increased trends of child use and recruitment and brainwashed and militarized Yemen's children. In addition, the military use of schools by the

Houthis deprives children of their basic right to quality education and puts them at risk of recruitment and use by the Houthis and other armed groups, which exploit the poor economic and financial hardships of Yemeni families in areas under their control to recruit and use children in their absurd war against the Yemeni people.
